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**ŌTSUCHI FUTURE MEMORIES  
BY ALEJANDRO CHASKIELBERG,  
REVIEWED BY RODRIGO  
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Very few projects I've seen lately manage to marry concept and medium in such a startling way. Perhaps it was coincidence, but I think a work so thoroughly calculated like the one of Alejandro Chaskielberg would leave very little to chance. Even from *La Creciente* (<http://www.photobookstore.co.uk/photobook-la-creciente.html>) – Chaskielberg's first book –, where he started experimenting with a combination of long exposures and flash lights under the cold light of the moon, one could feel the start of a longer, more ambitious search. But I think it's here, literally at the other side of the world from his home country Argentina, that the pieces finally begin to fall into place, flawlessly, as if his presence in Japan had been long

awaited.

Starting from *La Creciente* and throughout Chaskielberg's many series, -including his projects shot in Suriname and Kenya- there is a constant interest in the minimal stories of small communities and their relationship with water. The flow of rivers and the tidal waves of the sea are both a metaphor for an understanding of time -the continuous cycle of life, death and rebirth- and also for memory and contemplation. It is not surprising how the stories he heard coming from Japan instantly captured his interest, and sparked the project which we can now see in the form of a book.

The Great Earthquake of Eastern Japan in 2011 and the tsunami that followed, devastated most of the eastern coastal towns of the island. The small fishing town of Ōtsuchi was one of the most affected. Like most people in the world, I witnessed this tragedy live on television, and was saddened by the images on newspapers and magazines that came during the following weeks. But little was thought or done about the aftermath, especially stories focusing on small communities and how they have managed to rebuild their lives whilst coming to terms with the past. Chaskielberg's work, through focusing on the intimate relationship of people and place, manages to grasp a much wider story dealing with -as the title of his essay suggests- the atemporality of memory, but also the particular ritual of remembering that is photography.

Chaskielberg's project has many layers, all carefully imbricated in the book. At first he travelled to Japan, and slowly started to get acquainted with the community at Ōtsuchi. He photographed the piles of debris, the discarded remains of the tsunami, perhaps in preparation for the real core of his project. The opening of the book is his first impression: a note on colours, composition, an initial glimpse into the ritual of sorting out the rubble left in the aftermath of the tragedy. On one of his several walks he found a photo album, battered by the elements, which became a key part of

the project, a metaphor for the fragility of memory and the ritual of remembrance.

The main series in the project -and the core of the book- is a series of portraits shot in Chaskielberg's now staple style. Working with the community who he began to slowly know and befriend, he shot portraits of people standing in their former homes and places of work. His unique use of moonlight, coupled by his mastery of balancing long exposure of natural and artificial light, creates atemporal, dreamlike images of a remembered past, now hardly more than a ruin reclaimed by nature.

What I think makes this project unique is Chaskielberg's patience and craft bringing together the different aspects of his journey. As he recounts in the many interviews done after the publication of the book, the portraits were shot on black and white plates, and then patiently hand tinted using colour samples he found on the photo album he recovered from the rubble. This is a very poetic way of combining multiple layers of time. There is of course the allusion to remembrance that comes from the colours and textures of the old photo album, but also the act of remembrance of people standing in their former homes. And then there is the conundrum, the *future memories* of Chaskielberg's constructed images.

The images of the book are all impeccably crafted; it is difficult to pick my favourite. Perhaps it is the spread with the portrait of the firemen, opposed to a half-dissolved image of a fire station during some sort of fire fighting exercise. It is a remarkable combination that sums up Chaskielberg's intentions, but also sparks -the pun here is valid- many connections for enthusiasts of Japan, and especially Japanese photography.

It occurs to me Chaskielberg is aware of the particular history of photography in Japan, and how the first photographic portraits of the Japanese emperors and their courts were delicately hand-

tinted to bring them to life. Photography was brought to the Japanese court by Dutch merchants in the mid-nineteenth century and was quickly appropriated by the Japanese, who made it their own by bringing in elements of their art, especially the use of colour and transparency. I can see clear connections to these early images in Chaskielberg's book, and even if it is only personally, I think he makes a quiet but meaningful vow to the country's history of photography.

For me not only is Ōtsuchi Future Memories one of the best books of the last few years, but perhaps of the current decade. It won RM's Iberoamerican Photobook Competition in 2014, unanimously awarded by an all-start jury. The project's final incarnation as a book could not be better backed up. Famed creative director Ramon Reverté (the creative mind behind RM) was behind the publication, and one of Japan's most respected photographers, Daido Moriyama sealed it with his blessing in form of a small preface. This is one of those photobooks that becomes an instant reference, a definite must for those who like Chaskielberg's work, but also anyone with an interest in Japan and its unique history of photography.

Ōtsuchi Future Memories can be purchased [here](http://www.photobookstore.co.uk/photobook-otsuchi:-future-memories.html)(<http://www.photobookstore.co.uk/photobook-otsuchi:-future-memories.html>).

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*working with artist photographers from around the world. The first book is due to be released during summer of 2016.*





*Images courtesy of Alejandro Chaskielberg(<http://www.chaskielberg.com/>)*