

Stellar Artist Shares Work with SLAC

by Lauren Rugani

Artist Leah Lubin feels at home in the Kavli building. There, 19 of her paintings adorn the walls in tribute to many of the cosmic wonders that Kavli scientists explore on a daily basis, including black holes and the nature of the universe in the first instants after the Big Bang.

"I come up with an idea, and then I meet my audience halfway," said Lubin, who bases her abstract paintings loosely on images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. She describes her pieces as lyrical, rather than literal, interpretations of cosmological concepts. "You have to leave room for intellect and imagination," she said.



Lubin's paintings are featured in the Kavli Building. (Photo by Brad Plummer.)

The collection includes paintings that date back as far as 1975, with the most recent completed in 2004. Lubin previously showed 12 of the paintings in a four-and-a-half-month exhibit at NASA's Ames Research Center in 1997. Her time there inspired six new paintings, dubbed the "Galactic Mysteries" series, which now hang in the two-story atrium of the Kavli Building.

As for how her paintings landed a spot at SLAC: "Sometimes, you just really need to know someone," Lubin said. She teaches adult classes at the Pacific Art League in Palo Alto, where Renée Dorfan—the wife of former SLAC Director Jonathan Dorfan—is a student. Renée told her husband about Lubin's cosmos collection, and Dorfan, in turn, alerted Kavli Managing Director Ziba Mahdavi. Within weeks, Mahdavi had arranged for the work to be featured in the Kavli Building.

"You wait years for something to happen, then one day your life changes," said Lubin, who had been searching for a new home for the collection since the end of her NASA exhibit. The work went up on June 18, 2010, and will remain in the building indefinitely.

"I wouldn't bring these paintings anywhere else, even if the Smithsonian wanted them," Lubin said. "They belong here."

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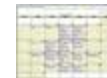
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