

Black Hole Sun: Cincinnati Artist Jordan Tate Plays with Perceptions of Light and Dark 'Superblack' is Result of Both Art and Science

by Matt Peiken

CINCINNATI -- Unlike most artists, Jordan Tate cares more about triggering reactions in viewers than he does about the objects he creates.

Raised in Cincinnati and now an assistant professor of photography at the University of Cincinnati, Tate devotes his parallel careers in art and academia to shaping "how we come to understand the world."

"For me, photography is more of a metaphor and way of thinking than of capturing light onto film with a camera," he said. "I think about what the photograph does and acts upon us and how we relate to the photograph more than what's represented in the image."

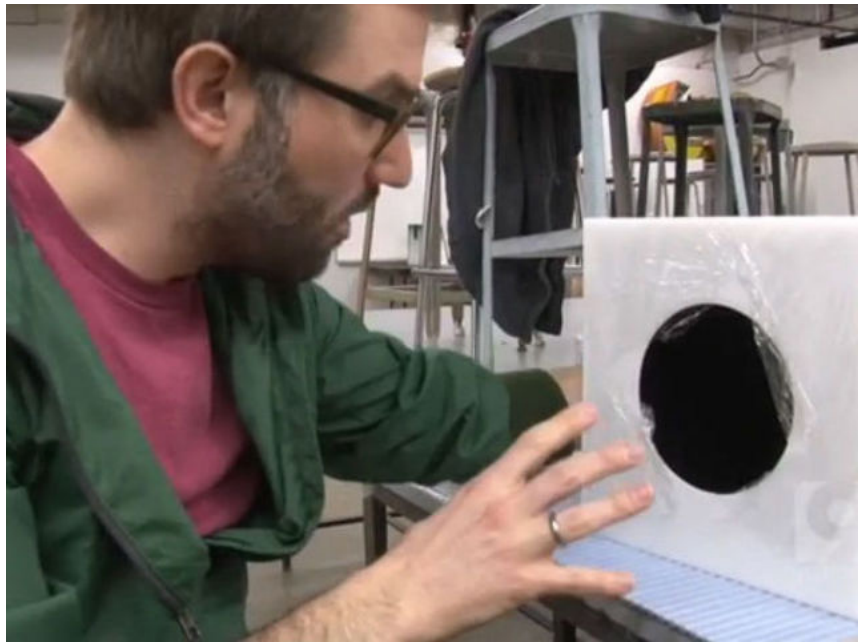


Photo courtesy of WCPO, Cincinnati

That plays out in Tate's newest work, an installation titled "Superblack," for the Transformer Station in Cleveland centered on a one-foot-squared box and a five-inch hole cut into one side. Inside the box are sheets of carbon nanotubes developed by NASA—the blackest substance known to man, Tate said, and far lighter yet stronger than steel. The material is composed of fibers so fragile that anything coming into contact with them depresses and crushes them, resulting in reflections that destroy the purity of black.

The work has only a glancing connection to what is perhaps Tate's best known work, the 2010 book "The Contemporary Dictionary of Sexual Euphemisms." There, too, Tate marries research with the desire to exercise the minds of his viewers.

"I became obsessed with this idea of perception and the effects of perception and grounding, and then I heard about physicists creating the darkest material known to mankind," Tate said in explaining the roots of "Superblack."

"I was really interested in what would happen when I gazed into that darkness and what my eyes would do, and to see what would happen when you place that darkness within your normal field of vision."

Unless you're headed to Cleveland for the March 28 opening or before the exhibition closes in mid-June, this video gives you the closest glimpse of what it means to stare into true black. Here, Tate talks about the art and science behind his work.