

**Japan Esquire**  
**March 2008 Vol.22 No.3 – Art Section**  
**An interview of Jean Claude Wouters by Shigeo Goto**  
**‘ Shadow of Sky’ at Marunouchi Gallery**

Encountering a person is such a mystery. One day, I received an invitation card for an exhibition. Even though, I was unfamiliar to the artist, enclosed images of his works rejoiced my heart, and I **had** to meet the artist.

It was an almost white photography. Slowly, an image rises on the picture. Only dimly, but it remained in my heart very strongly.

His name is Jean Claude Wouters. I almost had no background information about him. As we started the interview, he introduced himself.

He originally wanted to attend an evening film school, but there was no such school in Belgium, so instead, he started to learn dancing, and later became a pupil of Maurice B ejart (who has recently passed away.)

Soon, he became a filmmaker and lived and worked in Paris. Filming the face of Isabella Rossellini in close up for Lanc ome, he became obsessed by:

“I want to reveal the light of a person” and this led him to the work we are talking about.

Goto: Your technique and your work are particularly unique.

JCW: I started my journey with the portraits almost 10 years ago. I did use different means to achieve what I was searching for; the technique “stabilized” around 2001. When I was 20, I have been lucky enough to meet people like Maurice B ejart or Karlheinz Stockhausen, for whom art was a spiritual matter. And our own journey in it, is almost like polishing a stone until it would become a mirror, which is impossible.

This is the matter of my portraits.

Goto: Are you thinking that the fragility create strong image?  
Or are you feeling an emotion of the loss?

JCW: none of those, I think I am searching for impossibility. I want to bring together the opposites. The possibility for the apparition and development of life on earth was close to none, and hence, life is there and we are part of it:  
an impossible possibility.

This is my territory, facing the limit, trying to constantly go to the edge.

The title of the exhibition is ‘ Shadow of Sky’; but there is no shadow in the sky. That is also an impossibility.

But we can say it, think it, and then a kind of reality appears.

Goto: The word ‘Sky’ in Japanese (空) means ‘Empty’ and ‘Sky’. Your story reminds me of the meaning of this Kanji.

JCW: In Japanese, the meaning of the word “Photography”, “shashin”, is “copy of reality”.

I have no interest in a copy of the reality. The reality is much more exciting than a poor copy.

For me, the experience with the portrait, is something like: when you think of someone and try to imagine that person’s face. My mother is 78 years old now, and when I recall her face, it is charged with all the feelings and experiences I had with her since I was born. My image of the mother has built up within a long period. The power of a portrait is something like my own experience, the atmosphere that appears in the air captured.

Goto: In Japan, what you have just told me, we call it 'omokage' which '面' means face, '陰' means shadow.

JCW: Thank you.

Goto: Earlier, you told me about polishing endlessly a stone to make it a mirror, Japanese Shinto believes in polishing the nature to make it a mirror. I would not say your work is about Shinto, but I want to say that just like your work is reflecting the viewer, it is a 'mirrored photograph'.

JCW: Perhaps my work is close to Shinto by its spirit. I like mirrors very much. For me, the polished mirror you have on the altar in the Shinto temple is the best representation of god. As you said, my portraits are related to mirror.

It was also Maurice B ejart who told me, in the first place, this story about mirror in Shinto. I was amazed, and from that moment, I wanted more than ever to come to Japan, this very special country.

Now, photography is swallowed by a big wave of digital.

Within those changes, how precious is the work of Jean Claude Wouters.