

Brian Fridge

Essay by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

In *Sequence 2.1* (2002-03), time slows down for two minutes as the muscles of the eyes relax while the gaze is lulled into a vortex of light refracting off of barely material objects – occasional glitter, mostly haze – spiraling and pulsating organically. It is a microcosm or a macrocosm, endlessly coming together and then apart, suggestive of galaxies and quasars, and like them, unfathomable intellectually in terms of translating in our mind the light years of their location into a graspable notion of space and distance from us.

Yet Brian Fridge's universe is also a simple one as he explores an epic and vanguard notion of photography and film in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, his camera recording the condensation of humidity in the air above an open freezer, pulling us back to the basics of photography, and making us think of salts and silver nitrate. His art shows us how the iris of the video camera strives to pick up light. A Hi-8 video camera, some lights, and a freezer are among the few things in his stark studio/apartment in Fort Worth, Texas where one has the acute sense of being in the alcove of a true modernist, experimenting with vision, form, and the representation of space through both aesthetic, philosophic, and scientific parameters – searching for something absolute.

The thoughts that run through his mind must be almost unbearable at times, bordering on folly. In his universe, there is ultimately no free will and there is only free will: all has already happened; human beings exist as sculpture in the universe which is in itself also a sculptural event on a broader, larger scale. When you look at things from his point of view, motion and events that happen around us are not actually happening because everything has already happened. Fridge's art makes you think of Big Science and Big History today, and how those perspectives may open up new fields of research. Time can be conceived in nanoseconds or billionths of seconds. At the same time, his art evokes the sublime, epiphany, transcendence, and the exploration of the soul (at first glance more typical of religious endeavors than of science or philosophy). His acute explorations of vision and perceptions are also self-portraits, analyses of the self and of consciousness.

Although apparently an artist of detached viewing, and although he uses video to make his art, Fridge is more significantly a sculptor. His earliest works, in fact, prior to 1997, were spherical objects covered in graphite on plinths. Then he began to use the video camera to "see" what he was seeing, empirically pointing it towards elements of his environment that he could perceive on the same scale as his body – no microscopes, no telescopes, just his freezer that he could also look at with the human eye. Using lighting carefully and moving air vapor in an open freezer her encouraged condensation and ice crystal formations became visible to be recorded by the camera lens, turning into abstract images when projected or seen on monitors, with gray and whites and glitter effects, suggestive of electricity.

When he shows *Sequence 2.1*, *Sequence 2.2*, and *Sequence 2.3* (2003) on three monitors in a space, like he did at Artpace San Antonio, technology transcends power- monitors are no longer television sets, nor are they merely means by which to present videos, rather, they become opalescent laboratory tubes that are freed from the fetters of reporting daily life. *Sequence 2.1* rushes quickly as three seconds loop over and over again, a lapse of time during which the notion or precipitation is represented as continuous through the

implosion and collapse of tiny iridescent circles. Sequence 2.2 and Sequence 2.3, instead, slow duration down again around experiences of focus and radiate outwards and inwards, suggestive of solar eclipses and of eyeballs. As the gaze is pulled towards the center of the images by the camera recordings of simple magnetic phenomena, vision becomes three-dimensional and sculptural.

A deep sense of solitude emanates from these works, of melancholy, daydreaming, and detachment from current events and the apparent urgency of conceptual documentaries so topical in the art world today. It is not that Fridge's art is apolitical – it is rather that it is more deeply political, engaging the viewer into a thought process about vision itself, and how knowledge is constructed through the dance of perception and memory in consciousness, as something ultimately liquid and made up of shifting dimensions. His art grounds the viewer in the body precisely through the presentation of constant embodiment and disembodiment (while news broadcasts disengage viewers from the body by projecting them into an inevitable unsatisfactory experience of mere information and lack of agency). In many ways, not too many words should be spent on describing Brian Fridge's works for contemplation. Like a poem by William Blake, he evokes the sublime and sees a universe in a grain of sand, and he delves into the incandescent iris of a tiger's eye.

When I visited his home and studio, he offered me some grapes on a dish, and we spoke of the early-twentieth century Suprematists, from Malevich to Tatlin, we spoke of Henri Bergson's notions on duration, of Julian Barbour's Block Universe theories in physics, and of the visionary culture of the 60's Belgian artist Panamarenko's flying machines, the way Robert Smithson addressed time in *Spiral Jetty*, Arte Povera's celebration of endless change, process, and the flow of energy. We spoke about science and art in general and never mentioned poetry, of course.

*Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev is Chief Curator,
Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy*

essay from *Artpace, New Works : 03.1*, 2003, Artpace, The International Artist-in-Residence Program, San Antonio, Texas

Brian Fridge

Statements

"The universe is useful because it is at the service of nothing and is in this respect similar to art." (1999)

"Art can mark the center and edge of the universe as well as be its purpose." (2000)

Selections from Mircea Eliade:

"All this amounts to saying that by consciously establishing himself in the paradigmatic situation to which he is, as it were, predestined, man cosmicizes himself; in other words, he reproduces on the human scale the system of rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world, that, in short, defines any universe."
(*Body, House, Cosmos*, pg. 173)

"For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the axis for all future orientation."
(*Homogeneity of Space and Hierophany*, pg. 20)

Brian Fridge

Education

1994

B.F.A. University of North Texas, Painting and Drawing

Awards and Grants

2003

International Artist in Residence, ArtPace, A Foundation for Contemporary Art, San Antonio, Texas

1996

Dallas Museum of Art, Kimbrough Fund

Selected Exhibitions

2009

Cou Huo, Five public venues, Beijing, China

Archetectonic, CADD ArtLab, TX

Blueprint, McKinnney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas

Say Anything, University of Texas at Dallas, TX

10th Anniversary Exhibition, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, TX

2008

A Place in the Painting Continuum: Brian Fridge, Jin-Ya Huang and Derrick Saunders, University of North Texas Galleries, Denton, Texas

ech_o, Centraltrak, University of Texas at Dallas Artists Residency, Dallas, Texas

Something New, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

2007

P.R.I.N.T. - Looking Back, Pressing Forward, University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton, Texas

Brian Fridge: Photographs, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX (solo)

Everything, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

2006

Teenage Fanclub, Janette Kennedy Gallery, Dallas, TX

2005

Video Installations: Nic Nicosia, Brian Fridge, Bill Viola, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery,

Lincoln, NE (solo)

Art Show Here, Janette Kennedy Gallery, Dallas, Texas

Works on Water, Environment Education Science and Technology Building, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

Symbiotic, UNT artspace FW, Fort Worth, Texas

The Pantagruel Syndrome, TI - Turin Triennial, Turin, Italy

Conspicuous Production, McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, Texas

Material Support, University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, TX

2004

5th Anniversary Exhibition, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, Texas

New Prints, International Print Center New York, NY

2003

Brian Fridge, Susan Phillipsz, Paul Pfeiffer, ArtPace, San Antonio, TX (solo)

Brian Fridge, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX (solo)

Projections: Elemental, Brian Fridge, Samantha Krukowski, Rivane Neuenschwander, Blanton Museum, Austin, TX

Brian Fridge, Sala Diaz:Tia Room, San Antonio, Texas

Untitled, Bower Living Gallery, The Bower, San Antonio, TX

Flip, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

2002

Slide, University of Dallas, Haggerty Gallery, Irving, TX

Surface: Works on Walls, Tarrant County College, The Art Corridor II, Arlington, TX

Next, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

Graphite/Graphite, NRH Gallery, North Richland Hills, TX

2001

Composition in Black, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

Alternative Currents, The McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, TX

Phoenix Triennial 2001, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ

Blue Skies, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX

2000

Vault Sequence: Video Projections by Brian Fridge, Art on Site, Inc., Four Walls, Displays Unlimited, Fort Worth, TX

Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY,

Out of the Ordinary: New Art from Texas, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX.

Crossing State Lines, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

Houston Sculpture, Art League Houston, Houston, TX

Texas in the Biennial, Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans, LA

Artistic Centers in Texas: Dallas/Fort Worth, The Texas Fine Arts Association, The Jones Center for Contemporary Art, Austin, TX (traveled to Galveston Art Center, Galveston, TX).

Positexan...the show with the right attitude, PROJECT, Wichita, KS

1999

Toy Models of Space, Conduit Gallery Annex, Dallas, TX
Between Image and Object, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
Black and White, Grey Permitted, Amarillo Museum of Art., Amarillo, TX
Wired for Living, The McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, TX
1998

Slag Channeling, Good/Bad Art Collective, Denton, TX
Blurring the Lines, University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, TX
a posteriori, charlieuniformtango, Dallas, TX
Drawings, Rachel Harris Gallery, Fort Worth, TX

1997

Video Flash, Hohenthal und Bergen, Cologne, Germany
Fort Worth Hot Shots: Nine Artists, ArtPace, San Antonio, TX
Convergence of Kinds: Collaboration, North Lake College, Irving, TX
Act Natural, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
Video Night 4, Good/Bad Art Collective, Denton, TX

1996

Fort Worth Hot Shots: Nine Artists, Main Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Brian Fridge/Keith Lymon, Gallery 414, Fort Worth, TX
Gallery Night, Gallery 414, Fort Worth, TX

1995

Anti-Gravity and Artificial Snow, Good/Bad Art Collective, Denton, TX
Frozen, Cora Stafford Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Brian Fridge, Union Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Expo '95, 500 Exposition Gallery, Dallas, TX
Voertman Exhibition, Main Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Video Night 2, Good/Bad Art Collective, Denton, TX
Members' Show, The McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, TX

1994

Hybrid Forms, Cora Stafford Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Voertman Exhibition, Union Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Spring Exhibition, Union Gallery, University of North, Texas, Denton, TX

1993

Select Show, Cora Stafford Gallery, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Members' Show, Good/Bad Art Collective, Denton, TX

Selected Public Collections

American Airlines, Dallas, Texas
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
Seattle Art Museum, Washington
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Dallas Museum of Art, Texas