

Agatha Gothe-Snape, February 2017 | the subMachine

REVIEWS

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*Agatha Gothe-Snape, Oh Window*  
MAM Project 023 at Mori Art Museum; 4 February to 11 June



GOTHE-SNAPE, Agatha, *Screentone* and *Skintone*, part of her solo exhibition 'Oh Window' at Mori Art Museum

Composed and choreographed with a level of care akin to surgical precision, Agatha Gothe-Snape's *Oh Window* is exquisite. Manufacturing a simplicity through complexity, the artist manages to refine and distill motifs into alloys of idea and material, before deploying them in an orbital array that puts the viewer at the heart of the situation. Interdisciplinary and multi-sensual, it is a show that stretches itself wide and then plunders down deep, exploring a series of tropes through a variety of delivery techniques.

Greeting you on arrival to the space, like a gallery attendant or invigilator, is a flatscreen monitor displaying text and playing an audio of overlaid voices. It both restricts your access and guides you in. It sets a very particular tone that runs through the show like a DNA code implicating the character of every work, and that is the consideration of the viewer and their attention. It is attentiveness offered and encouraged, and it is a partnership of engagement based on respect and reward. The artist and the curator have treated your arrival into the space, and encounter with the works that occupy it, with the same level of thought that they applied to the arrival and positioning of the art on the walls, ceiling and floor.

The inception and conception of the show came from a proposition put forward by curator, Haruko Kumakura – how might someone go about working with a gallery space that has no windows, and yet is on the 52nd floor of a Tokyo skyscraper, and only a few metres away from the gallery there are incredible panoramic views? Gothe-Snape processed thoughts about this through her own observations of the immediate surrounds and invited the curator to put forward her observational reading of street level activities. Tellingly, this way of filtering ideas through her own senses and having someone else filter ideas through their's, passing them to the artist to include as material, reveals a way of working by the artist that uses multiple processing points as a device for orchestrating her compositions, in development as well as in presentation.



GOTHE-SNAPE, Agatha, *This Meandering Hand I*, at Mori Art Museum

In two artworks, the infrastructural guidance equipment of urban planning and the simple labours of cleaning staff in civil institutions work together in a dance of sculpture and video. On the walls, stainless steel handrails that read like a thread of wavelength. They are designed to follow the undulating ascendancy of a body moving upstairs, revealing a hard-edge material accompaniment to a soft-edge organic reality. These handrails ('Qunetto') are essentially found objects, ubiquitous in Roppongi, the area where the gallery sits. In the video piece, *Screen (His Tender Grip)*, we read the subtitle narrative to an architecturally-oriented moving image on two screens. The text describes a cleaner who holds a cloth to the cycling rubber handrail of an escalator, all sensuousness in its slithering, pink lipstick gloss against the mechanical structure of the steps in the giant mall. But all we see are the escalators moving constantly, in an empty shopping centre. Partnered like dancers, these works echo and reflect, bringing humanity to systems and charging the space with the apparition of the absent body.

Dividing the gallery are two large curtains, *Screentone* and *Skintone*, which work as authoritarian traffic control of the lightest touch. Unable to enforce any real power over the body, for they blow away with the slightest of breath, and yet so clearly demanding your obedience to positioning, they work to conceal one side of the space in mystery – the space where you are going or from which you just came. Blurred futures and forgotten pasts, physical barriers to hope and nostalgia. One curtain a screen of indecipherable language, like fractured code, or an unfamiliar language; the other the familiarity and warmth of skin and surface touch. One, a form of communication delivering data you can't digest; the other, a form of embrace offering to consume you in comfort. But then, there's a pattern in the code, so there's meaning just under the surface; and there's a smothering that comes with embrace, and who really is ever comfortable in their own skin?



GOTHE-SNAPE, Agatha, *Screen (His Tender Grip)*, at Mori Art Museum

Always there are connections between the works. Riffing off each other, they feel like dancers awaiting their turn to tango, while those who've just danced move to the edges. First the sculptures and the videos have their dalliance, then the PowerPoint video-texts reach out to the diptych prints, before they subside to allow the wall vinyl to pick up step with the audio that lurches forward in the room. And always too, it is performance inside every moving and static thing. Performance residue and performance invitation. The trace of the artist and the evocation of the audience.

A video piece, *Awaiting the Apparitional Surge*, is all anticipatory angst and the democratic declaration of the agency of the things. We look inside a small room with a sliding-door entrance made of glass. Inside is a flat shelf, with an old pay phone on the left and a pot plant on the right. Culture one side, nature the other. Artifice and reality. Or is it so simple? Pot plants are hardly natural and technology is really just melted stone and silica. Are we waiting for a human to activate the room or are these two subjects/objects the characters on the stage? Are we an audience, or the phone and the plant watching us through that glass? It's all perfectly balanced and yet slightly off-kilter, and it's endlessly fascinating because it is stripped to its bones. Oblique on one frequency while piercing on another. An overlay of harmonics through associative thoughts and visual delight.

It's impossible not to hear and see and feel everything compositionally. Works are internally composed with clarity and balance, and the show itself is composed of external chords that are played through adjacency and reflection. Cycling back to the initiation of the show it's clear that Gothe-Snape has been able to embrace the nature of this space and overcome the concern of its windowless character at this height above the fray. She has done so by building windows into the walls, puncturing portals into open space and divining a pathways inside the mind of the observant and patient visitor. A true pleasure for body and mind.