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ART IN REVIEW

William Lamson: 'A Line Describing the Sun'



By KEN JOHNSON - Published: October 29, 2010

The Boiler (Pierogi)

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Following the example of [Robert Smithson](#) but with more modest means and ambition, William Lamson traveled to the Mojave Desert to produce the entrancing video "A Line Describing the Sun." Using a wheeled contraption equipped with a mirror and a Fresnel lens, he burned an arcing, 366-foot line in the dried, cracked surface, a process that lasted from dawn to dusk. The lens focuses the sun into a 1,600-degree point of light, which melts the dirt into bluish black glass. In the gallery, a 23-foot bowed section of glass pieces that [Mr. Lamson](#) saved is arranged in a low platform. Illuminated by a congruently curved overhead light in the darkened gallery, it sparkles like an oversized necklace of semi-precious stones.

Projected on adjoined, angled screens, the two-channel, 12-minute video follows the action in unhurried takes. Mr. Lamson rolls his unprepossessing invention across the flat earth under a big blue sky and arranges the lens and mirror to catch the rising sun. We see how the ground hisses, sparks and boils where the light hits it and how, slowly and patiently, Mr. Lamson, wearing welder's goggles, [moves his drawing machine along](#).

With the vast expanses of Western landscape as a backdrop, Mr. Lamson's action has a sweet pathos about it: he's a tiny man making his mark in the wilderness. There is an obliquely comical aspect, too, in the nostalgic effort to revive the revolutionary spirit that inspired earthwork artists in the late 1960s and early '70s. Mr. Lamson can't go back in time, but he can still go to the desert. **KEN JOHNSON**

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