

delight



Photograph by: Takaaki Fujiki



THE NOTORIOUSLY MESSY JAPANESE STREETScape IS TRANSFORMED BY THIS WITTY URBAN DESIGN PROJECT.

The Japanese urban landscape is typically an irredeemably messy visual *potage* of utility poles and wires. This mess is nationally ubiquitous, procreated without any wider awareness of its impact on the public realm. Any tourist photograph of a famous temple or landscape usually includes the odd 30ft telegraph pole and spaghetti tangle of wires. The reasons for this are practical; in seismically active Japan, earthquake-damaged cables are easier to repair if not buried underground.

In the city of Tokamachi in Niigata prefecture, however, architects Fujiki Studio show that utility blight can be beautiful in an urban improvement project carried out under the auspices of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial. Fujiki Studio's solution is simply to clad the offending poles and street lights in specially-designed wraps of brightly coloured fabric. Tokamachi has a tradition of making intensely coloured silk fabrics for kimonos, so the project playfully acknowledges the city's manufacturing and cultural history. Fabric from the Finnish Marimekko range was selected, designed by Maija Isola. Wrapped around lamp-posts and telegraph poles, the familiar Unikko pattern of gaudy abstract flowers cheers and enlivens the streetscape. An intricate support structure of stainless-steel wires, bamboo poles and fishing nets provides anchorage for the fabric cladding. Instead of being drab eyesores, the poles are fleetingly transformed into objects of strange and compelling beauty. CATHERINE SLESSOR