

John Riddy's Views of Shin-Fuji are based on an antipodal contrast between the majestic presence of Mount Fuji and the humdrum character of the provincial town that borders it. Fuji's appearance in these pictures alters one's perception of the place by introducing another dimension of time and space. This subtle conveyance of different orders of reality, which is the ostensive basis of this particular body of work, in fact, pertains to Riddy's entire oeuvre. Typically, embedded within his pictures' closely detailed compositions are certain passages or motifs that pop out of their descriptive matrix and present themselves as 'magical' vignettes. These isolate, transformative passages are connected to the collaged consistency of his compositions, which undermines their naturalism and shifts their temporality.

The Shin-Fuji pictures are notable for their chromatic subtlety, their formal intelligence and subtle wit. These, together with an abiding interest in architecture, are the identifying ingredients of Riddy's art. The gradual discovery of formal niceties and incongruities within his compositions is part of the kind of satisfaction they afford. One may enjoy his pictures both for their refined sensibility and for their wry portrayal of the jangled textures of modern urban culture. His art's wit remains subordinate to its reflective gaze and enjoyment of contradiction. Through its keen observance and structural acuity, its evident craftsmanship, its naturalistic descriptiveness and its avoidance of dramatic effect and theatricality, his art recuperates the ethos of nineteenth century documentary photography. The refinement of his work and its minute intricacies lend his work a Ruskinian flavour and, in fact, one of his projects, takes Ruskin's autobiography, *Praeterita*, as its topos.

The Shin-Fuji pictures are articulated structurally by a clear division of foreground, middle ground, and background, with the town comprising the middle ground and the volcano establishing the distant background. Despite their evident thematic homology, each of the Shin-Fuji compositions is distinct. The light and chromatic harmonics vary considerably from one picture to the next, endowing each with its own distinct identity or tenor.

Shin-Fuji (Street), one of the works reproduced here, offers a view down a street, through the town, upon the sacred mountain. Compositionally, the view is utterly prosaic. Its interest derives from its compacted detail that transforms the view into something resembling a painted theatrical scrim or backdrop. The two curved white lines on the pavement in the foreground frame the view. The welcoming opening of the foreground is mirrored by the expansive space and 'painted' image of the volcano in the distance, with the city occupying the compacted middle ground. An overhanging pinkish cloud tuft that accentuates other pink dabs throughout the composition inflects the prosaic tenor of the scene with a fanciful delicacy and painterliness that brings to mind the art of Japanese prints. The chromatic schema of the entire scene, enlivened by the myriad bits of color scattered throughout its tangle and jumble of signage, wires and buildings, endows the picture with an incongruous delicacy and aesthetic appeal. Equally, the color scheme possibly reflects a culturally specific sensibility. The intricate array of color flattens the perspectival view in a way that mimics the aesthetic of collage. A routine view down a street is replaced by a mode of seeing that is intrinsically photographic. Being there in person one might well miss the picture that is lurking in the scene. It is the camera's graphic compression of the scene, mapping of three dimensions onto a surface, which affords the perception of new relationships and clarifies and accentuates

relationships that are only vaguely discernible by the naked eye. This capacity for pattern recognition and for anticipating the effects of displacement wrought by the camera is crucial to photographic vision.

The composition of *Shin-Fuji (Street)* is ambiguously symmetrical and asymmetrical. The vertical accent of the utility poles and the two cars in the foreground play their part in this formal destabilization. They are nestled into the space demarcated by the utility poles, the overhanging roof and the right edge of the picture, whereas the prominent building on the left side of the picture, with the brightly toned roll-down metal door, counterbalances and is in tension with, the shallow recess occupied by the two cars. This dynamic balance, incorporating spatial tension between the two halves of the picture's foreground, literally sets the stage for the abundant collagist effects that animate the picture. The horizontal cloud that divides the mountain in two, felicitously reflects and reproduces the picture's multiple horizontal divisions, spatial divisions and general compartmentalization. The noble mountain rises above this cloud and supervenes on the chaotic, passing show below. The mountain's anomalous, almost apparitional appearance in the picture exemplifies contingency as the stuff of the photographer's art.

Shin-Fuji (Hillside) is replete with contingencies. It, too, is an assemblage of objects and motifs. A car is perched on top of another car in the middle of the scene. The car is American and the houses are in a global vernacular modernist style. They could be anywhere. These incongruities and displacements exemplify the mundane disorderliness of the scene, while the houses, all facing the setting sun, structure it.

Objects in the foreground, judiciously oriented, designate diagonal lines of sight, amplifying this sense of structure, and linking the scene to what lies outside it. Textural intricacy and profusion coexists with structural clarity and maintenance of transparency, specifically in the shadowed foreground. The picture is too complex and the structure too embedded and masked, to grasp synthetically or comprehensively. This establishes its realism. Its association of spatial compression and fluency and its conjunctive materiality, architectonic formality and luminosity are worthy of Cezanne. The unity of the picture overrides its fragmentary, composite, enmeshed consistency. Space and time are embroiled by the network of spatial blockages and concomitant collagist fragmentation and compaction that pervades the foreground and middle ground, and which are sublimed by the atmospherically etherealized, image of the mountain bathed in serene light.

Riddy's art salvages form and aesthetic delectation from the chaotic ground of urban life. His wryly witty, texturally and chromatically inflected, constructive, objective yet imaginatively appealing pictures, seek and find permanence and a measure of delight in unlikely places and untoward circumstances.

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