

Time Out New York

March 15-22, 2001

Rika Noguchi, "Did He Reach the Moon?"

D'Amelio Terras, through Mar 24
(see Chelsea).

Rika Noguchi's straightforward photographs—of such ordinary events as a man crossing a street in Queens, and of such common scenes as a pastoral farm and a muddy construction site with bulldozers and exposed piping—should be boring, but they're not. Noguchi combines extremely formal images with clear light and subtle color to create eerie, meditative tableaux. They possess all the uncanny qualities of Gregory Crewdson's, or Jeff Wall's, staged photography, and yet they are actually random scenes that Noguchi has stumbled upon.

Dreaming of Babylon #11 sounds about as dull as can be: a shot of a black pickup truck at a drive-through car wash in Brazil. Noguchi shoots the truck from behind, doors open—framed by the giant, fluffy red cylindrical brushes of the car wash—to make the entire scene seem abandoned. The image is reminiscent of the empty Parisian streets photographed by Eugène Atget in the 1920s: The lonely, man-made landscape seems slightly sinister, as if the people who should be there had been abducted by aliens.



Rika Noguchi, *Dreaming of Babylon 12, 1999-2000.*

Indeed, Noguchi's curious, slightly off-kilter photographs seem like documents of earth taken by a visitor from outer space (the show's title reflects Noguchi's consistent ability to recast her home planet as an unfamiliar one). Her "New Land" series, which focuses on construction sites near Amsterdam, portrays people and their machines as buglike and insignificant. In *New Land #2*, workers are dwarfed by a giant pipe, bulldozers and a forest of electrical towers, but the entire human scene seems tiny compared to the giant sky and ominous black clouds that fill the upper portion of the frame. Her attention to the horizon line brings to mind the work of fellow Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto: Like him, Noguchi has the keen ability to turn the simplest of images into a haunting, dramatic work via a meticulous attention to composition.

—Reena Jana