

In the phrase “stay gold,” “gold” is a metaphor for an untainted childhood. Of course, I do not mean that Yosuke Takeda is holding on to some sort of boyish innocence. What I mean, instead, is that his digital photographs are connected to the golden age of photography’s early years.

There is a historical discourse which supposes a dualism between the world as it is and the world of representations. This dualism allows the photographer to capture something real, in other words something beyond the realm of representation. If the photographer follows the nature of the photographic medium, eliminates subjective expression and releases the shutter at the moment that some “real thing” appears—then a single photograph can be produced. This formula, which defines modern photography, is constituted by assumptions of a “purity of medium,” a “decisive moment” and a “single photograph.” Modern photography reduces photography to indivisible units of “real things” and fixes this identity for itself. At the same time, since it can be nothing other than a type of representation, it struggles to move outside of the representational realm; as a result, it perpetually criticizes itself for its incompleteness—that is, for remaining representational. Modern photography (i.e. analog photography) has thus far oscillated between the poles of natural/artificial, sharp focus/soft focus, straight/pictorial, analog/digital and so on.

Digital photography does not fit into the framework given above. It destroys conventional notions of photography and releases it from the trap of dualisms. One of digital photography’s unique traits is continuity. Continuity means infinite divisibility, which in turn means the elimination of a single identity. When anything printed or projected from light is considered photography, the photographic medium’s unique identity ceases to exist. By looking at a subject in a way that superimposes other traces or signs before and after the towering decisive moment (the “here and now”), this moment will overlap with other moments, and finally, the single photograph will dissolve into an infinite number of photographs. The sensibility which attempts to connect to others or to the world through a single point (an aperture or rupture) does not belong to the 21st century.

Still, digital photography is connected to photography’s infancy, in other words to a time before the establishment of modern photography’s conceptual framework. Through doppelgangers, twins and spirits, early photography threatened the notion of identity by multiplying the precious, indivisible unit of “one.” Digital photography “stays gold,” as it were, by reviving this primitive power which modern photography suppressed.

Although Takeda’s images belong to the genre of straight photography, they employ pictorial composition and a flatness that resembles abstract paintings; thus they have been praised for their surreal, cool ambiance and their detachment from everyday life. “Surreal,” “cool” and “detachment” are all subjective terms, but it would be a mistake to consider Takeda’s images through the dualism of straight/pictorial photography. In fact, these images are far from painterly; this is because they are, without question, photographs of the basic conditions of photography—photographs of the photographic mechanism. For example, Takeda’s newest series, “Digital Flare,” comprises backlit images with lens flare (a trace of the lens on the image) and overexposed areas that are indistinguishable from the white of the paper on which the image is printed. The images of light filtered through foliage may look painterly at first glance, but they address fundamental issues regarding the photographic medium: they refuse its transparency, and reveal its material existence as a mediating device between the photographer and the world. The details of the high-resolution images are filled with nearly chaotic textures of light.

Takeda’s works, however, are not merely conceptual. He walks endlessly to find locations for these images and waits for perfect light conditions. His photographs, which expose photographs for what they are, are entirely dependent on real-world conditions like geography and weather and are products of intense physical labor. Behind each of his images are hundreds of similar images which have been edited out. In this sense, they are primitive, like the photographs from photography’s early days. The difference is that today’s viewer, including Takeda, has knowledge of photographic history. His reticent images have a density that makes them hold up as large-scale prints; indeed, this density is what will make his work stand the test of time.