

## **Helen Lundeberg: Inner/Outer Space** **September 14 – November 2, 2024**

Throughout a career spanning six decades, Los Angeles-based artist Helen Lundeberg (1908-1999) held an enduring fascination with the patterns and cycles which underpin the natural world and the universe beyond it. From her early botanical and zoological illustrations to the hard-edged abstract landscapes and planets she painted in her later career, Lundeberg traced shared conceptual and structural concerns across terrestrial and cosmic orders of magnitude. Relying as much on calculated formal composition as on the subjective engagement of the viewer, her work straddles the permeable borders between observation and memory, perception and imagination, and physical and psychological space.

Lundeberg began to explore the possibility of a career in the arts against a backdrop of significant and rapid scientific development centered around her hometown of Pasadena, CA. Research performed at the California Institute of Technology, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Mount Wilson Observatory would fundamentally and irrevocably shift humanity's understanding of the nature of physical matter and the Earth's relative scale within the cosmos. Lundeberg imagined at first that she might become a scientific illustrator, after courses she took in astronomy and zoology initiated a lifelong interest in recording the appearance and behavior of living things and cosmic phenomena. This academic preoccupation found its creative counterpart when she began studying fine art under Lorser Feitelson in 1930. Feitelson instructed Lundeberg in the principles of formal pictorial composition in drawing and painting, mirroring her fascination with the organization of patterns in nature. Armed with this knowledge, Lundeberg found that she had the means to apply her technical skills and analytical mind to the creation of artworks with meaningful subjective content.

Feitelson and Lundeberg co-founded the Post-Surrealist movement in 1934. Rejecting the European Surrealists' focus on automatism and the unconscious, they promoted the imposition of deliberate formal structure onto symbolic imagery to induce a conscious introspective experience in the viewer. This artistic approach encouraged Lundeberg to explore intellectual and metaphysical themes that had long engaged her. Juxtaposed studies of seed pods and human embryos provoke contemplation of analogous form and function amongst seemingly unrelated organisms. An interior scene of a spherical object on a table dissolves into a vast night sky illuminated by a glowing moon, suggesting adjacent views of the same object expressed at telescoping levels of magnification. These vignettes visually mirror the murky boundaries between the physical world and psychological experience, focusing the role of human perception in constructing meaning from observed reality.

In 1950, Lundeberg began to shift toward the geometric abstract style that would characterize the rest of her career. She pursued the subjective content of these works through dreamlike references to landscape, architecture, and planetary bodies expressed in calculated arrangements of hard-edged color. Lundeberg's 1960s *Planet* paintings conjure fantastical alien worlds, swirling with brilliant colors and dissected to reveal their labyrinthine cores. Her cosmic inventions, created at the height of the Space Race, represent figments of humanity's imagined future amongst the stars. Lundeberg's abstractions of terrestrial environments condense mountains, dunes, and shorelines to their most essential forms, enhanced or modified by considered color choices to generate a particular sensory atmosphere or mood. These constructions, not painted directly from life but fabricated from Lundeberg's accumulated observations of natural patterns, are resolved through the synthesis of perception, memory, and an instinctive visual understanding shared by artist and viewer.

Louis Stern Fine Arts is the exclusive representative of the Estate of Helen Lundeberg.

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