



Silver Linings: Delicate Drawings by Carol Prusa

June 16, 2009 - August 30, 2009



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Limen, 2008
checklist # 9

Acknowledgements

Polk Museum of Art is proud to present this exhibition - Silver Linings: Delicate Drawings by Carol Prusa. We have been fascinated by Carol's work since we served as the organizing institution for the exhibition of work by recipients of Florida's Individual Artist Fellowships in 2003 in which her work was included. In the years since then, her work has continued to develop in fascinating new directions. Her most recent efforts maintain the intense detail and subtle elegance we have admired in her work for years, while adding electronic technologies in a harmonious yet dynamic and unique format. These changes make the exhibition even better than we had originally imagined it to be. I enjoy the way her works bridge biology, philosophy, theology and physics in compelling compositions. Her use of silverpoint, fiber optics and video spans centuries of artistic production and through a unique combination of media she achieves compelling and complex visual feats of wonder.

Polk Museum of Art would like to express its gratitude to Bernice Steinbaum Gallery for facilitating this exhibition and for sharing Carol's work over the years through exhibitions in Miami. We have worked with Bernice on a number of projects over the last ten years since her move to Miami, all of them noteworthy for the depth of their ideas, their exquisite craftsmanship, and their undeniable physical beauty. I personally have known Bernice for about 25 years and celebrate that friendship and her unerring eye. The assistance of Bernice and her staff on this project has been invaluable. I would like to thank Jeane Cooper, Carol's colleague at Florida Atlantic University, for designing this wonderful catalogue, a fitting tribute to an exhibition of this importance. I also wish to express my continuing gratitude to our Annual Exhibition Fund Sponsors for supporting this exhibition and the many other projects we will bring to fruition in the coming year: Cowles Charitable Trust, Dorothy Chao Jenkins, Ron and Becky Johnson, Mark & Lynn Hollis, The Reitzel Foundation, BCI Engineers & Scientists; and the Eunice Lee Fuller Fund within the Community Foundation of Greater Lakeland, and Summit Consulting, Inc.

I am especially grateful to Carol Prusa for her guidance and generosity throughout the planning of this project. Her exhibition takes us on a whirlwind adventure that explores everything from the natural world and the most basic human impulses, to the grandest and most complex ideas that define our times. At the same time the overall sensuousness of her work reminds us that beauty is not just skin deep; it is through countless tiny details working in unison that beauty of both form and function are created. It is through the realization of artworks such as these that great artists like Carol Prusa demonstrate that art can bring us as much understanding of the world as any amount of scientific knowledge. She has mined many sources to realize her vision. And finally I commend Curator of Art Todd Behrens, and our curatorial team, for bringing this exhibition into being. Its careful selection and elegant display resonates for all who witness its beauty and pause to absorb the quiet power of these works.

Daniel E. Stetson
Executive Director

Silver Linings

Since her earliest training, Carol Prusa has had a strong interest in science. Her skill in drawing combined with her study of science led her to the rather unusual major of Biocommunications Art/Medical Illustration. Even as she worked toward this degree, she sensed that the creative limitations of work as a medical illustrator would not, as she has indicated, satisfy the desire to “think differently every day and be challenged – not provide product. I figured painting was a place where I would never be satisfied so it would be a challenging and engaging life – and, that I would have to learn new things all the time.”

And when it comes down to it, the physical creation of an artwork depends upon science: the understanding of how materials work. Most of Prusa’s works take literally hundreds of hours to complete. The rectangular works are created on large wood panels that are covered with smooth layers of white gesso. The hemispheres or “domes” are created on clear acrylic (plastic) domes made to Prusa’s specifications. Then she draws patterns and images using tiny hatch marks created with silverpoint. The drawing is then enhanced with graphite. She then grinds dry pigment and combines it with an acrylic binder to create thin, gray washes. Prusa layers a number of washes over the drawing made by the silver point. Then, she uses titanium white paint mixed with acrylic binder either to highlight parts of her drawings or to add new images to the drawings. The rectangular works often contain additional details such as dabs of sulfur paint or small bits of cut glass. The domes contain networks of fiber optic lights that shine through tiny drilled holes; two of the works have videos that run on iPods, viewed through lenses in the center of the works.

What is immediately attractive about Prusa’s artworks, though, has little to do with science. Her works are beautiful, delicate and detailed. Though she works on hard surfaces, her works seem full of softness, largely the result of the light gray washes that create most of the tones of her works. This softness lures viewers in to get a closer look, like bees to a flower blossom. What viewers discover by moving closer to her works is that the details reveal themselves in layers. They also discover that a closer look does not necessarily provide answers to questions that an initial, broader view suggest.

Just as the basis for theoretical science begins with a question and works toward answers that are part of larger models, Prusa’s work is as conceptual as it is physical. Relatively arcane ideas such as quantum mechanics, game theory, or parallel universes provide some of the framework for her ideas. Perhaps the one work that represents her ideas at the moment is her largest dome, *Entanglement*. While common use of the word indicates a group of things being twisted together in a potentially troublesome way, in quantum mechanics it describes a situation in which two different things are so closely linked that a description of one of them must include a mention of the other.

We can find this concept represented in our daily lives through our continuous encounters with opposites: light and dark, creation and destruction, good and evil. Opposites depend on each other. Their importance connects directly to Prusa’s manner of creation: lure people in with an overall sense of delicate beauty and then present them with unexpected layers of detail and information. *Entanglement* presents a pattern of abstracted black images on a soft white and gray background. But within *Entanglement* plays a video with similar abstracted images, this time in white against a dark background. Are the light colors defining the dark or vice versa or both?

This concept extends itself to include her other large dome in the exhibition, *Multiverses*. Instead of thinking that a single universe exists, some scientists and philosophers have theorized that there might be multiverses, which include our universe and parallel universes. Within this set of universes, all possible outcomes to particular situations could occur. Thinking this way means that the world of possibilities seems less like a series of steps or segments and more like a circle of connectivity. In the circling pattern of *Multiverses*, viewers find two circles each of which contains a scene depicting Adam and Eve—one shows the couple smiling and holding fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; the other left shows their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This represents the first instance of “what if” in Judeo-Christian traditions. Within the idea of multiverses, the “what if” would have all possible results.

Prusa extends this line of thinking when addressing the two greatest forces

that shape our lives, love and death. In *Spooky Action at a Distance*, she converts Einstein's ideas of the indefinable interaction between pairs of isolated objects or particles into a swirl of biomorphic streams connected only barely at the center of the artwork. Viewed from a distance, the work stares back in the shape of two eyes. Viewed at close range, the pupil of each eye becomes a male or female figure, appearing to float within a bubble. In the midst of all of the activity around each figure, isolated from each other, they are still able to find a way to connect.

In *An Awful Rowing/Atomic Sublime*, Prusa addresses the ultimate question, again with a hopeful response. The lower portion, *An Awful Rowing*, refers to a book of poems by Anne Sexton titled *The Awful Rowing Toward God*. Sexton described the never ending quest to answer all of the unanswerable questions of life and death. Again, Prusa indicates that life and hope spring from this journey of agonizing questions by having frail, leaf-tipped branches extending from the boat form's inner hull. The upper portion, *Atomic Sublime*, refers to our peculiar fascination with the power we developed to destroy everything. Even within this greatest of all manmade destructive powers, Prusa sees a light at the end of the tunnel and transforms the shape of a mushroom cloud into a bouquet of blooming flowers. The two panels presented as one work suggest that the many explorations available to us during our lifetimes will, as a matter of course, give birth to new ideas and a greater understanding of the world around us.

This is where art and science both meet and separate. Both explore new ideas. Science looks for answers, which might, in the case of discovering atomic power, come with new dangers. Art looks more, perhaps, at the journey toward the answers and likewise asks questions regarding the true meaning of scientifically derived answers. In the work of Carol Prusa science and visual poetry come together in many ways, creating beautiful and seductive works that contain remarkably intellectual ideas.

Todd Behrens
Curator of Art



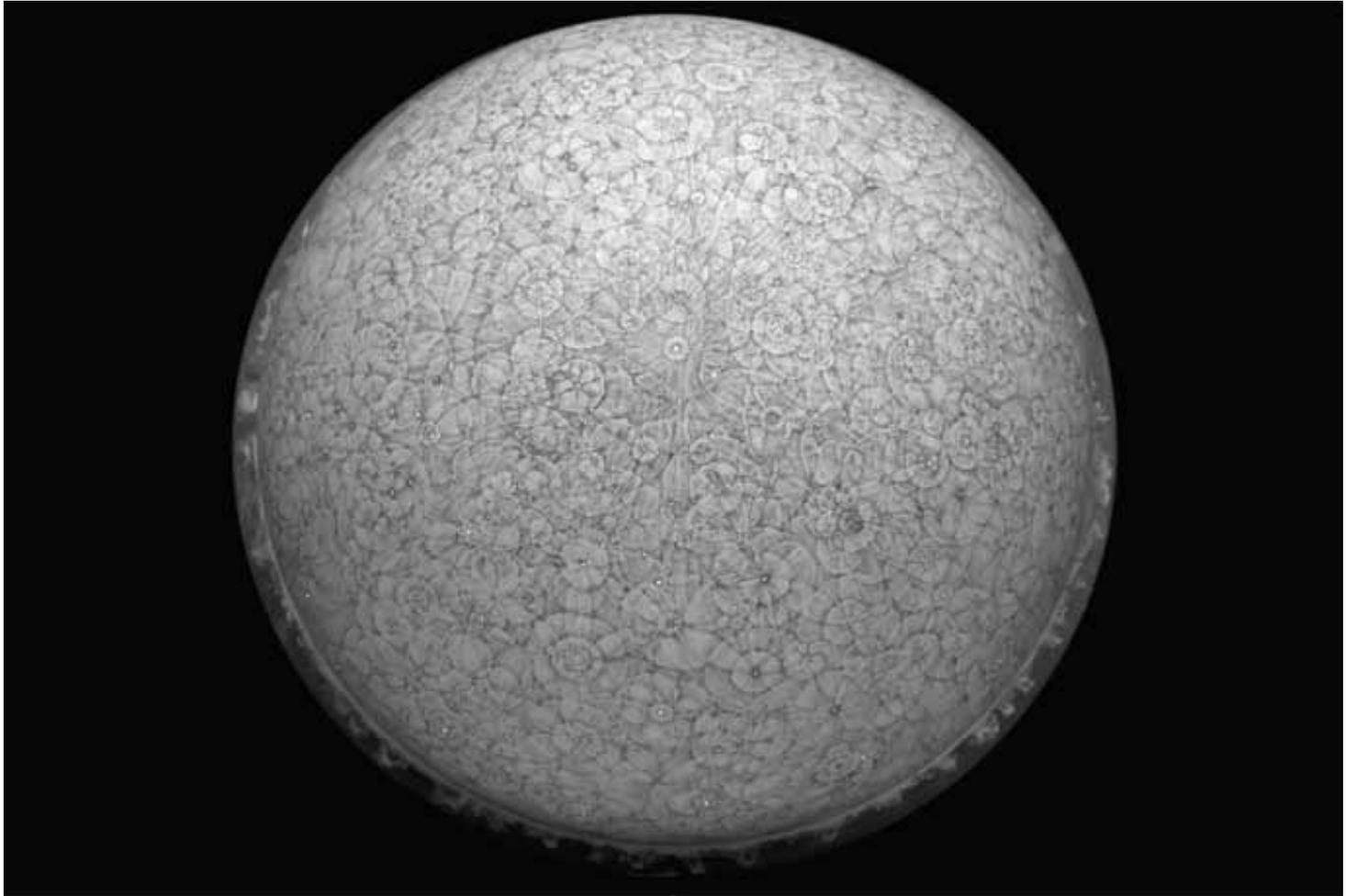
Dorothy Jenkins Gallery installation view



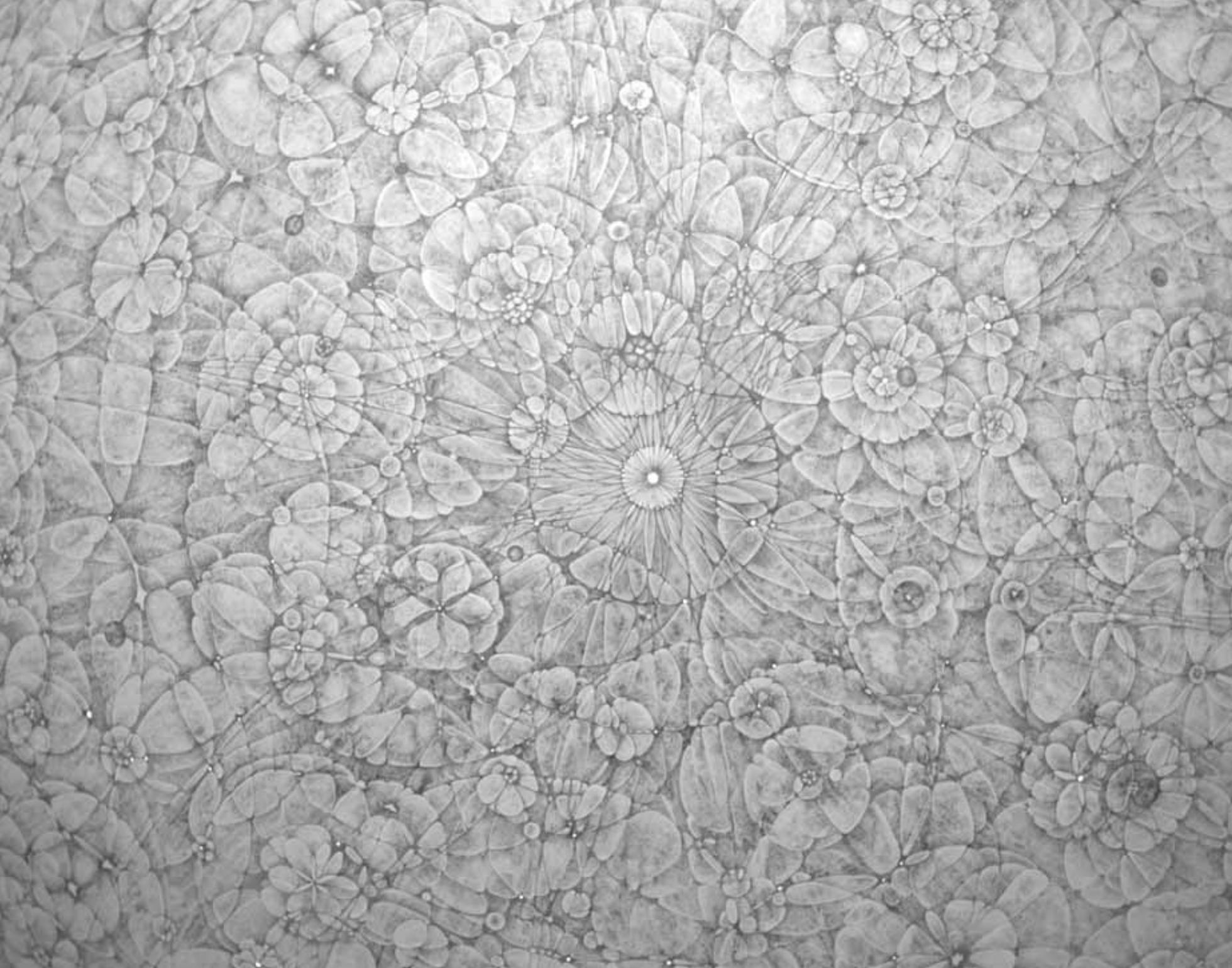
Internal Architecture, 2009
checklist # 13

Chord, 2008 (right)
checklist # 8

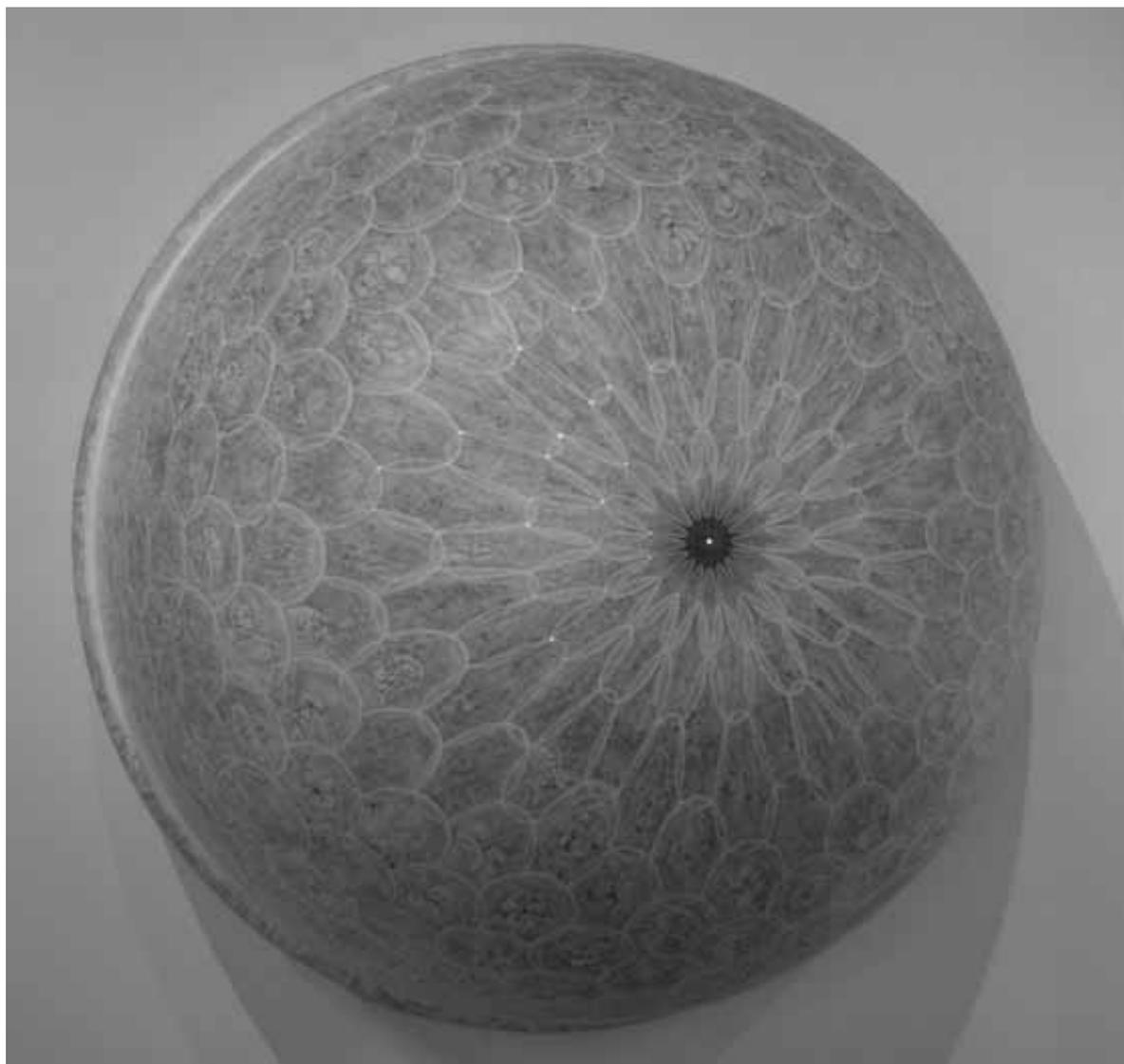




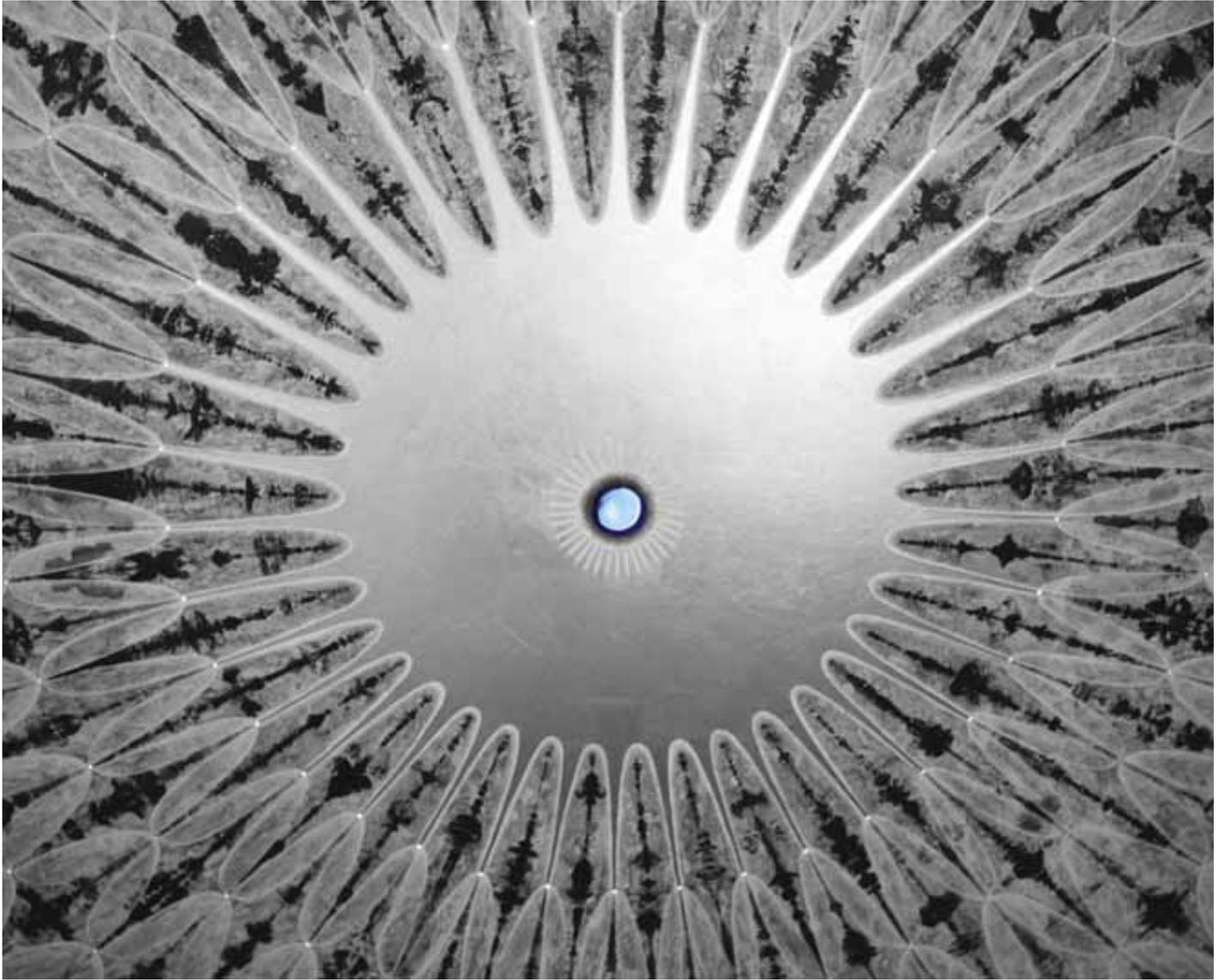
Latona, 2009 (detail right)
checklist # 14







Multiverses, 2008 (detail left)
checklist # 10





Entanglement, 2009 (detail left)
checklist # 11



Dorothy Jenkins Gallery installation view

Exhibition Checklist

1. *Anande*, 2003
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on wood panel
48 x 84 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
2. *Tomb*, 2004-07
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment and cut glass with acrylic binder on wood panel
80 x 44 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
3. *Spooky Action at a Distance*, 2005-07
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on wood panel
48 x 168 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
4. *An Awful Rowing/Atomic Sublime*, 2007
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder
96 x 96 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
5. *Babel*, 2007
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment and sulfur with acrylic binder
80 x 44 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
6. *Wreath*, 2007
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white and mars black pigment with acrylic binder
80 x 44 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
7. *Breath*, 2008
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
12 x 12 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
8. *Chord*, 2008
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
18 x 18 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
9. *Limen*, 2008
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
36 x 36 x 18 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
10. *Multiverses*, 2008
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
48 x 48 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
11. *Entanglement*, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with metal leaf, fiber optics and video
60 x 60 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
12. *Fountain*, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
24 x 24 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
13. *Internal Architecture*, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics and video
22 x 22 x 11 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
14. *Latona*, 2009
Silverpoint, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere with fiber optics
30 x 30 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery

Artist Bio

Prusa, born and raised on the south side of Chicago, received her B.S. in Biocommunication Arts from the University of Illinois. She went on to study painting and was awarded an M.F.A. from Drake University. Currently a Professor of Art at Florida Atlantic University, she has been awarded visual arts fellowships from the South Florida Cultural Consortium, the State of Florida and the Howard Foundation through Brown University. Notably, her work is in the permanent collections of the Miami Art Museum, Museum of Art – Ft. Lauderdale, Arkansas Arts Center, Daum Museum of Contemporary Art and Telfair Art Museum, among others. Prusa's work traveled in the Triennial Exhibition of German and American Artists curated by the American Museum of Arts and Design, NYC, exhibited at the Museum for Angewandte Kunst – Frankfurt and at the Museum of Arts and Design. Solo museum exhibitions include the Arkansas Arts Center, University of Maine Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art – Jacksonville, Lakatamia Municipalia – Nicosia, Cyprus, and the Polk Museum of Art. She has shown at the DeCordova Museum, Frist Center for the Arts – Nashville, Evansville Art Museum, Museum of Art - Ft. Lauderdale, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Telfair Museum of Art, Tomio Koyama Gallery – Tokyo, Kentler International Drawing Space – Brooklyn and the Boca Raton Art Museum. Prusa is represented by Bernice Steinbaum Gallery in Miami, where she has had several one-person shows. Her work is featured in numerous magazine and newspaper articles and published in *Miami Contemporary Artists*, ed., Paul Clemence and Julie Davidow, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2007.





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