

## Doug Hall

Feigen Contemporary, New York

Doug Hall's recent photographs strike the viewer with their tightly organized, large-format, color compositions and seductive clarity. Yet this is only a veneer, masking a subtle dialogue about the difference between place and space, and the highly regulated social patterns that exist within each. This type of photography is not new, of course, and can be found in the work of those artists—Andreas Gursky, Jeff Wall, Candida Höfer, Thomas



Doug Hall, *Wild Blue Yokohama*, 2000, C-print, 127 x 160.6cm

Struth, Mariko Mori—who are repeatedly cited in relation to Hall's own long-established oeuvre. What is different, however, in this recent body of photographs of Hanoi, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, is the way that composition is emphasized, not for its own sake, but as institutional critique—an area of investigation that has long been associated with Hall's work. His training in the field of anthropology at Harvard may have contributed to a vision that both reflects and interrogates

Western, ethnographic postcard centrality and single point perspective. Within this over-determined trope, he provides a subtle commentary on the social patterning of commerce, traffic, architectural high-rise sprawl, and even the vectors of river travel. These patterns of movement are evidenced by the starkly-painted, abstract crosswalks of Tokyo, or the chrome stanchions delineating foot traffic in public plazas—institutional guidelines that would pass unnoticed were it not for Hall's camera. Outdoor escalators, kinetic billboards, and multiple traffic signs direct not only the path of the consumer, but also the viewer's gaze. Hall's images fluctuate between unpeopled, sacred spaces and densely populated, everyday places. Yet each hints at the presence of the other. A container-like high-rise, covered in grass green scaffolding, insinuates an unseen army of inhabitants. An open-air market in Hanoi calls attention to the institutional nature of the marketplace itself. Hall implies that a logic nestles behind visual patterns of routine, whether work or leisure related, and by cutting and pasting at will, by lifting a figure out of one image and inserting it into another, he has started to establish his own visual code of conduct. Hall's seemingly straightforward scenes lead us to query what is real and what is not, what is direct and what is manipulated, in both photography and society.

—Lisa Jaye Young