



## SKYLAB:

### LINES OF SIGHT AND FORCES OF ATTRACTION | CURATED BY FELICITY SPEAR

31 July – 30 August

Artist & Curator talks: Saturday 8 August, 2.30 pm

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#### DANIEL ARMSTRONG

As far back as the eleventh century, the Islamic mathematician Abu Alhazan noticed that segments of crystal balls could be used to magnify small objects, and that light rays seem to bend, or refract, when they pass from one medium to another. At the heart of our conception of the cosmos lie this phenomenon of refraction and the instruments of magnified observation which it has afforded. 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 and the Sun was confirmed as the central anchor in our planetary system.

Daniel Armstrong's work *Aqua Optica - Planet X* explores the refractive properties of a spherical aquatic lens. It acts as a signifier for all lenses (both optical and ocular) and the observation and detection of which lies beyond.

Pluto was the only planet (now a Dwarf planet) which cannot be seen by the naked eye.

The search for a hypothetical Planet X was initiated in Flagstaff Arizona by Percival Lowell in 1906 and continued unsuccessfully until his death in 1916. In 1930 Clyde Tombaugh was employed by the Lowell Observatory to continue Lowell's quest. Using a device known as a Blink comparator, Tombaugh was able to detect the elusive point of light which we now know as Pluto. Eighty-five years later the lenses on board the New Horizons spacecraft have begun to unveil the shroud of distance that lay between us and Planet X.

*Aqua Optica - Planet X* explores the evolving and continuing visions of Pluto while engaging the viewer in the elemental and visceral forces of optical phenomena.

#### MAGDA CEBOKLI

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.

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#### Counihan Gallery In Brunswick

233 Sydney Road, Brunswick VIC 3056 | 03 9389 8622

Wednesday - Saturday 11 am - 5 pm | Sunday 1 - 5 pm

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## LESLEY DUXBURY

The night sky and the sky by day are the same but what we see and experience differs. By day clouds and the phenomena of the atmosphere affect light and the ways we view the world. The brilliance of the sun and the scattering of its light to create the blue of the sky almost completely obliterate any view beyond the atmosphere during daylight hours. At night however, though often still visible, clouds shift and disperse and if we are lucky to be away from urban development and light pollution, star constellations and planets are revealed to the naked eye. These works merge these circadian conditions to create a persistent twilight that is both neither day nor night, light nor dark, an ever-present ethereal world.

## SAM LEACH

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, 3 dimensional models, diagrams and maps, together with art historical images. His model *Sartorius Basic*, (named for its original creator), references the first nanogram balance which set the world record in 1971 for the most precise weighing. This balance was used to weigh the moon rocks that astronaut Neil Armstrong brought back to Earth from his expedition. In Leach's hands this small machine appears to take on a hint of the human simply by meeting our gaze with the two small eyes placed on one of its sides.

Leach speculates about the potential for as yet unrealized possibilities for humanity beyond our own planet, understanding and utilizing technology as an extension of human consciousness, while emphasizing the connectedness between the human and non-human life. With the aid of such technology and space exploration he suggests it might be possible ultimately for all life on Earth to have control over the cosmos and find a way to extend our viability beyond planetary timescales. In Leach's work formalism, figuration and utopian modernism co-exist to suggest alternative or fictional worlds.

## HARRY NANKIN

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 *Syzygy* 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.

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## NANCY HENRY RIPIJINGIMP

Nancy Henry created *Sky and Upper World* on a floating cloud of blue and white silk from one of her drawings which was then hand printed on to silk at Jilamara Arts and Crafts Centre. The Tiwi Islanders work with screen printing at Jilamara in the village of Milikapiti on Melville Island (120km north of Darwin). 'Jilamara' (design) or 'yoi' (ceremony) is thought to be associated with body painting and the Tiwi Islanders, (Tiwi meaning 'we people'), did not usually attribute meanings to their paintings. However in *Sky and Upper World* we can glean from the title and the repeated motifs symbols which relate to the sky and the cosmos. Her graphic, map-like images of the visible sky and the imagined non-visible space beyond, the upper world, seem to reach out into multiple universes, creating many worlds within the upper world. The work also reflects the immediacy, the intensity and the complexity of the night sky in the island dwellers' purview.

## FELICITY SPEAR

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. Felicity 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 viewer 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 of view of the Milky Way Galaxy at its centre, Spear's work reveals an atomistic undulating space-scape of foaming, flickering and fluctuating surfaces.

## TARJA TRYGG

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 lenseless 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 pinhole 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 pinhole 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. They 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.

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