

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

***The craft-art: Form 'SPARK: The Science and Art of Creativity' to 'Art Central',  
Central Harbourfront, Hong Kong, 26-30 March 2019***

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### **Abstract**

Technology has initiated a new era in art and craft. SPARK: The Science and Art of Creativity is the first time which organized by the British Council in January with the collaboration of over 200 artists, scientists and academics from Hong Kong and the United Kingdom celebrating creativity across the arts, sciences and education. SPARK has showcased new conversations between art and technology, transforming the definition of art and craft through the involvement of science and technology. The combination of light and crafts were continued two months after in Art Central 2019 which was returning to Hong Kong's Central Harbourfront for the fifth time. This review concentrates on some of the artworks in the Art Central exhibition, particularly those using light as a medium to express the artists' emotions and points of view. The reflections of light created by the Korean artist Yong R. Kwon and the fascinating installation made up of 100 light bulbs by Satoru Tamura from Japan demonstrate how these artists express their language of art through craft. Yong R. Kwon combined hundreds of handcrafted stainless-steel discs and painted them to express his view of darkness. Satoru Tamura's work featured the movement of a needle on a circular metal plate, which illuminated the light bulbs. The movement of the art piece was initiated by

an internal motor, honouring the traditional craft of watchmaking. There is a common thread in the work of these two artists, who both avoid defining their artworks, allowing the viewer to respond to and define the artworks for themselves.

## **Keywords**

craft-art

sparks

light installation

incandescence

light and dark

contact points

crafting light

## **Introduction**

‘Creativity sparks art’ is one of the underpinning themes of the event SPARK: The Science and Art of Creativity which is Hong Kong’s first festival to celebrate creativity across the arts, sciences and education. Over three days, more than 200 artists, scientists and academics from Hong Kong and the United Kingdom present numerous interactive experiences, performances and talks. This innovative exhibition concept developed by British Council was arranged into four themes, including: Art meets Science; Altered Realities; Future Skills and Creative Cites, through which visitors could experience a disparate blend of biological research, a live piano recital and a dystopian sci-fi thriller via AR and VR, all of which demonstrated the blurring of art, craft and technology.

The definition of craft has been debated in the field of art and design throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Pöllänen 2011). Crafts are often considered a functional but not purely visual form, even when craftspeople intentionally make them non-functional. In contrast, fine art has been defined as non-functional (Crouther 2005). Markowitz concluded that the distinction between art and craft is not clear, as they are similar in important ways but also somehow different (1994). The editors of the *Journal of Modern Craft* suggest that craft can be distinguished from art and design by its purpose and function, but that these forms can also merge, and craft is also significant in contemporary art (Editors 2017). Increasingly, artists with craft backgrounds incorporate contemporary art practices such as installation, performance and events into their work (Crouther 2005). The term ‘craft-art’ was proposed by Karppinen, referring to the incorporation of skills, knowledge, thoughts, experiences, perceptions and sensations into craft (2008). Niedderer and Townsend (2014) suggested that eliciting emotion and the ability to experiment are essential characteristics of craft. Therefore, craft can act as a form of self-expression and reflect culture and society (Pöllänen 2011), and thus there can be an interrelationship between craft and art. The involvement of craft in an art piece can also be supplemental, in that it is not intended to stand alone but is rather related to other things and activities (Adamson 2007). The uniqueness of craft is its ability to combine function with expression and through this combination create a subtle revolution in human values (Niedderer and Townsend 2014). Today, craft practitioners increasingly embrace new technology, which provides them with new ways to develop their work (Niedderer and Townsend 2014).

At Art Central 2019, the five-day exhibition featured performance art, large-scale installations and talks by some of the world’s leading contemporary artists and makers. In this exhibition, technology, craft and contemporary art are clearly combined,

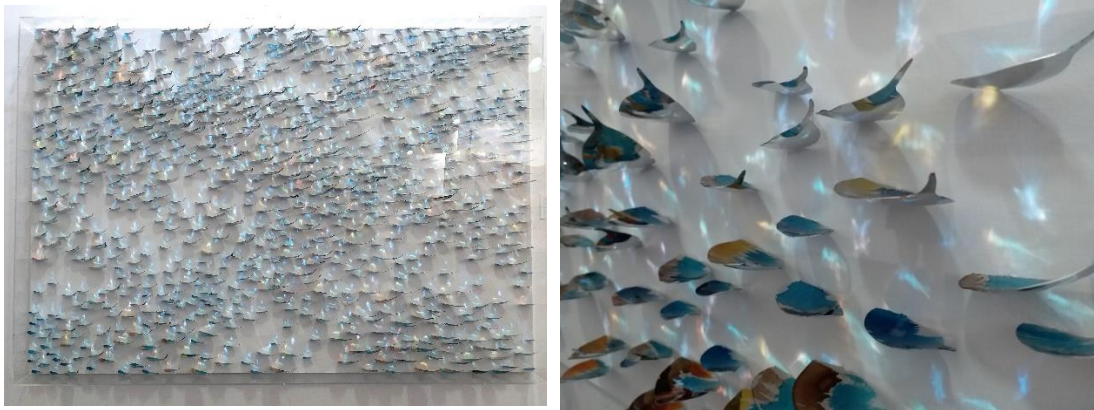
and each year more artists express the language of art through a combination of craft and technology. With the rapid development of technology, craft created through the medium of natural elements such as light and sound can be particularly appreciated, as they are easily forgotten. Two impressive collections of artworks in the Art Central were those of Yong R. Kwon and Satoru Tamura, who both expressed their emotions through the beauty of light but via different approaches. Yong R. Kwon expressed the idea of darkness through the light's reflection, while Satoru Tamura expressed the happiness light can evoke through his kinetic works.

### ***Stainless-Steel on Canvas* by Yong R. Kwon**

Yong R. Kwon's series of conceptual crafts emphasizes expression through the reflection of light. Kwon is a Korean artist who graduated from Seoul National University and is known for his craftsmanship in handling stainless-steel discs and immersing them in light. By creating hundreds of handcrafted stainless-steel discs, Kwon attempts to tell the story of darkness rather than lightness. This inspired my curiosity. The discs, which have a specific curvature, were stuck onto the canvas and then each was painted in colour by hand (Figures 1 and 2). When light shines onto the stainless-steel discs from above, coloured light is reflected and dispersed by the discs onto the canvas. Writers have described Kwon's work as paintings that cannot be seen until the lights come on and are reflected by the discs (Writer, 2018). For the audience, the common thread in his works is playing with contrasts in the senses, such as cold and hot and hard and soft. The coldness of the stainless-steel disc reflects the hotness of the light. The hardness represented by the discs contrasts with the softness of the light. The natural colour of the light is also transformed into the colour created by the

artist, as it is controlled by the paint on the stainless-steel discs. This suggests to the audience that the artist has the power to control light, which introduces another concept to the work. Each stainless-steel disc passively reflects the light shining onto it, but actively controls the colour of the reflected light through the paint on the disc.

Yong R. Kwon created this artefact after his experience of ‘meeting the darkness’. He was inspired by his consciousness being awakened from the dark and described this experience as being ‘as short and concise as a shriek’ (Kwon, 2017). In *Stainless-Steel on Canvas* the artist’s intention is to scatter the light by reflection, powerfully but not brashly, enabling the audience to experience its natural beauty rather than as an illusion. He also wants the audience to notice the contrast of light and dark and how the vibrancy of the coloured light disappears when the light is turned off. He proposes that this intangible experience can feel like the memory of one’s first love.



Figures 1a and 1b: Yong R. Kwon, *Stainless-Steel on Canvas*, 2019. Photo by Li Nga Wun.

### **The creations of Satoru Tamura**

Satoru Tamura was born in Saitama, Japan in 1980 and graduated from the School of Art and Design at the University of Tsukuba. In 2011 he began creating art pieces with chains and gears. His artworks at SPARK 2019 featured the movement of a needle on a circular metal plate that illuminated light bulbs. Five small artworks and one large piece appeared to use the same technique to represent the creator's purpose. When first entering the booth, the viewer encountered numerous small, intriguing artworks placed on a wall. Their size and the number of light bulbs followed a progression by sharing the same working principle: beginning with a motor that drives the movement of the needle, metal plate or ring. The overall effect appeared to demonstrate the traditional craft of watchmaking. When the needle ran around the circular metal plate, it produced friction between the contact point of the needle and the plate. The frictional energy resulted in sparks on the point of contact, which in turn provided energy to the light bulbs. The room containing this large installation was very quiet, although the variously sized artworks were in motion. In the exhibition text, Tamura wrote

When we are born, we do not strive to find meaning in anything, but as we grow up, we begin to search for the meaning of life. I do not think that a meaningless existence is necessarily a bad thing.

This approach provides room for the viewer to respond to and think of their own interpretations of the artist's 'objects'.

*Point of Contact for 20 Incandescent Lamps* (Figure 2) is composed of twenty incandescent lamps, a needle with two contact (end)points and a metal ring with two gaps. When the needle reaches the gap, the light bulbs switch off because there is no

contact point between the needle and the metal ring. The viewer can thus understand that the energy of the bulbs comes from the contact between the needle and ring. Sometimes, sparks can be observed at the contact point when the needle moves. This gives the viewer the opportunity to interpret the art piece. The needle and the ring are made of the same metal but have distinct forms and once they come into contact with each other, sparks are created. The sparks generate energy in the form of visible light and invisible electric energy, which illuminate the connected incandescent lamps.



Figure 2: Satoru Tamura: *Point of Contact for 20 Incandescent Lamps #4*, 2018. Photo by Li Nga Wun.

These art pieces reveal that their creator Satoru Tamura has a deep understanding of the relationship between energy and engineering. The most remarkable thing was the expression of the meaning of contact and connection through the form of energy and material used. It proposed a new definition of contact and connection. Although there

was limited information on the background of these artworks, the viewers were given room to imagine and create their own stories. Everything begins with contact. This can either be a small needle actively in contact with a large metal ring or plate, or vice versa. The contact produces energy, which is sometimes visible and sometimes invisible. By making use of this energy, the metal needle can connect with another medium and energy is transferred to become a bright and visible shining light. The story begins with the small sparks, or even without any sparks, and becomes a bright light that gives warmth and light to others in both an expressive and practical way. When the needle moves to the gap, the energy is transferred and the lamps switch off. This appears to be the end of this story. However, the lamps light up again after a second. This reconnection gives the impression of rebirth and happiness. It starts from nothing and becomes something. The continual motion of the needle on the metal rings also represents the running cycle, in which contact and separation occur. The relationships between contact and connection, the invisible and visible, presence and absence are fully expressed in this art piece.

The works by Satoru Tamura were some of the most frequently photographed by visitors, who seemed fascinated by *Point of Contact for 100 Incandescent Lamps* (Figure 3) a construction similar to that of *Point of Contact for 20 Incandescent Lamps* but with more light bulbs and an enlarged metal ring and needle. The needle in this installation does not create any sparks when moving on the metal ring, but simply runs at a faster speed to continuously illuminate the connected 100 incandescent lamps. The transformation from invisible to visible is expressed by the energy changing from kinetic energy to light. The sudden disturbance and interruption of the light caused by the disconnection of the needle attracted visitors, who spent a long time standing in front of the installation, which seemed to emanate an emotional power. Art has been



said to help us communicate with one another and to facilitate a more socially connected culture (Morizot, 2004), and Tamura's artwork uses the point of contact to prompt visitors to question the relationship between physical and emotional connections.

The artwork *Point of Contact for 10 Incandescent Lamps #10* displays a near-continuous connection between the metal needle and the ring. In this artwork, ten lamps are illuminated continuously. The combination of the wooden background with the aluminium sheet underneath the lamps gives a sense of peaceful harmony to the artwork (Figure 4). A similar artwork entitled *Point of Contact for 3 Incandescent Lamps #3* uses a metal plate instead of a metal ring and a different pattern of light bulbs. Here, the metal plate moves instead of the needle to drive the point of contact. This artwork is built on a wooden board and the yellowish light from the lamps provides a pleasant and warm feeling (Figure 5). Another piece displayed at Art Central was *Heart Machine #30* (Figure 6) composed of steel, chains, bearings, a motor and cables. The movement of the chains makes the two bearings turn in a symmetrical heart shape. The movement of the chains and bearings breathes life into the metal object. The heart-shaped kinetic sculpture attracted the visitor's attention, encompassing a sense of coolness and warmth, conveyed through the combination of the metal chains and bearings, encased and moving within a familiar, symbolic human form.

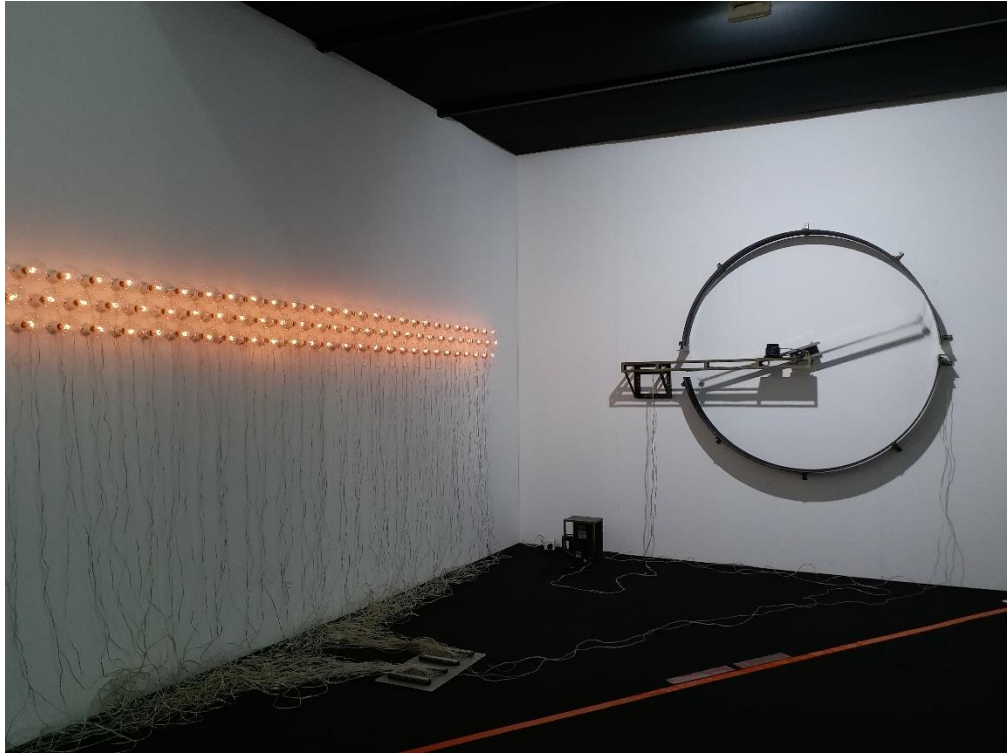


Figure 3: Satoru Tamura: *Point of Contact for 100 Incandescent Lamps*, 2018. Photo by Li Nga Wun.



Figure 4: Satoru Tamura, *Point of Contact for 10 Incandescent Lamps* 2018. Photo by Li Nga Wun.

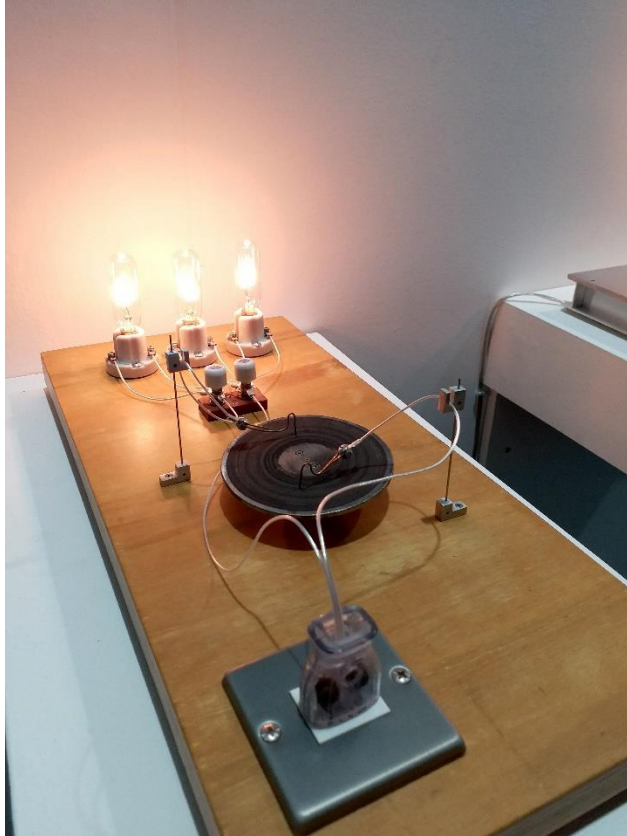


Figure 5: Satoru Tamura, *Point of Contact for 3 Incandescent Lamps #3*, 2018. Photo by Li Nga Wun.



Figure 6: Satoru Tamura, *Heart Machine #30*, 2018. This consists of steel, chains, bearings, a motor and cables. Photo by Li Nga Wun.

SPARK: The Science and Art of Creativity and Art Central 2019 were a feast for the eyes and included numerous attractive and artistic designs. It was good to see so many artists featuring technologies and mechanical theories in their art pieces, which enabled them to create their own meanings and further communicate with us through their artworks. Yong R. Kwon created a series of conceptual crafts through hundreds of handcrafted stainless-steel discs, and he plays with contrasts of senses, including cold and hot, and hard and soft. Of particular interest is how he attempts to tell the story of darkness by the reflected light in his work and gives room for the audience to experience the feeling of memory of their first love. Satoru Tamura's artwork was also impressive. He is an expert in playing with contrasts and telling stories through his

artworks. I am sure he will continue to use metal, light and wood as media to create more wonderful art pieces. Tamura tries to stay away from meaning and purpose and lets the objects resist any definition, thus providing room for the audience to create their own definitions of his work.

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