

In raptures: Dominic Hawgood photographs the evangelical experience

Sean O'Hagan

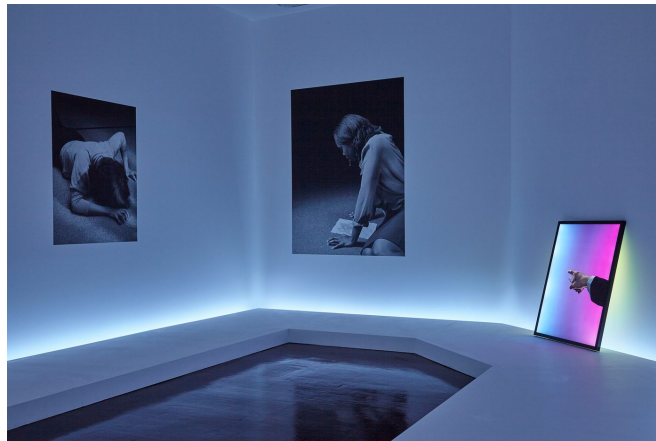
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Under the Influence, TJ Boulting, London

A review of *Under the Influence* at TJ Boulting, shown after the series won the British Journal of Photography International Photography Award.

The series looks at worship in African evangelical churches around London, including exorcisms relayed by live satellite sermon onto large screens. O'Hagan sets it apart from documentary: the interest is not in place or cultural context but in ambiguity — between the real and the supernatural, between photographic fact and fiction — and the scenes are re-enacted tableaux.

He reads the monochrome prints as carrying the charge of film-noir stills and the LED colour pieces that of advertising, notes that the whole show was rendered digitally before it was installed, and singles out the raised and outstretched hands that recur through the work. Hawgood, on winning the award: "I want people to think about what is being presented to them."

O'Hagan places the series after two earlier projects made in Texas — *Shrine*, illuminated roadside church signs around Dallas, and *The Conversation*, on speaking in tongues — and reads it as being as much about power and surrender as about belief, with the screens and lights of the churches borrowing the methods of advertising. He ends on what Hawgood will not disclose: whether a given image is real or staged, photographed or rendered.

Read the full article at theguardian.com ↗