

AGGLOMERATIONS

ALTHOUGH EACH SERIES I UNDERTAKE may superficially appear quite distinct, there exists three main ideas/preoccupations that operate in my work as constants, interacting with one another in order to manifest, for the lack of a better word, the overall feeling generated by my body of work as a whole. The first idea is something I refer to as a *charged neutrality*. I use the term charged loosely, and depending on the individual piece, I intend the work to be politically charged, socially charged, sexually charged, etc. However, because I have no desire to impose my personal point of view on the spectator, I deliberately make use of narrative and/or formal devices in order to negate any static meaning which could be derived by the depicted subject.

The second preoccupation is that which probably relates to my own personal experience in a number of urban and suburban environments (e.g. Tokyo, Yokohama, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Mexico City), and my observations that for the majority, if not all, of the people I know, the common thread that affects the inhabitants of these places is what I consider as the modern condition. I cannot pinpoint exactly where the origin of this condition begins, and if such a thing exists. Perhaps it has its roots in the industrial revolution, or perhaps earlier with the enlightenment and colonial expansion. Regardless, anyone in any major or minor city in the world is experiencing at this very moment the outcome of this strive towards the modern in which civilization as a whole has undertaken.

The third and final idea I feel is common to all of my work is an examination of the "real" and the "fictional" and a questioning of the line where one begins and the other ends. From my perspective, anything that lies within the realm of social reality could be seen as a fiction which has been constructed by a collective either large or small, with power or without, in determining the shape of the social world. The individual's position in society is largely determined by his/her relationship to this constructed reality/fiction.

With these ideas in mind, I have realized my two main series thus far, *Reactors* and *Ultraman Encyclopedia*, and with these ideas in mind I have begun my newest series, *Something In The Air*. Where I had used the medium of paintings to create ambiguous narrative figures in *Reactors* and quasi-historical portraits in *Ultraman Encyclopedia*, I will use the medium of photography for my latest series, *Agglomerations*, in order to create large format minimalist inspired landscapes with the purpose of confronting similar concerns as those mentioned above.

For *Agglomerations*, my plan is to take color photographs of a flat evening sky in several of the most populated and polluted urban agglomerations in the world. The images will have no geographic referents, no mountains, no buildings, no trees, no airplanes and, no distinguishable forms. The only thing visible will be a subtle gradation of tone and color caused by the color of the sky, the smog and the setting sun. Furthermore, I will only take the picture late enough in the afternoon/evening so that the sky is no longer light blue as it is during the day, and more of a grey, dark blue or violet hue so as to further evade any obvious cue that it is, in fact, the sky which the spectator is looking at.

I will choose only one image from each city, and print them on 20" x 40" (~50cm x 100cm) metallic paper.

The metallic paper will give the images an almost bronze like effect when the gradations of color and tone reflect against the gallery illumination. Although I own a medium format Mamiya and a high resolution Nikon digital camera, I have chosen to use a standard 35mm Minolta with negative film for this project, because I believe to this day, 35mm negative prints have been the most common and accessible photographic format, and also because the grain of this format will ensure the desired effect for this project. The tests I have conducted so far have only reaffirmed my assumptions.

In short, *Agglomerations* is about smog. Sunsets are supposedly more beautiful than ever now, because of the amount of debris in the atmosphere caused by pollution. Instead of depicting smog as a horrible and ugly nuisance as it obviously is, I have chosen to exploit this phenomenon by transforming the smoggy sunsets from all around the world into photos which are utterly clean, uncluttered and beautiful.

Whereas minimalists made a great effort to remove content from the work which did not exist in the formal properties of the work itself, my series is loaded with

a lesson on the failures of the modern urban project in this sense. Instead, I have chosen to use the photographic process in order to transform this failure into an object of beauty, at once a documentary portrayal of reality, and at the same time a flat out lie, quite neutral on the surface, but with a loaded subject matter contained within the depicted image.

Ichiro Irie

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THINGS TO DO:

06.05

content which directly undermines the formal and visible aspects of the photographic object. It is interesting to me how minimalism is in many ways a culmination of certain modernist principles, of creating an object which represents nothing but itself which is clean, ordered and restrained, and how smog is a byproduct of the modern world - dirty, chaotic and unrestrained. In doing this project, I have absolutely no desire to make light of an environmental burden which affects millions of us who live in overpopulated industrial cities on this planet. That this is a huge problem is obvious and should be to any viewer of my work. Neither do I wish to make any critique or celebration of minimalist work or the theories surrounding it.

What I would like to accomplish with *Agglomerations* is to borrow from the language of minimalism to create a work which is unapologetically and undeniably beautiful on a formal level in order to reflect upon a ubiquitous environmental and social phenomenon, a phenomenon which most would consider one of the worst side effects of the modern world, and an affliction which has existed throughout most of the 20th century and continues to exist into the 21st. Once again, no one needs to be told

CityAir 2004 **“Every Breath You Take”**

IN THE SONG OF THE SAME NAME, Sting construes a world in which it is possible always to see what another person is doing – the verse concludes with “I'll be watching you”. However, the idea of the omnipresent observer is essentially a fantasy world of the past. Today, we inhabit domains so large as to be invisible to us, whether they are immaterial global networks or the material fabric of mega-cities. Indeed, our natural habitat is one no longer defined by natural givens, but by man-made constructions. The sociologists would have it that the core characteristic of life in these domains is their diversity, and the scientists have long since been championing bio-diversity as a necessity. In the face of such diversity, how to define the common characteristics of the human race, or the common denominator in such locations other than to point to the endlessness of urban sprawl and junk space?

Increasingly, the world is coming to realize that one key factor to the survival of the human race is the level of CO₂ in the air. Indeed, in the wake of the Kyoto Protocols we will soon see countries allocated emission rights to try and brake ongoing global warming. Such ecological insights relate to a very simple fact. Air is the shared property of all mammalian life. Air is shared by us all human life: rich and poor, the fortunate literate, the unfortunate illiterate, the well-clothed fed and the badly-heeled starving, the foreign tourist and the local inhabitant. And air, like the mega-cities themselves, is visibly invisible, except when emerging from an exhaust or chimney, an air-conditioner in a humid climate or a street grating on a cold day. Making it somewhat problematic to portray it.

Rather than taking a meditative deep breath before daring to immerse herself in the hustle and hassle of mega-city life, Sandra Mann has elected to render that most basic quantity and quality (of life) visible. To do so she has chosen a classless garment more ubiquitous than blue jeans and without the overtones of cultural imperialism associated with them: she has taken more-or-less white T-shirts. Two associations spring to mind here. First, T-shirts in the plain-vanilla version have become as good as extinct, as T-shirts that do not proclaim a message of some sort or other serve no consumerist purpose, it would seem. And secondly, (outside Europe) T-shirts are typically a product of the countries in which they are bought, as cotton production and T-shirt manufacture are characterized by cheap labor.

Sandra Mann has dispatched volunteers wearing their own T-shirts, freshly bought and taken out of the wrappers for the purpose, in numerous different metropolises world-wide, all cities of over eight million inhabitants, and thus as large as anything Europe has to offer. She has asked them to act there as her human scanners. So it is that they have recorded in a fitting number of 256 gray tones the air that surrounds them day-in day-out for a week. It is a project in which it is not the hand of the artist that has functioned as the medium for creating art, but the invisible hand of the respective city. Coupled of course with the body of the person wearing the respective T-shirt, whose sweat bonds chemically with the fabric as the day and the week progresses and by extension forms new chemical compounds with the dirt carried by the air or with which the T-shirt by destiny comes into contact.

Given such “natural” coloring on the outside, it is left to our imagination to wonder what colors the wearer's lungs assumed. Perhaps in addition to the laws on the use of chemical bleaches (that have destroyed the health of so many laundry women world-wide) and those on money laundering, it is high time T-shirts were used by international politicians to assess statistically whether pollution levels were too high. After all, it is in everyone's shared interest to make certain the washing line from which the T-shirts hang does not come to symbolize a rope around our necks.

Jeremy Gaines

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THINGS TO DO: # 06.05

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zu der Ausstellung:

**SOMETHING IN THE AIR
ICHIRO IRIE, SANDRA MANN**

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