

Krow B.

Santa Rosa, California

Untitled

Wood, acrylic paint, Posca paint pens

Since I was a kid, I have loved looking at the stars and watching the moon. More recently, I have incorporated stars into my artworks. For this piece, I chose to explore the relation between celestial and humanity, primarily through literature, drawing on celestial mappings and star charts for inspiration for my final piece. I felt that it was very important for this to take the shape of a room -- a physical space I could enter, as that is similar to how I see the stars: a gateway to my own world where I can escape.

The design of the mural covering the walls was very free form, I spent a lot of time planning as I went. It was essential to me that I incorporated wood into my installation, as it was partially inspired by a corner of the barn at Oxbow. Woodworking is something that I associate with my early childhood, due to my grandparents teaching it to me when I was a child. The celestial mappings by Tallmadge Doyle were a very big inspiration to me, as I felt that it showed how humans have interacted with the stars by mapping them in an artistic sense.

The Moon, the Stars, and Us



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OS47

Writer's Note: This paper explores the long and rich history humans have with the celestial, particularly through the lens of literature and history.

I.

What is our relationship with the celestial? I have been extraordinarily lucky that from my home I have a good view of the stars and constellations they form. Gazing back at their twinkling faces each night and observing the moon as she passes through her nightly phases is always something that brought me deep comfort.

Autumn by T.E. Hulme portrays a very intimate way of interacting with the moon, in a similar fashion to how I interact with it:

“A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.”

It shows a sense of familiarity and companionship with the moon as he walks under it, demonstrating a feeling of comfort. I believe that part of our attraction with the celestial comes from a feeling of home. In many works of literature, the moon and stars have been referenced, symbolized, and thought of in awe. The awe that many feel is a bit removed - less like the bond of

a close friend, it places expectations of magnificence. While many other pieces present a quiet companionship, such as likening it to a “red faced farmer”, many others present a more grandiose moon that is something higher.

Humans have always been able to find ourselves among the stars, whether in nursery rhymes, poems, or myths. They allow us to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, we can imagine ourselves among them or let them bring us home. Written by a much loved friend, the poem below expresses a mix of awe and understanding, as if you are coming into a new phase of your relationship with the moon:

“I had a dream where I could fly.
And maybe I was Icarus,
For if he saw the sun the same way I see the moon
I think I may understand now.
He allowed himself to melt in her beauty.”
— Natasha Polling

This is a new moon, no longer the friendly farmer but a more powerful presence. As the poem calls in the story of Icarus, so too does it call in the nature of gods and goddesses. Yet the understanding and cooling nature of the moon continues the theme of comfort, with the fact that the moon is also most often a maternal goddess. We can see there is power, but she is not dangerous and we are called to relax in her beauty.

My personal love of the moon and stars has been with me for most of my life, expressed in observatory trips, traveling to see eclipses, or simply going out behind my house to watch them

move across the sky. I've often taken pleasure in trying to find my own constellations within the starry sky, but simply being under them and seeing something so distant has always been a joy. Like many others, the moon knows my secrets, the stars know my wishes, and all are a comfort in the dark.

II.

Spanning across history and cultures, there have been many different interpretations of the moon and constellations, often telling tales of familiarity and wonder.

Our fascination with the cosmos is not a new one, as demonstrated by the art in the caves at Lascaux in France. The paintings may be our earliest example of interest in the moon and stars. Some of the paintings in the cave depict the moon phases, and it is thought that they were used as a calendar. A few of the animal depictions are also thought to be constellations, showing just how long we have been studying the sky. It is most likely that these would have been used for time keeping or navigation, so while more on the practical side this art is still highly valuable in showing one aspect of our relationship.

The Woman in Moon is an old Hawaiian myth about the goddess Hina escaping her disrespectful husband and going to live in the moon. Traveling up a rainbow bridge during the day leads her to the sun, and she suffers as her skin blisters and burns. Eventually she turns back, but returns at night to go to the moon. It says that she sits there to this day, and you can see her resting with her tapa board and beater at her side. In this story the moon is a refuge for Hina, providing her with comfort and at the same time almost casting her as a mother figure, watching the rest of the people down on earth.

In Greek mythology, Selene is the titan goddess of the moon who drives it across the sky each night on her chariot. She is often associated with Artemis, who hunts under the moon's light. Selene was thought to preside over eclipses, which were a symbol of the god's displeasure and terrified the Greeks, but she also played an important part in agriculture and timing for plantings. She was a kind goddess, and while less was written about her she was nonetheless an important figure to them.

Mother Goose's famous rhyme *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* is simple but references the wonder and beauty that you can experience when looking at the stars. Originally published in a collection of nursery rhymes by Jane and Ann Taylor in 1806, it shows how early we start referencing and asking about the stars.

Stars, by Sara Teasdale tells of the magnificence of the night sky and awe she felt while she felt observing the stars. "And a heaven full of stars over my head, ... I know that I am honored to be witness of so such majesty." Teasdale is struck by the depth and beauty of the stars, her relationship is one of admiration. As she admires the stars she is able to take peace in their presence and appreciate the natural beauty around her.

"Each that we lose takes part of us;
A crescent still abides,
Which like the moon, some turbid night,
Is summoned by the tides."

— Emily Dickinson

Dickinson's poem likens her emotions to the moon, getting stronger and weaker as the phases of the moon. What she has lost, as well as her grief, is never fully gone, getting stronger in the same way the moon controls the tides. Her relationship is far more doleful than many of the others, yet the quiet acceptance she shows is almost peaceful.

As long as we have been able to create art we have depicted what we see around us, including the moon. Going from cave art to written word to journeying to the moon's surface may not have been an inevitable path, but it is one that I do not find surprise in. It rather seems human nature to want to explore and be close to things we are drawn to, and therefore the moon is no exception. I believe that our proximity to the moon is part of what draws us in, it allows us to consider it "ours". It can be a very appealing world to be a part of - detached from this world's problems the moon is peaceful, the stars have no worries. Our constellations will continue to reflect back the stories we have crafted for them, and our moon will continue to watch over us.

III.

Constellations have been used for navigation, to help sailors and travelers find their way in the night. Humans brains have been wired for pattern recognition, which could indicate as to why we search for meaning in images and symbols where there may be none. Myths are created to give us explanations for how the world functions and explain what we otherwise could not. Our own curiosity and need for meaning drives us to weave stories relating the world around us in ways that make our environment a place we can stand to live in. But why is it that we are so opposed to letting chaos in, what about creating meaning makes us feel better?

Often we can feel lost and alone in our world, but when we tell stories of the stars it can help connect us to something more than ourselves. Our tales of how the moon came to be, why the

stars form the patterns they do are our ways of explaining the universe and reaching out to find ourselves. When the cosmos are personified, especially through gods and goddesses who resemble our own humanity, it can help us see more for ourselves. Particularly when our situations are less than optimal, humans attempt to find a reason why; someone to blame when it's out of our control. When we no longer feel as connected to those around us or ourselves, we can turn to something outside the situation.

With all that is written in regards to the celestial, it's impossible not to notice that despite the vast amount written about the stars there are even more about the moon. Might this be because the moon is closer, and therefore feels like "ours"? On clear nights you can see the craters that pocket the moon's surface, we see it pass tirelessly through the different phases, and watch as it moves across the sky. The possession we feel towards the moon and in contrast the lack of possession towards the stars shows us how much proximity can matter.

The Moon, by Robert Louis Stevenson, Personifies the moon and lets us in on her nightly watch of all the activities taking place this night. We see the animals who take joy being out under the moonlight as well as the creatures that "belong to the day" and wait until morning to rise.

"The moon has a face like the clock in the hall;

She shines on thieves on the garden wall,

On streets and fields and harbour quays,

And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees.

The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,

The howling dog by the door of the house,

The bat that lies in bed at noon,
All love to be out by the light of the moon.

But all of the things that belong to the day
Cuddle to sleep to be out of her way;
And flowers and children close their eyes
Till up in the morning the sun shall arise.”

— Robert Louis Stevenson

This poem is similar to the book *Half a Moon and One full Star*, which follows the many people and animals awake at night. Read to me as a child it holds a special place in my heart, and reminds me of the harmony that can come with the moon. In Stevenson’s poem the moon plays a passive role, her face like a clock keeps time but does nothing to partake in any events or happenings.

Humans' one sided relationships with the moon could be painted in a tragic light, but I believe that reaching out to the heavens is a beautiful thing to do. We are talking to the same moon that the native Hawaiians and Greeks did thousands of years ago, still finding a face reflected back on the surface. While the moon will never love us back, the stars will not speak to us or guide us, I think it no less of a worthy pursuit to talk to them and feel a little less alone under their light.

IV.

Humanity’s longstanding history of fascination with the celestial has been well documented, from cave art to modern poems and books or our own ventures to the moon's surface. The multitudes of

literature and art regarding the celestial bodies have woven themselves into our history and everyday thought, and the many connections we have made with the moon and stars affect us to this day.

But why do we care? While art that serves a purpose or promotes a cause is a worthy pursuit, art for art's sake should be equally valuable. To find beauty in the world and take time to appreciate it can make the world at the very least more bearable, and at best a kinder place to live. We should strive to find joy in the everyday and share it with others, and as the moon and stars bring me delight I implore you to go out and spend some time with them yourself.

As Michelle Thaller said, "What is human existence? It turns out it's pretty simple: We are dead stars, looking back up at the sky." We are made of stardust.

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