

Manifest Presences: Mediators of Light

Thalia Vrachopoulos

The Tyranny of Light: Pelagia Kyriazi is an installation of animated digital and still images. This complex presentation depicts an environment composed of stairs/bars upon which is overlain an androgynous figure, who is absorbed/ exchanged sequentially and multi-dimensionally by/with its surroundings. Time is synchronic and diachronic as images of ground and figure interact, appear, disappear and criss-cross in spaces that metamorphose depending on the available light. The resulting figure-ground ambiguity serves to disorient the viewer enabling the questioning process to take place.

The concept spearheading this exhibition concerns light, space, and the human in their relationship to positive as well as negative connotations of these elements. The extracted multivalent readings about light and space enable the viewer to speculate, doubt, and be amphibological about the world. Whereas light has always been treated as something positive it can also be, according to its context, interpreted as negative in its punitive blinding/burning aspects. Consequently, Kyriazi has engaged us with her images of positive and negative space as well as void-solid relationships. Her figures can be read as solid or as void depending on her use of line, or shadow and her atmospheres/void areas can also be viewed as solid ground. This interplay between presence/absence, solid/void are multi-layered values which depending on context and movement as well as texture and line, render her *métier's* complexity.

Thematically, this video is related to Kyriazi's series of photographs based upon light, space and the body. It is created out of a single still image that combines many sequences into a video animation design whose repetition both transforms and intensifies spectator experience. Moreover, the digital animation allows the viewer to speculate about the video's multi-sensorial, multi-dimensional aspects combining music, poetry, light, image, and movement. The content of the narrative voiceover is indebted to Cavafy's 1903 poem entitled "Windows." His/her voice contains enough gender ambiguity to create further puzzling speculation. He/she speaks in the first person about his/her fears of imprisonment much like Cavafy's nightmares.

The cynical, skepticism and its ensuing critical punning present in Kyriazi's video images were qualities also present in Cavafy's poetry that bespoke of sensuality, symbolism that are grounded in the ironies of life. These dramatic concepts manifest themselves in Kyriazi's video as appearing/fading figure, sexually ambiguous characteristics both in the figural elements and voice, but most importantly in the mysterious shadows that alternate with brilliant light. The video's 'terribilitas' elements are intensified by the eerie sounds of the musical score of Stockhausen's *Licht*, which concludes in a series of helicopter sounds - possibly signaling the entrance of reality.

Dr Thalia Vrachopoulos

Professor of Art History and curator

Catalog essay for the exhibition 'Tyranny of Light', 2003