



Daniel Armstrong

Tarja Trygg

courtesy of Aalto University Helsinki Finland

Vanessa Stanley

Felicity Spear

Govinda Sah 'Azad'

courtesy of October Gallery London UK

Sky Lab

from where you stand

Image: Skylab over Earth 29 April 2006 courtesy of NASA

Curated by Felicity Spear

Sky Lab: from where you stand, reveals the idiosyncratic perspectives of five artists who are experimenting with models and concepts within the culture of sky-situated knowledge. They direct their gaze into a space which is largely inaccessible to the full range of our senses, and where it is possible to have only a remote experience. The question is, when we look into the night sky are we aware that we are seeing beyond our genetic programming, looking through time into a remote past?

Both art and science engage in fields of research which involve acts of observation, speculation and visualization, the use of analogy and metaphor, the testing of ideas and finally the remaking of experience. From a cosmic perspective science tells us that Earth is a totally insignificant speck of dust in an expanding and accelerating Universe, and we are made from that dust. Through their research these Earthbound artists point towards a cosmos which is continually unfolding in mysterious and complex ways.

What does it mean to be part of the expanding Universe and to understand that nothing is permanent? The sky was once viewed as an extension of the life of the Earthbound observer to which the patterns of daily life and beliefs were intricately connected. Now it is regarded as 'outer space', a space which is increasingly demystified through specialized fields of knowledge in engineering, astronomy and physics. This cosmic space is no longer understood as a clockwork mechanism and a quantity of discrete objects. It is now thought of as a set of interacting processes and relational fields which challenge our understandings of what is meant by reality.

We are learning to re-negotiate the physical and phenomena in an increasingly desensitized and abstract milieu. Through computer simulations, physical space seems to be dematerializing, mapping a new form of reality generated by electronic data. Everything seems to be everywhere at all times. Remote space is mapped through virtual models and imaging technologies associated with time, light and sound. The invisibility of phenomena is revealed through the filter of a machine-produced visibility, and through the eye of analysis, where computerized imaging processes reveal the elusive materiality of light.

Today our horizon has expanded exponentially. Increasingly technological sophistication has enabled us to survey and appreciate the structure of the Universe. It has given us an understanding of our modest place in the scheme of things. The advancement of any branch of inquiry engenders new horizons, new choices and ethical challenges. The idea of 'nature' is increasingly filtered and mediated through 'culture' and its technologies, but the natural world, resistant and infinite in its depth, seems headed for defeat. Is there anywhere else to go? As the astronomer John Barrow has observed, 'We feel like the Universe's only child and that has many consequences.' FS 2011

Opening

2pm-4pm Saturday November 12

Exhibition

November 9-26 2011

Stephen McLaughlan Gallery Melbourne

Level 8 Nicholas Building 37 Swanston St

The corner of Flinders Lane 0407 317 323

Wed to Fri 1-5pm Saturday 11am-5pm

Daniel Armstrong

UFOs and Flying Saucers: quasi-science, enigma, foolish fantasy, hoax, alien visitations, encounters and abductions, sublime technologies, fleeting visions and luminous orbs suspended in the silver halides of the photographic print.

As a cultural phenomenon the true nature of the UFO is complex and illusive. Its hallucinatory manifestations giving shape to something, like dark matter, which cannot be seen directly, a presence which infers intangible forces at work.

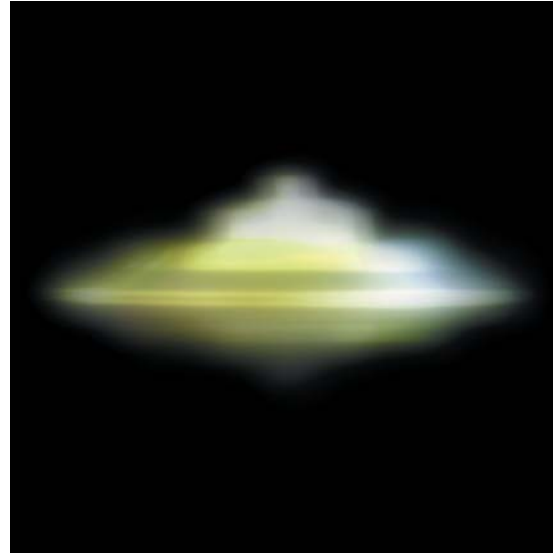
Of photograph and fakes: a genre of staged realities and darkroom deviations - spectral aberrations, soft focus, double exposures and chemical stains. An infinite number of frozen moments from the inevitable earth bound trajectories of every hubcap that was ever thrown before sky and lens.

A seductive vision that wove its way through my childhood obsession with the night sky and the vicarious satisfaction and inevitable disillusion that came from faking such images myself.

"As a boy I stood gazing up and out the small windows of a gloomy flat with my back to the raucous debris of family turmoil, my eyes open onto the patches of serene darkness in the midnight sky visible beyond the roof tops. A simple ludicrously inadequate camera sat ready...."

Folly by Edward Colless, (from which this series takes its name and pays homage).

Flying Saucer 2011
Chromira digital print
600 x 600mm



Govinda Sah 'Azad'

Mandala 2010 (detail)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
400 x 400mm



In clouds we see the passage of time and the movement of light and shadow. Painting clouds however, rendering them visible, creates other associations with things that are not visible. My home is Nepal in the Himalaya. Standing before these soaring mountains wrapped in cloud is to sense a connection with a living, breathing Universe. It is to understand that unseen to our own eyes this Universe is expanding, woven through with gravitational waves and distortions in which time and space shrink and stretch in response to matter. These mountains have a symbiotic relationship with the chemistry that occurs in cloud formation. I am reminded of ancient alchemical transformations and the transcriptional burst or pulse that fires or quenches life. In my culture the Hindu proverb says : God is in everything living and non-living, in the earth or the sky. These things are embedded in my genetic memory.

Felicity Spear

Shifting and Sifting light.

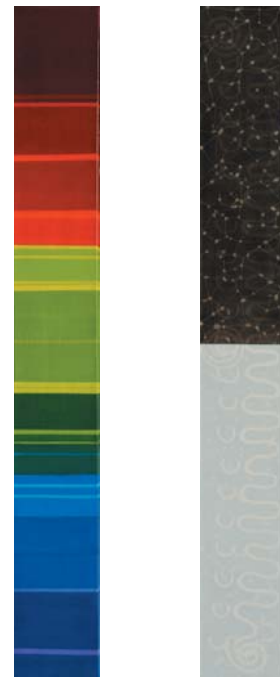
We have all observed the rainbow of colours that result when white light is passed through a prism, just like sunlight through raindrops. Through this process white light is spread out into individual spectral colours. After Isaac Newton's seventeenth century studies in *Opticks*, the spectrum became the standard of colour and opened up new colour theories and experiments. We now know that each element in the Universe produces a spectrum unique to itself, like a fingerprint, no matter where it is found, and the spectroscopic appearance of the sun and stars reveal the chemical elements in their atmosphere. In more recent times, radio astronomy and the expansion of the accessible electromagnetic spectrum made possible by new telescopes has changed how we view and map the Universe. Spectroscopy is a forensic mapping process, where light is shifted and sifted, breaking down the radiant energy into its components and recording the patterns of energy that are produced. Newton realized that for this chromatic energy to be perceived, light waves must interact with the light sensitive cells in the retina, and nerves must deliver this information to the brain to be processed. He also understood therefore that although colour imparts information, it is always intrinsically subjective.

Atomic - my carbon copy (left)

Oil on linen 2400 x 300 x 100mm

Sonic - should I answer the phone from space? (right)

Oil on linen 2400 x 300 x 100mm



Vanessa Stanley

We survey and observe the untouchable and mostly invisible space of our universe with telescopes and cameras. Our observations are deciphered, processed, analysed, categorised and modeled. Continually we contemplate space. The representation of the usually invisible changes the way in which we make sense of ourselves. The artworks exhibited represent a part of this search for the unknown through observation and framing.

The images of stars removed from the dark night outside, to the day light inside, replicates and simulates the night sky observed on a particular night. The mostly invisible becomes nearer, more familiar as artificial light inscribes starlight images into the room on a series of lightboxes.

The hidden processes of astronomical observation are experienced in the three videos, *Your Universe - Inner Dome*, *Star Dome and Clear Clear Target Star* (2009). Multi-levels of surveillance are engendered. The observer watches images, filmed directly from the monitor screens in the operations room of the Australian National Observatory. The monitor screens survey the inner dome, star dome and the targeted star, while all are observing the Universe.

The observer produces their own visual experience, as observations of nature make you realize that there is more to reality than what is at first perceived.



Your Universe - Inner Dome 2009
HD dvd, 2 minute duration.

Tarja Trygg



From Winter to Summer 2010 - 2011
Solargraph, pin-hole image,
6 month exposure of sun's changing path
Digital print 700 x 1430mm

Through solargraphs, (the recording of the Sun's path over time with pinhole photography), the world reveals things to us that we would normally not be able to see. Solargraphy allows us to see the phenomenon of nature and makes the invisible visible. When the pinhole camera has been loaded, a piece of black and white photographic paper is set to face the Sun for an extremely long exposure, even up to six months. The track of the Sun across the sky changes according to the position of the observer in relation to geographical latitudes. The tracks become visible through heat and sunlight without using any chemicals, and the final images are produced in colour. How different are the movements of the Sun at various latitudes? It is not only the image of the sky but landscapes or urban views in cities that tell us about the context and the atmosphere in which these solargraphs were captured. My research is a pragmatic, experimental and cooperative artistic work.

The world has rapidly become digitalized and the Internet is a useful tool for keeping in contact with participants from all around the world who are recording solargraphs for my research. They are using the simplest pinhole cameras to record the paths of the Sun from many places in the northern and southern hemispheres.

Mapping the Sun's path at different latitudes can be seen in my Solargraphy Gallery. (www.solargraphy.com)

From where you stand

On a camping trip in the Lake District of England, Sherlock Holmes, (author Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective), and his assistant Dr Watson, found it difficult to sleep through a rather chilly night. As they lay there admiring the nocturnal sky, Holmes asked Watson what he thought of it. Watson, believing he should be seeking some eternal hidden truth, replied, 'From a meteorological point of view, it looks like a fine day ahead; astrologically Saturn is rising; horologically it's about 4am; and theologically it is a manifestation of our Lord's Grand Design.' Holmes paused momentarily, as if absorbing such philosophical observations. Then he sat up, stared fixedly into the distance and said, 'No my dear Watson, it's elementary. Someone has nicked our tent.'

Sky Lab: from where you stand, 2011, represents five artists who presented papers in the UK at the cross disciplinary Seventh International Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, INSAPVII, at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, October 2010, organized by the University of Wales. Papers on line at www.insapvii.org

Felicity Spear curated the first Sky Lab exhibition, to coincide with the International Year of Astronomy, in November 2009 at Stephen McLaughlan Gallery. The participating artists were Daniel Armstrong, Magda Cebokli, Sam Leach, Lesley Duxbury, Harry Nankin and Felicity Spear. Details on line at www.felicityspear.com



Felicity Spear completed a PhD at Monash University in 2007. In 2009, the International Year of Astronomy, her work was included in the exhibition *Shared Sky* at the National Gallery of Victoria. Also in 2009 Spear curated *Beyond visibility: light and dust* with astronomer David Malin and Indigenous artist Gulumbu Yunupingu, exhibiting at Monash Gallery of Art in Melbourne and UTS Gallery in Sydney. The two *Sky Lab* exhibitions, December 2009 and November 2011 have since evolved to further explore these themes.

For further information visit www.felicityspear.com

Author and Publisher: Felicity Spear
Editor: Stephen McLaughlan
ISBN: 978-0-9807345-3-9 (hardcopy)
ISBN: 978-0-9807345-2-2 (online)
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Design: Felicity Spear, Stephen McLaughlan, Mark Ferrie.