

URBAN PANORAMAS

KIM

LIAO

OPIE

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GETTY EXHIBITION EXPLORES THREE CITIES THROUGH THREE CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS

Urban Panoramas: Opie, Liao, Kim

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center
February 2–June 6, 2010

LOS ANGELES—On view at the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center, February 2-June 6, 2010, *Urban Panoramas: Opie, Liao, Kim* brings together bodies of work by three contemporary photographers that recently entered the Museum's collection. Each artist explores a specific city and how various modes of transportation define the urban infrastructure. Selections from Catherine Opie's *Mini-malls* series, Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao's *Habitat 7* series, and Soo Kim's *Midnight Reykjavík* series will be on display. This exhibition will run concurrently with *A Record of Emotion: The Photographs of Frederick H. Evans*.

Based in Los Angeles, Catherine Opie used 7x17-inch film negatives to document the mini-malls that are ubiquitous in a city traversed by automobiles. To trace the route of the number 7 subway line connecting Queens and Manhattan in New York, Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao used digital technology to combine multiple 8x10-inch negatives into seamless prints. Working with a 2¼-inch format camera in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, during the summer solstice, Soo Kim cut and layered the resulting chromogenic prints to suggest the transparency of a city characterized by pedestrian accessibility.

"This exhibition highlights three distinctive bodies of work, each of which explores a specific aspect of urban architecture to capture the essential rhythm of a city," says Virginia Heckert, associate curator of photographs and curator of the exhibition. "Paired with

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The J. Paul Getty Trust
Communications Department

1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 403
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1681

Tel 310 440 7360
Fax 310 440 7722

www.getty.edu

photographs by Fredrick Evans, who worked in England from 1890–1910, these two concurrent exhibitions provide a wonderful opportunity to compare and contrast changing approaches to photographic documentation of architecture over the course of a century."

Catherine Opie's *Mini-malls* Series

Catherine Opie (American, born 1961) received a bachelor of fine arts degree from San Francisco Art Institute and a master of fine arts from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. For her MFA thesis, she documented a model housing project, setting the stage for future projects that would feature architecture or portraiture, or a combination of the two, to address issues of identity and community in the United States.

Opie's *Mini-malls* series focuses on the decidedly unspectacular architecture of strip malls in Los Angeles that originated in response to automobile culture and convenience shopping. Photographed on weekend mornings with the camera placed parallel to the buildings' facades, the images are devoid of people and cars. Rendered as black-and-white inkjet prints on watercolor paper, they blend elements of nostalgia and romanticism with a deadpan documentary style.

Opie's use of a 7x17-inch banquet camera, typically used to photograph large groups of people, accounts for the panoramic format and enhanced legibility of details in each image. Storefront signs in a wide range of languages, which are clearly legible, attest to ethnic diversity and the persistence of the American dream for immigrant owners and tenants. The generic banality of these low-slung structures—located in Chinatown, Koreatown, Silver Lake, the Miracle Mile and Venice—belies the mingling of cultures throughout Los Angeles. The series consists of seventeen images, of which eight are on view in this exhibition.

Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao's *Habitat 7* Series

The youngest of the three artists featured in this exhibition, **Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao** (Taiwanese, born 1977) attended high school in Canada before moving to New York in 1999 to study at the Pratt Institute of Art and Design in Brooklyn. After earning his bachelor of fine arts degree in photography in 2003, he completed a master of fine arts at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan in 2005. *Habitat 7* originated from his MFA thesis and was featured in the September 11, 2005, issue of the *New York Times Magazine*.

Since moving to New York, Liao has lived along the number 7 subway line, which connects Main Street in Flushing, Queens, to Times Square in Manhattan. For his *Habitat 7*

series, Liao selected specific locations along the subway line as both the subject and vantage point. Using an 8x10-inch camera mounted on a tripod, he made numerous exposures over the course of several hours, adjusting the camera to expand his angle of vision or capture the changing light. After scanning the color negatives, Liao used digital editing software to stitch together large-scale digital pigment prints that present broad sweeps of information in minute detail.

The resulting panoramas are complex collages that encapsulate the elements of time and movement that define daily life in New York. Each image creates a seamless whole, as does Liao's portrayal of the culturally and economically diverse communities that coexist harmoniously along the eight and a half miles of the train's path. Ten of the forty-seven images that make up *Habitat 7* are on view, transporting viewers from Flushing through the neighborhoods of Corona Park, Jackson Heights, Woodside, and Sunnyside before arriving in Manhattan. Their recent acquisition was made possible by the J. Paul Getty Museum's Photographs Council.

Soo Kim's *Midnight Reykjavik Series*

Soo Kim (American, born South Korea, 1969) moved to Los Angeles in 1980. After earning a bachelor of arts degree from the University of California, Riverside, she combined studies in critical writing, art, and film at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia for her master of fine arts. Kim's practice as an artist blends the making of photographs with the critical interpretation of images on a broader level. Her recent bodies of work employ the techniques of cutting and layering prints, introducing areas of absence or disruption to address the issues of photographic transparency and the immediate consumption of images. Kim believes that the lengthy process required to create her images infuses them with a "slowness" that finds its counterpart in the amount of time it takes the viewer to read them.

For the *Midnight Reykjavik* series, Kim traveled to Iceland in 2005 to photograph the city of Reykjavik. After exploring the pedestrian-friendly city on foot, she selected a rooftop vantage point that provided both condensed views of the brightly painted homes lining narrow streets and the sweeping vistas of the surrounding mountains and sea, and captured both with her handheld 2¼-inch format camera. Taken at midnight during the summer solstice, the photographs introduce elements of uncertainty into a city that is brightly lit but devoid of pedestrians and eerily still.

Each of the works in this series is made up of two prints that have been hand-cut to provide a complex, intricately detailed overview of Reykjavík. By slicing into the surfaces of the densely layered architecture, Kim leaves behind skeletal outlines of a semitransparent city that defies traditional notions of photographic representation, encouraging the viewer to experience the images as three-dimensional and sculptural. Ten of the twelve works in the series are on view in this exhibition.

Together, these three bodies of work by Catherine Opie, Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao, and Soo Kim demonstrate the range of film-based and digital technologies available to artists working in photography today. Individually, each reveals how multiple sensory experiences can be collapsed into carefully composed visual images that capture and interpret the essential character and tempo of a unique urban environment.

Note to editors: Images available upon request.

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RELATED EXHIBITION

A Record of Emotion: The Photographs of Frederick H. Evans

February 2–June 6, 2010

Frederick H. Evans (English, 1853–1943) began pursuing photography in the mid-1880s. Focusing on architecture, he paid particular attention to medieval cathedrals in England and France. His images of York Minster and Ely Cathedral are among the most renowned architectural renderings in the history of photography. He attempted to capture what he called "a record of an emotion," by invoking the potent symbolism of these awe-inspiring spaces. These photographs and other cathedral subjects are displayed alongside rarely seen landscapes of the English countryside and intimate portraits of the artist's family and friends, including writer George Bernard Shaw and artist Aubrey Beardsley.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Desiree Zenowich
Getty Communications
310-440-7304
dzenowich@getty.edu

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