

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Latrobe Regional Gallery sincerely thanks the artists for their enthusiasm and participation in this exhibition.

Daniel Armstrong
Govinda Sah 'Azad'
Magda Cebokli
Lesley Duxbury
Sam Leach
Harry Nankin
Felicity Spear
Vanessa Stanley
Tarja Trygg

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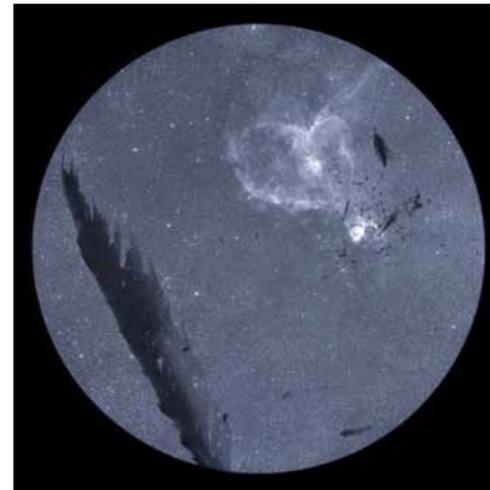
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Curator Sky Lab: Felicity Spear
Curator Latrobe Regional Gallery: Fiona West
Design: Irene Proebsting
Cover photo: Felicity Spear, *Full Moon*
21/08/13 Stockholm, (detail)

Harry Nankin



Harry Nankin, *Szygy 18/Transit of the Heart*, 2011, from the *Szygy Works* series. Two toned gelatin silver films created by exposure to starlight each mounted on a starfire glass pane with screen-printed mask on opposing face. Glass/film objects 336 x 366 x 6 mm, wooden base 76 x 390 x 60 mm. Courtesy of the artist and Dianne Tanzer Gallery.

IN HIS SEARCH for what he describes as an *ecological gaze* Harry Nankin's interest lies in the contested meanings attributed to Nature in modern times. The *Szygy* project was a collaboration with artist-scholar Paul Carter and astrophysicist Dr Maurizio Toscano. The site of the project, Lake Tyrrell in the semi-arid Mallee region of Victoria, once served as an aboriginal celestial observatory where the heavens were mirrored in the lake and formed connections between the human and non-human world.

Now ruptured by European settlement, Nankin seeks to reimagine through this site the reciprocity between earth and sky, and between humanity and the natural world. He recaptures this ancient

observatory through surrogate eyes, glass discs of floating, teeming insect life from the bed of the lake and the myriad stars and galaxies above. Using traditional camera-less photographic techniques to better evoke the traces left by ecological phenomena, he employs as his medium raw starlight falling on the dry lakebed on clear moonless nights. He imprints photographic films with the shadows of live native invertebrates gathered from the lakeshore, and rare astronomical photographs on glass plates brought to the location. These works remind us of a deeply connected natural world to which we belong, which we observe detachedly, and with which we have an increasingly troubled relationship.

Felicity Spear



Felicity Spear, *Deep Field – interconnected euphoria or the overview effect*, 2007, archival pigment inkjet prints on soft cotton paper, 7 panels, overall 700 cm x 360 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne. Acknowledgements: Photograph, Paul Pavlou; Michel Szczepanski, master printer, C-Lab, University of Melbourne; David Malin, Astronomer and Photographer, formerly of the Anglo-Australian Observatory; NASA, National Aeronautical and Space Administration.

TECHNOLOGY stands in for first-hand experience, and mapping stands in for space, giving a form of visible reality, (the map), to an invisible reality, (the space being mapped). Machine produced visualizations now enable a more creative mapping process. NASA's famous photograph the *Hubble Deep Field 1995* captured by the Hubble Space Telescope, revealed for the first time a core sample of the extent of the Universe's observable limits. Spear's mural-sized work, *Deep Field – interconnected euphoria or the overview effect*, is a homage as well as a playful reference to this famous photograph, which has extended our vision deeper into time and space.

In this speculative mapping work information is shuffled into different scales and focuses, juxtaposed through vertical strips. They are created

from layers of time lapse star trail photography, computer images and visualized maps of hidden phenomena found at different radiations and depths in the night sky. Reminiscent of a seventeenth century mural of the heavens the viewers may find themselves zooming in and out at different distances from the work as if manipulating a camera lens or a mouse, absorbed in this immersive, illusory space curving out from the wall as if warped by gravity. This contemporary view revisits the all-encompassing fifteenth century *mappae mundi* or world map in which different conceptual frameworks and ideas were explored. With an edge on view of the Milky Way Galaxy at its centre, Spear's work reveals an atomistic undulating space-scape of foaming, flickering and fluctuating surfaces.

Vanessa Stanley



Vanessa Stanley, *The Earth Was Dead*, 2013, Video, 3 minutes, variable size. Collection of the artist.

WHEN GALILEO turned his simple telescope towards the heavens to look into the night sky through a telescope, horizons disappeared and the concept of spatial boundaries extended deeper into infinity. In this sense the telescope became an instrument of transcendence. The mapping of cosmic space is now determined by new evidence about the structure of the Universe seen through ground and sky based telescopes. The information gathered in these observatories is revealed by electronic data which is deciphered, processed, analysed, categorised and modelled. These extended virtual eyes have enabled us to reconsider the cosmos as a new form of reality in all its mysterious and continuously unfolding complexity.

Vanessa Stanley's work focuses on these processes of observation and our personal visual experiences resulting from them. In her video work *The Earth Was Dead*, she witnessed and recorded in May 2013 an annular solar eclipse over northern Australia. As the moon passed between the Earth and the Sun it blocked most of the Sun's light causing it to look like an annulus (or ring). For those few minutes of increasing darkness the birds ceased to sing, and the world became silent and seemingly lifeless. Finally the Sun re-emerged in its full luminosity breathing life back into the Earth once more. And those who witnessed this phenomenon felt the fear and awe of the forces of nature which were especially intense when experienced at first hand.

Tarja Trygg



Tarja Trygg, *From the winter solstice to the summer solstice*, 2010, Helsinki, Finland, 60°N, 24°E, Solargraph, pigment inkjet print, edition of 10. 1110 cm x 1460 cm. Michel Szczepanski, master printer, C-Lab, University of Melbourne. Courtesy of the artist and Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland.

SOLARGRAPHY is a form of mapping which tracks the path of the Sun over time using time lapse photography. From our Earthbound point of view the mapping of the Sun's path reminds us of the journey we take on our rotating Earth, its rotation around the Sun, and together with its solar family its endless journey around the Milky Way. The Finnish artist Tarja Trygg uses pinhole photography, a traditional low tech. process, to record the Sun's path over time. Tiny film canisters acting as lensless cameras containing light sensitive film are fixed to trees, bridges, domes, sky scrapers and the like, tracking the Sun over many months. The images are then digitally manipulated to reveal

the somewhat other-worldly pin-hole images and rows of Sun trails burning their way across the sky. Trygg is conducting a global project to create a cooperative artistic work, employing pin-hole volunteers from all over the world to record the Sun's paths at various latitudes. These sun trails appear differently configured according to the position of the observer in relation to geographical latitude and the time of the year. Images such as *From Winter to Summer 2010–2012* captured in Helsinki, Finland, are not only the images of the sky but the landscape and urban view which reveals the human context and the atmosphere in which these solargraphs were captured.

SKY lab



SKY LAB

FROM A COSMIC perspective science tells us that Earth is a totally insignificant speck of dust in an expanding Universe. We are made of that dust. So the story of the Universe is also our story. The artists represented in Sky Lab direct their gaze beyond our planet to create speculative works about our relationships to *outer space* and sky-situated knowledge.

In the depths of this space, in a blisteringly hot furnace at a temperature of 4.5 billion degrees, emerged the iron we see in cars, in buildings, and in our blood which at this very moment is flowing through our veins. We humans are carbon based bipeds. Life as we know it could not have begun without the formation of carbon, the physical basis of all living organisms. It is electronic data, remote sensing and computer simulations, which are allowing astronomers to examine and map the characteristic fingerprint or barcode which these elements reveal in the light coming from stars.

This is the forensic evidence for our existence here on Earth. Our reality, once tangible for all our senses, is now understood as a pin point in an unfolding and much greater remote sensed reality.

But what if we Earthlings, travelling through the Universe on *Spaceship Earth*¹, are destined to cosmic solitary confinement with no one else to talk to and nowhere else to go? Projected space stations and dreams of bases on the Moon and Mars create the possibility of man escaping the confines of the Earth and becoming an inhabitant of the sky. Scientists are suggesting that it might even be possible one day to *terra-form* or *Earth-shape* by modifying the atmosphere of a planet like Mars, or a moon, in order to make it habitable for humans. Such propositions

Felicity Spear 2013

remind us that science fiction, which has conceived all kinds of alien life forms and possible worlds existing in other parts of the Universe, creates a rich imaginative culture about the Universe, *out there*.

What do we make of these cosmic signs in our everyday world? Do we see Earth as a planet, with all its complex biodiversity, or merely an amalgam of human-designated territories? Artists who are inspired by scientific interpretations of Nature are inevitably confronted with ecological concerns. Our knowledge of *Nature* (from the Latin *physica*) is increasingly understood through culture, the various customs and human intellectual activities in which our species, modern humans, *homo sapiens* (from the Latin for *wise-man*) participate. But as our population overwhelms Earth's resources and we manipulate and modify the natural world for our own ends, this *blue planet*, once seemingly resistant and infinite in its depth, may be headed for defeat at the hands of our own species, the so-called wise men.

Today our horizon has expanded exponentially. Increasingly technological sophistication has enabled us to survey and appreciate the structure of the Universe. Cosmic space is no longer understood as a clockwork mechanism and a quantity of discrete objects. Now it is thought of as a set of interacting processes and relational fields which challenge our understandings of what is meant by reality. The advancement of any branch of inquiry engenders new horizons, new choices and ethical challenges. As the astronomer John Barrow has observed, 'We feel like the Universe's only child and that feeling has many consequences.'²

Daniel Armstrong

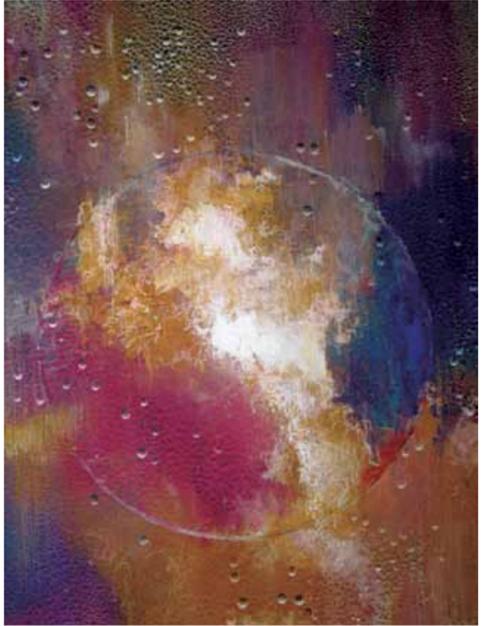


Daniel Armstrong, *Aqua Optica Saturn*, 2013, glass, water, digital projection, 36 cm x 36 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen McLaughlan Gallery.

AS FAR BACK as the eleventh century, the Islamic mathematician Abu Alhazan used a simple device, the *camera obscura*, as an analogue to demonstrate how an image was formed in the eye by light reflection. He also noticed that segments of crystal balls could be used to magnify small objects, and that light rays seem to bend, or refract, when they go from one medium to another. At the heart of our conception of the cosmos lies this phenomenon of reflection and refraction. The curvature of boundary surfaces gives rise to the instruments of magnified observation (the optical and ocular), the lens and the eye. The European Enlightenment tradition based on rational thought and scientific observation and analysis of the natural world, grew out of the desire to represent reality through empirical research. With the invention in the seventeenth

century of the *optik tube*, or telescope, the Italian astronomer Galileo mapped an as yet unseen part of the night sky. The understanding of light, time and space underwent a seminal shift. The Sun was confirmed as the central anchor in our planetary system around which planet Earth revolves. Daniel Armstrong's work *Aqua Optica: (the primordial lens)* explores the refractive properties of a spherical aquatic lens. It acts as a signifier for all lenses and the very act of seeing which lies beyond. The corporeal and experiential nature of observation is invoked by the spatial positioning of the viewer to this lens, which through this process gives form to light as an image. This primitive instrument and the eye of the observer become meeting points between inner and outer, the celestial and the self.

Govinda Sah 'Azad'



Govinda Sah 'Azad', *Uncertain Centre (detail)*, 2010, oil acrylic on canvas 40 cm x 40 cm. Courtesy October Gallery, London and Siddhartha Gallery, Kathmandu.

NEPALESE ARTIST Govinda Sah 'Azad' was born in the Himalaya. In these mountains there is an ambivalence to Nature exposed through a frozen and dangerous beauty which, as one ascends, sucks away one's breath. But standing before these soaring mountains wrapped in cloud is to sense a connection with a living, breathing Universe. Unseen to our own eyes this Universe is woven through with gravitational waves and distortions in which time and space shrink and stretch in response to matter. Mountains have a symbiotic relationship with the chemistry that occurs in cloud formation.

Clouds reveal the passage of time and the movement of light and shadow. 'Azad' paints clouds, rendering them visible in order to create associations with things that are not visible. His cloud painting *Uncertain Centre* represents ancient alchemical transformations of matter which generate life. Reality in Govinda's culture is premised on the idea that all things are connected. It is understood through the Hindu proverb which says that 'God is in everything living and non-living, in the earth or the sky.'

Magda Cebokli



Magda Cebokli, *Probability Monochrome - Eclipse*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 101.6 cm x 122 cm. Collection of the artist.

A MOTIVATING force in both science and philosophy is the desire to elucidate the nature of reality. Historically this has been the search for the constant, the underlying principle, the thing of which one can be sure. In the twentieth century the possibility of certainty has been challenged by quantum physics which argues that at any particular point in time, nothing is certain, anything is possible. The best one can say is that something is probable. On one hand we have the circle, a perfect

form, a Platonic ideal. On the other, a universe where chance is a constant. How do they co-exist? Two forms of uncertainty are addressed in Magda Cebokli's painting *Probability Monochrome - eclipse*. The transition from dark to light, a questioning of the point at which one becomes the other, and the way in which chance interacts with structure, in this case the sphere, in the transition from one state to another. Cebokli's works explore the shared ground of abstraction, mathematics and science.

Lesley Duxbury



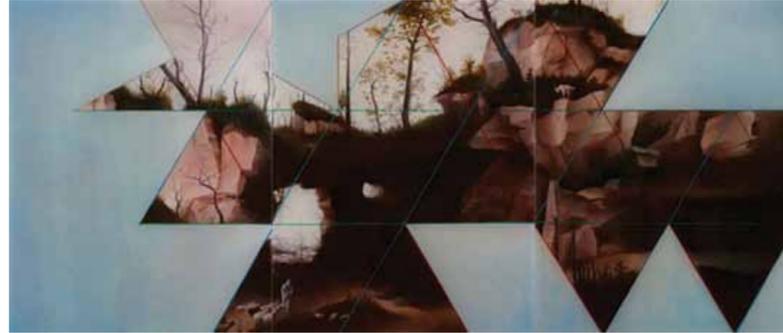
Lesley Duxbury, *66.0667° N 18.6500° W 21/06/2012-22/06/2012#3*, 2013, ink jet print and ink, 33 cm x 48.3 cm. Lesley Duxbury's work has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen McLaughlan Gallery.

THE OBSERVATION of cyclic patterns of astronomical phenomena, and the development of systems for prediction and the reckoning of the passage of time, have been fundamental to our perceptions of and interactions with space and time. Planets rise and set and satellites glide across the sky. Stars twinkle in formations and patterns identified with mythological figures. Earthly forms appear and disappear. However the brilliance of the sun and the scattering of its light to create the blue of the sky almost completely obliterate any view beyond our atmosphere during daylight hours. These all but invisible diurnal celestial journeys are for the most part taken for granted.

The night sky is undiscriminating. It belongs to us all. But for city dwellers man-made light blots out access to an appreciation of this moving intensity. Would we continue to pollute the night sky with artificial light if we knew we would never see the

night sky again, or would we mine the virtual world of technology to recreate this experience? How satisfying would that be? Lesley Duxbury spent last summer in Iceland, close to the Arctic Circle, where in mid-summer there is twenty four hours of daylight. She saw no stars or planets as the sky never darkened. The only way to orient herself to the reassuring rhythms and patterns of day and night was to resort to her iPhone App. *Night Sky*. Her work *66.0667° N 18.6500° W 21/06/2012-22/06/2012#3* superimposes information from this App. over photographs of the skies of Iceland at this liminal moment, this mysterious between-space, neither fully dark nor fully light. The cupreuscular silver tracery of constellations layered over these monochrome photographs are the only evidence of unceasing celestial movements and Earth's journey through the Universe.

Sam Leach



Sam Leach, *Van Dalem in Dymaxion*, 2013, oil and resin on wood, 3 panels, 81 cm x 36 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan and Strumpf Gallery, Sydney.

ART AND SCIENCE have been described in Western culture in the twentieth century as the two cultures, inferring their opposition to each other. But both are preoccupied in their own idiosyncratic ways with enduring questions about the nature of knowledge and our efforts to understand ourselves and the space in which we live. Sam Leach's speculative works juxtapose thinking from early and later Enlightenment ideas of vision, space and technology, often referencing contemporary data visualisation and models such as diagrams or maps, together with art historical images. In his painting *Van Dalem in Dymaxion*, - *Jakob van Dalem's Landscape with Origin of Civilization [1590]*, formalist figuration and utopian modernism co-exist to suggest alternative or fictional worlds. Leach references the

mid-20th century architect Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion map, and the idealized subject matter of Jakob van Dalem's 17th century painting. Mapping is always embedded in the subjective conditions of human thinking. Fuller's map grew out of his proposal that the Universe has no preferential or political direction, and space is ideally understood by the gravitational forces that react in the presence of matter. Consequently his idealized map of the Earth over an icosahedron represents the continents as *one island earth*. It provides a model that reveals our connectedness to each other and the potential for as yet unrealized possibilities for humanity beyond our own planet. Leach suggests that the van Dalem painting and the Dymaxion map both show the totality of human progress from opposite ends of the era of modernism.

1. A term suggested by Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) philosopher, architect, systems theorist. Creator of the geodesic dome and the fullerene, a carbon molecule forming a hollow sphere, ellipsoid or tube resembling the geodesic dome and its hexagons.

2. John Barrow, *The Artful Universe*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), pp 44.