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Arts & Entertainment Arts

## Beauty & Unease Coexist in Carol Prusa's "Dark Light"

By **John Thomason** - August 23, 2019



"Totality"

**F**or an eerie moment, while staring at Carol Prusa’s “Twilight (Persophone),” I wondered if somebody had slipped a little something under my tongue.

Like many of Prusa’s works, it’s a perfectly geometric graphite circle atop a square black background as permanent and pitiless as deep space, this one containing a textured circle-within-a-circle with a twinkling star at its center. The more I gazed at that cosmic iris, the more it seemed to come alive: to pulsate, to throb, to recede and revert back to its 2D flatness.

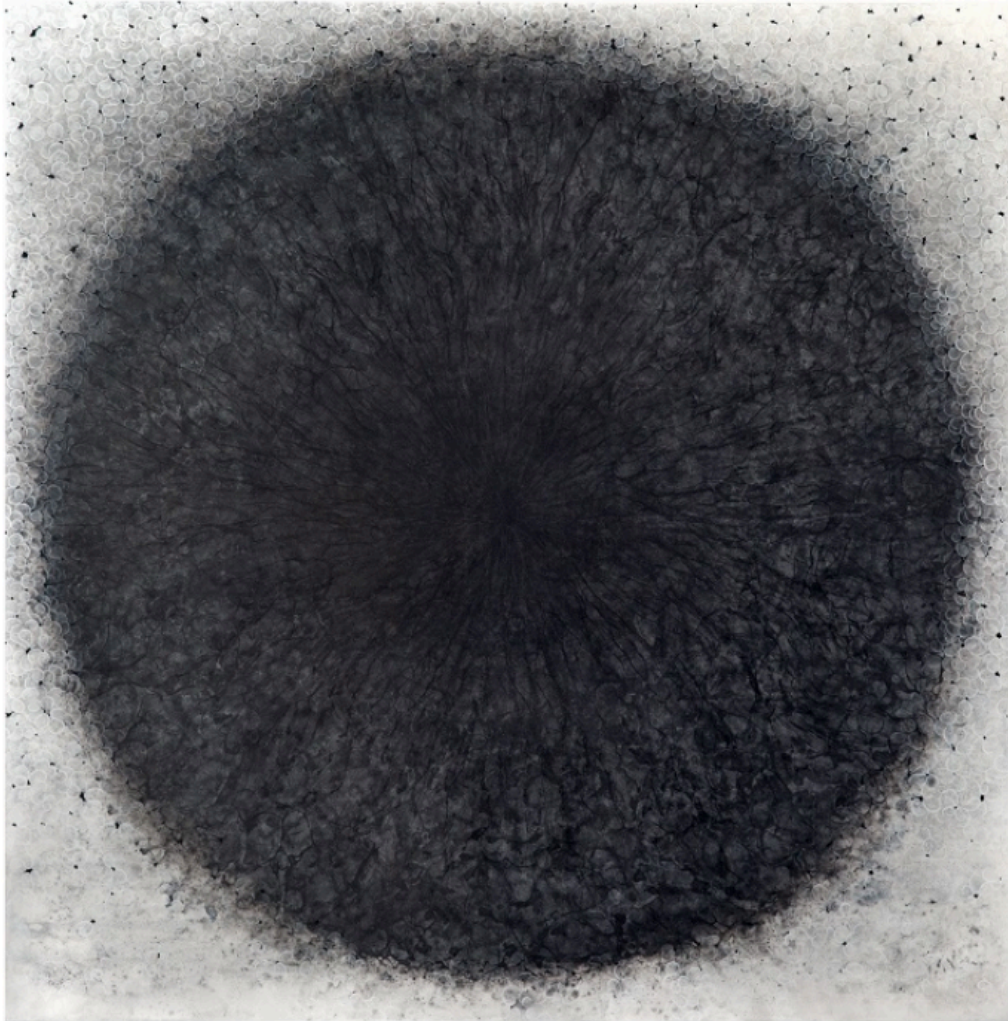
The same effect is probably not true of every work in this silverpoint artist’s canon, but for those that do play tricks on our eyes, it is surely not an accident of technique. At any rate, while immersing myself in “Dark Light,” her new solo show at the Boca Raton Museum of Art, I felt too unsettled to penetrate her other pieces with the same hyper focus. Prusa’s art projects beauty and unease in equal measure, drawing us in and pushing us away, and inviting visceral responses that we can’t quite explain, because we may not possess the language to do so. This is art on an astral plane, as if channeled from somewhere else.



The artist at work

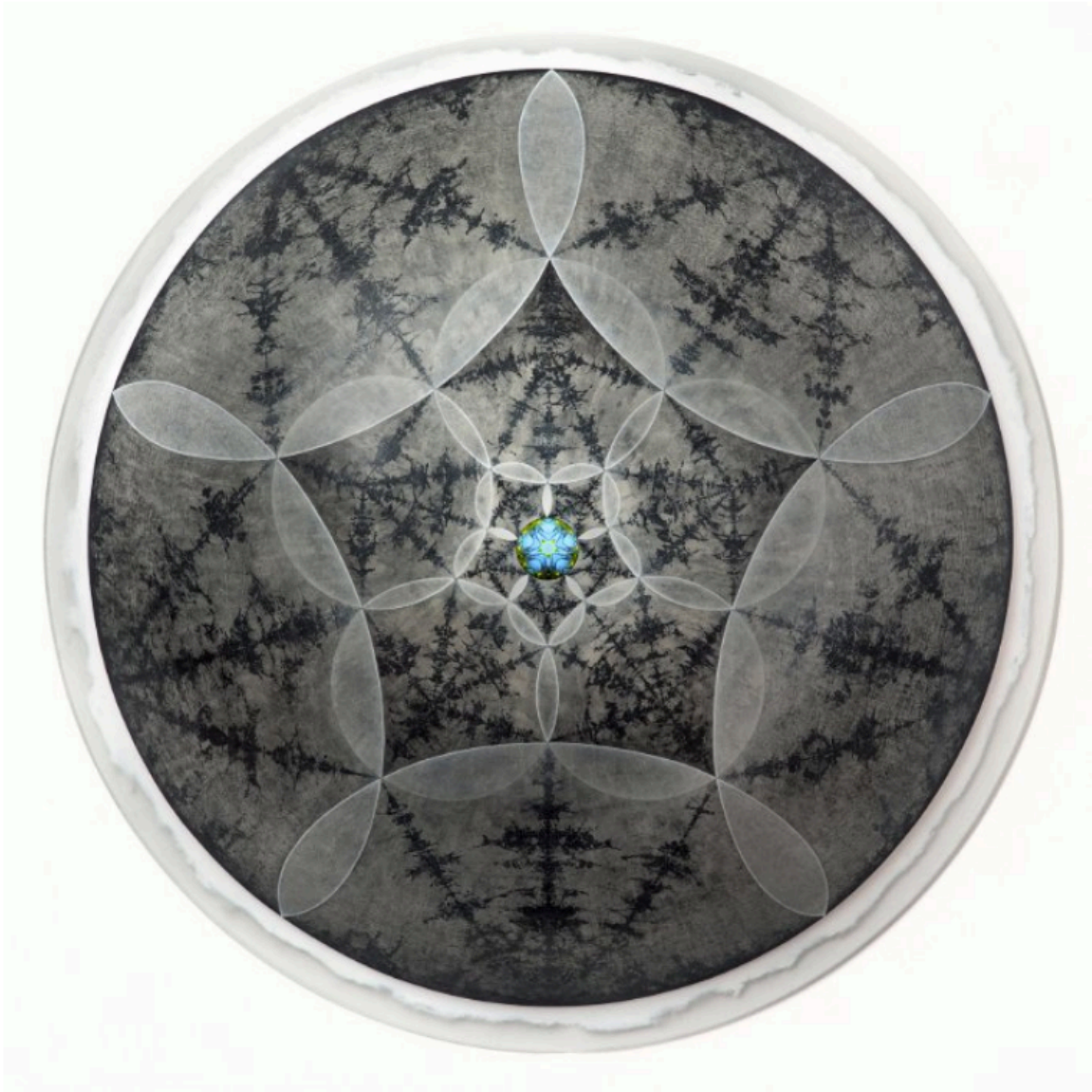
It says a lot about the hypnotic hold of Prusa's art that it worked its magic even on one of the Boca Museum's customarily bustling opening receptions this past Tuesday, with its open bar, its live DJ, its buzzing hives of members and guests creating a blanket of ambient noise in the second-floor gallery. It wasn't the ideal environment for introspective engagement, yet each work still confronted, still puzzled, still invited a one-on-one relationship with the spectator.

"Dark Light" is an accomplished suite of recent works inspired by Prusa's own life-changing experiences viewing total eclipses of the sun; other pieces pay tribute to pioneering women astronomers. Meticulously created by hand in the ancient silverpoint technique, each piece required hundreds, if not thousands, of hours to complete. Each work, then, must qualify as something of an obsession, and there certainly are worse obsessions than the eternal mysteries of the cosmos, which still beguile the best and the brightest.



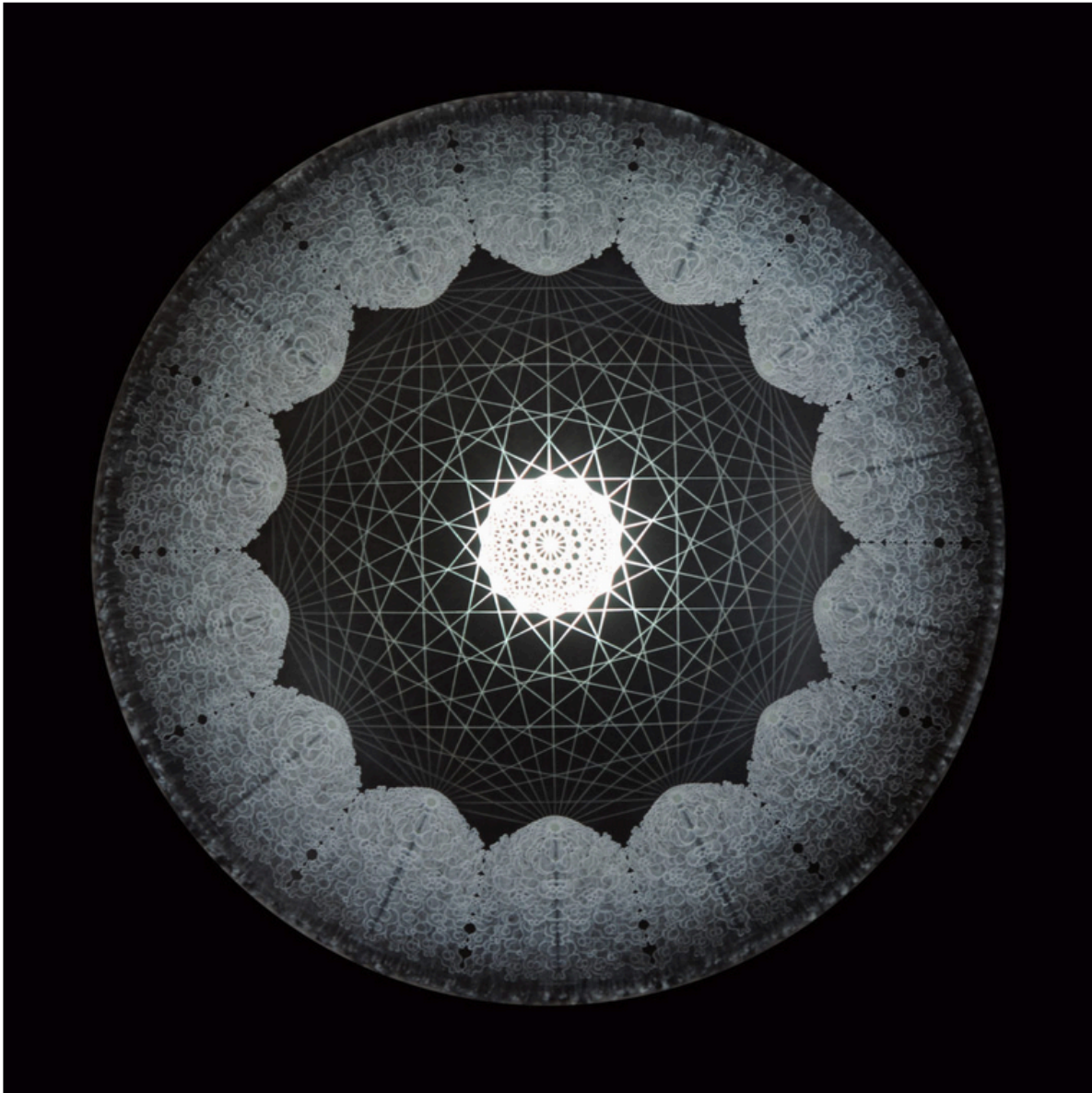
The title work in "Dark Light"

This project often finds the artist dwelling in the inexplicable nothingness of space. In “Dark Energy,” a ring of fetal silverpoint shapes surrounds a black void in the center, fraying at the edges until it disintegrates into the universal darkness. In “Corona,” blacker still at its ominous center, those same shapes hug the entire perimeter of the piece, though this time they almost resemble flowers—a surprising injection of loveliness wallpapering an unfeeling void.



“Quintessence”

Not all of Prusa's pieces are on flat canvases. "Quintessence," for instance, is a convex half of an astral body protruding from a gallery wall, with a small aperture in the center projecting a video of kaleidoscopic shapes—feeding into our voyeurism as much as our thirst for knowledge. "Emergence" and "Lessons" are silver spheres displayed under glass, each one teeming with mutated shapes, suggesting what primordial life may look like on other planets. I'm not sure if, or where, God plays into Prusa's equations, though "Cosmic Web" is perhaps the closest this exhibition gets to explaining a creator: The center of this piece, unambiguously glowing with an internal light, suggests a spiderweb-like nexus—the central brain of all that is.



"Cosmic Web"

It is possible to feel awfully small when immersed in Prusa's art, because human life as we know it does not even qualify as a pixel in her celestial matrix. Earth might as well be the black dot in the roiling cosmos of "Between Day and Night," an object that feels insignificant in the grand scheme of things. But that dot is still there, and so is the moon, in "Crescent," even if you have to strain your eyes to notice its hangnail sliver peeking out of the lunar fog.

I prefer to focus on the optimism that takes root in a piece like "Luna," with its single tree sprouting incongruously in an ashen vortex. Even in the cold, unfeeling, uncharted depths of space, life happens.

*"Carol Prusa: Dark Light" runs through Jan. 19 at Boca Raton Museum of Art, 501 Plaza Real, Boca Raton. Admission is free through August. For information, call 561/392-2500 or visit [bocamuseum.org](http://bocamuseum.org).*



**John Thomason**

As the A&E editor of bocamag.com, I offer reviews, previews, interviews, news reports and musings on all things arty and entertainment-y in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties.