

Darren Glass

b.1969

Master of Fine Art (Photography): Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

Some photographers like the bells and whistles of digital technology, while some use traditional cameras with film, which require developing in a dark room. Darren Glass goes one step further than the traditionalists, and builds his own pinhole cameras, which are so unusual and complex, they become artworks in their own right.

Pinhole photography is often taught at schools to demonstrate the basic principles of light fixed onto photosensitive paper. But Glass has turned this simple school project into a personal obsession, making cameras in all kinds of crazy shapes, such as a camera that pretends to be a log, a camera that can look up girls' skirts, and a camera that fits a spiral staircase. Glass also makes drawings for cameras that are so big he'll never be able to construct them – for example, a camera that stretches all the way around Mt Ruapehu.

Ickythump is a black tyre-shaped ring with 27 pinholes in its periphery. Photographic film was put into the ring while Glass was inside a darkroom. He then took *Ickythump*, in a black, light-tight plastic bag, to the top of Mt Eden, and rolled the camera out of the bag to the bottom of the crater. He did this about 50 times, and displayed the resulting images together in strips.

Some strips show snatches of grass, trees and powerlines, while others, made near sunset, show reddish streaks of light against a dark background, like showers of sparks. Glass said that in summer, the white lines made by the sun were thicker than they were in winter. You can imagine the camera barrelling, banging and bouncing down the mountain; it certainly suits its title *Ickythump*. The nonsense word is actually an old English expression, and Glass took the name from the goofy British 1970s comedy show *The Goodies*, where characters hit each other over the head with giant sausages, yelling "Ickythump". It also happens to be the title of an album by *The White Stripes*, and although it's just a coincidence, a lot of the images Glass creates using his pinhole technique are white stripes of light against dark paper. These strips of exposed film are also reminiscent of

New Zealand experimental film pioneer Len Lye's 'Scratch Film'. Lye scratched marks into black film stock, and then projected them, creating moving patterns of lines, dots and dashes.

For both Lye and Glass, there is little emphasis on telling a story with film or photography; it is more important to allow the materials to tell their own story. When Glass makes a pinhole camera, he allows chance to take over. He can set up a situation, but he can't control the outcome. This allows for all kinds of 'happy accidents', blotches and blurs, black-outs, white-outs, scratches and all kinds of glitches. *Ickythump* would be a control freak's nightmare, but Glass loves the chaos. In some ways, Glass is only the coordinator of his projects – the real artist is light itself – the sun's rays that imprint the photographic paper.

Tessa Laird

Galleries and museums:

www.annamilesgallery.com

Articles:

www.artnews.co.nz/previous/26-3/26-3-profile.html

Books:

Horrocks, R. (2001). *Len Lye: A Biography*, Auckland University Press.

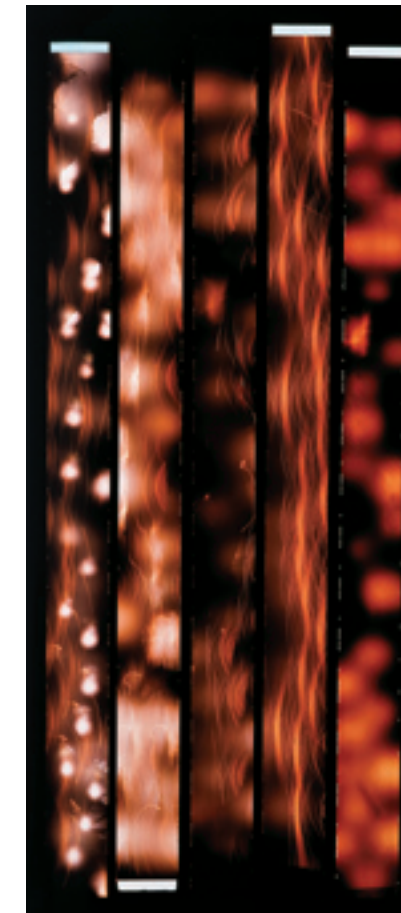
Laird, T. (2007). *The Land Has Eyes: Darren Glass's Ocular Landscapes*, Z/X #3, Art School Press, Manukau School of Visual Arts.

YouTube search:

Len Lye. *A Colour Box* (1935) and *Free Radicals* (1958).

Web search:

Pinhole camera



Darren Glass	<i>Sunset 11–21 May</i> from the series <i>I Can See Stars</i> <i>Ickythump</i>	2004 1995	Two Type-C prints from <i>Ickythump</i> 27 aperture circular pinhole camera	390x935mm each 360x360mm
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