



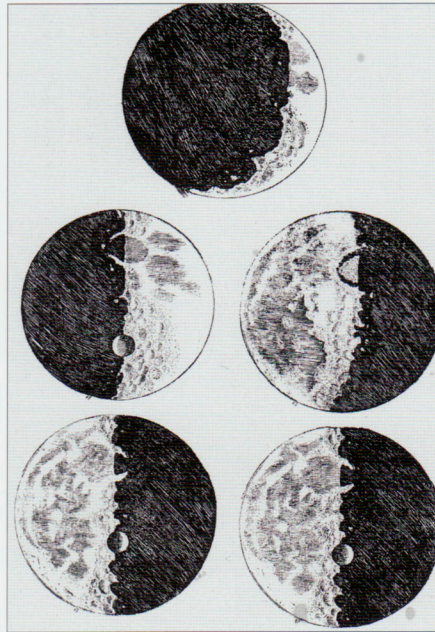
Starry Messenger: Galileo's Vision in 21st Century Art

FEATURING WORKS BY

Vija Celmins • Thierry W Despont • Elen A. Feinberg • Jonathon Feldschuh • Eva Lee • Carol Prusa • Josh Simpson • Sallie Wolf

SEPTEMBER 26–DECEMBER 13, 2009 • LOUISIANA ART & SCIENCE MUSEUM

Starry Messenger: Galileo's Vision in 21st Century Art



The artist's fascination with astronomical subjects is manifest in some of the best-known works in art history, from Giotto's *Adoration of the Magi* (1305–6), in which the artist painted Halley's Comet, to Rubens's *Birth of the Milky Way* (1668), Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889), and James Turrell's ongoing land project *Roden Crater*. Conversely, scientists have incorporated art into their work throughout history, using it to help them find answers to some of life's most complex puzzles.

Celebrating the International Year of Astronomy 2009, *Starry Messenger: Galileo's Vision in 21st Century Art* includes the work of eight notable and emerging contemporary American artists who are inspired by celestial phenomena—Vija Celmins, Thierry W Despont, Elen A. Feinberg, Jonathon Feldschuh, Eva Lee, Carol Prusa, Josh Simpson, and Sallie Wolf. They work in a variety of media, including paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, digital animations, and video. In the exhibition, their work hangs alongside reproductions of Galileo's own drawings and text panels that describe the great scientist's accomplishments.

The discoveries of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) revolutionized humanity's understanding of its place in the cosmos. The exhibition takes its name from Galileo's publication *Sidereus Nuncius*, sometimes translated as "starry messenger." The first scientific treatise based on observations made through a telescope, it caused a sensation when published in 1610. In it, Galileo described our moon's landscape as covered with mountains and craters, he deduced that the Milky Way was composed of clusters of stars too small to be seen by the naked eye, and he described the four bodies he discovered orbiting Jupiter. He called those bodies the "Medician stars," today known as the Galilean moons. Later on, he observed the unusual appearance of the planet Saturn, the phases of Venus, and sunspots.

Having originally considered becoming a painter, Galileo used his trained eye and practice in the visual arts to further his studies of astronomy. For instance, his understanding of *secondary light*, an aesthetic term referring to incidental light reflected on a three-dimensional object, led him to debunk Aristotelian cosmology, which held that heavenly bodies, unlike Earth, must be perfectly smooth spheres. Galileo's sketches, such as those delineating the features of the moon's landscape, aided his analysis and made it more persuasive in an age when people trusted images more than words.

Galileo's observations intrigued the painters of the early 17th century, many of whom turned to astronomical pastimes and to the depiction of the new discoveries in their work. Yet it was quite daring for Galileo's artist friend Lodovico Cigoli, in his *Immacolata* of 1610–12, to paint a cratered moon at the feet of the Virgin Mary in place of the perfectly rounded, smooth moon that traditionally symbolized her purity. Galileo's assertions challenged the prevailing authority and astronomical beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, which stubbornly upheld the conception of Earth as the center of the universe and all other elements of the cosmos as heavenly phenomena.

The artists represented in *Starry Messenger* are not restricted in their interpretations of astronomical findings. Yet the notion of the skies as a heavenly concept prevails. Carol Prusa builds upon the age-old metaphor of the "dome of Heaven" in her Entanglement series. This body of work consists of wall-hung half-domes of varying size. Forms composed in silver wire visually coalesce and dissolve across a surface flickering with 700 fiber optic lights. Prusa considers herself to be a "conceptual voyager,"

Galileo Galilei

Sketches of the moon, from *Sidereus Nuncius*, 1610

presenting visual possibilities to describe problems contemplated by cosmologists. Playing upon the definition of quantum entanglement, these hemispheres suggest mankind's reliance upon the "real" world to make sense of the next world or of that which is beyond our comprehension.

Elen Feinberg's paintings also allude to the beyond, the eternal infinite. Her Sightline and Nocturnes series are partly inspired by photographs from the Severe Storms Center in Norman, Oklahoma, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. These depictions of clouds and incandescent light hover on the borderline between representation and abstraction, simultaneously recalling the luminous clouds of Alfred Bierstadt and the sublime color washes of Mark Rothko.

The mysterious unseen, or rather "what lies at the threshold of perception," forms the basis of Eva Lee's work. Lee credits Dr. Seuss's story *Horton Hears a Who* as having inspired her in childhood to explore the idea of other worlds. Her research with scientists at the University of California, Davis, culminated in a series of large-scale drawings, later transcribed into digital animations to create abstract experimental shorts. Her markings suggest cellular and body structure, as well as the vast expanses of the universe.

Josh Simpson, husband of astronaut Catherine Coleman, captures the vastness and complexity of the universe and the natural world in sculptures composed of glass. His luminous spheres, termed "megaplanets," contain colorful landscapes, underwater scenes, and vistas of outer space.

Just as the zodiac fancifully depicts constellations, photographs circulated by the Hubble Space Telescope, NASA, and other space-related agencies are elaborate composites of real entities. Upon learning this, celebrated architect Thierry W Despont was moved to paint planets, moons, and nebulae borne of his imagination using a mixture of materials that include enamel, oil, acrylic, asphaltum, liquid iron, and acid upon surfaces of copper, metal, wood, or paper.

Vija Celmins, internationally celebrated for intensely realistic images that reflect her engagement with the natural world, renders star-studded night skies with uncanny accuracy. A master of several mediums, including oil

painting, charcoal, and multiple printmaking processes, Celmins labors for months on a single image. She limits her palette to blacks and grays, working from photographs with no horizon or discernible depth of field.

For more than a decade, Jonathan Feldschuh has used scientific images, such as those from the Hubble Space Telescope and other orbital observatories, as a starting point for his work. He composes planetary landscapes in swirling, dense layers of paint that seem to be gaseous fluids sealed in layers of clear acrylic. Feldschuh's process produces organic forms of indeterminate scale. They simultaneously suggest the microscopic and the macrocosmic, and mirror his interest in the chaotic processes of nature.

With no scientific training, Sallie Wolf began recording daily observations of the moon more than a decade ago. She organizes and reorganizes this data into visual configurations in an effort to discern the shifting patterns of the moon over time. In addition to producing charts, diagrams, and installations, she has worked with composers to translate the data into musical notations and even a musical score.

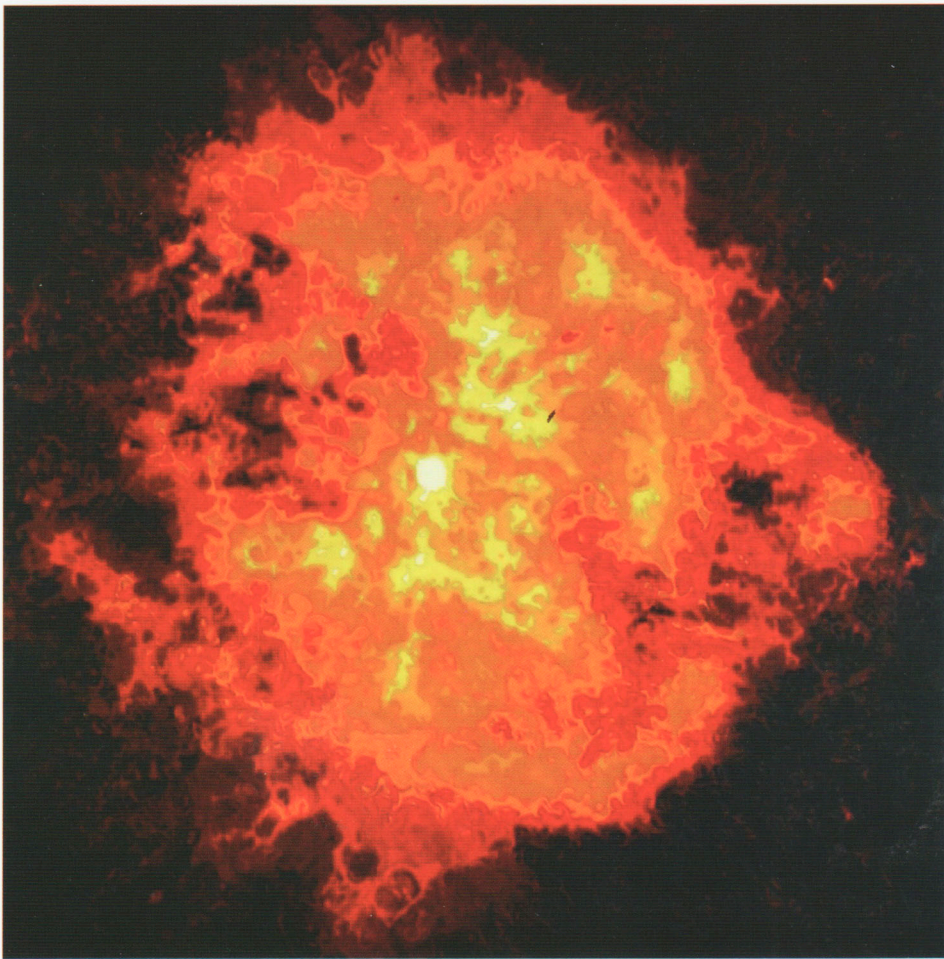
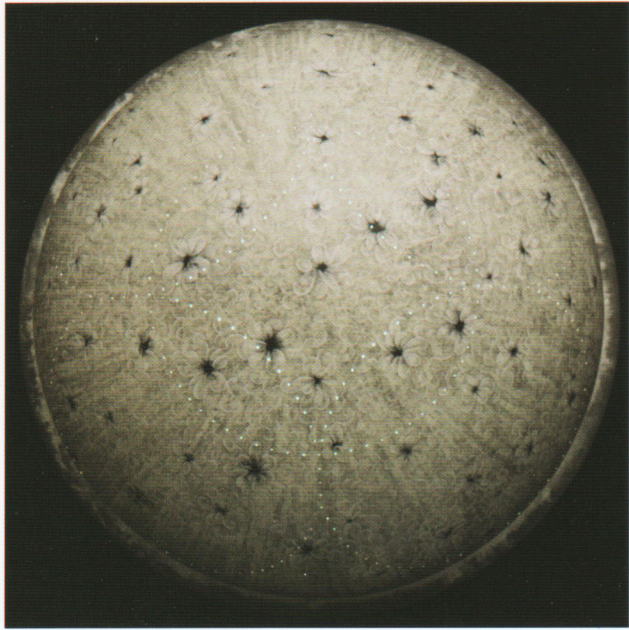
Many artists begin their professional life in the sciences—Jonathan Feldschuh holds a Harvard degree in physics—and many scientists hone their artistic skills or partner with artists to demonstrate their discoveries. This lack of distinction between the disciplines of art and science, even mathematics, that characterized the Renaissance is manifest in contemporary art and moving into the mainstream of public education.

Galileo is best known today as one of the great figures of the Western scientific revolution. However, according to his first biographer Vincenzo Viviani, Galileo purportedly stated at the end of his life that he wished he had been an artist instead. Perhaps he would be pleased to know that a few hundred years after his death, his tomb was moved. His final resting place is just across from that of Michelangelo.

—Elizabeth Chubbuck Weinstein
Art Curator
Louisiana Art & Science Museum



Josh Simpson
Megaplanets, 1990–2007
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals



CLOCKWISE

Carol Prusa

Chaosmos, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder, and metal leaf on acrylic, with fiber optics
30 x 30 x 15 in.

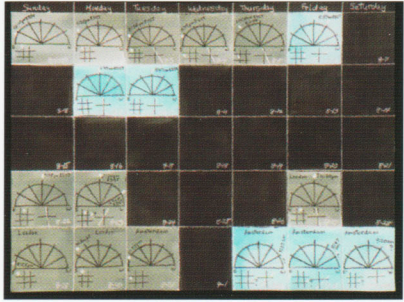
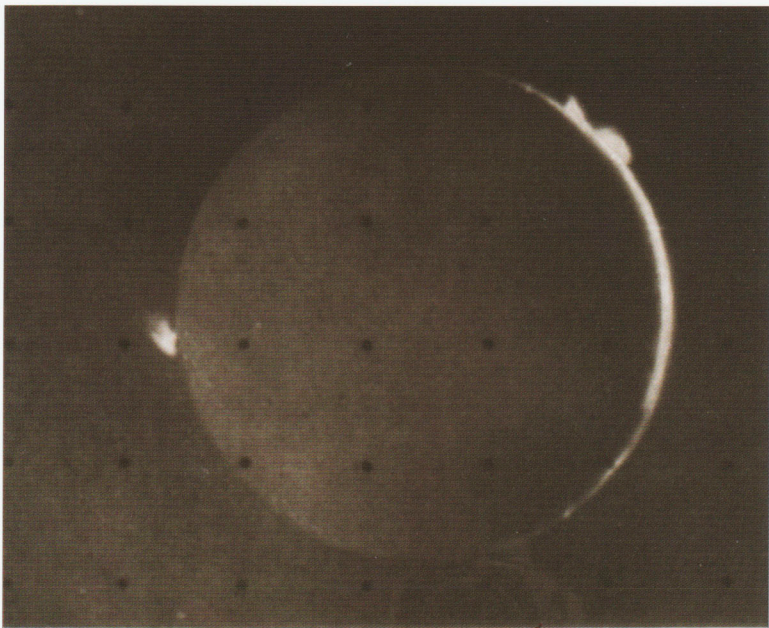
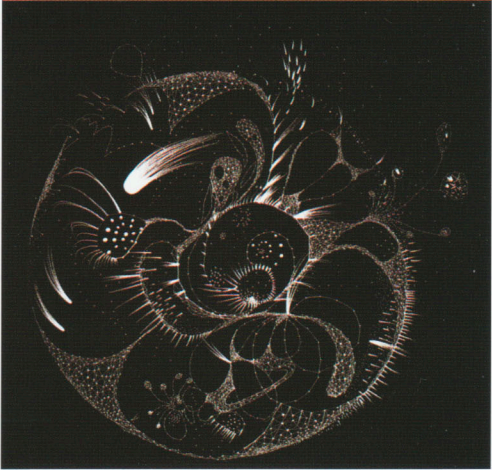
Elen A. Feinberg

Sightline III, 2008
Oil on birch plywood
48 in. diameter

Jonathan Feldschuh

Nebula M1-67, 2002
Acrylic on canvas over panel
48 x 48 in.

F



ABOVE

Eva Lee

World Cell 2, 2009
Ink on paper
60 x 65 in.

Sallie Wolf

Moon Project, 1994-2009
Chart from installation of 155 moon charts
Graphite, china marker, and ink on paper
Each chart 18 x 24 in.

Vija Celmins

Jupiter Moon—Constellation, 1982
Three-color mezzotint and etching
23 3/4 x 18 1/2 in.
Edition 16/48

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Vija Celmins

All works by Vija Celmins courtesy of the artist and McKee Gallery, New York City

Alliance, 1982
Three-color aquatint, mezzotint, and drypoint
237/8 x 193/8 in.
Edition 16/48

Concentric Bearings D, 1984

Three-color mezzotint, aquatint, drypoint, and photogravure
18 x 223/8 in.
Edition 21/34

Jupiter Moon—Constellation, 1982
Three-color mezzotint and etching
233/4 x 181/2 in.
Edition 16/48
December, 1984

Mezzotint
291/2 x 223/4 in.
Edition 23/25

Thierry W Despont

All works by Thierry W Despont courtesy of the artist and Marlborough Galleries, New York City

DNB 01, 2001
Ink, acrylic, oil, varnish, and shellac on handmade paper
541/2 x 40 in.

MNB 06, 2003
Enamel, acrylic, liquid iron, acid, and resin solids on metal panel mounted on wood
48 x 36 in.

MNB 16, 2003
Enamel, oil, acrylic, asphaltum, liquid iron, and acid on metal panel mounted on wood
48 x 36 in.

PNB 07, 2002
Asphaltum, enamel, ink, and oilstick on copperplate mounted on wood panel
48 x 36 in.

PNB 10, 2002
Enamel, aluminichrom, acrylic, oilstick, and ink on copperplate mounted on wood panel
48 x 36 in.

PNB 14, 2002
Enamel, acrylic, oilstick, ink, and glue on copperplate mounted on wood panel
48 x 36 in.

PNB 21, 2002
Oilstick, acrylic, enamel, aluminichrom, liquid chalk, resin, and ink on copperplate
48 x 36 in.

Elen A. Feinberg

Nocturne XII, 2007
Oil on linen
48 x 48 in.

Nocturne XXXIV, 2008
Oil on linen
60 x 50 in.

Nocturne XXXX, 2009
Oil on paper
68 x 48 in.

Sightline I, 2008
Oil on birch plywood
48 in. diameter

Sightline II, 2008
Oil on birch plywood
48 in. diameter

Sightline III, 2008
Oil on birch plywood
48 in. diameter

Sightline IV, 2009
Oil on birch plywood
48 in. diameter

Sightline V, 2009
Oil on birch plywood
36 in. diameter

Sightline VI, 2009
Oil on birch plywood
36 in. diameter

Sightline VII, 2009
Oil on birch plywood
36 in. diameter

Sightline VIII, 2009
Oil on birch plywood
36 in. diameter

Voice 39, 2004
Oil on linen
36 x 36 in.

Jonathan Feldschuh

Nebula M1-67, 2002
Acrylic on canvas over panel
48 x 48 in.

Red Spot, 2003
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 78 in.

SOHO, 2002
Acrylic on canvas over panel
48 x 48 in.

Whirlpool Galaxy, 2002
Acrylic on canvas over panel
57 x 48 in.

Yohkoh, 2002
Acrylic on canvas over panel
48 x 48 in.

Eva Lee

Indelible Longing, 2005
Ink on paper
60 x 84 in.

Jewel, 2006
Two-channel digital video installation
2 min., 43 sec., silent

No One Here But I, 2009
Ink on paper
60 x 102 in.

The Liminal Series, 2004–6
Single-channel digital video installation
24 min., 52 sec., silent

Transformation Scroll II, 2002
Ink on paper
18 ft. x 59 in.

Winter's Veil, 2007
Single-channel digital video installation
7 min., 10 sec., silent

World Cell 2, 2009
Ink on paper
60 x 65 in.

Carol Prusa

All works by Carol Prusa courtesy of the artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami

Cacophony, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder, and metal leaf on acrylic, with fiber optics
18 x 18 x 9 in.

Chaosmos, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder, and metal leaf on acrylic, with fiber optics
30 x 30 x 15 in.

Aporia, 2008
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder, and metal leaf on acrylic, with fiber optics
24 x 24 x 12 in.

Josh Simpson

Blue New Mexico Platter, 2004
Hand-blown dark amethyst glass with reactive silver decoration
22 in. diameter

Corona Platter, 2009
Hand-formed and hand-blown colloidal silver glass with crystal overlay
143/4 in. diameter

Corona Platter, 2009
Hand-formed and hand-blown colloidal silver glass with crystal overlay
151/2 in. diameter

Corona Platter, 2009
Hand-formed and hand-blown colloidal silver glass with crystal overlay
21 in. diameter

#100 Megaplanet, 2007
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
131/2 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 1990
Glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
5 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 1997
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
61/4 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 1998
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
61/4 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 2002
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
81/2 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 2003
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
7 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 2005
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
41/4 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 2007
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
51/4 in. diameter

Megaplanet, 2009
Solid glass with filigrana cane and precious metals
10 in. diameter

Saturn, 1992
Encalmo technique platter of silver reactive glass; fused glass planet with filigrana cane and precious metals
Platter 191/2 in. diameter
Planet 33/4 in. diameter

Saturn, 2007
Encalmo technique platter of silver reactive glass; fused glass planet with filigrana cane and precious metals
Platter 21 in. diameter
Planet 3 in. diameter

Tektite Portal, 1998
Meteorite-shaped glass with inclusions of filigrana cane and precious metals
14 x 71/2 in.

Oval Vortex, 2008
Hand-formed and hand-blown dark amethyst glass with reactive silver decoration
191/4 in. diameter

Sallie Wolf

Moon Project, 1994–2009
Installation of 155 moon charts
Graphite, china marker, and ink on paper
Each chart 18 x 24 in.

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This exhibition was also made possible in part by East Baton Rouge City-Parish Government, the members of LASM, the Community Fund for the Arts Campaign, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

COVER IMAGE:

Thierry W Despont, *MNB 06* (detail), 2003, enamel, acrylic, liquid iron, acid, and resin solids on metal panel mounted on wood, 48 x 36 in.



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