

# The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2007

## THE Listings Sept. 7 - Sept. 13

**'KOHEI YOSHIYUKI: THE PARK'** It is hard to characterize this unusual exhibition of black-and-white photographs from the 1970s by the Japanese photographer Kohei Yoshiyuki. Basically they are snapshots, taken in Tokyo parks at night using a 35-millimeter camera, infrared film and flash to document the people gathered for amorous trysts, as well as — and this is the bizarre part — the hordes of spectators hiding in the bushes who watched, and sometimes even participated in, the action.

The three dozen images at Yossi Milo Gallery in Chelsea show more or less equal numbers of heterosexual and homosexual couplings, but they are not simply about sex or even the social strictures of Japanese society at a time when loving couples were forced into the park. They are about the guilty, if electric, pleasure of voyeurism, which drew people to these lonely locales all those years ago and draws us to Mr. Yoshiyuki's photographs, which by and large are not terribly well composed or printed. Several pictures are slightly out of focus, and at times movement blurs the figures. But somehow it all adds to the allure, giving them a grainy realism. We delight in the naughty, clandestine quality of the im-



KOHEI YOSHIYUKI/YOSSI MILO GALLERY

agery, viewed in safety from another time and place. But the experience is no less engrossing. (Through Oct. 20, Yossi Milo Gal-

lery, 525 West 25th Street, 212-414-0370, [www.yossimilo.com](http://www.yossimilo.com).)  
BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

# ARTS & LETTERS

PHOTOGRAPHY

GALLERY-GOING

## Peeking In on the Social Set

By DAVID COHEN

With photography, one perversion can segue to another. Voyeurism focuses such attention on where the photographer could possibly have been placed, or what they could have been doing at the moment of surreptitious capture that in the very attempt to achieve transparency, the agent

### JESSICA CRAIG-MARTIN:

*American Summer*

*Greenberg Van Doren Gallery*

### KOHEI YOSHIYUKI: THE PARK

*Yossi Milo Gallery*

becomes the essence of the image. It is precisely through efforts to become invisible that the person behind the camera takes center stage. Thus voyeurism begets a certain narcissism.

Two new shows that dramatize the photographer as absent presence in images of candor and intrusiveness open this week: Jessica Craig-Martin's "American Summer" at Greenberg Van Doren Gallery is the first New York show of this internationally fêted society photographer (she works at *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*) since her 2001 exhibition at P.S.1. Kohei Yoshiyuki, by contrast, has remained invisible for a quarter of a century. "The Park" at Yossi Milo Gallery, a body of work from the 1970s documenting casual sexual encounters in three Tokyo public parks, was shot at night using infrared-sensitive film and filtered flashbulbs. This work is being shown for the first time since 1980, and marks the artist's American debut.

Their prints constitute an essay in contrast — hers, in gaudily opulent color, are as oversize as the glitzy, self-conscious set whose lifestyle she documents, whereas his are grainy, black-and-white, and kind of dingy in their half-light, almost as if offering themselves in as undercover a manner as that in which they were shot.

Please see **CRAIG-MARTIN**, page 19

**CRAIG-MARTIN** from page 15

Where Ms. Craig-Martin has made the moneyed Hamptons social circuit her locus, Mr. Yoshiyuki's subject is a sexual underclass, whether self-selected or forced toward social margins.

What unites these artists — despite such distinct production values — is the way each documents a specific, historical, and peculiar — yet in some ways ubiquitous — scene. Like Dante or Boccaccio, it is through attention to particulars of time and place that they are able to conjure vices that transcend them.

In Ms. Craig-Martin's work, drastic cropping is a defining characteristic. Image after image amputates or decapitates her revelers, homing in on torsos, legs or feet, or a snatch of mouth. In each case, the viewer's mind oscillates between possibilities of what this strategy means as violently as the eye seems to tip and lurch around the party. Sometimes, for instance, there is the kind of exactitude of an anthropological specimen: "Cancer Benefit, Southampton 2006 (Brooks Brothers Weiner)" (2007) links the sewn logo on a waiter's pink T-shirt to the last remaining canapé on a tray of grass. Other times, it is more as if to say, "This is what I could get away with." The cropping is highly functional, homing in on the only details that matter, sparing individualizing features that would distract.

With "Cancer Benefit, Southampton 2006 (Real Wasps)" (2007), however, in which the lower halves of a poolside couple — he in chinos and a blue blazer, she in a cocktail dress and waxed, bronzed legs — are shown, the intentions behind the cropping are more ambiguous. The image might be saying that half tells all — that their in-

dividuality is superfluous. Or it might be saying that the grounded, animal side of their personae are more apropos to the party mode than their higher selves. Or perhaps the cropping conveys coyness about identifying individuals, introducing an element of fear or awe toward the satirical victims.

The best images, such as "Cancer Benefit, Southampton 2006 (Air Kiss)" (2007), in which the smooched face belongs uniquely to a named individual, Ms. Denise Rich, instill ambivalence about whether the photographer is a skilled paparazzo or was herself a happy-go-lucky partygoer who made sense the next morning of whatever wayward camera cropped. Whether or not this is true, the images imbue this sense of nonchalance. The focus is crystalline and the printing pristine, but vertigo can imply a drunken lens.

The less successful images are ones where there is no sense of speed or intrusion. In "Real Estate Brokers, Southampton 2007 (Peace/CannabisLoafers)" (2007), for instance, the shoes, each embroidered with an instantly recognizable sign, seem worn to have been photographed. Whereas "Watermill Center Benefit Gala 2007 (Town Car to Tent)" (2007), in which a pocketbook swings aimlessly by its wearer's thin, muscular legs, is a stolen moment, a gesture caught between expectation and tedium, a quiet, subtle image.

The cumulative effect of Ms. Craig-Martin's merciless cropping, sumptuous color, emphatic scale, and pristine focus is, despite its power and clarity, to add another layer of ambiguity to her work, this time between visceralness and artifice.

The odd angles, a sense of snapshots taken on the sly, the fragmented body parts, make the action seem present tense, unmediated, all the more real. Flesh is captured in ruthless precision: Too much information outbids too much money to emphasize that even the rich have sweaty pores, scars that can't be disguised, bodies that age. But the photography takes dancing, posing, dolled-up bodies in another direction: toward flattened-out, abstracted shapes, colors, and textures.

Mr. Yoshiyuki's nocturnal forays culls both homosexual and heterosexual activity in three Tokyo parks, with straight couples his focus in the early 1970s, gays in 1979. It could be argued, however, in view of the crucial role played by onlookers, that the sexuality in both instances is pansexual — that the where of sex is more important than the with whom.

Sometimes the viewer senses people turning around and acknowledging the camera, perhaps as the filtered flash from a previous image captures their attention. But even without evidence that lovers are literally posing for a camera, there seems little point in

describing the relations depicted in terms of intimacy. Often the onlookers are as much the subject as the primary participants; their stalking of the couples entails more bodily energy than those furtively engaged in actual intercourse.

The thrill and squalor of these images reflects far more on the act of taking them than the actions captured. The lovers are bizarrely coy, remaining mostly dressed and opting for the simplest erotic transactions. The crucial ambiguity in Mr. Yoshiyuki's work isn't in his subjects' libidos but his own.

Who is out there behind the camera each night: an anthropologist, an artist, a sexual deviant, a free love advocate, a blackmailer?

The grainy, soft texture of the images, meanwhile, has more to do with the constraints of surreptitious night photography than with aesthetic intentions, but the result is a strangely wistful fusion of prurience and poignancy.

*"Jessica Craig-Martin: American Summer" until October 6 (750 Fifth Ave. at 57th Street, 212-445-0444).*

*"Kohei Yoshiyuki: The Park" until October 20 (525 W. 25th St., between Tenth and Eleventh avenues, 212-414-0370).*

the village **VOICE**

PREVIEWS

Art



KOHEI YOSHIYUKI:  
"THE PARK"

Yossi Milo Gallery

PREVIEWS

**Kohei Yoshiyuki**

SEPTEMBER 6-OCTOBER 20

*Yossi Milo, 525 W 25th, 212-414-0370*

During the 1970s, Yoshiyuki ventured into Tokyo's public parks with camera and flash at the ready, capturing nocturnal trysters and crouching onlookers—some of whom joined the anonymous lovers—on infrared film. There is little nudity in these black-and-white shots, mostly hands reaching under uplifted skirts, spectators crawling through leafy bushes toward entwined couples, and men warily pairing up as they edge around tree trunks. Yet there's a queasy, erotic charge that photographer Martin Parr identified as "the loneliness, sadness, and desperation that so often accompany sexual or human relationships in a big, hard metropolis like Tokyo."

# Arts & LEISURE

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The New York Times

Sept. 2-8, 2007

## Art

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Benjamin Genocchio

The Chelsea art gallery scene gets back into full swing this week, and many good shows beckon. Among them is one of black-and-white photographs from the 1970s by the Japanese photographer **KOHEI YOSHIYUKI** at the Yossi Milo Gallery. Taken in parks, using infrared film and a flash, they document a bizarre ritual: young Japanese couples who gathered there at night for romantic trysts, as well as the numerous spectators hiding in the nearby bushes who liked to watch. A new book on this artist's work with essays and an interview will accompany the exhibition. *Thursday through Oct. 20, 525 West 25th Street, Chelsea, (212) 414-0370, yossimilogallery.com.*

# NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 3-10, 2007

Art



© KOHEI YOSHIYUKI/COURTESY OF YOSHI MILO GALLERY

*Kohei Yoshiyuki's Untitled (1979), at Yossi Milo.*

## **A Lost Voyeur's Paradise** *Images from Tokyo's furtive sex life, brought to light again.*

**BACK IN THE** seventies, a photographer crept around Tokyo's parks, watching as people (straight and gay) went at it, observed by fervent Peeping Toms. He showed his grainy, life-size images in Tokyo's Komai Gallery in 1979, alongside blurry stills lifted from sex tapes left behind by patrons of a pay-by-the-hour hotel. The show was an underground success, but paranoia set in. Yoshiyuki (a pseudonym—his real name is still unknown) apparently destroyed many of the

images and set up shop as a family photographer in the Sears Portrait Studio vein. Interest in his work reemerged with the 2006 publication of Martin Parr's *The Photobook: A History—Volume 2*, where he was mentioned as a little-known innovator. The Yossi Milo Gallery tracked down the reclusive artist, and he agreed to reprint photographs from the remaining negatives for the first showing of his work in nearly 30 years. **R.W.**

**KOHEI YOSHIYUKI** *Yossi Milo; opens September 6.*



## THE NEW YORKER

SEPTEMBER 3 & 10, 2007

### GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

#### **KOHEI YOSHIYUKI**

Working at night, with a camera equipped with infrared film and a filtered flash, Yoshiyuki photographed couples making out in the bushes and behind the trees of Tokyo parks in the nineteen-seventies. His self-published book of those pictures, from 1980, has become a cult item, and this exhibition—Yoshiyuki's first in the U.S.—is sure to be one of the season's most sensational. Although there is little explicit sex visible in these images, they still give off plenty of heat, much of it sparked by the shockingly bold onlookers who crowd around the couples like moths drawn to a flame—voyeurs whose presence implicates both the photographer and the viewer. Opens Sept. 6. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

DOWN  
IN  
THE  
PARK  
YOSHIYUKI KOHEI'S  
NOCTURNES

**INTERVIEW BY  
ARAKI NOBUYOSHI**

*Michelangelo Antonioni's film Blow-Up (1966) places the photograph at the center of a gripping drama and in the process offers compelling commentary on the ambiguity of photographic veracity, the photographer as voyeur, and the fact that you never know what kind of scene you might capture in a public park with a camera. In 1971, while strolling across Tokyo to take night shots of skyscrapers, Japanese photographer Yoshiyuki Kohei was surprised to stumble upon a couple having sex on the veranda of a model home. This run-in inspired him to investigate a world of lustful adventurism in the city's parks after dark—couples having sex, sometimes in view of a rapt audience of voyeurs. Intrigued by this clandestine give-and-take of performance and spectatorship, Yoshiyuki became in effect the ultimate "peeper"*

*and photographed these secretive tableaux, staged in the shadowy corners of public parks. A small automatic camera and infrared film provided a stealthy cover—no sunburst of paparazzi-flash would startle those in flagrante delicto. The resulting scenes of unhinged desire, desperation, and palpable loneliness rendered in haunting chiaroscuro are a jarring combination of surrealist dreamscape and social document.*

*The following is a conversation between Yoshiyuki and the photographer-provocateur Araki Nobuyoshi, who for decades has playfully pushed the limits of kinkiness and sex in serious photography. Originally published in the Japanese porn magazine Weekend Super in 1979, this conversation appears here for the first time in English.*







**ARAKI NOBUYOSHI:** I don't know you that well. I know who you are, but readers don't know much about you. Why don't you tell them about yourself? I'm sure they would like to know when you were born, for instance. How old are you? What interests you? What kind of work are you doing? I'll bet you're not in your twenties.

**YOSHIYUKI KOHEI:** I was born in 1946.

**AN:** As the genius of photography, I'd like to introduce Yoshiyuki Kohei to our readers. You were first featured seven or eight years ago, then?

**YK:** Something like that.

**AN:** You were featured first in *Shukan Shincho* in 1972, and then in *Camera Mainichi*. You created a huge sensation by taking voyeuristic photographs of people having sex, and of voyeurs—peepers—watching people having sex, with infrared film. A lot of people made a lot of noise about them, but my critique consisted of exactly one line: "These are what I call photographs!" [LAUGHS]. After that we met and chatted now and then, but I haven't seen you for quite a while. Recently, I received an invitation to your solo show. I couldn't go because I was busy, but I mentioned it to the editor of *Weekend Super*, and heard later that he went to see it. When I asked him about it, he said he liked the way the photographs were exhibited.

**YK:** I turned out all the lights in the space, and gave each visitor a flashlight. That way I was reconstructing the original settings. I also blew the photographs up to life-size.

**AN:** You recreated the original settings.

**YK:** Yes.

**AN:** I'm sure that you have a concept about exhibiting them. Can you tell us about it?

**YK:** This is how I would have done it if I had exhibited the photographs back when I shot them. But there was a lot going on then, and the magazine feature came out first. The concept remained in the back of my mind, though. Last year, I lost my job, and I thought, why not?

**AN:** Viewers went into a dark room with a flashlight and looked at the photographs? But that way, you can only see part of them.

**YK:** Yes, that's how I wanted them to be viewed. I wanted people to look at the bodies in the photographs an inch at a time. But this is an uneasy situation. When it's completely dark, the whole photograph is illuminated, but the viewer looks at it section by section. My original concept involved a corridor where points of light would be focused on the photographs. Viewers would look at them slowly . . . carefully. They might even touch the photos. That's how I wanted to exhibit them. But then I realized that viewers would suffer if I forced them to look at the photographs in that way. So, that time I just used a board as a partition in the middle of the space.

**AN:** That sounds interesting. And I think people could see what you were aiming for. But you're focusing too much on *how* you show them. Five years ago, you wanted to exhibit them in a certain way, and the idea implanted itself in your brain until it became sort of an obsession. It's like coming into some money and deciding to buy a nice gift for a girl you had a crush on long ago. And it's how you'd feel if the girl said: "Oh no, nobody does that anymore," isn't it?

**YK:** In a way.

**AN:** We're talking about how to display them today. The photographs are defi-

nately good, so maybe you should have exhibited them more straightforwardly. They are powerful enough to thrill anyone who comes to see them. The type of exhibition you're talking about reminds me of a woman trapped in a bad relationship.

**YK:** I really enjoyed watching people looking at the photographs. Since the points of light were also their lines of sight, I saw things that were totally unexpected.

**AN:** That kind of thing was the mainstream in contemporary art not too long ago. If you asked me, I'd say go back to simple ways of exhibiting photographs. I'd tell fine artists to return to oil paintings and photographers to return to photographs.

**YK:** But your activities have a conceptual aspect to them.

**AN:** Yes, but when you exhibit photographs, you have to do it with conviction. And I heard you didn't issue many invitations. That was a bad idea. It's a shame you didn't make a really spectacular gesture.

**YK:** I'm a coward.

**AN:** Cowards don't go around spying on people and photographing them having sex. What was your motivation?

**YK:** It had never occurred to me to take that kind of photograph. I knew about peeping, though, and then one day I stumbled onto a scene—an incredible scene [LAUGHS]. That was when I was still an amateur. At that time, there weren't many skyscrapers in front of Chuo Park in Shinjuku. There was a model apartment in one of them. I was walking behind it with a friend (we had just finished a shoot), when we saw something amazing!



**AN:** “Something.” I like your choice of words.

**YK:** Yes! I was shocked. They were actually screwing.

**AN:** They were?

**YK:** Yes. And when I saw them, I knew this was something I had to photograph.

**AN:** You didn’t photograph them at the time?

**YK:** I had my camera, but it was too dark. After that I did some research. I found out that Toshiba made flashbulbs—infrared flashbulbs. But before I had a chance to use more than a few of them, they were discontinued. Then I looked around for filters, and ended up using two tricolor separation filters. After a while I heard that Kodak had some flashbulbs, so I used those. At that time, infrared flash units didn’t exist. Sunpak came out with them after I took these photographs.

**AN:** So they’re making them now?

**YK:** Yes. Now, anybody can take photographs like these.

**AN:** Wow! Guess I won’t be able to have sex in dark places anymore. Are the people you photograph totally unaware of what’s going on? I’ve never used equipment like that, so I have no idea.

**YK:** The light flashes—a red light. I’d better not say anymore!

**AN:** Like the lights on a passing car, from the subjects’ point of view?

**YK:** That’s right. Anyway, they’re so engrossed in what they’re doing that even a lot of light shouldn’t faze them.

**AN:** Let’s have a look at the photographs. They are amazing—because they’re really screwing. Look at him giving it to her! You need a lot of nerve to take

photographs like these. Mine are just pseudo-documentaries, so everything is staged [LAUGHS]. These days it’s the women who are aggressive. At Shinjuku Gyoen park, for instance, the women are always on top.

**YK:** I saw that sometimes, too. But I can’t photograph that. If the guy’s on the bottom, he’ll notice the camera.

**AN:** Look at this one!

**YK:** This guy was hopeless. He couldn’t get it up. The ambience made him self-conscious, I guess. I was right near them, listening and thinking he’d get it together. But then he said: “It’s no good.”

**AN:** The wonderful thing about this photograph is that it shows the peeper. It’s a self-portrait. It shows your shadow. I really like that. It’s probably strange to talk about photography theory in a context like this, but this is what a photograph is supposed to be. Oh, look: that peeper is touching her. He’s assisting.

**YK:** Yes, maybe. But peepers shouldn’t touch, because they’ll definitely be discovered. Things gradually get out of hand. The peepers, too!

**AN:** Yeah? Here he’s touching her ass. Oh, I’ve done that. What’s this . . . the peeper’s fly is open. But you know, this scene is actually more festive than pathetic. Look where the peeper’s hand is!

**YK:** Look at his face, too. The peeper’s face.

**AN:** They say all peepers have buck teeth, and it’s true, they really do. What’s this . . . one, two, three . . . there are *eight* people watching! When, say, four or five peepers get that close, the guy is going to be too scared to say a word, even if he knows they’re there.

**YK:** Definitely. Things are different now, but when I shot these photographs, even if the subjects had heard rumors that peepers were around, they wouldn’t have thought they’d come so close. And if they did see the peepers, they’d just stand up. Remember, the couple is lying on the ground. In their place, I’d be scared.

**AN:** Wasn’t it hard to shoot these photographs?

**YK:** Well, it’s harder to photograph the peepers. But at that time, nobody ever dreamed they’d be photographed. I had a tiny camera with a flash attachment. I think it would be almost impossible to do that now.

**AN:** But you could do it openly, couldn’t you? Just grab one shot with your flash, and then run?

**YK:** I guess so. Maybe that’s the way to do it.

**AN:** Then you get different reactions. Maybe the peepers would be more upset at you than the couples would be for spoiling their fun, and start chasing you. Then you’d photograph their reaction.

**YK:** Maybe if I took sequential photographs. Wonder what would happen if I yelled out to them while they were doing it, then took a flash photograph.

**AN:** That’s an excellent idea! What I’ve been doing is taking photographs at night with a small flash, yelling: “These light-scapes are obscene!” It’s fun when you have only seconds to get a shot, and the reaction is very clear.

**YK:** Yes, it is fun.

**AN:** Maybe everybody will be doing it by this summer, once word about the Sunpak flash unit spreads.

**YK:** I heard the company had a lot of inquiries after my show.

**AN:** Uh-oh!

**YK:** Yeah. I won't be able to do my work anymore [LAUGHS].

**AN:** You mean nobody has ever come after you when you took photographs like this?

**YK:** Never.

**AN:** Wow! Maybe you're a ninja.

**YK:** The guy who developed the Sunpak infrared strobe is a real lecher and a lot of fun.

**AN:** Really? He must have done a lot of fieldwork.

**YK:** Yes. I guess that's where the idea came from.

**AN:** Lechers are the only hope for the twenty-first century. Only lechers come up with good ideas. Only lechers take good photographs. So are you one, too?

**YK:** I think I'm completely ordinary, but maybe there's a little lecher in everyone.

**AN:** I guess it's a matter of degree. I am fascinated by this topic. . . . I like the way the legs are open in this shot.

**YK:** I think she was a student—really cute. Others are much more outrageous. They get carried away.

**AN:** What do you mean?

**YK:** Once a couple walked over and laid a piece of cloth on the ground. I thought: "They're going to do it," and then they started screwing. The guy pulled his pants down to his knees.

**AN:** That's good! In this one, he just unzipped his fly. You really need to see

the guy's ass. Men are shy about that part of the body, though.

**YK:** I don't know about that. . . .

**AN:** They should get completely naked. He could sit her on his lap.

**YK:** But most of them do it in the missionary position. Or standing up. They do it in the rain, after everyone else has left the park.

**AN:** That's their chance!

**YK:** Right. There's nobody around then.

**AN:** Why do they go to the park to screw? Have they done it everywhere else already?

**YK:** I don't think that's why. Even if the girl isn't thrilled about having sex there, the guy might say: "Let's do it here." Maybe they've been drinking nearby or something. But only couples who've had sex before screw in a park. You can always spot them, because they walk fast.

**AN:** Really? So you stand at the park entrance watching. Then you see a couple walking fast, so you know you'll get some shots?

**YK:** That's definitely what I look for.

**AN:** I'm not a peeper, but I once tried to spot couples headed for "love hotels" at Shinjuku Station. My hunches were usually right. You can tell.

**YK:** I've never seen a couple who haven't already had sex together screw in a park. Foreplay takes too long, and the peepers will gather around, and the opportunity is gone. They have to have had sex at least once. Even if the girl doesn't feel like it, guys want to do it in the park. I've overheard their conversations.

**AN:** I'd like to observe sometime. We could organize a tour. Let's do a grand

tour, with you as the guide. Can you imagine a bunch of photographers filing into a park [LAUGHS]?

**YK:** A photo-session!

**AN:** Right. Once our tour leader raises his flag, the flashes will go off all at once. The surprised subjects will stare at us, and we'll photograph that, too. A colleague and I once shot a couple having sex in a car, from a microbus. When the first flash goes off, they're stunned. Then you take another shot. So this time we'll each use two flash units, not infrared, grab our shots and run. Or we could bring our own bodyguards to scare them.

**YK:** You can't threaten people. You can photograph them, but the law. . . .

**AN:** So photographing them isn't illegal?

**YK:** No, as long as you don't say anything. If you keep quiet, take your photographs and run, it's okay.

**AN:** Really? It sounds almost criminal. You know, you could blackmail people with these photographs.

**YK:** That's true.

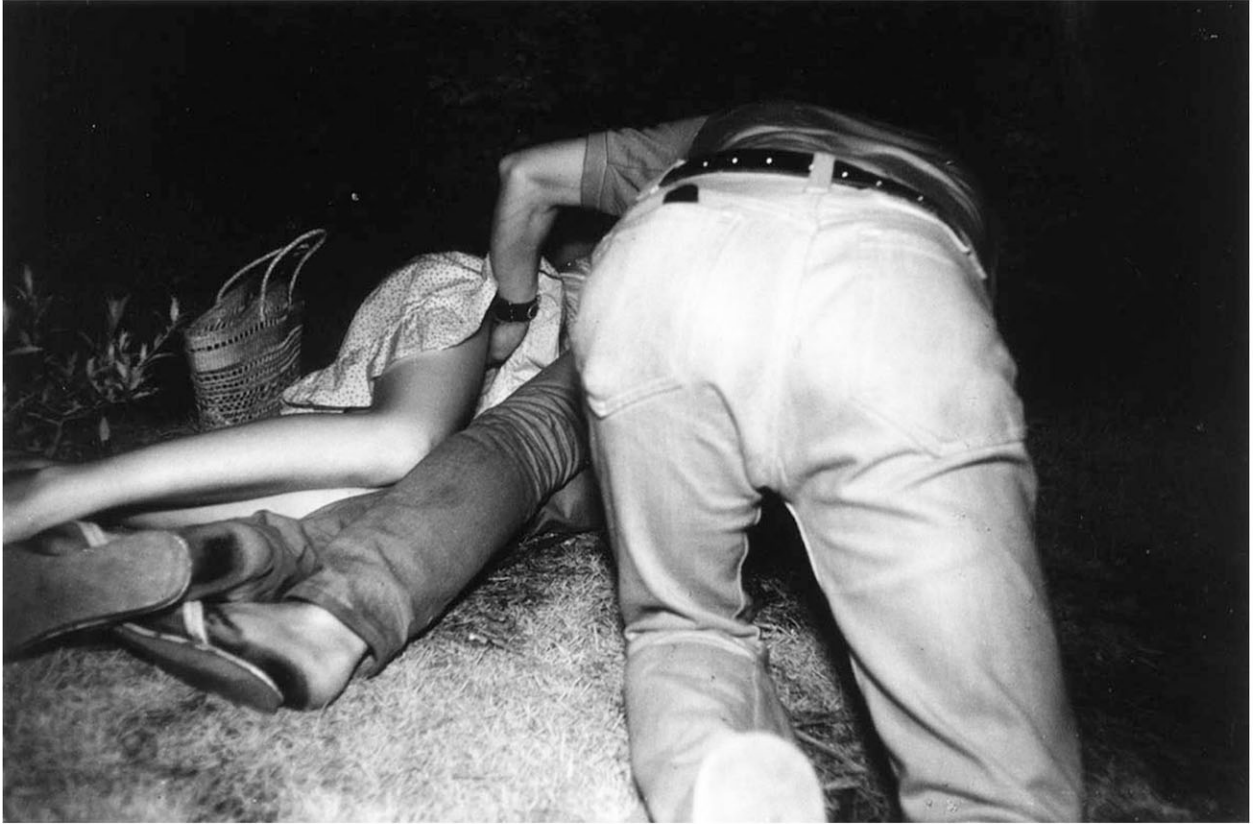
**AN:** So, let's do it, all right? This summer, and make a big event of it. It'd be a shame to waste the opportunity.

**YK:** This summer, then!

**AN:** Yes, yes. Watch out, everybody. Yoshiyuki is coming! ☺

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*Translator's note: Japanese personal names have been rendered surname first, in accordance with Japanese custom.*











Page 77 (bottom) and page 81 are both *Untitled, 1979*; all other photographs *Untitled, 1971*, from the series *The Park*.

Photographs © Yoshiyuki Kohji / Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery