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Interview

Mark Godfrey

Illumination is obviously a central subject of your work, both in terms of how they are physically and technically constructed, and their imagery (candles, windows, electric lights, and so on). Can you describe the ways in which you work to heighten the light contrasts in the works by using lightboxes without transparencies (as in the practice of other artists) and instead by placing C-prints over lights, and back-painting some sections of the prints? How did you come to these procedures? Was it a way to distance your work from some of the existing models (eg Jeff Wall) or did it come from a desire to heighten the drama of the imagery? And given the fact that you conceal the mechanisms of the work (the back-painting, the fact that the tubes are placed in specific locations to illuminate only parts of the images), why have you always been happy to show the cables leading up the works?

I think it may be useful to tell you how my lightboxes are made. The photograph ––as you say I don't use the usual transparency–– the photograph is mounted onto opal Plexiglas. Some sections of the back of the Plexiglas are painted black so as to mask the electric light from the lightbox in certain areas; while in other areas the electric light is allowed to filter through the photographic paper. Every lightbox is quite different from the others, both in the way it's painted, and in the choice and positioning of the fluorescent tubes. It's a manipulation of real light, an exploration of the solid and the void in the photographic image. One unfortunate thing, of course, is that when the work is re-photographed for documentation, the effect of the real electric light is lost, and it looks like a plain photograph again!

In some works the electric light of the lightbox corresponds to the source of light represented in the photograph. For instance in *Foyer* (2003), the fluorescent tubes are placed behind the lights in the photograph and light also diffuses through the windows. But in most of my lightboxes the electric light is not positioned in order to create a highlight in a realistic way. It's intended, rather, to disrupt the photo. Have a look at an example of the inside of a lightbox with this kind of mechanism. In *Untitled (Square)* I added a halo of light around the structure of the empty billboard in order to highlight its emptiness and geometry. I wanted to intensify the suspended atmosphere and the feeling of estrangement in the photo.

Going back to your question of how I came to these procedures, I suppose that because of my background in sculpture, I've always thought of both photography and light as objects to be manipulated. When I was at college I made an installation in which a sheet of perspex was mounted on a fake wall in front of a window. This perspex would "record" the shadows of the building opposite and the movement of clouds throughout the day. Later, I happened to stick some photographs onto the perspex and I realized that I could play with the light of the photo using real light.

In the first experiments I cut the photograph so as to allow light to go through it. But in the end I wasn't happy with the feeling of "collage" that I was getting from this, so I solved the problem by painting the back of the photograph and allowing electric light to filter through it. I also made installations using photographs of interiors which were shot through doorways or closed doors, and I installed them real-size directly into fake walls, creating a sort of photographic *trompe l'oeil*.

When I started experimenting with photographs, light and space in this way, I wasn't actually thinking about distinguishing my lightboxes from those of Jeff Wall. The use of the lightbox wasn't the aim for me –– it was just a way to use light to manipulate the space of the photograph in an autonomous object instead of an installation, and as you suggest, as a way to heighten the drama of the imagery.

I've always been interested in how masking and partially backlighting a photo disrupts both the space and the time of that photograph. It creates different spatial planes and it contradicts photography's two-dimensional nature. It's also a way to suggest a space beyond the flatness of the surface of the photograph. At the same time it creates a temporal paradox: time is suspended between the present of the electric light and the past of the photograph. While photography, by its nature, fixes a moment that automatically becomes past and dead, the backlighting keeps that instant continuously present and suspended.

The effect of the back-lighting is quite subtle, and, as you said, its mechanism is mostly hidden. On one hand I'm trying to conjure up an illusion. But on the other hand I choose to leave the cable visible, and so to reveal what I'm doing, because I shouldn't like the work to be just about the trick itself.

Can you discuss some of the reasons you were drawn to subject matter relating to light? Given its long connection to religious themes and stories in Italian art, light seems to have a very secular charge in your work - it is almost always ordinary, everyday light. But perhaps you don't see it this way? Was Arte Povera's treatment of light

important to you - here I'm thinking of the way Merz used Neon, of Boetti's Yearly Lamp, of Anselmo's concealed fluorescent tube...

I think that my interest in subject matters relating to light derives from my fascination with light itself and its "magic" manifestation, but I don't know really know why.
I thought that using real light through a photograph might be a way to highlight our perception of the present moment, a sort of epiphany of the existence of objects, so that a viewer feels as though they are looking at something for the first time, and in this exact instant. I suppose that I am interested in the sublime, but in an everyday context.
I see my works as mute, devoid of any narrative, but, somehow, the light is like a presence, like a desire to communicate––while time is suspended, and communication is suspended too. Probably Arte Povera or Fra Angelico may have always been at the back of my mind; but I think that the works of artists like James Turrell, Sugimoto, George de la Tour, Vermeer, Rothko were more important to me.
I have used light in conjunction with a wide variety of subject matters: the interiors and exteriors of buildings; natural landscapes and details of urban cityscapes. And in one instance I also used it as just light itself, to explore the mechanisms of vision and of visual perception. As part of the *Phi* exhibition in 2006, I showed an installation called *Film Without Film*. It comprised one hundred lights which switched on and off in sequence, suggesting movement, as if a light was rotating around the gallery walls. The switching on and off of the lights in sequence created an optical illusion, the perception of apparent movement. This is the same mechanism of vision that makes us perceive the still images of cinema, put in a sequence, as though they are moving. This perceptual mechanism is known as the "phi phenomenon". The one hundred lights were installed in a line around the gallery walls and marked its space. So the apparent movement of light followed a horizon which was not parallel to the floor but at an angle, as if the whole gallery was tilted.

Some of the works which involve light sources were of normal domestic houses seen from across the street and these images carry a very strange charge even though at first they look very ordinary. One feels extremely excluded from the illuminated room; and seeing the images in the gallery we feel even more disconnected from the scene. Can you talk about the affective dimension of these works – whether you wanted to create uncanny sensations and whether you wanted to point to something haunting about everyday spaces?

I suppose that in my photographs of facades of buildings at twilight, with one window lit up, I was wanting to suggest an intimate space, a presence. But I don't think that I had

any conscious aim of referring to some haunting or uncanny presence; my aim, rather, was to suggest our exclusion from a private space. I placed an electric light behind the window to indicate a space beyond the surface of the photograph; this space is at the same time suggested and negated (in the sense that the interior is only glimpsed). The light accentuates the opposition between interior and exterior, and renders this negated presence even more real; it intensifies the relationship between the feeling of warmth emanating from the window and our sense of exclusion.

This question also relates to the interior images of chairs, curtains, and so on. Again it's quite hard to describe why they are so much weirder than they would seem; the depicted scenes are completely ordinary, but then they feel strangely empty. This strange emptiness isn't just about the lack of people in the images; it isn't just about the fact that the furnishings in the images (beds, chairs) allude to people who would use them who aren't there. To me this emptiness is re-inforced by the compositions many of which show these furnishings on diagonal axes, and of course by the treatment of light. Can you speak about the affects you hoped to create by photographing these scenes in these ways?

When I was photographing these interiors I wasn't thinking about suggesting some absent person, and giving clues to reconstruct their identity. I wasn't hoping to tell a story, but rather to create a silence.

These images are at the same time both familiar and anonymous. As you say, they're strangely empty, but they feel very intense to me. They may potentially be narrative; but in practice they don't evoke very much. They can only point a mirror towards us. I think that the treatment of light, which often isolates an object from its background, highlights a suspended and de-familiarized atmosphere. The ordinary becomes *intensely* ordinary –– both close and distant at the same time.

I am interested in the viewpoints in many of your works as these seem pretty unusual. Often the camera has been positioned so that the image captures the perspective of someone lying on the floor. As such, the foreground is thrown out of focus, and those objects that appear in the background are very crisp. This produces a double kind of disturbance: we aren't quite sure what lay in front of the camera, and we can't be sure either of the actual size of those things some distance away. We're also not sure how to respond to the viewpoint in terms of the subject position it implies: do we imagine ourselves in the place of someone lying on the floor, and ask why they might be there?

Or do we regard this viewpoint as that of a fictional character with whom we might not identify?

The reason why I positioned the camera on the floor was to create a sort of "horizon line" in the middle of the photograph. This came from a desire to find a new way of photographing a landscape, which would be a conceptual rather than a realistic representation. I wasn't interested in the naturalistic perception of space, and so it never occurred to me that my way of positioning the camera would imply, as you've suggested, the point of view of someone lying on the floor! What interested me was the construction of the image in an abstract way. But I suppose the trouble with photography is that because of its indexicality, it's always possible to give it a realistic reading. I wonder if anyone would ask the same question if they were looking at a similar image, which was painted rather than photographed...?

What you are saying here introduces questions about landscape in relation to your work; clearly this category 'landscape' has a complex status in your work and as you indicate some of your interior shots become strange landscapes because of the way they were shot. What continuities did you perceive between your interior and landscape images?

I was consciously looking for a continuity in the composition of the images. I set about photographing the interiors and the landscapes in the same way. I would position the camera on the ground, so as to make sure that the foreground of the photo would be blurred, and also so that there would be a "horizon line" intersecting the photograph –– not a real horizon line, but rather one created by the very low point of view of the camera. In the landscapes, you can see hills or ice above this horizon line, while in the interiors, there'll be maybe a table or some beds on top of the "horizon", as though they were elements of a landscape. I thought it would be interesting to transform an interior into a landscape, and to try to make a connection between images that traditionally belong to different genres.

Another continuity is the fact that both the interiors and the landscapes are uninhabited, and feel empty and solitary. Going back to my wish to deal with landscape…. I had noticed that traditionally, in painting, the foreground is in focus, while distance is suggested by indistinctness. I decided to invert this relationship, and to have the bottom part of the image blurred, whereas the "horizon", and everything above it, would be in focus. In Kjolur: Desert, for instance, these two distinct spatial planes are very evident –– partly also thanks to the backlighting from the lightbox that illuminates the sky. So light diffuses from the horizon up, while the out-of-focus ground

is not lit at all. This stresses the contrast between the "solid" quality of the earth, which acquires an illusion of materiality, and the "ethereal" of the sky.
The area in focus is very small, just around the horizon, an evocation of a here and an elsewhere.

What drew you to particular places - for instance, to Iceland? Did you visit these places following commissions or did you go there entirely on your own steam, so to speak? Were you looking for conventionally 'sublime' landscapes that you could represent in new ways?
It depends. Sometimes I got invited somewhere to do a show and I took photographs there-– for example in Santiago de Compostela at the Centro Galego de Arte, or in Siena at the Palazzo delle Papesse. But most of the time I would choose locations just out of personal curiosity, such as Cuba, Mexico, and Namibia, and in recent years Asian metropolises such as Tokyo, Bangkok, Shanghai and Hong Kong....
In the case of Iceland I applied for a travel scholarship that I didn't think I was going to get. So, while I was joking with a friend, we took out a map of the world and we selected a place that I thought I was never going to visit! But then, while I was writing up this proposal, I came to realize that Iceland was potentially the perfect place for me to work with light and landscape. And then I did in fact get the scholarship!

Roni Horn, who spent a lot of time in Iceland, has written about it as a kind of desert, and elsewhere that the desert is like a mirror, because 'when you get out there and you're in the middle of it there's nothing coming back at you- just you.' Did you see Iceland in a similar way? For me your Iceland photographs create a powerful sense of solitude, not just because they are unpopulated, but because of the way they are taken.
Yes, I agree that much of Iceland could be seen as a sort of desert, which for me represents the essence of a landscape, with just its constitutive elements of ground and sky. When I was working there, I really enjoyed the absence of the visual comfort of trees, and I also liked the chance to work on a "pure" composition and scale. And it was this interest in deserts that led me the following year to go to Namibia.
You're right: it is indeed the way that the photographs are taken that suggests a sense of solitude. For instance, while "Iceland: Icebergs" may feel grand and solitary, it was actually shot from a tourist boat in a lagoon, a busy location next to a cafeteria!
And yes, I do agree with the idea of landscape as a mirror. I would actually extend this idea to the interiors as well, but for a different reason. As I mentioned earlier, I can see the interiors working as a mirror, not so much because they're empty, but rather

because we feel that we've seen them already some time before, and so they're able to stimulate memories.

What informed your decisions to split the horizontal images into square or near-square panels? This seems to have been motivated by something more than the practical difficulties of printing a huge horizontal photograph. Was there a reason you often chose five panels? In some of your interiors you had worked in a similar vein, making groups of images rather than long horizontal images - but this idea has a different resonance in the works made outside, because it is as if you deliberately invoke and then break up a panoramic image.

I take photographs using a medium format camera, and the negatives it produces are square, so I usually keep this format.

In both landscapes and interiors, but it's especially noticeable in the interiors, I don't try to make a huge horizontal photograph. In "*Parlour*" (2002), for example, I photographed a space from various different points of view. Then, later, I placed these separate images in succession. They don't actually match, and indeed the only thing that they have in common is a fictitious "horizon line". So my interest is not in making a very large panoramic image, but rather in composing a "suite", that plays with diverse points of view and diverse scales. This is why I often choose to use five panels: a group of five images is enough to create a rhythm, and at the same time it's still "compact", and the composition is in equilibrium, balanced.

The piece doesn't represent the way you would realistically perceive that room. The room becomes an imaginary place.

A few years after the Iceland series, in 2005, your work with landscape took a different course in the photographs of details of Sienese paintings. Can you explain how you came to this project? Were you interested in particular painters? Some of the details you photographed might be considered as peripheral information in terms of the grand narrative or religious schemas of these paintings - what did it mean for you to attend to these unattended elements of the works? Can you say something about the connections of this series to your other landscape images?

I was invited to have a solo show by the Palazzo delle Papesse, the contemporary art centre in Siena, so I thought of doing a project which was specific to that context. I photographed details of some Sienese old master paintings from the local museum, and I transformed them into lightboxes. I photographed only small details of landscape in the backgrounds of the paintings, and I completely cut out the characters that made up

the foreground. I focused on paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which were painted before the notion of "landscape" became diffused as an autonomous genre with codified canons. These landscapes are not based on reality, but they are very imaginative.

Yes, these details are indeed secondary to the main scenes represented in the paintings, but the painters found a lot of expressive freedom, and some very interesting solutions. The idea of taking what was originally the background of the paintings, and making them the foreground of my lightboxes –– I suppose it's a homage to these painters of the past, a way of looking again with contemporary eyes at their works. I'm also fascinated by the way that the photographic framing of these details of paintings allows me to create autonomous new works. It's a process that lets us discover in one painting many other individual paintings which are in a sense hiding there, even though they're openly visible. I think that probably there isn't really much connection with my other landscapes: apart from the fact that there are no people in any of the images.

Another instance of your work with landscape is the first of your moving image works - Pitfall from 2004 made in collaboration with Marzia Migliora. This is a very unusual work in your oeuvre as it is an animation of a passage through a black and white forest. The images of trees and foliage seem to have been taken from 19C etchings or at least disparate historical illustrations. However, the animation mimics the camera-work of classic 'horror films', those jolty scenes which seem to record what a person sees as they proceed through a space either pursuing or being pursued. What was your thinking for this work, and how did it come out of your concerns at the time with creating new ideas around landscape?

The work *Pitfall* came at a time when I was feeling that I needed to explore new ways of working. I asked Marzia Migliora to collaborate on a project for a show. We made the 3D animation, and also a wallpaper and a set of drawings. Marzia and I normally have very different ways of working, and we found it very exciting that the piece that we created together was completely new for both of us, and didn't look at all like either of our work.

Our starting point for the whole project was the 18th century *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and D'Alembert. We found an illustration there which struck us both as being particularly interesting and strange. It was an engraving showing a wolf-trap in a forest – a big hole in the ground covered with a hinged wooden board. When the victim steps onto the board, it tips up and plunges them into the hole. It is, literally, a pitfall. We enjoyed the fact that it's a description of something that on the one hand is very

practical, but which at the same time looks quite surreal; it embedded ideas of danger, but also of equilibrium. Our first idea was to animate the pitfall; but what we ended up doing was hunting through the *Encyclopédie* for all the illustrations of trees that we could find, scanning them, and then cutting them up with Photoshop! With the help of Paolo Lavazza we created an animated sequence that showed a forest of cut-out trees. It has a subjective perspective, so that viewers seem to find themselves walking through the wood, trying to find a way out. But the only way out is to fall into the pitfall trap.

You're right; it *does* feel like a horror film! We've even added some flying leaves!

We liked the idea of taking Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* –– which you could think of as a manifesto for the positive notions of progress and reason in the Enlightenment –– and transforming it into a kind of gothic nightmare. Its practical illustrations of a useful craft are turned into a dark wood, a symbol of fear, the sort of place where you find yourself facing the unknown, losing all sense of direction and all control.

We also enjoyed the idea of making a three-dimensional space from two-dimensional images, and we liked the contrast between the new technology that we were using and the 18th century technique of engraving. We also used another illustration from the *Encyclopédie* to make a wallpaper. It's a schematic illustration of the military manoeuvres needed to get a company of soldiers across a river. We transformed this eighteenth century technical diagram into a decorative pattern.

We were a bit surprised that the *Encyclopédie*, a sort of manifesto for the Enlightenment, contains a whole heavily-illustrated section on the history of techniques of war. This seemed to us to be a complete contradiction to the *Encyclopédie*'s positive ideals of tolerance and well-being.

Your other video works relate more closely to each other. One recurrent fascination is to use a time-based medium to complicate our experience of time. How do you see this process in connection to your use of photography to make strange our relationship to light? Were you drawn to particular people - for instance, to Bill Viola's early videos like The Reflecting Pool? In your videos you often use extremely simple editing devices but their effect is much stranger than one would expect. For instance in Non-stop exotic cabaret, we see a view from a hotel balcony onto a swimming pool - a figure crosses the pool doing breaststroke, disappears at the bottom of the frame, and then re-enters, crossing back again, but this time backwards. It is immediately clear that the initial footage has simply been reversed, but we cannot help but see the swimmer as

somehow altered - as if they were a frog or an automata. Can you speak about your ability to achieve unusual experiences with such simple means? And how did you approach sound in this work? Did you realise in the edit room that the effect of the reversed footage would be stronger if the sound continued in a linear way throughout the piece?

Yes, as you suggest, I am interested in complicating our experience of time; and this question is crucial in both the videos and the lightboxes. Although they're about time, my videos never have a narrative structure. I'm not interested in telling a story. I see them rather as moving photographs.

The photographic works somehow have time embedded into them. I consider the light of the lightbox as a device to lengthen the duration of our reading of the photograph.

I don't remember having seen Bill Viola's *The Reflecting Pool*. When you mention it, I can see how my work might relate to it. But I don't think that in my video-making I was looking at any artist in particular. My interest in working with video came as a natural development of my photographic works. And I was naively surprised to see what results could stem from such a simple editing device as the reversal of time.

This possibility of transforming reality is what interests me in all my works, both the photographic ones and the videos as well. To take a fragment of reality and to transfigure it into a new world. Sometimes this process of abstraction makes one wonder how real or constructed the work is. But the starting point is always real: even if I don't consider the subject-matter very important, it's the way of looking at things that counts.

A few years ago I read Italo Calvino's "*Six Memos for the Next Millenium*". They're five lectures he prepared for Harvard University, each one about a particular quality in literature. I was seduced by his notion of "lightness", considered as a value instead of a fault. He talks about his work as an attempt to subtract weight. I tried to translate this idea of lightness in my work by always trying to keep the work simple but exact.

The sound of *Non-Stop Exotic Cabaret* was made by a friend, Paolo Campana, who has an extensive collection of music from the fifties and sixties. I thought I wanted something that sounded familiar, slightly exotic and tropical, but a little bit distorted. The image of the pool and the palm trees is a cliché, and I wanted the sound to be as trite as that image. So when you think you know what you're looking at, the effect of reversing time comes as a sort of understated surprise and is quite funny. You're right about the sound: I tried to keep it as fluid and dreamy as possible so as to smooth the passage to the reversed clip.

Let's speak about the 'The River Suite' installation. One part of this work is a single-screen video Nocturne (Trajectories) which shows illuminated boats passing over a river- they are seen from above at quite a height, and it is reasonably hard to judge their actual size; they appear almost as moving patterns across the screen. The other part of the installation was in a separate room where two single-screen videos were shown – Nocturne (Left Bank) and Nocturne (Right Bank). These videos were recorded on the river and show the river banks, with lights coming from houses and buildings on the river and their reflections on the water. They were shot in the dark, so a lot remains opaque. Instead of one part of the installation 'explaining' the other, the two rooms create a redoubled sense of opacity. Was this important to you? I assume this work was made in the Far East, and so this raises questions about what this opacity means.

The installation was more complex still. Both videos, *Nocturne (Left Bank)* and *Nocturne (Right Bank)*, were installed in two opposite corners of the gallery, and were projected with their left edge tucked against the wall, as if the river was coming into the gallery from the corner. I imagined it as going in a circle around the outside of the gallery and appearing at the two opposite corners.

There were also 5 monitors showing *Nocturne (Grid)*, *Nocturne (Laundry)*, *Nocturne (Warehouse)*, *Nocturne (Red)*, and *Nocturne (Blue)*. In these works the camera focuses on a single detail of the riverbank, such as a red building in the distance, or a blue house, or a mysterious warehouse. Like moving photographs, these fixed images evolve in time, but the passage of time is revealed only by the shifting reflection of light on the water.

One of my main aims for the installation *The River Suite* was to create a relationship between the two videos where the camera is constantly moving –– the views of the riverbank from a moving boat –– and the videos that were shot with a fixed camera. In both cases our voyeurism is frustrated: in the first case we think we might be able to glimpse inside some of the houses, but the image is fleeting and keeps moving on before we get a chance. While, in the videos that were made with a fixed camera, the stillness and silence create an expectation of what may be about to happen; but the suspense is trapped in a continuous loop.

The other aspect that really intrigued me about these works is what you were asking about, their opacity. In *Nocturne (Left Bank)*, and *Nocturne (Right Bank)*, we see illuminated houses appearing in the video projection, and they're interspersed with areas of total blackness. This is because Bangkok doesn't have city lights on its riverbanks, and the houses there face directly onto the river.

I was intrigued by the fact that the image completely disappears into darkness, until the next building glides across. The black sections are a blank, which we read as abstract absence, in contrast with the physical presence of the buildings. But hidden in the abstraction of the void interval there is reality: it's just that we can't see it. Invisible but real.
I like the idea that the video would be completely black if it wasn't for the intermittent appearance of houses and buildings.
As you said, you can see this opacity also in the video "*Nocturne (Trajectories)*", where the river becomes like an empty black void, (as in *Dance-Bound*), with illuminated boats tracing trajectories of light, moving drawings that hover simultaneously between reality and abstraction.
I don't know what this opacity means: I was interested in it terms of formal qualities, the play of light and darkness, reality and abstraction.

Were you concerned with the dangers of making exoticising representations of oriental cultures?
I think you're right; this is always a worry. In the same way I'd be concerned about making picturesque representations of western cultures.
But sometimes I like to play with clichés: for example, in *Non-stop Exotic Cabaret* that I mentioned earlier, the video of the swimmer in the ubiquitous exotic pool. Or in "*Nocturne (Trajectories)*". In that piece I filmed some boats, and I thought that it was funny that, because they were used to carry tourists across the river, they were shaped in a sort of mock-oriental style as little pagodas. There were no other boats of that shape on the river! Somehow they were fitting in with our tourists' expectation of the exotic.

And was the work an attempt to record what you saw without claiming to 'know' it?
Yes, I'm very conscious that in the short time I spend in a foreign country it would be very pretentious to pretend to understand it. I have a very superficial view, but at the same time I'm not making any attempt to document another culture.

There is an exquisite beauty in many of these videos that derives from the contrasts of light and dark, colour and blackness, and from the unusual movement of their elements - boats, swimmers, fireworks, and so on. Perhaps this beauty is most pronounced in Dance Bound which shows sea horses gliding across the screen. What were your motivations to make this work? Were you interested in the works of Jean Painleve, or

others who had filmed such animals? And what decisions do you make about the ways in which these videos are screened?

I had seen the Painlevé films at the MCA in Sydney, and I really enjoyed them. They were part of a beautiful group show, called *Liquid Sea*, which I took part in as well. I didn't make *Dance-Bound* until a few years later, and by that time I wasn't thinking about Painlevé's films any more. My piece came about partly by chance. I was visiting an Aquarium and I saw sea-horses swimming in a fish-tank with a black background. I was amused by the way they moved, and I thought that the dark background would look like an empty void in a video, an endless deep space if it wasn't for these funny creatures crossing by....

For the editing I worked with an artist friend, Lucy Harris, who is also a fantastic video editor. We worked for a long time on how to make the sea-horses appear and disappear on the screen so as to create a sort of three-dimensional choreography in an endless black space. It's a work about the space of the video. Like *Nocturne (Trajectories)*, the video of the little lit-up boats, this piece is about the edge of the video, the way objects come into the frame from one side and disappear at the other.

We distilled many hours of tape into a video with an hypnotic rhythm (a quality that I try to get in most of my videos). I think that for me this is a way to suspend real time and to induce daydreaming.

Most of your moving image works are videos but you have also worked with 16mm for the work Fan-tasmagoria. What was your reason for using this outmoded technology for showing a film about high-technology illumination?

It's interesting that you suggest a contrast between the traditional format of 16mm film and the technological subject matter of *Fan-tasmagoria*. The funny thing about this work is that while it may look highly technological and abstract, it's actually just a film of a toy fan with LED lights on the blades; the LEDs switch on and off, and create the optical illusion of constantly changing coloured patterns.

One of the reasons why I used 16mm was that if I'd used video it would have looked more like a digital animation; so to keep it more "real" I thought of using film. And I also thought that somehow the rotation of the film in the projector mimics the circular movements of the fan. I fixed a metal tube onto the lens of the projector to make the projected image circular. I'm not sure that I'd agree that 16mm is 'outdated technology'. After all, *The Hurt Locker*, which won this year's Oscars for Best Film and Best Cinematography, was shot on 16mm film.

Fan-tasmagoria was part of an installation called Phi whose subject is dramatic kinds of light that you photographed and filmed in the Far East. This body of work connects to your images of the usually concealed illumination devices for billboard advertisements, fireworks displays, Carlo Mollino's lights for the Teatro Regio in Turin. These works invite a series of new questions: your relation to design culture, your reflections on the 'society of the spectacle' and the globalization of formerly western kinds of spectacle, and so on. Did you set about on this new body of work with any intentions to question the culture of spectacle and commerce, or to render its image-making devices strange?

Probably for both reasons! I thought of questioning the culture of spectacle by making its devices strange and useless.

I started to photograph neon billboards from behind or from the side as a way of subverting the usual point of view, a way of depriving the advertisement of its function and meaning so as to reveal its apparatus purely in terms of structure and light.

I explored this idea also in a video, *Phi Building* from 2006. It shows a skyscraper with the façade covered by LED lights that displayed advertisements. I edited out all the footage showing the adverts and left just the moving abstract patterns of coloured lights. In the video, when the lights are on, it reminds us of an abstract animated film. While when the lights are off, the building looks like a real building again.

I was also thinking that the overloading of images and information leads to a sort of blindness and an impossibility of communication. So in some works I showed empty billboards, like in *Untitled (Squares)*, (2007) which is a "conversation" between blank billboards.

In the past I used to think that in a world full of images and visual noise, it could be interesting to present very simple and "empty" images. So in the older works of interiors I chose very common and everyday scenes, which could trigger a sense of *déja vu* and possibly work as a mirror for the viewer's introspection and "existential" perception.

Lately my strategy has changed and my images are more ambiguous. I prefer to create doubt in the viewer by defamiliarizing the subject matter, so as to strip it of its immediate familiar connotations. So the photographs will seem to have been shot by an alien!

I like to play around with fragments of reality, and to transform them. For instance in the video *Untitled (The Party is Over)* (2009), fireworks are edited in reverse so they *im*plode instead of *ex*ploding. They lose their realistic connotation and become a sort of "cosmic" spectacle with an hypnotic rhythm which induces daydreaming. Or you might read it as a depiction of a journey in a time machine!

You were asking me earlier about my relation to design culture. I think that I'm interested in design only in formal terms. I don't look at what objects represent: I look at their structure. Especially in the latest works from 2009. Here I was searching for a geometry in fragments of reality. They range from a simple shape (but with a deceptive composition) like *Untitled (Sphere)* to a very complicated structure like the chandelier of *Untitled (Objectless Composition)*.