

From the collection



Every year, thousands of tourists flock in summer to Nepal, a landlocked country in Southern India between China and India.

Their aim is to hike around the spectacular mountain scenery before the beginning of the monsoon season of July and August, and with their cameras they bag the classic images of mountain passes and trails. In the last four years, Korean-born photographer Jae Hoon Lee has travelled amongst the constant stream of visitors, paying patient attention to what lies at his feet. The result is a composite image of tracks collected together to encircle the experience as others might use the native rhododendron flowers to make lei. His harvest of shots gets blended together digitally to make epic panoramas of place which do not describe a specific location but provide instead a sense of how overwhelming it is. Avoiding the clichés of travel photography, Jae Hoon Lee ignores landmarks in favour of the documentation of substrate.

In this instance, he blends a range of views collected during an hour on the Annapurna

circuit in the western hills of Nepal using the computer programme Photoshop. The effect is to magnify the homogeneity of the trail, with the repetition of barely discernible features such as a single rectangular rock the only indication that the same image has been duplicated several times and then knitted into one seamless whole. The resultant fictional country looks barren and inhospitable, relentlessly stony and prone to slips, and is completely uninhabited. But the artist offers a route through this precipitous scree to his viewers, albeit a daunting and difficult path. Those veterans of Nepalese treks will recognise the shifts of scale and steepness brought on by altitude, and also the hairpin bends to be negotiated by the zigzag technique of walking taught by Sherpa guides to the parties of tourists who dog their steps. Concentrating on placing one dusty boot in front of another while heaving to get enough oxygen into the lungs, the landscape often see-saws in front of a trekker's eyes, the stones threatening to skid away into a rockslide with any misplaced step. The artist has successfully re-created the

perilous and precipitous nature of a Nepalese trek by being there for us, recording the experience as it is lived rather than just seen.

His compositional technique draws on the vertical perspective of Chinese scroll painting, which influenced the Tibetan thangka images frequently seen in Nepal. In these pictures (designed to be rolled up for travel between monasteries) mountains are stacked up to the surface to enact the Daoist idea of the landscape as a living body. Jae Hoon Lee evokes a sense of movement which is both contemporary and ancient through taking us on a journey which is not a trajectory from a point of origin to a distant place of arrival but instead a slow meditation on the relationship between the human and the natural worlds, examined with endlessly increasing detail.

Linda Tyler

Jae Hoon Lee, Trekking, 2010, digital photograph