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An Artist's View of Space Science

Part I.

By Leah Lubin

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It was a cool Monday night in January 1998, and the NASA Ames in Mountain View, California was brightly lit.



NASA Ames Visitor's Center.

I was pacing the floor of the lecture room, nervous about my upcoming speech (Refer to "*I Paint The Cosmos*", *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, Volume 6, No. 3, March, 1998 for helpful background information). Mike Mosher composed and smiling, Trudy Myrrh focused, hospitable and welcoming, as we watched the hall fill up with our audience for the night.



Reception Desk.

Our show, "Artists Uninhibited View Of Space Science", included an exhibit of paintings on canvas (mine), Myrrh's imagery on translucent acrylic, Mike's "Flight Paths", an eclectic narrative with historical and semiconductor imagery in a computer based installation behind a mural-like façade and "Space|RACE", an interactive multimedia exhibit by C. Gaiter (This artist being from out of town did not attend the show or lecture in person).



Art Display.

Our collaborative show was in it's third month and this was the night that the artist voice would be heard. What were we trying to say with our art? What were our interests and inspirations where some of the questions we were going to address?

To round out the evening, we invited Dr. Chris McKay, planetary scientist with the Space Science Division of NASA Ames, a popular speaker on Mars research and active scientist in the field

I noticed our curator, NASA Ames own exhibit hall boss Jeff Cross, responsible for the exhibit hall content and look, from a billion dollar "moon rock" to pieces of space craft and displays that educate and excite. He had been so generous with his time and exhibit space. This night found him comfortably sitting in the audience watching us, he seemed pleased.

Trudy Myrrh welcomed us all and introduced the order of the evening program. First to speak was Dr. McKay, followed by me, the one to conceive the idea of the show, it's visionary creator willing to go out and sell NASA on the idea of moving aside their exhibit for four months to let us show our art work. Then Mike, followed by Trudy were to speak, rounding out the evening.

The audience seemed ready. The lights were dimmed. The evening got going and Dr. McKay showed his vivid photos from Pathfinder on Mars, simulations of future space stations and more. He was lively, he was entertaining, and answered all audience questions with care and concern.

I knew that I was the next one. I felt ready. I had written a four-page speech especially for the occasion. I felt good, I felt I looked good and recognized that not too many moments in ones life could it actually get better than this. This was my moment to communicate and explain about the paintings, my life's work and love, in the way that only words can sometimes describe.

Dr. McKay's talk was over. Trudy joined him on the podium and thanked him. We all clapped, and then she turned her attention to me and the history of our show. A year of pre-exhibit stories had her busy with enough to say. Then, she called my name and invited me to come on stage and give my talk. At this point I got up and walked on stage. To the left, Dr. McKay was leaving the stage. Returning to his seat, or so I thought, but as I reached the podium I realized that actually he was briskly walking down the middle of the hall and right through the exhibit doors. "What, hey wait a minute", I silently thought, "Don't you want to hear what I have to say?" Suddenly, if not briefly, I didn't feel so good. Why was he walking out, our guest, didn't he think the artists have

anything worth while to tell the scientist?



Leah Lubin at NASA Ames Research Center.

But the moment passed and I refocused. I must admit that something in my writer's mind said "There's a story here, isn't there?"

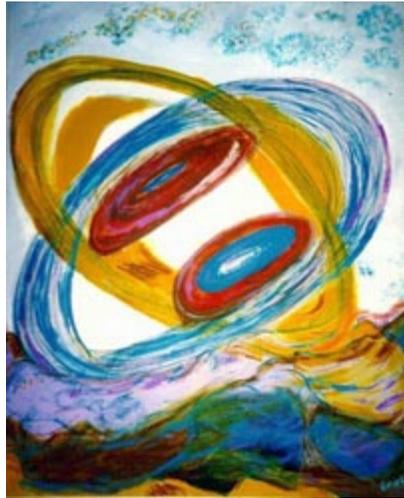


The Big Bang

The good news is that the audience didn't notice his exit. My talk went very well and so did Mike's and Trudy's. Although we the artists exchanged looks and might have mentioned the quick exit of Dr. McKay, nothing was made of it. But, I must tell you next time we include a scientist in one of our talks, they will give their speech last! Of course, this incident itself is just a small indication of a situation that I inwardly believe might be something to look at. I am aware that some lucky artists who work in the field of space art are included in brainstorming sessions and projects that are scientific in nature, and that the interaction of the artist viewpoint is considered important, but I also believe this is extremely infrequent with minimum funding. I hope that might change in the future. I personally would welcome it in my career.



Hale Bopp No Spaceship Behind



Mars

Part I. of a three part series on the subject of "Artist's View of Space Science".

Leah Lubin

March, 2000



The Landing.