

Leah Shirley

DANCER

February 2 - March 17, 2024

Sibyl is pleased to present ***DANCER***, an exhibition of sculpture and lensless photography by interdisciplinary artist and astrologer **Leah Shirley** (b. 1988).

Shirley cites light as her primary medium and source of inspiration. Her studio practice is grounded in a study of color darkroom photography, a complex process with which increasingly few photographers are familiar. In a pitch-black darkroom, light itself becomes material. Shirley turns the photographic process in on itself to capture the innate formal qualities of light.

In her "Colorgrams," Shirley uses the tools and apparatus of darkroom color photography without a negative to capture images of pure light. She subjects each Colorgram to multiple exposures, using her hands to disrupt and diffuse the stream of light between the light sensitive paper and the color photo enlarger. She embraces indeterminacy in mixing her colors, experimenting to capture certain hues between cyan, yellow, and magenta. She likens this process of nontraditional color darkroom printing to choreography, recalling her own long history as a dancer. Within the strict parameters of color darkroom photography, she finds ample space for exploration and play.

With a series of cyanotypes Shirley examines the Morning Glory, an entheogenic flower that appears in visual culture throughout history and across continents. The Morning Glory operates as a symbol of unrequited love and mortality, with different cultures associating the flower with ritual communion between the living and the dead. Shirley considers the flower, a common sight around her home in Los Angeles, from an astrological perspective. She likens the five-pointed bloom to the "Petals of Venus," a pattern created by the geocentric plotting of Venus over an eight year cycle. Shirley imagines this pattern as a dance between Venus and the Sun, as observed from the Earth, itself an object in motion. This formal kinship and repetition of pattern between the terrestrial and celestial strongly inform Shirley's practice and her search for connection between light and form.

Shirley's sculptural practice examines light as well as she sculpts with materials that reflect, refract, and filter light such as copper, glass, and mirror. When activated by light, these objects alchemize into something sacred, imbued with their own power to exponentially change the makeup of a

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physical space. Two mosaiced swings reading "EROS" and "CHAOS" in cut glass hang from the gallery mezzanine, independent yet adjacent pendulums. Shirley draws from ancient Greco-Roman myth, which names Chaos as the original void state of the universe. Out of Chaos came Gaia, the earth goddess, then Eros, the god of love and passion, and from there came all of existence. Shirley unpacks this foundational connection between Earth, Love, and the Void. In Audre Lorde's "The Erotic as Power" Lorde calls for a radical embrace of the primordial Erotic, removed from its purely sexual connotations, as a source of strength and emotion as power. With another reference to choreography and movement, Shirley recalls the confluence of energies on rave and nightclub dance floors; a contemporary sacred space becomes a site of ancient ritual as Chaos and Eros swing and swirl between bodies in motion.

In her quest to marry light with tangible form, the artist herself becomes a tool or conduit for an innate feminine power and knowledge derived from the natural world.

ABOUT LEAH SHIRLEY

Leah Shirley is an interdisciplinary artist working within sculpture, lensless photography, video and astrology. She was born in Austin, TX and spent formative years in Brussels, Belgium. Her practice weaves together her fascination with the sensuality of materials, beyond-human timescales, the potentials of light and rhythm. Her work as a consulting astrologer informs her practice by bridging the celestial with the terrestrial, playfully mapping connections between the mystery and the mundane. Leah earned her MFA in Sculpture & Extended Media from the University of Texas, Austin in 2022 and her BFA in Photography from Columbia College Chicago in 2011.

ABOUT SIBYL GALLERY

Founded by Katherine Lauricella Ainsley in 2022, Sibyl Gallery is a contemporary art space in New Orleans dedicated to promoting emerging artists and art practices. Collaborating with artists, patrons, and institutions alike, the gallery aims to continue to diversify and strengthen the New Orleans art community and connect it with the broader international art world.

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