

VISUAL ARTS

Ode to a troubled planet and its sun

By Charles Desmarais

An art exhibition built around global warming sounds like a downer.

But “10,000 Fahrenheit,” on view at the San Francisco Arts Commission through Nov. 17, is no rehash of the horrid environmental news of the day, no self-righteous polemic. An exhibition in progressive San Francisco can rightly assume that most visitors share the frustration and abject fear engendered by knowledge of what we are doing to our planet.

Rather, without a hint of treacle, the show is an elegiac visual ode to the sun, the Earth and the frail relationship between the two.

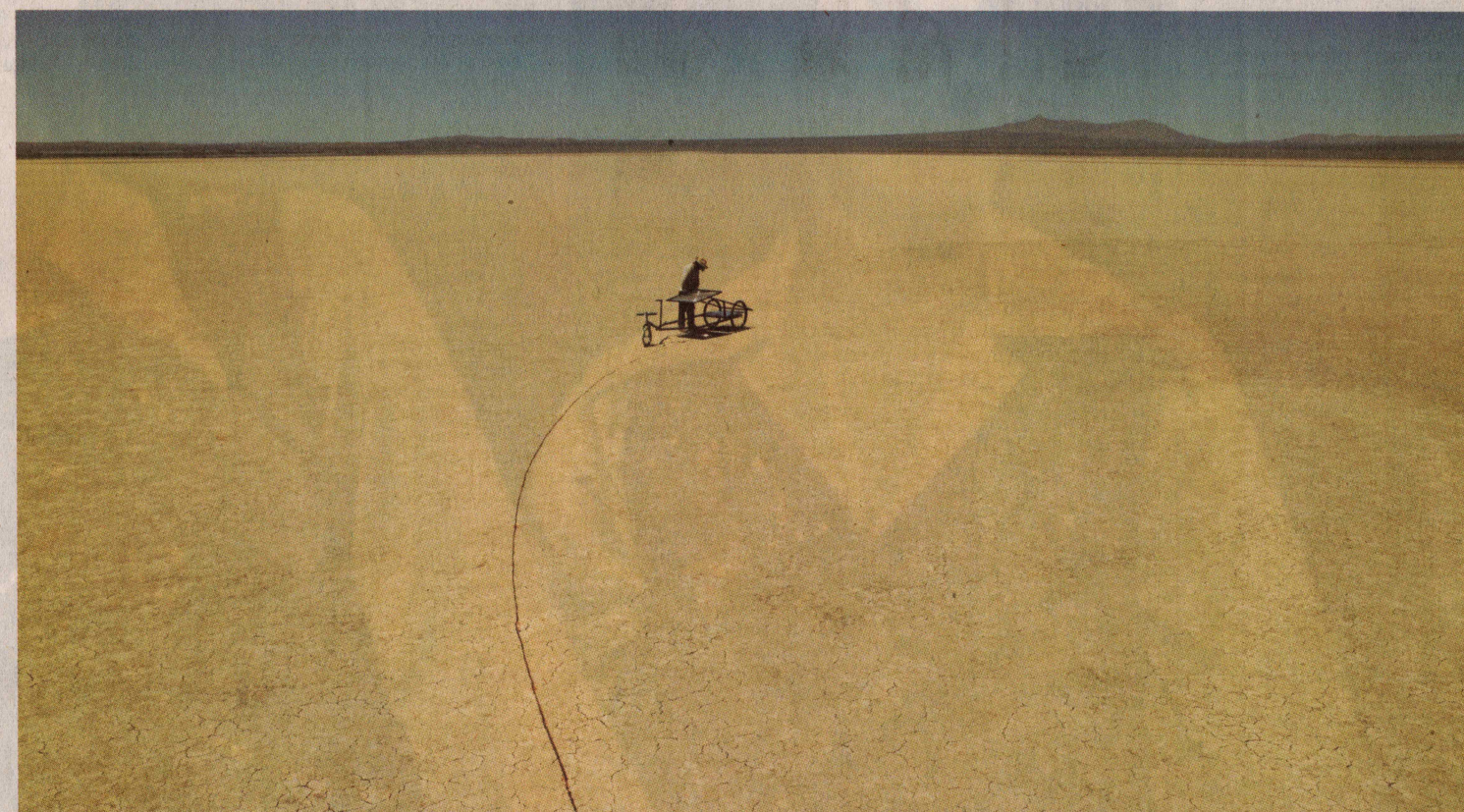
Though relatively small — it comprises no more than 25 works, the products of nine artists — the exhibition is everything much larger presentations on topics of current political import try, and fail, to be. While potentially raising awareness, it offers no simplistic solutions, implicitly recognizing that everyone must find their own way, ecological or political, activist or personal.

There might be a time for sloganeering, a place for marching and making righteous noise. This, however, is a space for reflection.

The exhibition opens with an array of pictures of solar eclipses by the great Bay Area photographer Linda Connor. Rather than employing her own camera for this series, Connor printed from 19th century glass-plate negatives that are housed at the University of California’s Lick Observatory. The prints are produced by an antique process with the kind of care and meticulous craft for which the artist is known, in tones of dusky browns and purples. Cracks and ragged edges in the original plates become part of the new works, bringing to descriptions of an awesome celestial phenomenon a human delicacy and fragility.

Lisa K. Blatt’s photographic works are unmanipulated abstractions, records of a meditative focus on the color, light and limpidity of, the title tells us, the “Clearest Lake in the World.” They are images that bring to our attention the most significant elements of the artist’s visit to such a site: the impurities and disruptions that are not there.

Chris McCaw’s photographs are frequently exhibited in the Bay Area, yet his method of working retains its interest for viewers. Using hand-built cameras and specialized lenses, he concentrates the power of the sun so intently on his paper negatives that the in-camera sheets darken, scorch and, sometimes, burn. That metaphor of savage vision is em-



William Lamson

William Lamson’s “A Line Describing the Sun” (video still, 2010) documents the artist’s slow and careful work in the desert.



Linda Connor / Haines Gallery, S.F.

Linda Connor’s prints of 19th century eclipses were made from glass-plate negatives housed at Lick Observatory.

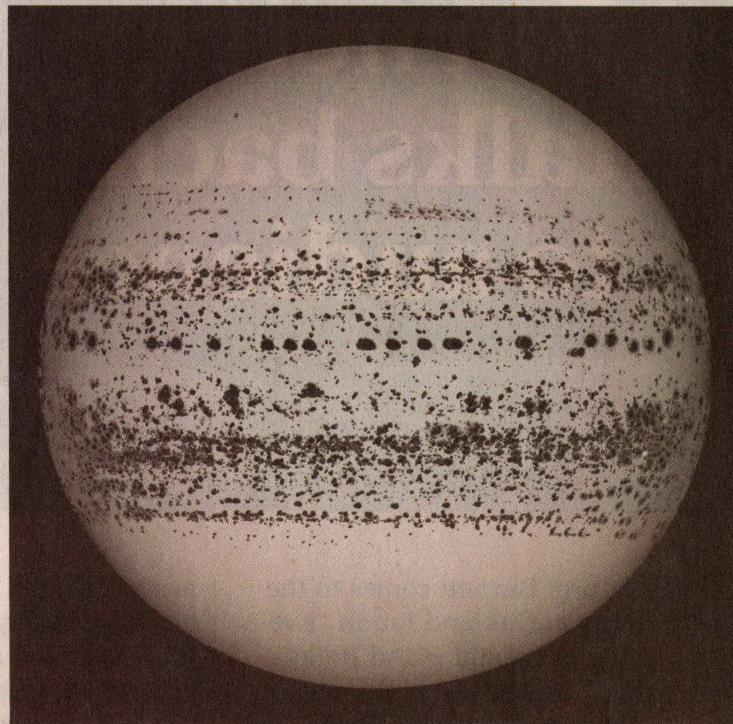
ployed here in a 2015 work titled “North Slope, Alaska, Within the Arctic Circle,” a long picture made in a revolving camera that followed the summer sun in its meanders across the Arctic sky.

Sarah and Joseph Belknap map a different solar energy, recording NASA sunspot reports, while Chris Duncan both controls and obeys the sun’s power, allowing it to bleach the fabrics that will support his paintings and accepting as matrices the abstract shapes it

leaves behind.

SFAC Galleries director Meg Shiffler organized the exhibition, the best of many good shows I have seen in the space. An excellent smaller exhibition, “Young Suh: Wildfires,” also runs through Nov. 17 and complements the primary offering.

Shiffler perfectly placed three works in video at strategic spots in “10,000 Fahrenheit.” The most prominent gallery wall is occupied by Antonia Wright’s “Under the Water Was Sand,



Sarah and Joseph Belknap

Sarah and Joseph Belknap map solar energy using NASA sunspot reports in “Twelve Months of Sun Spots” (2014).

“10,000 Fahrenheit”: 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Tuesdays–Saturdays. Through Nov. 17. Free. San Francisco Arts Commission Main Gallery, Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., Suite 126, S.F. 415-252-2255. www.sfartscommission.org

Then Rocks, Miles of Rocks, Then Fire” (2016). It’s a deceptively simple piece, showing a figure in a fantastic costume that suggests brilliant flames of red, yellow and orange against a vast blue sky. The creature shuffles unsurely across a field of ice until, inevitably, the ice gives way and the sun goddess falls through, sinking slowly out of sight.

William Lamson’s 2010 “A Line Describing the Sun” documents the artist’s slow and

careful vitrification of an arc of desert crust with a powerful Fresnel lens. And Jean-Pierre Aubé leaves us with nothing but an orb of fiery gases in “31 So-leils (Dawn Chorus)” (2010). It might as well be a sign saying, simply, “The End.”

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