



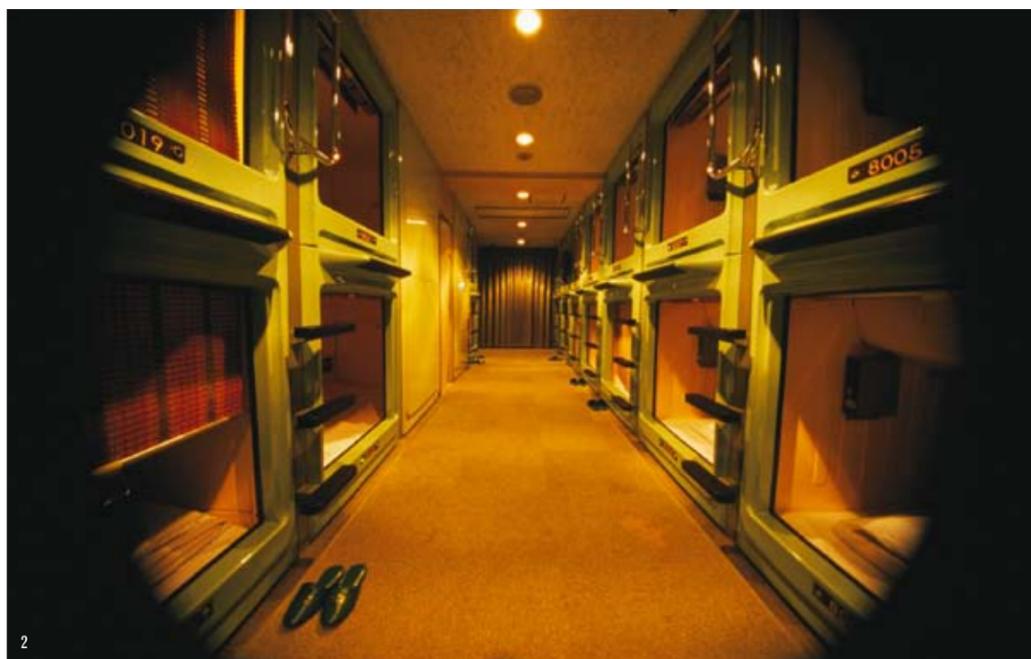
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# Lost in translation

BRITTA CAMPION PUTS TOKYO'S URBAN ECOSYSTEM UNDER THE MICROSCOPE IN HER *CITY CREATURES* SERIES.



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Explorers sailed to uncharted shores in more swashbuckling times of old, and recorded undreamed-of flora and fauna. But on a one-month sojourn to Tokyo in January 2006, photographer Britta Campion found herself studying urban life instead of jewel-like beetles or exotic birds of paradise. The resulting series of photographs, *Tokyo – City Creatures*, embodies Campion's fascination with urban sociology, and the idea that "the city functions and grows in much the same way as a biological ecosystem". Through Campion's lens, police, firefighters and bike couriers prowl the metropolis like animals in a jungle. "Individuals, in assuming a functioning role within one of these groups, in a sense simultaneously strip themselves of their unique personal identity and assume traits that visually distinguish them from other breeds of city creatures," observes the photographer.



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Ultimately, as each creature carries out its role, the city hums with colour and movement: balanced delicately in stasis. "Over half the world's population lives in cities and nowhere is this more apparent than in Tokyo. This is because of Tokyo's large population, but also because this contemporary metropolis has emerged out of traditional Japanese society that is by nature homogenous and conformist, comprising a rigid social framework where expected norms and processes prevail." It is a world without night, forever illuminated by neon, fluorescent, natural and reflected light. Shucked-off slippers are the only

signs of life in a futuristic capsule hotel, while a line of green buses gleam like shiny beetles. Campion observes it all with an almost scientific precision, yet the effect is cinematic and hyper-real. "The series was shot using a DX lens, designed for a Nikon digital body, mounted on a traditional film SLR, so that the vignette effect is created in-camera," she explains. The result is that each photo offers a porthole view of Campion's voyage of discovery – or a dissection of a truly fascinating ecosystem, glowing surreally under the lens. [www.britta.com.au](http://www.britta.com.au)

Clare Fletcher



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1. Shinagawa Station. 2. Capsule hotel in Asakusa. 3. Pachinko parlour. 4. Bike courier in Ebisu. 5. Fire brigade in Shinjuku. 6. Bus depot, Shinagawa.