



International Center of Photography

Contact: Communications Department
212-857-0045 info@icp.org

media release



Kenji Yanobe
Blue Cinema in the Woods, 2006
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Courtesy of the artist

Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan

On view from
May 16 through
September 7, 2008

Media Preview
May 15, 2008
11:30am - 1:00pm

RSVP:
info@icp.org
212.857.0045

Reflecting contemporary directions in Japanese art and culture, *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan* will be on view from May 16 through September 7, 2008 at the International Center of Photography (ICP), 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street. The works in the exhibition comprise a range of highly individual—and sometimes eccentric—responses to the changes that have taken place in Japan since the mid-1990s. In addition to opening up fresh perspectives on the cultural dynamics of contemporary Japan, *Heavy Light* and its accompanying catalogue will provide new insights into the distinctive position occupied by Japan's visual arts on the world stage.

Heavy Light will feature approximately eighty works by thirteen Japanese artists, all currently living and working in Japan. The participating artists are Makoto Aida, Naoya Hatakeyama, Naoki Kajitani, Hiroh Kikai, Midori Komatsubara, Yukio Nakagawa, Asako Narahashi, Tsuyoshi Ozawa, Tomoko Sawada, Risaku Suzuki, Miwa Yanagi, Kenji Yanobe, and Masayuki Yoshinaga. Approximately half of these artists will be showing for the first time in the United States. Seen together, their works will reveal the unusual imaginative power and visual inventiveness that are found in recent photo-based art in Japan.

The exhibition will explore four themes that have come to occupy Japanese artists working with camera-based mediums. These include the relationship of nature and the manmade world; the reexamination of Japanese tradition; personal identity as a form of costume play; and the role of the child as a cultural icon. By foregrounding these themes, the exhibition will provide a window onto the cultural transformations that are shaping Japan's 21st-century visual art.

Exhibition Highlights

I. Surfaces of the World

In his *Lime Works* series, **Naoya Hatakeyama** (b. 1958) offers a remarkable meditation on the human consumption of nature. His dramatic color photographs of the violent blasts that are part of the process of limestone extraction lead to images of the factories where limestone is turned into cement. His concluding cityscapes reveal the transformation of cement into Japan's contemporary urban environment.

In her series *Half Awake and Half Asleep in the Water*, **Asako Narahashi** (b. 1959) photographs Japan's coastal landscapes and architecture while standing in the waves just offshore. Her large-scale color photographs portray the ocean as both a serene presence and a potentially turbulent force.

II. Transformations of Tradition

Risaku Suzuki (b. 1963) conceives his photographic projects as book-length sequences of images that unfold in a cinematic flow. Twenty color photographs from his *Kumano* series trace the artist's journey from Tokyo, where he lives and works, to his home town of Kumano at the time of the winter fire ritual.

Since the 1950s, **Yukio Nakagawa** (b. 1918) has been recognized as one of Japan's most radically inventive practitioners of ikebana. His distinctive color photographs of his flower arrangements encompass a wide range of moods, including refinement, eroticism, and violence.

The whimsical objects, photographs, videos, and installations of **Tsuyoshi Ozawa** (b. 1965) use the procedures of conceptual art to explore everyday materials and situations. Included in the exhibition is Ozawa's *Vegetable Weapon* series.

A digital street photographer who employs an intuitive, stream-of-consciousness approach, **Naoki Kajitani** (b. 1970) produces large-scale, Pop-style color photographs of Japan's dense urban settings.

III. Costume and Self-Display

For three decades, **Hiroh Kikai** (b. 1945) has carried out memorable street portraits of the unusual personalities he encounters near the famous Senso-ji temple in the Asakusa district of Tokyo.

Tokyo-based **Masayuki Yoshinaga** (b. 1964) photographs Japan's subcultural groups, portraying the street-fashion teenagers of Harajuku, leather-clad motorcycle gangs, and young members of Tokyo's *yakusa* (gangster) clans.

In her series *Sanctuary*, **Midori Komatsubara** (b. 1965) suggests a fictional story taking place at a private Japanese boys' school. Her photographs chart the changing emotional and erotic relationships between her invented characters.

Tomoko Sawada (b. 1977) explores the ever-present tension between individual and collective identity in contemporary Japan. For this exhibition, the artist will make large-scale prints that are part of her continuing *School Days* series.

IV. The Child as Icon

Kenji Yanobe (b. 1965) creates elaborate sculptural objects and installations that testify to his childhood fascination with manga (Japanese comics), anime, and sci-fi films. In the installation presented in *Heavy Light*, the doll-like figure Torayan is instructed in techniques for survival in an ever-threatening world.

Makoto Aida (b. 1965) creates works that revel in grotesque exaggerations of Japanese cultural attitudes. The exhibition will feature his sculptures and photographs of bonsai plants whose stems are ornamented with smiling, childlike faces.

Miwa Yanagi (b. 1967) presents her most recent photographic series, *Fairy Tales*. These dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish photographs are darkly erotic reinterpretations of famous fairy tales. In them, the protagonists are young girls who use their youth and cunning to triumph over their tormentors.

Heavy Light has been conceived and organized by ICP curator Christopher Phillips and Noriko Fuku, an independent curator who teaches at the University of Art and Design in Kyoto. The exhibition reflects ICP's long-standing commitment to presenting the most innovative photo-based visual art from around the world. Following such acclaimed recent ICP exhibitions as *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China* (2004), *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (2005), and *Atta Kim: On-Air* (2006), *Heavy Light* will provide fresh insights into Japan, one of Asia's most visually innovative cultures.

Tour

Heavy Light will travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (summer 2009) and to two additional North American venues.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated, 246-page catalogue produced by ICP/Steidl. The catalogue will feature extended interviews with each of the thirteen exhibition artists, as well as a special essay by distinguished art historian Linda Nochlin.

Symposium

ICP will present a symposium devoted to contemporary Japanese art and photography on Saturday, May 17, from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Among those participating will be artists Naoya Hatakeyama, Kenji Yanobe, Makoto Aida, Tomoko Sawada, and Hiroh Kikai, as well as exhibition curators Christopher Phillips and Noriko Fuku. The event will be free and open to the public.

Sponsors

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