

Variations on the theme of Water Droplets

Yosuke Takeda's New Works

Yosuke Takeda (b. 1982) made his debut in 2009, and has been active both domestically and abroad largely through Taka Ishii Gallery. He also published the monograph *Stay Gold* in 2014. However, his activities came to a halt after his solo exhibition in 2019. It was said that the artist left Tokyo soon after to recuperate from an illness in his hometown.

Last fall, I received an unexpected email from Takeda, and he shared his most recent works with me. I was surprised to see that he himself had not changed much since we last met four years ago. But there were new abstract photographs that seemed to be an evolution of his “Digital Flare” series. Beautiful photographs of light trails confirmed that the artist’s distinctive sensibility was still alive and well.

As a reference point, let us look at a backlit photograph from *Stay Gold*, which served as the catalyst for the “Digital Flare” series. When looking at this photograph, it is as if the light source were within the photograph, while the surrounding leaves receive the light emitted. Led into the camera / the square frame, the light seems to permeate the frame. Guided into the camera / darkroom / frame, the light reverberates and amplifies within, just as sound resonates in space. This sensibility is present throughout almost all of Takeda’s photographs, demonstrating his interest in light. By no means pictorial, Takeda’s colors are prismatic, glittering from the light cultivated within the camera.

The gold of *Stay Gold* is a metaphor for childhood, or naivete and fundamentals. The introduction of light into a box can be regarded as the basis of photography, which Takeda’s photographs embody. Within the details of his high-resolution photographs, the texture of light forms a chaotic effervescence, as the photographer retreats within the dazzling “room” of the camera.

However, Takeda clearly distances himself from such photographic reclusion. In contrast to the abstract photography of James Welling and Wolfgang Tillmans, which is taken without lenses, Takeda’s works are straight photographs captured earnestly by the artist while on the move. His photographs are taken after a meticulous search for the right place, time, and lighting, while also considering environmental conditions, such as geography and weather. Each photograph is then carefully selected from this fruit of painstaking physical labor.

Also, while Takeda’s abstract works are truly immersive images when realized as prints, they do not hide the fact that they are photographs, or paper objects. The series “Digital Flare” consists of photographs in which a lens is aimed at a strong backlight, creating a halation. Imprinting the presence of the lens itself on the image, photography as a medium loses its transparency, and is revealed as an intervening mechanism (medium). The brilliant images of light are identical to the blank margins on the print; the effervescent percolation of light is nothing but mere paper.

The mutually complementary qualities in Takeda’s photography—his reclusive sensibility towards light inside the camera-box and his practice as an artist who distances himself from this sensibility—remain powerful in his new works. In this most recent presentation, rather than light within a box, the subject is water droplets that have condensed upon a surface. These were photographed in a room with a myriad of variables, such as artificial light, differing exposure times, experimentation with blurring (movement of the camera), lens types, and camera models. Having left the box known as the camera, the artist has pared things down to a single subject, isolating himself in a room and repeatedly taking photographs while endlessly changing the shooting conditions. The works in this latest presentation are carefully selected from tens of thousands of images.

Many composers, including Liszt, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff, have developed spectacular variations on the Paganini theme. In a similar manner, this is a variation on the theme of water droplets (Image of work titled “011801”). Just as Paganini’s theme is a well-known melody, the motif of water droplets, which can be likened to small lenses, is by no means uncommon. Furthermore, the conditions of photography with a camera are accessible to anyone, just like the keys of a piano. Nonetheless, the rich variations that compose this exhibition will surely attract and sustain the attention of its viewers.

I would encourage you to experience these new works by Yosuke Takeda, who, putting his illness behind him, found a new start at KOSAKU KANECHIKA.

July 2024
Minoru Shimizu