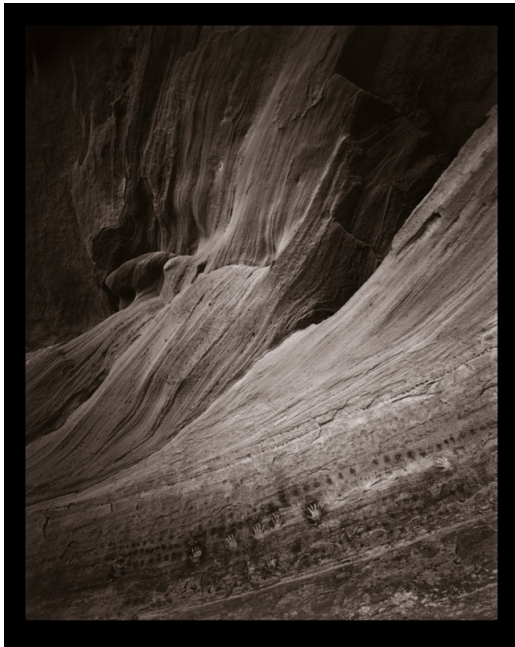


Weight and weightlessness: Linda Connor at FMoPA

Carving out new forms of spirituality.

CAITLIN ALBRITTON FEB 14, 2017 2 PM



Linda Connor, *Dots and Hands II*, Fourteen Window Ruin, Buff, Utah, 2000

Take a breather — there's a lot of noise out there in the world at the moment. It takes sincere effort to pull away from these stressors in an effort to slow down, take the time to see past the here and now, and go beyond to meditate on spiritual existence. Traveling to sacred sites around the world (like Africa, Southeast Asia, Nepal, India, Turkey, Mexico, and Tibet, to name a few), photographer Linda Connor aims to capture the essence of what makes these places feel timelessly otherworldly in her solo exhibition *Gravity* at the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts.

Through her exploration of multiple cultural examples of spirituality, she creates a more encompassing comparison of the unfathomable things in life in hopes that these inexplicable notions can be dug at a little deeper. *Gravity* doesn't just deal with tangible life, but it uses the physical world around us as a springboard for reaching towards the metaphysical.



Despite spirituality being a human endeavor, the works selected on display are devoid of human flesh. Many only hint at humanity through our marks made on Earth, as in “Dots and Hands II, Fourteenth Window Ruin, Bluff, Utah.” The vastness of the impressive canyon overshadows the barely noticeable handprints on the side of the sandstone wall that seem to declare existence even up against the immortality of nature. In comparison to a piece nearby, “Hand Prints, Blue Mountains, Australia,” the similarities of mark-making are unmistakable, showing the universality and similarity of creation despite being made on separate continents and perhaps even different timeframes.

Connor explains that she wants her work to dislodge our sense of linear time, concrete place, and documentation. The work that most exemplifies this is her series of pieces titled *Once the Ocean Floor*, which act as abstracted sites of worship, as opposed to other images of temples in Jordan or French cathedrals that put more emphasis on historical time.

Instead, “Once the Ocean Floor #90, Ladakh, India” considers the idea of religious structure at its most basic, rudimentary form: Solid, monumental boulders of ageless earth. Since the works are toned and fixed with gold chloride, the lightest tones on the boulders are given a soft glow when the light hits them directly, adding to their marvel. With the shards coming together centrally, it subtly hints at the practice of creating mandalas from concentric geometric shapes.

The mass of these rocks is pretty clear, but the heaviness of gravity is juxtaposed with a weightlessness in the way Connor dislodges us from being grounded with the oftentimes confused perspective of these particular series — are we looking from above, straight on, or below? Is this a macro or micro view? Without any clear reference to human life (like in “Passage Grave,” with spirals carved into the stone at what would typically be thought of as a site of worship), just the blank canvas of boulders opens up discovery for a new visual place of meditation and tranquility. Without any connection to tradition or symbolism, there’s a beautiful, universal freedom.



On the other end of the spectrum, and away from brick-and-mortar religious sanctuaries, some bodies of work point to science as the grounds for spiritual arrival. Using nineteenth-century astronomical glass plate negatives from the Lick Observatory archives to make her prints, the vastness of space is shown as an origin of discovery. Lightly dotted with only a few of the millions of stars out there, “October 13, 1893” helps to bridge the sometimes large gap between science and religion. Through the seemingly emptiness of this field of vision, there’s something still out there; there are still mysteries left to inspire amazement in us.

Instead of using a large-scale format to replicate these sites’ epic proportions, Connor’s pieces remain modest in size. Her goal is not to duplicate the feeling you would get from physically standing at these spiritual places; the attraction of her work evokes a new ethos of spirituality. Their intimate scale grounds them in the physical, and in essence, makes the spiritual a precious object that is more tangible to understand, and therefore honored.

This exhibition truly quiets the world, if only for a moment. Though it may take shape in different ways, some form of spirituality is something many people around the world continuously seek. Looking around the physical world for inspiration, Connor seems to allude that we can carve out our own spaces for getting in touch with something deeper and more significant than what we can explain with words.

Linda Connor: Gravity

The Florida Museum of Photographic Arts. 400 N Ashley Dr., Tampa.

Through March 31, 2017

fmopa.org.

Caitlin Albritton, CL Tampa's visual arts critic, spends her time tracking down art you might not see anywhere else. She's also an artist in her own right. Follow her on Instagram or read her blog.