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## The artists journey- Strolling the edges of the universe

Mary P. Williams

*The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*

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THE ARTISTS JOURNEY-  
STROLLING THE EDGES  
OF THE UNIVERSE

A Thesis

by

MARY P. WILLIAMS

Submitted to the Graduate College of  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2016

Major Subject: Painting & Sculpture



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OF THE UNIVERSE

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MARY P. WILLIAMS

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December 2016



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## ABSTRACT

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Space exploration has always fascinated me, and so has the idea (so far fictional) that humankind may someday encounter extraterrestrial life. My series of paintings and prints are a visual expression of the awe and wonder I feel as I follow our species unending drive to expand the boundaries of its known world.

But the unknown is not just out there in interstellar space. And there are other lifeforms to encounter right here on our own planet. Another series of my paintings documents Earth's flora. Our ties to the microorganisms, animals, and plants on our planet, and the life which may exist on far away stars, are facets of the same question: how are we interrelated? And how do we manage the dwindling resources of our planet? The challenge of space is equal to, not greater, than the challenge of our shared life on Earth.





## DEDICATION

The completion of my masters studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My father, Joseph Jacob Phillips, my mother, Pauline Wheeler Phillips, my husband, Doyle Lavern Cummings, my sister, Josephine Phillips Reed, my daughter, Carrina Mary Williams, my son, Geoffrey Jeremiah Williams, wholeheartedly inspired and supported me to accomplish this degree. Thank you for your love and patience.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION



Fig 1. MPW-C “Earth Seen From Mars”, 8”x 8.6”, oil on wooden panel, Spring, 2011

My artistic journey has been a projection of my spirit and vision out into the farthest reaches of this solar system and the universe. Exploring with watercolor paints and brush I have tried to communicate my sense of wonder and awe at the vastness surrounding us. It is my belief that mankind will be living on Mars by the end of this century. My exhibition is a series of paintings and prints of solar events happening in the time period 2011-2016

In my lifetime the most inspiring contemporary goal for Homo Sapiens has been to lift off Earth and travel in space. To do this it has required a tremendous expenditure of resources, brain power

and imagination. The artists and writers of the twentieth century rose to the occasion and produced ground-breaking art and literature. The immediate goal was to colonize Mars and then out to the stars. Fig.1 For decades many scientific agencies have worked to determine if that planet is habitable.

In 1950, when I was eleven, I read Asimov's *I, Robot*, and Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicle*. That was when I developed my passion to learn about space and try to envision what might lie in the future. It may seem odd for my age but it was what inspired and excited me. I read every science fiction book as it came out. The photographs being provided to the public of far galaxies, planets, and interstellar space thrilled Carl Sagan, an American physicist, cosmologist, and me. Painting what may, or might, reside out in space awaiting us has been the delight of my heart. My spiritual journey for 50 years has been about exploring space; interior space, the space around us with all the unique habitats for the creatures of Earth, and interstellar space with its vastness. Interior space is the soul, or the spirit of a particular person and their quest for the meaning of life. This includes the imagination, the visionary look into the future, or the dreamer's depiction of the world. The personal space is the environment the person lives in, travels to, or chooses to record in their art. The space of the universe is the entire solar system and interstellar space which, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is becoming the most important exploration of all. Painting and music assisted my journey into these spaces along with the emerging digital film industry, science fiction literature, and visionary paintings where imaginations romped ever outward to the stars and beyond. In the last fifty years the art world has responded with incredible changes in film, video, digital art, and movies such as *E.T.* and *Avatar*. The public was being educated to think that there might be alien beings and even the belief that humans could live in other environments. Movies like *Star Wars*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Alien* and *Avatar*

presented life on planets other than Earth. Who knows what may be in the outer regions of the universe waiting for us to discover it? We need many lifetimes to see and enjoy the splendid feast provided for us by the entire universe.

The rapid advance of science in the last three hundred years has expanded our sense of what place we occupy in the universe. The stars are always there to be gazed at, ruminated about, and dreamed on. When I was a small girl in California there were few lights to obscure the nearness of the moon and the stars. The black velvet night was there and we spent evenings sitting outside trying to identify the constellations. Stories were read to us about the way they were named. Greek myths, American Indian myths, and the Inca myths about the stars were our common talk. My mother and father were better educated than many of the people of our socioeconomic status and they believed we should understand how the moon sailed around our planet and how the thousands of stars wheeled majestically overhead. My Dad had a pair of binoculars and later in my teen years there was a telescope. In our family it was understood that the world was large, we were on a small bit of it, and that adventure awaited the ones who took their courage in their own hands and ventured past the town, city, country and the oceans “out there”. The National Geographic magazines, which showed up occasionally, only whetted this appetite for discovery. The evolving consciousness that we are fragile and our planet is fragile has recently encouraged reverence for the all natural phenomena we live amongst. One of the miraculous and least understood events in the polar regions of the Earth is the Aurora Borealis, Fig 2 By leaving the Earth and looking back from space the dimensions of the Aurora have become clear. It is only in the last two centuries that we know they are caused by fast moving particles from space. In the past our ancestors were moved to awe by these seemingly magic

lights and stories to explain them were invented. Now we have photographs from the International Space Station detailing the changing colors and forms.



Fig 2. MPW-C, “The Aurora Borealis as Seen From Space “, Watercolor, 22” x 30” 2012

The entire world was astounded when the first photos of our world came back from the vantage point of space. Suddenly we saw our lives and our planet from a different perspective. Our egocentric view of the cosmos began to change. Photographs have given us new ways of seeing our world and the 20<sup>th</sup> century off-world space travel has given us awesome pictures of our place in the universe. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our resolve to travel away from our home world has become more universal and many countries are trying to participate. Orbiting Mars, at present, are spacecraft from the United States, Europe, Russia, and India. Painting my imaginary

version of the new information and blending it with actual photographs being sent back to earth is challenging. The fluid nature of watercolor seems to be a good fit for recording both a galaxy and flowers. Painting in detail the flora of my particular niche, an alpine niche in the Sierras, is a way to show the correlation of an intricate flower with an arm of our galaxy. The two share basic forms and similarities of structure. I wish to balance Macro, the universe, with Micro, what is under my feet on this Earth. My fascination with the insects, birds, microorganisms, and flowers of our precious planet form the basis for expanding my focus outward to the imaginary creatures who may reside in the far reaches of the universe.

While looking to outer space it is imperative to record what is around us on our own home planet. There is currently an effort by the scientific community to document life on our planet before some of it is driven to extinction. Our near neighbors, the planets who orbit the sun with us, may have forms of life different from ours. Out in space Mars has two moons, Phobos (fear) and Deimos (panic). They were named in 1877 for the mythological two horses who drew the chariot of the Greek war god, Ares, across the heavens. Ares was known by the Romans as Mars.



Fig.3 MPW-C. “Phobos, A Moon Of Mars”, passing in front of our Sun Aug. 20, 2013  
Watercolor, 22” x 30”, Fall, 2013 Painting class of Philip Field



The Mars Rover took photos of the passage of Phobos in front of the sun at 4 second intervals and sent the photos back to earth Fig.3. So the question is: “Do you need to know what the painting represents?” Does the painting stand alone without explanation? Does it prompt questions in the viewers mind when he/she looks at it?

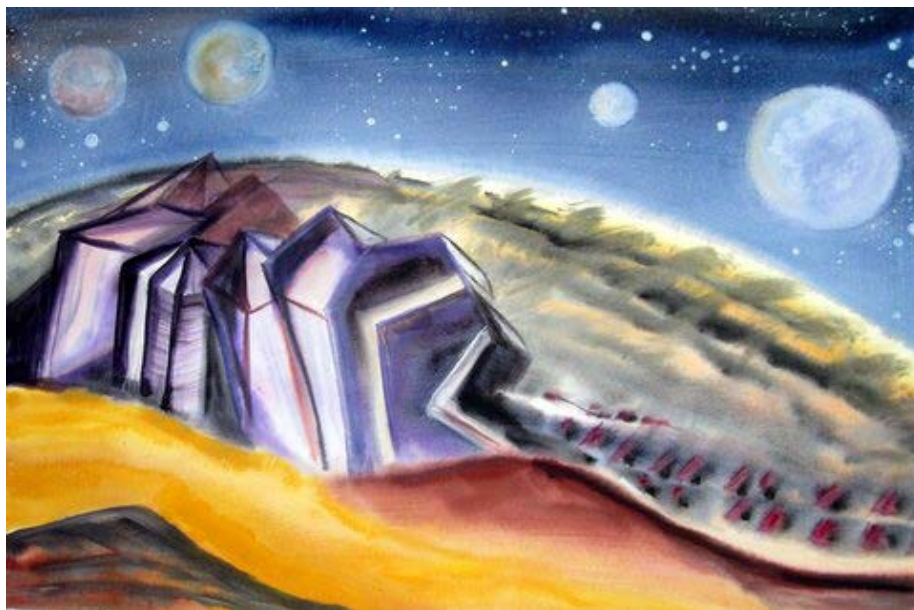


Fig. 4 “But Can We Live There?”, Watercolor, 22” x 30”,  
This painting evolved into my Mars-Earth settlement series.

Meanwhile, in the science fiction world new ideas were being explored by Philip K. Dick who grappled with what constitutes a human being in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Ursula Le Guin did a ground-breaking examination of gender in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and Frank Herbert reviewed human behavior under stress from the scarcity of water on a planet called *Dune*. Most significant was the book *The Drowned World* by JG Ballard describing the world after the ecocatastrophe of melted ice caps. I read these exciting books with unusual ideas presented by great writers. It seemed anything was possible if the world would make a concerted effort. All these books were prophetic when looking at them through the lens of the world situation in 2015. A seminal event during that decade was the teaming up of sci-fi author, Arthur C. Clarke, and Stanley Kubrick to produce the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A lot was

happening “out there” while here on Earth the North Vietnamese attacked two U.S. destroyers sitting in international waters (Gulf of Tonkin incident) in 1964. The first combat troops arrived in Vietnam in 1965 and the long war had begun. Sputnik had launched in 1957 and the Pioneer and Luna spacecraft continued to try to reach the moon or attempt a flyby. In February 1961 there was another attempt to impact Venus or do a flyby of Venus. These attempts continued along with a try to land on Mars. Then, in 1965, a lander succeeded in landing on the moon. Finally, in 1969, NASA and the sci-fi community were wild with excitement as Armstrong and Aldrin landed and walked on the moon: One Giant Leap for Mankind. In response the art world moved to conceptual art (post-minimalism - post-painterly abstraction) and exploration of the concept of space. Post minimalism embraced Land art (Smithson), Body art (Abramovic and Burning Man) and Performance art (Nauman). Post-painterly abstraction moved toward clarity of color and design with Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly. Arte Povera emerged challenging pure abstraction and the established aesthetic order and protesting the market-driven art world. The entire 60’s and 70’s were a time of turmoil and change in both the art world and the political



Fig.5 MPW-C, “The Cauldron” oil on canvas, 30”x 30”, Spring 2012

world. Three decades later, in my classes at UTPA (now UTRGV), I finally had a chance to concentrate on the planets, their physical composition, the space they occupied, and the phenomena still being recorded and sent back to us by all the satellites and spacecraft. Fig 5.

In Spring 2012 I began a series of paintings documenting the solar events happening in the 2012 – 2016 time period, including comets passing through, and Lander Philae doing an almost miraculous landing on a comet nucleus. Exciting times in our solar system! This series of watercolor paintings combined all the imaginary information I had absorbed over the years with the actual information streaming back from the various spacecraft that were crisscrossing and documenting our solar system.



Fig.6. MPW-C, “Mars Series-Phobos and Deimos”, Watercolor, 22”x 30”, 2014

From my travels across the American southwest I had seen miles and miles of desolate desert. Was it possible that the barren, uninhabitable, planets whirling out in space resembled the deserts of Earth? Fig 6. As the photographs streamed back to NASA it became clear that the

planets were similar. Between my travels and the photos I imagined the surfaces of Mars and also the way our Earth would look if I were standing on the surface. What would it look like with two moons? Fig 7, Imagine the four major moons of Jupiter: Io, Europa, Callisto, and Ganymeade, discovered by Galileo in 1610. These four were named for the lovers of Zeus yet 63 other moons of Jupiter exist!



Fig.7 MPW-C, “Mars-Series Phobos and Earth seen from Mars”, Watercolor, 22’ X 30” 2014

A richness of moons to be imagined, drawn, painted, and dreamed about. The method of recording the beauty of the individual planets after seeing the actual photos and the digitally enhanced color photos seemed to require a muted palette. “The stars at night, which seem so tantalizingly close yet so far, will be in sharp focus for rocket scientists, but the road to building





Fig.8. MPW-C “Comet *Sliding Spring* Passing Mars” Oct 2014, Watercolor 22” x 30”

starships will be a rocky one. Humanity is like someone whose outstretched arms are reaching for the stars but whose feet are mired in the mud.”<sup>1</sup>

The rare event of an icy comet passing close to Mars generated excitement in the scientific community and in my dreams. Would the Red Planet be hit by dust, gas, and meteors? Humans are, for the first time, positioned to have spacecraft take photos as the comet bypasses Mars. This first visit to the inner planets by an object so large was ready to be documented. Fig.8. The comet hurtled by at 35 miles per second and left a trail of debris. In recorded history the closest comet to swing by Earth was in 1770. This was a historic chance to see for ourselves how our universe works and at last we were ready with three NASA spacecraft orbiting Mars. The photos sent back especially stunning as they were digitally enhanced using color. This

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<sup>1</sup> Kaku, Michio, *Physics Of The Future*, p. 295

presented room for artists to add their own interpretation to the visual events happening out in space. My own low key watercolor range of Indigo Blue, Naples Yellow, Mauve, Alizarin Crimson, Indian yellow and Cadmium Orange gave me a range suited to my imagined moons and planets.



Fig.9. MPW-C, “Mars Series-Methane Fountains on Enceladus” Watercolor, 22” x 30

As we, the humans interested in leaving the planet, searched for water and oxygen to sustain life in the great void the info began to flow back. Saturn’s moon Enceladus had fountains of some liquid shooting thousands of miles up above the planets surface. Fig9. What could it be? It turned out to be methane which is not a liquid usable by us. Still, it was awe inspiring to see mile high methane fountains. Then it was discovered that there were ice caps on Mars and like the Earth they were seasonal. Were the ice caps water that could be consumed by space travelers from our planet? The photos and samples from the Mars Curiosity Rover continued to flow back to Earth and a group of scientists and dreamers in the Netherlands conceived a project (Mars

One) to send a spacecraft to Mars on a one way trip. There was no way to bring the astronauts back and no way to make sure they had enough resources to live but 200,000 people volunteered to go and die there. Heidi Beemer and other volunteers signed up to go to Mars on a one way trip and trained intensively for this purpose. Now one major question: what are the ice caps made of? Carbon dioxide? (dry ice) or Hydrogen dioxide? (water). In 2005 the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter began the search with a robot rolling over the surface. In 2015 it is one hundred percent sure there is water in the ice caps of Mars. Life is now theoretically possible on Mars. Fig.10



Fig. 10. MPW-C, “ICE CAPS on MARS”, watercolor, 22” x 30”

Scientists on Earth were talking seriously about a permanent settlement on Mars in 2030 with a round trip to and from Mars. Slowly the Mars One project faded but Heidi’s wish to go to Mars, at the cost of her life, overwhelmed my imagination and I did a celebratory painting of her as a symbol of the universal desire of mankind to ever explore outward. Fig.11. Must we be physically present to explore? Michio Kaku proposes we use nanoships. “Instead of sending a single, expensive starship to the stars, one can send millions of tiny starships, each costing a

penny and requiring very little rocket fuel.”<sup>2</sup>The eyes of the artist will then reside in a thimble-sized nanobot. The only way to conceptualize this is to remember that my iPhone contains processing power a trillion times more powerful than the original computers.



Fig.11. MPW-C

“Heidi Beemer”

Watercolor, 22” x 30” 2012.

This one way trip later failed to happen although the volunteers trained to be space cadets and were interviewed by the media many times. It was a very exciting concept.

If a nanobot is to be our surrogate to unfamiliar “alien” planets and intelligences, how will we be able to convey the reality of our home planet and our bodies? Will the tiny nanobot, which will be programmed to replicate itself, represent us or will it represent itself Fig.12 Creative minds all over the world are working on these questions.



Fig 12. MPW-C

“Nanobots Seeding Space”

Watercolor 22” X 30, ”2016

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<sup>2</sup> Kaku, Michio, *Physics Of The Future*, p.335





Fig. 13, MPW-C, “Lander Philae” Artists Proof. Etching, 8” x 10” Fall 2014

Another celestial event was the decade’s long attempt to determine the composition of a comet. This robotic Lander left Earth on the Rosetta spacecraft in 2004 and ten years later landed on a comet, the 67P Churyumov comet, on Nov 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014. In order to catch the comet it made four slingshot flybys. Three around the Earth and one around Mars to achieve the necessary speed to catch the comet. It is a miracle of science and the entire scientific community that the lander caught up with, and landed on, the comet. Fig. 13, 14. The Lander detached from Rosetta spacecraft while speeding along at 24,000 miles per hour. It was like trying to land on a speeding bullet. When it landed on November 12, 2014, it bounced into a shady spot so its solar batteries ran down on Nov 15<sup>th</sup> and it ceased communicating until June 13<sup>th</sup> – July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015. In that time period it sent back valuable information on comets and the entire solar system. It also proved that

the scientists of the world could co-operate and accomplish a historic collaborative enterprise. Both Rosetta and Philae are currently accompanying the comet around the sun and will voyage far out into deep space until they disappear. The mission ended in December 2015 as all three plunged out into the unknown void and contact was lost. AMAZING!!



Fig.14, MPW-C, “To Catch a Comet: Lander Philae”, watercolor 22” x 30 Fall 2014

With all this new scientific knowledge why is it important for artists to add their imaginative take on the situation as it stands? Perhaps scientists, by sticking to the known “facts”, are not able to take the leaps into the future which the artist can take. Visualizing something which does not exist at this moment in time is risky and exhilarating and is the purview of the imaginative, intuitive, mind adding a dimension of unreliability to the mix. Since it is not tied to hard reality the mind can float and connect heretofore unconnected dots. That is what Richard Morgan did in his book titled “*Altered Carbon*” in which a person is downloaded, sent across space, and booted up into a body belonging to someone else. Basically, it is a copy of

a brain which is re-installed in a body awaiting it on another planet. It is interesting to note that the artists making science fiction movies are already tinkering with how perceptions can be altered. The “Avatar” movie uses this concept to move between planets and between species.



Fig.15 MPW-C “Space Brain”, 12” x 10” x 8”, Ceramic Head & Embroidered Brain Spring 2014

This ceramic sculpture shows the symbols of space, science, plants, and the creatures of Earth swirling around in my head as a result of my fascination with the three spaces: interstellar space, personal soul space, and the environmental space around us where we live. Fig. 15. The brain is made of silk with symbols of our cultures sewn on the convolutions of the brain. If we are able to conceive of “other brains” for other creatures we move a long way toward accepting some different forms of intelligence. It is instructive to think of the octopus with its ability to delegate some of its thinking to “smart” nerves in its tentacles. To date we have done little research on the types of intelligence living on our own planet. The raven, an intelligent bird, and the dog, an intelligent mammal, are examples of highly organized brains which we scarcely comprehend. The idea of a dragon is undefinable and yet it most certainly has captured the imagination of countless people. Imagine the dragon anyway you want; the sky is the limit in regards to form, color, and size. This imaginary being is reputed to be extraordinarily intelligent.





Fig.16. MPW-C, “Are These Intelligent Beings ?” , Watercolor, 22” x 30”, Spring 2014

There is a long history of artists painting unreal, fantastical, creatures. There are angels, dragons and Star Wars creatures. The uncertain border between animal and vegetable has been a subject of science fiction writers for decades. Fig.16. There is much speculation that “alien” life could assume forms unrecognizable to humans. They might be wave forms, crystal shapes, or anemone-like creatures. How will we recognize them? The following Alien Series explores various imaginary meetings of “the other” on planets far from where we live. Our distinctive footsteps, or tracks, will be our signature to “the others” that we exist so I have used them in these paintings Fig.17,18. My belief is that all the science fiction stories exploring the variety of forms that intelligence might inhabit in deep space will help the human race to adjust when we eventually find alien intelligence. When we meet them will xenophobia, the fear of the stranger or foreigner, dictate our behavior? Will they be far more advanced technologically than us? Less

advanced than we are? How do we define the “other”? What is identity? Is fear a realistic response? It may very well be the appropriate response.



Fig.17. MPW-C, “Are They Alive?”  
Watercolor, 22”x 30”



Fig.18. MPW-C, “Mysterious Beings”,  
Watercolor. 22” x 30”

Here the footprints will indicate to “aliens”, if they are aliens, something about our orientation in regards to standing upright. As our space-people walk around objects on other planets they will leave marks, indications that we have been there. Will any life forms already there recognize us as alien (to them) intelligences? Many mysteries will be found and already we have had decades of imaginings ( *The Alien* movie, the *Star Wars* movie) about what form other intelligences will assume. As artists and writers present the general public with more and more varied forms the more likely it is that when we do encounter “the other” we might be able to recognize them, evaluate them, and accept them if it is prudent to do so. Science fiction literature

has described both positive meetings and negative meetings. These stories are indicative of our own strengths, weaknesses, and mental habits as a race.

## CHAPTER II

### ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Again and again the concept of time is examined. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* has the protagonist traveling between time periods of his life. In *Earthseed* Pamela Sargent writes about a ship searching for a new planet and the psychological aspects of generational time travel. One generation leaves the book the *Physics of the Impossible*, consider our short lifespan and the time required to span the universe. Will the concept of time we currently hold limit us?

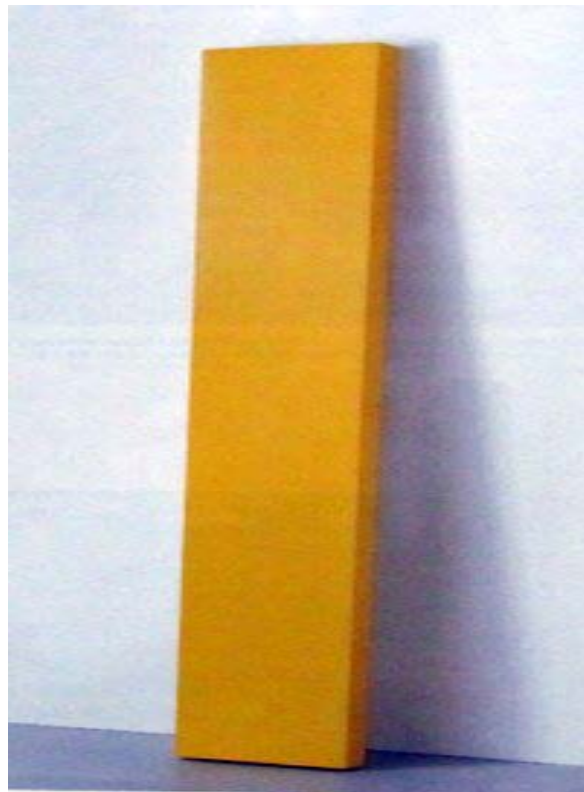


Fig.19 John McCracken, “Yellow Plank”, 1968  
Polyester, resin, fiberglass, 94” x 14,6” x 1.25”

Linda Norden, in Art Forum magazine, ties McCracken's belief system to his sculpture and says "As if in Kubrick's 2001 spaceship, McCracken understood his planks from the get-go as a way to make contact between worlds, from within the confines of his studio space."<sup>3</sup> This Bay Area artist, who was labeled a LA minimalist, was concerned with paranormal objects and with extraterrestrial beings. Fig.19. He was convinced that "alien, as well as more familiar, intelligences are at large." The yellow plank formed a bridge to space as it touched both floor and wall...it became both a bridge and a thing for a cosmic expansion of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> This artist reflects the decades long preoccupation of the 1960's 70's and 80's with space exploration.

I closely followed McCracken's career as it dove-tailed with my own passion for the idea that we are not alone in the universe. In the Bay Area, including Silicon Valley, there was much interest in this subject. It was promoted by Carl Sagan and fellow scientists, which resulted in the formation of the SETI Institute (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligences) near Stanford University in Mountain View, California. The public was, and is, invited to visit the site of the Alien Telescope Array which continually searches for messages from space. So far there has been no message we can understand yet the unending monitoring is maintained.

My intent here is to document sixty years of strolling the edges of the art world and the scientific world and the impact such a journey has upon the traveler who embarks on such a journey. Tony Judt says in his book *Thinking the Twentieth Century* that "no scholar, historian, or anyone else is ethically excused from their own circumstances. We are also participants in our own time and place and cannot retreat from it"<sup>5</sup> In my time we are beginning to explore our

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<sup>3</sup> Art Forum, October, 2011, Norden, Linda, "In Search Of..." p 274

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Judt, Tony, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, 2012, Penguin Books, London



universe. Therefore a short personal history covering the most formative time of my life is presented below to show how I came to be a leave-the-planet advocate.

When I was twelve, 1952, I started Thomas Downey High School in Modesto, California. At this age I became an avid science fiction fan devouring Astounding Science Fiction magazine and The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. After three and a half years I had the necessary units to graduate. The Dean of Women met with me and I declared my intention to either go to work or go to Modesto Junior College if she would help me get in. She expressed doubt about entering MJC before I was 16 and reluctantly helped me apply. What a wonderful experience it was to be in classes where the people actually wanted to learn and were enthusiastic about intellectual pursuits. In the realm of science fiction books George Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949 and Heinlein wrote *Stranger in a Strange Land* in 1961. Ginsberg published *Howl* in 1955 and Kerouac published *On The Road* in 1957. At MJC my professor, Leonard Nathan, was a vibrant teacher who later was a founder of the Dept. of Rhetoric at Univ of California, Berkeley. The introduction to his Poetry class was “Brains are a dime a dozen; it’s what you do with them that counts.” I learned an enormous amount from him. College was heaven for me and I took every kind of class I could for the fun of learning new things. Loved it! Also got a D in creative writing even though I attended class and turned everything in. My writing was not “good” thanks to my idolization of e. e. cummings who wrote free verse in lower case letters. One poem, which demonstrated his style, was titled “*if everything happens that can’t be done,*”<sup>6</sup> and concluded with “(with a spin, leap, alive we’re alive, we’re wonderful one times one)”. This poem formed the basis for my view of our world and universe. I took Physics, Zoology, Chemistry, Economics, Poetry, Art and Archery. Even more strange was my social

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<sup>6</sup> e.e. cummings, *Complete Poems*, 1991, Liveright Publishing Corp, New York p. 594

experience. As the Sophomore Class President, and the Editor of the Yearbook, and Secretary of the Young Democrats organization it seemed that I was popular yet I remained socially isolated due to my extreme poverty and the need to work three jobs to help support my family and get thru another semester of college. There were occasional highlights such as the field trip to the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco my class took to see an artist named Vincent Van Gogh. With this painting begins the artistic influences which helped me explore other artists and their world views expressed in their art. There were many schools of thought about the role of the artist in society or the absence of a role in society during these decades.



Fig.20 Vincent Van Gogh, “Vase with Iris Against a Yellow Background”, 1890, Oil on canvas, 36” x 29”

This is the painting I saw at the museum in San Francisco in 1958. Fig 20. This was my visual starting point as an artist and my understanding of what an artist is, and does, evolved from viewing this painting. It was the beginning of my desire to try to be that thing called “an artist”. This was a life-changing event for me. I wanted to lie down in front of those paintings and spend the night looking at them but alas! We were hustled back on the bus and returned to

Modesto. That day I resolved to become an artist and have never given up this ambition although I have veered off into other careers during my 55 year work history. Another important marker in my development as an artist was attending pottery classes at MJC with Mr. Corrigan. He encouraged being creative, disregarding traditional approaches, and told us about Peter Voulkas who also became an influence on me. Fig.23. Another local (San Joaquin Valley) artist I followed quite closely was William T. Wiley with his intricate watercolor-drawings of imaginary, fabled worlds. Fig 22 This was the first time I saw words incorporated into a painting. This magical combination, verbal words and visual drawing, was instantly accepted by me as a legitimate way to expand communication and bring the viewer one step closer to the artist .It was a time of exploration, growth, and asked my favorite question “What does it mean?”



Fig.21. William T. Wiley, “Whats It All Mean”1957, Acrylic on plywood and Mixed Media

At twenty years of age it was thrilling to see a painting by William T. Wiley ask my own personal question. It was a validation of all my questioning about the world AND it was deemed “ART”.Fig.21 Relief washed over me and hunger for more. More art and more understanding of

the universe was my desire. The lure of the city after a life in the country was fulfilled when my husband and I moved to Berkeley, California. The Bay Area Figurative Art Movement was a group of artists who abandoned abstract expressionism in favor of figurative art. David Park, Diebenkorn, and Thiebaud were followed by Joan Brown, Manuel Neri and Bruce McGaw.



Fig.22. William T. Wiley, “Hung Up Not Far From The Mill”, 1959, watercolor and ink.

An interview of William T. Wiley by Paul J. Karlstrom for *Archives of American Art* in 1997 states “you are one of the artists who early on incorporated words into your imagery. It became like a fusion of words and puns and sayings with the imagery”<sup>7</sup>. I was delighted with this seemingly new development as I was writing descriptions of my paintings as I did them. Another way to use words with paintings was in the title and brief description in a brochure. I did not add the words into the paintings just wrote them on the back of the watercolor painting. At this time in my life I was open to any new-seeming ideas and embraced them wholeheartedly.

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<sup>7</sup> Karlstrom, Paul J., *Archives of American Art*, 1997, Smithsonian Institute, Wash D.C

Studying art books became a passion which the local library was totally equipped to fulfill with a large collection donated by various art collectors. In Berkeley I had even larger stacks to peruse. The art department at University of California was more or less open to anyone who wanted to wander through the studios and see the work being done by students. It was a very loose time and no one bothered asking if you were a student but freely talked to you.



Fig.23 Peter Voulkos, Little Big Horn, 1959, Glazed clay, 62” x 40” x 40”

Moving to San Francisco in 1960 provided me with a rich culture to study and think about. The 1960’s investigation of new drugs like LSD gave me an incredible education about the social dynamics of people on various drugs. Fortunately for me I had this experience before I started at SFAI as there was a lot of free-wheeling drug use by faculty and students at the Institute. I observed but did not join in. This laid back attitude at SFAI suited me fine although it was hard to get answers to basic questions about materials and techniques of painting. According to Caroline A. Jones in *Bay Area Figurative Art: 1950-1965* the faculty supported “an Abstract Expressionist approach to the process of painting, be it figurative or non-objective. Students

were free to paint anything they chose, since it was understood that subject matter was entirely subordinate to the values of process, paint, and significant form.”<sup>8</sup> This encouraged the “anything goes in art” attitude among the students and some of the faculty. The faculty was varied in their opinions and some students took only the classes of the professors who fed into their concept of what art should consist of. I, on the other hand, approached each class with the desire to find out what this particular artist/professor endorsed as the path forward in the art world. With such variety of styles and opinions being expressed by galleries, museums, and artists it was easy to try everything presented and see if it fit with my own perceptions of what it was all about. The studios were big, the equipment was high quality, and the classes offered covered a large variety of subjects and styles. This was the time of magic realism which was represented by Bill Martin and Gage Taylor who were visionary psychedelic painters. These tiny paintings were painstakingly detailed with myriad natural plants, animals, and people. They were filled with utopian ideas of the abundance of the Earth. Gage Taylor's paintings were all the rage in the Hippy era and thousands of posters reproducing his vision of the LSD-Mescaline experience adorned the walls of Bay Area houses. Fig. 24, 25. This was mainly a West Coast art movement. The “found art” movement sent us out to scrounge odd pieces of metal or wood and drag it back to the studio to use as a way to stimulate our imaginations and get us to look at art in a different way than the traditional way.

It was in the spring of 1970 that I began to go to the San Francisco Art Institute. I was 31 years old and desperate to begin the work I felt destined to do. I was the mother of a 6 year old and a 4 year old. Time was slipping away and I had now faced the possibility that my husband,

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<sup>8</sup> Jones, Caroline A., *Bay Area Figurative Art: 1950-1965*, Bay Area Figurative Art, 1990, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif.



David, would die of cancer. Mortality was a reality as it had never been before. Both of the children were in the San Francisco Montessori School and I was free from 9 am to 2:30 pm which was enough time for a class or two. That spring semester I took drawing with Ivan Majdrakoff. In the Fall I took painting with Wally Hedrick and drawing with Carlos Villa, a Bay Area artist, who had spent years in New York as a minimalist. He coaxed us in that direction.

In Figure Drawing class we had live models and it was heaven except for the fact that the whole art world was veering in a different direction attempting to digest the abstract art mantra. Is being pleasing to the eye the main goal? Is a recognizable scene desirable? These were the issues Carlos Villa brought up in his drawing class. After spending a decade in New York he came back to San Francisco and began exploring the meaning of cultural identity. He was



Fig.24 Bill Martin, "The Rock", 1971, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"



Fig 25 Gage Taylor, "Aquaria", 1972 oil on canvas, approx. 12" x 12"

Filipino-American and abandoned minimalism for feathered cloaks. Fig.26. Which way to go? Just as Carlos finished convincing us all to try minimal painting he, himself, switched to 3D cloaks of feathers which were wonderful objects which could be worn and veered away from the concept of minimalism. Now, decide, we were told! I tried out minimalism. Fig.27. In this same time period Bruce McGaw taught painting which he described as "a poetry of sight." He pointed

out that it was the constrained format and physical limitations that made it challenging. There was a canvas, of a certain size determined by the artist, and the kind of paint used and the subject chosen by the artist. After that the style was entirely the choice of the artist. He was a tough teacher demanding reasons for what was put on the surface. He worked with angular forms and dissonant colors in an expressionist style. There were professors who were able to guide you in any style you might choose. I chose to try to do figurative art and concentrated on the human figure and landscape, but landscape which approached the abstract impressionists.

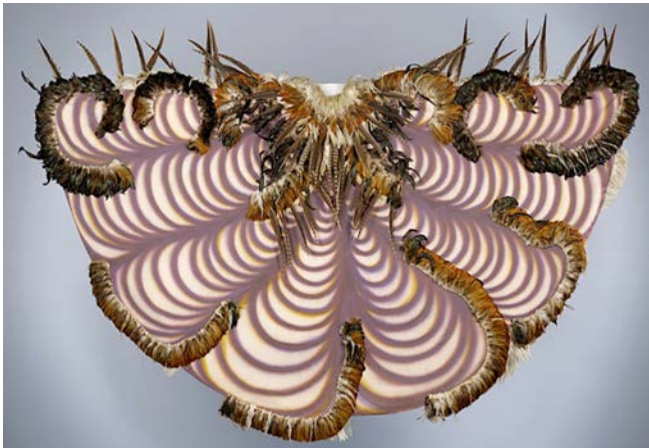


Fig.26. Carlos Villa, 1969, Feathered Cape 12' x 12' , "Rehistoricizing the Time Around Abstract Expressionism"



Fig.27 MPW-C "Wall paper? Upholstery? Art?" Fall 1970 Carlos Villa class, 8" x 8.6"

Now the lines between what was called art and what was called a craft began to blur more and more. Performance art often required sewn costumes which were designed by the artist. Where did commercial pottery blend into fine art ceramics? Was a feathered cape art or was it costume design? Using your own body as the canvas added to the debate...were tattoos a form of art or just a vulgar, reprehensible craft? Gradually the galleries and museums loosened their definitions of what comprised art. It is well to remember Aldous Huxley's division of people into two groups: "the visualizers think in terms of images seen with the minds eye. The



non-visualizers think abstractly, in terms of words which do not evoke definite images.”<sup>9</sup> Now it became a matter of deciding not who was “right” or “wrong” but of who you had an affinity for.

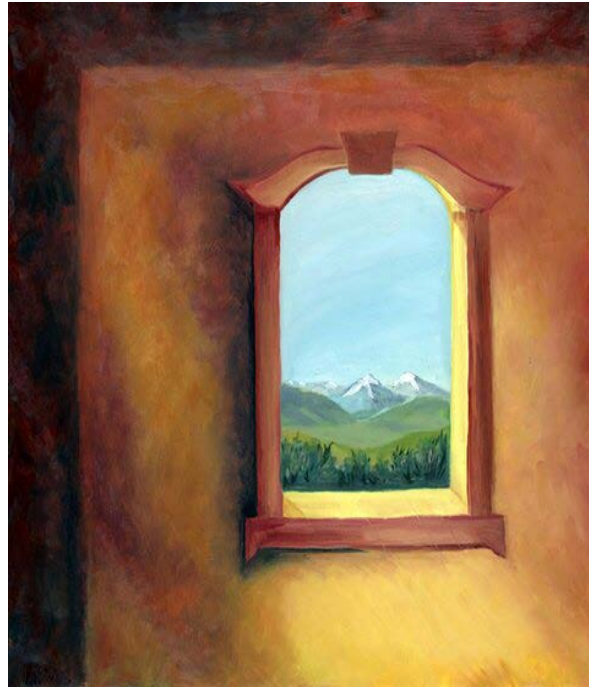


Fig.28 MPW-C, “LOOKING OUT”, 1971, Oil on canvas, 30”x 30”  
Joe Oda’s class in painting.

Long discussions about spirituality engaged artists in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the society as a whole struggled with the “Turn on, Tune in, Drop out” message of Dr. Timothy Leary and the morality of the Vietnam War. Protests against the war divided families and the nation. The art world developed political posters and paintings condemning the war. The students in Joe Oda’s class decided to try to paint serenity as a protest against chaos and war. The most serene thing I could paint was a window looking on snow covered Sierra peaks. Fig 28. Another attitude circulating at that time was reflected in Jean Cocteau’s remark “An artist cannot

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<sup>9</sup> Huxley, Aldous *Proper Studies*, 1927, Chatto and Windus, London

“speak about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture.”<sup>10</sup> Our critiques were short and did not seem to revolve around learning to speak about what we painted. Being able to talk about your ideas and concepts was not emphasized and I am still awkward when trying to verbalize the concept behind my Space Series. My desire to see humans break the bonds and go outward into space, the next frontier, form the basis for my paintings. Reading about leaving the planet sharpened my observation of the shape and color of our particular Earth landscape, and gave it special significance. Fig. 29.

The landscapes in interstellar space and the stars have a mutual connection with the landscapes of our planet and the denizens of the ocean and other flora and fauna of Earth. If we expect to exist “out there” we will have to co-exist with diversity. It will become evident that the different sizes and colors of the human body are insignificant when compared to the strange shapes of aliens. Ours is not the only form of intelligent life. There will be different forms and perhaps some will be better in the sense they have evolved and adapted to fit their own planet. The truth of the saying “variety is the spice of life” may become more relevant. As we develop more sophisticated technological devices it may become apparent that the same structures that we share with all creatures on Earth are the same structures that alien life forms will have used to structure their bodies, flora, and fauna. These structures, backbones, eyes, ears, legs, arms, and opposing thumbs may be basic building blocks for other creatures on other planets. Their planets and landscapes may bear a close correlation to our landscapes here on Earth. Their art forms could have a relation to gravity as our sculpture has a relation to gravity. If they happen to be technologically equal or superior to us how will their culture shape their response to their own world geography? Will they have the concept of art? What will art mean to their life forms or

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<sup>10</sup> Cocteau, Jean *Diary of an Unknown*, 1991, Marlowe & Co., England

will it even have a meaning? Will they conceive of spirituality or the idea of beauty? What will their idea of beauty encompass? We humans are moving into ever more complicated digital art forms in the last few decades and we have sent a pictorial message plus symbols out into space via the Pioneer 10 spacecraft in 1972 in hopes of contacting aliens.



Fig.29 MPW-C “Landscape of My Mothers Death”, 7’ x 5’, oil on canvas, 1972  
Advanced Painting class with David Hannah, Fall 1972

Meanwhile, here on Earth, in 1975 George Lucas formed Industrial Light and Magic, a visual effects company, using advanced computer graphics. There was a surge in creativity on the Internet and web pages began to pop up in art and business. Digital art became the new rage with Photo Shop. Now it was easy to shift the colors in your painting back and forth with a click. Decisions could be made and unmade in a matter of seconds. Posters were created with vibrant colors and forms in a minimal amount of time. Now the old ways of painting began to seem burdensome with the wait-time required for an oil painting. Half the faculty surged in the new direction and I surged along thinking of minimalism and the way that it emphasized and confronted space directly. The Morris cubes (mass) balanced out the space the object was shown

occupying. The concept of defining the representational object by the quality of the surrounding space seemed, to me, to be valid. Should I abandon the older methods of painting on canvas and move forward with the Minimalist or the Ephemeral Art group of artists?

Meanwhile, the feminist movement, including the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, was evolving into a serious political issue and women artists, visual arts and verbal arts (writers) were actively promoting the cause. The battle was waged via the media, with marches demanding equal pay for the same work, and speeches by political activists. Our class was asked to try to express the attributes of the female body. The female body was the subject of a major revision in attitude toward sexuality. Masters and Johnson published their book “Human Sexuality” in 1966 catapulting the topic of female sexuality into the national conversation. It is interesting to note that it took 40 years to ratify one aspect of the ERA ( the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act) which President Obama signed in 2009 and which gave women “equal pay under the law”. In this decade birth control pills began to be used which changed the dynamic for women: now they could choose not to have a baby and gradually they gained control over their



Fig.30 MPW-C “Women” pencil, gouache & watercolor , 3’ x 2’ 1972.  
Advanced Drawing with Rod Titus, Fall 1972

own bodies. This was a threat to the traditional authoritarian social structure. The fight was on: were you for or against legal abortion? Were you a Feminist? How you chose defined who you were in the eyes of many people.



Fig.31. MPW-C “Carrina On A Tire Swing”, 6’ x 5’. Oil on canvas, 1971  
Painting II with Julius Hatofsky, Fall 1971

My two instructors, Hatofsky and Jefferson, were classically trained abstract expressionists who taught their students abstract-expression painting and then the students were free to depart that tradition. Their theory was you had to know an object in order to “abstract” it. Their thoughtful, quiet, critiques were always on point and valuable but many students scorned their information. My thought was both traditional (Fig 31.) and contemporary art was viable.

The San Francisco Art Institute in the 1970s was a place where many interwoven threads of contemporary art-making existed. The artists of that time, in the Bay area, were trying new ways of using the new plastic materials. There was a permissive atmosphere regarding what was “art” and the arguments raged on all around us. The Visiting Artist program gave the students some insight into contemporary happenings on both East Coast and West Coast. Conceptual art, minimalist art, and traditional painting competed for the attention of the entering students.

The idea that art was dead rubbed elbows with the idea that everything was art. Having been ejected from formal Christian religion I was open to the Buddhist precepts which were floating around in San Francisco and attended a weekend at Esalen Institute with the Zen master Suzuki Roshi to learn meditation. Gestalt Therapy with Fritz Perls shared the stage with Buddhism. Public attitudes about nudity in the Bay Area were drawing national attention. Drawing from nude models presented no challenge for me as I assimilated these new attitudes. Another change was “collaboration”, the new buzz word, which shifted the general perception of the artist as a lonely individual, living in isolation, to team or group interaction around an agreed project such as performance art. Examples given to us were Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* and Christo’s *Running Fence*, both pieces of art requiring the cooperation of many artists. Rooms were set aside for installation art and then it moved off campus to varying locations. *Burning Man* is an excellent example of installation art, body art, and land art. It was a wild, tumultuous time at SFAI yet our professors were mostly classically trained artists who seemed to enjoy the fast changing art scene while steadfastly remaining abstract expressionists in their own careers.





Fig.32 Judy Chicago, "The Dinner Party" 1974-1979, Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576" x 576"

"The Dinner Party" was done by 129 artists along with hundreds of volunteers all under the direction of Judy Chicago. It was an installation done by a collaboration of ceramicists, fabric artists, embroiderers, etc and was considered feminist art as it honored 1038 women from the past and present. My favorite place setting was the one done for writer Virginia Woolf. Such a big project elicited lots of admiration and talk. Fig.32 The other collaborative project on a massive scale was "The Running Fence" by Christo which required many volunteers to dig the postholes, stretch the material, and create the final piece which followed the contours of twenty four miles of hills in Marin Co., California. Christo once told us, the students, that the most difficult tasks in constructing the Running Fence were the negotiations with the farmers whose land the project crossed. Students from SFAI, including me, worked on and contributed to these installation pieces which inspired them to take off in many directions in their own work. Fig.33. It was another avenue to explore.



Fig.33 Christo, “Running Fence” located in Marin County, Ca. Sept. 1976

Around this time my classes in sculpture began with Richard Berger who touted Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Cornell. “Duchamp’s fundamental goals were to get away from the physical aspect of painting”.<sup>11</sup> This intellectual approach culminated in “The Large Glass” which our class studied in detail. The question for me was what to do with the fact that traditional painting was no longer the main focus of cutting edge artists while I still desired to put paint on canvas. The theories and concepts of these artists were innovative and tempting. Robert Morris, Richard Serra and Donald Judd all worked to rid art of emotion and remove “beauty” from the evaluation of an art piece. Their use of geometric forms was mirrored in the work of the Land

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<sup>11</sup> Schwarz, Arturo, *Marcel Duchamp*, 1975, Harry N Abrams, Inc. Publishers, New York



artists. To quote Christos “I think it takes much greater courage to create things to be gone than to create things that will remain”.<sup>12</sup> This is 180 degrees from Donald Judd who stated in the same article “I am trying to deal with something more long range...more involved with things that happen over a longer time perhaps.” He wanted to see how his sculptures survived wind, rain and other events with a long time line. Land art such as Smithson’s “Spiral Jetty” also endorsed this long time line as opposed to Olafur Eliasson, who did a work titled “Green River” in 2000 in which he dyed the river in Stockholm green with a environmentally friendly dye and commented that the piece was “about the relationship between the viewer and the object, with the viewer’s reaction being part of the work.”<sup>13</sup> He designed the piece to disappear over time. Fig 34. Time was also the focus of intense interest in the scientific community.

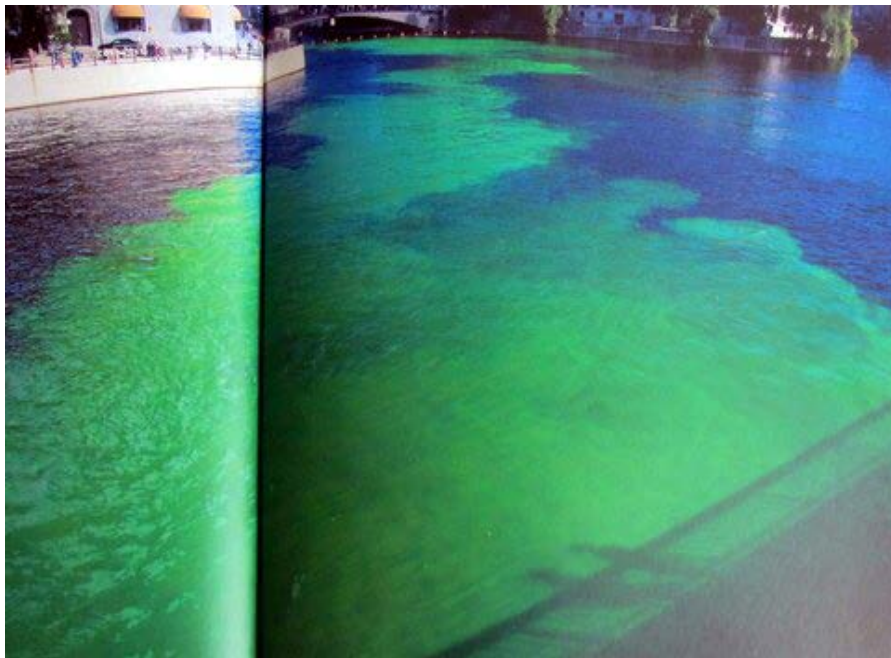


Fig.34. Olafur Eliasson, “Green River”, 1998, non-toxic dye in Stockholm River

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<sup>12</sup> Getlein, Mark, *Living With Art*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. 2009, McGraw Hill. P22

<sup>13</sup> Finger and Weidemann, *50 Contemporary Artists You Should Know*, 2011, Prestel Publishing N.Y. London Munich

Discussions about time being a fourth, or fifth, dimension was debated by the physicists of the 1980's. Before this century time was thought to be static and unchanging. Hawking thought that time had a definite beginning and possibly a definite ending. A corollary to this was time as experienced by a space traveler. Did time expand and/or contract? Did people age based on a different time schedule as they reached the speed of light? These questions were basic to the idea of space travel. During this decade Magellan spacecraft mapped the surface of Venus, space shuttle Discovery deployed the Hubble Space Telescope, and the Mars Pathfinder arrived on Mars. Mankind was on its way to the STARS!!!. I was now fifty one, focused on art, space, and time as a great unknown. Artists now included time as a factor in their representation of the world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dali had his melting clocks in "*The Persistence of Memory*" and the emergence of ephemeral art with Christo struck a chord with me. Jeanne Claude remarked that "The fact that the work does not remain creates an urgency to see it,"

Also doing ephemeral art was Andy Goldsworthy whose "*Rivers and Tides, Working With Time*" was art that was supposed to disappear as the tides went in and out on their appointed courses. There was an overlap in minimalism and ephemeral art in attitude toward space, time, and the representational object used by the artist to explore these relationships.



Fig. 35 Robert Morris “Untitled” 1965, reconstructed in 1971

As a major artist in the minimalist tradition Robert Morris was interested in the interaction of the viewer and the artwork. Stripped down geometric forms with no expressive content formed his approach to sculpture. Fig 35 This he shared with Donald Judd who declared that the object must be viewed in relation to the space it is placed in. Judd placed his huge, concrete, geometric forms on land (pastures in Marfa, Texas) and demanded that time and the environment be considered part of the art piece. Judd wished to confront the viewer with the material reality of the fabricated parts of the serialized forms. Fig 36. By serially repeating the form it was supposed to re-enforce the image. Simplicity of form was the key word. Personally, I thought this presented a view of reality very much in sync with Zen Buddhism’s simplicity in living precept. Buddhism’s ideas of how to live a moral life were influential among artists, especially on the West Coast, and I spent a week at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center to learn meditation. Understanding this direction of thought in the art world (more is less) did not diminish my desire to paint on canvas in the old, traditional way. There are many ways to reach enlightenment.



Fig.36. Donald Judd "This, This and That" 1960's, Marfa, Texas

There was so much going on with conflicting opinions about art and the function of art. Joseph Cornell was doing his boxes. Donald Judd was doing his boxes. Warhol was forcing a discussion of art as the depiction of ordinary objects, Margaret Keane was producing her "Big Eyes" paintings, the traditional painters were dallying with abstract expressionism and the minimalists were declaring that true art forced the viewer to supply the meaning. In this bewildering array of definitions of "what was art" I was trying to see if I could put paint on canvas that told of the "real" world we lived in with people, vases, flowers and stars. Late in August of 1974 I spent two weeks at the Panther Creek cabin and while there I did an oil painting of cow parsnips in the meadow with the sun back-lighting them. Cherish the flowers which produced the seeds and future of another generation and insured the life cycle.



Fig.37 Cow Parsnips, 5' x 4', oil on canvas, Fall 1974  
Advanced Painting with Ursula Schneider

In my painting, “Cow Parsnips”, I tried to record the humble plants found in the meadows of the Sierra Mountains which sustain our life on Earth. In 1957 Loren Eiseley wrote a mind altering essay about the place of flowers in evolution titled “How Flowers Changed the World.” His book, *The Immense Journey*,<sup>14</sup> shifted my perceptions of the natural world around me and the importance of plants in the overall scheme of living. Let us celebrate every weed, flower, and bug was the mantra of these decades.

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<sup>14</sup> Eiseley, Loren, *The Immense Journey*, 1957

In my thoughts the entire twentieth century was about thinking of time, of space, and of  $E=MC^2$ . Sculpture was the placement of objects in space and time. Webster's dictionary defines time as "a non-spatial continuum that is measured in terms of events which succeed one another from PAST through PRESENT to FUTURE."<sup>15</sup> Philosophers discussed the place of man in the universe and growing numbers of people were abandoning a "little" God (authoritarian, bearded man in the sky) for a "big" God who created an infinite, unknowable, universe. The abhorred words atheist and iconoclast began to gain an aura of respectability. Einstein's theory of relativity where E is energy, M is mass, and C is the speed of light in a vacuum began to be expressed in the arts. Painting jumped off the wall and blurred the lines between two dimensional (painting) and three dimensional (sculpture). A painting could incorporate an object which stuck out into the space of the viewer. Sculpture would comment on time as it affected the materials used in a particular piece (would they degrade over time?) Science Fiction books grappled with all the new concepts about time, space, and the universe with wild and crazy ideas about black holes, reverse time travel, fourth dimensions, etc. Physicists became the rock stars of science. Think Stephen Hawking and the movie "*A Beautiful Mind*". It was a heady few decades in which culture and art tried to catch up with the science which provided new, untried, materials such as plastic. The museums, curators and galleries were tasked with deciding what was "art" and what was not "art". Alan Watts celebrated..."eliminating the boundaries between art and everyday life. The paintings are vanishing into the walls: but they will be marvelous walls. In turn, the walls will vanish into the landscape: but the view will be ecstatic. And after that the viewer will vanish into the view"<sup>16</sup> Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all these questions are still being

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<sup>15</sup> Webster's Dictionary

<sup>16</sup> Albright, Thomas *Art In The San Francisco Bay Area: 1945-1980, 1985, University of California Press, Berkeley, California*

hotly debated. So many ideas to be considered and so many artists addressing them and still I wanted to paint on canvass in a two dimensional manner. It was not that I did not understand or appreciate the new directions. It was that I did not think that 2D had explored all the possible ways of expressing the unfolding wonders of the universe out beyond our atmosphere. With the state-of-the-art neutron microscopes there are endless unfolding micro universes under our feet, and indeed, in our very bodies. There are remarkable similarities between the billions of viruses in a drop of water and the billions of stars in a galaxy. With the tools of paint and brush it is up to me to explore the territory I can comprehend.

Once, while sitting in this meadow, I took a tab of mescaline and the visual world it opened to me was a marvel. The intricacy of our ecosystem, and its delicate balance was revealed to me. I never tried LSD but the mescaline which I took produced an intense way of looking at the world. Although the art world was sliding away from “realism” (representing a thing or person in a way that tries to be true to life) my passion was with people, plants, and the solar system as opposed to the intellectual concepts of Duchamp, Morris, and Judd. Understanding what their art was about did not in any way reduce my desire to document what was around me.

Was this a chemical epiphany, or enlightenment? Thanks to Eiseley, and mescaline, I had a deeper understanding of the interconnection of the small with the large: the tiny organism in the soil supplying nitrogen to help the plant grow which in turn makes it possible for the human body to eat, grow, think, and reproduce. Aldous Huxley wrote in *The Doors of Perception*<sup>17</sup> that “the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call ‘a gratuitous grace’ ...to be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and inner

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<sup>17</sup> Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954



world ...directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large.” With this experience in mind here is the first etching I did at the San Francisco Art Institute and reflects my concern with the female body as it relates to the galaxies and the universe as a whole Fig 38. We, the creatures of Earth, are part of the stars and they are part of us.

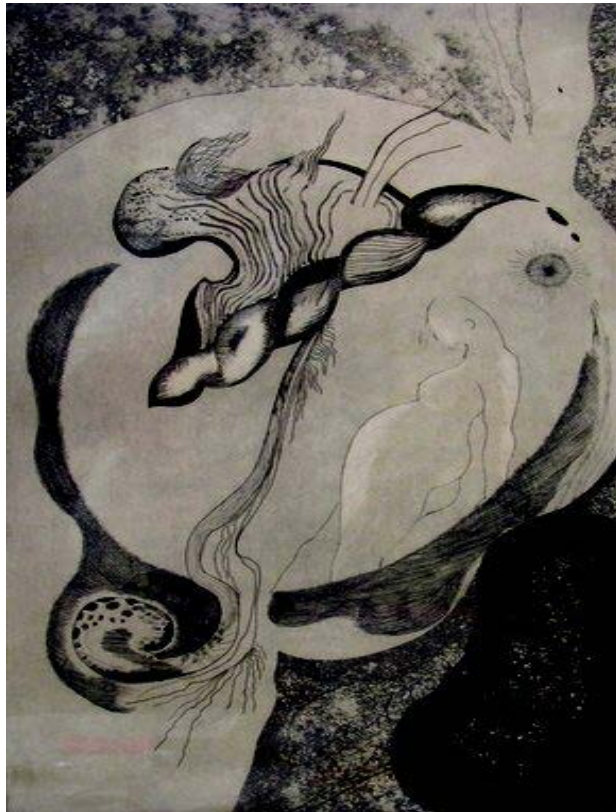


Fig.38 MPW-C, “Woman/Universe” Etching, 11” x 20”  
SFAI Spring 1974, Beginning Printmaking

Skip a couple decades and I began all over again at the South Lake Tahoe Community College. The classroom has the requisite skeleton, drawings and paintings lining the walls, and easels galore. Our instructors are Phyllis Shafer and Alison Harris. Now I had an organized class in which color and form were emphasized again and again. The exercises that were assigned were helpful in getting the basics of painting and drawing. Ms. Harris tells us at the first class meeting “Drawing is a skill which can be learned. I am not here to teach you Art but anyone can



learn to draw.” Alison taught perspective and form. Phyllis taught technique and color theory. Here I began basic research into the forms of flowers and seeds and the biology of plants.



Fig.39 MPW-C,  
“Milkweed Seeds”  
2010,  
30” x 34”,  
Oil on canvas  
The magic, sacred, seeds of  
Loren Eiseley are ready to be  
dispersed. Another cycle.



Fig.40. MPW-C  
“Sierra Angelica”,  
2009,  
24” x 24”  
oil on canvas



Fig 41 MPW-C,”  
“Between My Feet”,  
2009  
30” x 34” oil on canvas

So the pendulum swings between the tiny star-like flowers speckling the ground between my feet and the flower-like galaxies flung across the heavens as I lie on my back gazing upward.Fig.40,



Fig.42 MPW-C  
“Galaxy or Flower?”  
2013  
A/P Etching  
8” x 10” Printmaking.  
Class with Rey Santiago

As this was happening I was building a house in the Sierras at 8000 feet with a ceramic tile stove which had native flowers from the meadow painted on the tiles. This took all my resources for ten years. With the help of D.L.Cummings we completed the house in time to retire.



Fig.43 Photo of “Mountain Bluebird Lodge” California, house built in 2000-2001

This house had one drawback: the winters are severe and the county did not plow the one mile road into our house. The only way in was to cross-country ski, buy a snowmobile, or snow shoe in. We wanted to stay over the winter but common sense prevailed. The same exploration of space I spent so much time on was reflected in the design of the spaces inside a house and the choice of a remote location surrounded by acres of uninhabited land. The wide open spaces at the top of the Sierra Mountains provided wide spaces to gaze at stars at night unencumbered by the lights of other houses blocking out the night sky. Still, we cannot stay here in the winter. Where to go? Seeking warmth we followed the people fleeing the cold and wound up in Arizona, New Mexico, and lastly Texas where we are called Winter Texans. The house was boarded up for the winter. We bought a second-hand fifth wheel RV, a truck to haul it, named it The Winter Palace, and ventured forth. What was the rest of the United States like? Sweeping spaces called to us for exploration and we responded with “Let’s GO!”





Fig.44 “Ceramic Tile Stove”, photo by MPW-C completed by Gunter Richter in 2000



Fig.45 “Kachelofen Tile”

Here is the ceramic tile stove which absorbed so much time and effort for a ten year period of my life. The intent was to have a house which was eco-friendly with solar panels and heating that did not pollute our precious air. This is the tile dedicating it to Dina, who taught me to china paint, Gunter Richter who built the ceramic tile stove, Josie, my sister, who supported my dream and dear Mr. D.L. who worked hands-on for months to help build this house. The goal was to celebrate and document the flora and fauna of the actual piece of land on which the house sat.



Fig.46 “Green Jay” photo by MPW-C at Salineno, Texas in 2011

Chance! The winds of fortune blew us into the Rio Grande Valley in pursuit of the Green Jay, a bird frequently seen here, but not in the rest of the United States. This stately, saucy bird surely resembles a fantasy painting. We visited several state parks in the Rio Grande Valley on the Texas Tropical Trail in our pursuit of this colorful bird. While here to see the Jay I idly dropped by the Upper Valley Art League to check where figure drawing classes might be offered. They recommended UTPA so I stopped off to audit a drawing class at University of Texas Pan American taught by Angel Berrios. I had asked around where I might find a figure drawing class that would let me attend on a temporary basis as we would only be here for a short time to visit the State Parks and see the local varieties of birds. Angels’ kind acceptance of a stranger into his class was impressive Fig 45. I was happy to find a place to practice drawing a model and we decided to extend our stay from October to April as there was a creative oasis in Edinburg.

The campus was of an architecture I had not seen before. The students were Mexican-American by and large, Spanish was spoken, the food was a different experience for us and the weather was similar to the Central Valley of California. The entire environment presented a lot of learning to be done which we both enjoyed.



Fig.47 “Bones”  
. Pencil drawing in black and white  
22” X 30”  
Angel Berrios drawing class  
Fall 2011

Angel advised me to take a class with Jerry Lyles which was given the next semester

Fig.46 Why not apply for a MFA in Fine Arts? This could be much more interesting than working alone with no input from other artists. I applied which presented a challenge as I graduated from high school in 1956 in Modesto, California and they would have to try to go way,way back in their files to get my transcript. Also needed was a transcript from Modesto Junior College in 1959 and from San Francisco Art Institute in 1983. Finally I was accepted and the whirlwind began. At UTPA the art department was moving its location, changing its focus, and pleasant chaos was the result as the University of Texas Pan American became the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Here was a place to work and people to talk to about the concepts I was exploring.

The next decision was to buy a little park model home at Victoria Palms RV Resort in Donna since we expected to be in the Rio Grande valley for some time as I took the classes necessary to graduate from the Masters of Fine Arts program. I used to be the hare but now I was the tortoise. Sculpture class with Dr. Lorenzo Pace opened up a lot of vistas as he taught the difficult concepts of sculpture in his own way. The problems assigned were always mind-bending ideas.

The struggle to come up with a solution to a problem posed in class by the professor is always hard. Perhaps made harder by having spent so many decades reading, looking at art, and talking to artists, Many avenues were instantly discarded having already been throughly explored. Prof Lyles has the perfect sign tacked on his door: INSPIRATION : she does not visit the lazy.



Fig.48 “Palms in a cemetery” Jerry Lyles drawing class 14” X 14” Spring 2012



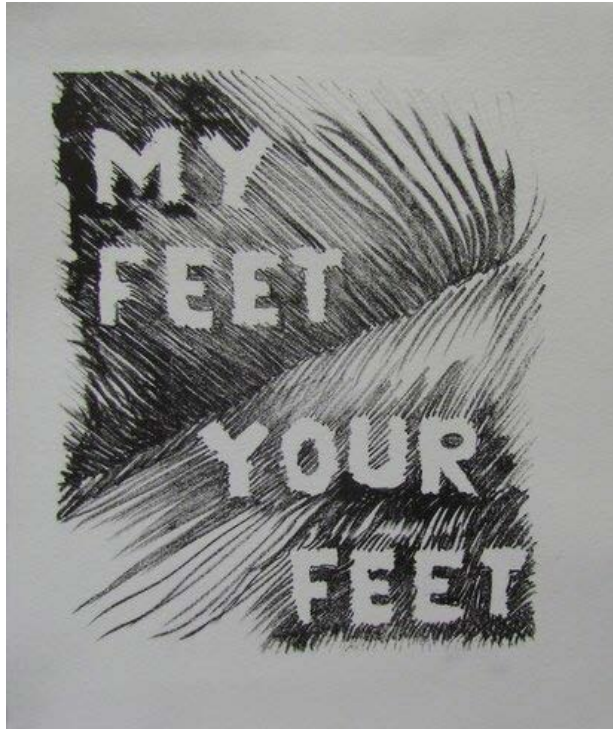


Fig.49. MY FEET – YOUR FEET  
There are now footprints on the Moon.  
Will there soon be footprints on Mars?  
Our feet will lead us on to discovery.

8” X 10”

SERIES OF SEVEN PRINTS OF FEET

Etching Spring 2012 Printmaking Dept.  
with Rey Santiago

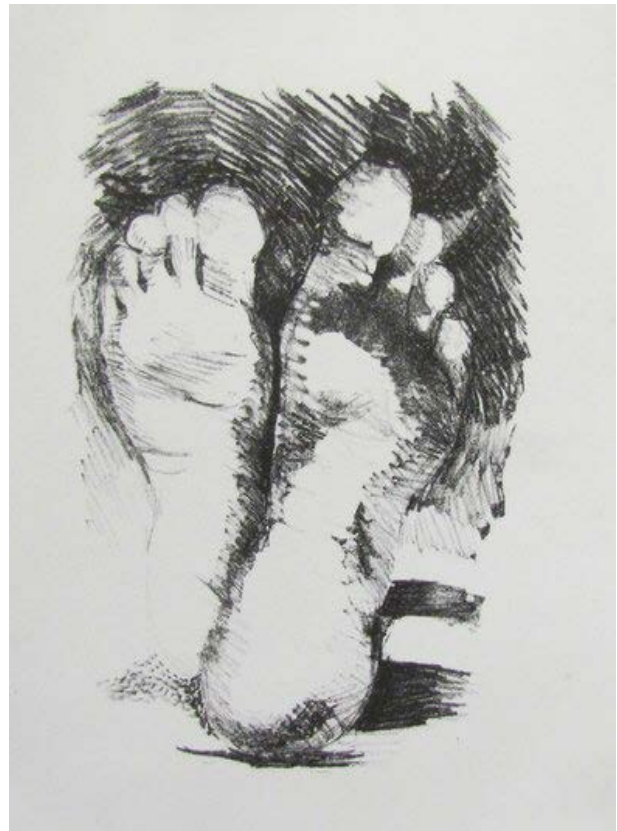
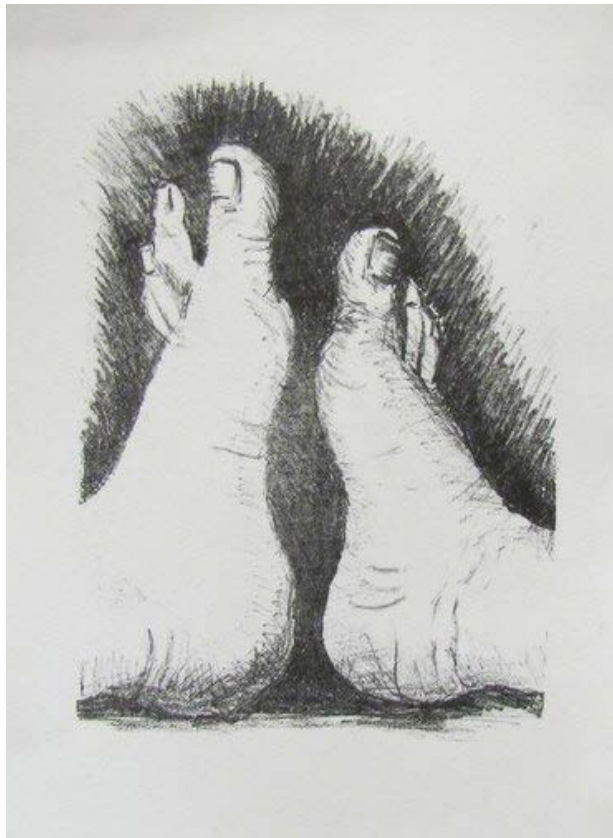






Fig.50 MPW-C, “Explosion - Impressions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, oil on small canvases, 6’ x 5’

Looking back on the (20<sup>th</sup>) twentieth century it was a century of massive wars; First World War, Second World War, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the first Iraq War plus many small wars. My impression of the (21<sup>st</sup>) twenty first century is there has been a change from huge massive wars to terror attacks by small political groups of disaffected people. The Saya art gallery in Reno, Nevada gave me a show in the summer of 2013 based on the above painting.

This show was about Al Qaeda, or Isis, and the shift from massive wars to personal suicide attacks and terrorist attacks targeted toward certain races, religions, or political groups. If we, humankind, are able to redirect our aggression and use our resources on something besides war then perhaps we will be able to simultaneously save our own planet and to go to the stars. But wait! There is the opposite view of what we will find if we explore out of our own solar system which is noted by Philip K. Dick in his speech in France at a sci-fi convention which was titled “If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some Of The Others”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps we should not strive to get off our own planet as what we may find out in the universe will be horrible, scary, and even the final destruction of our human culture or world. This is the apocalypse, or lifting of the veil, which may be the end of the present age due to the revelation of what the universe actually holds for us in the future. The possibility of disaster awaiting us, and acknowledgment of our darker side, was an important theme in the writing of Philip K. Dick. Wherever we go we will take ourselves with us: our own conscious and sub-conscious traits, the good and the bad, our total human mindset, will emerge in this new setting. The military/scientific mindset which Orson Scott Card considered in “*Ender’s Game*” destroyed an alien society. Aggression on our part or on the part of another race may become the next moral crisis of mankind. If we discover a benevolent universe out beyond our solar system what direction will the arts take? What will be our response to the lack of gravity? Weightless dance and weightless performance art might kick off a wonderful new direction. Will we wrap a planet like Christo wrapped an island? How about weightless sculpture floating above a crater on the moon? Or free-falling sculptural beams

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<sup>18</sup> Carrere, Emmanuel. *I Am Alive and You Are Dead-Philip K. Dick*, Henry Holt and Company, 1993, p.294

interwoven with a colorful laser light show? The sky is no longer the limit. Soon the endless universe will be the limit to our imaginations.

The Masters program at University of Texas Rio Grande valley has provided me with an opportunity to consider the contemporary views of our society toward space exploration and the simultaneous deepening concern for the wildlife and forests of our home on Earth. Mankind has an opportunity to engage with both of these interrelated ideas in this century. My fascination with things outside of the boundaries of Earth has not lessened, but is stronger than ever, as we begin to actually have the tools to make our star dreams become reality. Dick's dark view of the human psyche is in strong contrast to e. e. cummings. In conclusion here is another quote with many meanings on many levels:

“listen; there's a hell of a good universe next door: let's go”<sup>19</sup>

e. e. cummings

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<sup>19</sup> e.e. cummings, *Complete Poems, 1991, Liveright Publishing, London*

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## APPENDIX A

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## APPENDIX B



## APPENDIX B

### SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS I HAVE READ.

These books helped develop my view of art and culture over many years.

Science Fiction –In 1726 Swift’s ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ (the first utopian and dystopian societies are examined). Segue to 1895 and HG Wells who wrote “The Time Machine”, (purposeful time travel), ‘The War of the Worlds’, 1897, (war with Martians) “Star Begotten”, (the idea of Martians) 1937, and “The New World Order”, (nations to unite and end war) 1940.

Aldous Huxley writes “Brave New World” 1932, (explores genetic engineering) after WW1

George Orwell, “Nineteen Eighty-Four”, 1949 (totalitarian party curtails individual freedoms) after WW2 - the term Big Brother enters popular culture)

Isaac Asimov, “I, Robot”, 1950, (robots must protect humans) The Three Laws of Robotics

Ray Bradbury, “The Martian Chronicles”, 1950, (fleeing Earth and conflict between aboriginal Martians and colonists)

Arthus C. Clarke, “Childhoods End”, 1953, ((peaceful alien invasion by Overlords)

Walter M. Miller, “A Canticle for Leibowitz”, 1960, (after devastating nuclear war civilization takes thousands of years to rebuild itself)

Robert A. Heinlein, “Stranger in a Strange Land” 1961, (human raised by Martian back to Earth)

JG Ballard, “The Drowned World”, 1962 (ecocatastrophe of melted ice-caps)

Frank Herbert, “Dune”, 1965, (human survival and evolution) Philip K Dick, “Do Androids

Dream of Electric Sheep?”, 1968 (what constitutes a human being?)

Ursula LeGuin, “The Left Hand Of Darkness), 1969 (examination of gender)

Stanislaw Lem, “Solaris”. 1961 but translated into English from Polish in 1970. (A sentient planet. Communication between human and non-human species.)

Doris Lessing, “Memoirs of a Survivor”, 1974, (society breaks down after disaster)

Joanna Russ, “The Female Man”, 1975, (examining gender roles)

Sargent, Pamela, “Earthseed, 1983, (generational conflict in space ship over long time span)

Williams Gibson, “Neuromancer”, 1984, (cyberpunk- society is controlled by computers) the term “cyberspace” enters popular culture

Orson Scott Card. “Ender’s Game”, 1985, (military scifi novel –war with insectoid aliens)

Margaret Atwood, “The Handmaids Tale”. 1986, (totalitarian Christian theocracy keeps women in subjugation; explores the means of gaining rights back)

Octavia E. Butler, “Dawn”, 1987, (explores concept of reproduction between species)

Iain M. Banks, The State of the Art, 1993 (Short stories)

Kim Stanley Robinson, “Red Mars”, 1993, (colonization of Mars- imagining Utopia)

Nancy Kress, “Beggars in Spain” 1993, (society faces consequences of genetic modification)

China Mieville. “Perdido Street Station”2001, (magic and steampunk Technology exist together)

Richard K. Morgan, “Altered Carbon” 2002 (cyberpunk- human bodies are stored digitally)

Richard K.Morgan, “Woken Furies” 2007. (25<sup>th</sup> c when death is nearly meaningless)

Iain M. Banks, “Surface Detail”, 2010, (a Culture novel which is fiercely Anti-hell)

Karen Lord, “The Galaxy Game”, 2015 (social commentary on psionic abilities out in space)

## INFLUENTIAL MOVIES

- 1956 – Forbidden Planet First faster-than-light starship, first entirely electronic music, first use of Robby the Robot concept
- 1956 - Invasion of the Body Snatchers Imposters take over human bodies
- 1968 – 2001:A Space Odyssey Movie by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke
- 1968 – Planet of the Apes. Role reversal of humans and apes
- 1971 – A Clockwork Orange Dystopian future crime film with android by Kubrick
- 1977 – Stars Wars Epic space opera involving war on other planets and in interstellar space
- 1977 – Close Encounters of the Third Kind A mysterious UFO appears to earthlings
- 1979 – The Alien Aggressive alien stalks and kills people on spaceship
- 1982 – E.T. the Extraterrestrial E.T. phone home- lovable alien
- 1985 – Back To the Future Time travel into the past
- 1985 – LifeForce Aliens behave like vampires
- 1990 – Total Recall Memory implants and Mars in 2084
- 1999 - The Matrix Sentient machines subdue human population, then rebellion
- 2001 – A.I. Artificial Intelligence Explores an android programmed with the ability to love
- 2009 – Avatar - A hybrid alien-human is created to go to war on another planet and falls in love with a native - gorgeous special effect movie.
- 2011 – Paul - an alien comedy! Seth Rogan (alien) takes us on a wild ride to space-atheist film?
- 2013 – Enders Game – Man uses computerized mind (and War) games to defeat alien species

2015 – The Martian - One man left behind on manned trip to Mars – human ingenuity explored

## SPACE EVENTS WHICH I HAVE FOLLOWED:

1957 – Soviet Union launches Sputnik

1961- Artificial satellite orbited Earth.. Gagarin in April. Shepard in May

1965- Manned space craft sent into orbit

1966- Soviet Luna is first spacecraft to orbit the Moon

1967 – American unmanned lunar probe made soft landing on moon

1969 – Moon landing “One Giant Step for Mankind”

1969 – First photograph of Phobos from space. One of two moons of Mars

1970 – First soft landing on planet Venus

1971 – First space station

1976 – First photos and soil sample from Mars

1983 – First space craft to pass beyond all planets

1986 – American Challenger explodes.

1991 – First asteroid flyby

1996 – First orbit of Jupiter

2005 – First soft landing on Titan

2011 – First orbit of Mercury

2014 – October- Comet Sliding Spring flies by Mars

2014 – First probe to land on a comet (67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko)

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary P. Williams was born in 1939 in the Central Valley of California. Her family's circumstances were modest and her desire for education sometimes had to take a backseat to earning a living. In 1970 she began work on her BFA at San Francisco Art Institute while working full time as an insurance claims adjuster. She graduated from SFAI in 1983 then worked as a Real Estate Broker/Owner in San Francisco, California until retirement in 2008. She then took art classes at South Lake Tahoe Community College. In spring 2011 she visited the Rio Grande Valley and took classes at University of Texas Pan America. Professors Lyles and Berrios encouraged her to apply for the Master of Fine Arts program and she was accepted in the Fall of 2011 and received her MFA from UTRGV in December 2016. She currently resides in Alpine County, California. She can be contacted at mpwdl1@yahoo.com.