

Hiroshi Watanabe: Veiled Observations and Reflections

White Room Gallery

8810 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood

Judging from this exhibition, Hiroshi Watanabe is an avid traveler: His photographs come from all over the world. Rather than capturing the important monuments, sweeping vistas and other obvious splendors of a place, however, he finds poetry in its details--a pair of butterflies perched momentarily on a window screen in Japan; a Che Guevara T-shirt hanging on a clothes line in Ecuador; the mirror on a makeshift barber shop on a sidewalk in India; or an enormous soap bubble undulating through ocean air at the Santa Monica Pier.

They're lovely photographs--beautifully composed and expertly printed. Watanabe's style is traditional but elegant. Like the Modernists he clearly emulates, he's drawn to interesting forms and surfaces, and builds his images around unusual juxtapositions of texture.

One photograph taken in Ecuador, for example, depicts a fur-lined, plate-glass-covered, shoe store window display adjacent to a chipping stucco wall. Another depicts a grid of rickety wood cages covered with disintegrating mesh, through which one sees the faint, feathery outlines of resident chickens.

"White Terns, Midway Atoll,"
photograph by Hiroshi Watanabe.

The majority of the photographs in the show, which is appropriately titled "Veiled Observations and Reflections," involve some element of transparency or reflection. The viewer is continually looking through screens, mesh, veils, glass, water or mirrors.

One of the most beautiful images depicts a swath of netting over the photographer's head, onto which a small flock of birds has temporarily landed. Seen through this translucent ceiling, the birds appear only as overlapping fragments of delicate shadow, an effect that transforms the photograph into a nearly abstract, wonderfully striking composition. With a sharp, unassuming eye and an impeccable aesthetic sense, Watanabe makes a perfect travel companion, if only for an afternoon.

--HOLLY MYERS, Special to The Times

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Tue.-Sat., noon-6 p.m.

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