

KRISTA STEINKE

GOOD LUCK WITH THE SUN



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

APRIL 28 - JUNE 7, 2018

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Images left to right:

took advice and kept going: one month exposure (from *Sun Notations*), 2017, archival pigment print, 44.5" x 65"

it all seemed so serendipitous: one-week exposure with insects and an accident (from *Sun Notations*), 2016, archival pigment print, 44.5" x 65"

June (from *month to month calendar*), 2018, archival pigment print, 44.5" x 65"

Cover Panel: *1'00* (from the series *Burn and Fade*), 2018, archival pigment print, 15" x 22"

GOOD LUCK WITH THE SUN

I recently spoke with a novelist who elegantly and emphatically described his work as an art of *implication*. Such a tantalizing description, I thought. Now I keep coming back to this phrase, the “art of implication,” to describe photographer Krista Steinke’s astonishing new cycle, *Good Luck with the Sun*. It seems so exactly right, precise, comprehensive, and...mysterious. Really though, what does “the art of implication” mean? *Implied* refers to all that which is understood but not stated. The novelist was describing a book filled with words, none of which say what they mean. A description, non-description. Steinke’s pictures, whether standing alone, in grids, or animated—all the figments and filaments, the architectural reach of each scratchy line, the swampy, velvety saturation—have such a joyfully belligerent disregard for the explicit, and such an interrogatory relationship with the representational that “art of implication” seems the most plausible way to define them.

Good Luck with the Sun is process-driven work, a collection of images derived from pinhole photography, multiple exposures, long (very long) exposures, and other experiments. It’s an experiment in leaving the camera, many cameras actually, out in nature, essentially at the mercy of the elements. This series has an aesthetic of pure discovery: what impressions the sun makes, how it pushes and draws color and light across the frame, when the sky bleeds with perfect blue clarity through a jagged hole, the way a single perfectly focused twig is transformed into a beacon, letting the viewer know this is a landscape—how the photographer chimes in, methodically rotating her primitive cameras over days, defining time passing with streaks and scratches, animating impressions of light, relentlessly ordering and cataloguing the ephemeral. The word “luck” in her title is at once literal—these gorgeous impressions

randomly gifted by the sun—and, from an environmentalist perspective, metaphorical and ever-so-gently chiding, as in the multiple exposure grid entitled, *I saved some sunshine (in case of nasty weather)*. The sun is our most essential and primordial resource; in other words (other, *not stated* words), here is its portrait. Don’t fail to recognize it.

Across this exhibit, Steinke’s exuberant engagement with discovery is manifest in her carefully phrased, narrative titles. *being careful for what I wish for* is a four-week exposure resulting in a stark, strong vein of light sculpted into a deep moody blue. *fear of missing out* is the title of an almost extraterrestrial account of the 2017 solar eclipse, achieved with multiple pinhole exposures. And *the bad news was actually really good news*, an eight-week long exposure that, however it came to pass, looks subaquatic and, in its surprising murky palette, radiates serenity. Each title suggests an interpretive response to what the experiments reveal—and yet they aren’t responses, they’re factors. Steinke’s titles refer to the experiments themselves: commentary, notes, diaristic descriptions of the period in which a given exposure took place. The resulting image becomes the interpretation, or visual note. The idea of luck returns, so very vibrantly for example, in *70 days after the election*—the way an unpredictable image perfectly articulates something of the period in which it was being created. The titles interpret the time that the images manifest. Nothing less than a dialogue between the artist and her work, extending then outward to her audience, an invitation to respond. The conversation itself is where suggestion, the art of implication, comes radiantly alive.

Perhaps the most conversational piece in the collection is *it all seemed so serendipitous*. Conversational in that it strikes me as a kind of bridge—between Steinke’s previous work (specifically, the sublime gothic *Purgatory Road*,



eyes to the sky, 2018, (detail),
photo installation: dye sublimation
prints on aluminum

2010–2015) and this new series; and more pertinently between abstraction and figuration. Suddenly, in a world of colors and lights, bold graphic gestures made of shape and shade, we see insect carcasses. The viewer’s endorphin-seeking brain exclaims, “Ah ha! . . . Ants! Flies! Bees!” Insects, dead insects, are suddenly remarkable in that they are exquisitely identifiable. They exist outside the narrative of implication and yet the picture is still visually disorienting, still all about suggestion. They are motionless, fallen, their inert silhouettes serendipitously forming a Rococo frame around the pin hole. Precisely because the bees are seen from the ground up somehow, a particle of some greater nature, just past the leaves. Vast and minute.

Lingering in *it all seemed so serendipitous* are the sultry droplets of pumpkin-colored lights, the scarlet-tipped arrow shooting north, the heart shaped opening that forms a window that looks out at sunlight filtered through opalescent green leaves. Here, as in many of the images from this series, we’re looking at the world through the pinhole. The leaves, the dead bugs, the dappled light—all entirely familiar components of a forest floor. The components tell us what we’re looking at and where to direct our eyes to see. And yet, for this picture, the eyes are directed up. We’re below the foliage carcasses, below the aperture to the sky. We’re the ground dwellers; we’re the paper capturing light over the course of a single week.

Perhaps this perspective is not disorienting so much as it is directional but from an uncommon direction. It is an accident of course, a happy accumulation of color, light, and design.

But accidents have value in this aesthetic system. They are a means of discovery, a way of moving past abstraction, past process, into picture. The three-image series entitled *learning to let go* is a wonderful account of this movement. Pertinently, the cameras that captured these pictures were placed before Hurricane Harvey struck the artist's Texas home. She let the cameras sit through the storm (the wind, rain, flooding, and bizarre sunbursts) and beyond, rotating them on schedule. Water, mud, and goo got into the cameras of course, soiling and corroding the paper. In the third picture of the series, there is an unmistakable water stain—nature painting its dramatic path. Each image here is, in singular ways, a flurry of things that happen to photosensitive media: a smear, a boil, a contamination, particles, and burns. Writ large, these pieces represent the

inverse of conventional photography, an art form generally mediated by precision, focus, selection, and impeccable adherence to rules. With these three images, the artist relinquishes control—she “lets go.” In the cumulative of record keeping, technical process, emotional process, accidents withstood and then curated, the most transcendental aspects of the artist's project powerfully emerge.

Which isn't to say that there isn't a system in place. Steinke's vision for these pieces is highly evolved, the themes and contrasts reiterated and enhanced. This collection may be about accident and abstraction but it is also about storytelling and time, containment and expression. The video, *Sun Notations*, for example, emphasizes the artist's manipulation. In *Sun Notations*, over fifty still images are reanimated almost as if to show the constantly moving world behind the frozen moment of a single photograph. The sun traces build and retreat across the screen as the sun moves over a horizon, bees fall, the treetops and sky beyond spin like the earth on its axis. Nature dances with photography.

Similarly, the startling array of over forty black and white images in *eyes to the sky* underscores the artist's hand and yet, here, instead of animating, Steinke boldly shoots the sun, stopping time, in a way, at its apex. It is dangerous to look directly into the sun, and the camera's lens is as vulnerable to damage as the human eye. In order to capture the elusive sun, Steinke shot directly at it without looking, protecting the lenses on the various cameras she used with random household objects, deflecting the glare the way one does when trying to “see” a solar eclipse. The resulting images, arranged here in a tight, size-variegated horizontal line, are a remarkable marriage of organic and sculptural shapes, of what's impossible to see yet looks like what remains of the sun on the cornea in that disappearing moment—the blinding white, frameless glare. Referring back to early daguerreotype

experiments and, specifically, the first image of the solar eclipse in 1851, Steinke printed these images on metal. The effect is solid and very still, almost architectonic with its drained palette, oblique shapes, and jagged sizes. If it's architecture, the viewer thinks, drawing closer to the small images, it's the architecture of a fern not a city. The sun, like nature, also vast and minute, arranged but not captured.

I often think about photography in terms of successive choices—*What to shoot? From how near or far? With what camera? In what color? How to display?* and so forth. Photography is an interpretive art form that wrangles with everything that's immutable—yet to be captured, yet to be *seen*—on the other side of the lens. Steinke's work adheres to this system and yet makes nature itself an active participant, “a collaborator” in her words and also a medium, for in this series the sun is the paint with which the photographer paints. The paradigm of artistic choice profoundly shifts in this exhibition. Instead of showing the viewer what she's seen, Steinke invites the viewer to see alongside her. And so, the question of *What picture am I making today? What shall I shoot?* is reframed. The artist asks, *What of the world will make its way through the tiny hole of my primitive camera*

...if I leave it in this spot, or that

...for this long

...or for that long?

And then, *Can you see it too?*

Minna Zallman Proctor is the author of *Landslide: True Stories* and *Do You Hear What I Hear? My Father, Religious Calling, and the Priesthood*. She is the editor of *The Literary Review* and lives in New York City.



Homemade pinhole cameras used in creating the work in *Good Luck with the Sun*, 2015-2018

Krista Steinke

EDUCATION

Masters of Fine Art, Photography and Digital Imaging, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Bachelors of Fine Art, Studio Art, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Bachelors of Art/ Advanced Degree in the Humanities, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN

SELECTED SOLO & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Good Luck with the Sun*, Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN
Good Luck with the Sun, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
- 2015 *Serious Play: Krista Steinke and Sherman Finch*, LSCC Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2014 *Second Nature: Krista Steinke and David Politzer*, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
- 2011 *Ann Seidman and Krista Steinke*, Schmidt Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2002 *New Works by Krista Steinke*, Rainbow Gallery, Tower Fine Arts Center, State University of New York, Brockport, NY
- 2000 *Works by Krista Steinke*, Engine Performance, Baltimore, MD
Specimens, Fox Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *In Their Element*, Spartanburg Art Museum, Spartanburg, SC
Currents New Media Festival, Santa Fe, NM
Reducing Landscape, Box13, Houston, TX
- 2017 *Field Work 2017 Artscape*, The Pinkard Gallery, MICA, Baltimore, MD
The National Weather Biennale, The National Weather Center, Oklahoma University, Norman, OK
Double Exposure, Arvada Center for Arts and Humanities, Arvada, CO
- 2016 *iDEAS Exhibition*, International Digital Media and Arts Association Conference, Winona, MN
- 2015 *The Landmark Show*, Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe, NM
Envisioning the Impossible, Box 13, Houston, TX
Perspectives Photography Exhibition, Longview Museum of Art, Longview, TX
- 2014 *The Apocalyptic*, Truman State University Art Gallery, Kirksville, MO
Contemporary Photographers: Vision and Method in the 21st Century, The Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Roanoke, VA
- 2013 *Invitational Area Artists Biennial*, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

2012 *Centennial Exhibition*, Delaware Museum of Art, Wilmington, DE
Philadelphia Women Photographers, Schmidt Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

2010 *Fresh Start*, Arena 1 Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

2009 *Photo Miami*, represented by Light Work, Permanent Collection/ Artist in Residence Program, Miami, FL

Suspension of Disbelief: A Digital Photography Exhibition on Social Commentary, Salena Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
As It Happens: Artists-in-Residence at Light Work, Light Work, Syracuse and Lubin House, NY

2008 *The Elusive Surrounding*, C. Grimaldis Gallery, Baltimore, MD
Child's Play, Projects Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

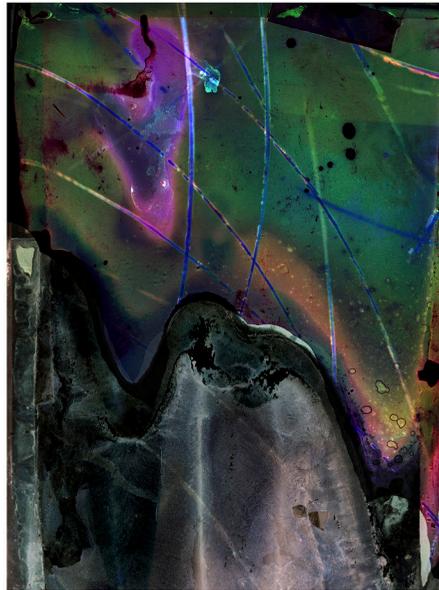
2007 *Photo Forum*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

SELECTED FILM SCREENINGS 2000-2018

- Dallas Videofest: Texas Show Festival*, The Angelika Film Center, Dallas, TX
Dallas Medianale Video Screening, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, TX
Green Screen Environmental Film Festival, Trinidad + Tobago
Earth Day Film Festival, San Francisco, CA
ALT/Future, Biome Arts, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn, NY and Taipei, Taiwan
Mess With Texas (curated by Peter Lucas), Film Screening, Aurora Picture Show, Houston, TX
New Media Caucus Performance Event, University of the Streets, New York, NY
30 Second Spot, New Media Caucus Event, School of the Visual Arts, New York, NY
The New Screen Television Broadcasting, An Alternative TV Arts Channel, Orlando, FL
One Minute Video Screening, Jersey City Art Museum, Jersey City, NJ
1800 Frames Video Screening, CWW Gallery, Newark, NJ
Museum of New Art Film Festival, Detroit, MI
The Tank Presents: Selections from The Reel Venus Film Festival, The Tank, New York, NY
Out of The Loop Film/Video Screening, Barbes Performance Space, Brooklyn, NY

AWARDS/ FELLOWSHIPS/ RESIDENCIES

- 2017 Howard Foundation Fellowship in Photography
2016 Puffin Foundation, Grant Award in Photography
2012 Promise Award, Sustainable Art Foundation
2009 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship in Photography
2008 Artist-in-Residence Fellowship, Light Work, Syracuse, NY
2000 Henry Walter's Traveling Fellowship, MICA



Images left to right: *learning to let go/ Lesson 1, Lesson 2, Lesson 3 (from Sun Notations)*, 2017, archival print, 32" x 23" each

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 40th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,901 artists in 314 visual art exhibitions, 128 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 636 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, the New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 650 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and
their work

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