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ISSUE NO. 24:  
SPACE

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# SPECULATORS OF THE FINAL FRONTIER

*Comparing and contrasting seminal works  
by Jem Finer and Fei Disbrow*

WORDS BY SUNSHINE FRÈRE ART BY FEI DISBROW

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*“Time exists in order that everything  
doesn’t happen all at once... and space  
exists so that it doesn’t all happen to you.”*

SUSAN SONTAG, *At The Same Time: Essays and Speeches*, 2007

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It is only in recent years, thanks to quantum mechanics, that our perception of space and time has changed. Our hypothesized inception of the universe is based on an explosive first impression—the Big Bang theory—but 13.7 billion years later, we are still trying to comprehend this micro-instant.

Fear not, for there are those who seek to understand the strangeness of time and space. Two such artists, United Kingdom-based Jem Finer and Vancouver-based Fei Disbrow, are adept at transplanting viewers and listeners into altered space-time realities.

In the late ‘90s, Finer conceived of a piece of music that would play for 1,000 years. *Longplayer* exists as both art object and ongoing musical performance: its composition and its physical manifestation, both designed to work continuously for a millennium. *Longplayer* started at midnight on Dec. 31, 1999 in London, England. It has been playing for over 17 years now. One can tune in anytime online to hear the current ethereal phase as it unfolds.

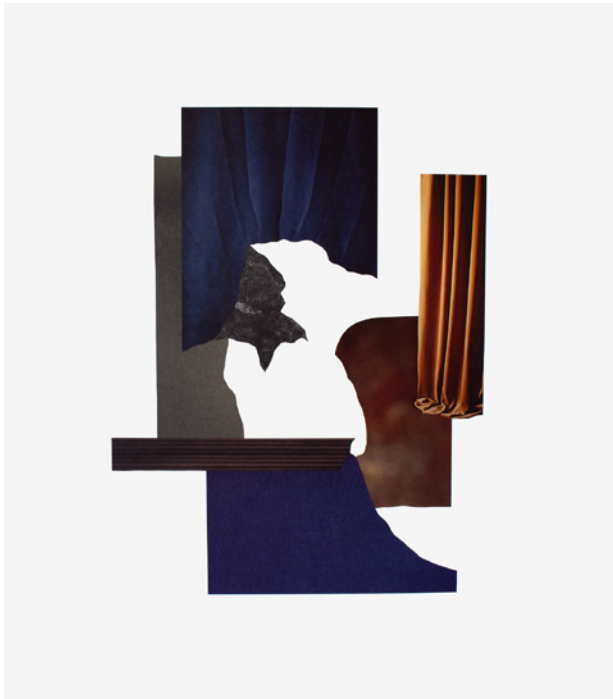
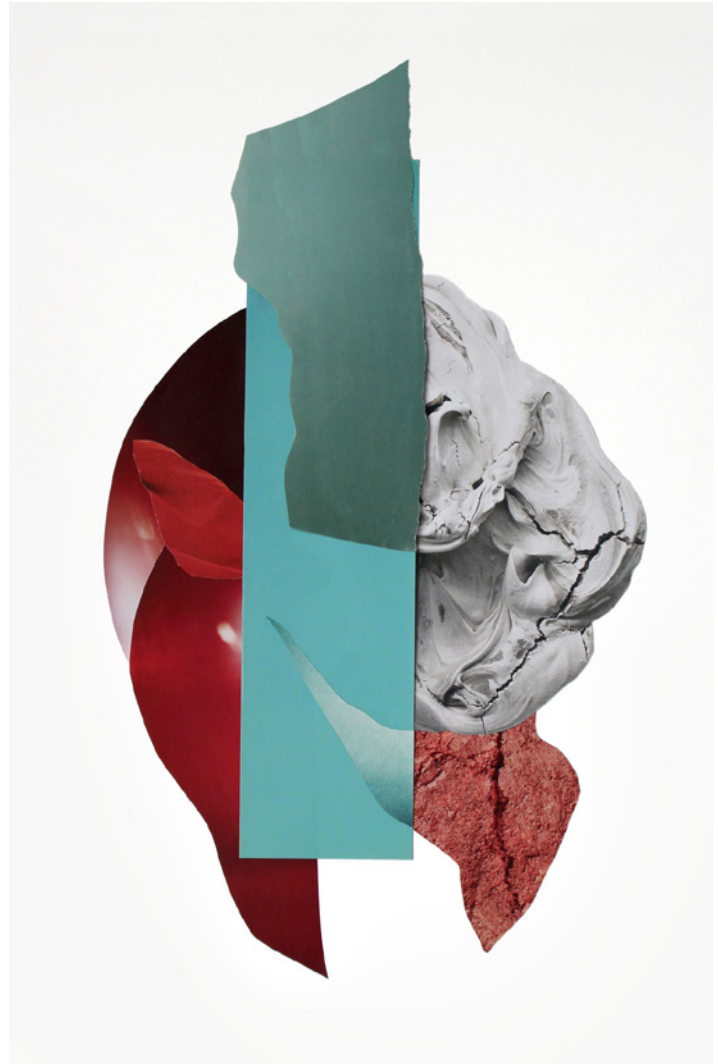
Then there is Disbrow, whose *Eccentric Journeys* collage series is made from printed paper cuttings. A planetary aesthetic prevails in this work; groups of abstract texture, pattern, and colour form solid structures that emit bountiful ocular signals and hover above pristine backdrops of white space. The series invites viewers to circumnavigate the flat and multi-dimensional aspects of these arrangements.

Looking at Finer’s and Disbrow’s works, time is activated in very different ways. When one encounters Finer’s piece, time is conceived beyond the personal life cycle. Finer’s otherworldly composition compels us to ponder metaphysical constructs of interstellar time—it forces an expansion in the mind. Time is drawn out. Disbrow’s work, on the other hand, has a visceral immediacy to it. Her work stops time, each piece implanting an instant and bold retinal impression. Disbrow synthesizes abstraction into a compelling singularity, a force to be reckoned with.

Expansion and contraction play a key role in interpreting both works, which toy with the notion of space in unique ways. Disbrow explores the void, her planetary entities stranded in isolation; like a languishing blue dwarf star that is light years away, each composition is its own spectacular swan song of magazine cuttings, an isolated and imaginative gesture of reconfiguration to dive into. When viewed in series, the works form a cloud of connective thought patterns, their existence intangible but visibly interconnected. Meanwhile, Finer’s work sends viewers inwards, directing them to the resonant frequency of their bodies in relation to other objects. *Longplayer* can be streamed live anywhere with an internet connection. Knowledge of this creates the opportunity for boundless universal experience, but it also comes with heavy existential introspection on time.

Each collage in *Eccentric Journeys* is a confluence of time projected onto a two-dimensional plane of infinite density—a singularity. Like the attack and decay of a musical note, first impressions of Disbrow’s work start with a sharp, loud bang, the colours and shapes vibrating voraciously. As the note decays, other layers become audible: texture, context, and concepts undulate ad infinitum. Finer’s work, however, impresses a feedback loop on the listener. For most who encounter *Longplayer*, it is introduced conceptually first. We become overwhelmingly lost in the conception of time as we once knew it, then we experience the esoteric singing bowl vibrations of the work, and are brought into a granular and embodied present.

Both artists push the audience into a multidimensional universe. Brace yourself—time and space are indeed both happening, all at once.



*Collages clockwise from top:*  
Lodge Insights, Moulded Mess, Floater Landscape,  
Redaction Redux, Beyond the Reveal