

brutjournal

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With this month's purity theme in mind, we find that many of the works on view in Facts of Light, an exhibition at Cathouse Proper at 524 Projects, a gallery in Brooklyn, capture the spirit of the power of pure form in its most ephemeral manifestation – that of pure light.

ON VIEW IN THE CATHOUSE: THE FACTS OF LIGHT IN A GROUP OF PERCEPTION-CHALLENGING ARTWORKS, SUBJECT AND MATERIAL APPEAR TO BE THE SAME

by Edward M. Gómez

Several articles in this month's issue of **brutjournal** touch upon the theme of purity, considering the meaning of that word in relation to art and aesthetic concerns, in particular, while also exploring its use to refer to that which is authentic, honest, or unaffectedly real. Keepin' it real. That's our bag.

Facts of Light, a group exhibition that is now on view at Cathouse Proper at 524 Projects, in Brooklyn (through January 9, 2022), serves up a multifaceted theme of its own, reminding us that when one resonant, poetic-philosophical metaphor bucks up against another – purity, meet light; light, meet purity – some fruitful crosspollinating of ideas may emerge.

After all, what could possibly be more pure, not to mention more mysteriously ineffable, than light itself?

Conversely, what could be more illuminating, spiritually speaking, than the notion of purity – of an invigorating cleanliness and unclutteredness of mind, heart, and psyche? (Turn off that lamp and let these symbolic-metaphorical bedfellows discuss their affinities and mutual affection late into the night.)

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Gwenn Thomas, "Sky-Shaped Window (Ingots III-XIII)," 2021, cast neodymium glass, each piece 4.5 x 6 x 2 inches (11.43 x 15.24 x 5 centimeters). Photo courtesy of Cathouse Proper

The artist David Dixon, whose own work tends to tip the conceptualist edge of the scale, is the founder and director of the gallery Cathouse Proper, whose unusual name is the product of a curious history, which we'll come back to and explain someday over a long, stiff drink (to be sipped in bright light, not in the dark). In part, it has something to do with the fact that Dixon's gallery first opened several years ago in a group of rooms in a large building in Brooklyn that had once housed a funeral parlor.

Facts of Light has been organized by Robert(a) Marshall and features works made by this artist-curator, along with the artists Xingze Li, J. Pasila, Ethan Ryman, Elisa Sighicelli, and Gwenn Thomas. Marshall observes in notes describing the exhibition's themes that, nowadays, the kind of light to which so many people around the world are exposed for many hours each day is that of electronic screens. That's certainly no secret, but what might come as a refreshing news flash to those who have become blinded by computer and mobile-phone screens, tiny LED read-outs on microwave ovens, and the addictive glow of TikTok is the reminder that the fleeting, constantly changing, seductive or revealing phenomenon of natural light can be more dramatic and entertaining than social-media scrolling any day.



Above, left:
Works by the artist J. Pasila; left: "10:41, 10.21," 2021, archival digital print, 32 x 24 inches (81.28 x 61 centimeters); right: "1:19, 1.10," 2007, archival digital print, 28 x 24 inches (71.12 x 61 centimeters).



Above, right, works seen left to right:
Robert(a) Marshall, "Curtain (toward a portrait of my mother), 2019, latex ink on silver vinyl, mounted on Dibond (aluminum composite sheet), 48 x 36 inches (122 x 91.44 centimeters); Elisa Sighicelli, "Untitled (3420)," 2020, photograph printed on satin, 55 x 46 inches (139.7 x 117 centimeters); Ethan Ryman, "Still Life #55," 2021, dye sublimation on aluminum with metal hinge, 28.25 x 28.25 inches (71.76 x 71.76 centimeters).

Photos courtesy of Cathouse Proper

Marshall writes, "I turn off my phone, look at the wall, zone out. Allow my mind to wander. Tell myself the wall is white. I look again. There, an area of faint ochre. There, a greenish blush. Later in the day, the wall darkens to maroon." Marshall asks, "How do we separate the perceived object from the light in which it appears? From the spatial and social conditions of seeing?" With such thoughts in mind, the works on view in *Facts of Light* examine and provide evidence for light's changeable nature, while toying with its elusive properties.

Gwenn Thomas's chunks of glass, for example, which the artist calls "ingots," reflect the light that falls on their slick surfaces even as they appear to give intangible light a solid form. Thomas's trapezoid-shaped windows, in frames, seem to have the same effects. J. Pasila makes photographs of details of her studio, but looking at these abstract images, it's impossible to know for sure if they portray the surfaces of particular objects or shadows cast on such surfaces.

As studies of light's effects on forms and surfaces within what appear to be architectural spaces, Ethan Ryman's images, which the artist makes with dyes on aluminum sheets, become somewhat animated by the play of light



Works by Gwenn Thomas; left: "Ingots" (see details in the caption, above); right: "Moments of Place II," 2013-14, C-print and aluminum frame, 18 x 25 inches (45.72 x 63.5 centimeters). Photo courtesy of Cathouse Proper

that falls across their own surfaces. Marshall makes pictures of curtains that are printed on mirrors, again confounding the distinction between depicting reflected light and actually trying to capture it in art objects.

About the collective character of the works on display in *Facts of Light*, Marshall told **brutjournal**: "I definitely think that the concept of purity is relevant. I'm thinking in terms of pure perception. What do we see when we get past preconceptions, coding, linguistic formulations? The pieces in the show function as subtle visual koans. Is the window in Gwenn Thomas's work more accurately depicted as the rectangle we 'know' it to be or as the trapezoid it appears to be in perspective? In one of my images of a curtain, is the shadowy presence situated behind or in front of the curtain?"

Gallery director Dixon shared his sense of delight about the changeability that is an inherent quality of all of the works on view in *Facts of Light*. He observed, "This show is minimalist but it intentionally complicates notions about light. Even Gwenn Thomas's 'ingots' are not stable, insofar as the color of their glass changes in differing light conditions. In daylight, they're blue, but under incandescent light, they appear purple. In our show, the 'ingots' are lit with two different light sources in order to highlight this shift in color."

For all of light's unknowability, Marshall seemed to revel in its fugitive quality. The artworks now on view, the artist-curator noted, "break us out" of familiar narratives about the nature of light "on an almost microscopic level, bringing us toward pure perception or consciousness."

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Facts of Life, curated by Robert(a) Marshall, is on view through through January 9, 2022.

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