

Throughout his life as an artist and theoretician, light was fundamental for Gyorgy Kepes. In *The Language of Vision*, his book of visual analysis originally published in 1944 and still in circulation today, he wrote, “Without light, there is no vision, and without vision there can be no visible space. Space in a visual sense is light space.” While his orientation towards the primacy of visuality was typical of the European modernist milieu he came out of, Kepes goes on to write that “Light is the life-giving basic energy for any existence.” an indication that beyond its ability to illuminate and allow for perception, for Kepes light held properties essential to being itself.

Distinguishing himself from his mentor Moholy-Nagy, who popularized the term “photogram” for his cameraless images, Kepes borrowed from Henry Fox Talbot and called his own photographic works “photogenics.” This designation emphasizes the production of light rather than its use as a tool to write or draw with, and represents an aspect of Kepes’ thinking I find particularly relevant to and even prescient of our current moment. Moving away from a romantic notion of “capturing” light and instead focusing on its propagation strikes a resonant chord for me at this tech-saturated juncture in history, in which the production of light is so intimately interwoven with the dominant modes of information and image exchange.

The light of Kepes’ time is of course different from our own. In my work I am contending with the light of the LCD screen, whereas Kepes was dealing with the incandescent light of the black and white dark room. What’s more, we approach those respective lights with distinct dispositions. In his recent book, *György Kepes, Undreaming the Bauhaus*, John R. Blakinger draws a portrait of Kepes as unswervingly technophilic, dedicated to the belief that a merger between art and applied science was the path to an advanced new form of cultural production. My relationship to technology is much more conflicted. While I use technology in the making of my work (in large part because I am motivated to produce paintings that reflect our current moment), I am quite skeptical of the promises of our technocratic present. Whereas Kepes was convinced of technology’s ability to take us “forward,” I am interested in the friction between a reluctant acceptance of certain

interfaces as being unavoidably representative of how we currently consume aesthetic input and the necessity to maintain a critical stance towards them despite their ubiquity.

These distinctions are at least partially endemic to the times in which our work was produced, and despite them I feel a strong affinity with the experimental aspect of Kepes' photographic practice, not to mention its inscrutability. We share a compositional sensibility, as well as a drive to combine the aleatory with predetermination, a desire for chance to play a role within a system of control. These are just a few of the ways Kepes' photogenics from the 1940's resonate not just with my work but also with a more expansive sense of now. I am extremely pleased that this exhibition allows for our work to be shown side by side, and the dialogue that might be generated by that juxtaposition.

—Cameron Martin