

The First Day

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“On the first day, God created light in the darkness.”

Genesis stories are a part of virtually every culture, with human imagination aiming to solve the mysteries of the creation of our world and existence, seeking to give direction and meaning to our lives. The theme of light is ever present in bringing about the first day, but in a most general way “a universe comes into being when a space is severed” (Spencer-Brown). As such, modern scientific cosmogony follows in these footsteps: the big bang as an explosive severance of an original singularity; the CMB (cosmic microwave background) or relic radiation as a universal shimmer of light remaining from the moment the first atoms formed and the universe became transparent; the birth of the first stars some 13.6 billion years ago, which the James Webb Space Telescope promises to capture live.

Even if we see resemblances, modern cosmogony does not pertain to give direction and meaning to our existence, for it has cut all its ancient ties with cosmology. Science, its foundation, provides means, but neither meaning nor ends. And thus, we today might side with the 18th century German physicist and philosopher Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who, when learning of Wilhelm Herschel’s discovery of Uranus as the first new planet since antiquity, wrote in his *sudelbücher*: „To invent an infallible cure for toothache by which it might be immediately arrested, could well be worth as much and more than the discovery of yet another planet. “ THE FIRST DAY features work by Sarah Anelle Schönfeld, Guðny Guðmundsdóttir, Björg Thorsteinsdóttir, Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir, Anna Júlía Friðbjörnsdóttir and Erla S. Haraldsdóttir, presenting a reflection on the human condition and our place in the cosmos. These works open our imagination to fathom the vast and strange expanse of the universe and its possible worlds, with our earth sitting seemingly calm in its time/space vortex. And they direct the view to the other side of creation, our seemingly supreme directive to, as Genesis 1.28 has it, subdue the earth, and the futures this may bestow on us.

ASS (2022) by **Sara Anelle Schönfeld** (1979) is an abstract adaptation of the ancient future-telling method of reading coffee grounds. Aspirin is pulverized and blown onto a screen, resulting in a constellation of particles that can be analyzed and interpreted. Using the pharmaceutical ASS as a translational ether and computational screens as new event horizons, we might reframe our unasked questions about human and nonhuman cosmologies.

Guðný Guðmundsdóttir’s (1970) **Terrestrial Studies** (2020) remind us of how our earth is a spinning ball, as evidenced by the vortex of the northern hemisphere counter rotating to that of the southern hemisphere, earth itself being the center of a time/space vortex. We see the

same moment from infinite perspectives, pieces revolving on the fluidity of existence, mapped,

re-mapped, broken down to the smallest common denominator, picked up, and put back together. The same pieces but each a different perspective - endless cycles around the same axis line.

A more alien perspective is found in **Björg Thorsteinsdóttir's** (1940 –2019) works from her **Genesis** series (1977). At first sight clear and austere, these graphics allude to strange geometries, other cosmic dimensions, impossible worlds, or the infinite small of electron microscope images. But countering the clarity of geometric lines and circles, there is also a tension, a dynamic, a scale both in duration and size that we cannot grasp, an uncanny hint of a possibly microcosmic, macrocosmic or inorganic liveliness far beyond our imagination and our human world.

The Golden Ship (2016) by **Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir** (1973) is a model of a fish troller covered in 23.75 karat Rosenoble gold leaves. Many seaside communities' economies rely on fishing, having long abandoned the picturesque fisher boats of old. The harvest of fish in the sea has become thoroughly industrialized, an industry with a global yearly production of 180 million tons, valued at almost 400 billion US-\$, the fishing trawler being its symbol. In the same vein, **The Golden Ship** alludes to the global rise of capitalism by maritime exploration, exploitation and trade ever since the “discovery” of America and the sea-route to the East Indies. It is the vessel of the quest for new territories to discover, new worlds to conquer and new riches to seize, beyond the sea and in the skies above.

Anna Júlía Fridbjörnsdóttir's (1973) work **Speed of Light** (2021) consists of irregular-shaped and hand-made beads of bone ash and stone clay threaded onto a string forming a Morse code where a single bead stands for a dot and three continuous beads a dash. They spell out the digits of the exact numerical for the speed of light, 299 792 458m/s (written: 299792458 ms-1). That light has a definite speed which is the same for every observer was first proposed by Albert Einstein in 1905 as part of his Theory of Special Relativity. It means nothing less than that there is not space AND time, only spacetime; it means that time can dilate, and space contract; it means that there is an equivalency between mass and energy, as expressed in the formula $E = mc^2$, with the constant c being the speed of light.

First Day (2016) and **Binary Solarsystem Fourth Day** (2017) by **Erla Haraldsdóttir** (1967) appear if the artist had shifted from contemplating a scene to painting the subject from within the point in the biblical text where light comes into being, where water is separated from water, where dry land emerges and the earth brings forth plants. What we see is a meeting between the Creator and the creative artist in which the story of creation unfolds. The Hebrew word used for the Creator's achievement can mean both “create” and “play”. In play, we use our imagination to test, deepen and transform reality. As such, this reenactment of the subject of creation is clearly marked by the exploration and experimentation characteristic of play, transforming the “nostalgia for the primordial” (Eliade) into a presence.

Text, Dr. Jochen Steinbicker