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INTO THE WILD: INTERVIEW WITH SHINGO YOSHIDA



Portrait of Shingo Yoshida, courtesy of Maxime Ballesteros.

Shingo Yoshida (<http://http://www.sleek-art.net/artists/shingo-yoshida.html>) is a Japanese photographer and video artist, who finds inspiration in travelling, myths, traditions and the overwhelming beauty of nature. In his photographs Yoshida expresses his deep reverence for nature and its power. Some of his photographs are also available for purchase on Sleek Art (<http://www.sleek-art.net/artists/shingo-yoshida.html>).

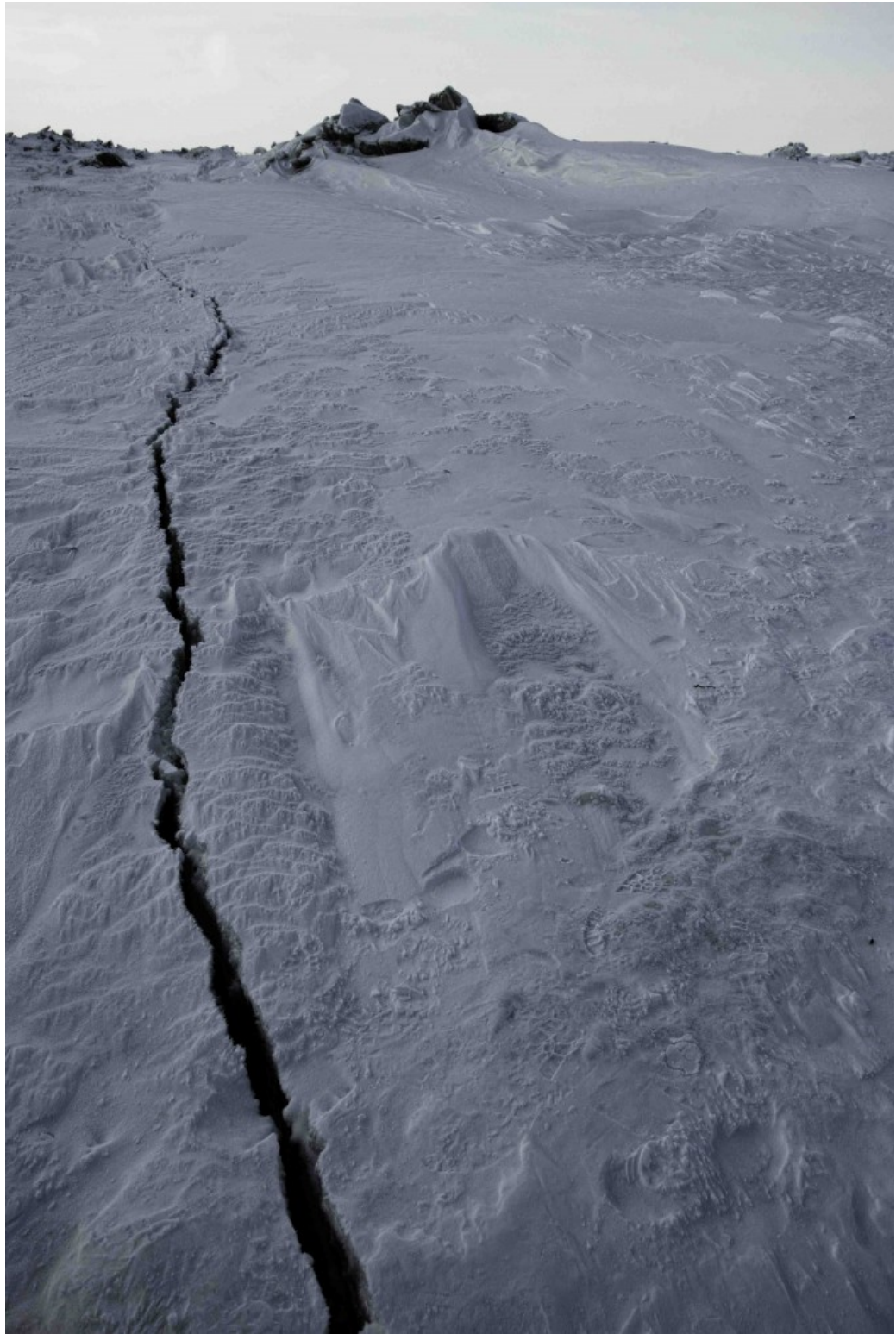


Shingo Yoshida, Untitled, 2015. Images courtesy of the artist

Why did you decide to explore Siberia?

Whenever I fly back to Japan, I mostly take the route via Russia and each time I am still astonished by the vast size of this country that owns such a cultural diversity. It even owns the date line at the 180th meridian and separates two calendar days. Since my stay in the Amazonian jungle I have been into the idea of going to the South Pole as another place of extreme conditions.

During my exhibition at Villa Arson Nice Centre National d'art Contemporain in France in 2013 Ida Ruchina who is the director of the Red Cross of Chukotka in Siberia got interested in my work. She founded the local Red Cross together with her older brother Roman Abramovich who at the time was the mayor of Chukotka. The remote region had serious problems, but the two of them really helped its development. Ida and I stayed in touch and founded another cooperation with the Beringia National Park which I visited as well in order to take photos.



Shingo Yoshida, Untitled, 2015. Images courtesy of the artist

In the project you captured the breathtaking nature, industrial towns and the people living in both landscapes. How do you split the thematics in your work?

When I arrived in Anadyr I was really surprised by how deep Leninism had changed all the people's lives no matter if they were living in cities or as nomads. They had to adapt to the new system. Only with Gorbachev they regained the traditions of their cultures. Today

everyone seems to be kind of integrated into a somewhat more flexible system. So I don't really split my topics, for me they are all connected to each other. They enter my work automatically. The research I like the most is about folklore when I get to talk to local people who tell me their stories during my journeys. Folklore plays a crucial part of documenting our own culture and at the same time there is always an amount of it being fiction, which you can hardly know. I like this tension.



Shingo Yoshida, Untitled, 2015. Images courtesy of the artist

How do you decide in which medium to work? Did you also draw during your trip?

My main medium is film and I also do photography. Sometimes I draw but this time it took me a lot of effort to plan the taking of the photos and videos. For example, I had to prepare my equipment according to the cold temperatures. I am working on some collages now.



Shingo Yoshida, Untitled, 2015. Images courtesy of the artist

How do nature and the current state and future of the environment influence the way you work?

In the past whenever the Bering Sea froze people most likely walked back and forth to Alaska. Imagine you could almost see America with your own eyes, but hardly get a visa as an average person. Such made up borders between nations seem very questionable once you get to see a place like Siberia where nothing but nature governs. I think in this way I always wish my works to carry this message of reverence towards nature. To me the way humans adjust to all kinds of extreme conditions is a wonder. I am not too much into guidebooks, I prefer going out and find out by myself. This is why all of my work is connected to travelling. And of course I am much into finding an adventure of some special kind. I never get this excited in a big city; maybe because I grew up in Tokyo, it is less attractive to me. An adventure in nature in the end means some kind of process of reconfirming my own identity to me.

The way I work itself is mostly intuitional, since I am actually quite superstitious. For example in Siberia ravens are believed to bring good luck, they are a good symbol even though they are scavengers. People show them their respect by bringing some nice food for good luck whenever they visit some important place for the first time, and so did I in order to do each new piece of work in Siberia.



Shingo Yoshida, Untitled, 2015. Images courtesy of the artist

You're also working on a research project concerning Slavic mythology. What can you tell us about it so far?

At the moment I am staying as artist-in-residence in Slovenia. The country owns rich nature with huge forests. This week I am about to make a trip to the area of Tolmin, which is very remote. Actually there are some indigenous people who live independently in the forest to avoid current systems such as capitalism. They are tightly linked up with contemporary issues such as sustainability. These people also tell stories about the forest, its elements such as stones and animals. There are some stones that are made to look like snakes' heads with holes in them as eyes. They protect the route of travellers. But rather than mythology, this is a contemporary movement that tries to bring back traditions and humans' relation to nature.

Interview by Will Furtado

Portrait of Shingo Yoshida by Maxime Ballesteros

Photography courtesy of the artist

See more works by Shingo Yoshida (<http://http://www.sleek-art.net/artists/shingo-yoshida.html>) available for purchase via Sleek Art (<http://http://www.sleek-art.net/>).

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