

17 April 2012

Looking to the sky



Real-Photo Postcard, *Couple seated on crescent moon*; black backdrop with stars, c. 1912.

In the process of putting together the exhibition 'Dark Sky' for the Adam Art Gallery, curators Christina Barton, Director of the Adam Art Gallery, and Professor of Art History Geoffrey Batchen discovered photographs of the night sky dating as far back as 1874.

"The skies above us have always fascinated people—and with the advent of photography, our ability to capture what is 'out there' has greatly aided our ability to speculate about our place in the universe," says Ms Barton, who curated the exhibition with Professor Batchen.

The exhibition examines the relationship between photography and astronomy.

“When selecting works for the exhibition we were particularly interested in mixing photographs taken for scientific purposes with the more evocative meditations of artists,” says Ms Barton.

“When seen together, this varied collection of work will offer viewers an insight into our fascination with the heavens from a range of historical and contemporary perspectives.”

The exhibition ‘Dark Sky’ (opening 1 May) has been timed to coincide with the 2012 Transit of Venus on 6 June, a rare astronomical event when Venus passes between the Earth and the sun.

Photographs by Hermann Krone, a German photographer who attended the Transit in 1874 as part of an expedition to the Auckland Islands, feature in the exhibition. Visitors will also get the chance to see the work of contemporary German artist, Wolfgang Tillmans, a keen amateur astronomer, who recorded the 2004 Transit of Venus.

The more scientific works include images taken by unmanned satellites and spacecraft as part of the space exploration programmes of NASA, as well as photos taken by various observatories in the United States.

Images on a more whimsical note include modernist experiments from the 1950s by New Zealand artist Eric Lee Johnson, who used long exposures to capture the movement of stars and satellites in the night sky.

“We also found some delightful Real-Photo Postcards from around 1910 which depict studio portraits of Americans posing with a paper moon against a starry sky,” says Ms Barton.

Two New Zealand artists have been commissioned to create new works.

Simon Ingram has developed and built a radio antenna that will be placed on the roof of the gallery and will then translate radio waves from outer space into a painting via software he has programmed. “It will be like the sky is literally creating its own portrait,” says Ms Barton.

Stella Brennan will produce a sound installation based on research she has undertaken into the audio recordings made by Venera 13, a space probe that landed on Venus in the 1980s as part of the secret Soviet space programme of that era.

The exhibition will be complemented by a public programme, including talks by scientists, artists and writers, including the German and New Zealand poets who have been commissioned by the International Institute of Modern Letters and the New Zealand Goethe-Institut to write about the Transit of Venus.

What: Dark Sky

Where: Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University, Gate 3, Kelburn Parade

When: 1 May–8 July, Tuesday–Sunday, 11am-5pm

Free entry

Note to journalists: Professor Geoffrey Batchen will present a curator’s tour from 4-5pm on Tuesday 1 May, which media are welcome to join. Please contact Therese Lloyd for details.

If you require further information or high resolution images please contact Therese Lloyd

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