

Canine accoutrements and a mini-planetarium make for an otherworldly art experience

By Annette Monnier
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On a clear night between 7 and 8 p.m., The Print Center illuminates its sign (dog fur, glowing pink) and turns on the sound that emits from the center (a single tone only perceptible to canines) and visitors wait, in anticipation, for their star to rise.

They are there at this twilight hour to see the “Dog Star,” Sirius A, the brightest star in the night sky. It’s the astral ingredient utilized by artist Demetrius Oliver to create *Canicular*, which has transformed The Print Center into a mini-planetarium. The lighting informs the otherworldly feeling — eerie green fades to celestial pink and, then, darkness.

Visitors are first confronted with a “telescope” created out of a stack of five-gallon buckets (when you peer into it, though, it shows an image of a wooden floor) before traveling upstairs, bypassing a video and a photograph before reaching the core of the exhibition, a circular chamber with a small “dog-door” entrance.

This intimate space must be crawled into on hands and knees. Inside is a wooden floor and a projection ceiling that screens a live video feed of Sirius A — which happens to be visible by the naked eye — from a telescope mounted on the roof of the Franklin Institute. The feed of the star is lovely and somewhat bewitching.

Inside, the five-gallon bucket telescope (*Heliometric*, 2014) seems a let down upon first glance, but after visiting the upstairs chamber it creates an interesting foil: Upstairs, you enter a cylinder and stand on a wooden floor to view the projection of a star, while downstairs you peer into a cylinder to view the image of a floor. A reminder of where we are in relation to the vastness of the universe, perhaps.

There are five works in *Canicular*, and two of them seem completely unnecessary.

The exhibition includes a video (*Diurnal*, 2014) of a kinetic sculpture composed of upside-down skeletons of umbrellas and covered in various debris from Oliver’s studio. It’s an interesting means to get to better understand the oeuvre of the artist. A photograph of a twisted paperclip on a star map (*Messier*, 2013), also serves this purpose, but both pieces seem out of place within the central thesis of the exhibition.

Outside the center, the dog-hair sign (*Dwarf*, 2014) and dog-whistle refrain put the viewer in another headspace before even entering the building. It is tempting to think of the various canine accoutrements as being a little gimmicky, but they do add a whisper of otherworldly mystery.

Canicular is a mysterious and ambitious display for The Print Center that rewrites some of our expectations of a traditional art gallery. The viewer must accommodate the artwork, is aesthetically rewarded for their hardship, and the experience seems fresher because of it.

Demetrius Oliver: “*Canicular*.” The Print Center, 1614 Latimer St., open 7-8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, weather permitting through March 22. Check printcenter.org for details.

