

Slate

BEHOLD

Ethereal Views of Earth From Way Up High

By David Rosenberg



While reading a Japanese guidebook about Bolivia in the mid-'90s, Asako Shimizu noticed a small black-and-white photograph of a salt flat with a seemingly endless horizon. The memory of the image stuck in her mind for 10 years until finally, in 2006, she was able to visit the South American country where, inspired by the image, she created the series "On Her Skin."

Shimizu went to the world's largest salt flat, Salar de Uyuni, which covers more than 4,000 square miles and is roughly 12,000 feet above sea level. If you have friends who have visited, chances are your Facebook timeline has been filled with trippy photographs that play off the optical illusion of people balancing on odd objects or holding a mini version of fellow travelers in the palm of their hands.

She chose the title, "On Her Skin," after thinking about her relationship with the Earth while photographing from such a high elevation. The people in some of the images are just an added bonus—Shimizu didn't intentionally capture them, preferring not to compose the images too much and letting people wander in by chance.

“Once I have a miracle moment, the rest follows and that is how these series of works are created,” she wrote via email. “I was very surprised at that time when people appeared and walked by my camera.”

“The basic idea of all my works is to let a camera capture unexpected moments that are beyond my thoughts. It is my work to simply capture something of value in a subject.”

All of the images were shot on film with a Hasselblad 500cm without any digital retouching. The deep blue hues were from the very clear, crisp sky.

Currently, Shimizu is working on a new series, “Storyteller,” that is inspired by snow and will be unveiled this week through the NextLevel Galerie at the Unseen photo fair in Amsterdam. She said that although the title is a literal definition about how she views the series, it could also have been applied to her other work.

“I was seeing the landscape covered with deep snow and something let me notice it,” she wrote. “Such awareness happens incidentally in photography. All things are the storytellers and are revelations to me.”

