

»Stellar Spectra«

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In »Stellar Spectra« arbeitet James Nizam mit dem unvorstellbar alten Licht der Sterne und begibt sich in eine anhaltende Tradition menschlichen Bestrebens, Informationen mit dem Universum auszutauschen. Gleichzeitig fasziniert ihn die Idee, visuelle Codes durch mediale Umformungen in sensorische oder Audiosignale zu übersetzen und somit erfahrbar oder gar verständlich zu machen. Im Geiste von Johannes Kepler, Alexander Graham Bell und Samuel Morse greift Nizam dabei das Experimentieren mit Licht auf, welches jene Pioniere schon im 17. und 19. Jahrhundert unternommen hatten. Jedoch tut er dies mit überwiegend philosophischer denn technologischer Ausrichtung.

Das Hörbarmachen von Lichtwellen. Komprimieren und Dehnen von Zeitintervallen. Sonnenlicht, zurückgeworfen (und umcodiert) vom Relief eines Tonträgers: Die Arbeiten aus »Stellar Spectra« gehen der Frage nach, wie die Informationen aus dem Ursprung zu begreifen wären. Aus dem Ursprung des Lichts, das uns von unendlich fernen Sternen erreicht wie auch aus unserem eigenen.

Nizam betrachtet die Analogie wissenschaftlich erfasster Daten, Medien und Ausmaße. Sie lässt annehmen, dass es, freilich enorm komplex, einen grundlegenden Code für die Entstehung des Universums gibt. Ein Code, der prinzipiell dechiffrierbar ist.

Der Künstler interpretiert und ändert den Informationsfluss. Dieser Eingriff ist in Fotografien festgehalten, auf Schallplatten gepresst und nimmt skulpturale Gestalt an. Seine eigentliche Form ist jedoch die der Welle. Empfangen aus dem All und wieder dahin gesendet, wird daraus zugleich ein Werk des Künstlers und des Kosmos.



James Nizam ponders cosmic questions minutely. His particulars also have universal associations. He is fascinated by how visual codes reverberate across many material instantiations and how they might be translated across sensory conveyances. The works in »Stellar Spectra« orbit one another, enacting how data is translated and can be exchanged between the visible and audible. The exhibition explores both the immediate and interstellar dimensions of Nizam's works in their reciprocity.

»Stellar Spectra« examines how we decode sources and origins, whether our own as a species in the cosmos, or that of light that reaches us from stars. The photograph SOS can be taken as a starting point. Shot on a clear and moonless night, Nizam's 42-minute exposure yielded an image of star trails against the night sky. Always intent to make the artist and his technology's presence known, he opened and closed the camera's aperture in a way that interrupted the traces of the star's and planet's axial rotation to create a language, the dashes and dots that speak 'SOS' in Morse Code. This visual repetition produces human language and suggests communication, but who is contacting whom? Nizam and his camera are not passive receivers. The technology and artist actively translate cosmic information. As we see in Nizam's fascination with reflective, re-turned data is also bounced back to the ether.

Nizam's new work builds on powerful precedents in art and science. The co-inventor of Morse Code, Samuel Morse, was also a prominent 19th-century American painter. His conventionally picturesque landscape views provided Robert Smithson with a negative example of how to envision our planet in his essay "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967). Where Smithson looked to the ground-level grittiness of Passaic's post-industrial 'monuments,' however, Nizam (in kinship with Pythagoras, Kepler, and others who were curious about the sound of the cosmos), looks up to the stars and planets. He went to great lengths to sonify SOS using image-to-sound conversion software to transform what we see into audible sound waves. The resulting sound work - Score - accentuates the equivalences in data, medium, and scale that Nizam wants to convey across this exhibit. Twinned with the photograph's exposure, Score is also 42' in duration, too long to play on one side of a 12" vinyl record. The solution? To cut the master at 66 rpm to compress the duration into 21 minutes and play it at 16 rpm on the purpose-built turntable that we see in this room. This process expands the whole back to 42,' which we hear on a continuous loop. A synecdoche for the exhibit as a whole, his device compresses and expands time simultaneously.

Because Nizam's individual works are discrete yet also interrelated on an essential plane, we are encouraged to move from one to another and back again. Nizam's disks – particularly the reflective surface of the stamper used to impress the grooves into vinyl records – not only transcribe stellar light but also allude to a famous attempt to communicate with the cosmos, the Golden Record that Carl Sagan and his colleagues created as a time capsule record of Earth's sounds and cultures. Launched into our solar system aboard Voyager 1 and 2 in 1977, the Golden Record awaits an audience, but the spacecraft are still communicating with Earth. The first track on the Golden Record's 'Sounds of the Earth' section was American composer Laurie Spiegel's realization of Kepler's music of the spheres, described in his book Harmonices Mundi (1619), another inspiration for Nizam's project.

»Stellar Spectra« brings imponderably old starlight into our present experience. Correspondences occur across extreme distances as well as intimately, among media. For example, Nizam's three photographs of starbursts in a limestone quarry on Texeda Island, near Vancouver, link in myriad ways with SOS. Suggesting sound but in itself quietly reflective in all senses, the stamper, which is the 'father' of the record playing on the phonograph, sits on a nearby plinth. Where the grooves of vinyl records display micro topographies, these photographs show a large-scale and decidedly anthropocentric landscape onto whose unnatural plateaus Nizam manoeuvered the reflective stamper to align with the sun's light, capturing yet also creating the starbursts we see in the photos shown here. The ascending/descending solar scale that the photographs record participates in the endless cycle in which humans exchange data with the universe. The sun is both source and receiver of this light.

Nizam photographs starlight. He presses it into vinyl and takes the stamper and turns it back into a mine of starlight in the quarry. With Spindle, he carves this ephemeral emanation into a sculptural form, as if to hold it for our inspection. The source for the spindle's profile is the sound waves in Spiegel's Harmony of the World (1977). Spindle is thus a recollective homage to Spiegel and Kepler that resonates with other works in the exhibition.

The works in Nizam's exhibition extend the metaphorical, philosophical, and technological experimentation with the registration and redeployment of light pioneered in the 19th century - particularly the 'heliograph,' which allowed sunlight to 'write' onto a mirrored surface that is then manipulated to bounce a message in Morse Code to a distant viewer, and Alexander Graham Bell's remarkable 'photophone' of 1880, which conveyed sound on light beams. Bell's brainchild projected the voice towards a mirror, which in turn transmitted soundwaves towards a second mirror that decoded the data back into a human voice. No electricity was needed. »Stellar Spectra« as a whole stages similar relays of light and sound. In the room with Spindle, for example, are several Starlight Drawings, summative works that push Nizam's translations of light into abstraction. As in SOS, Nizam's camera receives the faint light from the night sky and again interrupts the initially mute and regular progressions by opening and closing the aperture. Here the artist has added mechanically controlled lenses to his camera. The imprint of his movements - stopping and starting and now moving in and out - appear on the photograph as wave forms travelling into or out of space, the hand work of the artist and the cosmos. The many permutations that comprise »Stellar Spectra« suggest that even in the complexities of the interrelationships we witness, there is a fundamental code for the makeup of the universe that we can fleetingly perceive and translate.



































- 1 »Circumvolution« 2017 . Lightjetprint / lightjetprint . 61 x 95.8 cm
- 2 »Sequence« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 121.9 x 152.4 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP
- 3 »Solar Scale (Tertian)« 2017 . Pigmentprint auf Barytpapier / pigment print on baryta paper . 91.44 x 114.3 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP
- 4 »Starlight Drawing (Cut)« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 101.6 x 81.28 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP
- 5 »SOS« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 121.9 x 152.4 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP
- 6 **»Solar Scale (Quintet)«** 2017 . Pigmentprint auf Barytpapier / pigment print on baryta paper . 121.9 x 152.4 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP
- 7 »Music of the Spheres« 2017. modifizierter Schallplattenspieler Autoloop 16U/min, Verstärker, Installation mit 2 elektrostatischen Lautsprechern/ modified turntable, auto loop - 16rpm, amplifier, installation with 2 electro-static speakers. 60.96 x 45.72 x 88.9 cm / 248.92 x 60.96 x 10.16 cm . Ed. 3 + 1 AP

»Score« 2017 . Schallplatte, 42min Komposition / vinyl record, 42min soundscape . 30.48 cm

8 »Starlight Drawing (Bloom)« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 81.28 x 101.6 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP

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- 9 »Disc« 2017 . vernickelte Positivmatrize, Schaukasten / nickel-plated (father) disc, glass display box . 139.7 x 50.8 x 45.72 cm
- 10 »Spindle (after Laurie Spiegel's "harmonices mundi") « 2017 . gedrechseltes Ahornholz, Karbon, Pigment, Wachs/ turned maple wood, carbon, pigment, wax . 304.8 x 10.16 cm . Ed. 3 + 1 AP
- 11 »Solargraph (View of Texada quarry generated in Paint Can-Mera« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 17.8 x 25.4 cm
- »Paint Can-Mera« 2017 . Farbdose, Rost, Klebeband, retroreflektierender Staub, Cinefoil / paint can, rust, tape, cinefoil, retro reflective microsphere . 19.5 x 17 x 17 cm
- 12 »Starlight Drawing (Gate)« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 81.28 x 101.6 cm . Ed. 5 + 2 AP

Titelbild / cover image: »Starlight Drawing (Track)« 2017 . Lightjetprint auf Dibond / lightjetprint on dibond . 101.6 cm x 81.28 . Ed. 5 + 2 AP

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