

New Scientist

WEEKLY 21 February 2026

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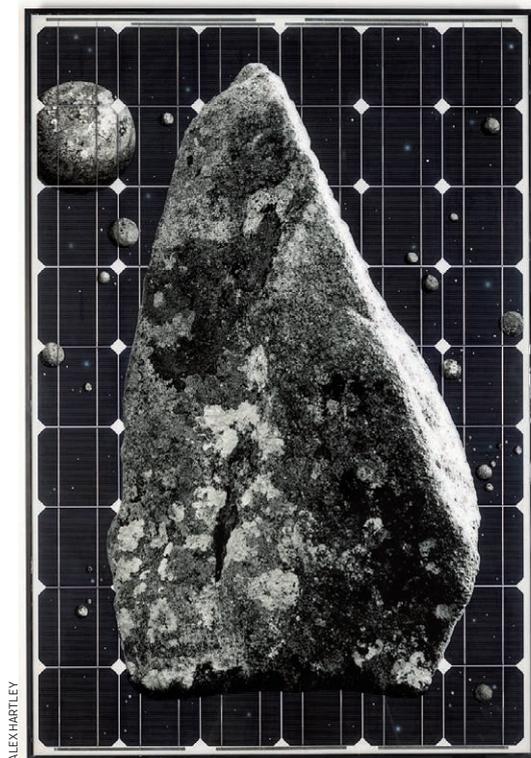
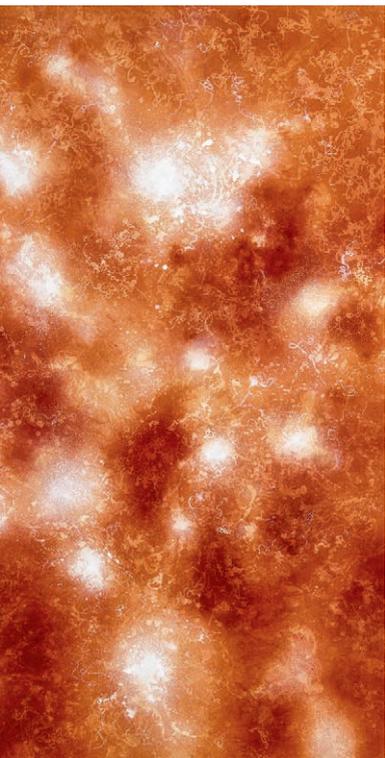
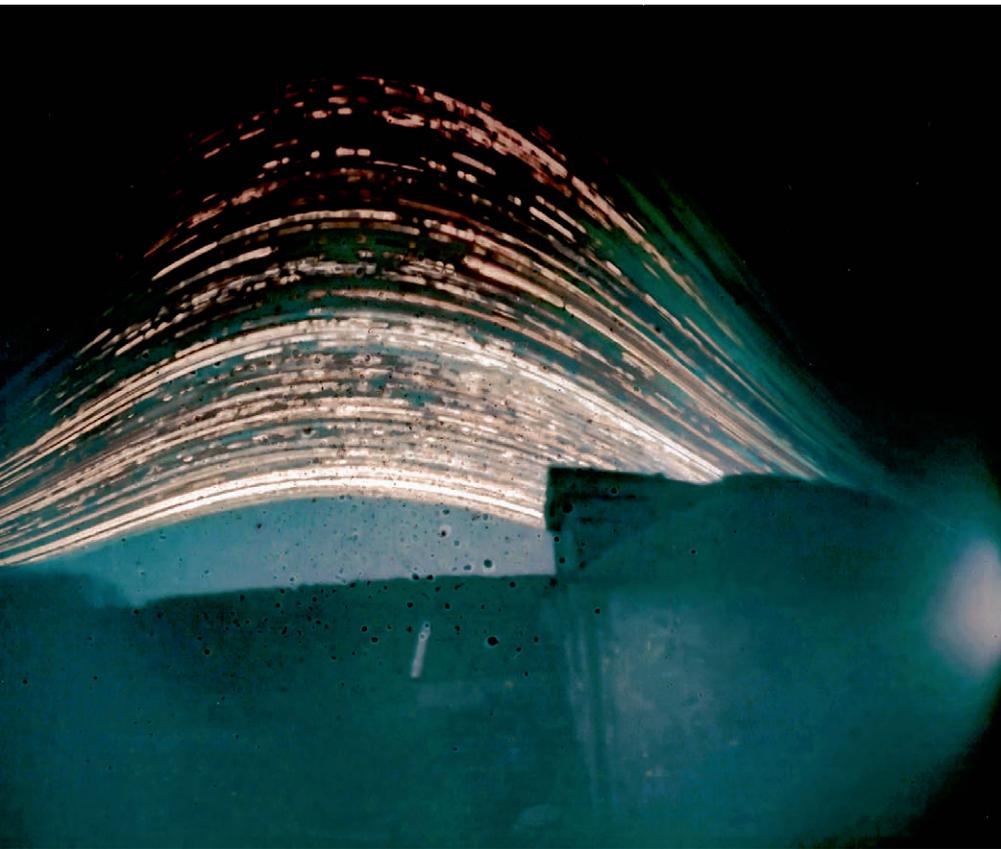
MICHAEL PORTER



JANETTE KERR



IONE PARKIN



ALEXHARTLEY

Cosmic art



Royal West of England Academy

BOTH artists and astronomers are, in a way, translators. They convert what we can see into a story we can tell. In *Cosmos: The art of observing space*, a new exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol, UK, every facet of this process is on display.

“We recalibrate our perspectives nourished by the prolonged experience of the sustained gaze,” writes artist Ione Parkin, the exhibition’s curator, in an essay about the show, evoking nights of stargazing as much as those spent poring over scientific data. The exhibition, which runs until 19 April, invites visitors to engage in their own act of observation and discover new insights in the interweaving of art and science.

For the top, near-left image, Janette Kerr worked with communities in Iceland, Greenland, Shetland and Somerset to freeze time through solargraphy – photography of the sun with months-long exposure times. Moving clockwise, this detail of a work by Alex Hartley combines a solar panel with manipulated photographs of Neolithic standing stones, showcasing a continuity of solar tech from antiquity to now.

Next, Parkin’s own painting swirls with reds and oranges, with cracks of bright white, evoking the restless motion of super-heated plasma on the surface of the sun. Finally, Michael Porter depicts an *Impossible Landscape*. He reaches “beyond the experientially knowable”, writes Parkin, but textures his alien vista with rocky and icy structures familiar from terrestrial geology to connect what science suggests that we know with what art can help us dream of. ■

Karmela Padavic-Callaghan