

## Critical Fieldwork 47

## Isolation and distance, or light in a box and light on paper

Since winning successive Canon New Cosmos of Photography Honorable Mention awards in 2007 and 2008 and holding his debut solo exhibition in 2009, Yosuke Takeda (b. 1962) has gradually asserted his preeminence to the point where he is now regarded as one of the most notable photographers in Japan. From March through April he held exhibitions simultaneously at four locations in Tokyo (Taka Ishii Gallery, Taka Ishii Gallery Modern, Kurenboh and Traumania). All titled "Stay Gold," these four exhibitions were based on Takeda's debut photobook of the same name, the contents of which, particularly the works from the latest series "Digital Flare," give a clear indication of the sensibility of this artist.

But let us go back two years. It was in 2012 when I saw the solo exhibition "Cancel" at 3331 Arts Chiyoda that I first became aware of the sensibility that lies at the heart of Takeda's photography. [1] There is one axis that has as its two poles "luminous things" (things that act as light sources; light, highlights) and "non-luminous things" (subjects exposed to light), and another axis that extends from points through lines to surfaces. At the intersection point of these two axes – in other words the starting point of this exhibition – there is light in the form of lines (three works), and from this starting point there extend five routes: one in which the lines gradually lose their luminosity and become "non-luminous lines" (five works), another in which the lines lose their linearity and become "non-luminous surfaces" (seven works), another in which the lines of light merge and expand and become "luminous surfaces" (four works), another in which the lines of light break up and contract and become "points of light" (seven works), and another in which linear reflections and highlights contract and become "points of light" (four works). At their culminating points, the final two routes merge into one by way of a photograph of a "point of light" (an annular eclipse) and a photograph of a "point of reflected light" (a cat's shining eyes). The 30 beautiful, scrupulously printed works presented at this exhibition were neatly incorporated into a diagram similar to the following:

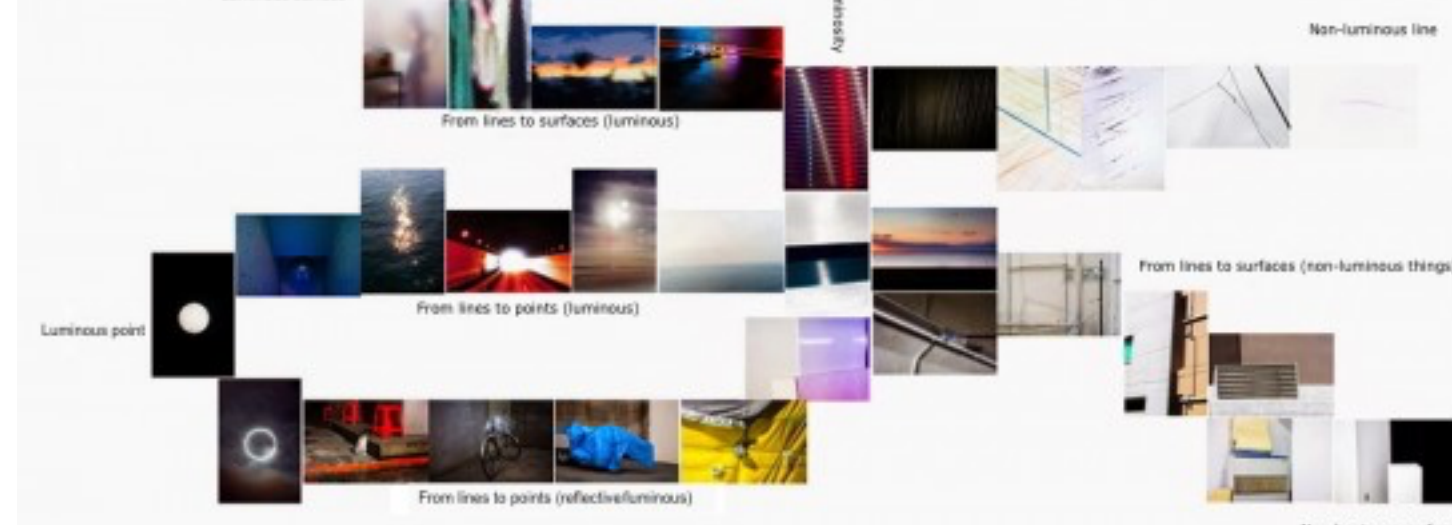
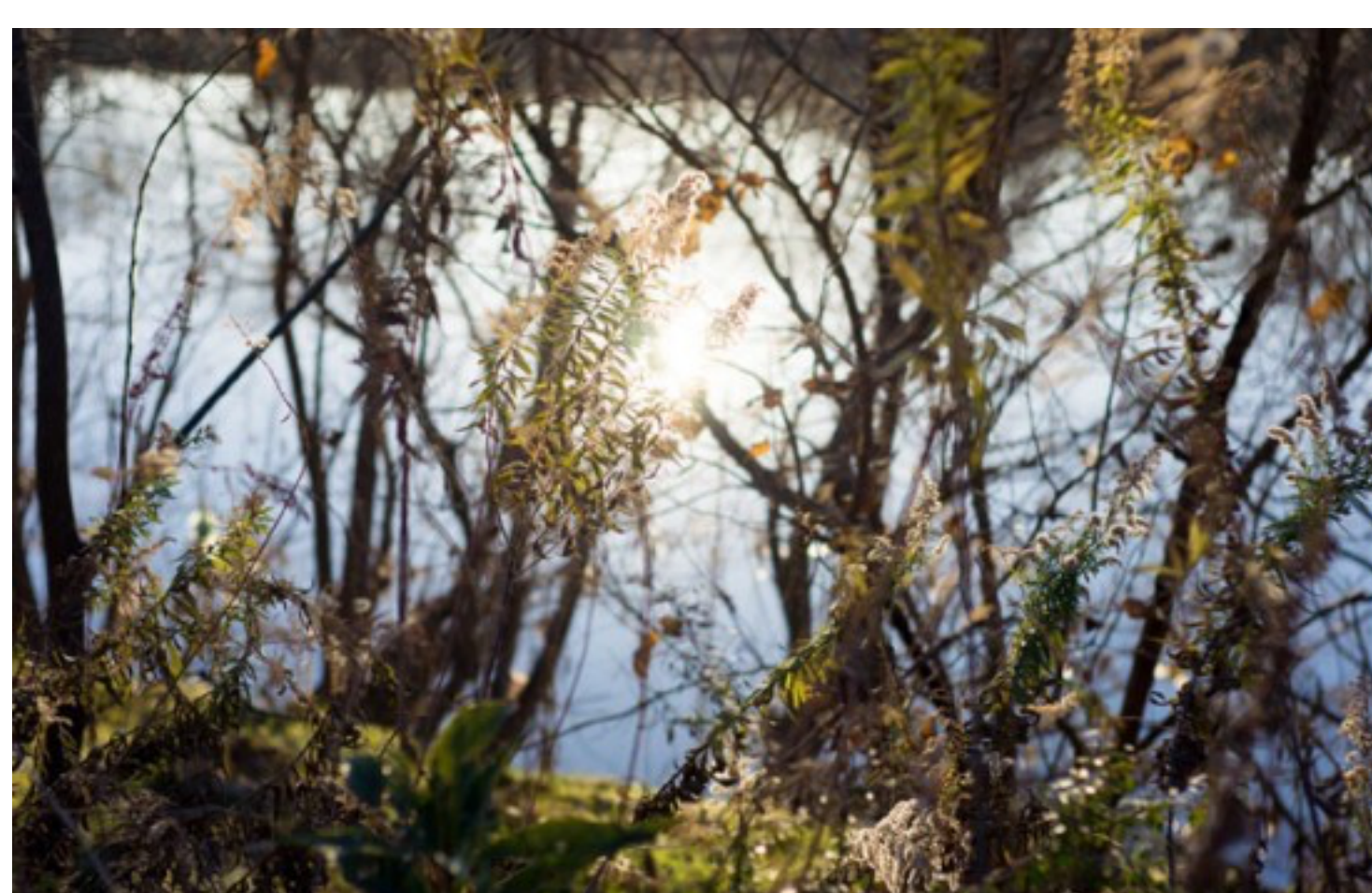


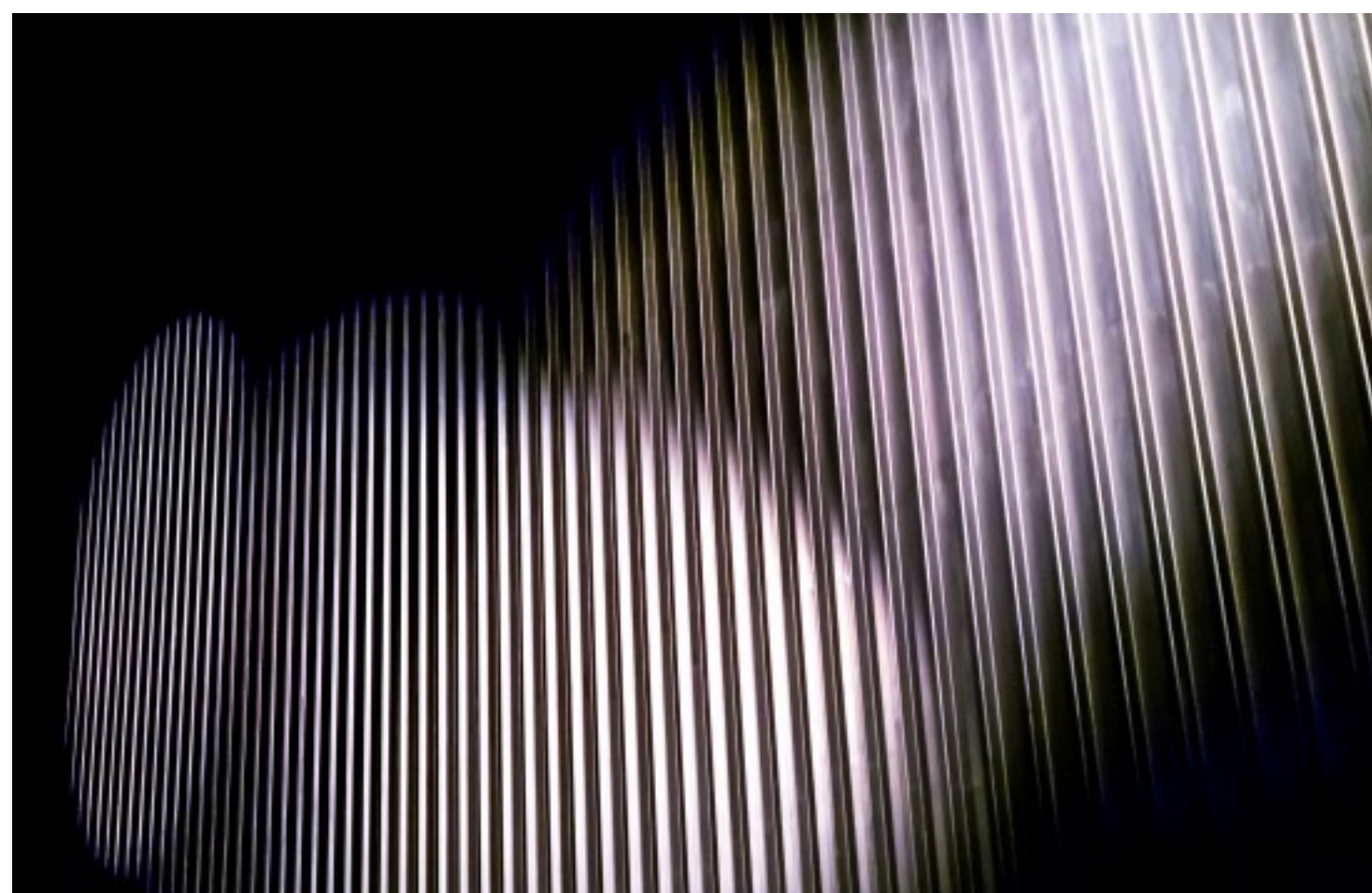
Diagram of the exhibition "Cancel" [1]. More than a few works from this exhibition are included in the photobook Stay Gold.

While essentially straight photography, Yosuke Takeda's photographs often incorporate the composition and two-dimensionality of abstract painting, and for this reason they are appreciated for their projection of a surrealism and cool ambience slightly divorced from everyday street scenes. Of course people are free to describe them however they like, but it is wrong to view Takeda's photographs in the context of the dualism between straight and pictorial photography. The diagram "light source – subject exposed to light axis x point – line – surface axis" is none other than a metaphor for the camera. The photographer takes photographs while moving this way and that along the former axis, or in other words between back lighting and front lighting. A point corresponds to the light source, a line to the image coming into focus, and a surface to the picture plane. A point of light extends out conically and forms lines (outlines, images), and these images dissolve into surfaces. This process is performed using back lighting and front lighting. In other words, far from being pictorial photographs, the photographs concerned were in every way photographs of the essential conditions of photography, photographs inside a camera obscura or black box, photographs trapped within the camera.

Returning to Stay Gold, upon opening it one is confronted with a backlit photograph that served as the starting point of "Digital Flare."



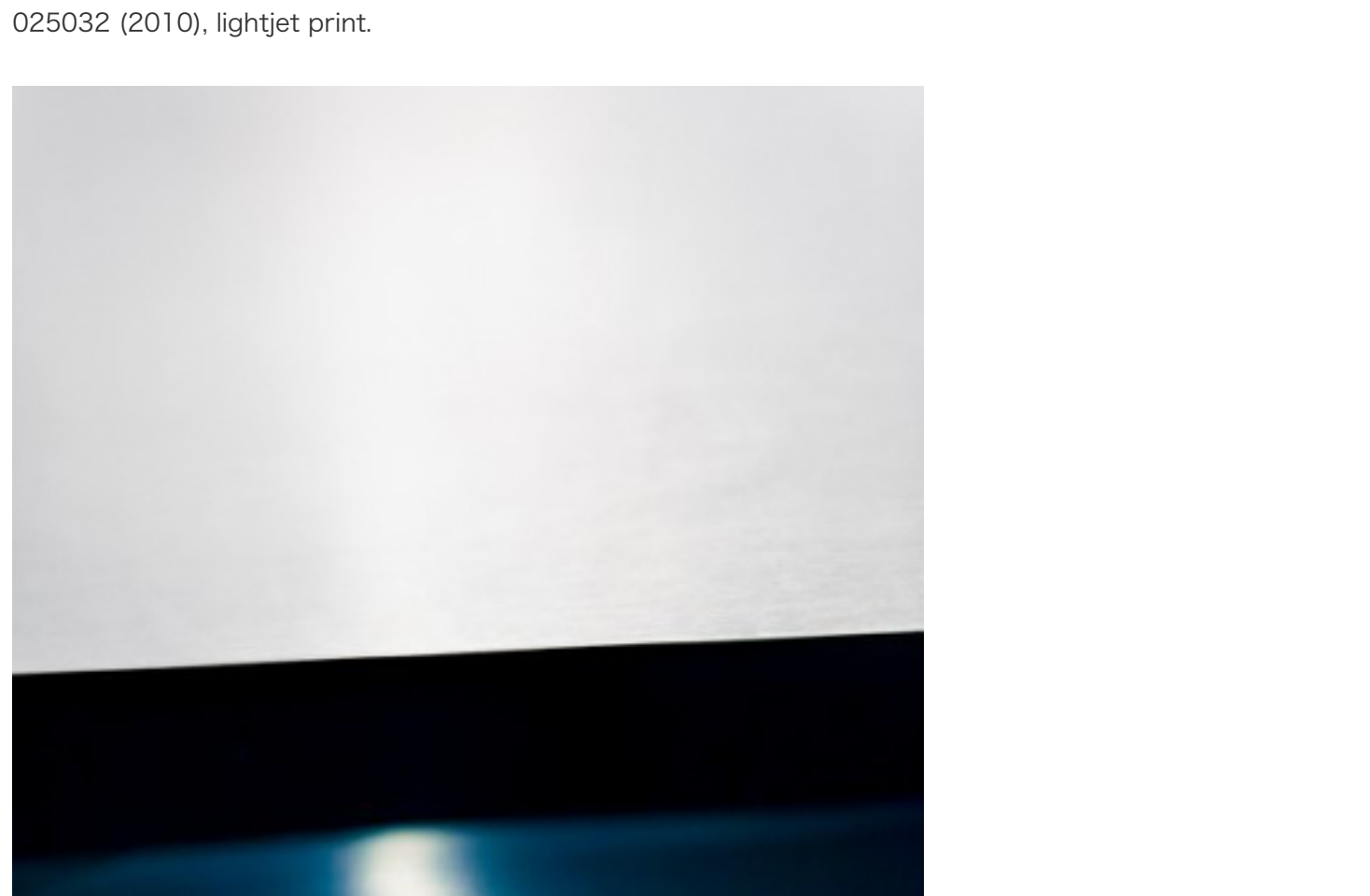
In this photograph, it appears that the light source is inside the photograph and that the surrounding leaves are exposed to this light. That is to say, it appears that light is drawn into the camera = the square frame, and that the scene within the picture plane is shining slightly. Light is drawn into the camera = darkroom = frame and reflected and amplified as if making sound reverberate in space – as soon as one becomes aware of this sensibility, one realizes that it runs through almost all of Yosuke Takeda's work.



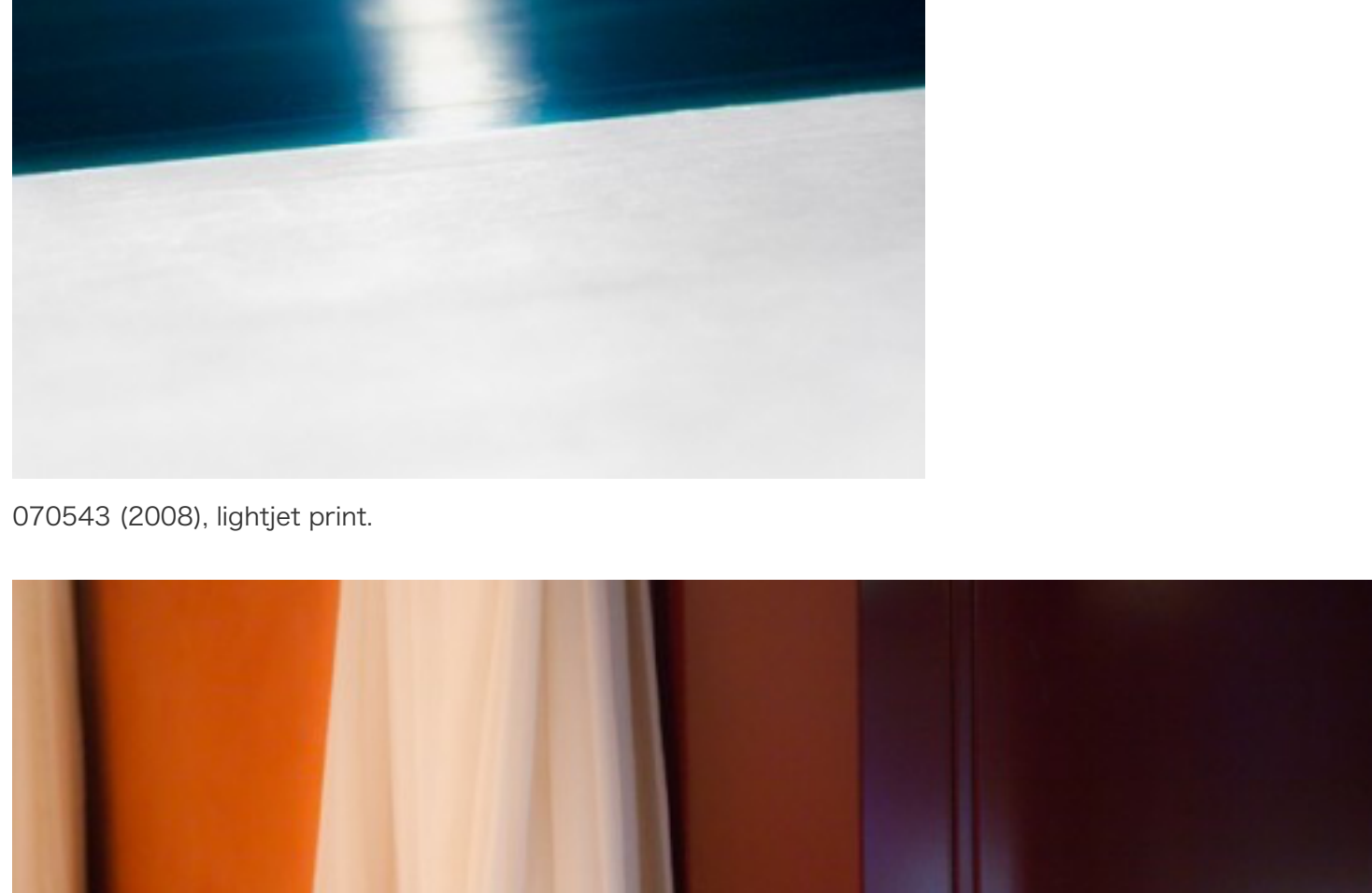
202846 (2012), lightjet print.



025032 (2010), lightjet print.

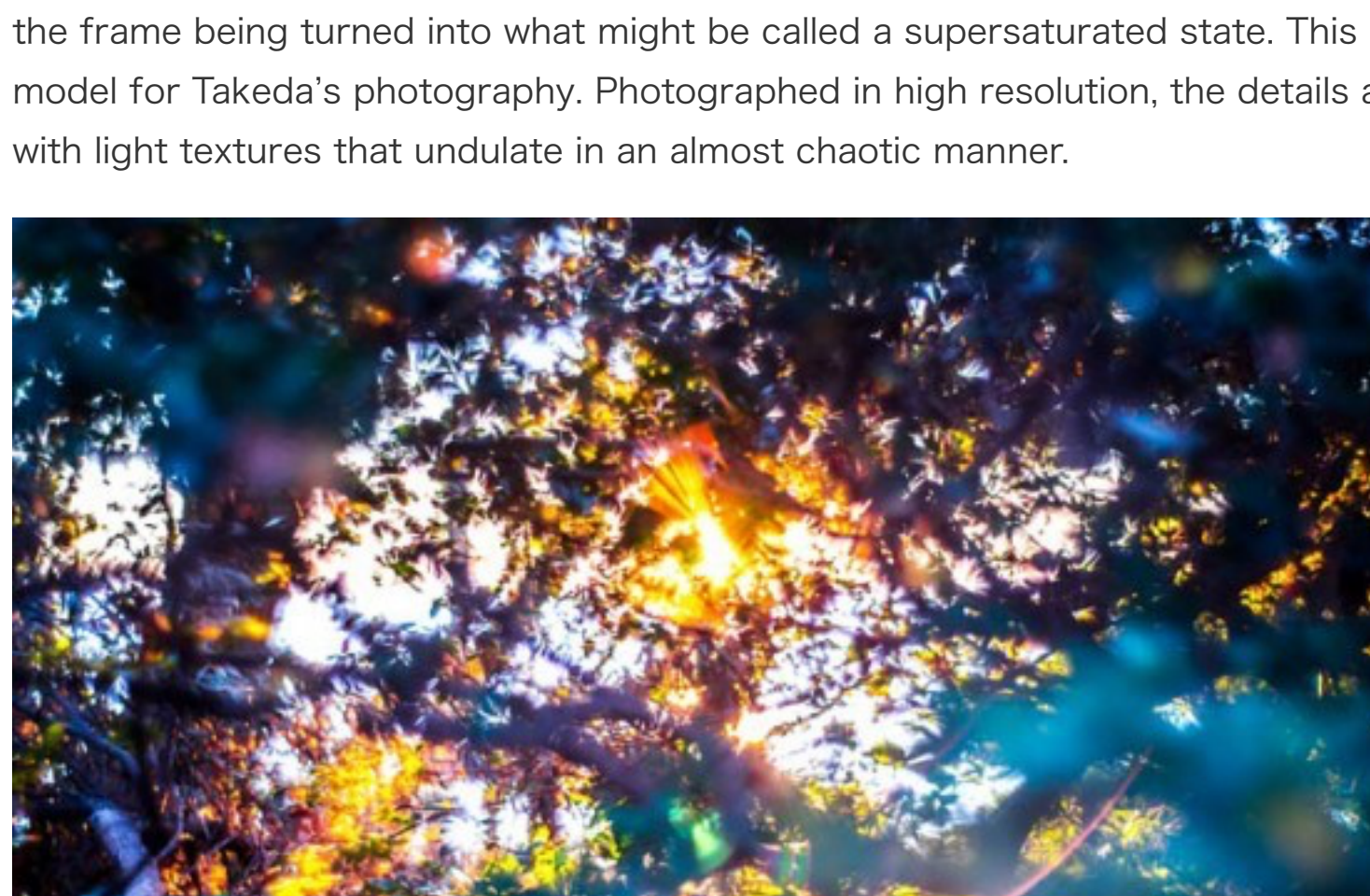


070543 (2008), lightjet print.



140230 (2009), lightjet print.

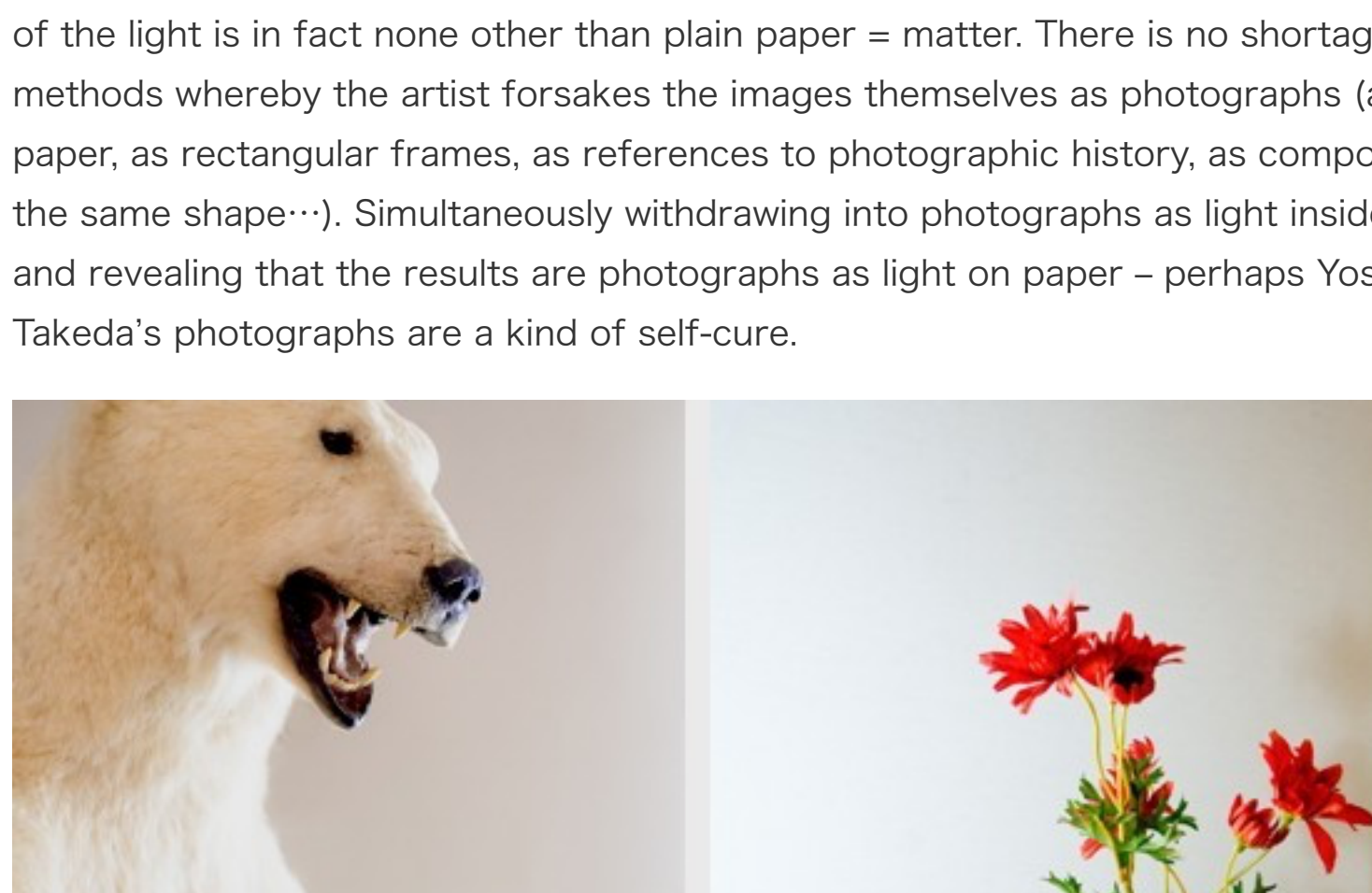
Takeda's concern is with light, and the color in his photographs is by no means pictorial color; rather, it is prism color that seeps out from the light nurtured within the frame. Although at a glance they look like aesthetic, pictorial images of rays of sunshine filtering through the branches of trees, the images in the series "Digital Flare" are in fact photographs of strong light being drawn into the camera and the area within the frame being turned into what might be called a supersaturated state. This is the pure model for Takeda's photography. Photographed in high resolution, the details are filled with light textures that undulate in an almost chaotic manner.



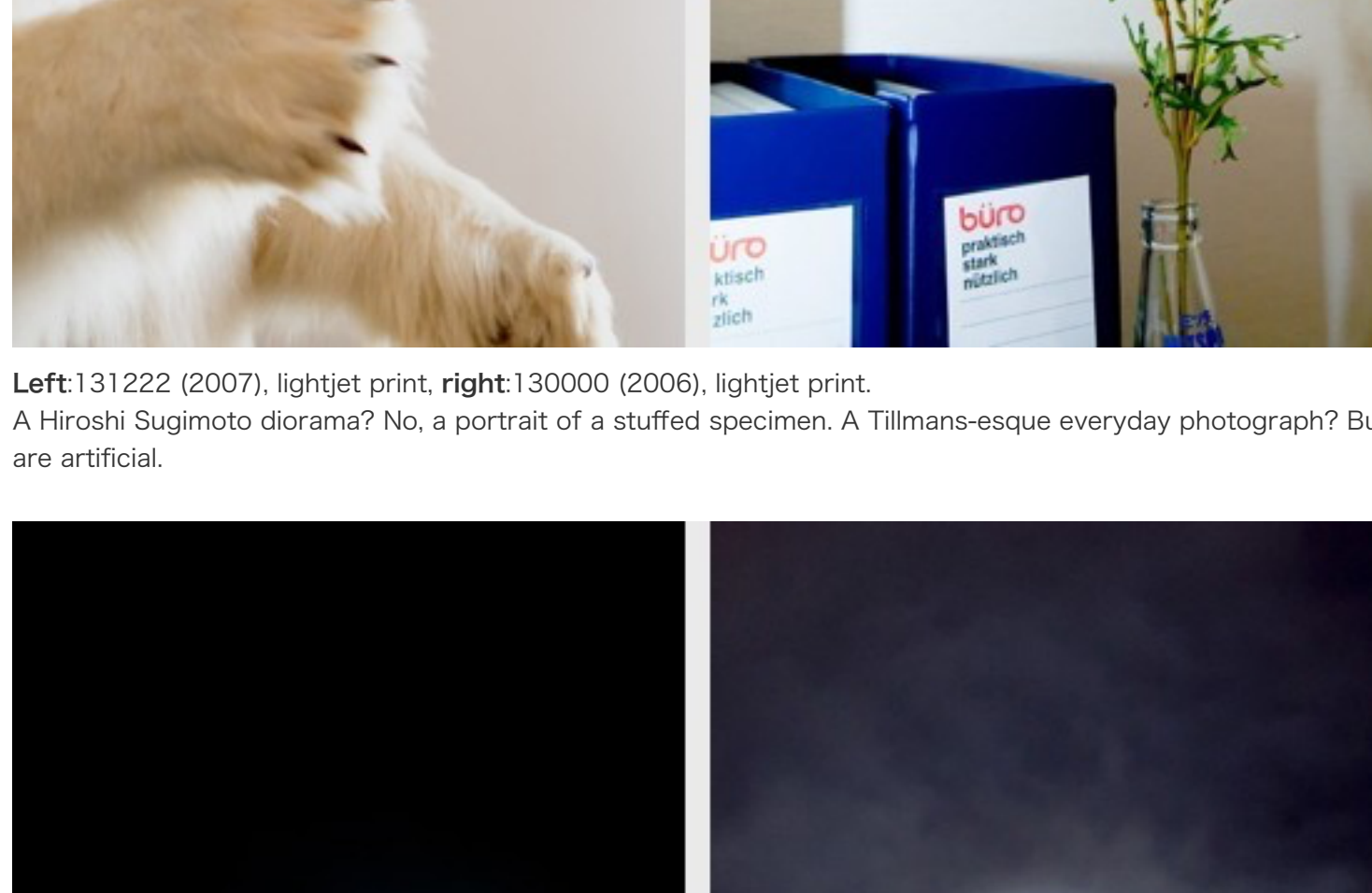
144540 (2014), lightjet print.

The "gold" of Stay Gold is a reference to childhood, or in other words a metaphor for naïveté and the basics. It could be said that drawing light into a box represents the basics of photography, and in this sense Takeda's photographs are also photographs of these basics of photography, Stay Gold. The artist is isolated together with light inside the camera = room. [2]

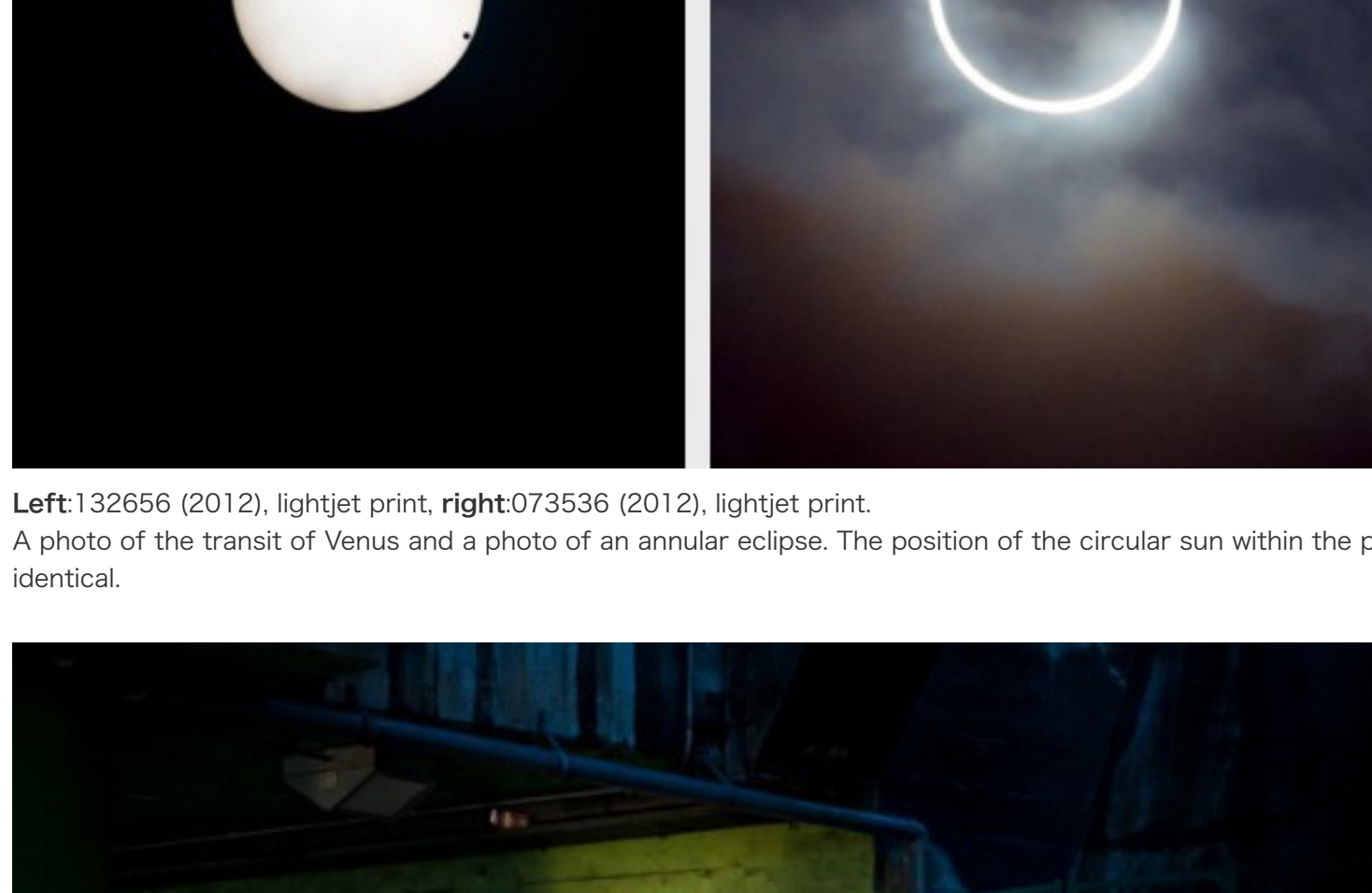
At the same time, however, the artist is clearly also maintaining a distance from this photographic isolation. For a start, all the works are straight snaps requiring honest legwork on the part of the artist. Far from isolating himself, the artist takes them by walking and walking in search of locations, and by seeking the optimum lighting conditions within a limited timeframe. They depend on real world conditions such as geographical conditions and the weather, are the result of physical labor requiring perseverance, and are carefully selected from among hundreds of similar/rejected photographs. As well, Takeda's work is based on an approach both of immersion in photographs and of keeping a distance from photographs as photographs. Because the basic model, "Digital Flare," consists of photographs in which the lens is pointed directly at strong backlight causing halation and leaving an impression of the lens itself on the image, the work can also be understood as photographs in which the medium of photography is relieved of its transparency and exposed as a mechanism (= medium) in the middle. Furthermore, observing the printed works closely, one notices the artist frames the images with blank space. After a while the viewer realizes that this blank space and the areas of shining light are the same, or in other words that the areas of shining light are nothing but the white background of the glossy paper. Even the sparkle of the light is in fact none other than plain paper = matter. There is no shortage of other methods whereby the artist forsakes the images themselves as photographs (as print paper, as rectangular frames, as references to photographic history, as compositions of the same shape –). Simultaneously withdrawing into photographs as light inside a box and revealing that the results are photographs as light on paper – perhaps Yosuke Takeda's photographs are a kind of self-cure.



Left: 131222 (2007), lightjet print, right: 130000 (2006), lightjet print.  
A Hiroshi Sugimoto diorama? No, a portrait of a stuffed specimen. A Tamara-seque everyday photograph? But the flowers are artificial.



Left: 132656 (2012), lightjet print, right: 073536 (2012), lightjet print.  
A photo of the transit of Venus and a photo of an annular eclipse. The position of the circular sun within the picture plane is identical.



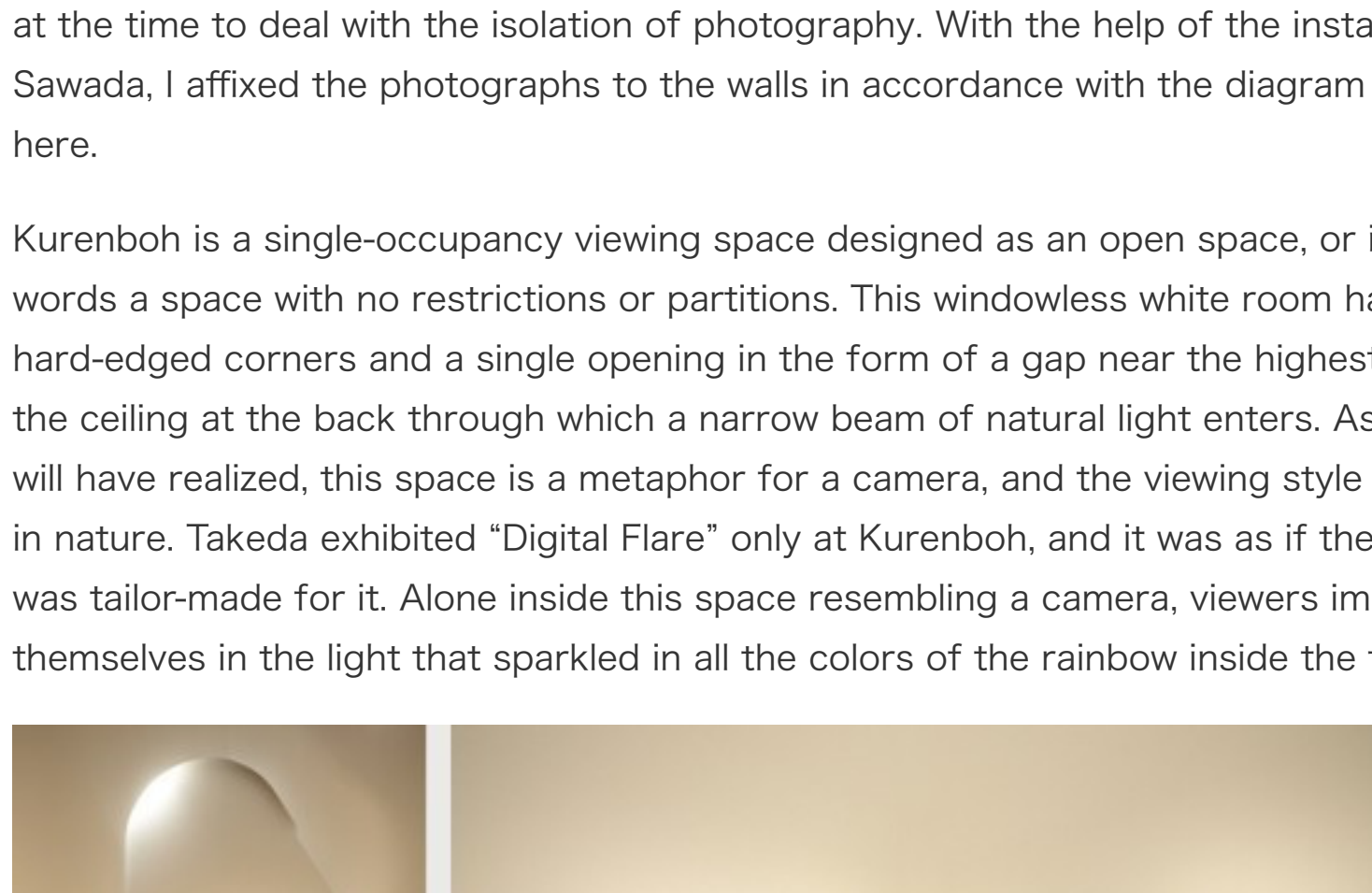
Above: 063917\_A (2006), lightjet print, below: 063917\_D (2009), lightjet print.  
In three two photos with identical composition, presence and absence flicker back and forth, and accordingly our perception of the work as straight photograph or processed photograph changes. In the photobook the two photos are placed apart from each other.

Yosuke Takeda, "Stay Gold" was held at Taka Ishii Gallery from March 22 through April 19. "Stay Gold, Color, Eroad" at Taka Ishii Modern from March 26 through April 19. "Stay Gold, Digital Flare" at Kurenboh from March 26 through April 25, and "Stay Gold, Too Warm" at Traumania Space from March 26 through April 27.

Yosuke Takeda, "Stay Gold" was published in 2014 by Omoplatá & Taka Ishii Gallery.

For this solo exhibition, Takeda adopted the format of leaving the installation up to collector Daisuke Miyatsu and Shimizu. It is likely this was one method Takeda adopted at the time to deal with the isolation of photography. With the help of the installer, Ryo Sawada, I affixed the photographs to the walls in accordance with the diagram shown here.

Kurenboh is a single-occupancy viewing space designed as an open space, or in other words a space with no restrictions or partitions. This windowless white room has no hard-edged corners and a single opening in the form of a gap near the highest point of the ceiling at the back through which a narrow beam of natural light enters. As readers will have realized, this space is a metaphor for a camera, and the viewing style isolationist in nature. Takeda exhibited "Digital Flare" only at Kurenboh, and it was as if the space was tailor-made for it. Alone inside this space resembling a camera, viewers immersed themselves in the light that sparkled in all the colors of the rainbow inside the frames.



Installation view at Kurenboh. Courtesy Kurenboh Chohouin Buddhist Temple Gallery, Tokyo and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo. Photo: Kenji Takamizawa.

2014/11/17 Minoru Shimizu



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