

Looking into the Light

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Yayoi Kusama : Infinity Mirror Rooms

Seemingly simple in its creation this installation by a Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (born in 1929) called Infinity Mirror Rooms is far from boring.

Over the course of her career Kusama has produced more than twenty infinity rooms, she first began her series in the 1960s and exhibited her work all around the world currently her work can be seen in Tate Modern, London.

The exhibition is everything that the artist is known for: spots, speckles, polka dots. The inspiration for her unmistakable style came from her rather sad and turbulent childhood when she was suffering from a mental illness that caused her to experience hallucinations. Young Kusama decided to paint what she saw to deal with her illness and provide her with some sort of relief. What she often saw was a repetitive pattern, oftentimes a series of flickering polka dots.

Her art is also a response to the personal traumas and phobias she experienced while being a child and during wartime. Her work links strongly to activism and the anti-war movement.

Infinity Mirror Rooms is another example of what Yayoi Kusama's work is about and shows her long-life devotion to her style and attempt to possibly heal herself from all the terrible things she witnessed and experienced in her life.

Infinity Mirror Rooms are usually made in a small blacked-out chamber or room. The rooms are filled fully with mirrors as well as with various types of light sources such as LED lamps, lanterns, or



Figure I

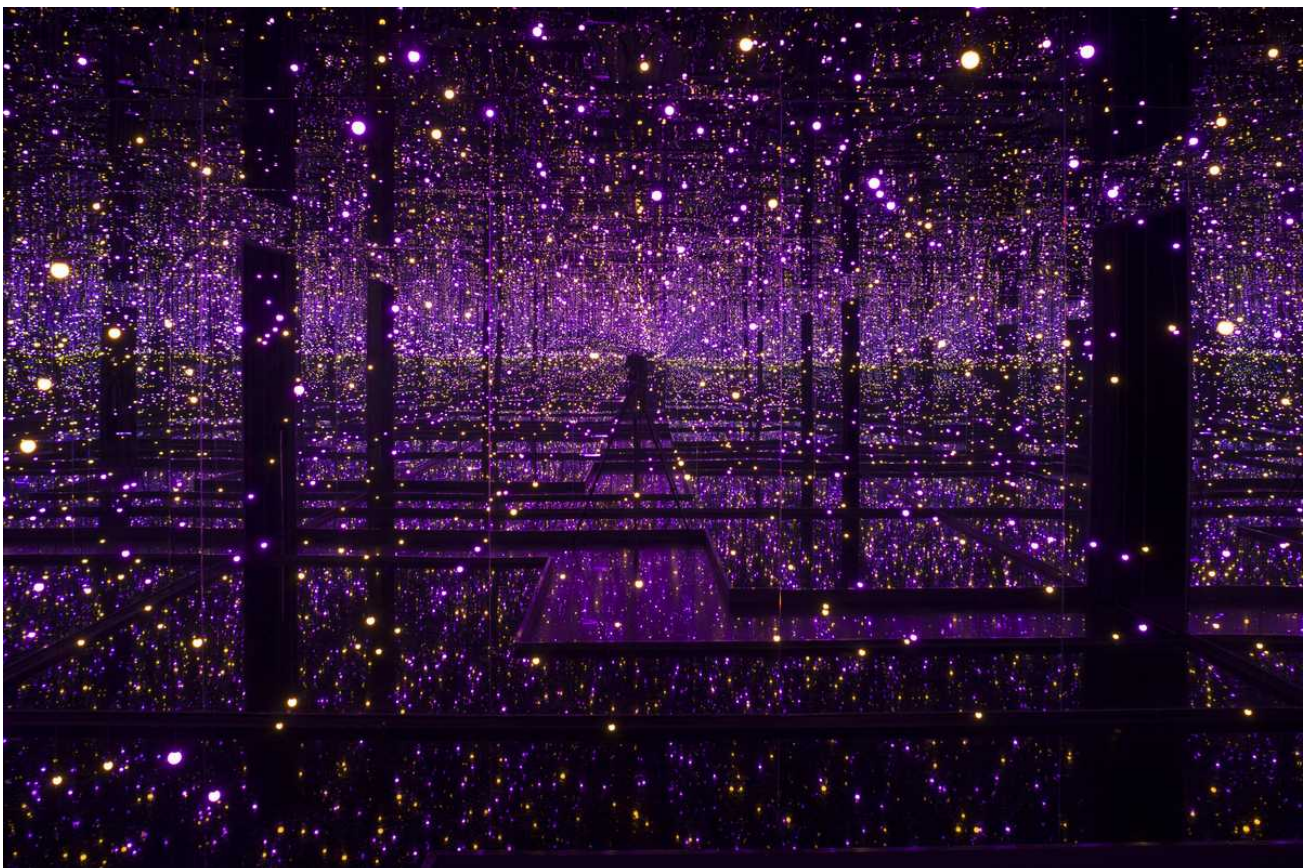


Figure II

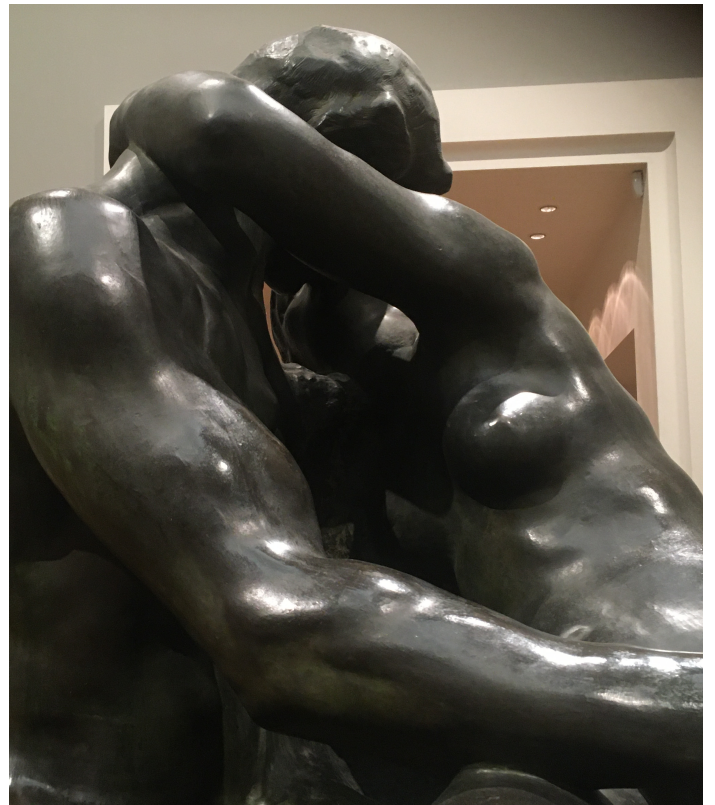
chandeliers, those showing different colours. The lights are flickering or pulsating or sometimes they are just still. The main idea is that the mirrors are reflecting the light creating those infinite spaces. From one room to little room the experience seems to expand endlessly, creating a hypnotic and ethereal atmosphere.

Looking at Infinity Mirror Rooms it is not hard to notice that the light is a crucial and integral part of the whole thing. If there was no light and no mirrors that exhibition simply would not exist and would not be as spectacular as it is. It all started with a very simple idea—the light and the mirror, but the outcome is hard to pass by. Reflection and light are what create this endless kaleidoscope of patterns and shapes, making it feel like you are not just in a room with a light, it all creates a sort of alternative otherworldly space. But according to Kusama herself the light and the way it is perceived either still or flickering in this installation represents various emotions of human life like grief or joy.

I think this exhibition is a great example of how light can be used to transform something so simple like an empty room filled with mirrors into a hypnotic experience where light is the main object—the artwork. It also works conceptually and emotionally, knowing the life story of Yayoi Kusama I believe that all of us can somehow find being there somewhat relatable.

Auguste Rodin's sculptures at National Museum Cardiff

While visiting National Museum in Cardiff I came across the collection of Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) sculptures. They immediately caught my attention.



Auguste Rodin was a French sculptor known for his figurative decorative sculptures. His innovative approach to sculpture focused mainly on abandoning polished and idealised figures especially those of gods or muses. Instead, he was creating lifelike sculptures of modern people and often trying to portray emotions like love, intimacy, and physicality.

What was so fascinating to me upon seeing Rodin's sculptures is the way the light was reflected on the sculptures. Most of them were made out of bronze and the harsh white light was coming down onto the sculptures throwing shadows in all the crevices. I found it stunning because the sculptures themselves were not the

most detailed and perfect and the colours seemed rather dull and almost oxidised, but with work of light, Rodin's work came to life. I photographed the same sculptures from different angles to see if they would somehow change, and to my surprise looking at the artworks from various angles indeed altered the way they look.

The light crept inside the facial features and the muscles making those life-size figures almost alive as if they were eternally seized in a moment. The sculpture of a kissing couple was mesmerising almost uncomfortable, the way light worked on the surface of the metal added extra depth and dimensionality to the artwork.

In my opinion, the light worked successfully for this exhibition as it added extra attention to the details and made figures look real and captivating.



My work

Cyanotype

As part of the module and my experiments with light I decided to further explore the process of cyanotype. I really enjoyed the initial group experiment and learning about this technique and I was I intrigued to learn more.

I am particularly interested in portraits, and that was my idea to create a cyanotype print with my own face. I learnt that I need a make a negative. That was not a very hard task I simply printed my pictures on an acetate sheet. Before that I created a digital collage consisting of a few of my own photographs I took of myself. At the time I was doing a research on various photographers, one particular artist- Edmund Kesting became an inspiration for my work. I admired his photography and his use of very early type of collage.



Edmund Kesting

To overlap my photographs I used an app called PicsArt that also allowed me to invert my image to a negative. The process of covering paper in sensitiser was not the easiest as I had to make sure the light will not get onto the paper.

Unfortunately, many sheets got exposed to some degree and did not work very well with my negatives. In fact only few prints worked out successfully, the rest either did not expose or came out faded. It could be due to the paper malfunction or the light. The sun this day was behind the clouds, but it came out few times and that is when the prints looked the best.

I put my prints both indoors, on a windowsill and outside directly in the sunlight.

Those prints that have worked look very interesting and I was amazed by how the rays of the Sun turned my negatives in actual photographs. Along with experimenting with various types of paper and light options I have found out that dipping prints in vinegar can bring out the mid tones and highlights even more, that proved to work quite well on some prints.

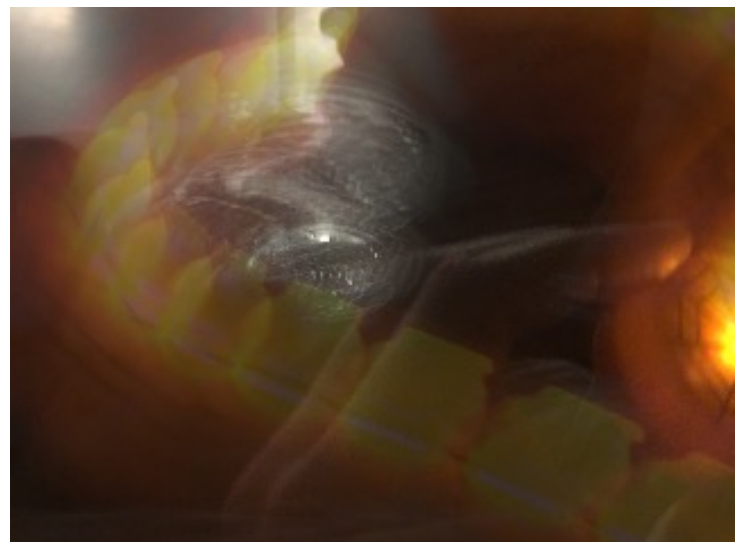
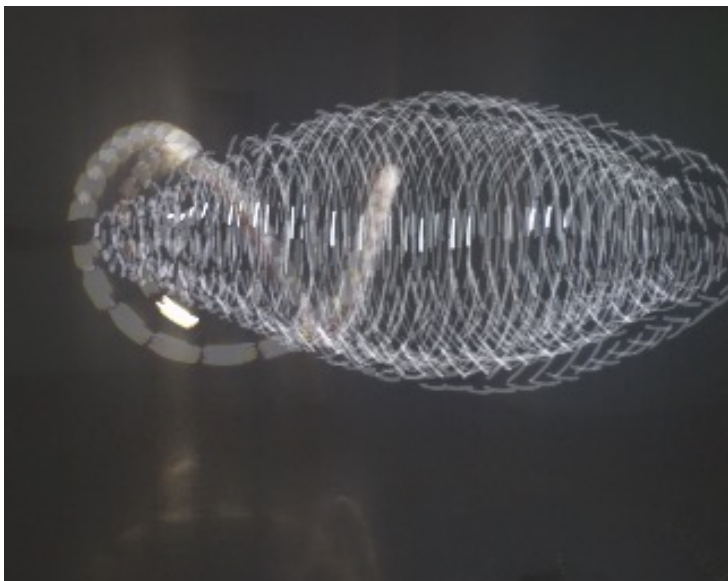
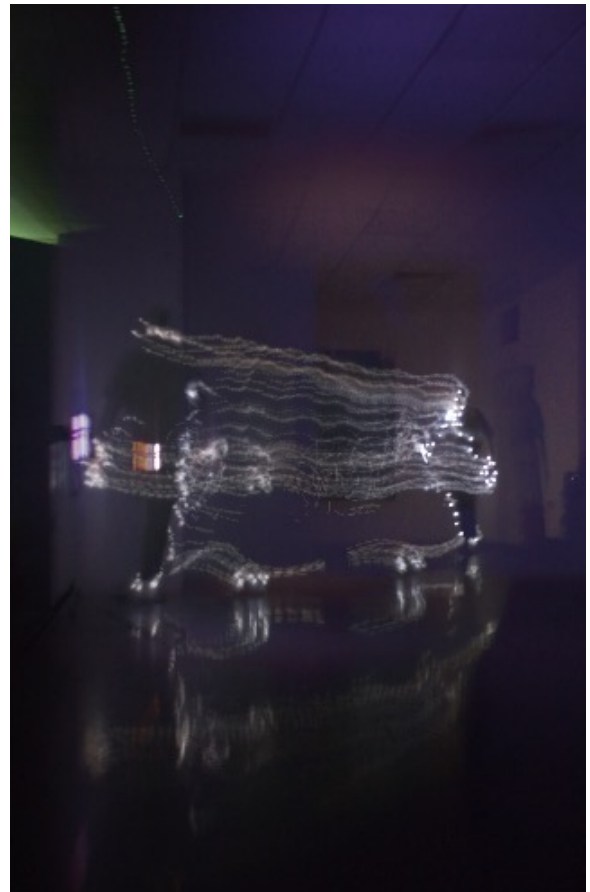
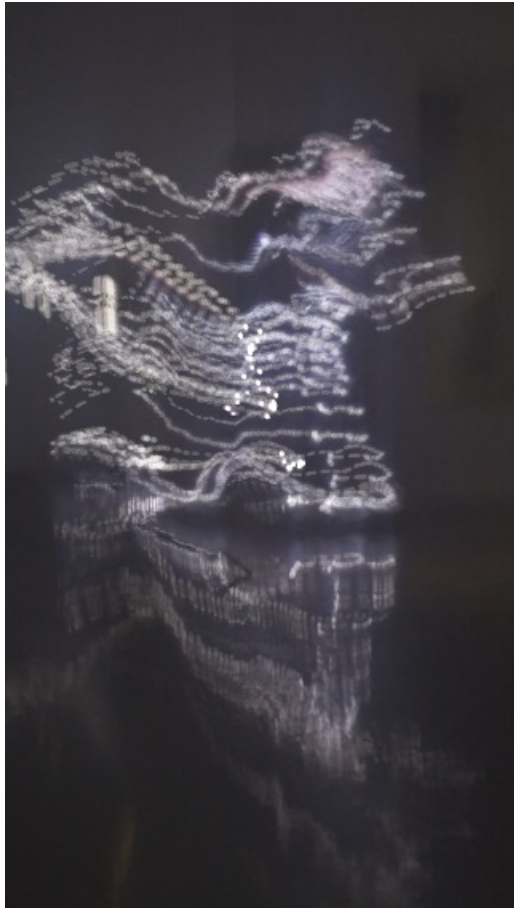


Example of one of my digital negatives

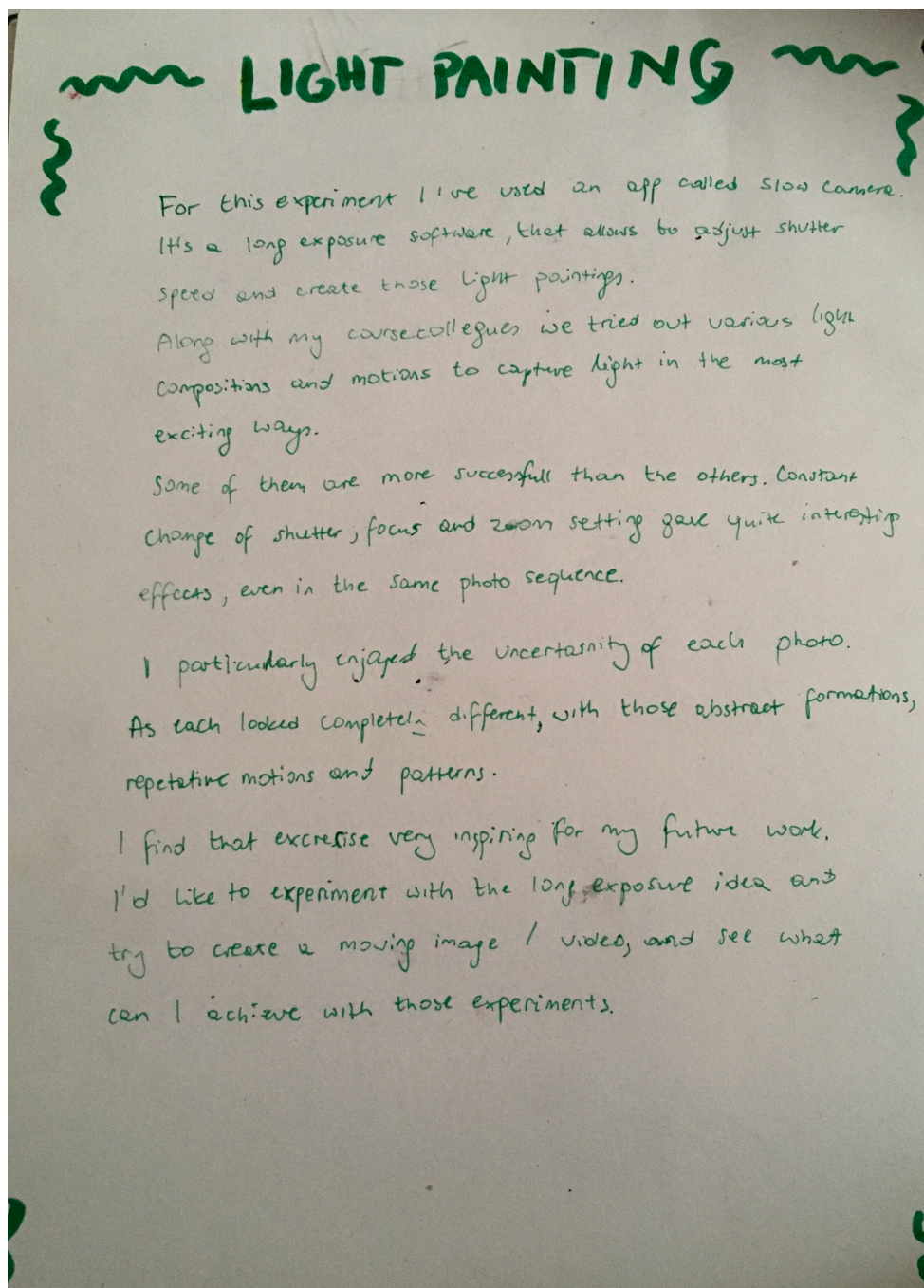


Negatives and final cyanotype outcomes

Painting with light



Example of photographs I produced



Sketchbook page

Another experiment that I worked on with my group. Painting with light was an interesting idea, though quite challenging. For taking these pictures I used an app called Slow Camera. I experimented with various settings such as shutter speed, or exposure.

Outcomes are quite interesting, and each looks different depending on the setting I have used. Painting with light has been a great experiment and it showed how light can be used in various ways.

While learning about various methods of utilising light in my practice I particularly enjoyed the broadness and flexibility that light gave me. From photographing my work to experimenting with light painting and cyanotype I noticed how versatile light is and how important it is, on its

own and as part of something. I observed how light and lighting can transform artworks as well as the idea that light can be used to create something completely new.

Bibliography

Figure I - Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden | Smithsonian. (2009). Infinity Mirror Rooms – Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors | Hirshhorn Museum | Smithsonian. [online] Available at: <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/kusama/infinity-rooms/>

Figure II - Tate (2022). *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms*. [online] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirror-rooms>