Imaging Saturn (Modeling Views) Risa Horowitz



Presented by Video Pool Media Arts Centre in collaboration with PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts

Opening reception 29 January, 7pm Gallery walk-through Saturday, 30 January, 2pm

29 January - 12 March 2016, at PLATFORM: 121-100 Arthur St. Winnipeg MB

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EXHIBITION 29 January - 12 March 2016 RECEPTION 29 January, 7pm ARTIST TALK Saturday, 30 January, 2pm

STATEMENT

I saw Saturn through a telescope for the first time in spring 2010 and it brought me to tears. I became immediately aware of the real-ness of the planet, its simultaneous closeness and distance, and the incomprehensible scale of the universe. We are, for the most part, Earthbound, forgetting that we are hurtling through space, along with a multitude of other bodies also hurtling through space. Despite appearances it isn't the stars that we see move when we look up; it is us down here, on Earth.

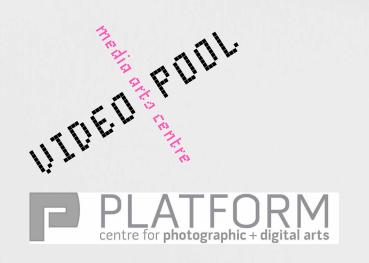
I have become an amateur astronomer as part of my art practice. I want to nurture, across disciplines and media, our shared desire to know ourselves and be known. The project deals with themes of participatory science and data-visualization, and explores crossovers and distinctions between training that defines an expert and enthusiasm that defines an amateur.

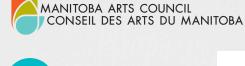
Imaging Saturn (Modeling Views) is a selection of images and objects that depict what Saturn looks like throughout its orbit. The exhibition is not illustrative; the viewer does not need to know the science. Within the exhibition there are photographs, and there are some lines and circles that refer to the paths of the sun, stars, and Saturn. There are some apparently Modernist sculptures on the wall that swing back and forth. There is a kinetic sculpture that propels a model of Saturn around the gallery. And there is a video of that object in motion.

BIOGRAPHY

Risa Horowitz is a visual and media artist and associate professor of visual arts at the University of Regina. She has lived and worked in seven Canadian provinces as an artist, educator, writer, and gallery programmer and is represented in Toronto by MKG127 Gallery. Horowitz's art practice tends toward blurring the boundaries between the expert and amateur, hobby and work, and leisure and productivity. Her current long-term project, Imaging Saturn, has involved becoming an amateur astronomer and astro-photographer. Horowitz is photographing the planet each year of its 29year orbit (2011-2040), and creating works in drawing, video, cross-stitch, and kinetic/electronic sculpture. The project has been supported by the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council for the Arts. She is also a tournament Scrabble competitor and vegetable gardener.

Risa Horowitz is grateful for the support of a Production Grant to New Media and Audio Artists from the Canada Council for the Arts. Horowitz would also like to thank Rob Cruickshank, Ray Peterson, David Gerhard, and Jesse Goddard for their technical assistance; Geremy Lague, Simon Fuh, and Karlee Stein for their studio assistance; Melentie Pandilovski and PLATFORM for arranging the exhibition, and Erika Lincoln for some very important conversations about making art.





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Risa Horowitz - Imaging Saturn

In 1662, the French mathematician Pascal conavailable frames; the greater the resolution fessed dread in Pensée 201 over the "eternal and detail afforded by the video, the greater silence of these infinite spaces" that exist percentage of stacked frames were composited. between the stars. This is perhaps the best The second, complimentary component, Rings, consists of twenty-nine kinetic serknown expression of the transcendental terror of the infinite. Since the work on transfinite vomotor sculptures, each one representing, as with the aforementioned photographs, a single sets by the German mathematician, Georg Cantor, however, the infinite has become secularyear of the project's duration, and moving ized; no longer the source of a quasi-religious back and forth along a vertical axis to reprefear, the infinite is in principle subject to sent the appearance of Saturn as it traverses calculation, to human ratiocination. While on the terrestrial sky each evening. the one hand this might seem like another mo-A third component, Ecliptic, Stars and Saturns (2011-2040), interprets a Mercator ment in the post-Weberian "disenchantment of projection map of a part of the celestial the world," from another perspective this is, as Ray Brassier claims in Nihil Unbound: Ennight sky as seen from Earth, in which large open circles refer to the position of Saturn lightenment and Extinction, a situation that relative to the ecliptic on a specific day of "deserves to be celebrated as an achievement each year, full circles represent the stars of intellectual maturity, not bewailed as a debilitating impoverishment." The difference of the zodiacal constellations though which Saturn passes, and a solid line represents the between the two alternatives is stark: on the apparent path of the Sun "moving" across the one hand, we have the danger of the power of sky. This stellar cartography is supplementhuman reason becoming its own myth of enchanted by the photograph Hydrogen-Alpha Filtered ment (as per Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment, in which the liberation prom-Sun, revealing solar sunspots and prominences ised by ratiocination becomes its own trap). as photographed in August 2015, grounding the On the other hand, we have the potential for a former pieces in the physical reminder that, positivist nihilism, in which human rationalwhile so many human measurements necessarily ity, defined as the reason of strong, escapes take the Earth as their frame of reference, these measurements can more properly be taken any sort of immanent critique and whose legacy from a heliocentric frame. of domination and destruction is apparent. How is it possible, then to navigate between these The final components, Orbiter and the two unpalatable alternatives: between recidivideo based on it, Viewing Models, explore the relative movement of Saturn as it corresponds vist myth and eliminativist nihilism? In beto our terrestrial viewpoint. In the former tween these two alternatives falls the Imaging Saturn project undertaken by Risa Horowitz.

The variety of works of art that make up the present iteration of this project indegree axis. In the case of the video, refercorporate photography, video, 3D modelling, ences to the imagery of astronomical science kinetic sculpture, cut vinyl, and computer in popular culture corresponding to the secassisted design. The works are based on real ond largest planet in our solar system, whose distinctive rings and myriad moods resonate in astronomical investigation undertaken by the artist in a manner which combines the legathe collective imaginary. cy of the amateur stargazer and the visual One thing of note is the degree to which databases produced by professional astrono-Horowitz does not activate the mythic potentials of "Saturn" in the public imaginary: mers in the course of their research. The e.g., the Titan Saturn of Greek antiquity, the core of this project generally and this expernicious astrological influence of the planhibition in particular-a response to viewing Saturn-is the production of Saturn's image, et on the melancholic (as per Richard Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy). The imagery deployed the long duration of its "year" (comparable to 29.42 terrestrial years), and the nature in this exhibition is rigorously grounded in contemporary scientific procedure: both in of parallax and the terrestrial-centric relaterms of the content of the art works as well tion between human viewers and the celestial bodies (the movement and position of Saturn, as the techniques of their creation. But does indeed all celestial bodies, being recordthis lead to the sort of eliminativism dised relative to the position of the Earth). cussed in the opening paragraph? The answer As befits such a complicated dynamic system is, obviously, no: Horowitz navigates the reof contigencies and necessities, Imaging cidivism/nihilism divide by developing a mode of rationality that is not, as in the case Saturn consists of many intricately relatof the eliminativist position, fetishistic ed parts. There are five photographs of the as-yet-unfinished Imaging Saturn (2011-2040) towards technological science. Instead, the secular infinities of the vast distances of the series, a series which consists of a photograph taken every year for the entirety of the celestial bodies and the nonhuman durations planet's rotation around the Sun (thus, there are called together to produce opportunities are photos for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and for imaginative response. Thus, we might look 2015, with 2016 to 2040 forthcoming). Using upon the thirty-year project of Imaging Saturn as a refusal of both eliminativism as well as digital cameras, webcams, and iPhone cameras conservative anti-rationalism: a contribution attached to telescopes, the images that we see to a speculative inhumanism. are the stacked composites of the clearest

case, a kinetic sculpture moves around a ten foot diameter rising/falling along a ninety

- Tom Kohut