

# **Gareth Spor**

## **The Universe Unfolding**

**A [Micro] Catalog**

**Produced on occasion of the  
California College of the Arts  
Masters of Fine Arts Exhibition  
2008**

## **Courtenay Finn and Gareth Spor** **An [Abridged] Conversation**

**Courtenay Finn\*** What is it about 'stars in the eyes' that is interesting to you? Is it the notion behind getting starry-eyed, the mystical, the illusion of being transformed or transported, the relationship to this idea of romance and being in love? Is it just the idea of a geometric shape appearing in the eye? If so, what is it about this shape appearing in the center of mechanism through which we view the world? Is it about this looking upwards to the heavens (dreaming, spirituality) and its reflection in our eyes? Does it relate to patterns and theories of organizing and accessing the cosmos?

**Gareth Spor\*** I guess the image of the stars in someone's eyes resonates for me on a few levels. Primarily I think of it as an indicator that the subject is in a state of wonderment, that they have been transported elsewhere mentally, and that is a mind-state that I am interested in. My work is not intended to be about the cosmos as much as it is about peoples' ideas of the cosmos or whatever they think of as being vaster than their immediate reality. On another level, I'm interested in geometry and the mechanics of light, so creating these images by means of a sculptural light apparatus is really engaging territory for me.

**CF\*** This idea of a state of wonderment, the idea that one can be transported somewhere else mentally, what exactly is it about this that you are interested? Is it the fact that this can happen? Is it the presence of this 'mind-state,' its very existence that you find fascinating? Or is it the idea that people believe in something outside themselves? If people's ideas about the cosmos are so vastly different and their experience of being transported somewhere else is their own, then what is it about this symbol of the stars in the eyes? Is it a symbol to illustrate that this is a universal experience? Is it a way to create a connection between people? I think about people who share experiences that create this state, is that something that you are interested in? I also want to know more about the relationship between this mind-state and geometry? Is it the idea that there is a pattern to wonder? There are a lot of connections between the function and notion of light and the state of wonder, from the idea that when one leaves the earth they follow the light, to science fiction and the presence of another life, another world, through to what people describe when they witness miracles or fall in love? I want to hear more about how exploring the mechanics of light relates to this state of wonder...

**GS\*** Human beings invented geometry as a way to measure and describe our world in an abstract way. 'Geo-metry' literally means world-measurement. Understanding the abstract world of geometry then helps us understand our physical world. In the case of the cosmos, where everything of interest is outside the physical reach of all but the luckiest of astronauts and robotic probes, geometry becomes the main approach for study. I think that is one of the main concepts that connects these realms of interest for me, how an interest in the cosmos is so well complimented by an interest in geometry.

The medium of light is special in that it is the primary modality by which we sense things that are the furthest away. The Hubble Space Telescope has

captured light from galaxies so distant that it took the light billions of years to arrive. That light was emitted before the earth had fully formed, before humans had evolved and created the technology that would ultimately capture it. Stories like this keep me focused as an artist.

I think my own sense of wonderment is central to my work. When I think of my ultimate goal as an artist I think of sharing some of the wonder I experience in my world with others. So with this current body of work, I'm focusing on this conceptual realm bounded by ideas of the cosmos, geometry and trying to make sense of the former with the latter. Having stars in one's eyes, be they literal or figurative, indicates to me a state of wonderment. That I can create literal images of that using light, geometry and referencing the stars makes me really excited.

**CF\*** I have been thinking a lot about the lattice sculptures that you are currently fabricating and their relationship to ideas of sacred geometry, of pattern and its inherent relationship to the metaphysical, and to this idea of creating a path, or trying to find order in chaos. If the lattices will be free standing, I wonder about the physical interaction that your viewer will have with them? Will they be lit to create an extreme shadow, so that the viewer is partially covered in the pattern? Is there an interest in this lighting, in creating the pattern in shadow, in the beaming outward of pattern, in referencing this notion of divine light, in fragmenting one's view, breaking down the elements into their own parts? Or is it more about how the viewer feels interacting with these objects, passing by them, peering through them, relating their own physical presence to the intricate line work, relating their own physical form to the dynamic form of the lattice?

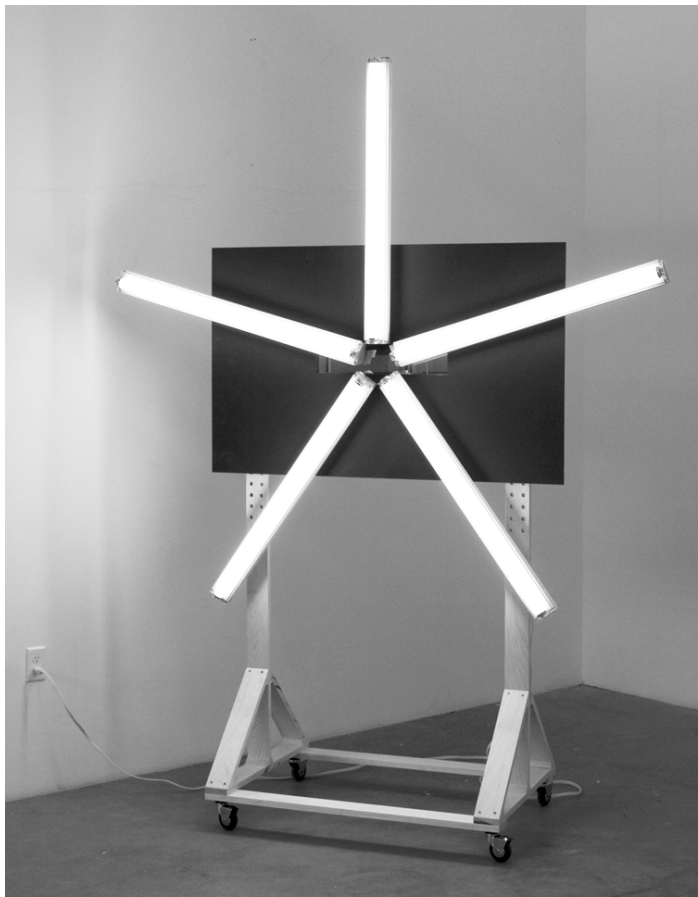
Do you see the patterning as being representative of the minuscule patterning that defines the cosmos? Of the things that science can see but are unavailable to the human eye? It brings to light this inseparable

relationship of the part to the whole. It makes me think about the intricate connection between geometry and notions of the spiritual; how shapes and patterning can represent unity, interconnection, and illustrate the presence of the divine. Do you see the lattices functioning in this discourse? Do you see them as a framework that allows your viewer to think about states of wonder? Or as a visual example of "reducing down to basic elements" revealing the beauty inherent in the universe, in the spiritual, and in astonishment itself?

**GS\*** The screens are meant to be displayed as free-standing sculptures and I have not planned any elaborate lighting scenarios. Their point is not so much to filter light but to filter the viewer's gaze. I've chosen to render them entirely white to amplify the background colors and forms that filter through. That is precisely how I think of these forms, as filters, they create images not by differentially reflecting and absorbing light, but by sculpting the light that passes through them. I should mention here that these pieces were inspired by a passage from the book *Mogador: The Names of the Air*, by Alberto Ruy Sánchez.

*The huge wooden lattice framing Fatma's window sliced the beams of sunlight into geometric shapes resembling stars. A tiny universe, on which Fatma's back was turned, unfolded on the wall behind her.*

This passage reinforced, for me, the connection between these geometric patterns, depictions of the cosmos, and the manipulation of light. I was immediately inspired as it contains many of my basic artistic interests while adding a layer of the poetic. I knew right after I read that that I would create something in response.



***Machine for Unfolding and Illuminating (installation element), 2008,***  
wood, mirror, fluorescent lights, casters, 96" x 57" x 27".

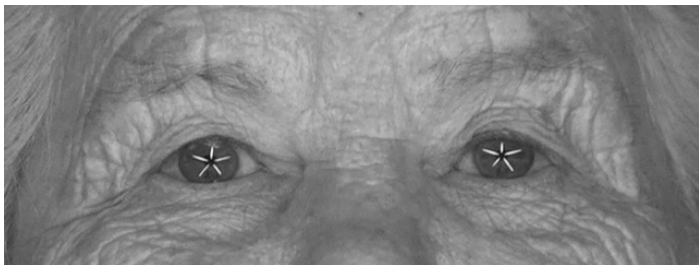
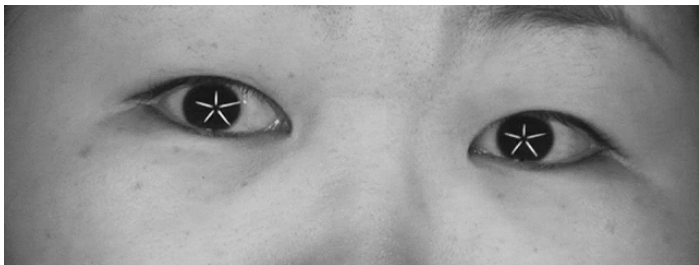
I decided to make something that directly referenced its historical source while adding a layer of my own personal interpretation of the subject. The source in this case is the jaali, a decorative carved window screen found in Islamic architecture, and I played on the idea of depicting the cosmos through these geometric patterns.

A pattern represents an understanding of a logical order. People have tried to fit patterns to the stars for as long as human history. They're a perfect candidate due to their apparent randomness and the fact that their immense distance ensures a purely visual manifestation, precluding easy testing of theories. Present technology, however, has shed quite a bit of light, as it were, on our understandings of the cosmos. Today, many of us are taught at an early age facts about the cosmos that took astronomy centuries to arrive at. My understanding is that the cosmos is a place where chaos rules yet order emerges and I wanted to portray that in these sculptures. I did that by randomly deleting pieces of a jaali pattern according to a probabilistic profile of a larger image I wanted to emerge. The larger images are borrowed from images of modern-day astronomy; galaxies colliding over millions of years, stars exploding into rings of dust billions of kilometers wide.

**CF\*** On a parallel note: I have been thinking a lot about the relationship between the lattices, their ornamental framework, the crisscrossing of line work and their intricate patterns with the video that you are working on. The video, which showcases only the eyes, the rest of the screen blocked off in black, reminds me of the notion that our eyes are our window to the soul. That when we lie, or attempt to cover our feelings, it is in the eye that we are the most fragile, the most vulnerable. The whole concept of looking someone in the eye and being able to know them, to feel the truth, to really see is totally illuminated in your video. You have to focus on the eyes, and there is something about looking so directly and seeing the presence of this



***Illuminating (video stills) 2008, video loop, 2'44".***

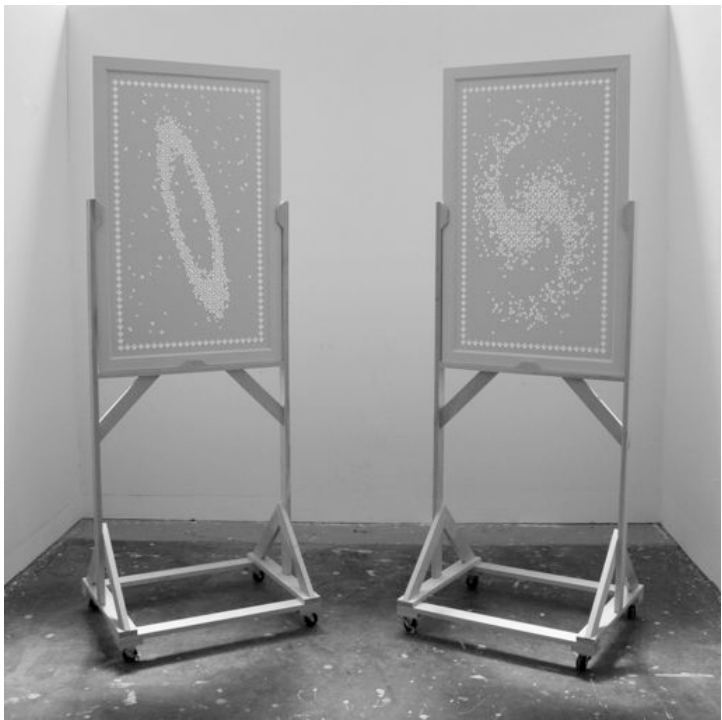


***Illuminating (video stills) 2008, video loop, 2'44".***

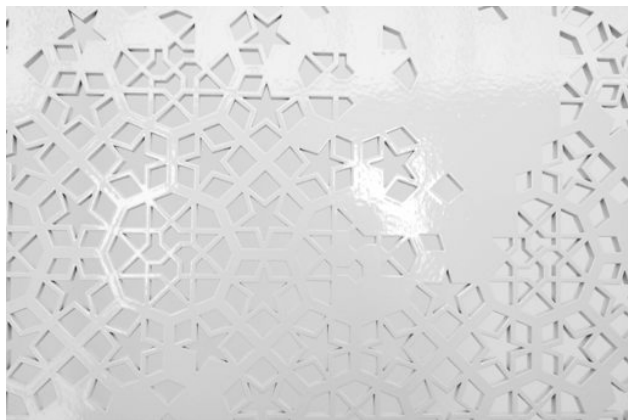
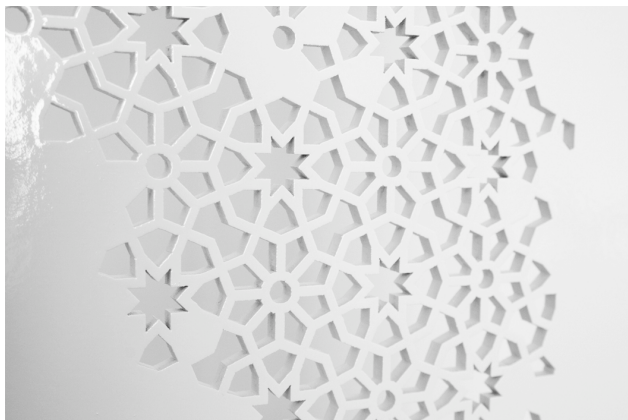
star that is powerful though simple. These coupled with the voiceover, the discussion of interconnectedness of choices, the belief in something larger, and the dispute of the random bring to mind the shape of the circle or sphere. Not only is it the basic element of geometry, and the basic shape of the eye, but there is also the video's inherent loop, circling back through the same words, the same imagery. There is also this relationship between the form of the circle and its relationship to the universe, to the state of the profound.

How do you see the video relating to the lattices, in terms of patterning, in terms of function for your viewer? Are these works telling the same story, creating the same state of wonder, or are they parts to a larger whole? Do they function as different elements of wonder, or rather, separate chapters in a longer investigation? I wonder about the sequence of viewing, is there a plan to guide your viewer through the works in a specific order, or is it more about the sense of discovery, moving from one object to another, each one its own surprise? I know that your exhibition space is still to be determined, but if you could have any space you wished- how would you envision these works being shown together?

**GS\*** I would love to have the various elements of my installation displayed in a large open space. Each of the sculptures invites the viewer to examine it from all sides and would benefit from having some space around it to be viewed from a distance. I originally envisioned the video to act as a preface to the rest of the installation, but I'm less attached to that idea as the objects have developed. I think of the forms as a whole as being points that form a larger constellation, and as such, they defy a linear ordering. The forms are each separate points but relate to one or more other forms in the installation. The lines that connect these forms are akin to lines connecting stars that form a figure in a constellation. The drawing of this figure is left to the viewer. To this end, I would ideally envision the works to be distributed



***Machine for Unfolding and Illuminating (installation element), 2008,***  
laser-cut masonite, wood, enamel, 81" x 27" x 24" each.



***Machine for Unfolding and Illuminating (installation element, details), 2008, laser-cut masonite, wood, enamel.***

in a pseudo-random pattern across an open space wherein they would all be visible from each other's locations.

This reminds me of the Allen Telescope Array currently under construction in Hat Creek, northern California. The array, when completed, will comprise some 350 radio telescopes, scanning the cosmos for signs of extra-terrestrial intelligence. The seemingly scattered telescopes all work together to provide unprecedented observational power. However, their pseudo-random configuration has been carefully computed to both conform to the natural terrain of the site as well as optimizing the performance of the array. I consider the positioning of the elements of my installation as a smaller version of the same problem. I feel that the viewer will have the most freedom to search for a connection between the various forms if they are not configured in such a way as to imply direct connections. The optimal arrangement will give the appearance of being randomized yet still conform to the specifics of the installation location.

I think the primary functional relationship between these forms is how they all deal with either the outward radiation of light produced by stars or the inward radiation of light collected by the eye's gaze. The video is projecting light outward from two stars in the eyes of the subject, while the screens are filtering the ambient light that radiates towards the eyes of the viewer. By functioning as opposites, they strive to tell two sides of one story.

I find it really fascinating that the form of the sphere is both the shape of the eye as well as the shape of the stars. By depicting stars as radiations of lines or sharp points, one draws attention to the way in which stars radiate light from a central point or sphere to be exact. The eye, then, can be thought of as an opposite, or complimentary form in that it is a sphere onto which light from stars radiates inwards to form an image. I think that is part of the excitement generated by seeing the one image superimposed on the other.





***Machine for Unfolding and Illuminating (installation element), 2008,***  
book of computer generated drawings, 6.25" x 9.25" x 1.25", 500 pages.

## **Space is the Place**

### **A [Micro] Essay by Matt Post**

An asterism is a conspicuous grouping of stars, an order imposed by the viewer onto an indiscernible cosmos. Not sanctioned as a constellation, these groupings are derived by a process of pattern recognition, a distinctly human activity. The recognition of an asterism reflects a specific anthropocentricism, a truth procedure grounded in the perceptual operations of the visual system. The universe is revealed as architecture of infinite regression, traces of the past flickering across the darkness and given form through the signifying methods of the receivers. Connecting the body to the celestial past transmitted across the void, the viewer seeks relations by which to relate to, an arbitrary yet compulsory orientation. Transporting the mind through space and time, this thinking operation links the viewer to the great beyond:

*In tomorrow's world, men will not need artificial instruments such as jets and space ships. In the world of tomorrow, the new man will 'think' the place he wants to go, then his mind will take him there.*

-- Sun Ra, 1956

Under traditional modes of empirical knowledge, vision is a verifier of truth: seeing is believing. Enlightenment reveals what was obscured in the past and illuminates the real; the relationship between the eye and the external

world become fundamental. Religious epiphanies, “visions,” act as commands from beyond, ecstatic and fleeting moments of divine inspiration transmitted through the ether. This euphoric encounter with galactic relations leads to a transverberation, an expansion of consciousness that transports the subject into the unknown through profound awe.

Utilizing the spectacular experience of the phantasmic, the neuroscientist turned artist, Gareth Spor, charts the limits of knowledge, the permeable and shifting membrane between what is illuminated and what is concealed, the known and the unknown. His works act as ciphers for inter-dimensional travel, enabling the flow between the imminent and the divine. Spor’s strategy is no mere parlor trick: his illusions are grounded in the mechanisms of perception; the way the body processes the unknown, making up for the unaccountable. This ambition is motivated through a human fervor for the empirical infinite. These objects are not producing illusions, but rather are tools to register the fluctuations of perception. His machines act as encryption keys to the fantastical cosmos, deciphering the text of the universe by imposing an order by which to understand celestial interrelations. These filters oscillate between obscuration and illumination, framing galactic broadcasts projected from the deep past into the future.

