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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

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FIRST LIGHT: OBTAINING A COSMIC PERSPECTIVE THROUGH EXPLORATIONS OF
ASTRONOMY, MATTER AND LIGHT.

Abstract

This study considers how exposure to varied experiences of light, specifically in the field of astronomy, can shape cultural perceptions. Through a production of artworks I will ask the following question: How can light act as both a conduit of information and as a material?

This line of enquiry relates to contemporary and historical anxieties concerning the effects of light pollution. In his book “The End Of Night, Searching for Darkness in an age of artificial light”. Paul Bogard explains how natural darkness is decreasing as humanity becomes dependent on city life and global populations continue to grow. Entire civilisations are bathed in artificial electric light, something which is recognized for having a detrimental effect on human psychology and biological patterns. Throughout history, the practice of astronomy has consistently allowed us to understand the universe and our place on it. This investigation considers how the masking of the night sky by light pollution not only affects our view of the night sky, but also leaves us philosophically disorientated.

In the twentieth century, astronauts began to travel to Space and were able to see the Earth suspended against the backdrop of outer space. In 1987, Frank White published “The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution” which documents the thoughts and feelings of astronauts who benefitted from such a unique experience. Consistently, the astronauts reported a shift in their perception, seeing the Earth and all living beings as interconnected. This body of research considers how it is possible to obtain such a perspective from a terrestrial standpoint despite the pervasive effects of light pollution.

In my practice, I explore the complex relationship between materials, light and our own stellar origins through the use of photosensitive materials. The use of celestial light in my practice highlights the mutability between artist, material and matter.

The text “Picturing the Cosmos” by Elisabeth Kessler compares NASA images to sublime landscapes of the American West by Thomas Moran. In this study, Kessler suggests that the use of dramatic colours, light and compositions in both fields of study invoke a feeling of awe and wonder. Both my writing and studio practice challenge the visual traditions of editing and cropping images to highlight certain features, offering instead an approach to making where light is allowed to flow naturally from object to substrate, demonstrating my own physical relationship with phenomena existing in outer space.