

The Columbus Dispatch

Entertainment

Sun takes center stage in photos, films at Columbus Museum of Art

By Peter Tonguette/For the Columbus Dispatch

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As autumn unfolds - and the days grow shorter - an exhibit drenched in sunlight seems especially agreeable. “The Sun Placed in the Abyss,” on display at the Columbus Museum of Art, gathers photographs, films and videos depicting the sun, whether directly or indirectly. The exhibit is the brainchild of Drew Sawyer, hired last year as associate curator of photography for the museum.

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“When I got here, I knew I wanted for my first show to do something that at least started with a few recent acquisitions — things that wouldn’t have been on view recently,” said Sawyer, who selected a pair of acquisitions in which the sun was front and center: Trevor Paglen’s chromogenic print “Reaper in the Sun” and Chris McCaw’s gelatin silver paper negative “Sunburned GSP#681 (Pacific Ocean).”

In all, more than 50 artists are represented in works whose focus is the sun, with many of the most powerful images offering head-on views.

In Paglen's "Reaper in the Sun," a government drone is nearly imperceptible in a sun-drenched sky. The color is wonderfully subtle; the blinding white of the sun bleeds into the pale blue of the sky.

The title of Craig Kalpakjian's inkjet print "Introspection/Speculation (Lens Flare 274)" refers to the phenomenon encountered in sunny conditions by all photographers: The direct view of the sun results in a rash of multicolored shards in the image.

Matt Keegan's "Untitled (Light Leak)" features a chromogenic print, showing the sun peeking through dark foliage, recessed in a wall. Its borders are peeled away, suggesting that the sun has burnt through the wall itself.

Equally impressive are film and video works in the show, especially Tacita Dean's 16mm film "The Green Ray," in which the sun slowly sets in a watery horizon; and Mary Lucier's video "Equinox," in which seven monitors show various views of a sun above a bustling city.

Less tranquil is Richard Prince's chromogenic development print "Untitled (Sunset)," in which the image of two figures dancing is seemingly degraded by the ferocious red-and-yellow sun behind them.

Sarah Charlesworth makes the sun the center of attention in a clever way in "Arc of the Total Eclipse, February 26, 1979." The installation offers assorted newspaper front pages focused on the solar eclipse, but with all stories and graphics excised. All that remains are the nameplates and — of course — black-and-white photographs of the eclipse.

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