

Art Forum Review of the Blind Light, the Pyre of Night November 2011, written by Daniel Quiles

CHICAGO

Conrad Freiburg

LINDA WARREN GALLERY

WHICH EYE DO YOU CHOOSE TO LOOK WITH? reads a handwritten text on the side of Conrad Freiburg's *Andromeda Galaxy with Hovering Eye* (all works 2011), a viewing device installed in the artist's third solo exhibition at Linda Warren Gallery, "The Blind Light, the Pyre of Night." Like wall text in a science museum, this label of sorts encourages the viewer to look through one of many holes—set in the pattern of the Andromeda constellation—that had been bored into a large, white-painted wooden disk. Several incense burners were visible through these apertures, strung across the room against a black background. In turn, each of these "burning stars," as the artist dubs them, featured a metal cover with its own constellation of holes, three-dimensionalized into an undecagon (an eleven-sided form), which also served as an organizational conceit for the show's arcane networks of drawings and contraptions.

The centerpiece of the exhibition was *The Blind Light*, a wood undecagon enclosure just large enough to fit two musicians (as demonstrated by an opening-night performance featuring the artist alongside others). The form of the pod is truncated—"interrupted by the ground," as another text in the show put it—such that its wider side is open, creating a sonic effect akin to that of a bullhorn. There is also a cover that, depending on its placement, modifies the volume and quality of the live sound by either amplifying it into the gallery or dramatically muting it by containing it within. Given that the pod has eleven faces, no two walls are parallel, and so sound circulates rather than caroming back and forth between two surfaces. This yields a unique aural experience for the performer, yet for the audience, such dynamics are imperceptible. If one stands outside the structure when it is fully open, only a portion of the musicians' bodies are visible; therefore visual access to the action also varies. This impression of isolation is compounded by the striking resemblance of *The Blind Light* to a space capsule or, more specifically, the now-defunct NASA shuttle, the final launch of which coincided with this show's July 8 opening. As a singer and ukulele player with two records of melancholic variations on Minimalism to his credit, Freiburg knows well the state of seclusion that both an artist's studio and a musician's practice space offer. (On tour this fall, he has been playing within a nine-sided version of *The Blind Light* called *The Pod of Absence*.)



View of "Conrad Freiburg," 2011.

the Nouveau Réaliste, however, Freiburg distinguishes various different voids (the unknown, loss, absence); prime polygons (triangle, hexagon, heptagon); bodily regions (mind, heart, loins); and "types of experience" (philosophical manners, types of love, musical harmony). Seven heptagonal bells from his solo exhibition at Hyde Park Art Center earlier this year reappeared here, marking the generative juncture between construction and music from which the artist set out on his present, proudly eccentric course.

—Daniel Quiles

Taking this fusion of sculpture and music into account, we return again to the prompt WHICH EYE DO YOU CHOOSE TO LOOK WITH? and wonder how it might be asking us to engage not just the visual but also the aural. Read as any input-gathering sensory organ, couldn't an "eye" also be an ear, a finger, or a nose, such that one might hear an undecagon or smell a constellation? Another common thread in this show can be found in the artist's penchant for things unplugged, as in his use of acoustic music and the prevalence of wood; another work on view, *The Pyre of Light* is a model for a funeral pyre comprising the combustible energy required for one astronaut's journey to the moon. A retro-futuristic ritual of immolation in miniature, that work provided one of the few echoes of the artist's earlier self-destroying machines and (Yves Klein in mind) his continued preoccupation with "the Void." Unlike