

An artist who captured a movement



PHOTO BY ANDREW BENJAMIN

Artist Toyo Tsuchiya in front of one of his charcoal drawings, now on view at the Resobox gallery.

As one of the artists who called themselves the Rivington School, Toyo Tsuchiya contributed to what is regarded as one of the most important art movements to emerge from the East Village in Manhattan. Now Resobox, a Japanese gallery in Long Island City, is exhibiting some recent charcoal drawings by the artist to celebrate his work.

Born near Mt. Fuji in Japan, Tsuchiya taught himself by reading books on photography and painting, circumventing a traditional art education.

He was especially drawn to photographers such as Robert Frank and Diane Arbus, who took documentary-like, black-and-white photos of ordinary people.

But establishing himself as an artist in Japan was hard, he explained.

“I was kind of depressed in Japan,” he said. “As an artist, it wasn’t so open.”

So he moved to New York City in 1980, settling in the East Village. There he took jobs as a carpenter and house painter to make ends meet.

Tsuchiya was discovered when he was photographing performance artists at the No Sen No social club, where many Rivington School artists would meet, perform and show their work. The group, who named themselves after an abandoned school across from No Sen No on Rivington Street, formed in 1983, and presented, as Tsuchiya puts it, “an alternative to the New York art world’s infatuation with glamour.”

Tsuchiya was invited to show his work at the club, and went on to direct many performance pieces there while continuing to pursue photography. Tsuchiya’s photos are now invaluable documents chronicling the Rivington School’s art.

The works on display at Resobox are not photographs, but are so realistic that they almost could be. Not surprisingly, he based many of these drawings on photographs he has taken, including one drawing depicting a child he once babysat and another of his ex-wife. Using charcoal, he said, reminds him of photography.

“I like black and white,” Tsuchiya said. “It’s kind of surreal.”

Just like his photography, his drawings feature real people.

“I can connect to people. Not rich people, not Wall Street people,” he explained. “These people have honesty.”

Takashi Ikezawa, Resobox’s event coordinator, said that among the appealing aspects of Tsuchiya’s work are his use of different media and its timeless quality.

“That’s exactly what we want to do,” Ikezawa said. “Some artists pick on a trend ... We want to show something with broader ideas.”

Success didn’t come early for Tsuchiya, yet he said that shouldn’t discourage anyone from giving up. “Do what you want. And do your best,” he advised.

Works by Toyo Tsuchiya

When: Through Dec. 9, Mon.-Fri. noon–6 p.m., Sat. & Sun. by appointment

Where: 41-26 27 St., Long Island City

Info: (718) 784-3680/resobox.com