

On *Whereabouts*, or the *Arche* (Fountainhead) of Image  
- Concerning the Go Watanabe Exhibition

The medium of Go Watanabe's works is digital data. He began working with digital data in his university days, and as an artist born in 1975, incorporated digital techniques fairly early on.

In 2002, he produced the work *face* by pasting images of human skin on a face using 3DCG. This led to his *face (portrait)* series, which was similarly based on 3D modeling and created by applying images of various human skin. This was followed by a transition to animation works that, while utilizing the same techniques, took books, tableware, rooms, and other familiar things as their motifs. Watanabe's animation works are characterized by the way the images, which seem to be static at first glance, show movement with the passage of each moment of time, and by the change in the look of the subject's existence along with the lighting.

Of particular note is how Watanabe makes light into an element of crucial importance in his production. What gave him precious experience related to light was his residence in Finland in 2014. This residence derived from his selection for the Newcomer's Prize of Art in the Gotoh Memorial Cultural Award in 2013, which gave him a grant for studying abroad. During his residence of about one year, he experienced the light on white nights and polar nights, of which he had had no experience, and got the opportunity to take re-examine subjects through the physical and mental gap he sensed then. In the place where Watanabe stayed in Finland, which is close to the Arctic Circle, the sun actually sets for a while even on white nights, and is up for a few hours on polar night days. Nevertheless, the white nights in summer and the polar nights around the time of the winter solstice threw Watanabe's internal clock out of whack and also hindered his artistic production. The natural human habit of waking up with sunrise and retiring for rest after sunset does not apply here. Watanabe's experience of this further reinforced his view that not only the light from the sun and various types of lighting but also that from computers, smartphones, and other devices which carry information as well have an effect that helps to shape our world. Thanks to his experience in Finland, he learned that the white nights and polar nights convert the familiar scenery and very environment into another world. The resulting recognition that light, shadow, and the scenes looming up before our eyes thanks to them are definitely not unitary or

monolithic led to the concept underlying his works.

The fact is that light has long functioned as an indispensable component in art, and especially painting. At the very least, we can say that, after the Impressionists appeared in the 19th century, the rendering of light underwent a fundamental change from before. Édouard Manet (1832 - 1883), for example, departed from the traditional technique, nurtured in academism, of carefully applying layer after layer of pigment on the canvas, and actively adopted brushwork with a light touch. While this made him the butt of criticism for action radically deviating from the techniques of the Academy as the authority in art, the times were already moving in the direction supporting his expression. This was because of the growing acceptance that the new approach to painting lay precisely in reflections of changing light and shadow in works that took on various aspects as a result, just as the appearance of the real world as motif changes with the play of light and shadow. While this should be understood as a development in mode of expression, we should also remember that it was not unrelated to the steadily changing face of Paris in those days. The modernizing capital was seeing the birth and spread of many new fruits of technical advancement, such as the railroad, telegraph, and telephone.

The light in Watanabe's works, in contrast, is not confined to the light of a certain time at a certain place; he uses light sampled in various states. It is indeed a mode of expression that would only be possible with digital technology. At the same time, it suggests that the light of today's real world, while presenting looks that are even more varied than in the early modern cities of the 19th century, can also be found within intricately interwoven pleats.

Watanabe himself remarks as follows in his statement for this exhibition.

*Returning from Finland after finishing my studies there for a year beginning in late 2013, I took up residence with my partner, and rented an apartment with a loft that swiftly became a studio for my production. From that time to the present, I have constantly led a life that has me going back and forth between my studio and home. This lifestyle is characterized by the cohabitation of two sets of value and meaning, one of life alone centered on production, and one of life with the family. These two lives go through repeated cycles of mutual rejection and acceptance while frequently encroaching upon each other's territories. Partly because I have unavoidably become*

*more keenly aware of things in my midst under the influence of Covid-19, the fuzzy relationship between my studio and my home has come to the fore in my mind over the last few years. So far, I have pondered the conformity and probability of landscapes before my eyes through my works, but now, these two places are the closest "landscapes before my eyes." While restructuring the day's light at each of them, I interpose photos I took day after day when my involvement with those two places began, using them as light sources (as I consider photos to be recorded light). By so doing, the interplay of the shared times generates new landscapes.*

- Go Watanabe

In accordance with what is mentioned here, this exhibition consists of *rotating studio (loft)* and *flickering house (sheets)* (2021 - 2022), *the towers (lights are books)* (2019 - 2020), and the prints *the towers (lights are books) -jumbled-*, *the towers (lights are books) -from the other room-*, *the towers (lights are books) -here and there-*, *the towers (lights are books) -self lighting-*, and *the towers (lights are books) -synthesis of four types-* (all completed over the years 2019 - 2021). In addition, as Watanabe notes, the light in these works did not come from a single source. Regarding the prints in particular, one of them uses light from a different room as indicated in the subtitle, and another, all the light used in these works. I have already profiled the reasons for the use of different light sources in Watanabe's works, but what is the meaning of this action of his?

Shadow plays an important role in mythology related to paintings in Europe. In Book 35 of his *Natural History*, the ancient Roman author Pliny the Elder asserts that painting originated when a maiden in love with a youth who was about to go off to war drew an outline of his face while he was asleep by tracing the shadow it cast on the wall. Obviously, shadows only arise with light, but Pliny does not mention any particular light source in this story. It is unclear whether the light came from inside the room or from the sun. In any case, the shadow was born when some sort of light was blocked by a person = the youth. Although space would not permit me to give a detailed account of the origins of painting here, it should be noted that the idea that shadow is nothing less than image is the same. Nevertheless, as anyone can easily imagine, shadows are not accurate reflections of their subjects. Among our childhood memories is certainly the change in the shape of shadows made with sunlight that changes with the passage of time. Only one thing would deserve to be called an origin, but we cannot even be sure of a single origin in this case.

To return to Watanabe's works, they manifest an awareness that the images formed on the retina come into being with differences in conditions at the time, meaning the states of light and shadow. The pioneering photographer William H. Talbot characterized the calotype he invented as technology for fixing shadows and for making outlines without the help of the artist's pencil. Here, too, shadows are perceived as things that change. Even in the days when there were not many different types of light sources, there was a non-identicalness or disparity in the relationship between subject and shadow. The situation has become increasingly complicated in contemporary society, where we are surrounded by not only various types of illumination but also computers and smartphones, as Watanabe points out.

In sum, precisely because of the environment in which we live today, the light and shadow presented by Watanabe's works abruptly confront us with the realities of our actual world, causing us to question the nature of the act of seeing and to re-think just what it is we are seeing in the first place.

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