



# ALYSON SHOTZ / INVESTIGATIONS INTO SPACE, LIGHT AND MATTER

American artist Alyson Shotz on her research and exploration of nature, light and space in conversation with Maria Abramenko.

## **Tell us a bit about your background, how you began.**

I have been making art as long as I can remember. As a kid I was always drawing and doing art projects on my own initiative. My parents divorced when I was very young, and art helped me get through that. Art still saves my life almost every day. However when I was in high school I wanted to be a scientist. I attended the University of Colorado with a major in geology, in order to become a glaciologist. That was where I was introduced to astrophysics and I became totally fascinated with that field. At the same time I was taking art classes. Everything about the art department felt like home and art took over my life. I transferred to Rhode Island School of Design and got my BFA. However both geology and astrophysics continue to inform my work. After college I spent a few years working at a lot of weird jobs. I went to grad school and then moved to NYC in the early 90's. I've been making art and showing ever since.

## **How do you relate your artworks to science and why?**

My work is inspired by nature, and to learn about nature in a deeper sense, you need to look at science. The fundamental forces of the universe have always fascinated me: what is gravity, what is light, what is space? These seemingly simple questions are actually quite complex and not fully understood.

Through sculpture, I engage in an artistic investigation into space, light and matter, the building blocks of our physical world. I try to think of these natural forces as my primary "materials". My work truly began in 1994 with a project called "Reflective Mimicry", which was conceived around a question of space and how it exists around us. Does it stop at the edge of our bodies or are we made of space – do we encompass space. This led to a general question about space itself: what is it, what is it made of? How does it shape our experience in the physical world. What is the structure and substance of space? I am making sculptures that explore these questions as well as some new ones.

## **What is fundamental in your research?**

Observation, is a huge part of what I do. I think in the past, I've probably minimised the role that close observation plays in my practice. I'm incredibly inspired by close looking at nature, at light. In addition to that I read: fiction, poetry, science fiction and books about physics.

All of that reading seeps into the work in one way or another. There is also material research that is very important. Many of my sculptures take years to develop because I have to find the right materials or the right way to use them. For instance I'll be showing some new sculptures in NY this September, and to make those, it took two years of testing to find the right weight of metal, the right type of plating, the best way to plate this metal, etc.

## **What role does light have in your installations and why?**

Light is everything. It's crucially important in my work. It is ineffable and ever changing, but it can be "captured" in reflection. If one collaborates with light in a spirit of respect, it can create a sense of life, presence and mystery.

## **Where do you think is the best physical position for your works? Can you describe your imaginary space.**

The best space for my work is a room in which there is lots of natural light, because with natural light, the work can become truly alive. I imagine a room with concrete floor and a huge skylight or a room with one glass wall facing the desert or a green forest.

## **What are you working on at the moment?**

I have a show coming up at Derek Eller Gallery in New York City, in September. This show was supposed to happen in April but was delayed because of the pandemic. I've had these past few very strange months to work alone in my studio, and during that time, I've been making work that explores light and time using wood, discarded rubber bicycle inner tubes and copper washers. I wanted to capture the idea of compressed time in sculptural form. The material metaphor was found in the discarded inner tubes that contain, in their physical history, many miles traveled and many hours spent traveling those miles. Distance= time. The tires are further folded and pleated onto the surface of the panels so as to increase the amount of hours the panels can contain. Light reflecting off the copper washers contrasts the dense black time of the tubes. Light has time embedded in it as well, but it feels like an infinite and weightless time. The speed of light is the fastest known speed in the universe and a bicyclist is quite slow in comparison. We experience both of these types of time simultaneously. I am fascinated by time because it's another "force" which absolutely dominates our lives and yet we barely understand it.