

# UrbanGlass

## Lucia Riffel and Lily Reeves: *Outer Special*

Curated by Angelica Fox

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*Outer Special*, illustrates the inherent human need to invent a personal reality through the connection of emotion and experience. The exhibition explores how the void, most commonly associated with the emptiness of outer space, can be viewed as a desirable location in an alternative reality; a space that fluctuates between digital utopia and a dismal, dystopian, post-human landscape. Artists Lucia Riffel and Lily Reeves explore the micro to macro realities that both surround and escape us, and question what would happen if the void coalesced with the real world.

*Outer Special* breaks the void into three key categories: the transcendence of light, the unknown, and altered reality; and includes three new installations created in collaboration by artists Riffel and Reeves, *Light Architect*, *Where Are We*, and *Altered Sublimity, Revised*. The concept of the void is often depicted in popular culture, notably in science fiction genre film and television. A common trope places the protagonists far from home and lost in space. This plot device draws from the emotion of fear and describes the human need to escape what is unknown and return back to a reality easily perceived. These traits associated with the void and reflected in sci-fi characters provoke questions of why we are inherently afraid or uncomfortable with what we do not know. This exhibition examines these questions and validates that the void can, as a matter of choice, become a tranquil space offering opportunities for meditation and self-reflection.

The void is depicted in many other disciplines as well. In particular, art allows artists to explore and emphasize the possibility for nothingness and infinite space. Minimalist artist Yves Klein, for instance, explored this idea in his 1958 exhibition *The Void* at the Iris Clert Gallery. In this exhibition he whitewashed the walls, installed nothing within, and put forward that a gallery space can transcend dimension and exist in a psychological space marked by nothingness. Klein's exhibition at the Iris Clert Gallery was significant because he made a connection between the void's ability to travel between alternative dimensions and realities. However, he did not recognize the role his artwork could play in the discussion of the void. Like Klein, Riffel and Reeves recognize their art has the ability to exist and transcend across dimensions. However, they depart Klein's train of thought and believe their art can also exist in this new dimension. *Outer Special* as a whole departs from Klein's take and instead features three installations by Riffel and Reeves that seek to exist in multiple dimensions - physical, digital, and somewhere in between - incorporating elements of light, shadow, and reflection.

Upon entering the exhibition space, one is met with an array of bright colors, projected videos, neon, argon and krypton-filled sculptures, and reflected mirrors. The exhibition is broken into three sections, or artist-made portals, which seek to bring the viewer into spaces that explore concepts related to the void. All three

installations are installed in unconventional ways on the floor, on the wall, and on the ceiling. The works include vivid colors and are loud in their appearance but are importantly marked by including no sound. The first theme of the show, transcendence of light, is represented by Riffel and Reeves' work *Light Architect* which explores the concept of light and lack of light.

*Light Architect* takes over the back corner of the gallery tucked away from the light, and extends over the floor and the wall. The work is made up of two projected videos that incorporate different shapes and colors in a shifting landscape, as well as, black sand, glass orbs filled halfway with water, glass cones, space rock, marbles, and suspended argon-filled glass tubes. When the light of the projected video hits the sand, water, space rock, and sculptural materials, a composition of color and sparkle merge together. In this work, the artists take on the role of the architect, working directly with the manipulation of light and how light impacts experience.

Incorporating constantly changing colors, the work subconsciously captures interest and it is difficult to look away. While at first it seems to exist in a space of utopia, the projected and shifting landscape is meant to speak to vastness and the idea that space does not need to exist in a specific place. The transcendence of light and color transports the viewer into a meditative space, that while could be perceived to be within a void, the colors of purple, pink, and blue calm any sense of alarm and bring the viewer further and further into the space. However, the ephemeral nature of the elements together illuminate spaces between the structure of a place, notably spaces of light.

While *Light Architect* seeks to look at spaces often overlooked in reality, the next installation located in the middle of the exhibition questions *Where Are We*. The exploration of the void or the unknown oftentimes leads to feelings of fear and anxiety. *Light Architect* exists in a utopia, manipulates light, and has meditative qualities that provoke calmness. However, not all mentions of the void can exist in a utopia, and *Where Are We* moves towards a dismal landscape. This work is influenced by Reeves' past *Suncatcher Series*, a sculpture of glass objects, mirrors, and neon, arranged to capture and project the natural light of sunrise.

*Where Are We* is a departure from Reeves' earlier work, using the artificial gallery light and made up of curved mirrors, intending to reflect a reality that distorts what is real, what is projected, and where your place is in this space. Made of argon and krypton-filled glass, mirror, video, sand and hardware, the light of krypton and argon-filled glass in this installation blends together and the reflection in the four mirrors distorts and contrasts space. Riffel and Reeves seek to evoke emotion from the blinding light produced from this work, and bring forth thoughts from the void of its unknown quality. Their collaborative work, *Where Are We*, seeks to distort the viewers' perception of space. The void here is focusing the viewers' attention to recognize what they see. In order to activate the work, the artists invite viewers to look into any of the mirrors. Instead of seeing a normal perfect mirror image, the viewers own self is distorted and brought into a plane of dizzying color and reflection. The distortion of oneself seeks to not create panic, but allow for inward reflection on our place in the artwork's subliminal, placeless yet never-ending space. The manipulation of natural light is very important for this work and in this context is dimmed through the use

of purple film on the window to render a space that a visitor has never been to before. While this environment could be considered empty, it bends the rules of our reality through a heightened attention to negative space.

While *Light Architect* and *Where Are We* seek to look at spaces and questions often overlooked in reality, the final installation in the exhibition understands reality is often overlooked due to our perception, and seeks to bring the viewer further into the void and within an altered reality. *Altered Sublimity, Revised* is a work that revisits Riffel's past video work *Altered Sublimity*, which warps the colors and walls of a space marked by columns and a ceiling fan. These elements remain in this new work but are now accompanied with sculptural elements made by Reeves mirroring aspects of Riffel's video, including the columns, mylar reflective paper, and geometric neon fixtures. The mirrored physical elements on top of the digital elements transport the visitor through the void and into the artists' created alternative reality, or the sublime. Surrounded by distorted measures, the concept of place and associated emotions are completely removed. The artists seek to leave the viewer feeling that the unknown can be a place for reflection and meditation.

Together artists Riffel and Reeves are deeply involved in the interrelation between their work and the visitors' emotional experience. Their installations on view play with light and reflection and seek to transport us into a new reality. The titles of their work seamlessly follow the themes of the exhibition: the transcendence of light, the unknown, and altered reality; and define the artists grappling with our current reality, questioning their whereabouts, taking on the role of light architects, and transcending the viewer through the void and to the sublime. The exhibition is designed with a sensitivity to light, placement, and the unique architecture of UrbanGlass. The three installations are installed in terms of light, and allow the viewer to enter in the darkest space and move towards the light, a practice familiar of moving outside of the void. The work of Riffel and Reeves utilizes the idea of the "white cube" as a blank canvas on which an entire world is projected for the purpose of adding depth to how reality is reflected and perceived. Overall, *Outer Special* seeks to be a special space for visitors to transcend physical and digital realities in an effort to understand the void.

**About the Curator: Angelica Fox**, Development Assistant at The Museum of Modern Art, is passionate about curating art that is accessible and engages audiences in new and surprising ways. She holds an MA in Art History with a focus on public art from The City College of New York, CUNY and a BA in Art History, Museum Studies from Arizona State University. With previous curatorial experience in Arizona, Fox is thrilled to curate *Outer Special*, her first exhibition in New York.