

Japan as you've never seen it before

Dean Irvine
26 November 2014



Kawaguchiko, 2003, Photographs © Asako Narahashi / Courtesy of Osiris

Evocative, unusual and perhaps a little disquieting, Asako Narahashi's photos of Japan can inspire a variety of reactions.

From coasts to rivers and lakesides, her seemingly semi-submerged photographs frame water and land as if taken by a castaway catching sight of shore, presenting a unique perspective of the country.

Since 2001 Narahashi has been using an all-weather film camera to take the series of photos that were first grouped under the title "Half Awake and Half Asleep in the Water."

Using an all-weather film camera she has traveled across Japan in all seasons, wearing a bathing suit in summer or fishing waders in winter months, and sometime taking to a boat or canoe to capture the shots.

"After much trial and error, I realized that it was better to give a sense of the water in the foreground, and gradually I took more photographs positioned as though the lens was put partially in the water," Narahashi told CNN via email.

"When I first started shooting this series, I imagined shooting all the way around Japan from the sea. But as I progressed, I felt this framework is not necessary for me, so I shoot both in Japan and other places." Her latest book "Ever After" is a continuation of that first series and saw travel across the world shooting in new locations. But her singular views of Japan are perhaps the most captivating. The commingling of the natural and the man-made is a consistent theme for Narahashi.

"(In Japan) nature exists within reach of people," she said. "You'll find old and new buildings or billboards and other artificial things randomly mixed along with nature. The natural and man-made are constructing landscapes while permeating each other."

But as the tsunami of 2011 illustrated to devastating effect, the natural and human worlds do not exist in harmony. The catastrophe also had a significant impact on Narahashi and her photography.

"After seeing the images of the 3/11 tsunami, knowing the scope of the disaster, it was a time when I questioned whether I could continue to shoot in the same manner as before," she said.

"Since I began the series I had been thinking that both 'fear' and 'consolation' are in my photographs in the state of being suspended in mid-air, unable to go up or down. But after 3/11, I felt like the pendulum had swung to the 'fear' side.

"The only answer I could find was to continue to take photographs. In last few years, I'm continuing to shoot in the sea but I have more occasions to shoot in rivers and lakes in (the) last few years than before."

Asako Narahashi
*Half awake and half asleep
in the water*

Opening september 19th
13.00 – 17.00
The exhibition runs until November 1st

Runebergsgatan 3, 114 29 Sthlm, Sweden
Phone +46 8 661 70 30
info@gungallery.se www.gungallery.se



GunGallery are once again pleased to show one of the most discussed names in photography right now. Asako Narahashi's latest work, *Half Awake and Half Asleep in the Water*, is now being exhibited in two locations: the prestigious Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, and here at Stockholm's GunGallery.

Her photography is best described as floating. She takes her pictures in the water, with a watertight camera. What's more, she doesn't like to swim. She's even slightly afraid of the sea. Maybe that's why she doesn't look into the viewfinder while she takes her pictures. Because who has time to concentrate on the camera when they're fighting to keep afloat in a menacing sea?

This results in self-willed pictures that are at first dominated by sky and sea. In between, one glimpses a city, a bridge, a person. There is a strong feeling that the beholder himself is lying in the water. And that we are the ones drowning.

If this is what drowning looks like, it seems beautiful, and futile to resist. The frailty of humanity against the powerful forces of nature is clear. The artist herself offers us little help in interpreting this original series. Or maybe she does. "I wanted to look at Japan from the water," as she put it herself in an interview in an American magazine.

Before at GunGallery:
Osamu Kanemura, Sølve Sundsbø,
Stephen Gill, JH Engström,
Pentti Sammallahti, Carsten Höller,
Anders Petersen and Martin Parr.

Asako Narahashi, Momochi, 2003 (#013)



International Center of Photography

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

media release



Kenji Yanobe
Blue Cinema in the Woods, 2006
© Kenji Yanobe
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

This exhibition was organized by the International Center of Photography with lead support from the ICP Exhibitions Committee. Generous support provided by Nikon, Robert and Gayle Greenhill, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Diana Barrett for The Fledgling Fund, Roberta and Steven Denning, and Studley. Additional support provided by Asahi Beer Arts Foundation, Asahi Beer USA, Japan Foundation, Rick and Ellen Kelson, Andrew and Marina Lewin, Ira M. Resnick, Shiseido, David Solo, Artur Walther, and by Omar Al-Farisi, Frank and Mary Ann Arisman, Toyota Motor North America, and Diane and Tom Tuft. Support for the interpretive programs has been provided by the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation.

Nikon



Asahi Asahi Beer Arts Foundation

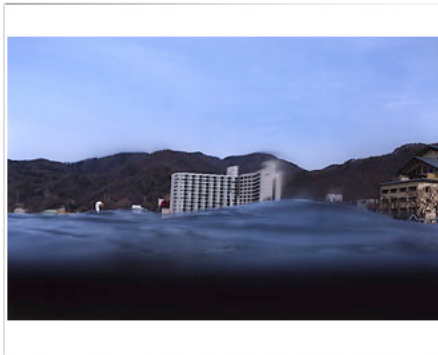


The 24th Annual Higashikawa Photography Awards

Winner of The 24th Domestic Photographer Prize
ASAKO NARAHASHI



Asako Narahashi - Lives in Tokyo



from *half awake and half asleep in the water*, 2007

Born in Tokyo in 1959. Graduated from School of Letters, Art and Science II of Waseda University, as an art major. As a student, she responded to an advertisement in *Shashin jidai* posted by Moriyama Daido and subsequently joined the photography group, Photo session. In 1990, she established a private gallery 03FOTOS in order to present her personal works.

Jointly published ten issues of *Main* with Ms. Ishiuchi Miyako from 1996 to 2000. Her photography books *NU-E* (1997), *FUNICULI FUNICULA* (2003) drew attention by capturing the Japanese landscape with a unique sense of distance.

Award-winning photographs, *half awake and half asleep in the water* focus on the rippling surfaces of the sea and lakes, which capture the scenes both underwater and above. This work, which depends on the fluid encounters between land and water, leaves an ambiguity between awake and asleep. Her photo is recognized as opening a new photographic style. Nazraeli Press (U.S.) published its photography book last fall and it enjoys a high reputation from abroad.