

Daido Moriyama: Audio Description

Written by Eleanor Margolies

Tokyo, 1969. From Accident, Premeditated or not.

In the aftermath of a car crash, two crumpled vehicles stand a couple of metres apart, with half a dozen people behind them. This black and white photograph has extreme contrasts, with some areas of pure black in the upper half, and people and objects that are bleached out to pure white, while the grey areas appear grainy. The effect is reminiscent of a low-quality photocopy.

It's night, with points of white light from street lamps. In the centre of the image, there are the side-profiles of two cars that seem to have rolled apart following a head-on collision. The car on the left is in much the worse state, with its whole front half, front door and windscreen crumpled. A vertical, cloud-like patch of light hovers above it, like rising smoke or even a spectre. The car on the right is a taxi, the bonnet been popped open by the collision, a door open as if someone has just got out.

On the far side of each car, there are a few people looking in with concern, but no particular sense of urgency. A boy, aged about 12, peers into the wreckage of the car on the left. In the foreground, the black tarmac of the road is grainy, with black oil trickling from underneath the taxi.

A woman is walking towards us, visible in the space between the two cars. Her form appears bleached out so that she's barely more than a silhouette, recognisable as wearing late 1960s fashion – a knee-length coat, a handbag over one arm. A few

patches of black on her white face indicate that her head is turned to look at the car on the right, her mouth open. Her hair dissolves into the blackness behind.

To her left, a man in a black shirt turns his head toward the woman. Despite – or because of – the photograph being so grainy, small details seem to leap out: the way his sleeves are rolled up, his wristwatch on his bare forearm, the heavy black arm of his spectacles, even the shadow cast on his throat by his Adam's apple.

In the top left-hand corner, very small relative to the whole image, there is a triangular crossing sign, with a white symbol of a man in a hat stepping forwards, a reflection in miniature of the woman in the centre walking towards us.

Inspired by American artist Andy Warhol, this photograph is from one of Moriyama's most ambitious projects – a monthly series in *Asahi Camera* magazine. Over the course of a year, he reflected upon the vulnerability of human existence and the distance between real events and their images, addressing the contradictions of photojournalism, the surveillance of citizens, the exploitation of crime reports and celebrity magazines, and the social transformations triggered by the westernisation of Japan and its rapid industrialisation.