

Amada Miller: *But Then (Again)*

Galveston Arts Center, 2020

www.galvestonartscenter.org/amada-miller



➤ About this Exhibition

But then (again) is an exhibition of photographic and video work focusing on the celestial bodies that make seasonal appearances near our planet. Astronomers and scientists have spent centuries probing these mysterious portents, claiming everything from life-bearing origins to humanity's destruction. Focusing on comets and meteor showers, the works in this exhibition are comprised of a record made of ice that plays the sound of a comet flying through space (recording acquired by the European Space Agency's Rosetta Mission) and photographs of the night sky during meteor showers. These images are viewed through the lens of tektite glass, a type of glass that is formed from the heat of a meteor impact.

➤ Discussion and Discovery:

Concept: Astronomy

Astronomy can be defined as "the branch of science that deals with celestial objects, space, and the physical universe as a whole." Most celestial objects—such as stars, moons, planets, meteors, and comets—are thousands of miles or more away from the Earth.

- What tools do scientists use to learn more about astronomy?
- Centuries ago, before modern technology, how did people learn about astronomy?
- After viewing the images and video from Amada Miller's exhibition, do you notice any other ways to find evidence of celestial objects?

Concept: Closeness

Closeness can be defined as “the quality of being only a short distance away in space or time.” However, a short distance may seem far away, and what is actually far may feel very near. For example, the sun is nearly 94 million miles away from Earth, but it certainly feels much closer in the summer! Our feelings of closeness can change even if our physical location doesn’t.

- When you think of celestial objects, do you feel a closeness to them? Why or why not?
- What makes some celestial objects seem farther away, while others seem closer?

Activity: On a night when the moon is visible, stand outside where it is safe to do so. Call a long-distance relative or friend and ask them to look at the moon as well. As you both gaze at the moon, notice if you feel any closer to the person on the phone. Can you think of other things in the natural world that may bring people closer together, even if you can’t be physically near?

Artistic Exploration and Practice:**Artistic Practice:** Cataloging

Explore your home or backyard for objects that share a certain quality. The objects may have a similar size, shape, color, or any other shared aspect. As you collect each object, write down:

1. the date and time you found the object
2. the location you found it
3. a brief description

Once you have collected the objects, organize them. You may choose to organize them visually, or in order of discovery, or some other method. Once you have organized and arranged the objects, take a photograph of your catalogued collection of objects. Then, re-arrange them and take another photo. Reorganize and photograph your collection at least three times. How does the story or appearance of your collection change depending on how you organize the items?

Artistic Medium: Video

Inspiration: Amada Miller’s video “Of Heavenly Things”

Create a video recording of sound encountered at your home that occurs in the background. If possible, try to capture the sound while visually recording a different object, so the source of the sound is not seen in the video. Or, you can record the sound and video separately and play them back at the same time.

How does playing the sound alongside video imagery change the way we might experience it? When thinking of Amada Miller's video, do the physical materials change the way we interpret the sound? For example, does knowing the record is made out of ice change the way we think or feel about the sound? If so, how?

Artistic Medium: Ice Sculpture

Supplies needed: A freezer-safe container, cooking oil, water, and food coloring (optional)

Note: The container or mold used should allow the entire sculpture to slide out while frozen. Narrow-mouth containers will not work or will have to be broken to remove the sculpture.

Instructions: Lightly coat the inside of the freezer-safe container with cooking oil, then slowly fill the container with water. If desired, stir in food coloring or add objects such as leaves, ribbons, or flowers, which will be frozen into your sculpture. Place your soon-to-be-sculpture on a level surface in the freezer for at least 12 hours. After removing your sculpture from the container, you may choose to keep it in the freezer or allow it to sit out on a water-safe area, where it will melt slowly over time.

From water to ice and back to water, your sculpture underwent several changes in physical state. Can you think of similar changes elsewhere on the planet? What about in your own home or personal life? Using Amada Miller's exhibition as an example, what are some ways you might document and save evidence of these changes and discoveries?

Vocabulary Review:

Astronomy – “the branch of science which deals with celestial objects, space, and the physical universe as a whole.” (Oxford dictionary)

Celestial – “positioned in or relating to the sky, or outer space as observed in astronomy” (Oxford dictionary)

Closeness – “the quality of being only a short distance away in space or time”

Found Object – “a found object is a natural or man-made object, or a fragment of an object, that is found (or sometimes bought) by an artist and kept because of some intrinsic interest the artist sees in it” (www.tate.org/uk/art/art-terms)

Moldavite – “a forest green, olive green or blue greenish vitreous silica projectile rock formed by a meteorite impact probably in southern Germany that occurred about 15 million years ago. It is a type of tektite.” (Wikipedia)

Tektite – “are gravel-sized bodies composed of black, green, brown, or gray natural glass formed from terrestrial debris ejected during meteorite impacts.” (Wikipedia)

Video – “art that involves the use of video and/or audio data and relies on moving pictures” (www.tate.org/uk/art/art-terms)