

SPACE ROCKS

by

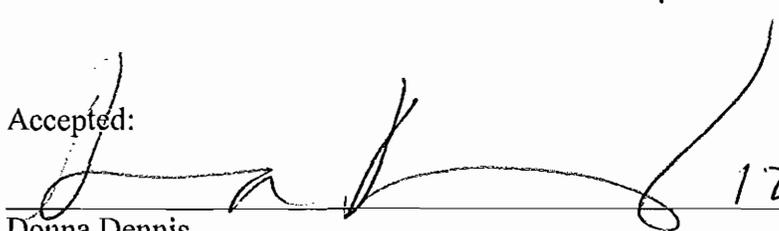
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There is nothing more complex or more beautiful than our natural world. I use the elements from this world to tell a new story. My work invents cultures that speak foreign tongues, which have sprung from stars and rocks. Each time I begin a sculpture, I am writing a new mythology for my imaginary world. Greatly influenced by the ritualistic practices of native societies, I believe humans need to create gods and legends for themselves, and making art is my way of satisfying that need.

Two years ago, I took a trip to California and had the opportunity to drive down the coast of the Sunshine State. I was overtaken with amazement and appreciation for the landscape around me. Immediately, personal myths began forming in my mind. The mountains and hills were living creatures, whose enormous faces would slowly emerge from the brush to watch over the world. This was the first time I was so inspired by the sculptural elements of nature, and it has deeply influenced my work ever since.

Mythology and story-telling are an important part of making art. After my visit to California, I returned to the studio to make the images of these creature mountains that had so deeply struck me. During this time, I began reading Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*, in which he connects mythology to personal spirituality and to our modern world. My work entitled *Watchers*, four ceramic animal-mountains perched upon individual shelves, each with a shadowy root below them, was the result of diving headfirst into an imagined spirituality that

only I was privy to. Watchers are the gods of heaven and Earth, connected to the sky and ground, looking over all of us, protecting us. This work was meant to be shared, but its meaning was obvious only to me. I bared my spirituality to whoever was willing to view and asked for nothing in return.

At the time I made Watchers, I had also become very interested in rocks and minerals. Minerals, of course, are the smaller pieces that make up the vast landscapes of our planet, and on their own they themselves are landscapes. My interest in mineralogy came naturally, I suppose, but the key moment was the day I obtained my grandfather's rock collection. My grandfather, Stanley, had passed away many years ago and the house he lived in had been recently abandoned. I went there with the intention of taking a few rocks; however, I ended up returning home with five buckets full. My grandfather is the source from which my artistic abilities and creative interests flow. He was an artist who was nearly obsessed with rocks and minerals. He conducted family excursions to Canada and Pennsylvania to go rock hunting. He invested time and money into his love for rocks. And he made art out of them; paintings and collages made from small polished stones, pictures and Bible verses penned on rocks, and table top mosaics of mineral slabs. Not only did he love art and rocks, but science fiction as well (which I will touch on later).

So I took many, many rocks, minerals, and crystals from Papa Stanley's collection out behind his abandoned house. I suddenly felt invigorated by his

spirit, emotional with gratitude, and greatly inspired to carry on a piece of him in myself. I lived with these rocks for some months, surrounding myself with their presence and studying about their origins, meanings, uses, and mythologies.

The first semester of my senior year I made a bronze sculpture inspired by a typical crystal formation and adorned with tiny Herkimer diamonds. The idea for the sculpture was completely organic, as was its creation. In the end, the only title that seemed to make sense for this piece was *Space Crystal*. It was a crystal formation, yet it was extremely foreign, perhaps fantastical. I developed a mythology for it: the piece was a powerful totem from another world, thus it could have only been formed literally in another world. At that moment, *Space Rocks* was born.

Within the past five years, I have been exposed to more and more science fiction and fantasy themes. Television shows like *Battlestar Galactica* and books like *Imajica* by Clive Barker made an impact on my life. The wonder and mystery of sci-fi fantasy genres excited me. In other worlds, anything is possible, and *anything* has its own mythologies. Space exploration had never quite interested me until recently. As I began reading Carl Sagan's *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God*, I posed myself the following question, what more can we learn about ourselves and our home if we would only embark on missions into outer space? Humans must venture out into the darkness of the universe for the answers!

Space Rocks is my contribution to the movement to inspire space exploration. This world, our world, is too caught up in itself; most everyone is a superstar with an iPhone, a Facebook profile, and a blog. Individuality is important, but it is essential for people to come together as a species to support the expansion of discovery and learning. Human progression into space is the next step in our own evolution.

The installation of *Space Rocks: A Look at Far-Out Minerals* is meant to put the viewer in a fictional time and place. It is set up as an actual scientific museum exhibit. Each planet from the Arcis Galaxy, Regina, Mirus, and Videor, has a display case with mineral samples. An informative, Nova-esque video of the same name accompanies the exhibition, showing images of each planet with commentary by scientists, and fills the room with spacey music and narration. The room is completely dark except for the spotlights illuminating the pedestals in the center, which invite the viewer to the display. The viewer enters the gallery and is immediately part of the installation by becoming a spectator in a fictional museum. The interaction between the viewers is that of visitors in a museum exhibit. The clear display cases allow the viewers to see the work and see each other, experiencing the specimens, their own reflections, and other viewers' expressions. The room is no longer a gallery but an exhibit in which everyone is involved. The authenticity of the setting is meant to convince the observer that what they are experiencing is true. This is the first time I've used the viewer as

part of my artwork. The installation can only work if the viewers submit to the fantasy. My goal is to engage and inspire the viewer, and also to push the line between what is real and what is imaginary.

The specimens on display are in fact ceramic sculptures, glazed and painted, to resemble imaginary rocks lifted from the soil of imaginary planets. The decision to work in ceramic was an easy one; clay is a familiar and comfortable medium for me, and yet it also has the pliability to take on almost any form. It is a natural material acquired from our own Earth, and there is nothing more humorous than using Earth material to pose as alien material. I've chosen to color the "rocks" with fire glaze, non-fire glaze, and paint to achieve different textures. A small collection of rocks from the planet Videor is displayed separately on its own shelf under a black light. Many Videorian rocks are fluorescent, so the ceramic was painted with special black light paint to attain a fluorescent glow. Variations of color and texture are important to me and I try not to limit my palette. However, the choices of combining pastel and bright pinks, purples, and teals are certainly influenced by the video artist Shana Moulton. The fantastic places she creates in her videos are saturated in neon and acidic colors. Her use of color intensifies the work visually and narratively, adding to the beauty and chaos of the setting. I've also been inspired by the use of color in music videos from the 1980's. Neon lights projected onto smoke, as in Salico's *I'm on*

Fire video, were another inspiration for the colors used in my ceramic sculptures and video.

Additional sculptures had been produced, but were edited out of the exhibit mainly for aesthetic reasons. The rocks from each planet had to illustrate a theme and relate to each other. Each pedestal represents one of the three fictional planets: Regina (Latin for “queen”), the volcanic planet; Mirus (Latin for “wonderful”), the rocky, terrestrial world; and Videor (Latin for “to appear”), the gaseous planet. Specimens collected from Regina resemble volcanic rock and are colored with blacks, metallics, reds, and oranges. Colorful geodes and organic crystal forms represent the planet Mirus. Videor’s samples contain glowing fluorescent minerals and spiked rock structures. The sculptures correspond with the information given in the video.

Humor is a regular part of my life. I enjoy making people laugh and being made to laugh. *Space Rocks* comes from a sincere and reflective place, but it is also meant to be fun. The video is the most humorous part of the project. Music, dialogue, and images mock the typical science video one might come across on PBS on a Sunday night. The actors portray cosmo-geologists and astro-mineralogists, giving facts about the planets from the Arcis Galaxy and the rocks sampled from them. The narration takes itself seriously, echoing distantly as if the narrator himself was in space. The music is lighthearted but meant to engage the viewer’s imagination and inspire them. Together, these elements are intended to

leave the viewer amused, entertained, and interested in the possibilities of space travel.

I believe my goal for this installation has been achieved. Uniting my interests in mythology, science fiction, geology, and humor I've managed to create entire imaginary worlds. My work engages and involves viewers, and presents them with beautiful sculpture loaded with myth. My career as an art student and an artist has reached an apex, and everything I've created, contemplated, and studied has come together completely.