

Feldman, Melissa E., "Sun Works, Berkeley Art Museum", PHOTOGRAPH MAGAZINE, 31 January 2012.

## Sun Works, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA

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Sarah Charlesworth, detail from *Arc of Total Eclipse*, February 26, 1979 (1979/2010), courtesy University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive



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It's easy to forget that pre-digital photography is essentially a two-dimensional register of the light in a particular place and moment in time. "Sun Works," at the [Berkeley Art Museum](#) through May 6, reminds us of this fact through two monumental works from the museum's collection: Sarah Charlesworth's *Arc of the Total Eclipse, February 26, 1979 (1979/2010)* and *Sunburned GSP #488 (Sunset/Sunrise, Galbraith Lake, Alaska) (2011)* by Chris McCaw. Though divided along generational and tactical lines, both artists follow the sun's movement over the course of a single day. The comparison is dramatized by the theatrical installation, two rooms deep, with the McCaw centered on the back wall of the far gallery, where it is visible as though through parted "curtains" of the flanking walls on which the Charlesworths are arrayed.

Charlesworth's black-and-white series consists of full-size photographic prints of 29 front pages of newspapers from cities and towns corresponding with path of the 1979 eclipse from the Pacific Northwest to Alaska. But the pages are empty—whited out—except for the mastheads and images of the eclipse, such as the full eclipse as a dark orb with a surrounding glow or the succession of diminishing crescents. Scanning the installation, the eclipse reappears in different sizes and positions on the page. Cosmic grandeur contrasts with the local charm of the different typetypes, logos and names such as the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald* from Saskatchewan. The eclipse seems to offer respite from quotidian concerns such as the local weather and the Dow Jones detailed in the mastheads.

By contrast, McCaw takes photography back to its origins in works using view cameras he builds himself fitted with 40-by-30-inch sheets of vintage gelatin silver paper. McCaw had to reload the paper four times to capture the complete 24-hour cycle of the sun, which traces its own smile-shaped path across the four pictures, ending in a burnt tail at sunrise—its heat having actually burnt a hole in the paper. Dominated by an unmodulated gray sky, the landscape is crude and foggy, with little sense of depth or detail. In different ways, though, both artists focus on the simplicity of nature's grand gestures.

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