

**Arts & Culture**



**As above, so below**

The celestial and terrestrial of Mark Zirpel  
 Eva Lake  
 November 23, 2004

From Mark Zirpel's "Celestial/Terrestrial"

Some people tend to avoid glass galleries in the Portland area. You either love them or hate them. I've got nothing against glass, per se, but maybe I've seen too much of it. Or at least I thought so until I came across Mark Zirpel.

First, there's the space. The Bullseye Connection Gallery (300 N.W. 13th Ave.) is an upstairs spot, dark and enclosed. Architectural guts are exposed and the space has various nooks and crannies that seem like small prison cells and maybe areas for torture. I loved it.

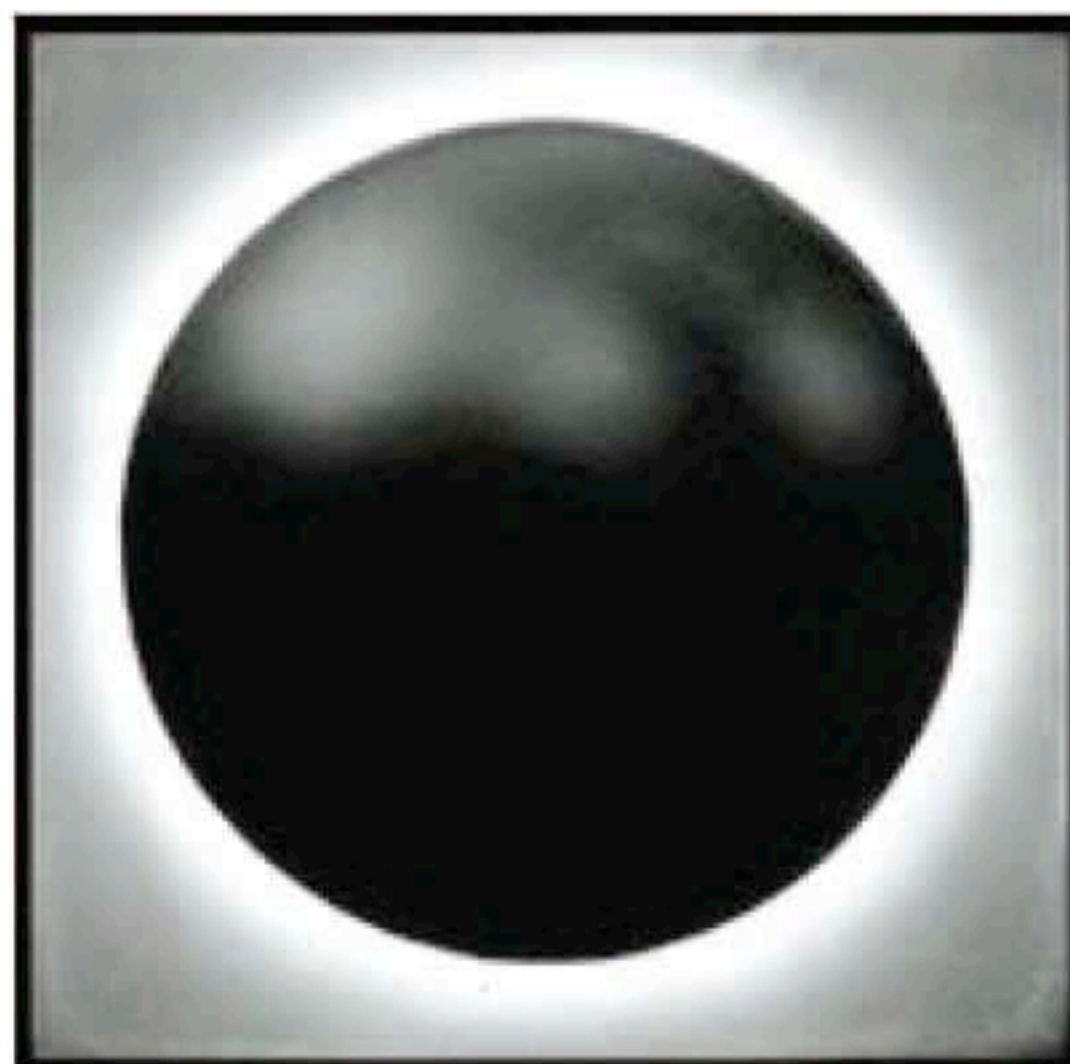
Then there's the installation. Every piece is individually lit in the darkness, similar to how ancient artifacts are displayed in the great museums. Signage and explanations are kept to a minimum, respectful of both the art and the viewer. In the case of this exhibition, one could bypass it all and completely at ease with the mystery of the work, uncaring if you "get it" or not.

"Celestial/Terrestrial" by Mark Zirpel is a collection of kiln-formed glass, installations and interactive sculptures that address time, tides and lunar phenomena. Everything in this show is some sort of elegant measure of how nature moves us along, in both the subtle and big, all-encompassing ways.



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Some of these examples are complex and curious gizmos. Moving, noisy machines, some apparently made with found parts, react as we move through the space. They have the flair of a mad professor, entertaining and a bit maniacal. The patina of the found elements plays well into the dark environment of the space.



Mark Zirpel, "Eclipse," 2004

Those small prison-like rooms held trios of glass pieces made from sand, sometimes formed by the tides. Also placed elsewhere in this exhibition, these pieces positively glow in their presence. They look like they are the light source, as opposed to having one thrown on. The sandy quality takes on a lunar aspect in both grainy surface and eerie romance. Some pieces are patterned like the beach after tides have drawn out. The ancient art of the Cyclades, with its simple circular and oval shapes attuned to nature and the water in particular, comes to mind.

The saying "as above, so below" is beautifully illustrated in these works, expressing a connection as subtle as it is undeniable. What looks like something from another planet comes from our own and vice-versa. The lunar imagery is actually made by water, but of course the water is greatly influenced by the moon.


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