ARI SAARTO / Statement

Suicide Forest - being at this very site, at this very moment

At the north-western lower slopes of Mt. Fuji, just a few hours drive from Tokyo, lies the forest of Aokigahara Jukai. This exceptional forest has grown onto 30 square kilometers of lava fields, which were a result of an eruption about 900 years ago. The Jukai forest has an almost mythical reputation: almost impossible to orientate, breathtakingly beautiful, and every year about 50 persons commit suicide in it. Official nylon lines mark the route to the sites of the corpses.

The panoramas of the series are shot in March 2006 and the installation includes water in a cup - collected from a cave and doomed to vanish by evaporating - and the video work Amnesia, which is originally an 8 mm film shot in the forest. The source of inspiration behind the video was an article named “Aokigahara-jukai: suicide and amnesia in Mt. Fuji’s Black Forest”, written by professor Yoshimoto Takahashi (Suicide Life Threat. Behaviour. Vol 18, issue 2, 1988).

The Sea of Trees - literally translated, Aokigahara Jukai means “a sea of green foliage” - combines concepts of site, presence and vanishing. The series continues my earlier work on landscape: Topography of Murder (Finnish Civil War execution sites, 2001), Topography of Fear (fear and threat in urban space, 2001), Aomori Water Walks (hiking and collecting creek water in north-eastern Japan, 2004) and IN SITU (huts of the homeless in Finland and Japan).