

Amélie Laurence Fortin, SUNBURST, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin

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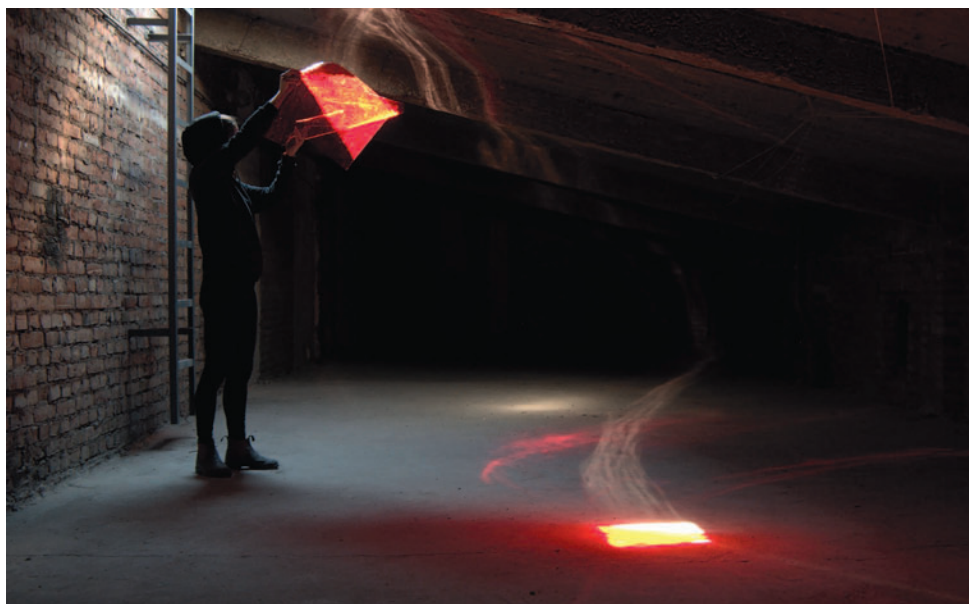
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Amélie Laurence Fortin

← *SUNBURST*, video still, 2020.

Photo : Tomasz Malinowski, courtesy of the artist

† *SUNBURST*, exhibition view, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2020.

Photo : courtesy of the artist

Amélie Laurence Fortin

SUNBURST

French Canadian artist Amélie Laurence Fortin's practice is characterized by a commitment to exploring the unknown. This intrinsic need is reflected in the works on view in *SUNBURST*, her solo show at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin. Stranded in a Warsaw apartment during the first wave of lockdowns in March, Fortin turned her attention toward the cosmos.

A ray of sunlight beaming through a skylight and dust in an attic became the raw material for her performative exploration of the dwarf star at the pivotal axis of our solar system. The sun, like the depths of our oceans and the workings of our brains, is both omnipresent and largely unexplored—close but beyond bounds. Stellar phenomena such as solar storms directly impact our ecosystem and technologies, but largely remain a mystery. Fortin weaves the solar thread with a piece of red foil and captures the process on camera. The molding of the ephemeral material is an attempt to intuitively understand spaces beyond human conception.

After peering through one of the first microscopes at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the poet Constantijn Huygens enthusiastically exclaimed: "This new world must be drawn in the arts!" And although bacteria and fungi would not become as favoured a motif as Huygens had hoped for, one may sense the same enthusiasm in Fortin's exploration of cosmic phenomena. In the end, they are both employing the same optical process: that of bringing their surroundings to human scale. But while the sciences scale space with numbers (Huygens's son was the first physicist to propose a mathematical theory of light), Fortin actively throws her own body into the emptiness delimited by human knowledge. In doing so she demonstrates that in essence, understanding is a performative gesture, one that constantly requires a return to the site of discovery to renegotiate. This performative method of generating knowledge was pioneered by Aby

Warburg in the 1920s, most noticeably with his associative map, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–29). Like Warburg, who draws lines from antiquity through the Renaissance and to the present, Fortin draws on the primal human need to map the space that surrounds us.

But Fortin's trajectory reaches not only into the present, but towards the unknown. Her works are predictive models, of the yet to come and not yet fully acknowledged. Her practice calls to mind both Yves Klein's paradigmatic *Leap into the Void* (1960) and Søren Kierkegaard's parable of the *qualitative leap by faith*. In both cases, highly contrived processes are veiled behind seeming spontaneity—Klein's leap is preempted by the clever manipulation of photography, Kierkegaard's by existential reflection. In Fortin's exhibition, while a *Scheinspontaneität* (apparent spontaneity) is discernible in her play with sunlight, a modular machine that projects its hypnotic dance onto the gallery wall openly displays the back end of the process. It is fed with data that forecasts solar and geophysical activity, which in turn dictates its movement. Uniting performative spontaneity with a skeletal structure that interprets scientific data, is akin to juxtaposing Klein's leap with the crowd that waited to catch him—revealing how illusion becomes a *prerequisite* for understanding.

Gustav Elgin

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