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By Loring Knoblauch

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Massao Mascaro, Jardin

JTF (just the facts): Published in 2019 by Witty Books ([here](#)) and L'éditeur du dimanche. Softcover, 80 pages (Japanese binding), with 41 black and white reproductions. There are no texts or essays included. In an edition of 500 copies. Design by Björn Schmidt. (Cover and spread shots below.)

Comments/Context: There is a green rectangle printed on the clear dust jacket of Massao Mascaro's photobook *Jardin*. It's an ordinary looking block of color, floating above the whiteness of the book underneath in a way that seems to accent its boundaries and edges – it's an expanse of green, but it has distinct definition. Given the photobook's title (*jardin* is garden in French), we can assume the graphic element is an exploration of what a garden can be – a block of flat green that is transformed into someplace special. And while we do see nature in many of Mascaro's understated black and white photographs, they are not really gardens in the literal sense; instead, his garden is broader and more metaphorical, encompassing all kinds of places that are transformed by a moment of careful looking.

Such an approach might have led off toward a compendium of visual discoveries of the kind we have seen many times before, but Mascaro's eye is more lyrical than wry and aloof, resulting in observations that feel measured and often gentle. He sees small rocks stuck in a drainage grate, an artful scattering of glass bottles, a crossed knee with a rolled up pant leg, and a white ball held between two sneakers, each of which is both normal and quietly unexpected.

The idea of physical touch connects a sequence of tender photographs. Two leafless trees reach out to each other, their branches just touching. Two women walk together in the street, their hands just a tiny bit apart. Two chairs are stacked together, their legs interlocked. A wisp of a weed has been blown into a chainlink fence, becoming entwined in the pattern. And a couple sits together, their legs casually but intimately overlapped. These moments feel surprisingly graceful, and seen as series, the rhythm of the light touches becomes even more apparent.

At several junctures in *Jardin*, Mascaro puts nearly imperceptible variant images back to back, forcing us to look and look again to discern the differences – it's a deliberate slowing mechanism that prevents *Jardin* from being flipped too quickly or haphazardly. He shows us a bird hopping on a concrete wall, a dark cave opening in a dusty hillside, the tranquility of a green space suddenly interrupted by a visitor, and the tiny moment-to-moment changes in a woman's expression, and these pairings are reminders of constant visual change, of a world in flux that is evolving every instant if we pay close enough attention to notice.

Mascaro is fond of the illusions he can craft with shadows. His cleverness takes form as a triangle shaped shadow behind a rectangular slab of wall, a dark shadow underneath a hovering sheet of plastic wrap, a seemingly straight post that casts a Y shaped shadow, and a bent tree trunk that casts a straight shadow. He also explores the other end of the light spectrum with a number

of images enlivened by highlights, from hair wisps and weedy creeping vines, to leaves blown in the air and a swarm of bugs hovering on a summer afternoon. Both sets of pictures (the dark and the light) have the air of magic, of something fleeting caught and documented by Mascaro's photographic curiosity.

The design and construction of Jardin support the overall feeling of cozy privacy. The images are nearly always one to a spread, with plenty of surrounding white space, the pictures bouncing around the available space with each page turn. Folded pages give the book a tactile intimacy, and the modest size further reinforces a close connection between viewer and photobook.

In the end, Jardin has a reserved charm that cuts against the prevailing tide of distant, overly self-impressed found photographic oddities we've seen of late in contemporary photography. What Mascaro has uncovered is often unexpected, but the presentation of his finds is humble, humane, and almost shy. That tranquil modesty makes for a serenely rich viewing experience, like a wandering stroll through a garden of calm wonders.

Collector's POV: Massao Mascaro does not appear to have consistent gallery representation at this time. As a result, interested collectors should likely follow up directly with the artist via his website (linked in the sidebar).