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Fields of Light

An exhibition of photographs, video projections, prints and handmade books sets out the layered perceptual and conceptual concerns of Mike and Doug Starn.

BY EDWARD LEFFINGWELL

Attracted to light as moths are to a flame, Mike and Doug Starn have in fact spent much of the last 10 years photographing nocturnal moths approaching rural porch lights. During this protracted night watch, they employed a medium-format camera armed with an enhanced macro lens to achieve an advanced degree of magnification. In some cases, the resulting images have been exposed onto mulberry paper treated with silver emulsion then developed. The prints are tea-stained and sulfur-toned. As hits of printed image flake and wear away, the works begin to resemble the powdery surface of moth wings. Pinned in the manner of entomological displays inside simple wood display boxes, the photos have the look and feel of things historic--characteristic of the Starns' production.

In "Behind Your Eye," a multimedia exhibition presented recently at the Neuherger Museum on the campus of SUNY, Purchase, these works were placed randomly on long study tables outfitted with chairs and white gloves, under a system of fluorescent tubes dropped from the lofty ceiling of the museum's Theater Gallery. With large digital prints, the 58 boxed images of this "Attracted to Light" series (1996-2003) formed the core of the exhibition. The show also included handmade books, video projections, other prints and an enormous sliding screen of tree images. All were linked by the Starns' interest in light.

The screen--actually two parallel sets of movable shoji-type screens, 10 feet apart, 55 feet long and up to 10 feet tall--defined the entrance to the gallery. Images of trees were printed by inkjet on gampi paper and fitted to one set of wooden frames. Fluid images of tree limbs sweeping across the other set of frames recall exhilarating strokes of sumi ink painting. In this work, titled *Structure of Thought 7* (2001-04), the bilaterally symmetrical branching of trees is seen to resemble the microscopic dendritic organization of neurons.

Across the gallery from the screens was a series of film stills. Centered on the end wall, *ATL film still 14* (2000-04) is, at 10 feet high and 30 feet long, the largest single element of the Starns' "Attracted to Light" body of work. A digital print of moths in flight, the image resembles the constellations of a starry night. Its glossy surface reflects everything

it faces, including, here, visitors and the nearby tables with boxed prints. To one side, an aluminum-mounted 10-foot-square still from the same series pictures a moth moving inexorably toward a light bulb in the upper corner. On the opposite wall an image of the same size captures a moth hovering in a field of light.

Also seen in this gallery, glossy chromogenic prints (2004) from the "Black Pulse" series offer exquisite portraits of desiccated leaves made by scanning and then digitally stripping them layer by layer to reveal their structural veins. These works were printed at large scale, 67 to 100 inches in the largest dimension, and pinned directly to the gallery wall.

In a separate gallery was *Nowhere to Fall* (2001-4), a complex, two-channel video projected side-by-side on a pair of scrims, 10 by 25 feet altogether. It features actor/photographer Dennis Hopper's reading of the artists' journals as well as excerpts from Dante's *Paradiso*, along with reflections' on weightlessness expressed by pioneers in space--the words largely unintelligible, possibly a matter of the pitch and timbre of his voice at the time of its' recording, but surely also due to the relatively high volume of its playback in a cavernous dark room. Hopper speaks, appears to float, ascends', descends. A moth flies by, wings beating slowly as though it were a bird; then a woman, barefoot in a long gown, appears to swim upward in defiance of gravity. There are references to the Starns' previous work and an odd soundtrack of sampled and commissioned music played very loud,

The brothers work out ideas' in words' as well as images, incorporating both in their own books. They are designing a two-volume monograph for publication by the Monacelli Press', as' well as a series' of catalogues, all of which were included in the exhibition in various' stages of development. Their maquette for the monograph promises' a tour-de-force interpretive overview of their past and future work. It has two spines, with the volumes' bound back-to-back, and can be opened from either side, as a metaphor for their shared identity (they are identical twins). It contains' early images, gate-folds, installation shots and drawings, as well as two scrolls that can be removed and unrolled.

Available to viewers on a study table, *The Same but Different* was the catalogue-in-progress for an exhibition titled "Gravity of Light," currently at the Färgfabriken Kunsthalle in Stockholm. Composed of inkjet on newsprint, edges frayed from use, it offered, again, the repeated image of a moth. Another catalogue-in-progress, *Black Pulse 3*, continues the "Black Pulse" series with inkjet images of desiccated leaves on a glossy film, taped together and artfully composed to resemble falling leaves, along with a single line of running text. In the darkened second gallery were two booklike works involving electroluminescence or fiber-optic light. Mike and Doug Starn have been insufficiently

exhibited in the New York area in recent years; "Behind Your Eye" offers a full reckoning of where they've come from and how they've arrived at where they are now.

"Behind Your Eye: Doug and Mike Starn" was curated by Dede Young for the Neuberger Museum at SUNY, Purchase [Mar. 7-Aug. 8]. Moth photos and film stilts were also shown at Lehman Maupin Gallery, New York [Feb. 21-Mar. 20]. "Gravity of Light" is on view at the Färgfabriken Kunsthalle, Stockholm, along with a solo exhibition at that city's Ejorn Wetterling Gallery [Nov. 13-Dec. 31]. Portions of the Neuberger exhibition travel to the National Academy of Science in Washington, D.C. [Mar. 1-July 15, 2005] including the "Black Pulse" and "Structure of Thought" series. A two-volume book from Monacelli Press will be published in late 2005 or early 2006.

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Gagosian Gallery presents an exhibition of new installations, light works, sculptures and prints by James Turrell. This is his first exhibition with the gallery. Since pursuing studies in perceptual psychology during the 1960s, Turrell has been exploring a variety of perceptual phenomena, ranging from sensory deprivation to intense optical effects. Early works such as Afrum-Proto (1966) and the Mendota Stoppages (1969-1974), which employed planes of light in relation to architecture, became the basis for ongoing investigations. Composed of powdered pigment, the prints depict various details and perspectives of the Roden Crater project. Two bronze and plaster models representing the "North Moon Space" area of the observatory will also be on view, particularly human conceptual world. A more comprehensive knowledge of our conceptual lives and the developmental dependence on social factors such as shared intentionality and linguistic labeling could potentially provide us with a more detailed knowledge of what set us apart from other species. Target article. Focus and content. The aim of this paper is to seek out the particularly human by an analysis of the current debate on categories and concepts among developmental psychologists. properties are not directly perceptual, but have more to do.