

The Guiding Light

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May 6, 2013



Tokihiro Satom, *Shirakami #4*, 2008, Gelatin-silver print, 42" x52"

Light is channelled in unusual and wondrous ways in *Hikari*, an exhibition of contemporary Japanese photography

The curatorial note of “*Hikari*” (meaning light in Japanese) explains that the exhibition attempts to do two things: one, to “see if new and interesting readings of the photographs can emerge when seen in the context of a theme,” and to “investigate the ways in which this theme might be unique to the country in question”,

“*Hikari*”, in this case is an exhibition of Japanese contemporary photography by Yuji Obata, Tokihiro Sato, Shiho Kito, Kimiko Yoshida and Ken Kitano. It does work with light in unusually obvious ways that are a wonder to behold.

Both Yuji Obata and Tokihiro Sato work with light in wondrous ways. Yuji, inspired by the work of Dr. Ukichiro Nakaya and Wilson A. Bentley who photographed snowflakes, also captures snowflakes gently falling and lighting up the blackness like intricately shaped stars, with the discernible delicate shapes of the crystals that are otherwise not obvious to the human eye.

“In my photographs, I am interested in the relationship between the ephemeral nature of the snow crystals and this relates to the notion of the ephemeral more generally— such as the transient nature of our journey through life and the people we meet. I wanted to capture the images almost as symphonies, bringing together the impressions and legacies of Dr. Nakaya and Wilson A. Bentley to create new work,” writes Obaya.

Tokihiro, on the other hand, channelizes light itself, by “drawing with light” to create flat orbs or lines of light made of natural or artificial light in space in “neutral” backgrounds like staircases or in nature, in water bodies, snowy woods or around trees to create images that are almost heavenly.

His technique is simple: Tokihiro employs a long-exposure camera (with exposures that last over an hour) against his background, a picture that is usually complete in itself, as he then walks around the frame either repeatedly drawing patterns of light using torches usually indoors or in the dusk or by reflecting sunlight onto the camera lens using

a hand mirror.

“I try to express ‘Existence’, or ‘Being’ through my works. Contradictorily, by not having life/lives visible in a frame, I would like to show it does exist there,” he says. “My actions are captured by the camera, yet the camera dismisses my body and lets in only the light. What I would like the viewer to see is his idea of the ‘missing part’ in my images. I want them to imagine that something which they cannot actually see in the picture does exist — by means of showing my own absence. My ‘respirations’ and actions in the pictures are the essence of my own life, even though my body remains invisible,” he writes.

The exhibition also features photographs by co-curator Shiho Kito, who displays work from two series ‘Pikari’ and ‘Walls’ inspired by Ahmedabad; Kimiko Yoshida who has created monochromatic self-portraits and Ken Kitano whose portraits that appear more like paintings are an “aggregate” of portraits of groups of people placed on top of one another.