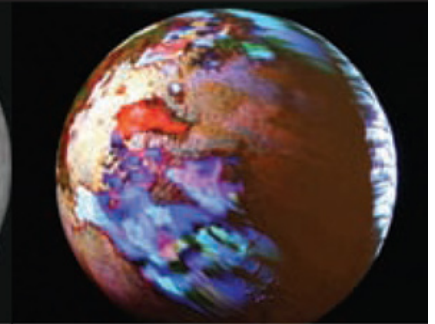
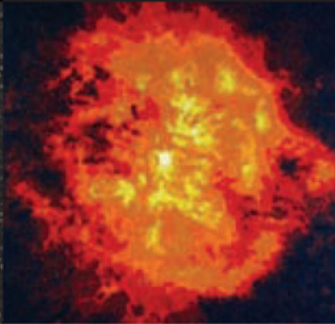




STARRY MESSENGER

Galileo's Vision in 21st Century Art



TOP LEFT

Josh Simpson, *Megaplanets (group)*, 1997–2009, solid spherical glass with filigrana cane and precious metals. Image courtesy of Tim Ryan Smith.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Vija Celmins, *December*, 1984, mezzotint, edition 23/25, 29.5 x 22.75 in. Courtesy of McKee Galleries.

Jonathan Feldschuh, *Nebula M1-67*, 2002, acrylic on canvas over panel, 48 x 48 in.

Carol Prusa, *Aporia*, 2008, silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder, and metal leaf on acrylic with fiber optics, 24 in. diam. Courtesy of Bernice Steinbaum Galleries.

Eva Lee, *Jewel*, 2006, digital video installation with globe, 2 min., 43 sec., silent.

SEPTEMBER 26– DECEMBER 13

Astronomical subjects have long been manifest in Western art, from Giotto di Bondone's *Adoration of the Magi* (1305–06), which included Halley's Comet, to Peter Paul Rubens's *Birth of the Milky Way* (1668), Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1889), and James Turrell's ongoing land project, *Roden Crater*. Celebrating the International Year of Astronomy, *Starry Messenger: Galileo's Vision in 21st Century Art* includes the work of eight notable contemporary artists inspired by astronomy. The exhibition will include paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures as well as digital animations and a video installation. Alongside these works are reproduced drawings of the once-aspiring artist Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and informative text panels describing his accomplishments.

After taking the novel step of using his telescope to look up rather than down, Galileo made discoveries that revolutionized humanity's understanding of its place in the cosmos. Having once considered becoming a painter, Galileo used his trained eye and drawing skills to aid his studies of astronomy. His sketches delineating the features of the moon's landscape served as not only a method of analysis but also a persuasive medium in an age when images were trusted more than words.

The exhibition takes its name from Galileo's *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. Galileo's observations influenced many painters of the time to embrace astronomy and depict new discoveries. In his *Immacolata* of 1610–12, Galileo's friend Lodovico Cigoli bravely painted a cratered moon instead of the perfectly rounded, smooth moon traditionally used to symbolize the purity of the Virgin Mary.

Today's artists interpret the heavens as they wish. Vija Celmins is internationally known for executing natural scenes in a variety of media. Painstakingly rendered, her star-filled nighttime skies are intensely realistic. Celebrated architect and artist Thierry W. Despont depicts moons, nebulae, and planets borne of his imagination. His paintings on wood panel or copper are composed of diverse materials, such as enamel, acrylic, oil stick, asphaltum, and epoxy resin, and feature glowing orbs that emerge from dark depths. Elen Feinberg paints colorful oil abstractions of endless space. Josh Simpson, married to astronaut Catherine Coleman, blends venerable techniques associated with Venetian glass with more exploratory methods to create imaginary planets and Saturns.

Interested in the concept of unseen worlds, Eva Lee uses digital animation to produce abstract experimental shorts that suggest the vast abstractions of the universe. Building upon the metaphor of the "dome of heaven," Carol Prusa uses fiber optics to produce celestial domes that glow from within. As many as 700 lights are programmed to flicker across the surface.

Like their Renaissance forebears, some artists combine their interest in art with a love of science. Jonathan Feldschuh started out as a physicist. His painterly technique mirrors his interest in the chaotic processes of nature. Sallie Wolfe produces visual as well as musical translations of data from daily observations of the moon over the past decade.

Best known today as one of the great figures of the Western scientific revolution, 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—just across from that of Michaelangelo!

This exhibition has been generously supported by Kean Miller Hawthorne D'Armond McCowan & Jarman LLP; Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities; Irene W. and C. B. Pennington Foundation; Albemarle Foundation; the Samuel S. Lipscomb and Joseph W. Annison Family Memorial Fund; the Alma Lee and H. N. Saurage Fund, and the Josef Sternberg Memorial Fund of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation; Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge; *The Advocate*; and WRKF—89.3.