

Star Vision

Some of Marco Breuer's photographs look aqueous, like limpid pools glinting in the brilliance of a sunlit afternoon. Other works appear brittle and crystalline, possessing the deep cerulean hues of ice shards removed from an ancient glacier. Others are nearly devoid of color, with hints of fiery red and vermillion scarcely evident beneath their black surfaces, like dark ash encasing tiny, glowing embers. Some images look nearly alchemical, as though elements of all the others—water, crystal, and fire—were combined under otherwise impossible circumstances. Still others have the otherworldly quality of images that render galaxies and nebulae as lambent and fantastical light displays.

In this last, kaleidoscopic sense Breuer's work reminds me of the famous "star gate" sequence from the final minutes of Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The original script for *2001* is economical in describing what it calls astronaut Dave Bowman's "fantastic voyage" into a black monolith cum world-creating intelligence, declaring only that Dave "sees astronomical wonders; the birth of galaxies, giant red stars, fiery nebulae, etc." And yet by employing a variety of technical innovations, Kubrick and *2001*'s special effects expert Douglas Trumbull were able to convey an amplified sense of a transcendent, unearthly experience. Trumbull used aerial footage of remote areas of Scotland that were converted into tinted negative images that appeared like molten landscapes; he produced shots using various objects dropped into what was termed a cloud tank in order to simulate the miasma of galactic gases; and he utilized slit-scan techniques to film still images containing moiré patterns and crystal structures that then conveyed the vertiginous perspective of entering the monolith.

Similarly, Breuer uses innovative techniques to produce startlingly unfamiliar images which reveal that the process of making, in and of itself, generates visionary effects. In particular, Breuer uses a heating coil adapted from a kitchen hot plate to physically affect the surface of photosensitive paper, at times literally searing the paper with the heat of the hot metal while simultaneously exposing the paper with the pale glow of its light. The innovations are multi-layered; Breuer sometimes runs the exposed paper through a color processer first and then scrapes away layers of the material to find colors buried in the paper. Like Trumbull, Breuer gives a laconic phrase like "fantastic voyage" a startling new vision with a rich arsenal of nearly psychotropic effects.

Eva Díaz

Thanks to Michael Connor for access to the original *2001: A Space Odyssey* script.

