



In 2009 Felicity Spear curated the first Sky Lab exhibition to coincide with the International Year of Astronomy. Since then she has developed the project with a core group of continuing artists and the addition of invited artists for each further iteration.

2009 Sky Lab / Stephen McLaughlan Gallery Melbourne  
 2011 Sky Lab: from where you stand / SMcL Gallery Melbourne  
 2013 Sky Lab / Latrobe Regional Gallery Morwell  
 2015 Sky Lab: lines of sight & forces of attraction / Counihan GIB  
 2016 Sky Lab: Kepler's Dream / LUVAC Bendigo

This exhibition draws together nine artists who reveal their diverse responses to a complex physical universe through the medium of Johannes Kepler, the 17<sup>th</sup> century German mathematician and astronomer. Kepler wrote a number of scholarly texts about astronomy and optics, the contents of which are still recognized as prescient today. One of these texts was a fictional narrative he titled *Somnium*, (*The Dream*) written as he says, 'to work out through the example of the moon, an argument for the motion of the earth.' Kepler was familiar with Galileo's telescopic observations and, coincidentally, there was a burgeoning interest in optics, instruments for seeing, mapping and the panoptic view seen particularly in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century art. These ideas were expanding the horizons of art, science and the known world.

However religious dogma at the time determined that scientific knowledge was deeply suspect. This induced Kepler to write his narrative in 1608 as an allegory. It was in fact also a 'science fiction', a guide for an adventurous lunar expedition, dreaming a possible future by imagining from his observations and his calculations, a way in which humans might travel to the moon. The subtext of his lunar expedition was the promotion of the Copernican view. This view deposed planet Earth's centrality in the known universe and proposed instead a heliocentric universe in which Kepler realized that planets journey around the sun not in circles but in elliptical paths. He reasoned that by taking people to the moon vicariously, and having them stand stationary there, he could show them the Earth in motion and demonstrate the theory.

But above all Kepler wished to communicate to his fellow man that the human animal was not the central figure in the cosmos, observing that 'the heavens did not wait upon his home planet, earth.' He was living through tumultuous times of which we see resonances in our own contemporary world. It was Kepler's overriding desire that through an awareness of the physical world, and by observing the movements of the cosmos about them (which he imagined as God's glorious creation), humans would come to realize the odds against them in the grip of the vast forces shaping their environment. Artists who are inspired by scientific interpretations of nature are inevitably confronted with ecological concerns. In contemporary terms we might see this creation, this physical world, more in terms of a reality that cannot be grasped completely. A reality which also poses questions about the ambiguities embedded in notions of good and evil. Nature holds us in both awe and fear as we gain knowledge of it, impose our human thoughts and expectations upon it and experience it in its many manifestations, not least of which is described by the poet A.L.Tennyson in his 1850 poem *In Memoriam* as '...Nature, red in tooth and claw...'

Kepler's *Somnium*, in a contemporary sense, is a timely reminder that for all our human ingenuity and hubris, manipulating and modifying nature for our own ends, we are only a small part of something very much larger than ourselves. We are, arguably, the 'caretakers' of a vulnerable space capsule we call Earth, described as our *Goldilocks* planet because our position and movement in space makes it not too hot, and not too cold. We've got liquid water and a decent atmosphere in which to survive. We're part of a greater ecosystem of living and non-living things. But there are no guarantees that our *Goldilocks* planet will be suitable for us forever.

Connected to the universe through the medium of light we keep searching and extending our vision through increasingly complex technologies, instruments, machines and data. We look for faint whispers from beyond, and speculate about what's out there, how it works, whether we are alone.

What, today, do we make of the world known by the scientist and the world of the artist? How does the artist translate human sensory experience into a world observed with instruments? As artists we respond to these observations with different insights. We are not inclined to be constrained by the evidence as would scientists, but like them we speculate about the possibilities for other dimensions of reality which might reveal insights about ourselves and the environment which we inhabit. In attempting to respond to the physical universe the artist is at liberty to reveal the idiosyncratic nature of human thought in poetic, political, playful or contemplative ways. Thus, the exploration of *Kepler's Dream* reminds us of the way in which the imagining of things draws us into different ways of seeing and responding to our universe in a world full of uncertainties and contradictions.

Felicity Spear 2016

Reference: *Kepler's Dream* by John Lear with full text and notes of *Somnium*, Sive *Astronomia Lunarum* – Joannis Kepleri. Translated by Patricia Frueh Kirkwood - University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles 1965

# Sky Lab Kepler's Dream

**Daniel Armstrong**  
**Lesley Duxbury**  
**Sam Leach**  
**Felicity Spear**  
**Paul Uhlmann**

**Magda Cebokli**  
**Simon Finn**  
**Harry Nankin**  
**Tarja Trygg**



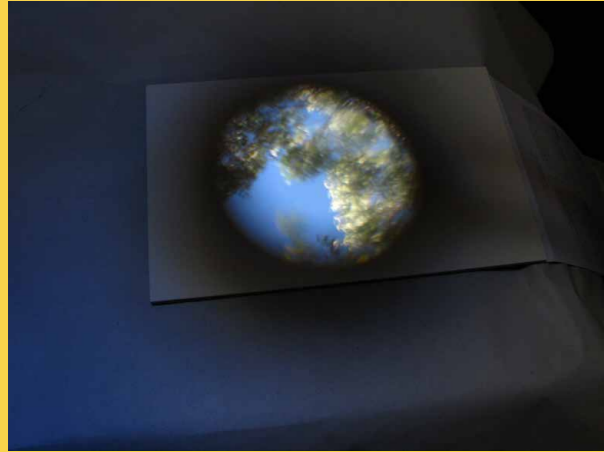
Cover image: Felicity Spear - *Winter Moon* 09/06/16  
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 ISBN 9781921915987

**18 August - 25 September 2016**  
**La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre 121 View Street Bendigo**  
**Gallery hours: Tuesday - Friday 10am-5pm Saturday - Sunday 12-5pm**  
**Sky Lab: Kepler's Dream Curated by Felicity Spear**



# Paul Uhlmann

Courtesy Art Collective Western Australia



**Camera obscura** (14. 04 2011 3.42 pm – 3.42.48sec) 2012 Video loop 20 x 25 cm

# Felicity Spear

Courtesy Stephen McLaughlan Gallery



**Somnium** (iii) 2016 (detail 2 of 14) inkjet print Photographs - moon eclipse 2015 ( Victoria) other image 2016 (Northern Territory) Full sheet size 30 x 110 cm

# Harry Nankin

## Flay 4

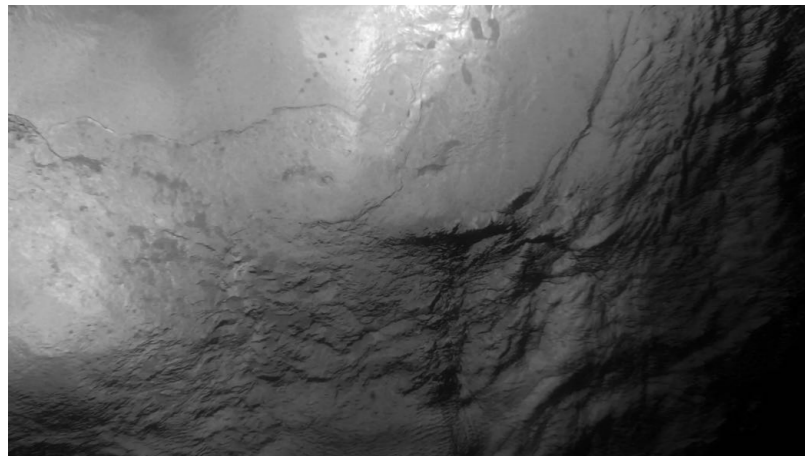
2016  
(detail No 4 of 9 )

Toned gelatin silver photographic film mounted on sapphire glass pane  
33.5 x 35.5 x 0.5 cm.

Displayed in alignment on three light boxes each 60 x 150 x 10 cm



# Simon Finn



**Submerged** 2014 (detail) HDVideo(loop) 1920X1080P

# Sam Leach

Courtesy Sullivan and Strumpf Gallery

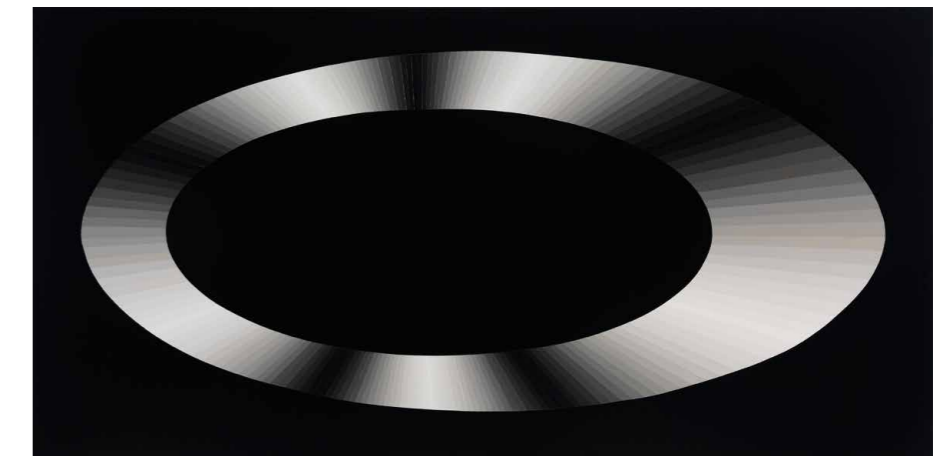


## Chair For Rock

2015-16

Granite bluestone  
steel automotive paint  
100 x 50 x 50 cm

# Magda Cebokli



**Foci** 2016, acrylic on linen, 72cm x 154 cm

# Lesley Duxbury

Courtesy Stephen McLaughlan Gallery



## Night Vision(s)

2016  
(detail)

Inkjet print of photograph on aluminium  
200 X 300 cm

# Dan Armstrong

Courtesy Stephen McLaughlan Gallery



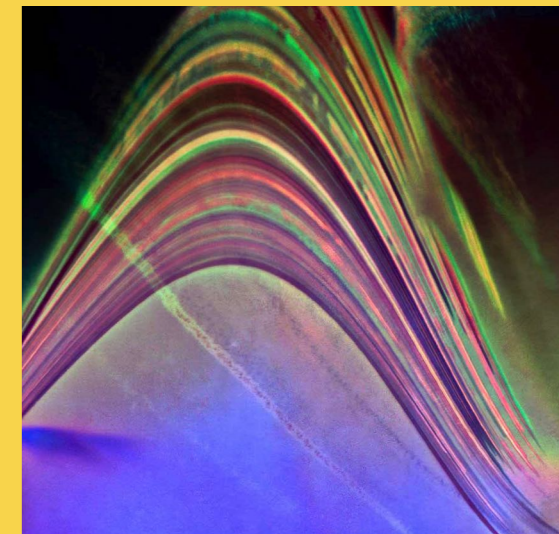
## Mysterium Cosmographicum

2016  
(detail No. 2 Of 5)

Traces of Mars #2  
4 x 5" scanned black and white film negative  
pigment ink print

# Tarja Trygg

Courtesy Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland



## Motion / Rotation of the Earth

2015

Pigment inkjet print of solargraph  
Pinhole exposure 6 months  
Sebastian Kirchof can assistant  
Namibia, Africa  
106 x 148.58 cm