

# DISCOVERING new LANDSCAPES

TOSHIO SHIBATA was born in Tokyo in 1949, and in the late 1980s started taking photographs of landscapes that have somehow been artificially altered, such

as dams or man-made structures covered in concrete. The tranquil presence of his works has won critical acclaim throughout the world. In the late 1990s, he started

to take photographs of dams all over the United States. One of Japan's most famous photographers, his works are found in art galleries all over the world.



**ABOVE LEFT:** Nishimera Village, Koyu County, Miyazaki Prefecture 2002 • **ABOVE:** Hirakawa City, Aomori Prefecture 2006

The feeling of surprise and wonder experienced on first seeing Toshio Shibata's works is perhaps best described as something akin to what it would probably feel like taking one's first steps on an unknown planet. The scene resembles the armor of a swarm of beetles, or even some kind of fortress-like space station. Even though I already knew that what Shibata had focused his lens on was a dam, or some other man-made structure such as the concrete surfaces designed to prevent landslides, that did not stop me from feeling a sense of bewilderment when I first beheld the image.

The landscapes that Shibata photographs using large format cameras are rather grotesque, but at the same time they somehow exude an air of extreme solemnity. Man-made structures with natural phenomena—hard geometrical patterns with smooth natural curves. While his works always possess aspects of this antinomy, they also reflect the tranquility of Shibata's world.

"I'm not trying to convey some kind of message through these landscapes. Some of the people who view my work will feel mixed emotions upon seeing something that helps protect us from natural disasters but destroys the environment as a result," said Shibata adding, "There will be others who simply view the works as stylish and beautiful. How people interpret my work is entirely up to them. From my point of view, all I am trying to do is to place myself in front of these landscapes created out of the clash between humans and nature and discover unknown forms of scenery."

After having produced stoic, black and white works for more than two decades, in the past few years Shibata has begun to work with color. He explains, "Art represents acts that seek to comprehend the links between humankind and the world." Now that color has been added to his repertoire, we look forward to seeing what exciting new landscapes he will discover.