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Merry

Merry is an exhibition of hundreds of large-scale photographs showing the smiling faces of young people on the streets of Tokyo's most fashionable district, Harajuku. The project was originally created in 2000 for Laforet, a popular shopping complex in Harajuku, and continues to evolve and adapt.

Every weekend the trendy districts of Tokyo, particularly Harajuku and Shibuya, are conquered by teenage girls carrying mobile phones and wearing vibrant, colourful outfits, platform shoes and heavy make-up. Parading triumphantly through the streets, these teenagers are the economic driving-force behind street fashion and are reshaping the outlook of contemporary Tokyo. Adding a futuristic and surreal ambience to the city, their styles draw upon science fiction films and cut-out characters from manga comics. The mix of contrasting colours, clothing patterns and mobile phone straps can be compared with the layering of fabric in kimono culture. Their use of little figures as accessories is reminiscent of *netsuke*: an antique 'toggle' in the shape of a figure or animal. When Japanese men wore kimono in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *netsuke* was used as a hook to suspend slim pillboxes, or *inro*, through their belts. *Netsuke* was originally a purely practical item but became a fashionable accessory to reveal the wearer's aesthetic taste. These young women appear to show little concern for political or economic issues, instead celebrating their youth and

living for the moment. Mizutani has spent many hours photographing these teenagers in the hope of capturing their 'happiest moment'. Approaching girls on the street, he briefly interviews each individual and records their dreams and aspirations. To date he has captured the smiling portraits of 2000 girls and his collection is still expanding.

For *Tokyo Life*, Mizutani presents the latest version of *Merry*; two hundred images taken recently in Harajuku, accompanied by special sound effects and interactive screen monitors. *Merry* is a forest of beautiful smiles animated by the naive chattering of Tokyo girls. The Japanese are famous for the smile which is reserved and enigmatic. But the young women in Harajuku seem to smile from the heart as if believing that this simple gesture will bring renewed hope and courage to their nation.

Koji Mizutani
Merry at Laforet 2000
Laforet Harajuku, Tokyo
2000
Courtesy the artist



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Koji Mizutani
Merry (detail)
2001

Courtesy the artist
Above left: "My Life"
Above middle: "I'm also a huge fan of Anisime!"
Above right: "School is everything"
Below left: "I like eating, talking and just hanging out with my friends."
Below middle: "It's best to be happy everyday."
Below right: "I like being with my 'darling'."



マイライフ!

あさみっち大好き!!

かっこーは、サイコーですのよ



友達とあそべたり、しゃべったりするのが好き

毎日しあわせ一番

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