

**Ari Marcopoulos**

Fergus McCaffrey, Tokyo

January 12 – March 9, 2019

Opening Reception: January 12, 6–8PM

**Fergus McCaffrey** is pleased to present our inaugural exhibition with **Ari Marcopoulos**, on view at the gallery's Tokyo location from January 12 – March 9, 2019. Marcopoulos is widely recognized for his photographic work that bridges fine art and street photography; Fergus McCaffrey's exhibition allows viewers a glimpse into another side of the artist's practice with three recent films created in the past two years.

The exhibition opens with *The Park* (2017–18), a 58-minute film of a public, unfenced basketball court adjacent to the Walt Whitman housing projects in Brooklyn, New York. The first 51 minutes are shot from one side of the court, and the final seven from the other. *The Park* reveals the basketball court as a fundamental space of public social life, providing an anthropological cross-section of social codes: sometimes the players are affable, relaxed. At other times, the game becomes competitive, tense. Throughout, neighborhood locals pass through the court, providing an ebb and flow of casual, spontaneous interaction. In this way, Marcopoulos's film transforms the court into a contemporary pastoral, a dream-like landscape scene picturing a languid, bucolic afternoon spent in community and kinship.



Originally presented as a silent film, for McCaffrey's exhibition *The Park* is accompanied by a live-recorded improvised soundtrack by renowned musician Jason Moran. In 2017, Moran saw a version of the film and was compelled to respond with a piano score to accompany its otherwise silent study of mundane urbanity. He screened a fifteen minute segment of *The Park* in Washington DC at the John F. Kennedy Center's centennial celebration of Thelonious Monk's birth, performing in real-time with an improvised solo piano piece. Monk was known to drag a piano from a community center onto the basketball court and play while watching the game, he could also be found standing on street corners in his native Harlem for hours, thinking about music; this meditative act is mirrored by Marcopoulos's film, which renders the artist's signature photographic intimacy into the moving image. Over the course of the film, the viewer is pulled into a fully absorptive situation of the informal basketball game. Moran's performance spontaneously translates the visual rhythms of the film's unscripted choreography, giving auditory form to the basketball court activity as read through Marcopoulos's lens.

*Monogram Hunters* (2018) finds Marcopoulos in a unique encounter with music and convergence, during travels in New Orleans. Invited to a gathering at a 7<sup>th</sup> Ward bar, the artist

captured a rehearsal by a traditional Mardi Gras Indian “tribe”. Marcopoulos films the members training a new generation the rules of the dance. There are specific codes and gestures which prepare each participant to do battle with rival tribes come Mardi Gras. The chants date back generations, and the drum rhythm coheres this tight-knit group of men to the wider collective of the neighborhood bar.

In *Upper Big Tracadie* (2018), filmed during a late summer trip in Nova Scotia, Marcopoulos visited a small town founded in 1783 by freed American slaves during the revolutionary war. The church, established in 1822, is a central part of a shrinking society and the site of gathering for its largely African Canadian congregation. Marcopoulos’s perspective—as voyeur and participant—allows the viewer an intimate experience of devotion as it is performed on a Sunday in this small municipality.

Marcopoulos has defined the pillars of his work as “noise, exertion, rebellion and chaos.” In Fergus McCaffrey’s exhibition, the artist brings the guiding principles of his photographic approach to video work, where they are informed by a sense of equanimity, care, and grace, capturing the slow flow and punctuated ruptures of



contemporary social life. Marcopoulos brings a formalist’s eye to public gathering spaces, transforming basketball courts, public parks, churches, and community centers into stages upon which the unplanned direction of daily life plays out.

The exhibition officially begins on December 20, 2018, with a screening of *The Park* at sonorium Music Hall with live piano accompaniment by Jason Moran. The soundtrack recording of this film was made possible with the support of Gucci. To celebrate Moran’s collaboration, Marcopoulos has created a playbill zine and poster, launched by iconic bookstore DAIKANYAMA TSUTAYA BOOKS, Tokyo with a book signing by the artist on December 21, 2018.

### **About the Artist**

Born in Amsterdam in 1957, Marcopoulos first came to New York in 1979, where he became involved in both the downtown art scene and city’s burgeoning hip hop culture. His photographs acted as bridges between the two overlapping worlds, creating a unique sensibility informed by both the raw, intuitive virtuosity of early hip hop music and the ironic, image-based culture of the 1980s downtown art world. After working in Andy Warhol’s studio for two years printing black-and-white photographs, Marcopoulos became the studio assistant of photographer Irving Penn; his work is dually informed by Warhol’s indiscriminate approach to subject matter and Penn’s emphasis on technical skill and formal elegance.

Marcopoulos began his own photographic practice on the streets of New York. His engaged, affable approach meant that he quickly found himself part of the communities he photographed. Taken as a whole, the volume of images Marcopoulos has produced since the early 1980s form a rough biographical sketch of the artist. Over the past four decades, these photographs have provided an intimate glimpse into his family life alongside that of his subjects, which, in the artist's words, include "edge dwellers, skaters, rap gods, athletes, kids, trees, graffiti, faces, tangles and cars." Marcopoulos is guided by the rich histories of conceptual art and documentary photography, his approach is spontaneous and intuitive; he takes cues from the practices and lifestyles of his subjects and this imbues his work with both emotional immediacy and formal rigor.

Marcopoulos has been the subject of several solo exhibitions at venues including the Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, Netherlands; Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA; MoMA PS1, New York; Frank Elbaz, Paris; Marlborough Chelsea, New York; and Alleged Gallery, New York, among others. Marcopoulos participated in two Whitney Biennials in 2002 and 2010, and his photographs are among the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; SFMOMA, CA; the New Orleans Museum of Art, LO; and the Detroit Institute of Art, MI. His work has been published in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Interview*, *Paper*, *Blind Spot*, *Transworld Snowboarding*, and *Snowboarder*. Among Marcopoulos's many books are *Epiphany: Gucci*, 2016 (IDEA); *Not Yet*, 2016 (Rizzoli), *Rome-Malibu*, 2016 (Roma); *Out to Lunch*, 2012 (Roth); *Fumes*, 2015 (Karma), *Directory*, 2011 (Nieves); *Out and About*, 2005; *Kids Born out of Fire*, 2004; *Pass the Mic: Beastie Boys 1991-1996*, 2001; and *Transitions and Exits*, 2000.

**Fergus McCaffrey Gallery**, founded in 2006, is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists such as Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018 with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman. The gallery's 2019 program features solo exhibitions by Ari Marcopoulos, Patti Smith, and Jasper Johns, among others.

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**Images:** *The Park Stills* © Ari Marcopoulos; Courtesy of Ari Marcopoulos and Fergus McCaffrey Gallery

**Map:**

