

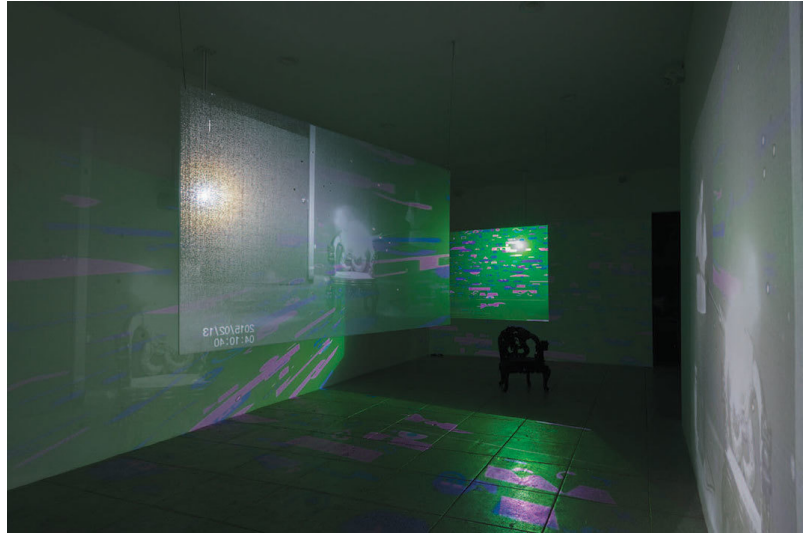
ARTFORUM

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Text by Andrew Berardini

Dylan Mira PARK VIEW/PAUL SOTO

“The word in Korean for shaman means ‘ten thousand spirits,’ as in to be in conversation with. In Chinese, ‘ten thousand things’ means the infinite,” explained the artist Dylan Mira through a recording, her voice disembodied as if she were another ghost haunting this spectral space. In her first exhibition with Park View/Paul Soto in Los Angeles, Mira fluttered through time and space with personal tales, physics theories, mythology, and history, all wrapped into a video installation demonstrating (as she puts it in a recent biography) “bodies making language through the thickness of time.” Everything exuded a cryptic spiritual purpose, as if setting the stage for an esoteric ritual during which one might speak with the ten thousand spirits within and outside of us.



A poltergeist in the machine of an infrared camera scattered the images that now unfold across two screens and cut them with the noise of colored pixels, a wash of green with curved splotches of pink and blue. Between these flashes of digital noise, we saw a scar on the artist’s left foot, the charred ruins of the musician Alice Coltrane’s Turiyasangitananda ashram (destroyed by wildfires in the hills above Los Angeles), King Tutankhamun’s lux accoutrements for the afterlife, the oldest drawings of the stars from the Northern Hemisphere, endangered Korean tigers, and finally the artist and Brooke Intrachat (the only other half-Asian woman Mira knew growing up in Lawrence, Kansas) together burning an inherited chair.

The artist and her buggy camera broke up the linear stream of the moving images. The words of the artist’s recorded recitation bubbled into the space in divergent verses, like prayers or invocations, diary entries leavened with the accumulation of knowledge many of us gather to make sense of a fractured world. The two screens, translucent sheets, hung from the ceiling at slant angles dictated by principles of feng shui (suggested by Intrachat). Puckered circles dotted their surfaces like wounds, describing constellations. The projections played through them, splattering on the walls. Between the two screens, half in shadow, sat the burned chair itself, its chinoiserie design a reference to the artist’s parentage and

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the conflicting meanings entwined in our inheritances. (The chair came from her Euro-American grandparents, who did not approve of their professorial son's choice to marry a Korean.)

Other entanglements here could be traced to lineage as well: The artist comes from a long line of Korean shamans—relationships disavowed by her mother but rekindled by Mira, who injects mythologies with stories of migration and references to science (from star charts to string theory). Every element was thickened with composite references, layering into deep strata. And like much good poetry, the meaning formed itself without requiring the viewer to understand every wisp of allusion. The title of Mira's exhibition was "The Book of Fixed Stars. cryotype." The first phrase came from a fifteenth-century treatise by Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi that attempts to synthesize Ptolemy's comprehensive star catalogue and Arabic astronomy; the second part is the biological term for a genetic trigger for adaptive survival in the face of harsh conditions, such as winter. The internet provided me with the source of the first phrase; for the second part, I had to call a biologist—but their beautifully literary texture can be understood without homework into their origins. The poem-cum-press release penned by the artist left plenty of clues, especially quotes, for viewers to trace their own associations: One cites a handbook on Egyptian mummies; another mentions Intrachat's feng shui suggestions. A Wikipedia link leads to an idea in string theory called the "holographic principle," and another line draws from an email with the art writer Litia Perta about oracular possibilities. The last quotation, from the blog feminist killjoys, succinctly accepts the disparate, sometimes difficult fragments of existence and, like Mira's work, releases us to the meaning we can gather from them: "Shattering; it is what we do."

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