

Arts preview: CMA opens 'The Sun Placed in the Abyss'

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The Columbus Museum of Art borrows this title for a group exhibition opening Friday, Oct. 7, that examines humankind’s changing relationship with and understanding of the sun, and artists’ attempts to express both. Curated by CMA Associate Curator of Photography Drew Sawyer, “The Sun Placed in the Abyss” features work from the CMA’s collection as well as pieces from other local collections. Altogether, the exhibit includes the work of 50 artists and collectives who have focused their practice on the sun, examining both its technological challenges in photography and its cultural significance. The exhibition explores solar phenomena, sunlight as a medium and the romantic trope of the sunrise and sunset in photography.

“I knew I wanted to do a show that featured recent acquisitions and also to work with local collectors,” Sawyer said. “I liked the idea of a big, thematic show that would bring together certain works and present them in a way that is accessible.”

The pieces all, in some way, reference the sun in the context of

photography. Lisa Oppenheim's work uses archival imagery of the sun, exposing the images to sunlight. Artists such as Trevor Paglen and Chris McCaw have pointed their cameras directly into the sun, resulting in images that capture the deterioration of the technology in the face of the sun's power. David Horvitz's piece features an image of a sunset he took in the Maldives while at the same time his mother recorded the sunrise in Los Angeles. Sarah and Joseph Belknap overlay a host of NASA images.

Sawyer said the exhibition highlights not only work inspired by the sun, but also "the diversity of photographic practices and approaches to photography today." "This work in learning how to observe the sun is important to the development of photography," he said.

CMA has partnered with COSI, which will present an original multimedia show, "Secrets of the Sun," in its Planetarium.

"It's a wonderful blending of science and art," said COSI's Chief Scientist Dr. Paul Sutter, adding that the museum and science center's offerings will "each raise questions about the other."

COSI will explore "our changing relationship to the sun, not just as an astronomical object," Sutter said. "Over the past 400 years, what we've learned about the sun is dramatic. As we unlock new secrets, it propels us to turn to art to learn something even deeper."

The exhibition raises "questions about the sun and solar phenomena. There's no way we could address it all," Sawyer said. "It's an amazing collaboration."