

The Sky Lab Project - 2009 - 2016 - curator and artist Felicity Spear.



In 2009 I curated the first of five Sky Lab exhibitions to coincide with the International Year of Astronomy. Since then I have 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](#) Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne

2013 [Sky Lab](#) - Latrobe Regional Gallery Morwell, Victoria

2015 [Sky Lab: lines of sight & forces of attraction](#) Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, Melbourne

2016 [Sky Lab: Kepler's Dream](#) La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre Bendigo, Victoria

Coupled with this during the International Year of Astronomy in 2009, I was included in the National Gallery of Victoria exhibition Shared Sky . I also curated the exhibition, Beyond Visibility: light and dust, with pioneering astro-photographer David Malin, and celebrated indigenous artist Gulumbu Yunupingu, at Monash Gallery of Art in Melbourne and UTS Gallery, Sydney.

Felicity Spear, *Deep Field - interconnected euphoria or the overview effect* , 2007, 7 archival inkjet prints, 700 x 350cm Counihan Gallery.

NASA's famous photograph the *Hubble Deep Field 1995* was captured by the Hubble Space Telescope and 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. 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.



Why the link to astronomy and science you might ask ? Well they in a broader sense provide the vehicle through which to explore our perceptions and understandings of the physical universe through time, light, space, geometry, matter, ecology and technology. And think about Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Herschel, Darwin, Mendel, Einstein, for example and the influence their thinking has had on our lives.

The most recent iteration of Sky Lab is Kepler's Dream. At the Latrobe University Arts Centre nine contemporary artists respond to a world observed through the lens of science and a complex physical universe. In the process they bring to life the ideas of the remarkable 17 century German astronomer Johannes Kepler which are still prescient today.

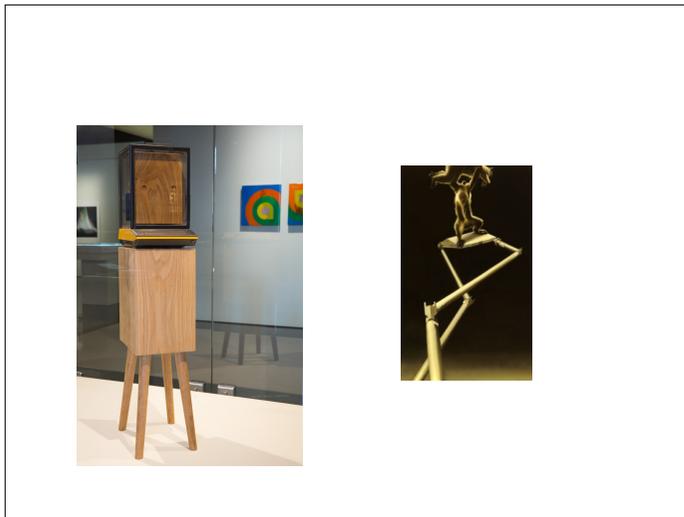
Kepler wrote *Somnium* (or the Dream), as a guide for an adventurous lunar expedition, dreaming of a possible future by imagining from his observations a way in which humans might travel to the moon and look back to see Earth from another perspective. Some regard this story as the earliest science fiction . It was in fact a veiled allegory to promote the Copernican view of a Sun centred, rather than Earth centred, universe, which was regarded with deep suspicion in his tumultuous century. Above all however Kepler hoped that through an awareness of the physical world humans would come to realize the odds against them in the grip of the vast forces shaping their environment. In the twenty first century artists who are inspired by scientific interpretations of nature are inevitably confronted with these concerns.

Installation detail - Counihan Gallery 2015.

Harry Nankin, *Syzygy*, (a pair of connected or correlated things, the reciprocity between earth and sky, between humanity and the natural world through photograms of insects exposed to raw star light and overlaid with rare astronomical photographs on glass plate to create silver gelatin film images).

Lesley Duxbury. *Ad Astra*, inkjet prints, merges the circadian conditions of a persistent twilight in an ever present ethereal world.

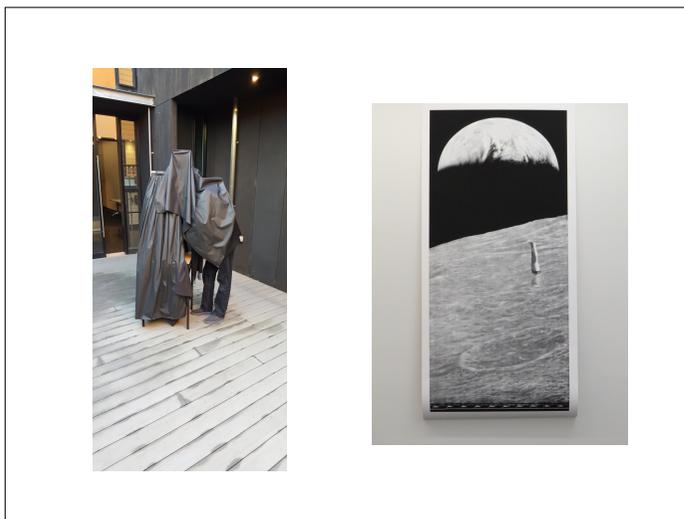
Magda Cebokli, *Probability Monochrome: Eclipse*, 2012 , acrylic on canvas, recording the transition from one state to another through the transition from dark to light where chance is a constant, referencing quantum theory.



So when we lay human culture over nature like a map we raise questions about the way we observe, speculate and imagine the natural world and our relationship with it. The Sky Lab project has emerged from speculations about relationships between our Earth-bound selves and sky-situated knowledge where our grasp of the physical universe and natural phenomena is beyond the full range of our senses.

Installation at Counihan Gallery 2015

Sam Leach, *Sartorius Basic 2015* and *The Lift*, Oil on canvas 2009 Stephen McLaughlan Gallery. Sartorius Basic was the first nanogram balance, so precise that it was used to weigh the moon rocks returned to earth from Apollo 11. In Leach's hands this small machine appears to take on the hint of the human simply by meeting our gaze with its two small eyes. In *The Lift* we see a prosthetic limb projected into space like a robot arm suggesting the next stage of development for humans reaching into space. He speculates about the metaphysics of objects and the potential for as yet unrealized possibilities beyond our own planet, understanding and utilizing technology as an extension of human consciousness, while emphasizing the connectedness between human and non-human life. (Ref Kepler extension of human reach to moon).



The camera's ability to illuminate the otherwise imperceptible is especially evident in the field of astronomy. Beginning with the creation of the camera obscura used by Kepler to view the Sun, to the current images of space, various forms of photography and image capture have led to a greater appreciation of the cosmos while also reminding us that technological developments have shaped these images.

Paul Uhlmann - *Small room to observe the heavens* 2016 - camera obscura (Ref Kepler). LUVAC.

Felicity Spear - *Somnium (ii)* Pigment inkjet print. Original images - *Diving Man - Denmark*, 2014, photograph F. Spear. *Restored: First Image of the Earth from the Moon*, Lunar Orbiter 1, 1966, [Credit: NASA/LORP](#). Lunar Orbiter Image Recovery Project, 2008. (Ref. Kepler)

LUVAC

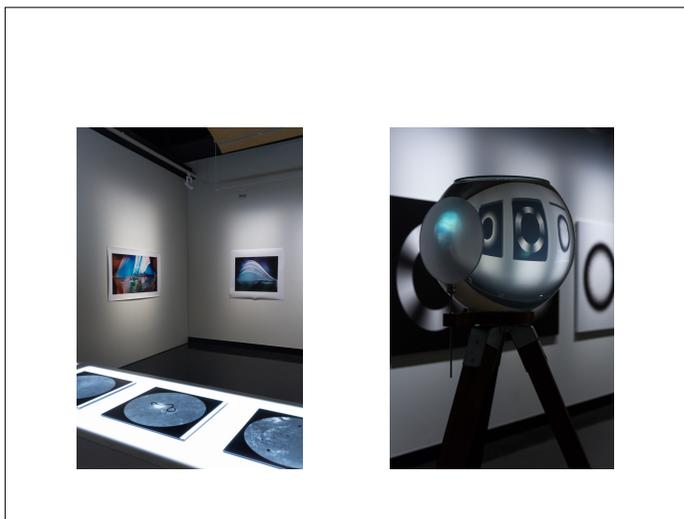
I have found an historical and celebrated image, the first image of the earth from the moon, which was captured by NASA's Lunar Orbiter 1 in 1966. It has now been restored using new technologies and is titled, *Restored: First Image of the Earth from the Moon*, and credited to the National Aeronautics Space Administration, NASA, and the Lunar Orbiter Image Recovery Project, LORP. Within this image I have superimposed one of my own photographic images of a diving man in Denmark, coincidentally the country in which part of Kepler's story takes place. It is from this perspective, between Earth and moon that Kepler's story unfolds in time and space, and *Somnium (or Dream)*, is celebrated for its imagination and foresight in travelling beyond the known boundaries.



So what, today, do we make of the world known by the scientist and the world of the artist? Artists who are inspired by scientific interpretations of nature are inevitably confronted with ecological concerns. And how does the artist translate human sensory experience into a world observed with instruments? Artists are not inclined to be constrained by the evidence as would scientists, we do however, like them, speculate about the possibilities for other dimensions of reality which might reveal insights about ourselves and the environment which we inhabit.

Simon Finn - *Simulant* 2016 , synthetic polymer and enamel, *Submerged* 2014, HD video loop, *Downward Spiral Two* 2013, charcoal on paper at LUVAC

Dan Armstrong - *Aqua Optica - planet x* 2015 Counihan Gallery.



I have brought together groups of artists who create speculative works responding to the physical universe and cosmic signs in our everyday world . They reference various systems of knowledge and relationships between the natural and constructed worlds. These include the history and properties of the lens, telescope, and photography, the shared ground between abstraction, mathematics and science, the virtual world of technology and the remote sensed mapping of space, the possibilities for alternative or fictional worlds and the extension of human consciousness, and the reciprocity between earth and sky and between humanity and the natural world.

Tarja Trygg - *Brisbane* 2005, 4 month exposure, and *Looking towards Uunisaari, Helsinki*, 2014 , 3 month exposure, both inkjet prints of solargraphs.
 Harry Nankin - *Syzygy*
 Dan Armstrong - *Aqua - optica* 2016

All Counihan Gallery.



As an artist and curator I look for an engagement with time, light, space, geometry, matter, ecology and technology. I look for the exploration of different media, ambiguity or mystery, a sense of humanity, a mindfulness of history, some poetry, some disquiet, some wonder and a sensitivity to the physical universe and the phenomenological world. In responding to specific gallery spaces I look for both conceptual and aesthetic dialogues between groups of art works. I combine thoroughly researched ideas with artists who are able, curious, trusted and dedicated. It's been my privilege to work with artists who have these qualities. And I continually ask myself some tough questions about the nature, content and conduct of my project in order to verify its integrity.

LUVAC - installation detail Gallery 1

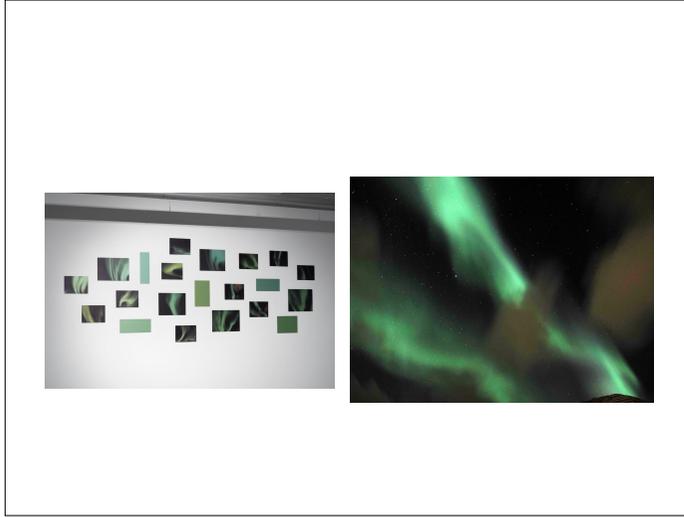
Sky Lab: Kepler's Dream, 2016 , Dan Armstrong
 Simon Finn
 Sam Leach
 Paul Uhlmann
 Felicity Spear



Dan Armstrong - *Mysterium Cosmographicum: Traces of Mars* 2016 Pigment inkjet prints and *Observational Instruments*, 1,2,3. brass, steel, timber, glass. (Ref. Tycho Brahe)

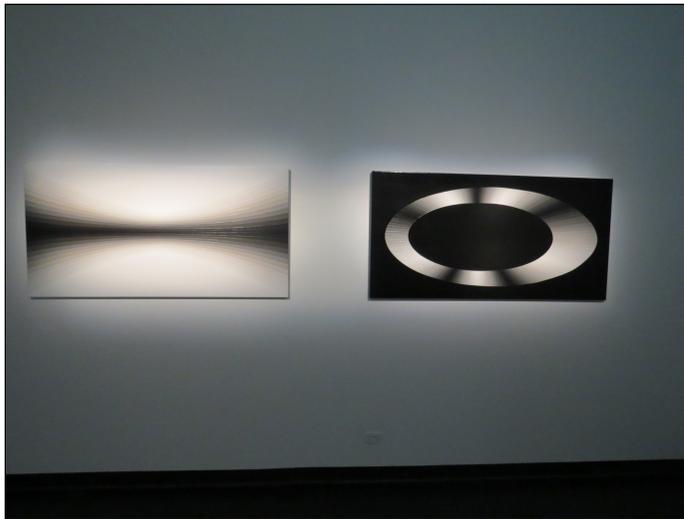
Felicity Spear - *Somnium (ii) Subvolva - Privolva*, 2016 Wood, acrylic paint, perspex mirror. (Duxbury installation in background of mirror). (Ref. Somnium - 2 sides of moon).

LUVAC



Lesley Duxbury- *Night Vision(s)*, detail, 2016, inkjet print on aluminium. Green curtains of flickering light from the Aurora Borealis in Iceland, where Kepler's dream begins.

LUVAC



The exploration of the ideas underlying *Kepler's Dream* reminds us of the way in which story telling and the imagining of things draws us into different ways of seeing and responding to our universe in a world full of uncertainties and contradictions. As it was when Kepler conducted his brilliant research in astronomy and optics which changed the way we view the universe forever and remains prescient today. Astronomy turns data into dreams.

Magda Cebokli - *Kepler's Horizon* 2016 , acrylic on linen and *Foci* 2016, acrylic on linen. (Ref. Kepler's elliptical paths of planets)

LUVAC

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LUVAC installation detail Gallery 2

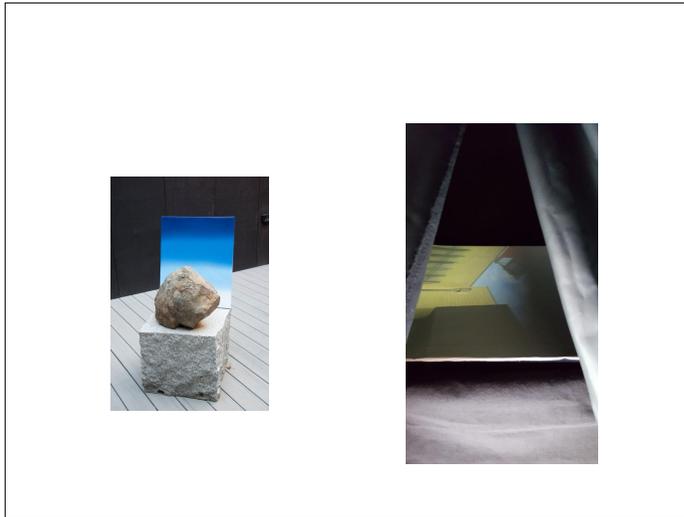
Harry Nankin *Flay*
Paul Uhlmann *Full Moon* (3 different dates).
Magda Cebokli *Kepler's Horizon* and *Foci*



LUVAC Gallery 2

Felicity Spear *Somium iii* detail

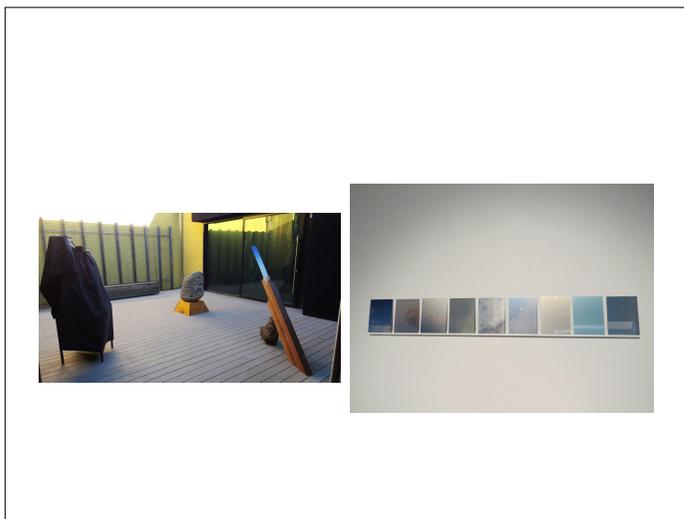




LUVAC installation details large courtyard

Sam Leach *Chair for rock*

Paul Uhlmann *interior projected image of camera obscura of sky and courtyard*

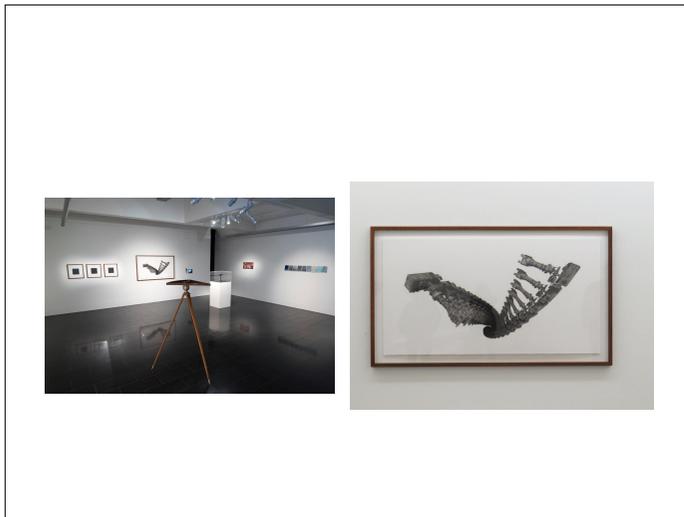


LUVAC large courtyard

Paul Uhlmann *Camera Obscura*

Sam Leach *Rock wants to be a meteor* and *What bluestone wants*

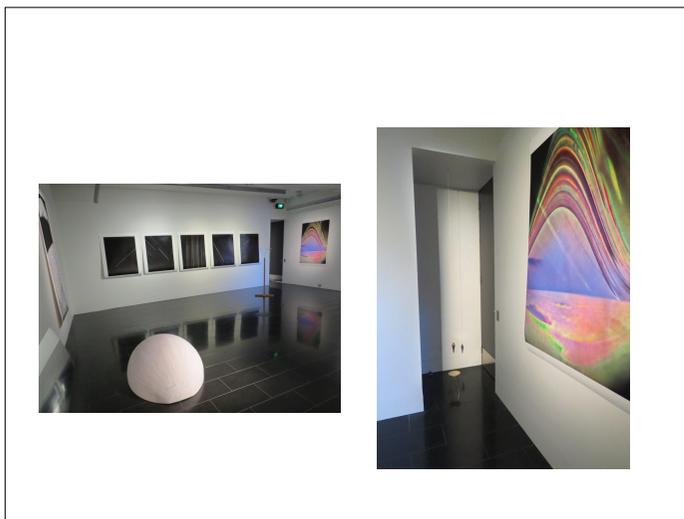
Paul Uhlmann *Nine skies*



LUVAC Installation detail Gallery 1

Finn, Leach, Ulmann, Armstrong

Simon Finn *Downward Spiral Two*



LUVAC installation detail Gallery 1

Dan Armstrong *Traces of Mars and Observational Instruments*

Felicity Spear *Somnium ii*

Tarja Trygg *Motion/Rotation of the Earth*