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Portland, Oregon

Celestial Bodies

Oil paint on wood panel, assorted items

My project looked at the human connection to astronomy and religion, and how the two are inherently linked. Religion offers a connection between humans and astronomy through explanation, and astronomy serves as the connection of humans to religion being the messenger of divine information. Religion was developed to explain the unknown and one of the greatest unknowns has always been space and our relationship to it as humans. Religion offers a way out of that unknown by presenting celestial events and objects as signs from divinities, making the idea of space not scary but informational and exciting by offering the ability to communicate with a higher power.

At the foot of the altar is 'my book of celestial findings' which is documentation for me during the research and art portion of this project, and was created to look like a religious text. Please feel free to look through any of the objects placed by the altar.

Astronomy and Religion



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I. A Quick Overview

My project looked at the question of what is the human connection to astronomy and religion, and how are the two inherently linked? Religion serves as the connection of humans to astronomy through explanation, and astronomy serves as the connection of humans to religion being the messenger of divine information. Religion was developed to explain the unknown, and one of the greatest unknowns has always been space and our relationship to it as humans. Religion offered a way out of that unknown by presenting celestial events and objects as signs from divinities made the idea of space not scary but more informational and almost exciting by offering the ability to communicate with a higher power.

Astronomy became the first science, starting with observations and speculations about celestial events. In order to explain such events myths and religions explanations were created. Inherently linked, it may seem as if the relationship between the two has always been harmonic and valued, but the complexity of their connection should not be undermined. The conflict of science and religion has been one that humans have created and struggled with for most of human history. This is seen from the history of Galileo to arguments about the creation of the universe. Science and religion talk about the same concepts with different explanations or meanings.

As the understanding of outer space grew there was less and less reason to expect that the predictable events were messages from a holy being. This created an intense mix of codependency and distrust of each other. Fighting without either having a full understanding of the events that happen above us. One of the biggest conflicts between the two is the creation of the universe and the predicted end of the universe.

I chose to portray my findings through a more creative writing approach, structured in the way of a religious text. I felt that it would better represent my research and conceptual ideas than

a research paper. I wanted the text to be a part of the art piece, without the disconnect the research can act as an informative piece to help the viewer understand the art piece while also providing more of an emotional insight than a scientific one.

II. My Book of Celestial Findings:

It's here where I've lost footing in the middle ground of abstract thought and my physical existence. When I started to question the reality in front of me. What sense does it make to be standing, to have everything stable on a planet that itself is in constant movement. I convinced myself that if I concentrated hard enough I could feel the dizziness due to a planetary rotation.

Here the stretch of the universe seems eternally lengthened at night, clear and cold. It's always clear skies here, a few picturesque clouds, a few stars to remind you of the planet's turning. Tell me why perfection feels so suffocating. California sun stands unbroken, falling in sheets, overheating acres of concrete and shrubs, draping itself over the ugliness of the ideal. I thought maybe I'd come to love the sun here, but it's not the same. I miss the way it falls through leaves, shattered on the cracked sidewalks, how it floods into my room, over my body and tinting my eyes.

Tomorrow night I'll walk until I can see the lights of the city reflected onto the water, to see life warped and melting into itself. Overlap of colors and how the lights fight each other in the waves, each image not the same as the one before. I'll watch the river repeat time, the memory of the city lights. A celestial existence. The distance between stars, tell me if you're lonely there. Our separate existence. The overlap of divinity and modernity, mortality and religion.

Were there a million more stars a thousand years ago? Outside of the churches and temples, the altars and statues. We've convinced ourselves divinity lies within our material goods, the pristine enlightenment of minimalism, the eccentric polytheism of colorful patterns. Through the

haze of human life no longer can we see the messages in the stars, masked by pollution and light, we've crowded ourselves into a corner.

The freedom of atheism is that we are our own gods and we decide our own fate, but I'm not sure I'm ready for that. The power in your hands is no more real than your thoughts, and slowly without your understanding, without your consent, the golden self you once held will have dripped through the gaps in your aging fingers. You've lived your full life trying to create one.

I've always thought how strange it is that the sky can look so different from one place to another, that I know I'm not home by the way the clouds arrange themselves and how many stars can fight light pollution. I'm not from here, because I feel closer to the sun.

In lieu of religion or god, pick a star for yourself. Watch how the world orbits it. Maybe it wasn't the sun, maybe it's far larger or closer to destruction. While the Earth is only said to orbit the sun, this has become the modern orbit. On a sphere each point on its surface could be the exact center. I stand in the center of the world, the dome of life and beyond.

The sacristy of existence, how the body is hundreds of layers, one after another. Meticulously placed between the nervous system and the neurosystems, the millions of cells in a drop of blood. The eye like a black hole, and the brain a replication of a cosmos. A million different stars make up the building blocks of your hands and knees.

Where does preferable existence lie? Between the infinite glow of cities, never have I seen a night where all the lights are off. Thousands of lives intersect and repel, some find each other and stay, others aren't so lucky, and not that they'll ever know, but their lights are both on at three am in the kitchen and in the bedroom. The once visible galaxy clouded by the clusters of stars on the planet earth.

In the pollution of those lives I dream of the middle of the sea. The numbing repetition of the waves and something deeper, the draw of the divine. All the stars I've never seen, the connection to people who've died before I was born. We saw the same sun, the same moon, and in my subconscious with my eyes closed, I allow myself to see the past through the veil of water below.

Maybe nothing is sacred. The importance lies where you put it. In worn shoes and mint tea. The dust that collects and shifts in afternoon light. The complex fate of the cosmos turned into a representation of dust catching the light and rearranging in an order that seems to be random at a glance. A closer divine writing. While most dust is created by our own being and our own bodies are creations of the materials of space.

I wake up at three in the morning. When it seems like you're that last person alive, at the edge of the world. Infuriating as it is, the inability to sleep through an entire night, I give myself a break and admire the world unrushed. There's always exceptions, still cars and lights, and people walking and waking, the planet hasn't stopped its orbit. But my life, my separate world, has slowed in between night and morning, there is nothing to be done, nothing for me to rush to, nothing to distract. When I'm sure I won't sleep I turn on all the lights, purple, green, and pink. The perfect center in which opposites appear the same. Where confusion over takes certainty, it is unclear whether life has just begun or is dwindling, without direction the sunset and sunrise look the same.

The beauty of the living and the draw of the dead. The sun will stand still as I die. The eternal light of the sun, the suffocating tie between the divinity of the dead and the dreaded fate of the living. Four in the afternoon and I can see those who've lived before me, in the golden light

the linear time is melted down and folded into something remarkable. For a few seconds it's as if I'm my own god, lonely and cold, but celestial nonetheless.

The mystery of the future and what it holds. Once we've learned all the secrets of the universe is there anything left? Once Mars becomes a ringed planet and Saturn loses its rings, once we know that life has ended, after religion is either proven or disproven.

Is dying in space the same as dying at sea? Death without a border, without a country to claim you. No funeral, no body, the endless expanse of space and the sea don't seem so different now. Through waves and headaches, the buzz of ears and lack of oxygen, once the two seemed so different and now they're inseparable.

But isn't it nice to know that as we're decaying the universe is being born? The human race might be dying at our own hands, but the world is only just beginning. Time will continue after us. Life after our death will talk of the stars that we see and the sun that was orbited by a planet full of life.

The dark energy of the universe is expanding as you read. If you believe in something beyond yourself, science or religion, it becomes the same in the face of the unknown. Speculation of whether or not we exist in a parallel universe or if we can create our own new one is religious. We have proved neither, only consisting of incidents that could be categorized as evidence or coincidence.

A planetarium. A spectacle that starts with color, the brightest blues and greens and reds fluorescent with the dust of colliding stars. From the back of a car the lights from streetlights look the same as space matter flashing. Most of the universe is empty, only dark energy filling it, a vast area and very little mass. The same dark that covers your eyes when you close them and the same nebulas when you close them even harder to see the oil spills of color.

Jupiter's storm will end, and the iconic red eye will disappear after never having seen it any other way. When I was young I used to go to a museum with a giant orb of shimmery liquid, representing the gas planets. As it spins the millions of vortexes and storms rage behind the solid plastic shield between her and I. Forever until the breaking point the glow of an always changing surface will draw kids.

The inevitable fate of the world is destruction. After the era of starlight, after the last star dies and the universe becomes dark. After the memory of light is no longer a memory but a forgotten thought. Once written in a coffee shop, the idea of a sun that rises with certainty, once not good enough, now in the trash, and in the darkness there's no evidence, so did it ever exist? Recently I've felt as though I'm living through my own degeneration. As the lights went out one by one I was left questioning if I had ever existed on the same plane as everyone I'd ever met.

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