



## William Lamson at The Boiler: A Line Describing the Sun

By [emmy thelander](#) | September 24, 2010

Two summers back, while I was working as an intern at [Pierogi Gallery](#) in Williamsburg, a tall young man with dirty blonde beard came in to show the manager and me a project he was working on. A video on his laptop, turned sideways to accommodate the vertical format, showed himself as he shot down pairs of shoes strung over telephone lines with a bow and arrow. My reaction: "Who is this?" and "Strange." (Libby and Roberta saw the [video](#) at Vox Populi back in 2008). But it was Will Lamson, recognized for videos of quirky performances that engage with the environment and often try to subvert science, and he is back, this time at The Boiler, Pierogi's new satellite space, with a solemn and elegant installation.



William Lamson, "A Line Describing the Sun," (Video Still), 2010, 2-Channel HD Video, 13:34 Minutes, Edition of 5. Photo courtesy of the artist and Pierogi | The Boiler.

The exhibition, *A Line Describing the Sun*, is a work Lamson completed as a resident at the [Center for Land Use Interpretation](#), based in Utah. The installation documents Lamson's project to draw the course of the sun on the earth floor by concentrating the sun's rays. Lamson accomplishes this by building an apparatus, resembling a hundred year old farm plough, which holds a large fresnel lens to focus the sun's light into a sizzling beam. Lamson pushes the apparatus, supported by three bicycle wheels, slowly throughout the course of the day, and while he does so, creates a drawn arc, a brown scar on the tan desert floor, that describes the motion of the sun.

The Boiler installation is three pieces of documentation from the process Lamson undertook in the Mojave Desert: a large video projection (two channels on separate screens each eleven feet wide, pitched toward each other slightly like an open book), an arced bench about seven inches off the ground that holds the burnt curve from one of Lamson's performances (he did it twice, on two separate days), and a light box with a single still image. The video panels reflect in complementing perspectives and beautiful cinematography the long process of Lamson pushing the cart throughout the course of a day (edited down to about thirteen minutes).



William Lamson, "A Line Describing the Sun," 2010, 2-Channel HD Video, 13:34 Minutes, Edition of 5  
Installation view at The Boiler, September 2010. Photo courtesy of the artist and Pierogi | The Boiler.

The video feels like a mini motion picture in its size and drama. Lamson dresses in long pants and long sleeves, a straw hat, leather boots, and welding goggles. He is a well-written character in a screenplay, alone in the desert, performing his strange act like it is his sorry destiny. The sound of the sand melting and bubbling crisps and crunches throughout with the echoey whistle of the wind always in the background, which only helps to accentuate the drama of Lamson as the lone figure in a huge, expansive landscape (though, there is obviously an attendant crew of filmmakers).



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Installation view at The Boiler, September 2010, Photo by Emmy Thelander

It *is* drawing, it *is* video, it *is* beautiful, and it *is* an interesting manipulation of the desert elements, but most of all it is a performance—a highly dramatized performance, holding all the tension and character of the scene before a duel in a quiet saloon town in an Old Western film.

The video and installation are so well executed, the piece must be serious, sincere poetry. But there are hints Lamson has ulterior intentions. His costume—the ostentatious sunhat—reminds one of the flippant behavior in his other video work in which the documentation is equally neutral, but the content more absurd. I can not forget the video of him wearing a mask of brown-spotted bananas with, apparently, some kind of explosive material inside. Lamson individually lights the end of each banana, they stay lit for a moment, and then explode, shedding banana guts all over the inside of the monitor.



William Lamson, "A Line Describing the Sun," (Video Still), 2010, 2-Channel HD Video, 13:34 Minutes, Edition of 5. Photo courtesy of the artist and Pierogi | The Boiler.

This sardonic self-consciousness touches even the beautifully crafted and thoughtful work at the Boiler—do not be fooled. It's hard to reach under Lamson's work and determine when it is sincere and when it is a farce, but of course, this is what makes it mysterious and worth paying attention to. Whether you are looking for a meditative afternoon or just a good time, you should see Lamson's installation.