

# **Illumination**

**Rieko Akatsuka  
Rowena Hughes  
Kaz  
Munetaka Shinya  
Dafna Talmor  
Adam Thompson**

**Fordham**

**22 April-22 May 2005**

# Introduction

*Have you ever seen a golden fusuma (sliding door) and a golden byobu (folding screen) inside a dark room within the depth of a large building, where light from outside is unable to reach, capturing a spear of light coming from the garden several rooms away and faintly reflecting this light in a dream-like manner? This reflection throws to its surrounding darkness a truly delicate golden light like horizon at sunset. I cannot think of any other time when gold displays such mournful beauty.*

Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*.

The exhibition presents work by six artists from different cultural backgrounds (Japan, UK and Israel) exploring the universal themes of light and dark with emphasis on the importance of darkness as investigated in the seminal Japanese text, *In Praise of Shadows* by Junichiro Tanizaki.

The essence of this text is contained in the above paragraph where he eulogises the beauty of delicate light being thrown by golden traditional Japanese screens, made more prominent by the surrounding darkness of a poorly lit room. In such a setting, darkness comes into being from nothing, playing an important role as it highlights the presence of light.

Through various media including sculpture, photography, installation and the moving image, each artist questions their place in a world that frequently appears to be dark. In a sense, each work acts as a source of light to illuminate this dark space and reveal new 'territories' - bringing about clarity and understanding of our existence within the framework of darkness.

Clock wise from top left hand corner:

Rowena Hughes  
*Untitled*, 2005  
Inkjet print and coloured pencil  
25cm x 17cm

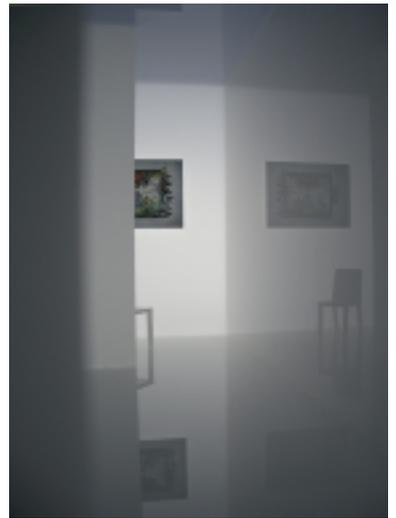
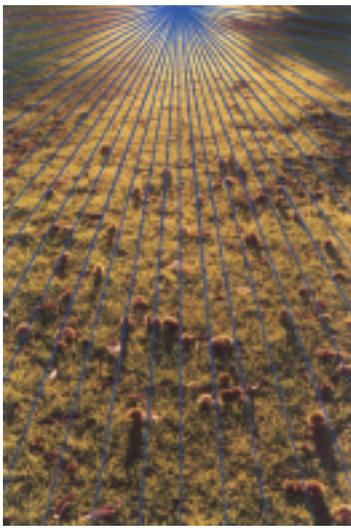
Kaz  
*... am I?*, 2001  
TV, video camera, 2 x video projector  
Installation view

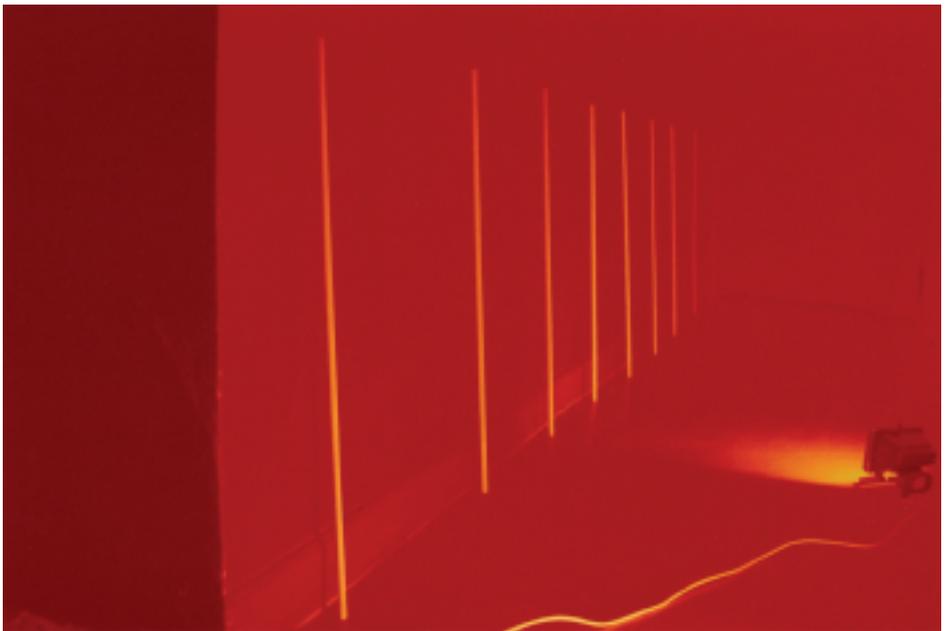
Rieko Akatsuka  
*Room*, 2003  
Perspex, inkjet print - detail

Adam Thompson  
*Untitled*, 2005  
Matt inkjet print mounted on aluminium  
30cm x 32cm

Dafna Talmor  
*Untitled*, 2004  
C-type print mounted on foamex with diasec front  
60cm x 80cm

Munetaka Shinya  
*Disappearing Point*, 2005  
Fluorescent light  
Installation view





*Foreshadow*, 2005  
C-type print mounted  
on aluminium  
50cm x 50cm

Kaz  
Born Tokyo, 1967

*Untitled (Corridor)*, 2004  
Inkjet print  
10cm x 15cm

## Trac[k]ing the Thresholds: Dichotomies of Self & Other / Light & Dark

Roy Exley

*Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us*<sup>1</sup>.

Emmanuel Levinas

If our perceptions of our place within the world consist of mapping those regions of experience which straddle the thresholds between self and other, then in physical terms there seems to be an analogy here with our perceptions of those areas of the visible world whose thresholds divide the extremes of pure light and absolute darkness. Those things that are subsumed by shadows or shrouded in darkness become more enigmatic, while those that are bathed in light become more familiar. We easily pass by the familiar - those things that are rendered prosaic through daily overexposure - or we adulate them, raise them up to a significance they barely deserve. The intrigue, however, conjured by those shadowy, more enigmatic elements of our world, entreats us to search them out to pin down their meaning and significance, to banish any threats - sometimes to the point of obsession. Darkness also, of course, engenders fear, so darkness can trigger either of those two polar opposites, fascination or terror.

Tony Oursler, Cindy Sherman and Gregory Green are three artists whose work makes strong references to the idea of the 'other', where terror, or trepidation prowl just below the surface. Artists like John Coplans, Jenny Saville or Sophie Calle relentlessly expose the concept of the self in work that oscillates between the illuminating and the disconcerting. But each of these critical positions has of course to relate to the other in order to make any sense. The artists in *Illumination* make various references to the self and the other, through and around the exploration of the multifarious

relationships between light and dark, addressing as they do so questions of identity and difference, belonging and alienation. To be intrinsic or to be extraneous are, like light and dark, totally different entities and can radically shift our perception of our world.

Rowena Hughes' paradoxically delicate images of tree foliage seen from beneath seem to veer in their mien towards that kingdom of darkness espoused in the works of H.P Lovecraft, signifying the sinister and that unsettling notion of the uncanny. There are parts of the picture plane here where light can scarcely penetrate, where shadows conspire to stifle those already constricted sources of illumination, creating an ominous sense of imminence. This could be a familiar street scene viewed from an obtuse, oblique or whimsical angle - the streetlights eclipsed - but we are propelled here into the realms of the horror film like the stalking scene in John Carpenter's *Halloween*.

In direct contrast to Hughes' work, Kaz's *Untitled (Corridor)* (2004) and *Untitled (Illumination)* (2005) are scintillating light-filled images imbued with a strange evanescence which while aesthetically seductive is distinctly unsettling - we are reminded of the brilliant eerie light radiating from that alien craft in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* - and while we strain to reconcile these images with reality, we remain stranded in that ontological territory belonging to the sci-fi novel. The contradiction here seems to be that while being light-filled these images are far from transparent, and while seductive, they are far from benign. In the basement we are thrust, physically into this same eerie alternative reality, where the pale phosphorescent glow of a rectilinear form appears to float in a black void and as we walk around it attempting to make sense of it we are suddenly but momentarily flooded by light, and the focus of surveillance switches from the form to us, but before we can orientate ourselves in this newly revealed space, and establish who it is that might be watching, the light flicks off again leaving us once more alone, surveying the glowing form. This switching from semi-dark to light creates a gestalt effect where our perceived surroundings become utterly transformed and the mood shifts from that of curiosity to that of alarm. This piece *and there was light...* (2005), somehow encapsulates what this exhibition is about, the framing of

light and dark as opposing signifiers of our constantly morphing concepts of self and other.

The near death experience most commonly recounted by so many visitors to that particular threshold, is that of floating down a tunnel of pure white light - unlike the tyranny of a cosmic black-hole that ruthlessly and relentlessly sucks all in its vicinity into its stygian void, this tunnel of light gently entices the dying soul into its halcyon tranquillity. In spite of its uncompromising starkness, there is something of this tranquillity in the demeanour of Munetaka Shinya's *Disappearing Point* (2005), a coy, minimal antithesis to the baroque brashness of those Cerith Wyn Evans' chandeliers recently seen at White Cube. Shinya's light modestly offers a visual mantra, something to be contemplated rather than questioned or analysed. Shinya's print, forming part of his site specific light installation work, *The Finest Line* (2005) depicts a pristine crepuscular interior that gently radiates that same tranquillity, inviting the viewer to passively navigate its gleaming topographies, whose symmetries suggest a cultural 'other' and whose pictorial horizon lends an air of unreality.

With her *Untitled* (2005) installation, Rieko Akatsuka visits James Turrell territory, lushly colourful geometric forms appear to levitate enigmatically within the intimate interiors into which we can peer through miniature windows let into the dark cubic exteriors. Inside, beautifully crafted windows and doors suggest domestic spaces. In their quiescence these spaces are the inhibitors, the bearers of slowness, that our speed-crazed age craves - there is little information here - not so much as a byte - but rather an extended moment of optical repose. Akatsuka's *Untitled* (2002), offers us what could be a glimpse into Le Corbusier's dreamworld - a luminescent ghost of modernist architecture projected into a cybernetic future, a space station for migrant technophiles floating hopefully in a timeless lacuna. This work is an extension of her earlier work where, using ready-mades - electronics components - she fabricated hi-tech phantasms whose hyperreality played with, but endlessly deferred, reality. Liam Gillick, who himself has a complex relationship with modernism could be referring to Akatsuka's work when he states: - 'Those who think about the future affect the future as much as thinking about the past changes what has already taken place'<sup>2</sup>. Akatsuka's slalom between the present and the future offers a miniature picture of what our aspirations could be given an aleatory flip of destiny's coin.

If the theme of identity is one of the dominant concerns of contemporary thought then for our particular culture to pin down a sense of cultural identity our hi-tech aspirations must be constantly addressed, not only their burgeoning physical manifestations and influences, but also the nature of the desire that constantly drives them forward. In Adam Thompson's darkly elusive image, *Untitled* (2005) we seem to witness a visual metaphor for this obsessive urge towards progress, a motorway snakes its way aggressively through a benighted and forsaken landscape whose blur is but a brief glass-filtered interlude in a million journeys

per whatever temporal unit applies. In this metaphor time has become a function of digitized space and the natural landscape is peeled away like a scorched sloughed skin at the side of the road as a stream of fidgeting integers, in overdrive, invade the horizon. In Thompson's vision of the future our planet has become an ashen burnt-out husk, the integers that fuelled the fire have run their race and have spun-off into space.

Dafna Talmor's C-type prints conflate Hannah Starkey's images of lone, alienated figures, with Elisa Sighicelli's deserted interiors flooded by curtain-filtered daylight, to create compelling pseudo-narratives, where identity is tantalisingly evaded and the other is eerily imminent. All seems to be held at arms length here and the distance proves uncomfortable for the viewer. The Romantic is clearly referenced here, but only in aesthetic terms, and the overriding sense of limbo denies any satisfactory completion, we can never bring things here to a close, the visual language is suspended in mid-sentence the viewer stranded in mid-flight as Talmor declines to talk us down. Enigma as figure summarily eclipses identity's ground, and we are left to wonder as the figures are left to blankly survey the window's invisible world.

*Untitled*, 2005  
Wood, foam board,  
uv light, electronics  
component

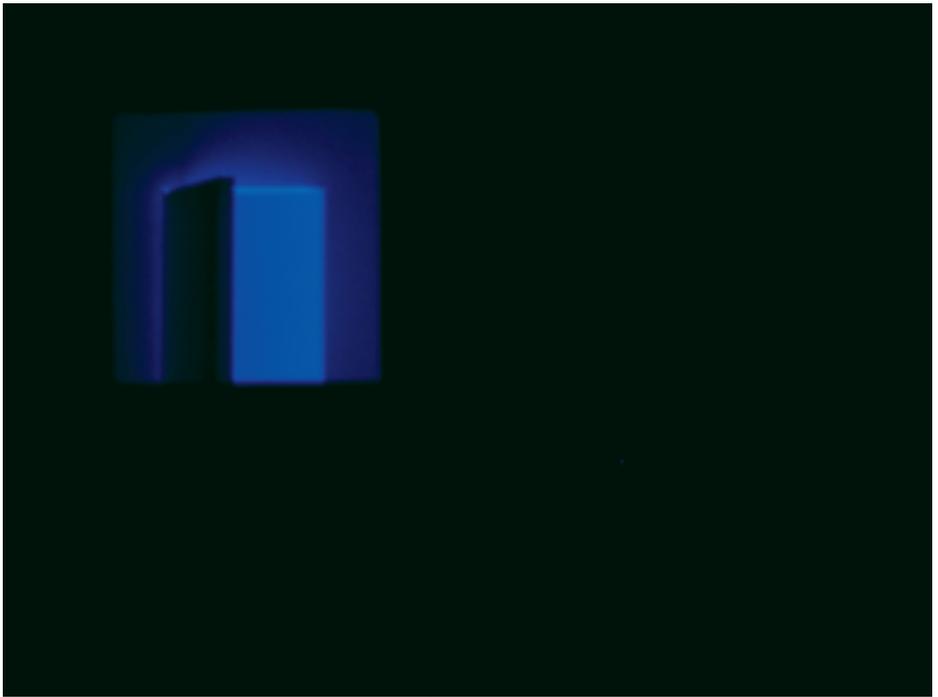
Munetaka Shinya  
Born Tokyo, 1976

Light and dark, like self and other, yin and yang, need each other, antagonists on the surface, they are protagonists in their underlying dynamics as they jink between their shifting thresholds through an infinite maze of permutations. Their presence in whatever configuration, has emotive connotations - traditionally powerful emotive tools, precipitators of moods, used widely in both visual and literary art. Their effects cover a vast range of phenomena, stretching from the wondrous and awesome cosmic spectacle of galactic clusters, right down to the delicate, subtle and intriguing dance of fireflies at dusk. In *Illumination* as the artists trace and track these thresholds through a whole cornucopia of effects on a more human but sometimes supernatural level, we can begin to appreciate the subtle complexities that light and dark can offer and perhaps bring new perspectives to our all too often humdrum lives.

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, (Trans. Alphonso Lingis), Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht. 1978. Page 48.

2. Liam Gillick, *Five or Six*, Lukas & Sternberg Inc., New York. 1999. Page 40.

*The Finest Line*, 2005  
C-type print for  
installation  
30cm x 40cm





Dafna Talmor  
Born Tel Aviv, 1974

# Illumination

22 April - 22 May 2005  
Friday - Sunday 12-6pm

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Curated by Kaz

*Untitled*, 2005  
C-type print mounted on  
foamex with diasec front  
60cm x 80cm

Adam Thompson  
Born Ipswich, 1980

## Acknowledgement

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Rieko Akatsuka and Adam Thompson  
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3019, 2004  
Wood, black pigment,  
miniature flags - detail

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