

KOHN GALLERY



Lita Albuquerque and Bruce Connor at Kohn Gallery

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp finds gratitude in the embrace of the sublime and the terror by two artists.

Thanks to a recent wave of renewed interest, we know much more about the artists who opted to work with the earth itself, the Land Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Bulldozers creating Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson and Double Negative by Michael Heizer. But what about the women in the field?

There is one in LA who has long been concerned with creating installations in the landscape and conducting relevant works of performance art: Lita Albuquerque. There are now two opportunities to see her more recent work.

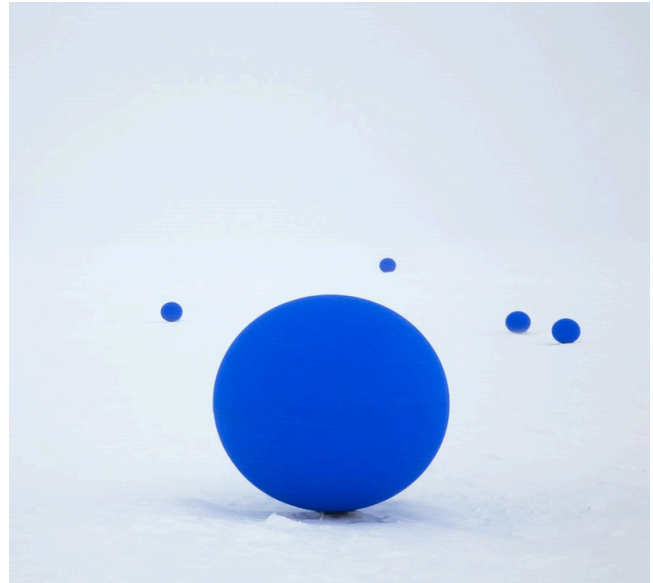
At Kohn Gallery, a selection of large photographs document her ambitious 2006 project called Stellar

Axis. This is also the subject of a seriously gorgeous new book by Skira/Rizzoli, published with the Nevada Museum of Art, which presents the exhibition of her work through January 4, 2015.

Long fascinated by the celestial realm, Albuquerque traveled with a team to Antarctica, the South Pole. There, the path of stars visible at the North Pole appears in reverse, which inspired Albuquerque's placement of 99 ultramarine blue spheres, their size relative to the stars they represent, amidst the drifts and planes of snow. At night there, the sky is bright white so the horizon line melds the two planes into one. She imagined the light from the stars penetrating the earth from both poles and coming together as a double helix at the earth's core.

Her fascination with Antarctica, the white continent, began in 1969. She was in the Saharan desert during the first moon landing when the image of the earth seen from outer space was televised around the globe. Her fascination with stars began even earlier, growing up in Carthage, Tunisia watching the night sky over the horizon of a desert extending to the Mediterranean Sea.

She moved with her family to LA in 1957 and graduated from UCLA with a bachelor of arts degree in 1968. In the 1970s, she poured dried colored pigment into shallow trenches dug along the floor of the Mohave as enormous temporal drawings in keeping with similar work around that time by Heizer and Smithson. Albuquerque, however, embraced an intuitive and spiritual dimension as symbolized in her use of the transcendent color of blue, though she uses other primary colors as well. Her interest in the principles of perception aligned with those of Robert Irwin. But her method of applying pigments was conducted in a purposeful, meditative manner, a form of performance. The performance aspect, often enlisting large numbers of assistants, has continued throughout her career and manifest again in Stellar Axis: Antarctica.



Albuquerque's hypnotic installation Particle Horizon is on view at the Laguna Art Museum through January 18, 2015, a complement to their Art and Nature exhibition. A model of a human figure covered in the ultramarine blue pigment appears to be suspended in a prone position and surrounded by a light show of stars. A narrative is recited in a low tone.

If Albuquerque represents humanity's more sublime aspirations, there is darker view offered by the late Bruce Connor, also at Kohn. The compelling if distressing Crossroads, a 1976 film composed of montages of actual footage shot of the underwater explosion of an atomic bomb at Bikini Atoll in 1946. The background music was composed by Terry Riley and Patrick Gleeson. In this digitized version presented on a full-scale film screen in a darkened gallery, one of the most filmed incidents in history is stunning to watch though devastating in its implications. Both shows are on view through December 20. In a way, we can be grateful for the views of both artists. Happy Thanksgiving!