

PROXIMAL ORBIT | STEPH FULLER

Throughout history, humans have gazed upwards and drawn upon the sky's phenomena. Practices of navigating, storytelling, measuring time and spirituality have emerged from this act. Our human sense of time and scale cannot help but come to the forefront as we look up into the past, observing distant features that are years away and embedded in the cosmos' history, yet just present in ours.

Proximal Orbit emerges from Steph Fuller's position of being unable to directly participate in deep space exploration, yet being completely fascinated by it. Fuller has instead spent years exploring the photographic archives of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which has come to profoundly inform her artistic practice. Through the careful composition of objects and balancing of light, Fuller's photographs often parallel the spectacles held within NASA's records, or move beyond to reveal the affective capacities of such imagery.

Labouring over the construction of these elegant assemblages, Fuller acts as an alchemist of dust, light, water, and web. These entities are already moving through transformative states, with Fuller further teasing out their inherent qualities until they spark into poetic and otherworldly compositions.

Fuller transforms the familiar into the fantastic. Stirring the dormant potential of a domestic landscape, she creates universes in the corners of her home. A spatter of toothpaste across a bathroom mirror shifts into a constellation of stars. As dust settles upon a pool of water, thrown light illuminates a cosmos within its surface. Fuller works to capture these sequences of drama, stillness and beauty. The heights of these fleeting moments are first preserved by the camera's memory, now either stable within the paper's ink, or set to perpetually transform as moving image works such as *Deep Space*.

When stepping into a dark theatre, our eyes need time to adjust to our surroundings. Fuller throws us into this darkness, only shedding light to reveal mysterious silhouettes, or to gently bask things in a pale numinous glow. Balanced acts of masking and revealing influence how we spend time with the works, our eyes digging in the darkness until other forms gently reveal themselves in the shadows.

In *Saturn*, we admire the luminous rings that appear to float in space, until we can make sense of the quiet figure that appears in the centre of this movement, akin to the eye of a storm. A thread running through these works is the positioning of the human form as a magnetic centre for other beings to orbit. Bodies feature in each of the works; bodies of water, bodily matter in the form of dust, insects, and the forceful forms of heat and light. Undisguised objects, such as a lit cigarette or match, sit at home within the series as we consider the energetic state they are captured in. The photograph's power draws from the fundamental energies that these entities emit.

Insects become alien forms that we see as if for the first time. The glistening trail of a slug reveals its navigation across a pulsing landscape. We are voyeurs of the intimate bodies becoming delicately aware of each other. The curve of a figure becomes a landscape for a fine-legged creature to rove across. These bodies introduce an unpredictable element to Fuller's orchestrated compositions, as they spur the quiet scenes into life. Insects facilitate a shift in scale, as the bodily surfaces they meander across could almost be mistaken for expansive and uncharted landscapes. We are further reminded of the slippage between macro and micro as our eyes rest upon the spiral of the garden snail's shell. Its regular pattern mirrors that of its marine mollusc relative; the Nautilus, with its bodily sequence embedded in mathematic systems, and in turn, lending itself to our understanding that all forces and beings are entangled.

The glimmering large-scale surface of *Night Sky* creates an immersive space for viewers to become absorbed within. It calls for a focused gaze; one that is reminiscent of times spent at the beach, where one can concentrate on a single point in the shallow water, and in turn, the quiet presence and movement of small sea life is revealed through ones peripheral vision. *Night Sky* captures this feeling that we cannot always take in everything that surrounds us, and embodies the practice of slowing down. It invites us to become lost in the vast landscapes of this universe, if only for a minute.

Proximal Orbit is an exploration that spans years of Fuller's practice, as she responds to the wild nature of deep space through the rigours of her photographic practice, and taps into our innate human fascination with the unknown. As we consider Fuller's poetic translation of imagery, such as a butterfly standing in for the rising earth, or a water droplet becoming a rippling crater, we understand more than ever that transformation is the only constant in this universe.

Written by Bernadette Klavins

