

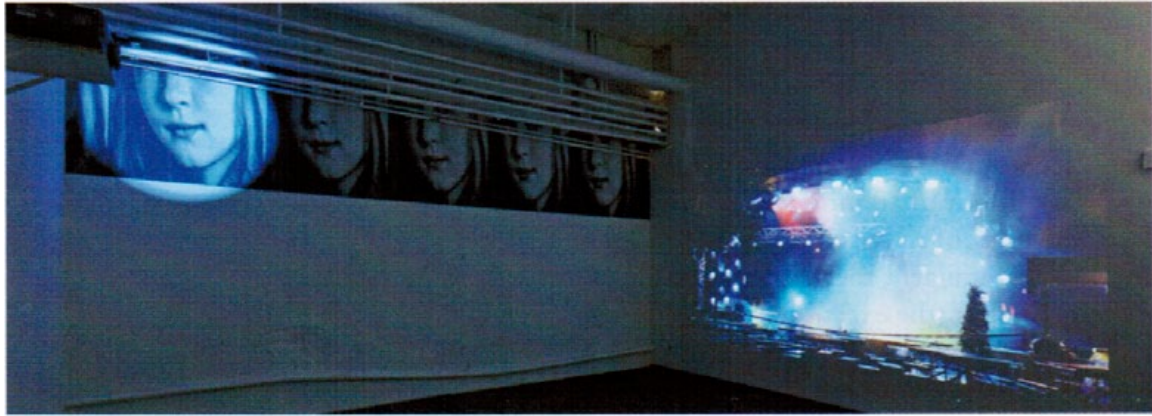
ZURICH

Thomas Julier

RAEBER VON STENGLIN

We increasingly look to screens for our views of our world rather than to the world itself. Light, the occasion for our sight, reaches our eyes from laptop, phone, camera—any of our interchangeable monitors. It glows as evenly as an infinity pool or refracts into rainbow effects and sunspots, each with its own emotional field and index of meaning. The Swiss artist Thomas Julier is uniquely preoccupied with this phenomenon. His photographic, moving-image, and sculptural works, concerned with both analog and digital light processing, adjust seamlessly to our present condition, like an eye adjusting to the desert sun or to a dark club's mirror ball. Yet despite Julier's fascination with light, and the clarity with which he pursues it, his work evinces a tangible darkness of character, of purpose.

Julier's cool dystopian vision takes in disparate themes—surfaces and surveillance, fashionable Western youths and their urbane, consumerist ennui—that, though familiar, are nonetheless removed from the fashion-magazine references and watery Pictures-generation precursors that might inundate his work. Consider the two video compilations and single film installation in “lag/lack/leak/lapse,” his recent exhibition in Zurich. *Untitled*, 2007–13, opens with a gorgeous static frame showing the backs of some young guys in a club, their lithe, silvery forms backlit by strobes and smoke, which soon obscure them. Darkness follows, followed by an amp bathed in a pulsating blue light. After another dark intermission, a Duchampian black-and-white wheel (a disco ball) spins, hallucinatory. A dark politics is at work: the generic, slightly menacing male crowd, the steady trance, the pat avant-garde reference. *Some 2012*, meanwhile, offers a series of sped-up digitally shot landscapes—a New York skyline, a desert—filmed from a large Times Square screen and rendered in saturated color, with a slick commercial look: clouds blaring against the sky, light lines skimming highways. Shown on a flat screen affixed to the wall, black cords dangling with a white fluorescent tube positioned vertically between them, the installation had a deliberate coldness of affect, hardly warmed by the light pouring from the screen and the fluorescent tube. More pale tubes punctuated portraits of youths hazily photographed from an old LCD screen and a poster offering HASHLINGERZ.COM—a fake company—in repeated horizontal lines.



Thomas Julier, *Dawn in the Basement (Light Check)*, 2013, wallpaper, LED spotlight, HD video projection (color, silent, 12 minutes), dimensions variable.

The installation in the gallery's back space, *Dawn in the Basement (Light Check)*, 2013, was affecting: A projected film of an empty outdoor concert stage offered a color-strewn light show. Where was the crowd? It was me. A spotlight positioned opposite the projector roved the gallery, settling briefly on the film projection and doubling the light, thus subversively conjuring Giorgio Agamben's "contemporary," or "the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time." If Julier is a Light and Space artist, his is the light of concerts, the space of clubs. He is less concerned with natural phenomena than with the artificial environments (and images) we create to inundate our senses. The experience of time here was that of a video clip rather than a film: concisely feverish visual moments (fireballs, an amp, an eye blinking), not descriptive narratives. But translation appears to be the strangest subtext of Julier's practice: of light into cinematic image, of viewed images into a language of information decoded by the viewer's brain. See, too, the undefined places that provide vacant vistas of light for Julier's gaze: postindustrial cities, dark basements, mountains, some Riviera. If the formal visual language that he works in remains surprisingly clear—dependent on technological process and his coldly compelling, canceling vision—his subjects offer their own sight lines (and sources of light) with which to contend. Perhaps this explains the sounds that punctuate his videos; always electronic, they too speak through technology, not nature.

—Quinn Latimer