

OLIVIA ERLANGER. "1.3521° N, 103.8198° E" (2022). SILICONE,  
ALUMINUM, LED LIGHTS, TRANSFORMER, CABLES. COURTESY  
DEL VAZ PROJECTS. PHOTO: EXHIBIT VIEW.



# A GLIMMERING TEMPORALITY

NEW GROUP EXHIBITION *SHELL* EXPLORES THE DAZZLING IN-BETWEEN

*Featuring* Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger, and Nicola L.

*Written by* Emmalea Russo



NICOLA L. "GRASS" (1974-78). INK, COTTON, WOOD. 63" X 35".



IN MYTHOLOGY, A SINGLE COSMIC EGG HATCHES A universe. Place an unbroken shell anywhere and the air short-circuits, an explosive object that fills the atmosphere with questions about what it might hold. What will crawl, ooze, or walk out? With what force will the interior emerge? If it's broken, what has it held? What made a home of it? What will become of its form? *Shell* (both the word and the new group exhibition at Santa Monica's Del Vaz Projects) evokes a glimmering and tactile temporality.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes a fleshly ontology of tangible sight, where "Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things." In *Shell*, the artworks of Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger, and Nicola L. act as nets, the works' aliveness stemming from what elements will move (or will have moved) through them before, now, and again.

Body armor, camouflage, home, clock, eye, planet, interior and exterior, here and there, send and receive. The shell is a mechanism of possibility both porous and opaque, of archives and sieves pregnant with possibility and experience, muscularity and airiness making curious conversation. The exhibition's many shells mark the dazzling in-between, making time felt as a form we move through:

*enter and exit*  
*enter and exit*  
*the shell.*

If you walked into a room and there was nothing but a shell at its center, what would you do? If you walked into a room and saw a see-through eyeball-shaped object with a miniature bedroom inside (Olivia Erlanger's *Home is a Body*, 2020), how might you approach it?

I spoke with Erlanger on the phone in late December. From opposite ends of the country, we talked about planets and their axes, distance and proximity, surfaces, seeing, light, the grotesque, Walter Benjamin's snow globes, and Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*, a book about architecture and the senses. Erlanger's worlds seem to alchemize Pallasmaa's words: "The eyes want to collaborate with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch—as specializations of the skin. They define the interface between the skin and the environment—between the opaque interiority of the body and the exteriority of the world."

Indeed, Erlanger's eye-shaped plexiglass-encased dioramas mediate between the miniature environments they hold and the room in which they are situated. They ask us to consider invisible noise swarming in the space between, mysterious information conveyed and held by the interface. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks writes: "Both film and video become more haptic as they die. Every time we watch a film, we witness its gradual decay: another scratch, more fading as it is exposed to the light, and chemical de-

terioration, especially with color film."

Erlanger's works dilate points of mediation, transmission, and spin haptically.

Then, consider the inherent spin of Erlanger's Saturn-like sculptures—tilted, wandering stars fallen from orbit and pinned to the wall. They have unwieldy GPS locations for names. Is a planet a body? Around what are they/we orbiting? What about our location and encasements are calculable and what whirls into ineffability? What is the nature of the axis?

During star death, light pulsates and quivers, expanding before collapsing fantastically. Erlanger's works remind us that to look at a planet is to view what it's infused by. Saturn's famous rings are comprised of glimmering pieces of asteroids, moons, comets, and unknown materials upheaved then reconstituted, clinging and spinning. The planet is the farthest we can see with our naked eyes—a spec of barely-there light. Erlanger's worlds evoke the limits of sight: very close (snow globe, a world in weird miniature) and very far away (a planet). Sight stretched to its strange ends melts into touch. Pupil is skin, skin is animate porousness unhooked from orbit.

Featured elsewhere in *Shell*, Nicola L.'s *Cloud* (1974-78) is a weathered brown jumpsuit with the word CLOUD stenciled across its drooping neckline. It feels birthed from/made for an atmosphere, even as it is person-shaped. Similarly, *Giant Penetrable (Sun)* and *Giant Penetrable (Moon)* (2012) are orange (sun) and silver (moon) jumpsuits—light becoming skin becoming shell.

Here, our luminaries are forms we might step into as we/they move. Or that we might step out of, putting them to rest. That we might be *in* those lights, and that those lights are also forms—that form is not stagnant but kinetically necessary for the transmission of messages and light. That the moon is an ancient shell orbiting us as we wander around the shell of the sun, perishable and morphing.

Heidi Bucher's work is also skin-like. In *Hautraum (Ricks Kinderzimmer, Lindgut Winterthur)* (1987), latex, gossamer tendrils, bamboo, and construction wire form a soft architecture suspended from the ceiling like a popped cloud—whatever it once held having been lifted from the center of its storied aura. In an untitled and undated piece by Bucher, what looks to be a piece of fabric lies flat atop a circle—as though it's been discarded or stepped on. How is a shell/skin an extension of a body—something we shed, move incongruously with/against/through? Bucher's works call up questions about what these pieces of vibrant material have themselves seen and felt.

During increasingly atomized times—a pandemic containing us in shells/homes—the word *transmission* is charged. *Shell* poetically conjures and complicates the expansive and contractive motions of transmission (*sending across, passage*) between inside and outside, sending and receiving, reminding us that to transmit is also to communicate by means of a third definition—jumpsuit, planet, room encased in plexiglass—shells which are also *messengers*.



HEIDI BUCHER. "UNTITLED" (N.D.). TEXTILE, GLUE, MOTHER-OF-PEARL AND OTHER PIGMENTS ON FOAM. 40 1/8" X 40 1/8".