



## RICHARD HARROD PHILADELPHIA

Richard Harrod's latest exhibition *A Larger Refrigerator* puts a chill on familiar interior views [Marginal Utility; April 1—May 28, 2011]. Using a variety of techniques and tricks, the artist's depictions of mundane spaces thwart our entry and monkey with the norms of representation.

A stalwart of the Philadelphia scene, Harrod has exhibited his work internationally and received a Pew Fellowship in 1997 for his quirky, cobbled-together places. Here, his oversized black-and-white digital prints beckon us to look in on various scenes of a typical urban apartment: a shower, a window, a staircase, and a mirror. Pleasantly familiar details—an outdated plastic window shade or painted-over Victorian ornamentation—remind us of a place where we have lived or visited. Yet on second glance, the spaces are impenetrable.

In several instances, the artist places a bright light at the very middle of an image, darkening the rest by contrast. Instead of a view through a window or a reflection in the mirror, we see black. The digital photograph *New York State*, 2011, is basically a pool of black and a spot of light surrounded by a window frame. Curiously, the artist has substituted grey paint for the actual grey of the window. This subtle yet critical decision forces us to see the surface of the paper rather than the image that is printed on it.

With each piece, interference with spatial reading becomes more blatant. *Open Shower*, 2011, and *Shower*, 2011, show a cramped tub—first without, then with a curtain. They are in fact the same photograph. In *Shower*, however, Harrod has added a single pencil line to represent a rod and a few strips of patterned toilet paper to evoke a curtain. The temerity of these last-minute additions—how many times are students told to use *two* lines to show the thickness of an object—pokes fun at the original image's truthfulness. A photograph's space, we are reminded, has no more substance than a piece of bathroom tissue.

Even more irreverent, Harrod's *Stair Business*, 2011,

takes us on a wild goose chase through a mocked-up environment. Blob-like plaster casts hang in front of or are applied directly to the surface of a fish-eye view up and down a staircase. The piece promises to be a trompe-l'oeil explosion, where real objects move freely out of the photograph and into our space. But some of the objects are disproportionate to their position on the stairs, and the spatial reading falls apart. The joke is on us, and as if to rub it in, the artist has given his plaster appliques a curiously scatological appearance. What kind of business, we wonder, has been done on these stairs?

*Retinal Burn 2*, *Cat and Mouse*, 2011, mounts the artist's ultimate test of a viewer's patience in that it actually hurts your eye to look at it. As you struggle to see into an array of broken-up mirrors, their raking angles reflect only blank wall and ceiling. Meanwhile, a system of bright blinking lights burns a blue-green afterimage into your eye. The annoying string of dots that now crowds your line of sight is bitter payback for having tried to apprehend your own reflection. Promising a pleasant look into personal experience and everyday life, this uncanny and very effective show leaves you half-blind.

—Edward Epstein

## HIRO SAKAGUCHI PHILADELPHIA

Volcanoes spit out airplanes. Bears eat airplanes. Airplanes shoot at the Great Wall of China. Hiro Sakaguchi's exhibition *No Particular Place to Go* presents a pandemonium of flying, floating, and fire-spitting menace that encompasses every shade of modern-day disaster [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; April 2—August 28, 2011]. Yet the artist's technique is curiously measured and meticulous, and his compositions spare and relaxed. In each piece, a quiet, protected space seems to defy the onslaught of dreamed-up chaos.

These works are more like drawings with paint than paintings insofar as line rather than color defines their forms. Sakaguchi's drawing abilities are truly on display in the small *Rooftop Tide*, 2010, in which the density and complexity of the line make a brilliant light in what is actually a cobbled-together image. In eerie anticipation of Japan's most recent tsunami, quaint half-timbered suburban houses are nestled amongst top-breaking concrete tetrapods of the kind that line the country's shores.

Strange nature-human mutations abound in the exhibition. *Volcanic Daydream*, 2011, shows a cutaway view of a volcano whose innards are a caprice of industrial tubing, ramps, and a railway line. The appearance is slightly clinical, like a medical illustration of the body's nether regions. Instead of lava, this volcano's primal plumbing emits airplanes.

The artist grew up in the shadow of Japan's Mount Asama, which may explain why volcanoes are so prominent in his work. War, too, and in particular the recent memory of nuclear destruction, seems to have imprinted Sakaguchi's thoughts and shaped his mental landscape. On the right side of *Great Wall*, 2010, a concatenation of weaponry from every historical period rains fire on China's Great Wall—which is being deployed as a protective barrier for an idyllic Japanese house on the painting's left. A greater protective force, however, is the vast expanse of empty canvas that separates the two

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Richard Harrod, *Stair Business*, 2011, digital print, plaster rocks, applied prints, 128 x 96 inches [courtesy of the artist and Marginal Utility, Philadelphia; photo: Aaron Iglor]; Hiro Sakaguchi, *Hibachi Engine Boat*, 2011, wood, copper, school chair, hibachi grill, reflective Mylar, 30 x 30 x 72 inches; carpet: 120 x 96 inches [courtesy of the artist and Seraphin Gallery, Philadelphia]