



## Jon Sasaki

### *Making Do With The Photons That Linger After The Sun Has Set*

With his new series of twilight pochades, Jon Sasaki delivered a Whistlerian nocturne for our dark times. Boldly departing from obligatory standards of illumination calibrated to maximize Instagrammability, the fluorescent lights in the main gallery at Clint Roenisch were dimmed to half strength for the presentation of these enigmatic paintings appropriately framed in a light-absorbing shade of ultra-black. This muted atmosphere elicited slow looking that mirrored Sasaki's durational process. Adapting his penchant for endurance art to a hazardous *plein air* methodology, his works in oil on plywood are compelling records of his quixotic quest to capture the fleeting moment of dusk's transition into night.

Produced over a ten-month span characterized by the progressive darkening of collective horizons, Sasaki's paintings were executed in wooded areas on the outskirts of Toronto during the brief nightly window known as "nautical dusk"—a period extending from about half an hour after sunset until the horizon disappears to observers at sea. This temporal constraint skilfully transposed the trademark rigour of Sasaki's perilous performances into a painterly idiom reminiscent at once of tonalist atmospherics and pointillist facticity. The *fin-de-siècle* ambit of these stylistic references anchors Sasaki's parallel invocation of Japanese aesthetics of *mono no aware*, a "sensitivity to ephemera" that also inspired the painter James McNeill Whistler's renderings of fugitive light effects.

Sasaki's matter-of-fact brushwork obliquely recalls the scientific aura of pointillist facture, the absorbency of his plywood support strategically muffling surface incident. The resulting tension between impersonal objectivity and subjective observation connects this series to his earlier evocations of romantic science. In meticulous graphite renderings of eye floaters that only Sasaki can see, for instance, his body has figured as an unreliable recording instrument reminiscent of the self-experimentation performed by artist-scientists such as the colour theorist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Having abandoned his early career as a painter, Marcel Duchamp

would subsequently harbour a lasting ambition to re-establish the experimental basis of Georges Seurat's colour-theory—inspired divisionism on a non-painterly footing—an ambition fulfilled by his proto-Op *Rotoreliefs* (1935/1953). Sasaki's studies of waning visibility are situated within this same trajectory of conceptual engagement with painting as a springboard for perceptual experimentation.

Frequently mistaken for antagonists, conceptualism and painting have in fact long occasioned fruitful dialogue. Following in the footsteps of forebears including Art & Language and John Baldessari, Sasaki has been circling the modernist Ur-medium in works probing its purist exclusions for several years. The presence of one of his signature images of microbial cultures grown from the palettes of Group of Seven members in the front gallery at Clint Roenisch underscored continuities between such conceptually driven excavations of the ordinarily invisible discontents of modernist painting and his more recent, hands-on venture in oils. His Lawren Harris-inspired documentation of immaterial auras, realized with the assistance of clairvoyants, is another foreshadowing of the liminal states of visibility reported by *Making Do With The Photons That Linger After The Sun Has Set*. But despite hovering at the borderline of perceptibility, works in this series are animated by hairpin dramas of natural and artificial illumination worthy of Whistler's brush. In contrast to the aestheticist's credo of "art for art's sake," however, Sasaki's quicksilver studies of dying light unfold a subtle response to the current confluence of global crises.

Adam Lauder

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