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REVIEWS TOKYO

Takahiro Iwasaki

URANO

By Ryan Holmberg

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View of "Takahiro Iwasaki," 2017. Foreground: *Out of Disorder (Structure of Light)*, 2017. Background: *Out of Disorder (Frame)*, 2017. Photo: Keizo Kioku.

When the power went out in 2011, the lights went on for Takahiro Iwasaki. He had been building tiny transmission towers out of towel and blanket fibers, and coal-fired power stations and oil refineries out of dirty cleaning rags, and was considering doing something on the Chernobyl catastrophe when events in Fukushima forced him to ponder Japan's energy infrastructure more deeply. Some of the results of Iwasaki's curiosity appeared in the Japanese Pavilion of the 2017 Venice Biennale, including a wraparound miniature representation of an industrial waterfront backed by hills of store-bought cloth, topped by dainty power lines. The cloth's softness evoked the Japanese archipelago's seismic instability.

Focusing on Japan's energy past and present, Iwasaki's recent show "Light Is Made of Stars" was a spin-off of the Venice exhibition. Its centerpiece was a large tabletop diorama, *Out of Disorder (Gas Field and Ship)* (all works 2017), constructed on a black plastic sheet bunched up in places to represent waves on an oily ocean. On one side of the largest crest were black coffee-cup tops, black rubber bands, black floss picks, and other disposable plastic (i.e., petroleum-based) objects, arranged like tsunami flotsam. On the other side stood offshore oil rigs made of black bento boxes and other plastic tidbits. According to the artist, these rigs are Chinese, drilling just on China's side of contested waters in the East China Sea. Though it was possible to circle the table, a squatting position from the tsunami side seemed most appropriate, for then one looked through Japan's disaster, saw a global powerhouse in the offing, and wondered how this resource-poor nation is planning to face expanding Chinese influence in the Pacific as the United States' regional monopoly deteriorates.



The other large tabletop work, *Out of Order (Structure of Light)*, provided a shock of color in an otherwise heavily monochromatic show. A two-and-a-half-foot-tall replica of Tokyo Tower—an iron-lattice structure built between 1957 and 1958 and based on the Eiffel Tower—stood on a bed of black towels and blankets, their layers visible from the side like a geological cross section. The setting was night; Iwasaki had brightened the tower's original orange and white to make the structure look illuminated from within, while orange, yellow, cinnabar, and crimson strings were laid out loosely on the feltlike ground, resembling streaking car lights in an aerial photograph of Tokyo's highways. On the wall behind this diorama was one of three shallow sculptural wall hangings, all titled *Out of Disorder (Frame)*, depicting (again in found cloth and extracted fibers) transmission towers with long wires loping across Japan's rolling landscape. The view was meant to simulate that from a bullet train speeding on its way to Tokyo. The conceit is an old one—Tokyo as a neat and bright but energy-voracious consumer of electricity produced elsewhere—but resonated more strongly again after the meltdowns of 2011, when the structural disparity between the countryside, with its dangerous power plants, and the cities, filled with safe consumers, became evident. The show also included a series of paintings, collectively titled "Constellation," made with spray paint and tiny decals on reflective black panels, depicting the starry and logo-illuminated night sky as seen from an airplane.

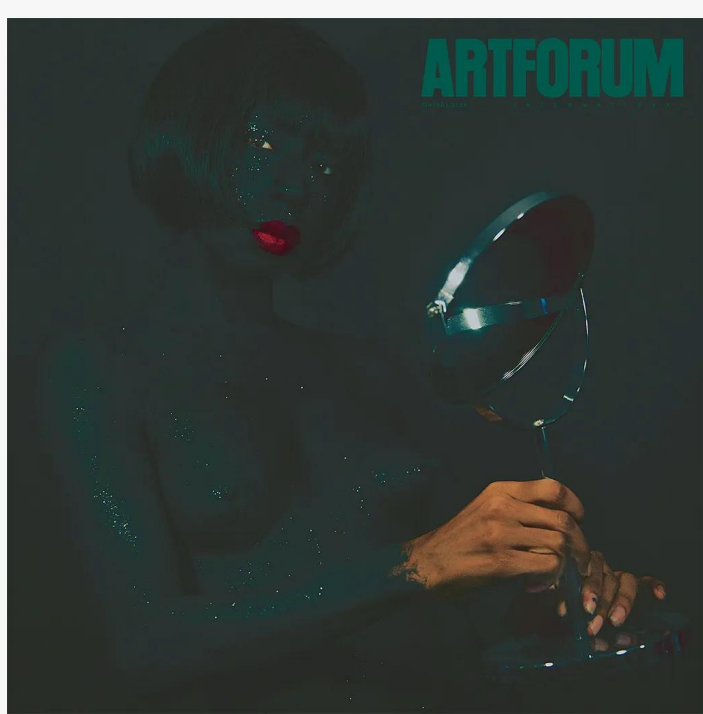
Iwasaki's handcraft and facility with metaphor are admirable, but his practice would benefit from some institutional self-reflection. Sure, Iwasaki draws attention to waste by using cheap, throwaway materials, and to conservation by using compact and portable ones. His mapping of local energy issues usefully expands the inquiry beyond Japan's borders. But to get his message out, Iwasaki's work depends on a cultural sphere—the globalized art world—whose energy efficiency rating is awful: brightly lit galleries open all day for a handful of visitors, international exhibitions that require transoceanic shipping to organize and tanks of gasoline to get to, and glossy magazines that fell forests to disseminate poetic protests. Iwasaki has made dioramas out of art catalogues and theory books (there were two here, both titled *Tectonic Model*) without pointing up his bibliography's readership. Likewise, his focus on mass consumption and shared infrastructure ignores the fact that the affluent (his patrons and audience) generally consume far more per capita than anyone else—with "culture" helping to make their indulgences look respectable.

—Ryan Holmberg

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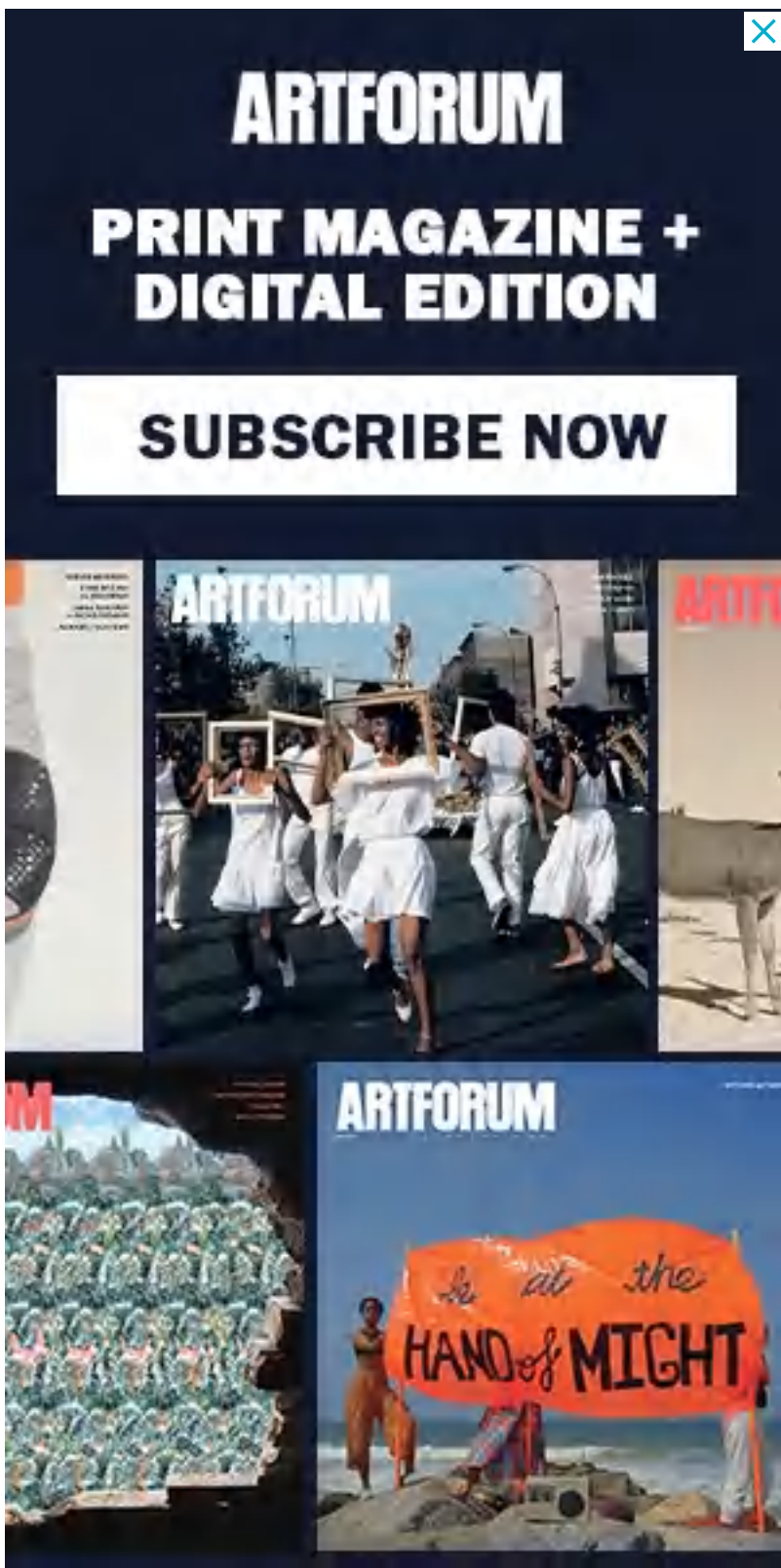
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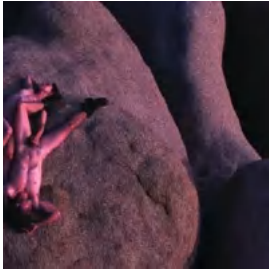
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