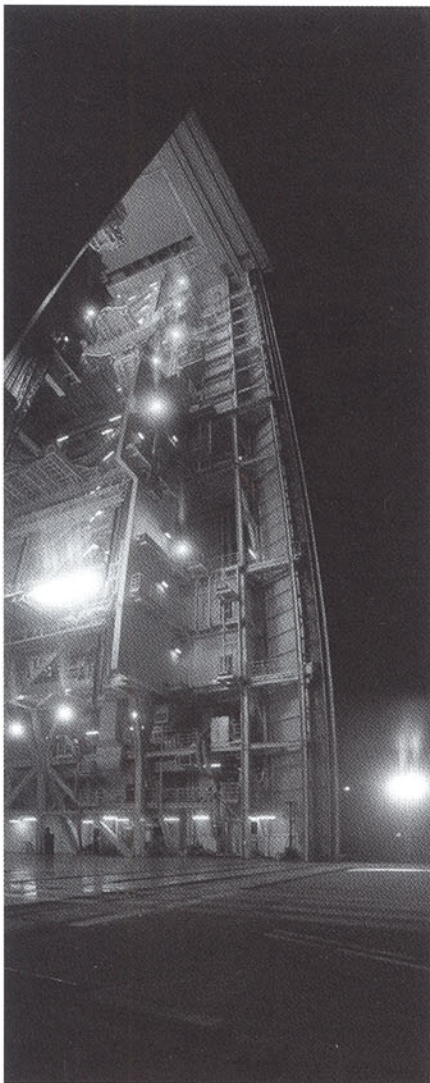


R E V I E W S

T O K Y O



NOGUCHI RIKA, *Rocket Hill*, 2002. Lightjet print, 243 x 95 cm. Courtesy of Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.

NOGUCHI RIKA

HARA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Noguchi Rika's photographic style and attitude radically depart from the dominant trend of Japanese photography in the 1990s, characterized by the appreciation of the everyday and the rediscovery of youthful naïveté to capture the immanent joy of life. While Hiromix and Masafumi Sanai projected their sensibility through objects in their rooms and local surroundings, Noguchi photographs large open spaces, placing human or mechanical figures in the visual field as heterogeneous elements to suggest her own modest entry into impersonal space. Her adept manipulation of composition, texture, and color renders landscape as a combination of color fields, asserting the power of artistic abstraction that sublimates the transience of nature in formal design.

Noguchi's recent work indicates her deepened interest in the specificity of an event. The portraits of Chinese swimmers in a partially frozen lake near Beijing in the winter of 2002 position the human body as a tangible mass against the gravity of the jade water. A push and pull between photographic contingency and formal estrangement can be traced in this mid-career retrospective. In a series photographing a scuba diver, the gradation of tone and texture created by the changing density of grainy particles dispersed over the surface — an effect produced by bleaching black and white prints and re-printing them in color after digital scanning — transmits the play of light and shadow that recapitulates the spiritual inflections of ink painting. The horizontally or vertically elongated frames evoke the composition of folding screens and scroll paintings. Among the photos in the "Rocket Hills" series, the pearly white flashes of light explode above a night ocean gleaming with the dark glaze of a Raku tea cup, and a translucent skeleton of an iron tower looms above the dark green trees and against the ominous stillness of a gray porcelain sky.

Capturing the otherness underlying natural scenes, Noguchi's photography indicates the interpenetration of life and art; her formalism balanced with the fluctuations of a phenomenal world sets a model for the next generation of Japanese photographers who search, through geometrical patterns, a different way of seeing the world.

Midori Matsui