

Art in America

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PHILADELPHIA DEMETRIUS OLIVER The Print Center

New York-based Demetrius Oliver's exhibition "Canicular," which consisted of five newly commissioned installations and a single 2013 photograph, brought together two seemingly disparate subjects: the cosmos and dogs. Timed to coincide with the visibility of Sirius (the dog star), the show was open for only one hour each evening, weather permitting, rather than during normal business hours. Juxtaposing canine sensorial experience with imagery relating to the heavens, Oliver engaged viewers in an interesting push-and-pull, in which they oscillated between the physical conditions and subjugation experienced by dogs—creatures who live dependently on their human masters—and the freedom suggested by outer space.

Outside the Print Center, the visitor encountered *Dwarf*, which combined a barely detectable sound piece played on a dog whistle with a circular lightbox mounted to the institution's facade in lieu of the normal entrance sign. Both sides of the lightbox featured the same softly glowing photographic image of a swirling peach-colored pattern that approximated the fiery surface of a solar body but was actually a close-up of canine fur. Inside the first-floor gallery, *Deutan*, for which the artist replaced the white bulbs of the room's track lighting with 17 green floodlights and two infrared heat lamps, evoked the red-green color blindness of dogs. The eerie colored light of this installation leaked onto the street through the frosting applied to the gallery's storefront window and also suffused a sculptural work exhibited in the same room. This work, titled *Helio-metric*, resembled a telescope used to measure the distances between celestial bodies but was made of low-tech materials: an outdated Kodak slide carousel, a stack of 47 white plastic five-gallon buckets, and a steel armature that positioned the stack of buckets at a 25-degree angle. Crouching down to look through it, visitors saw not a telescopic picture of planets or stars but rather a photographic image of a generic wooden floor, which was projected onto a Foamcore disc lodged inside the bottom bucket. Thus, with this piece, visitors seeking a glimpse of the cosmos instead found themselves with a dog's-eye view of the world.



View of Demetrius Oliver's exhibition "Canicular," 2014; at the Print Center.

The work in the upstairs galleries departed from the canine theme but likewise conflated the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. In one room was *Messier*, a digital C-print that shows a bent paper clip sitting on a Messier star chart and mimicking the type of constellation structures diagrammed below it. The adjacent gallery displayed *Diurnal*, a row of eight 32-inch flat-screen monitors playing looped sequences of images of *Orrery* (2011), an abstract sculpture by Oliver that consists of everyday items—rolls of tape, magic markers, spools of thread—arranged on inverted umbrella frames suspended from the ceiling, the assortments appearing like galaxies and solar systems.

The show's title work was a white plywood circular chamber, measuring 12 feet tall by 11 feet in diameter. The Sirius star, captured via high-power telescope at the nearby Franklin Institute, was projected via live feed onto a diaphanous screen stretched overhead in this makeshift observatory. Forced to crawl on all fours through an oversize "dog door," the viewer, once inside, gained a glimpse of the brightest star of the Canis Major constellation. Here, as throughout the show, Oliver juxtaposed the lowly with the ethereal, stretching the viewer's imagination from the earthbound to the heavens.

—Jennie Hirsh