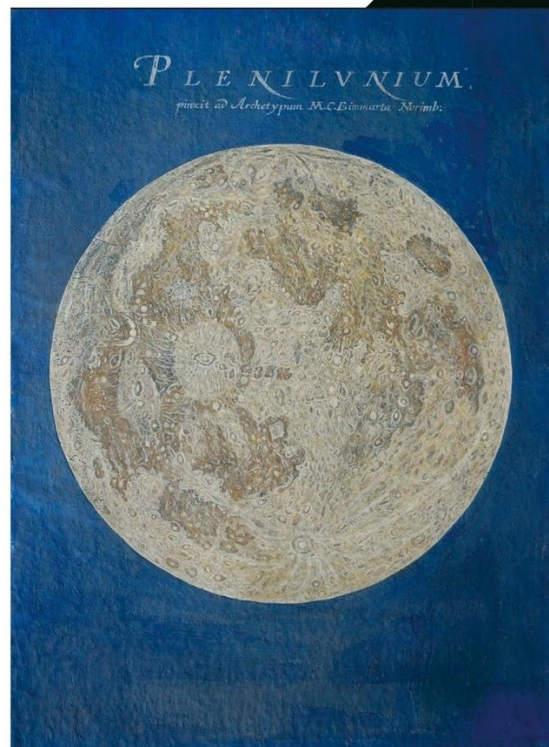


IMAGINING THE UNIVERSE

22.10.21
→ 16.01.22



RICHARD LONG

22.10.21
→ 20.03.22



IN THIS FILE

EVERLASTING AWE.....	3
THE UNIVERSE IN THE HANDS OF THE ALMIGHTY: THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION.....	4
THE UNIVERSE IN THE HANDS OF THE ALMIGHTY: THE GRECO-ROMAN TRADITION	4
AN INCOMPARABLE HERITAGE: THE EURO-ARAB VISION OF THE UNIVERSE.....	5
THE UNIVERSE ON A HUMAN SCALE	5
IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT	6
AND THAT'S NOT ALL	8
RICHARD LONG	9
BIOGRAPHY	10
SCULPTURES	11
PHOTOGRAPHY AND TEXTWORKS	12
MUDWORK	13
WORKS	14
PRACTICAL.....	18
CONTACT	19

Little by little, we are ordering our knowledge of the universe based on centuries of experience, carefully passed down from generation to generation.

Leuven professor Georges Lemaître penned these words a century ago to the day. And just a few years later, he would go on to formulate his Big Bang theory. His quote is the spark of inspiration behind *Imagining the Universe*, the main exhibition of the BANG! Big Bang City Festival hosted by the university town of Leuven.

Tying it all together is humanity's enduring sense of awe for the cosmos.

Leuven University Library's *To the Edge of Time* exhibition is the next chapter of that story, revealing what all that wonder has produced until now. In addition to these exhibitions, M is also hosting a solo exhibition by Richard Long. The exhibition is part of BANG! – Leuven's city festival in celebration of the Big Bang theory's discovery. BANG! is a city festival and KU[N]ST Leuven initiative in collaboration with diverse culture, science, and tourism sector players.

EVERLASTING AWE

*For my part, I know nothing with any certainty,
but the sight of the stars makes me dream.*
Vincent van Gogh (Arles, 1888)

Who are we, and what is our place in the universe? These fundamental questions have moved people since the dawn of time. For thousands of years, we have projected those questions onto the starry sky. Mythology, religion, the arts, and science have come up with a host of answers so diverse it beggars the imagination. And every imagined universe invites us to connect with the great unknown. At the root of every attempt to get to the bottom of this mystery is a deep longing for security. What persistently wins out, however, is a profound sense of our insignificance amid the majesty of the cosmos. There is only one constant – our everlasting awe of the universe.

Curator Jan Van der Stock and his team of art historians (Illuminare - Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Art, KU Leuven) co-created a captivating look at the wide range of answers proposed to these seminal questions over the centuries.

One hundred genuine masterpieces reveal how the visual arts and sciences were the seedbed of answers in Europe and the Arab world. And the fertile intersection of observation and imagination is what empowered them to pose the right questions and formulate answers. The exhibition homes in on this close encounter, where astonishment and wonder are ever-present. The result is a long and winding ode to the arts and sciences.

THE UNIVERSE IN THE HANDS OF THE ALMIGHTY: THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1: 'on the first day' (6th century BCE)

The universe depicted and understood by the Christian world is based on the Jewish tradition from which it came, starting with the Torah and the book of Genesis [Bereishit]. Genesis opens with a story that immediately draws the reader into an encounter with the universe: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. This is not a historical narrative that naively explains how life and the universe came about. Today, we view it as literary and poetic imagery dealing with the orchestration of a boundless cosmos. This liturgical-sounding text was written six centuries before Christ (Common Era). It generated conflict with neighbouring Mesopotamian religions by depriving the heavenly bodies of their traditionally divine status. At the same time, the story positions humans as – 'made in the image and after the likeness of God' at the centre of the universe.

THE UNIVERSE IN THE HANDS OF THE ALMIGHTY: THE GRECO-ROMAN TRADITION



Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri)
Atlas holding up the celestial globe,
1646
© Musei Civici Fiorentini, Museo
Stefano Bardini

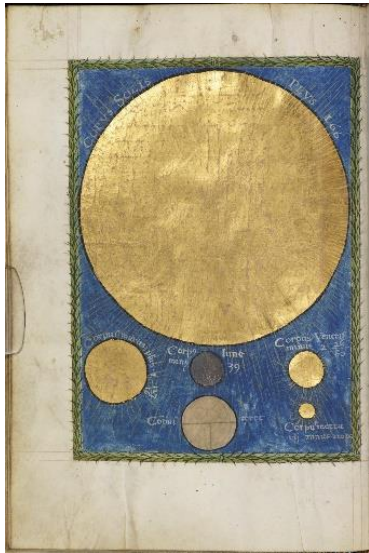
*When all the other animals, downcast looked
upon the earth,
he [Prometheus] gave a face raised on high to
man, and
commanded him to see the sky and raise his
high eyes to the stars.*
Ovid (Metamorphoses, Rome, 1st century CE)

The Greek and Roman Ancients unfolded the tale of the universe's creation and described its appearance through countless myths recounted all over the world. A pantheon of gods and goddesses, responsible for governing the moral order of life on Earth, populated the cosmos. These stories from antiquity served as an inexhaustible fount of inspiration for artists well into the seventeenth century.

AN INCOMPARABLE HERITAGE: THE EURO-ARAB VISION OF THE UNIVERSE

*Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.
Gaze at the beauty of the Earth's greenings. Now, think.*
Paraphrase of Hildegard of Bingen (ca. 1170)

The Greek astronomer Ptolemy of Alexandria laid the scientific groundwork for the geocentric model of the universe around 150 CE, in part inspired by the prior work of predecessors such as Aristotle (400-300 BCE). The geocentric model claimed that Earth was the centre of the universe. In his treatise, *The Almagest*, Earth is a sphere at the centre of the cosmos; the moon, planets, sun, and stars revolved around it in a complex system of concentric circles. This was the underlying concept of the European and Arab portrayal of the universe that persisted for over



1,500 years, well into the sixteenth century. In the West, the geocentric model was reinforced by Christian beliefs about creation and was passed down through the generations. Muslim astronomers also enriched the world's knowledge with their meticulous observations of the passage of the heavenly bodies. These observations allowed them to correct Greek astronomical errors. Byzantium, Spain, and southern Italy were gateways through which Islamic astronomy passed into Europe, made popular by a handful of texts translated into Latin. An impressive amount of classical Greek science was also translated from Arabic to Latin, allowing it to find an audience in Western Europe.

The Sun, Mars, Earth, Venus, the Moon, and Mercury in: Christianus Prolianus, *Astronomia* Naples, 1478
© University of Manchester, Rylands Medieval Collection

THE UNIVERSE ON A HUMAN SCALE

*A physician without a knowledge
of astrology has no right to call himself a physician.*
Hippocrates of Chios, ca. 400 BCE

The idea that macrocosm and microcosm are intimately connected was depicted as early as Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek Antiquity, which assumed humans to be the centre of the universe. The individual is the 'small world' (microcosm) that reflects the 'large world' of the universe (macrocosm). 'Cosm' or cosmos means the

harmonic order or interdependence of the parts in an organic system. For instance, phenomena and events observed in the macrocosm affect the microcosm. Astrologers saw omens in the position of the heavenly bodies that presaged events that would take place on Earth. Solar and lunar eclipses and the planetary alignment held sway over the fate of individuals and territorial domains alike.

IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Creating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting points and its rich environment.

Albert Einstein (Princeton – New Jersey, 1938)

The eternal sense of awe at the splendour of the universe was and remains the most powerful incentive for continually assessing old beliefs against new notions and fine-tuning how we imagine the universe.

In 1543, Copernicus was the first to devise a mathematical model in which the Earth and other planets revolved around the sun. He believed that the sun, not the Earth, was the centre of the universe. Over half a century later, Johannes Kepler improved this heliocentric model to provide a highly accurate description of planetary movements. Galileo then confirmed Copernicus' understanding with his first telescope observations in 1610. And in 1687, Newton's theory of gravity eradicated the last vestiges of opposition to heliocentrism. Newton proved that the celestial bodies attract each other. Copernicus' visionary imagination, Kepler's meticulous calculations, Galileo's telescopic observations, and Newton's foundational theories radically altered how we look at the universe. And so, humanity invented a new place for itself in the universe.



The exhibition rounds off with the greatest scientific achievements of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Western astronomers. They have been symbolically arranged around the lens of the telescope used by Christiaan Huygens in 1655 to discover Titan, Saturn's first moon. On that lens, he had a verse by the Roman poet Ovid, engraved: *Admovere Oculis Distantia Sidera Nostris* - 'They brought the distant stars closer to our eyes.'

Copernican illustration of the universe in: Andreas Cellarius, Harmonia macrocosmica seu Atlas universalis et novus ... Amsterdam, 1660.
© Amsterdam University Library

AND THAT'S NOT ALL ...

- Lecture 'Everlasting Wonder' 04.11.21
- Lecture 'Imagining the Universe – The Marquise and the Philosopher – The Universe as Theatre' 18.11.21

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

M presents an array of lectures, debates, and gatherings related to the exhibitions. Two lectures will be hosted at M in tandem with the Imagining the Universe exhibition.

Thursday 4 November – 'Everlasting Wonder'

- Speaker: Curator and Prof. Jan Van der Stock (KU Leuven)
- 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
- Location: M (please note that capacity is limited)
- Language: Dutch
- Registration: mandatory, per bubble

Tickets and booking via

<https://www.mleuven.be/nl/denkvoer-eeuwige-verwondering>

Thursday 18 November – 'Imagining the Universe – The Marquise and the Philosopher – The Universe as Theatre'

- Speaker: Prof. Em. Geert Vanpaemel (KU Leuven history of science studies)
- 18.11.21 | 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.
- Location: M (please note that capacity is limited)
- Language: Dutch
- Registration: mandatory, per bubble

Tickets and booking via

<https://www.mleuven.be/nl/universum-als-theater>

RICHARD LONG

Richard Long (b. 1945), one of Britain's most influential artists, has altered our perception of sculpture. In his work, he repurposes natural materials such as stone and wood as archetypes of the universe and the cosmos.

More than anything, Long has made walking the medium of his art, with nature and vast landscapes as the wellspring of his inspiration. On his long rambles around the world, he often stops to create sculptures along the way, as traces of his passing and transformation. The geometric shapes that make up these pieces simultaneously emphasise the order and multiplicity of the cosmos. They can be taken as metaphors for existence and an expression of his thoughts on locations, travel, distance, time, space, and movement.

'If you undertake a walk, you are echoing the whole history of mankind, from the early migrations out of Africa on foot that took people all over the world.'

Richard Long

Richard Long is fascinated by contemporary ideas and prehistory. He employs classical geometric shapes such as circles and lines in relation to deserts, mountains, coastlines, grasslands, rivers, and snowy landscapes. Transience is a crucial element in his nature-based pieces. In addition to his own footprints, Long mainly works with rough-hewn chunks of volcanic rock, driftwood, water, and – from time to time – slate. His indoor creations in mud, made from his own handprints, can be seen as allusions to prehistoric cave paintings. Richard Long describes all his separate works as simple despite the inherent complexity contributed by the diverse media used, i.e. photography, writing, sculptures, publications, drawings, and mudwork.

Curator: Eva Wittocx

The exhibition is part of BANG! – Leuven's city festival in celebration of the Big Bang theory's discovery.

BANG! the Leuven Big Bang City Festival is a KU[N]ST Leuven initiative and joint venture of KU Leuven and the City of Leuven where enthrallment with the universe and its effect on culture and science take centre stage.



© Richard Long; Courtesy Lisson Gallery.
Photography by James Wainman.

BIOGRAPHY

Sir Richard Julian Long (b. 1945) is an English artist who calls Bristol both home and workplace.

He studied at Saint Martin's School of Art in London. In 1976, he represented England at the Venice Biennale. Long is the recipient of multiple prestigious awards and has an impressive repertoire of global exhibitions. His works can be found in pre-eminent public and private collections all over the world.

SCULPTURES

During his rambles through nature, Richard Long makes interventions in the landscape. By restricting his intervention to materials from his surroundings, he makes nature the subject and substance of his work. The Earth itself becomes a sculpture.

However, characterising Long as an 'artist in nature' ostensibly leads to a paradox. How and what does he exhibit in a museum context? The indoor sculptures or floor pieces he exhibits are one answer. They are composed of natural stone or driftwood, arranged in basic geometric shapes such as circles, ovals, or rectangles. The materials come straight from nature, creating a literal encounter between nature and the museum. They are an extension of what Long does on his walks, making small interventions or leaving a trail in the environment behind; only this time, the museum gallery is the environment.

The scripted ruggedness of the sculptures primarily appeals to our senses, a reminder that we are physically tethered to the planet. *Basalt Ellipse* (2000) is composed of basalt, an igneous volcanic rock that has made its way from the Earth's core to the surface – a witness to nature's immense power and infinite beauty. The sculptures also have a powerful physical presence, but not necessarily from a conventional perspective. For instance, their weight and how they materialise gravity are uniquely palpable.

However, they are also symbolic of nature with shapes that allude to the Earth and other celestial bodies. A summary of the universe.



Richard Long, *Basalt Ellipse*, 2000, courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie © photo Daniel Steinfeld, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

PHOTOGRAPHY AND TEXTWORKS

Walking is at the heart of Richard Long's work. He has been taking walks through lonely, overgrown wildernesses and landscapes since the late 1960s. While on these journeys, he cuts himself off entirely from the outside world; he travels alone, whether for a few days or weeks, setting up camp in nature. He is on a quest for a radical connection with his environment and the Earth as a whole. And whenever he goes, he always deliberately leaves a mark behind – a sign that he was there – be it a line walked through the grass or snow, an arrangement of stones, or a carpet of sand blanketing the ground. To avoid marring the natural order and accentuate it instead, he keeps his interventions carefully circumscribed.

While on and based upon his walks, Richard Long takes photographs and creates 'textworks'. On the one hand, they transform the abstract, ephemeral nature of the walk into something tangible, a thing that can also be shared with an audience. The photographs are captioned, referring to the where and when of Long's presence. That forms a touchstone for the observer's imagination and makes concepts such as distance, time, scale, and space comprehensible. On the other, the texts are like poems that translate the impressions formed by the artist on a walk and information about the journey into a rhythmic cadence of words. His work bears witness to a unique bond between nature, people, and the universe, distilled in simple images and shapes.

Richard Long is exhibiting two kinds of textworks at M Museum – a selection of framed texts and four textworks mounted or adhered to the exhibition walls, transforming them into spatial art. The textworks on the wall engage in dialogue with the monumental sculptures and mud art. Their size was determined in relation to the M spaces and other artworks in the gallery. The specific works on M's walls were selected to highlight the link between nature and space or the universe.



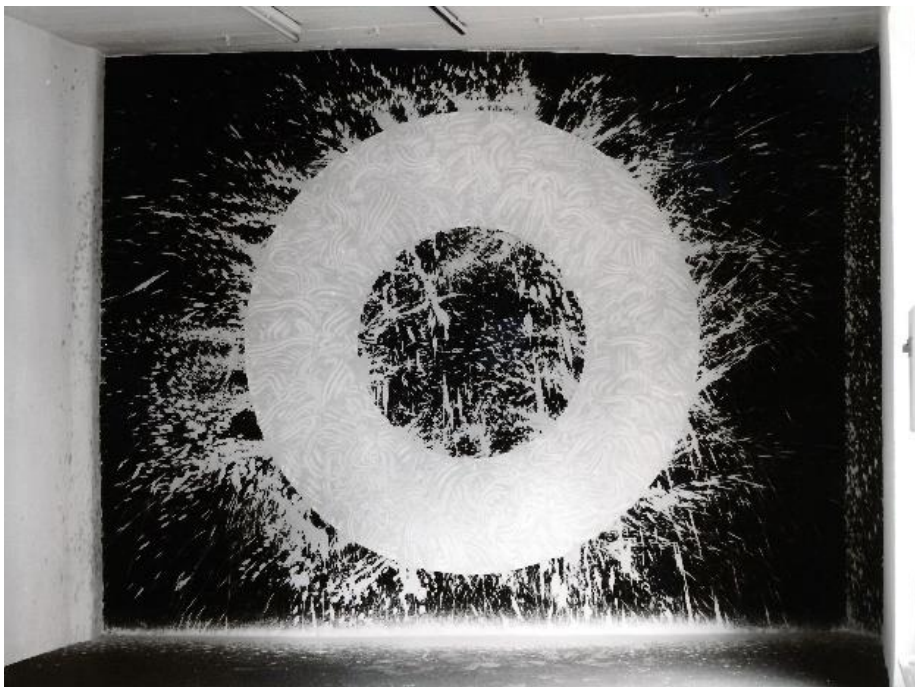
© Richard Long, Time and Distance Distance and Time 2014, courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie

MUDWORK

Richard Long works exclusively with materials found in nature. His forays into wall art are no exception. The piece in this gallery is made of mud, which Richard Long literally applied by hand. His process is intuitive and straightforward; he applies mud to the wall, allowing it to splatter and drip down under gravity's influence. Some compositions are reminiscent of waterfalls. The accelerated pace at which he works is clear from his random streaks, splatters, fingerprints, and impressions.

Long will create two new mud works at M – one, a geometric shape on the tall wall in gallery 1.F, and another, waterfall-like piece, on a black background in gallery 1.E. They allude to basic elements of the universe – a planet, soil, and water.

Richard Long's use of mud is self-explanatory. A natural material, it is made of soil and water. Long has been playing with mud in the River Avon, in Bristol – where he grew up and still lives – since he was a boy. The compositions of his mudwork express who he is as an individual artist, on the one hand, while being deliberately designed to evoke broader associations, on the other. Mud can be found all over the earth, and the paintings are composed of basic, esoteric shapes, such as the line and circle. The dripping of the mud renders gravity visible. The pieces are also site-specific, given that Long creates a new, unique mudwork for every exhibition. And after the exhibition ends, the pieces at M will vanish.



© Richard Long; Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photography by Ken Adlard.

WORKS

SCULPTURES

Black White Green Pink Purple Circle

1998

Swiss and Italian stone

650 cm diameter

Courtesy Galerie Tschudi

Basalt Ellipse

2000

Basalt stone

696 x 280 cm

Courtesy Konrad Fischer Galerie

Rhine Driftwood Line

2001

Driftwood

Courtesy Konrad Fischer Galerie

Quiet Skies Circle

2020

Delabole slate

220 cm diameter

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

TEXTWORKS

These textworks do not have a fixed size:

The Space of Time

160,7 x 675 cm

Kilimanjaro Mississippi

350 cm x 196 cm

Perpetual Motion

102,7 x 160 cm

Space Earth
195,6 x 400 cm

Framed textworks:

Cuckoo Walk
2014
159 x 105,5 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Entropy Stones
2004
160 x 109 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Anywhere
2008
112 x 176 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Moon Walk, England
2010
89 x 145 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

MUDWORK

Two mud pieces will be created in situ by the artist in October 2021 at M Leuven.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Blowing in the wind
1981
Photo
92 x 117 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Passing by, Warli Tribal Land Maharashtra, India
2003
Giclée print on Somerset paper
81,5 x 118 cm
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Leopard, Warli Tribal Land Maharashtra, India

2003

Giclée print on Somerset paper

81,5 x 121,5 cm

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Footpath Waterline, India

2003

Giclée print on Somerset paper

81 x 121 cm

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Flash Flood, South Africa

2004

Colour photograph with text

84,5 x 129 cm

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Granite

2005

Colour photograph with text

88 x 129 cm

Courtesy Konrad Fischer Galerie

Lull before a Storm, Pride before a Fall

2007

Colour photograph with text

87 x 129 cm

Courtesy Konrad Fischer Galerie

Rolling Stones, An Eleven Day Walk in Norway 2008

2008

Photograph and handwritten text

82 x 112 cm

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tigerline

2010

Photograph and text

85 x 113 cm

Courtesy Galerie Tschudi

Engadine Line

2013

Photograph and text

84,5 x 102,5 cm

Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Larksong Line

2015

Photograph and handwritten text

90 x 144 cm

Courtesy Galerie Tschudi

PRACTICAL

M LEUVEN

Vanderkelenstraat 28

3000 Leuven

+32 (16) 27 29 29

info@mleuven.be

www.mleuven.be

Plan your route to the museum

By bike

Cyclists are welcome! Parking is easy. Just use the secure underground bicycle parking at Rector de Somerplein. From there, it's just a two-minute walk to the museum.

Via public transport

The museum is a ten-minute walk from Leuven Station. Rector de Somerplein is the closest stop if you're coming by bus. Use Google Maps to plan your route.

By car

Leuven's new circulation plan leads you into the city and car parks via a series of rings. Would you prefer to avoid the city's traffic? Just park your car at one of the car parks on Leuven's outskirts and catch a free bus to the centre. Prefer to park nearby? The Ladeuze car park is only a two-minute walk from the museum. There are also 18 spaces for disabled passengers (higher clearance: 1.90 m). [Click here](#) for more information on the circulation plan and parking options.

CONTACT

Hanne Grégoire
Head of Press & Communications
hanne.gregoire@mleuven.be
+32 (0)472 95 52 26

Samantha Fadahunsi
Press & Communications Officer
samantha.fadahunsi@mleuven.be
+32 (0) 491 35 02 95

Link webpage:

<https://www.mleuven.be/en/imagining-the-universe>
<https://www.mleuven.be/eng/richard-long>

Link Prezly:

High-resolution images can be downloaded at the bottom of this press release:
<https://mleuven.prezly.com/media>