

“Questions for Heaven”

Interstellar Displacement and the Entrancing Work of Anne Wölk

by Shannon Permenter (USA), 2021

Anne Wölk’s recent solo exhibition illuminates our earthly relationships through an exploration into the mysteries and speculative realities of the universe.

Enveloped in the rich blues of the vast universe and the outstretched arms of the galaxies, Berlin based artist Anne Wölk transports us through the nebulae to introduce us to an extraordinary foreign world that is eerily similar to our own.

Her recent solo exhibition “Questions for Heaven”, on view in April 2021 at the Czong Institute for Contemporary Art (CICA) in South Korea, subverts the assumed familiarity with the astronomical through striking fictional landscapes that challenge the relationships between human and nature.

When viewing “Questions for Heaven” you suddenly find yourself lost traversing the cosmos; a cohesive journey created through the precision, skill, and passion Wölk infuses into each individual work through her months of dedication.

The exhibition, which consists of oil and acrylic pieces from three of Wölk’s most prominent series, explores the universe from its seemingly microscopic details to the vast regions that are beyond our mental grasp.

The viewer begins outstretched to the furthest expanses of the heavens. Works from her Nebulae series create textured, ethereal depictions of the gaseous clouds. Wölk investigates these epicenters of cosmic creation with a gestural nature that transforms these formidable swirling masses into delicate wisps illuminated by the galaxies they embody. The viewer then ventures deeper as they are met with pieces from her Planet Spheres series.

These three-dimensional works use acrylic paint on styrofoam spheres producing the sensation that the viewer has encountered this unknown world on their travels through space. The viewer journeys closer to this unfamiliar planet where they view the natural landscape collide against the cosmos. Lastly, the viewer finds themselves grounded in this mysterious world. Quiet mountain landscapes under endless starry skies are met with peculiar scientific architecture. These pieces from the Starscape series show life from the ground on these new planets. As we stare out into the darkness, Earth itself has become a microscopic element lost in the cosmic void.

Wölk brings these intergalactic scenes to life in an interdisciplinary manner that provides familiarity to the viewer. While an inherent painterly romanticism looms over each work it becomes clear that Wölk draws from astronomical photography, such as from the Hubble telescope, and imagery from science fiction that are prevalent throughout modern culture. She builds upon these elements by creating scenes that blur the line between fiction and reality to question the relationship between man and nature.

The fictional settings she presents depict neon and LED lights that seem to illuminate the planet’s surface, as a community of space travelers colonizes the land. While immersed in the distant worlds of outer space a digital glow still hovers over the planet’s landscape confronting the viewer with the human need to conquer, develop, and brutalize new environments for their own pursuits

highlighting the vulnerability of our home planet. While the viewer of the exhibition has seemingly traveled from the universe's furthest limits, they are forced to question the interactions held here on Earth.

Labyrinthine networks of stars, effervescent bursts of light, and the otherworldly landscapes have viewers embark on an extraterrestrial journey. For those who visit Anne Wölk's "Questions for Heaven", the selection of her works transports us from the comfort of our home on Earth, through the cosmos, and touch down on planets unknown. Wölk's ability to provide intricate detail in tandem with seemingly immersive fields of color consumes the viewer generating a revelatory experience about the way humans inhabit our world.