mystery and transparency

Fujiko Nakaya’s billowing fog transforms the Glass House in Connecticut

text: Craig Elspett
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olga/glass house
It was none other than Robert Rauschenberg who, back in 1968, put Tropic Nakaya in touch with a manufacturer of industrial high-pressure nozzles capable of producing microscopic water droplets. Nakaya subsequently made a career in employing them for installations that transform the built or natural environment with gaseous waves of fog. "I am not the sculptor. The wind is," she says. "I sometimes turn the fog on and off, improving with the wind like jazz." She has fogged up the titanium exterior of Frank O. Gehry & Associates' Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain, and she gave Dilor a Suffolk advice on the Blue Building for Switzerland's Expo '92.

Accustomed to such big-name projects, she nevertheless hesitated when asked to create a fog installation to interact with the Glass House. Philip Johnson's seminal 1949 residence in New Canaan, Connecticut. "I was afraid to even touch it," she admits. Two years of planning and experiments, in constant conversation with curator Irene Shum Allen, fortunately abated any jitters. "It was a great honor for me to collaborate with Philip Johnson," Nakaya says. Tropic Nakaya: End, on view until November 30, has made his 1,700-square-foot house disappear, "800 square feet house disappear, every hour, into what she calls 'a totally white darkness.'"