

# Art in America

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Sze Tsung Leong: *Skeioarársandur, Iceland, 2007*, chromogenic print, 14 by 24 inches; at Yossi Milo.

## Sze Tsung Leong

### Yossi Milo

Sze Tsung Leong's "History Images," 2002-05, shown two years ago at Yossi Milo Gallery, documented the way China's built environment is in the process of being erased and reconstructed. Taken during a period of accelerated industrialization, the photographs show traditional architecture and human-scale neighborhoods being swept away in favor of towering office buildings and apartment complexes. Leong's ongoing series, "Horizons" (begun 2001), suggests similar themes of transformation and urbanization on a global scale. A citizen of the world if ever there was one, Leong was born in Mexico City to British and Malaysian parents. He spent his childhood in Mexico, Britain and the U.S., and visited China for the first time in 1994.

His cosmopolitan background informs this series. Cairo, Lisbon, Tokyo, Mexico City, California and Iceland are some of

the places represented in "Horizons." Sixty-two of the photographs were hung side-by-side in the gallery, connected by a distinct horizon line that fell about two-thirds of the way down from the top of each and seemed to thread from one to the next. Nearly all of them share the same pale, whitish sky, further linking each image to its neighbor. The photographs—which Leong takes with a view camera and prints at either 14 by 24 or 28 by 48 inches—recall 19th-century architectural photographs, such as those made by Felice Beato in India and China. But they have a distinctly contemporary, minimalist feel and are as conceptual as they are documentary.

Read one way, they suggest the apparent inevitability of urban sprawl, with images of dense cities followed by photographs of landscapes cleared for construction, like the view in *Victorville, California* (2006), where rows of newly built, identical homes line up in the background behind the circular blacktop of a cul-de-sac. There are a few untouched landscapes, such as *Skeioarársandur, Iceland* (2007), in which a body of water winds its way through a nearly flat, empty landscape, but such images serve to accentuate what is missing in the others: expansive, pristine spaces.

Read another way, the photographs in "Horizons," viewed sequentially, suggest the arbitrary nature of borders and boundaries. It is difficult to identify with confidence most of the places depicted, and the ambiguity is intentional: "They could be taken for one place but actually be another," Leong wrote in an essay in the exhibition catalogue. Certainly, the undercurrent of this work is the fact that political and social forces influence the way geographical space is delineated and developed. Yet the photographs are open-ended enough to encourage a more personal navigation of geography and place as well, as suggested by *Teotihuacan II* (2006), in which a lone figure gazes out across a valley, contemplating the distant horizon.

—Jean Dykstra