

ENCOUNTERS: Artist Patricia Olynyk inspired by light pollution



Patricia Olynyk employs microscopy and biomedical imaging technologies to explore life at the micro and macro levels. Recent projects for the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C, and the Art I Sci Center's California NanoSystems Institute at U.C.L.A. challenge our "ocularcentric" tendencies.

1. Tell us about your most recent encounter with science.

I've recently been reading about light pollution and just produced an artwork for UCLA's California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI) Gallery entitled: [Dark Skies](#) The International Dark Sky Association (IDA) defines light pollution as: any adverse effect of artificial light including sky glow, glare, light trespass, light clutter, decreased visibility at night, and energy waste.

Light pollution obscures the stars in the night sky from urban environments, interferes with astronomical observatories, disrupts ecosystems and in general has adverse health effects for humans and animals alike.

New research shows that constant exposure to low light levels compromises the immune system of not only nocturnal animals but also humans. Scientists say this shows the unexpected impact human expansion and light pollution have on life.

2. What about it interested you?

Dark Skies, an astronomical metaphor, refers to remote places free of hazy city light, but also suggests sailing into dangerous or difficult territory. I like the implication of perception that extends deep into time and space, resulting in a kind of clarity of vision and with this, deep insight. The extended view offers the promise of new knowledge.

There's creativity in engineering, in math, in the planetary sciences, but the experience of art is unique and distinct from other kinds of experiences. Art-making is its own distinct territory and knowledge base and Dark Skies provides an opportunity to merge research and creative work in new ways.

3. Do you have anything to add about your personal view of science?

At present, there is a growing interest in scientific visualization and imaging, (especially forms at the nano scale) by artists for the purposes of re-presentation and reinterpretation of scientific data within a broader cultural context, and also through the lens of critical aesthetics.

Discourse related to cross-disciplinary creative work that exists at the intersections of art, science and technology has been influential to my thinking and production for over ten years, especially the more humanistic encounters with the life sciences and mathematical sciences. I am particularly interested in how images exist within and between multiple spaces and how they are encountered by so called "disciplinary specific trained experts" and the lay audience.