

Kevin Jerome Everson
Recover
3. 9. – 14. 11. 2021
HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark
Burgring 2, 8010 Graz (AT)

In the early seventeenth century, Galileo Galilei was the first to use a telescope for astronomy. He was the first man to see craters on the moon, he discovered sunspots and the four moons of Jupiter, and he saw the rings of Saturn. More than four hundred years later we observe a total eclipse of the sun. *Condor* (2019), an eight-minute-long black-and-white film, made with an analogue 16mm camera, records an astronomical event as it was seen on July 2, 2019, in the South Pacific region.

Experimental filmmaker Kevin Jerome Everson was in the north of Chile on this day, and at 19:22 local time he pointed his camera at the sky. *Condor* (2019), named after the bird of prey and national symbol of Chile, dominates the entire main gallery of the HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark, marking the start of this large exhibition. The artist's decision to film the eclipse in black and white reflects his sensitivity for the essence of things, and at the film's climax, when the moon covers the sun, the latter is reduced to a glowing white ring. This minimalist image that we see might seem for a few seconds to be all manner of things—a round cell, the lens of a camera, or the pupil of an eye.

As well as the screening of this film, there are two objects in the main hall that the artist has placed on simple stands. They are binoculars made of bronze and plastic, belonging to a series of works that are used in Everson's films as props.

In the films *Cardinal* (2019) and *Brown Thrasher* (2020), the camera concentrates on people watching birds. They searchingly gaze up at the sky. But while viewers of these films watch these watchers, their protagonists are actually looking through Everson's bronze and plastic dummy binoculars into nothing. This constellation of different perspectives is not only significant for the formal exhibition concept, as it also encourages reflection on the question of perspective in society. The so frequently restricted social and economic conditions of black Americans define their lives and realities, and also their ability to foresee and shape their own futures.

Although *Recover* consists almost entirely of film screenings, it is these two bronze and plastic objects that here open up the black box—the cinematic space within the exhibition—and carry the narrative forward. It is thus not surprising that casts of everyday objects in multiples made of metal or plastic are a key feature in the artist's practice.

We can also see this interest in the serial production of works in his use of the camera. Just as the material and features of each cast are unique, so each film that seems to repeat a motif already used—such as an eclipse of the sun, which is also at the center of *Polly One* (2018)—is unique in its "materiality." Working with a hand-held 16mm camera, and thus with the mechanics and abrasion between the camera and the celluloid film, as well as with different light conditions, leads to "mistakes" that inscribe themselves into the celluloid and thus then onto the surfaces of the pictures. This acceptance of the materiality of things, and of analogue and hand production represents the core of the artist's practice.

This is the defining feature of his unique approach to creating a relationship between film and object, and a sensitivity that is also expressed in the exhibition by using a 16mm projector, whose mechanic rattle in the side wing is also heard in the other exhibition galleries—as a constant reminder of the ongoing service that the machine performs in creating pictures and projecting them onto the wall. *Recovery* (2020), which inspired the title for the whole exhibition, was filmed with the 14th Flying Training Wing of the US Air Force in Columbus, Mississippi, and is one of many of the artist's

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works that addresses the working lives of Afro-Americans employed by the US armed forces. The sky plays an important role in this work too, but only in the context of the narration. The camera is pointed at a young man taking a vertigo test as part of his flight training. His body is seen turning and turning around its own axis, while he performs various exercises.

Two further films at the center of this exhibition are good examples of Everson's interest in formalism and abstraction and also of the essayistic nature of nearly all of his films. *Music from the Edge of Allegheny Plateau* (2018), for example, is devoted to rappers and gospel singers in Everson's home state of Ohio, and it creates an intimate portrait of the singers, whose music expresses their spirituality. The newest video in the exhibition, *May June July* (2020), was made last year as the artist's record in film of the turbulent summer of 2020. Everson went to Washington with the roller skater Jahleel Gardner to film at the recently renamed *Black Lives Matter Plaza*, where protests had taken place after the death of George Floyd. Scenes showing Gardner moving around the plaza alternate with night-time views of resplendent peonies and the lights of glowworms in the air. *May June July* (2021) is strikingly contemporary and it also appeals to our collective memory. On the other hand, this film is an excellent example of the filmmaker's subtle and poetic approach that shows how political themes can be presented by means of seemingly marginal matters.

This exhibition thus combines poetic images from various Afro-American lives with observations of universal phenomena such as the horizon and the cosmos. This juxtaposition leads to storylines that inspire us to reflect on the different meanings of perspective. Everson makes no specific proposals as to how to interpret his works, and yet the exhibition again and again raises one and the same question: "What is our perspective through which we see the world?" A question that cannot be answered in just one sentence, and a question that is crucial.

Kevin Jerome Everson (born 1965 Mansfield, lives in Charlottesville) is Professor of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Everson has been recognized with the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Alpert Award in Film/Video, the Heinz Award in Arts and Humanities, the Rome Prize of the American Academy in Rome and the Fellowship of the American Academy in Berlin. Solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul and the Harvard Film Archive.

Study Room & Program

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Artist talk & Screening

Kevin Jerome Everson, Greg de Cuir Jr. (curator, Belgrade), 3.9., 6 p.m.

Artist lecture

Kevin Jerome Everson, 4.9., 6 p.m.

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