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TORONTO

AKIRA KOMOTO

DeLeon White Gallery, Toronto  
May 2nd - June 13th, 1998

Lurking just beneath the apparent delight with illusion we see in Akira Komoto's photographs are deep questions about appearance and reality. The most emphatic embodiment of Komoto's disquieting obsession with representation in art is the shovel in *Seeing 85.25*. Only the handle and the base are immediately visible and the whole surface of this object has been painted to mimic the exotic background setting of sky, cloud, water and beach. This object/shovel stuck in beach gravel has been painted to literally imitate the nature that surrounds it, to disappear into the setting, but it does not entirely. As such, it raises questions about the way our perception of nature imitates our perception of art. The suggestion is that we cannot see without conceiving, be it in reality, or art. If one could actually walk into this photo, its illusionistic aspect would immediately vanish. Like the others works in the show at DeLeon White Gallery, Komoto's *Seeing*



*Seeing 93-35*

*85.25* hinges on the artist's presentation of a singular perspective on the work - the photographic perspective. The layers of art and artifice - of nature and matter - in these beautiful static images have to do with the way we "consciously" perceive them as "subjects". Komoto manipulates objects so they diffuse into their environmental settings as if to say it's all colour, light, life.

While Komoto's aesthetic is subtle, the underlying meaning to these works is mercurial. Komoto paints in space while referencing the limitations that object-based art or the painted landscape "subject" share in common. In *Seeing 90:18*, Komoto literally extends the shoreline onto a section of rock that projects into the ocean. Space invades matter. Modern psychology talks about the

thresholds at which certain senses are activated. In a sense Komoto's *Seeing 90:18* is a daydream. He flees the artifice he creates by leaving clues to his manipulation of the content in these photos. Found materials, often painted in bright colours, even rectangular elements that resemble paintings in their dimensionality can be found in these works. These are found illusions that allude to the act of reconstruction involved in painting, sculpture, even installation art.

The immensity Komoto depicts through his photographs is of a phenomenological, yet illusory constructed universe. The "real product" of his approach is that we become aware of the enlarging of elements and things, as we might when daydreaming. "It is often this inner immensity that gives (a) real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world," Gaston Bachelard once wrote. The reality we expand on, enlarge upon is an inner one. The titling of these works is revealing. Komoto does not affix a descriptive meaning to the photos, nor does he leave them untitled, but instead adds the prefix *Seeing* - then dates them. There is calligraphic, joyful iconoclasm to some of these works. It extends into and beyond these serene and exotic landscape settings to become a state of mind. Three different representations of wheels - the first painted in a rough

hewn way with spokes on wooden boards, the second a circular green shape and the third an actual car tire - become a rising wave in *Seeing: 93.59* that recalls Hokusai's *The Great Wave*. Komoto's is made up of paint, found wood and mass-produced objects placed in a sea of grass and flowers. The language of Komoto's art of artifice recalls Hiroshige and Hokusai's imaginative ukiyo-e (floating world) wood block prints from the Edo period that signified a breaking away from the austere, monochromatic scrolls of the court art tradition, and announced a new conception of landscape in Japanese art. Photoworks like *Seeing 93.59* or *Seeing 93.35* build a narrative out of *bric-à-brac*. We can only objectify Komoto's constructions and appreciate them as a language of composition because of their highlighted bright, painterly colours and arrangements within the photographed subject. Akira Komoto's photographic imaginings are like theatrical set design in the landscape, calligrammes of the highest order orchestrated in space and time. Playing, placing and painting elements amid nature's sensitive chaos, his visual vision is of an illusionary truth. Our mind's eye does the rest.

John K. Grande



*Seeing 93-59*