PRESS COVERAGE

Consuming Nature

December 11- February 9, 2004

2. Chicago Reader, 2. 6. 2004
3. Chicago Sun Times, 12. 25. 2003
4. Chicago Sun Times, 1. 2. 2004
5. Rearview Mirror, March/April, 2004
**CONSUMING NATURE**

at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, through February 19

**NORTHWEST PHOTOGRAPIERS PROJECT**

at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, through February 14

**TERRY EVANS**

By Paul Camper

**NATURE UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

R
domistic art of the 18th and 19th centuries often aimed to inspire awe at nature. That goal is much less common today, but the seven photographers now at the Museum of Contemporary Photography—four in "Consuming Nature" and three in the installation of "Midwest Photographers Project"—do just that. Their subject is hardly unadorned nature, however, but the intersection of natural and man-made forms, and they balance the power of each against the other.

In "Consuming Nature," Tsuko Shibata is represented by photographs of dome and other structures in his native Japan and the United States. Making constructed walls and mounds of soil equally palatable, Kamiyashima Village, Nara Prefecture, 1998 shows on a hillside a huge mound with a small mound on top of the mound.

On the left a huge, sloping wall of vestige of the land which the most eviscerates yet another curve. Once it could feel the monumental strength of the two elements as they press down, against each other, and against water. On a Village, Wajima Prefecture, 2000 shows an imposing cliff, covered with vegetation and many fractures, rising to the side of a road. A mesh covering apparently holds any fragments in place—yet once again the natural form seems to exert a tenacious force, which the mounds in the rock bold articulate and the net seems to contain.

What's most amazing about Shibata's photos is the way he refrains from making judgments: he holds natural objects and human interventions in perfect balance, often colliding but retaining their own qualities, their own beauty. His ultraflat planes have a meditative quality; made from negatives taken with an eight-by-ten camera, they emphasize the variety of surface details, signaling acceptance of the world as it is. 

In "Midwest Photographers Project," Mary Clark's photographs of natural landscapes are captured with a similar meditative effect. She was a documentary photographer until 1978, when she had a "conversion experience" while photographing a small patch of prairie for a friend: looking at its rich diversity and complexity, she began to see the prairie as a metaphor for "the structure of the universe." Her most recent series, "Leaves," a recent survey of much larger sections of land, seems filtered through that visionary moment: she presents formal lines and vegetation patterns as subjects worthy of close inspection, as mystically spiritual. There is considerable variety in "Leaves," Kansas, June 1998, which shows isolated burrows forming lines and curved arrows, the way vegetation follows those lines creates a sense of harmony in varying.

Exxon consistently frames her images to balance diversity and order. In "River and Trees," 1999, her focus is on the trees and their reflections, her eye fixed on the water surface, the trees' reflections.

Though easily distinguishable from the rocks, the trees are also scattered, so that the differences between the natural and man-made forms is less drastic than one might imagine.

Paul C. Clark's photographs of community gardens in "Midwest Photographers Project" achieve a similar balance. In "Garden 43," 1999, Clark draws out the similarities between a grid of plastic bags and the plants behind it: he notices small curves in each empty box, as if the rocks he grew in this land and the cardboard boxes were an interesting and indigenous species. In "Garden 40," 2000, fragments of dead plants cling to a dark roll of fencing whose dense web of lines creates forms as various and visually interesting as plants growing in a garden.

Like Shibata and Clark, Terry Evans creates studies of patterns—and her color views of praties, also in "Midwest Photographers Project," have a similarly meditative effect. She was a documentary photographer until 1978, when she had a "conversion experience" while photographing a small patch of prairie for a friend: looking at its rich diversity and complexity, she began to see the prairie as a metaphor for "the structure of the universe." Her most recent series, "Leaves," a recent survey of much larger sections of land, seems filtered through that visionary moment: she presents formal lines and vegetation patterns as subjects worthy of close inspection, as mystically spiritual. There is considerable variety in "Leaves," Kansas, June 1998, which shows isolated burrows forming lines and curved arrows, the way vegetation follows those lines creates a sense of harmony in varying.

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**"SHIMODA TOWN, FUJISAKA PREFECTURE, 1990" BY TSUKO SHIBATA**

Square and "boulders" where the plastic stands over. In Garden 41, 1998, Indian vegetation is interspersed on a fence, covering the entire area. But in Garden 3, the fence is some clumps of vegetation amid sand, while a dark green tree at the upper left pulls the composition to the left balance, as does the drop-off suggesting nature's boundaries. Toward Morning, Saline County, Kansas, September 1990 shows that nature contains an infinite richness of detail.

Mark Roxwold in "Consuming Nature," foregrounds the effects of working in series, records the ordinals of a utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm. Working in series, he records the effects of ordinals of utilitarian farm.

Roxwold's receding roads emphasize a Renaissance single-point perspective, creating the sense of vanishing, even on a hillside view that one might expect to see in a Renaissance painting. The effect of the hills and the distant railroad lines, Roxwold makes a statement about Thomas Cole's "The Course of Empire," which implies that the "Course of Empire" series of paintings that show the establishment and dissolution of civilizations. In a straining perspective, the"Course of Empire series of paintings that show the establishment and dissolution of civilizations. In a straining perspective, the"Course of Em..."
First Lincoln photo highlights exhibit

BY BILL CUNNIFF
Museum Pieces

The earliest known picture of one of America’s most beloved presidents is presented in Lincoln Through the Years: 1846-1865, a new photographic exhibit at the West Chicago City Museum.

The photo, which is a daguerreotype — an early type of photography — was taken by Nicholas H. Shepherd in Springfield. It was in 1846 or 1847, after Lincoln had been elected to the House of Representatives. Lincoln was 37 or 38 years old at the time of the sitting.

The picture was first published in McClure’s Magazine in 1886, after Robert T. Lincoln, the president’s son, revealed its existence in an interview in Chicago, according to Roger Norton’s Abraham Lincoln Research Site. Robert said the photo hung on the wall of his home from the time he could first remember as a child.

The picture was accompanied by a photo of Mary, Lincoln wife. “These are my two most precious pictures, taken when we were young and so desperately in love,” Mary said. “They will grace the walls of the White House.” The photographs are from the Illinois State Historical Library.

A 1857 photograph was taken in Chicago by Alexander Hesler. “This coarse hair of mine was in a particularly bad tangle at the time,” Lincoln reportedly said about the picture, according to a biographer. “The picture presented me in all its fright.”

Another image was taken by Hesler in 1860, just after Lincoln was nominated for the presidency. Of this image, Lincoln said: “That looks better and expresses me better than any I have ever seen.”

Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, thought the image was a noble pose, according to the American Museum of Photography. “There is a peculiar curve of the lower lip, the lone mole on the right cheek and a pose of the head so essentially Lincolnian. No other artist has ever caught it,” Herndon said.

In November 1860, the president-elect was photographed by Samuel G. Aeschuler while visiting Chicago. The image is the first to show Lincoln with whiskers. In February 1861, a full-bearded Lincoln was photographed in Springfield two days before departing for Washington, D.C., and the presidency.

Another image shows the president less than two weeks before delivering the Gettysburg Address. A picture from March 1865 is believed to be the last Lincoln photograph taken. Just weeks later, on April 14, Lincoln was assassinated.

A model of the Lincoln funeral train is also displayed. The model, about 15 feet long, was constructed by Dr. Wayne Wesolowski, a chemistry professor formerly at Benedictine University in Lisle. The funeral train carried Lincoln’s body from Washington to Springfield.

As a result of the Lincoln funeral procession, George Pullman and his railroad car received national publicity. His cars soon became famous for luxury train travel. In 1867, George established the Pullman Palace Car Company on the Far South Side.

The photography exhibit will run through Feb. 16. The train model will stay set up until March 14. The museum is at 132 Main Street. Admission is free. Call (330) 231-3576.

MAN VS. NATURE: Four photographers click on the ongoing relationship between man and the environment in Consuming Nature, a new exhibit at the Museum of
Contemporary Photography at Columbia College. The pictures show nature’s beauty as well as nature’s destruction.

“On one hand, humans are weak and in awe before the power of nature. On the other hand, they are energetic and domineering builders, diggers and settlers,” said Natasha Egan, associate director at the museum.

Mark Ruwedel’s series, entitled “The Ice Age,” records the evidence of both prehistoric and contemporary cultures that have left visible marks along the ancient shores of Lake Manly, which is now Death Valley.

Naoya Hatakeyama’s photographs of limestone factories and quarries depict the scarring and blasting of Japan’s hills and mountains in a country with few natural resources.

Toshio Shibata took images of cement dams, wire nettings, and erosion prevention to look at how man attempts to restrict the course of nature.

Dan Holdsworth made a large-scale photo of Black Mountain, taken at the edge of the Vatnajokull glacier in Iceland. An almost imperceptible trace of color is actually a fragile mass of ice and volcanic debris at the point of collapse.

The exhibit will run through Feb. 19. The museum is at 600 S. Michigan. Admission is free. Call (312) 663-5554.

YULE LOG: The tradition is ancient, yet it is still cool/To wander the forest/In search of The Yule.

The Morton Arboretum is calling all nature-loving sleuths to participate in its popular annual hunt for the hidden Yule Log on Saturday.

Once the official log is recovered, revelers return, greeted by a bonfire, hot wassail toasting, caroling and general merrymaking. Continuing tradition, the Yuletide Spirit bestows the Finder’s Garland on those who locate the log.

Hunts will take place at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m., near the Thornhill Shelter pavilion. Participants are encouraged to wear appropriate clothing and shoes for hiking.

The arboretum is at 4100 Illinois 53. Admission is free, but parking is $7. Call (630) 719-2465.
MORTON ARBORETUM. 4100 Rte. 53, Lisle. Ongoing: The 1,700-acre arboretum features more than 30,000 labeled plant specimens representing 3,600 different types of plants. It is home to the largest U.S. collection of plants from Russia, China, the Balkans and Northeast Asia, as well as a collection representing Northern Illinois. Daily, 7 am-5 pm. Members are free, non-members pay $7 per car. Wednesday is $3 per car. (630) 719-2465.

MOVIE PALACE MUSEUM. York Theatre Building, 152 N. York, 2nd flr., Elmhurst. Ongoing: The museum features blueprints, photos, posters, programs and artifacts from the theaters across the United States with special emphasis on the grand movie palaces of the Chicago area. Mon-Wed, 10 am-4 pm; Thu, 10 am-3 pm; Fri, 10 am-4 pm. Freewill donation. (630) 782-1800.

MUSEUM OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS. Chicago Cultural Center, Michigan and Washington. Ongoing: The museum's archival collection contains more than 70,000 radio and television programs and commercials. Guests can become television news anchors in the Kraft Television Center, or re-live the 1952 World Series in the Sportscaster's Cafe. Museum hours: Mon-Sat, 10 am-4:30 pm; Sun, noon-5 pm; archives closed on Sunday, museum closed all holidays. Free. (312) 629-6000.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART. 220 E. Chicago. Closes Sun. "Alexander Calder in Focus: Works from the Leonard and Ruth Horwich Family Loan." To Jan. 18; "Kerry James Marshall: One True Thing, Meditations on Black Aesthetics." To July, 2004; "Strange Days"; "Julian Opie: We Swim Amongst the Fishes." Museum hours: Tue, 10 am-8 pm, Wed-Sun, 10 am-5 pm. Adults, $10; students and seniors, $6; free, members and children 12 and under; Tuesday, free from 5-8 pm. (312) 280-2680.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY. Columbia College Chicago, 600 S. Michigan. To Jan. 19; "Consuming Nature" by Mark Ruwedel's, Naoya Hatakeyama, Toshio Shibata and Dan Holdsworth. Mon-Fri, 10 am-5 pm; Thu, 5-8 pm; Sat, noon-5 pm. Free. (312) 663-5554.

MUSEUM OF HOLOGRAPHY. 1134 W. Washington. Feature exhibits include an animated gold miner, a 3-by-3 foot hologram of a large dinosaur, moving holograms, and an animated hologram of Michael Jordan. Wed-Sun, 12:30-5 pm. $2.50, $3. (312) 226-1007.

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY. 5745 S. Lake Shore. Closes Sun. "Neptune's Holiday Kingdom." Daily from 11 am-3 pm. Ongoing exhibit: "Wild Reef." Ongoing: The world's largest indoor aquarium is home to more than 8,000 animals and boasts a 90,000-gallon Caribbean Reef where divers hand-feed fish, sharks and a sea turtle daily. The Oceanarium offers winding nature trails through scenic re-creations of a Pacific Northwest coastline and includes encounters with beluga whales, Pacific white-sided dolphins, Alaskan sea otters, harbor seals and penguins. Take an adventure and discover something new at Animal Encounters, daily, 11:30 am and 2 pm, when guests can look at least learn about and touch such critters as a Chilean rose tarantula, leopard gecko, African bullfrog, red-tailed boa, yellow-footed tortoise, and more. The Oceanarium's Beluga School—It's Cool, daily at 11 a.m. is another touch opportunity to meet the soft, the shielded and the spiny animals that inhabit the sea and shore. Amazon Rising: Seasons of the River, looks at the largest freshwater river system in the world. Museum hours: Mon-Fri, 9 am-5 pm; Sat-Sun, 9 am-6 pm. All Access Pass (Aquarium, Oceanarium and Wild Reef); Adults, $21; Seniors and Children 3-11, $15. Mini Pass (Aquarium and either Oceanarium or Wild Reef); Adults, $17; seniors and children 3-11, $13. Aquarium only: Adults, $8; seniors and children 3-11, $8; children 2 and under; free. Discount for Chicago residents. (312) 939-2435.

SMART MUSEUM OF ART. University of Chicago, 5550 S. Greenwood. To Jan. 4; "Hiroshi Sugimoto: Sea of Buddha." Tue-Wed, Fri, 10 am-4 pm; Thu, 10 am-9 pm; Sat-Sun, noon-6 pm; closed holidays. Free. (312) 702-
"Consuming Nature"
Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL

More than any other genre, the landscape has embodied the aspirations of modern visual art to evoke emotion through impression. Portraying nature as either a home through the offices of beauty or a transhuman power by means of sublimity, landscape artists traditionally compensate for industrial civilization by carving out a niche for spontaneity.

As technology encompasses the environment, contemporary landscape photographers have broken with tradition, turning their attention increasingly to the inroads into nature made by human contrivance. Their images have consequently taken on a conceptual dimension that bids to eclipse their aesthetic effect.

"Consuming Nature" brought together seven active landscape photographers from Japan, Great Britain, and the United States who deploy different approaches in their portrayals of the nature/culture interface. Thoughtfully curated by Natasha Egan, the show took full advantage of the museum’s ample tri-level space to highlight variations on its major premise that “nature and man challenge and consume each other.”

The sense that human beings are locked in a destructive conflict with nature was most evident in Naoya Hatakeyama’s series of color photographs shot in Japanese limestone quarries that, despite their quiet and muted lushness, brutally evidenced industrial spoliation. In one large central image that deconstructed the others, Hatakeyama showed how the earth is wounded, capturing an explosion in which rocks and dirt billow momentarily into the form of an enormous blooming bush. Blast—the only work in the show that was not still and meditative—evidenced how difficult it is for even a photographer with environmentalist intent to avoid the pull of aesthetic and emotion-laden impression.

Hatakeyama shared the main gallery space with Toshio Shibata, whose black-and-white studies of massive dam and road projects in Japan and the United States were so stolid and inert that they gave the illusion of permanence to processes that were inexorably grinding forward. If Hatakeyama recorded scars, Shibata documented operations in which the earth is opened up and prepared before it is resurfaced with a cultural skin. Elegantly composed and darkly luminous, Shibata’s images nonetheless evoked disturbance as they seduced repose.

The tempo of the show became more relaxed in the back space of the first floor, which featured Mark Ruwedel’s faded, light black-and-white photographs of decaying footpaths, railroad tracks, Native-American ceremonial sites, and tire tracks in the California desert. Ruwedel’s places have been abandoned or neglected by human beings, and his images evoked a sense of peaceful desolation that indicated a drawn-out process of healing that might never be completed. His most effective photographs emphasized single-point perspective, showing overgrown paths seeming to lead to nowhere and vanishing at the horizon. These images were especially effective because they balanced meaningful content with intense emotional impact. The brutality conveyed by the Japanese photographers was no match for Ruwedel’s conjuring with complex states of alienation.

Paul Clark achieved another equilibration of significance and sensibility. His intimate black-and-white studies of tomato cages and crusty fencing in community gardens in Chicago suburbs emphasized beauty and affirmation. A masterful abstractionist in the tradition of early Harry Callahan, Clark did not represent the nature/culture interface as a conflict but as an entanglement and exuberant embrace. Occupying an alcove off the main galleries, Clark’s images served as counterpoints to the other bodies of work, pointing toward an imaginative reconciliation that is the province and strength of the straight photographic abstraction.

Shooting in all four seasons, Clark has consistently evoked the wild and spindly elegance of the devices that gardeners use to direct growth rather than to master its forces. His delight in bursting overgrowth and wintry abandonment brought home the bias in favor of nature shared by all the photographers in the show that reflected not so much a political commitment as a persistence of the modern romantic compensatory aesthetic.

A bird’s-eye view of the show’s theme was provided on the second floor by Terry Evans’s color aerial shots of America’s Midwest plains. Here the viewer was placed a sufficient distance from the subjects to contemplate the cycle of wounding and healing—and the sheer beauty of humanity imposed geometrical form mingling with nature’s ragged forms—without rushing to judgment.

More than anyone else, Evans epitomized the fulfillment of Egan’s desire to exhibit artists who avoided the Scylla of “ecological correctness” and the Charybdis of “Romantic sublimity,” and who “observed a more complicated exchange” between nature and culture. That complexity, in this case privileged romance, does not detract from a curatorial success.

Michael Weinstein is a Purdue professor and freelance writer from Chicago, IL.

Blast (1995) by Naoya Hatakeyama

March/April 2004