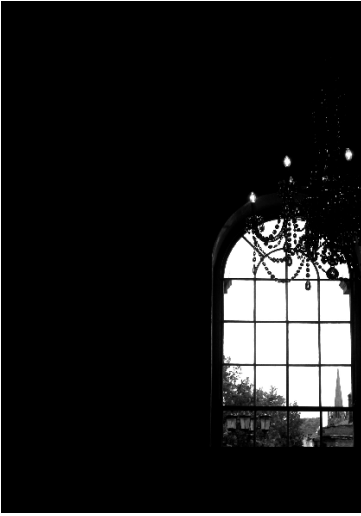


Synthetic Reality



Light has occupied a central position in the practice and theories of representation throughout art history. From Plato's cave to the luminescent gold leaf of medieval manuscripts to Turner's evocation of atmospheric conditions, it has taken on many guises, purposes, effects and connotations. It was not until the twentieth century, however, that light became a medium in itself rather than something merely depicted. Dan Flavin's neon tubes, James Turrell's installations and, of course, film and video in general, employ light's physical qualities, affecting the viewer not only optically but immersively. The six artists in *synthetic reality* work in this way through varying means, yet all have considered the plastic qualities of light in the gallery itself. As water takes on the shape of the container that holds it, so light too is reactive and particular to its environment, although here the gallery architecture is interpreted not as a restrictive container but facilitating armature.

The reciprocal relationship between light and space is difficult to disentangle, and a number of these artists play up to our reluctance to separate surface, reflection and emitted light. Brad Lochore's paintings, for instance, confuse the shadowy residue of an object with its form.

Unlike the individual in Plato's cave, who mistakenly thought that the shadows cast by objects on the wall were their only reality, we have experience of the three-dimensional world, so these paintings derived from chandeliers appear to us as spectres. To generate these images Lochore directed a bright floodlight outside the Gallery onto the chandeliers to cast a shadow, which was then painted. The refraction of artificial light through the crystal fragments culminates in a baroque, yet subdued, chimera that proposes questions about truth, presence and the sleight of hand on which painting relies.

Victoria Forrest's C-type prints make similar claims against the veracity of the constructed image, emphasising the proximity of drawing and painting to photography. Forrest has taken the word photography literary – her prints are indeed made by painting with light:

LEDs and fluorescent tubes are used like brushes, ranging from a couple of millimetres to a few feet in width. Light-sensitive paper is then exposed a number of times to create a layered image that coalesces into sense. Like Lochore's paintings, these images are haunted, but this time by movement rather than object – it is the trace of previous actions that accumulate into something plausible.



Victoria Forrest, Dulwich, Painting with Light,
C-type print, 2004

Tess Glanville employs reflection to turn her drawings of architectural details into shifting mirages. Scotchlite, a material used in traffic and construction environments, is appropriated as a medium with which to draw window casements, corridors or nooks and relocate them to the gallery walls and floor. From certain angles the drawing might

exclaim its presence, at others it might fade away to obscurity, depending on the viewer's position.

This establishes a complex interdependency between the drawing and the viewer, which flips between our memory of an interior and the direct encounter with the artwork.

Instead of the protective role Scotchguard plays in, say, cyclists' safety, here it presents a moment of déjà-vu and a bamboozlement of our processes of navigation.

In contrast, Ally Wallace has inscribed a section of the Gallery wall with a solid three-dimensionality. A moveable partition, used to reconfigure the space according to each exhibition requirement, has become the internal support structure for a series of cut-out card shapes that temporarily convert it into a section of stone-effect cladding. Each 'stone' is raised from the surface of the wall so that it casts a shadow, bestowing the bland, flat object with the illusion of rustic texture. Wallace turns notions of display and support on their head by calling into active service that which is usually inert. Shadows activate the illusion, while also offering a gap through which we can glimpse the reality.



Ally Wallace *Test Strip*, Installation at Glasgow Project Room, 2005. Vinyl strips and sellotape. Photograph by the artist.

Taegon Kim also draws the Gallery walls into the frame of the artwork. Blue threads drawn tightly across a section of the Gallery, lead the eye along the expanse, like the horizon in a landscape painting. In the context of light, the threads could connote rays or waves or photonic beams, embodying the hidden dynamics of vision itself. Taegon's horizon is a material analogy to its painterly cousin, and whereas a painted horizon

represents an accumulation of sunlight that indicates distance, his taut layer of thread, rather than zooming off to infinity, connects with our immediate surroundings.

Haroon Mirza's piece takes apart the mechanics of video, reconstituting its raw ingredients as a conceptual conundrum. Taking as a reference point Robert Morris's *Box With the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961) (literally a box containing a tape player that plays back the sound of the sawing and hammering of the box's construction) Mirza has made a visual account of the setting up of the installation in the Gallery. This is then projected on to a screen in front of a window, the arches and panes replicating themselves in the layers of video representation, presumably *ad infinitum*. Patterns of natural light become a design that repeats within itself, like a mathematical progression containing the evidence of its own inception – a pictorial DNA, if you like.

When we say things like, 'do you see what I mean?' it is apparent that we privilege sight over any other sense and that light, vision and understanding are inseparable in our experience of the external world. Perception rather than interpretation is the province of so-called fact, yet the artists in *synthetic reality* demonstrate how this can be muddled to invoke a shimmering subjectivity. Lochore's capturing of elusive shadows undermines the link between solidity and truth, while Mirza's telescoping imagery inscribes an installation on itself, rendering it as slippery as soap. Taegon and Wallace convert the orthodoxy of a gallery as an inactive holding space for art into a divisive interjection, while Forrest and Glanville upset the usual processes of picture making with emitted and reflective light. What these artists have in common above all, however, is their absorption of the manmade and the natural into their toolbox. Illusionism runs through the actual, like fabric shot with glitter.

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