

Human Nature

Naoya Hatakeyama and Japanese Photography at SFMOMA



Naoya Hatakeyama, *A BIRD/Blast #130*, 2006; Collection SFMOMA, promised gift of Kurenboh; © Naoya Hatakeyama

Naoya Hatakeyama: *Natural Stories* (p. 9), the Tokyo-based photographer's first retrospective in the United States, introduces Bay Area audiences to a key figure in contemporary photography and an acute, analytical observer of the complex relationship between humanity and nature. Hatakeyama has spent much of the last 25 years making stark and beautiful pictures of landscapes in transition. These images portray people through their impact on the environment, often examining the systems we create to produce and process natural resources—quarries, mines, factories—and the cities that those resources make possible. Then, in 2011, he turned his lens on a landscape where these structures were undone by natural forces: northeastern Japan after the massive earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011.

The Human Landscape

"There has never been a time in our history when the space about us was so fraught with artificial objects as today," Hatakeyama wrote early in his career. "We who live in cities have tossed away the sea, the mountains, the rivers, yet we receive their fruits for our consumption through a vast distribution system." Hatakeyama's works thoughtfully trace the ramifications of this system from multiple angles and across time.

For instance, after photographing limestone quarries in his early series *Lime Hills* (1986–91; pictured on the cover), Hatakeyama observed that "the quarries and the cities are like negative and positive images of a single photograph." Following this connection, he began to investigate urban centers built from limestone and concrete, leading to series like *Underground* (1999) and *Ciel Tombé* (2007).

Works like *Lime Hills* and the later *Terrils* series (2009–10) use light, scale, and composition in ways that recall the 19th-century painterly tradition of the sublime. But Hatakeyama's distanced, rational vision exists in tension with the traditional sense of awe at the beauty and vastness of the landscape. Ultimately, Hatakeyama's photographs redefine how we picture and understand the natural world, and the boundary between the natural and the human-made.

The power and unpredictability of nature is forcefully evident in the *Rikuzentakata* series (2011; pictured opposite), which records the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan. For Hatakeyama, the disaster struck extremely close to home: the town where he grew up, Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture, was left in ruins. These

are some of the most personal photographs the artist has ever exhibited, yet they are remarkably unsentimental, displaying the same calm precision that marks the rest of his work.

Connections in the Collection

Several works by Hatakeyama, including *A BIRD/Blast #130* (2006; pictured opposite), have recently come into the SFMOMA collection as part of a gift of more than 250 photographs from the Kurenboh collection. Photographs related to land use and works from Japan are two areas of emphasis in the SFMOMA photography collection, making Hatakeyama's work a natural and important addition.

At the core of the museum's renowned collection of Japanese photography is the avant-garde tradition that emerged in the tumultuous years after World War II. The raw, graphic black-and-white style and predominantly urban subject matter of postwar photographers like Daido Moriyama or Shomei Tomatsu are very different from Hatakeyama's cool, analytical, large-scale color works, whose concerns and context venture far beyond Japan. And yet, in documenting the aftermath of the Tohoku disaster, Hatakeyama and other contemporary photographers are heirs to a tradition of bearing witness that stretches back to the avant-garde photographers' responses to the human-made disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Naoya Hatakeyama, *Takata-cho 2011.5.2*, from the series *Rikuzentakata*, 2011; Courtesy the artist; © Naoya Hatakeyama

Japanese Photography from SFMOMA Goes on Tour

A group of important Japanese photographs from SFMOMA's collection—along with many other key works in our collection—will be going on the road when our exhibitions and programs move off site to accommodate the construction of our expansion starting in June 2013. Currently in the planning stages is a traveling survey tracing the roots of avant-garde photography in Japan from the 1950s through the 1980s, based on the 2009 exhibition *The Provoke Era: Postwar Japanese Photography*, which will tour to communities around California. We'll be announcing more details about our full slate of off-site exhibitions and public programs in the coming months; be sure to sign up for e.news at sfmoma.org/myaccount to stay in the know. And in the meantime, look for an interview with Naoya Hatakeyama on our blog, Open Space, at blog.sfmoma.org.

4

OPENING EXHIBITIONS

8

CONTINUING EXHIBITIONS

10

EVENT CALENDAR

12

TALKS, EVENTS + FILMS

16

MEMBERSHIP

17

SUPPORTING THE MUSEUM

18

BEHIND THE SCENES

19

MUSEUMSTORE + INFO

This exhibition and program guide is produced bimonthly for members of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

September/October 2012

Editor: **Juliet Clark**
Editorial associate: **Lisa Wong Macabasco**
Design direction: **Jennifer Sonderby**
Design and production: **Public**

© 2012 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. All rights reserved.

Printed on New Leaf Frontier: 100 percent recycled, 100 percent postconsumer waste, processed chlorine-free, manufactured with Green-e®-certified wind power, FSC-certified, ancient forest-friendly.

On the front cover: Naoya Hatakeyama, *Lime Hills #12801*, 1986; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; © Naoya Hatakeyama

sfmoma.org/socialmedia

