

## CATALOGUE ESSAY

### Aly Indermühle: Textured Light

Here is Light, caught and breathing softly in a box, stained by texture, coloured by memory, filtered by experience – what is it to you?

Don't dim the lights. Keep them on. See feathers, lace and coveted fur. Peer through tutus, papery veils, glass beads and antique lace. Look closely; discern intricate Japanese fan patterns and silk fibres layered into rice paper. All aglow in amber, turquoise, violet and rose. This is the softly-lit stuff of a visual daydream, a film-noir fantasy, evoking the vivid nostalgia of boudoir dress-ups and conjuring memories and tableaux of conviviality, heady celebrations, languid jazz, open-air parties and popping corks. Aly Indermühle is the artist dressing and layering texture on to the medium of coloured light in her solo exhibition Textured Light at .M Contemporary.

Aly Indermühle grew up in Alaska, has lived in Switzerland and is now Sydney-based. With an accomplished technical background including film, television and animation, she currently works as a light artist, creating large-scale public works as well as private commissions.

The power of light as a medium is intrinsically tied to the faculty of vision, and from seeing to the phenomena of memory and association. Seeing, perception and the experience of light are filtered in a psycho-physical-cerebral experience. Textured Light is a serial presentation of vertically oriented wall-mounted light boxes. The boxes barely contain the party within - nebulous bands of moving coloured light under a variety of superimposed textures introduce an unexpected element of tactility. The desire to touch light is unbidden, almost forbidden; yet the haptic nature of the work prompts this synesthetic response. As we see the feathers we feel their softness on a cheek and the sight of creased and torn paper is a familiar sound as well as a known memory held in the fingertips.

Varied in effect, the textures on display in this exhibition come from found objects, however these are no ordinary objects – peacock plumes, white mink, pearls and Japanese fibre paper are exotic and luxurious objects of desire. They are distinctly feminine and associated with adornment and clothing. As well as their tactile quality, the textures lend the works a sense of warmth, intimacy - and fun - not usually associated with light work, which can have a sanitised quality. Exhibited as boxes of glowing textures these elegant wall-bound lights have an architectural quality, akin to a votive niche, small window or other aperture. This seems appropriate as the works offer viewers a glimpse into another sensorial world.

Gently pulsating rhythms move within the lights and this adds another dimension. Indermühle refers to the movement as breathing light, achieved as each work contains a Nano computer with a generative program controlling the breathing rate and colour characteristics of the LED

lights within. The combination of anthropomorphic qualities (texture and breathing) with the technical provides a counterpoint that is an intriguing combination. Underneath the soft, breathing light is the rigour of carefully planning, fabrication and calibration.

When asked about her colour palette, Aly acknowledges that she is drawn to use saturated oranges, pinks, reds and violets, and here, one particularly intense green. They happen to be the colours of the Aurora Borealis, colours of her childhood in Alaska, a detail that perhaps also underpins the movement of the light in these works. Aly recalls lying on her back as a child and watching the dancing Aurora Borealis through a tracery of leaves, and there is a certain inversion of this remembered experience in the intimate scaled-down interiority of her Textured Light works. There is also another possibility, Aly says, they are "80s colours" of her youth, laughingly confessing that she "just loves kitsch".

Playfulness, optimism and joy unmistakably underlie the artist's conception of these works. These celebratory associations are reinforced by her delightfully evocative titling and grouping - there's Innocence Tickle Giggle, then Sugar Delight Sweetheart, the endearing Wishes Sigh and a favourite, Saucy Spunky Beloved Lollipop. One can almost hear the snatches of laughter, smell the perfume, taste the sweets.

This is a passage Aly likes to read aloud when asked to talk about light art (from the Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist);

Light can be gentle, dangerous, dreamlike, bare, living, dead, misty, clear, hot, dark, violet, springlike, falling, straight, sensual, limited, poisonous, calm and soft.

We know from physics that light travels to us in waves, so imagine a great poetic wave: a fluid, transformative wave enveloping objects, carrying colour, mood and memories, breaking and churning a whitewash possibility of emotions and associations over us. With the wide breadth of possibilities of what light can be, in Textured Light Aly chooses to work in the space where light is gentle, dreamlike, living, violet, sensual, calm and soft.

**Lisa Sharp**

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