Charles Stankievech
The Desert Turned to Glass

The Desert Turned to Glass forms a place where the cosmic and the chthonic collide. Commemorating the centenary of the planetarium as an architectural type, Contemporary Calgary presents a newly commissioned body of work by Canadian artist Charles Stankievech. A transmedia installation that inhabits both the projection space of the planetarium's dome and the subterranean chamber below, the visitor experiences a stratified ecosystem spread across multiple levels within the building, while representing vast distances in space and time.

Thematically, the video *The Eye of Silence* explores alternative theories of the origin of life, consciousness and art. Projected onto the overhead dome, a newly commissioned, multichannel video work marshals high atmospheric video recordings of the Albertan Badlands, the Utah Salt Flats, Icelandic & Japanese volcanoes, and a meteorite crater in the Namibian desert. Visualizing the Earth at the critical moments of its evolution–the presentation begins by speculating about the moment when life on the planet was seeded from a frozen meteorite. The video ends with images of prehistoric cave art projected onto the dome's curved screen, creating an architectural connection between our modern ways of imagining the cosmos in the planetarium with the ancient ways during rituals in caves. Accompanying the psychedelic visuals, temporality and timelessness entwine in a sonic fugue, combining both subterranean beats and cosmic noise—inviting the visitor to meditate on deep time, deep space, and deep listening. In dialogue with contemporary scientific research, the exhibition also comprises original field recordings by Stankievech of solar rays (whistling within the earth's ionosphere), hydrophone recordings of crackling Arctic ice and flowing Yucatan cenotes (created by a meteorite impact), and ambisonic recordings captured within the Canary Islands' volcanic calderas.

In the cavernous space below, a black pool of petroleum rippling with infrasonic waves completes a deep biosphere cycle. Following a theory by an astrophysicist that oil is a result of ancient bacterial deposits, bacteria once again returns petroleum to its primal hydrocarbon elements in the installation *The Dark Side of the Sun.* Unconsciously, but present nonetheless, an ultrasonic sound installation *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* hangs from the ceiling of the grotto. In an attempt at transspecies communication, an Artificial Intelligence reads the classic philosophical essay by Thomas Nagel in a frequency only audible to bats.

In between the parallel dark spaces of the dome and the cave, a singular and historic meteorite floats above a sand floor at the bottom of the atrium's spiral walkway–suspending the moment in time just before a cataclysmic collision. Spanning the abyss of space and the depths of the earth, *The Desert Turned to Glass* is an epic meditation on origins, endings, and infinity.

Presented by

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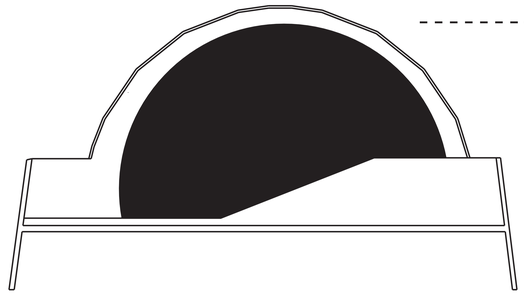


COSMIC | FLOOR 3

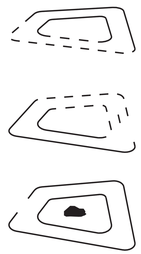
The Eye of Silence

Video (2023)

3 screen video projection in planetarium dome with 7.1 soundtrack, 30 min

Collection of The Vega Foundation
Producer Ala Roushan

Film starts on top of every hour and half hour

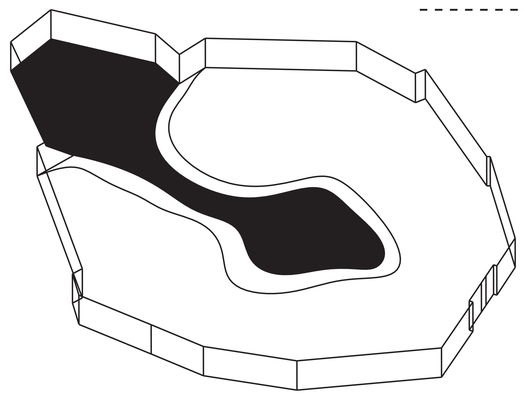


COLLISION | FLOOR 1-3

The Desert Turned to Glass

Installation (2012)

Meteorite sculpture floating over sand



CHTHONIC | FLOOR 1

The Dark Side of the Sun

Installation (2023)

Crude oil, bacteria (Alcanivorax Borkumensis), water, CO2, Rundle rock, geomembrane, submersible speakers playing infrasound

What Is It Like to Be a Bat?

Sound Installation (2023)

AI voice speaking ultrasonic frequencies 20KHz - 200KHz