

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JAMES WHITLOW DELANO
MANGALAND: A TOKYO RETROSPECTIVE

ON VIEW AT SOUS LES ETOILES GALLERY
DECEMBER 12, 2013–JANUARY 31, 2014

OPENING RECEPTION + BOOK SIGNING
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12TH, 6–8 PM

LECTURE ON JAPAN WITH THE ARTIST
MONDAY, DECEMBER 16TH, 7–8 PM



Under umbrella in nighttime rain, Hachiko Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan, 2002
©James Whitlow Delano

(NEW YORK, November 20, 2013) Sous Les Etoiles Gallery is pleased to announce *Mangaland: A Tokyo Retrospective*, marking photographer James Whitlow Delano's twenty years working in Japan. Since he visited the city of Tokyo in spring of 1993 at a friend's urging, James Whitlow Delano has become one of the most informed photographic eyes on Japanese culture. Delano's substantial oeuvre of photography in Asia, characterized by his ethereal use of vignette and partial defocus, presents complex tableaux of a society at once jaded yet naive, resilient yet vulnerable.

Mangaland: A Tokyo Retrospective draws from the long-term project of the artist, *Mangaland*. The images of *Mangaland* highlight the tenuous, almost vaporous moments, found within what Delano describes as the city's "volcanic brilliance." A young Japanese man, alone in a sea of pedestrians, gazes blankly ahead, the endless high-rises of the city muted but visible through the clear plastic umbrella he holds; three boys sit together under an expressway, their hunched bodies dotting the expanse of concrete all around them while in the distance, the city's construction is seen puncturing the evening sky; and a young woman in pigtails levels a piercing glance at the viewer, her cigarette held aloft in a moment of frank appraisal. As Delano notes, "It is as though the paranormal flirts just below the surface, just out of reach."

Also presented are select images from the series *Black Tsunami*, recently published by FotoEvidence in the new photo book "Black Tsunami: Japan 2011," depicting the aftermath of the 2011 tsunami and Fukushima meltdown. Together, the two series present not only the artistic merits of the photographer's work, but also its journalistic imperative.

James Whitlow Delano, born 1960, is an American-born photographer based in Tokyo, Japan. As one of today's foremost photographers of Asia, Delano's work is held in the permanent collections of La Triennale di Milano Fine Arts Museum (Milano, Italy); Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, TX); Museo Fotografia Contemporanea (Milano, Italy); Museum of Photographic Arts' Dubois Library (San Diego, CA); Noorderlicht Photography Festival (Groningen, Netherlands); and the Permanent Leica Book Archive (Solms, Germany). His work has appeared worldwide in numerous magazines and photo festivals, from *Visa Pour L'Image* to *Rencontres D'Arles* to *Noorderlicht*, and has been awarded internationally, including the Alfred Eisenstadt Award (from Columbia University and LIFE magazine), Leica's Oskar Barnack, Picture of the Year International, NPPA, and PDN, among many others. James Whitlow Delano is a grantee for the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. His newly released book, "Black Tsunami: Japan 2011" (FotoEvidence), received a 2012 PX3 Award.

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JAPAN MANGALAND

Japan is not so easily quantified, I have come to realize, but words do not come easily to describe the nature of the mental game here. It is as though the paranormal flirts just below the surface, just out of reach. Japan is a Mangaland. No other indigenous medium better describes the energy than manga. A lot is made of the internalized world of people here. It is real, but full of diversion. A jaded core sends up flowers of naiveté. Smiles are cheerless, and righteously indignant; poker faces hide warmth without suspicion. Western values are inverted, challenged and even mocked without malice. Absolutes become relative. Taboos are routinely opened up, dispassionately examined and discretely debauched without any outward emotion. Then, they are quietly set back in place in time for work the next morning, maybe never to be opened up again. Certain freedoms never existed here but are not missed. Other freedoms are infuriatingly stifled. The individual is not valued. There was no Renaissance here but no Cultural Revolution either. Yet there exist millions of individual private zones in public spaces, on tightly-packed trains or amongst and between pedestrians. These privacy zones are rarely breached. They are designed to cut off unscripted, potentially awkward interaction, to alienate; and they do. Acquaintances yesterday become today's strangers through selective amnesia. Suddenly it becomes risky to greet that familiar store clerk when encountered in a different setting, on the street. Idle conversation is reduced to vacuous niceties and nothing develops into anything more, for years. Yet longing gazes from the opposite sex reflected in a commuter train window can devour the recipient, and offer a vehicle inside the imagination. Eyes meet ever so briefly and never meet again. The powerful timorous moment is gone forever, leaving one shaken and wanting more when there is no more to be had. It is a chemical rush and unsustainable in every way.

Japan is a minefield for the zealot and liberating for the observer not subjected to its straight-jacket regulations. The crowded sidewalks are the loneliest places on the planet. Yet one is rarely physically alone. Human nature is squeezed and molded, and oozes out in the volcanic brilliance that is Japan.

- James Whitlow Delano