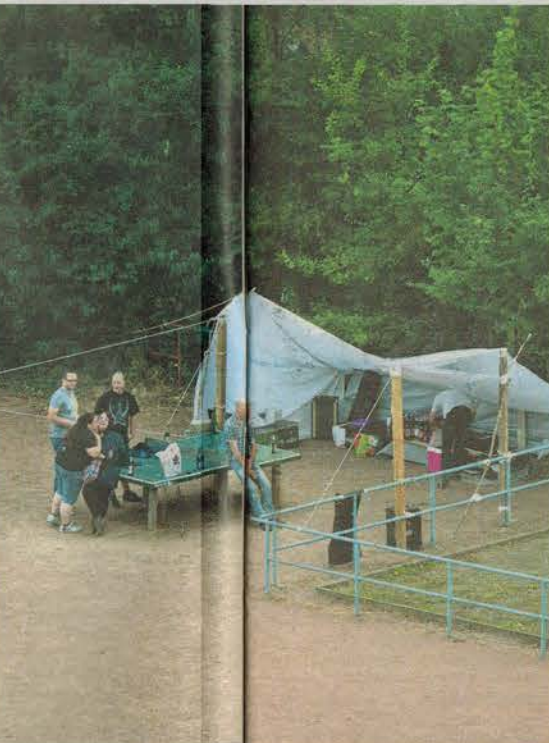
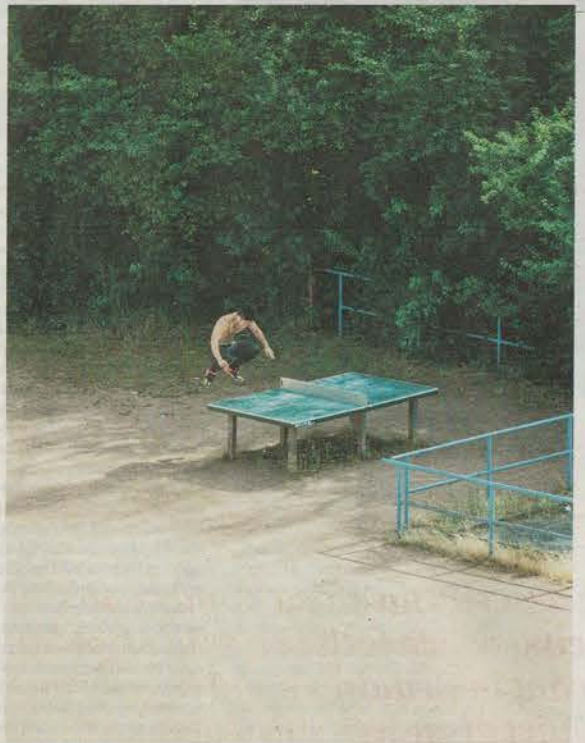


BELOW
Tomiyasu kept his camera
trained on this ping-pong
table for a period of five
years, photographing what
he saw. Courtesy the artist/
MACK



**Hayahisa
Tomiyasu**
Chosen by
Takashi Homma

On a Sunday night in August 2011, photography student Hayahisa Tomiyasu saw a fox sniffing around a lawn in Leipzig, Germany. It relieved itself, turned around, and stared at him before walking off. In the next few days, Tomiyasu searched for it in vain, until one day he looked out of his dormitory window and saw the fox passing by a ping-pong table. He never saw the fox again; instead, he turned his attention to the ping-pong table.

Over the following five years, Tomiyasu kept his eye – and his camera – on the table, photographing passersby and social gatherings around it. People occasionally played table-tennis there, but that wasn't what he was looking for. He wanted to find the object's potential. "It shows how many possibilities the table has in itself, which you don't know before you see it," he says. "I'm interested in photographing an object you see every day, and how people behave around that object in a public space."

Slowly, the project took over his life. "It was very strange – most things seemed to happen if I had something to do. If I was going out and people came to the ping-pong table, often I had to cancel my appointment. I tried to be there always, every day, also at Christmas and New Year, to not miss what was happening." He amassed a prodigious number of images: perhaps 4,000.

The project turned into a book, *TTP* – or *Tischtennisplatte*, German for ping-pong table – released earlier this year and winner of the prestigious 2018 MACK First Book award. The renowned Japanese photographer Takashi Homma, whose highly influential book *Tokyo Suburbia* was published in 1998, nominated Tomiyasu for this feature. Homma says: "I'm interested in fixed-point photography because I'm also doing that. Hayahisa Tomiyasu does the best fixed-point observation I have ever seen – I'm jealous."

What Tomiyasu discovered with *TTP* was that people can be creative. In the book, two shirtless teenage boys box each other as a long-haired girl looks on, transfixed. A man does his washing in a bucket on the table,

his shirts and blankets drying on a nearby railing. Various nappies are changed. Two girls have a night-time picnic. A child sits on the table, alone, a toy gun cradled to his face. In the dark, a man naked except for his socks and shoes squats on the table, a beer bottle perched precariously at his side.

Another motivation for the project was cultural observation. As a Japanese student living in Germany, Tomiyasu found it difficult to learn the country's social codes. "I was living in a student dorm where we didn't talk to each other often, not even a greeting. So, as a foreigner, it gave me a way to understand how people think and behave. For me, it was: 'Ah, OK, yeah.'"

Brought up in Chigasaki, Tomiyasu originally wanted to become a professional footballer: he trained intensely every day until, aged 18, he turned his attentions to his secondary interest, photography. He studied in Tokyo, then an exhibition made him fall in love with German contemporary photography. "What fascinated me was that it was another approach to reality. The eye for German photography is sometimes – in a positive way – cold, objective. Many photographs in Japan are taken in a private room, from a private point of view, and therefore very subjective."

He moved to Leipzig in 2008, partly to study in the class of Peter Piller, whose archive-based work influenced his own. Now 36, Tomiyasu lives in Zurich and is working on a street photography series looking at objects that people have thrown away.

On one of the last pages of *TTP*, a photograph seems to cast a new light on everything before it: a couple are seated on the table, and the man appears to be pointing towards the camera. Did people know the camera was there? Were they putting on a show? But they didn't know, says Tomiyasu: the image was placed there to stimulate debate about voyeurism, performance and artifice.

The sequence of images in the book suggests a narrative. "I arranged the book according to association, to similarities," he says. "I did not order it chronologically but like a tale: I wanted to see if you could create a small history out of reality. It's not a normal photo book, but like a novel that you can read." Kathryn Bromwich

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