

Dear Mr. Niépce: Daido Moriyama's Homage to the Origins of Photography

Introduction

Daido Moriyama, one of Japan's most celebrated photographers, pays tribute to the origins of photography in his book *Dear Mr. Niépce*. This work is a personal and artistic reflection on the legacy of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, the inventor of the first photograph, and his historic connection to Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes in France. Moriyama intertwines his own photographic journey with a reverence for Niépce's pioneering vision, creating a unique dialogue between the past and present.

The Sacred Ground of Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes

For Moriyama, the town of Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes holds a sacred place in photographic history. This is where Niépce captured the world's first photograph, titled *View from the Window at Le Gras*, nearly two centuries ago. Moriyama writes of this place with reverence, referring to it as a source of inspiration that has continued to stimulate his creative impulses over time.

Visiting the town years after first publishing his book *Lettre à St. Loup*, Moriyama reflects on the profound connection he feels with Niépce's legacy. His journey even took him to Texas, where he viewed a reproduction of Niépce's photograph at the Harry Ransom Center, further deepening his appreciation for the early experiments in capturing light and shadow.

The Fusion of Histories

In *Dear Mr. Niépce*, Moriyama bridges the gap between the large photographic apparatus used by Niépce and his own compact, pocket-sized camera. This contrast underscores the evolution of photography as a medium, from a highly technical process to a democratic and portable art form.

The book is composed of images Moriyama captured during his visit to Saint-Loup-de-Vareennes. These photographs not only document Niépce's old workplace but also juxtapose scenes of modern-day Ikebukuro, a bustling district in Tokyo. This fusion of locations connects the origins of photography with Moriyama's contemporary world, showing the timelessness of light, shadow, and the photographic impulse.

Why *Dear Mr. Niépce* Matters

Moriyama's book is not just an homage to Niépce but also a meditation on the essence of photography itself. It explores:

- **The universality of light and shadow:** From the windows of Le Gras to the streets of Ikebukuro, Moriyama's images reflect the shared language of light and form.
 - **The evolution of tools:** Niépce's groundbreaking experiments laid the foundation for the compact, versatile cameras that photographers like Moriyama use today.
 - **A personal connection:** By placing himself in the lineage of photography, Moriyama invites readers to reflect on their own relationship with the art form.
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Closing Thoughts

Dear Mr. Niépce is a deeply personal and poetic exploration of photography's origins and its enduring power to capture and preserve moments. Through his unique perspective, Daido Moriyama reminds us of the profound connection between past and present, between the pioneers of photography and the artists who continue to push its boundaries today.

Moriyama's journey from Saint-Loup-de-Varennnes to Ikebukuro exemplifies the timeless and universal nature of photography. In doing so, he not only honors the legacy of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce but also reaffirms the endless possibilities of the photographic medium.