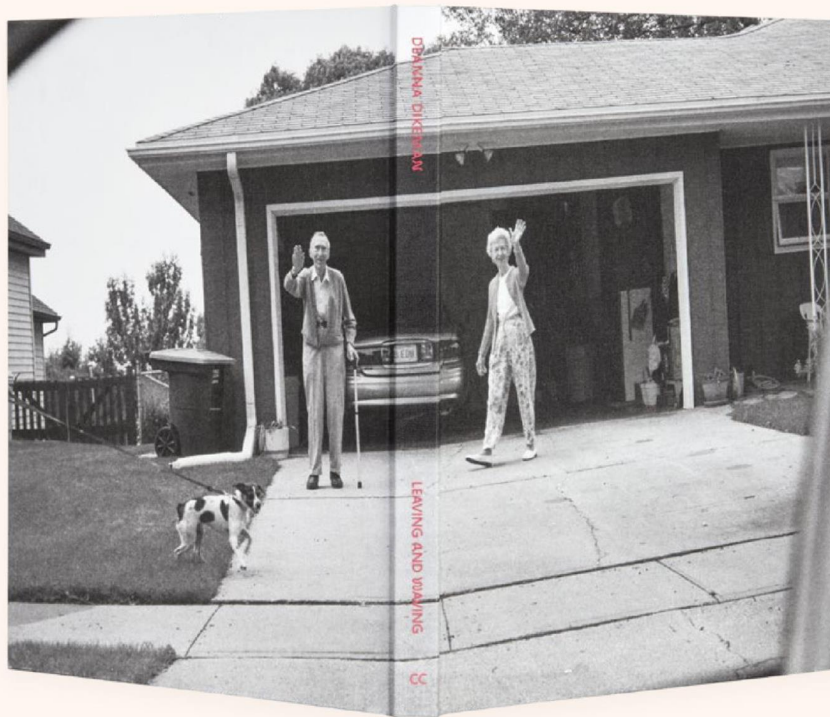


Looking, Watching, Trying, Doing

Cécile Poimboeuf-Koizumi in Conversation with Taous Dahmani



Cécile Poimboeuf-Koizumi has been making books since 2014. Founded in Paris in collaboration with the photographer Vasantha Yoganathan, her independent publishing house, Chose Commune—a reference to things that are both familiar and simple—has for nearly a decade created unique publications and objects. The press focuses on photography and works on paper in a manner that is meticulous, creative, and deftly attuned to the physical form of the book. Over the years, Poimboeuf-Koizumi has made striking publications with an acute graphic awareness and a collaborative outlook, including those with emerging artists such as Moe Suzuki and Deanna Dikeman as well as Japanese legends such as Issei Suda and contemporary photographers like Daniel Gordon. In a moment crowded with talented independent publishers, Chose Commune distinguishes itself with a singular touch.

Taous Dahmani: In 2020, you moved Chose Commune's offices from Paris to Marseille, where we also became close friends. Being such a charismatic place, how has the city influenced you and your work?

Cécile Poimboeuf-Koizumi: I guess Marseille has had more of an impact on my daily life than on my actual projects. The city instantly felt like home when I moved here—which is something I don't say often, because I've never really felt at home anywhere. Marseille is not an uncomplicated city, but I love how people-driven it is; I would never be able to have coffee with the delivery guy back in Paris! The sunny, warm weather fills me with energy and inspires me to work. I couldn't be under Paris's gray skies anymore.

TD: Moving around and navigating new cultures is not new for you. You traveled

a lot in your youth, and still do. How has that shaped your interests and your vision for Chose Commune?

CPK: Chose Commune is basically me. Whatever direction I take in my life has an impact on the publishing house. So, yes, my upbringing has definitely shaped Chose Commune. I've never done anything I don't feel strongly connected with. I think it really comes with knowing what I like and knowing what I'm drawn to. Growing up in China, Japan, Thailand, Australia, and Taiwan, I was in contact with so many different—mainly Asian—cultures. It was an incredibly rich cultural experience, and probably explains why I'm drawn to working internationally. But it came naturally, nothing was that conscious. I came to live permanently in Paris when I was eighteen; I remember not knowing much about France's culture and not knowing that many French people. Also,



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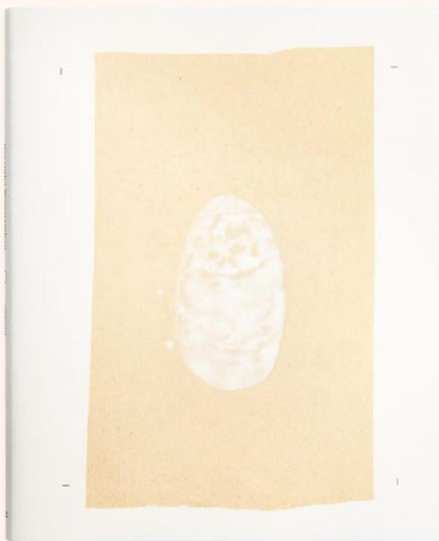
I studied Chinese and Japanese languages and cultures—not photography—so that was another unusual pathway into creating my own publishing house.

TD: It's interesting that you say that. I have a special appreciation for people who come to the field of photography from elsewhere, or are on the edge of that space, almost as outsiders. Do you think that lens has helped your work?

CPK: It definitely helped me and Chose Commune. I believe in charting my own path and starting from nothing. I knew almost nothing about photography and bookmaking, and learned by looking and watching and then trying and doing. It was always very instinctive, and it has proven to be quite a humbling process, because I don't think you can ever reach an exhaustive knowledge of bookmaking. I was very interested in production and learned on the job, going on press and talking to printers. Production was what I was most drawn to, and I loved getting to know every aspect of it. I'm still very hands-on with our projects, and I think the readers can feel that difference. There's no formula. I would never do the same thing twice.

This page, top:
Spread from Daniel
Gordon, *New Canvas*,
2022; bottom: Cover
of Vasantha Yoganathan,
Amma, 2021

Opposite:
Cover of Deanna Dikeman,
Leaving and Waving, 2021



TD: Your mother is from Japan and you were educated in an omnipresent Japanese culture. So I wanted to ask you about Chose Commune's links to Japan.

CPK: Because I've been publishing a lot of Japanese photography for the past two to three years people think it's my "thing," which is something I don't really like. I don't want to be put in a box. But, because whatever I do is, in the end, quite personal, I find within my work a way to stay very connected to Japan and to Japanese people. I don't really see that as making books about Japanese photography, but rather as having the ability to understand these photographers' working culture and process, which has enabled me to make books with Seiichi Furuya, Rinko Kawauchi, or Issei Suda. I think it's really more about finding something I'm drawn to. Sometimes I just see a body of work and picture it as a book. I use my knowledge to show something that is slightly different. What I end up picking for these books are often bodies of work or aesthetic routes that are unknown or unexpected.

TD: You are extremely sensitive to aesthetics and receptive to beauty in objects, and you also have a passion for



Spread from Seiichi Furuya
and Christine Gössler,
Face to Face, 2020
All photographs courtesy
Chose Commune

Inspiration can come from anything: a ray of light on the wall, a stain on the street, or the shape of a tree.

**ceramics, crafts, and vintage books.
How does this inform your own process?**

CPK: Inspiration can come from anything: a ray of light on the wall, a stain on the street, or the shape of a tree. Shapes and colors are important, especially the ones you find in the most mundane of things. I'm very interested in what was made before. I love old books—mostly 1950s French literature that I find at flea markets. The designs are always on point. They are filled with a wide range of bookmaking techniques, and great attention was given to papers and spines.

TD: Finally, I wanted to ask you about connections, friendships, relationships, and even love, as I know they are key guides in your life and work. For instance, you started Chose Commune with your partner, the photographer Vasantha Yoganathan.

CPK: Vasantha is no longer fully involved with Chose Commune—so that he can focus on his own practice—but he still has a very important place. I trust his judgment and vision the most. I would not be able to do whatever I do now if it wasn't for our relationship. Beyond Vasantha, there's always a strong connection to the people I work with, even if I wouldn't always call all my collaborations friendships. Making a book is a long and intimate process; I spend hours

talking to photographers. At the point when we're producing a publication together, we need to have a close connection to make things work. Then there are always "post-publication blues" once a book is released and goes on to live a life of its own. It's a real thing! I also work with a few senior photographers, who might be my mother's age, for example, and the relationship can be similar to a family dynamic. Whatever the relation, there's always the pleasure of working together and a necessary mutual trust. So, for me, the human connection is really important when making an object that is going to be in the world, hopefully for generations.

Taous Dahmani is a London-based French, British, and Algerian art historian, writer, and curator specializing in photography.

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