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Tristin Lowe: *Exile Sun*

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In *Exile Sun*, Tristin Lowe (b. 1966, Boston, lives and works in Philadelphia) presents a solar system anchored by a star fashioned from denim jeans, whose form is realized by inflation. Orbiting the star are a host of works that reference the cosmic/sacred (metal and neon comets) and the body/profane (articulated foam legs). Both jeans and inflation technology have been touchstones for Lowe. Worn jeans—in this case family castoffs—are like skin, a stand-in for the body. They reflect the individuality of their previous owners through scars, tears, patches, and wear marks. Here, Lowe plays with several ideas that he has investigated over time: sacred geometries realized through lowly means (in this instance, the star shape), the body and the senses, abject domesticity, and creation narratives. In an ongoing exploration of the senses, Lowe proposes a relationship between the star-nosed mole, whose finger-like fleshy proboscis enables it to smell in water, and the star-like form of his inflatable sculpture. Lowe has focused on the olfactory in previous projects—pheromones in particular—stressing the primacy of the primordial over the civilized and cerebral. Similarly, Lowe views the lower half of the body (waist and legs) as base forms of our animal attributes, signifying elimination, copulation and birth, while also suggesting our uniqueness among mammals—bipedalism. Stars, through a balance of nuclear chain reactions, simultaneously implode and explode in order to generate life-giving energy. Lowe, using jeans shaped to form a star, conjures the elegance of implosion and explosion, the cycle of birth, death, and regeneration. The jeans are fused together at the waist, suggesting that the absent torsos have disappeared into each other (implosion) but their inflated legs suggest the radiant energy of a star (explosion). Adding further resonance to the idea of the star as life-giver, Lowe's ongoing use of air/inflation is another metaphor for creation: the idea of breathing life into limp fabric and plastic forms has been pursued by Lowe over the years in works such as *Alice*, 1998/2011 (a 19-foot tall cyclops Alice in Wonderland), *Dumbo*, 2001 (a pink elephant), and *Mocha Dick*, 2009 (the albino sperm whale).

Lowe's star-shaped jean sculpture merges the abject with the philosophical, raising questions about our place in the universe. The notion of discovering, mapping, and realizing the point where matter converges has engrossed Lowe from the vantage points of the tangible/human (we each create our own universe in which we are at the center, spinning our own webs of significance) as well as the theoretical/astronomical (black holes formed by the death of a star absorb all available matter inward). The latter formed the basis of Lowe's Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship in 2012 in which Lowe studied hypervelocity stars or "exiled stars"—refugees from black holes. An exiled star is the renegade twin of a binary star that has been explosively ejected by a black hole (its companion has either been absorbed into the hole or continues to orbit it). Literally becoming a shooting star, the exiled star brings along its own solar system of planets and matter on its unfathomably fast journey, flying through space at speeds as great as two million miles per hour. *Exile Sun*, with its combination of scrappy and elegant sculptures orbiting a denim star, is Lowe the tinkerer's take on this astronomical phenomena that physicists are just beginning to understand.

Throughout his career Lowe has mined the crude and rude, the absurd and abject, and the mundane and metaphysical in pursuit of tentative answers to deep questions about our place in the universe and the meaning of existence. Playing the role of the garage hobbyist cum alchemist, Lowe employs jerry-rigged technology transforming humble objects that rise above the quotidian and venture into the realms of the philosophical, the scientific, and the occult. Lowe makes drawings from greasepaint and fire; utilizes edible materials such as butter, chocolate, and alcohol in the creation of comically pathetic installations (beds that wet themselves, pillows that smoke); and crafts large-scale sculptures of animate and inanimate things using an assortment of materials including wood, frost, metal, inflatable plastic, textile, and felt. Over the past fifteen years, Lowe's sculptures have ranged from a pheromone-emitting, musky, hairy creature (*Pheromone Trailing*, 1998) to a two-story folding chair (*Folding Deck Chair*, 2004) to a life-size replica of an albino sperm whale made from inflated plastic and felt (*Mocha Dick*, 2009), among an array of others.

Lowe received his BFA from Massachusetts College of Art and studied at Parsons School of Design and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has exhibited his work extensively in Philadelphia at venues including the Fabric Workshop and Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Fleisher/Ollman, Vox Populi, Girard College, and the Rosenbach Museum and Library. He has exhibited nationally and internationally at Rhode Island School of Design Museum; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, FL; Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin; New Langton Arts, San Francisco; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; and the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Switzerland. He has been awarded a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, a Pew Fellowship, a Provincetown Fine Art Work Center Fellowship, and the Fabric Workshop and Museum and Girard College Residencies. He was co-founder and co-director of the non-profit gallery Blohard. Lowe's work is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the West Collection, Oaks, PA.