



## *Creator Spotlight: Carol Prusa*

It was not until college that Carol Prusa realized creating art made her feel fully engaged. A native of Chicago, Prusa had originally thought she'd pursue a career in the sciences. However, that first drawing class at the University of Illinois (coupled with the support of its teacher) put her on the path to becoming an artist. Today, Prusa utilizes the silverpoint method for much of her internationally known work, while also teaching painting as a Professor of Art at Florida Atlantic University.

### **Mapping the Stars**

Prusa's latest exhibition, *Carol Prusa: Dark Light*, opened last month at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. It invites viewers to honor the women astronomers who originally helped map the stars. Curated by Kathleen Goncharov, Senior Curator of the museum, the exhibition features never-before-seen works. Prusa finds cosmology fascinating and remembers when she first heard of the Big Bang.



"I was in sixth grade when the Big Bang went into my head," recalls Prusa. "And it hasn't gone out since. My work refers to this idea of threaded singularity. We're all tethered to that moment, when the universe began, and the vibrations of that moment continues to touch us to this day."

Artists, scribes and artisans have used the age-old silverpoint method, favored by Prusa, since ancient times. Some of Prusa's inspiration comes from the sciences of astrophysics, meteorology, and optics. She also incorporates Russian Orthodox and Tibetan Buddhist art-making traditions, which she studied in the 1990s. Just one of her works can take thousands of hours to create depending on its complexity and size.

"My practice becomes, for me, like a form of meditation that leads to bliss, like a Buddhist prayer," said Prusa. "The time-intensive process expands my introspection and reverie about our universe."

### **Maria Mitchell**

Prusa's work begins with her process of reading and research. It was the story of Maria Mitchell that initially struck a chord for *Carol Prusa: Dark Light*. Mitchell was a pioneering advocate for math and science education for girls and was the first female astronomy professor. In 1847, Mitchell was the first person to discover a comet via telescope that was too remote to see with the naked eye.

She was also the first woman elected into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Mitchell also became famous for leading her female astronomy students on expeditions to see eclipses. Their observations would reach a national scientific audience. Her goal was to encourage other women into her profession, at the dawn of America's scientific age.

Following in Mitchell's footsteps, Prusa personally sought out the opportunity to fully view the 2017 solar eclipse. Works in *Carol Prusa: Dark Light* are the result of the life-changing effects she felt during the experience. Her favorite quote by Mitchell captures the exhibition's spirit: "We seize only a little bit of the curtain that hides the infinite from us."

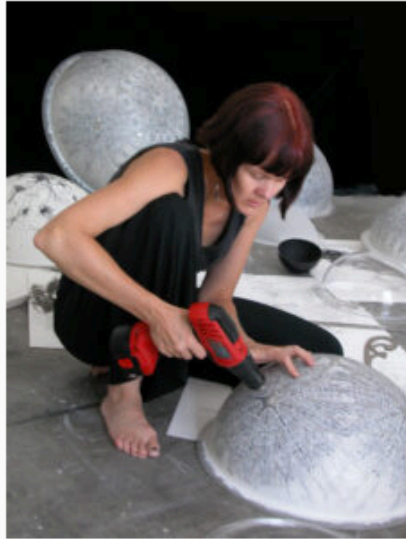
Additionally, works in *Carol Prusa: Dark Light* are dedicated to women who were human "computers" at the Harvard Observatory in the 19th century. It was there they painstakingly analyzed the many glass photographic plates from observatories around the world to map the stars. The earnings of these women were substantially less than men in their field, and their labor too went unrecognized. Another woman scientist honored is Rebecca Elson. She was a theoretical astrophysicist whose research focused on dark matter.



"An eclipse is dark light," explains Prusa. "Black, no matter how dark, still reflects light. I wanted to make black have depth and structure, and to be infinite. The eclipses influenced me in this respect, but this could also be a reflection on the times we live in. There isn't dark without light — or light without dark."

## An Artists's Life

Prusa strongly believes those who have an artistic self will ultimately be miserable if they fail to find an outlet for their creativity. When her children were young, Prusa took advantage of the time they slept or played elsewhere to focus on her work. She agrees the artist's path is not an easy one, but if one follows her passion, the rest will sort itself out.



In addition to a B.S. from the University of Illinois, Prusa also holds an M.F.A. from Drake University. Her work is in many public and private collections. Prusa received a SECAC Artistic Achievement Award in 2017 and was previously awarded a Brown University Howard Foundation Fellowship.

Her work will next be shown at the Anne Norton Sculpture Garden and Museum in 2020. In addition to teaching at Florida Atlantic University, Prusa regularly lectures at venues such as Carnegie-Mellon University, University of Cape Town, and Parsons School of Art and Design.

"The next step in my journey is to continue finding out more about myself and our world," shares Prusa. "One of the things I like most about teaching is how students keep my mind open to new things. Learning is a never-ending process."