

Time Out

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Art

Reviews

Tim Davis, "Illuminations"
Greenberg Van Doren Gallery,
through Mar 18 (see 57th Street)

Light is the life force of any photograph, but for Tim Davis it is also a muse. In several new series, the photographer explores the ways light adds color, texture and emotion to an image, but more significantly, how lightbulbs, traffic signals and neon signs reveal the artifice of the world.

One series of ten photographs captures museum spotlights casting shadows on the walls behind statues ranging from a winged figure to a Lipschitz-like abstraction. The forms are readily identifiable—but also almost completely out of picture. What we see instead of the sculptures are their dark silhouettes, as if Davis is documenting the "aura" of the artworks—something Walter Benjamin famously claimed was banished by photography's process of

mechanical reproduction. (The show shares its title, "Illuminations," with a book of Benjamin's essays.)

Less understated are the large-scale studies of light as spectacle, particularly *Searchlights (Illuminations)*, in which klieg lights glare in the sky above an ordinary suburban street of modest homes. Davis uses only "available light" in these images, a strategy that makes something as banal as the spire of the Empire State Building, punctuated by twinkling spotlights in the middle of a bright, clear day, appear almost surreal.

Davis's investigation extends to video, exhibited as still shots of objects passing through an X-ray machine. But it is the more straightforward photos that really hit a nerve: Light, so often romanticized in the history of photography, is presented here as a power broker in the construc-

tion of a contemporary world where "reality" is, frighteningly, little more than a buzzword.—Barbara Pollack



Light Bulb Shop
Window, 2005

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