



Philly-based artist becomes oceanic explorer and advocate

By Matteo Iadonisi | Monday, September 25, 2023 6:00PM

PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania (WPVI) -- "For over 20 years, I've been creating work inspired by the natural world," said Rebecca Rutstein.

The Philadelphia-based artist is known for her paintings, sculptures, and murals.

Commuters on the Schuylkill Expressway may already be familiar with her piece, "Convergence." The electric-blue wall, flanked by rainbow polygons, famously sits on the river with a backdrop of the Philadelphia skyline.

Rutstein became fascinated with geology during college and started dreaming of exploring the ocean. Fortunately, her creativity charted a map towards achieving her goal.

"In 2015, I ended up for the first time on a research vessel actually collaborating with scientists exploring the deep ocean," she said. "We were at sea for three weeks."

While at sea, Rutstein created art using paint and the motion of the ocean. She also learned more about what lay beneath the surface and became more curious.

In 2018, she had the chance to take two trips beneath the surface in the HOV Alvin, a deep-ocean submersible commissioned in 1964 as one of the world's first-of-its-kind.

According to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), Alvin is part of the National Deep Submergence Facility (NDSF) and can facilitate data collection by scientists as far as 6,500 meters deep.

"It was a dream come true," said Rutstein. "The experience of going down 2,200 meters, taking an hour and a half to sort of sink down to the bottom, it really gives you a sense of the magnitude of this place."

Rutstein became fascinated with networks of microbes working their chemical magic on the ocean floor. She decided to incorporate that imagery into her artwork once back on land.

"A lot of my work is sort of replicating or thinking about these networks, shedding light on these hidden systems in the natural world that connect everything," she said, "As a means to foster more empathy and ultimately stewardship of the natural world in the face of our changing climate."

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For example, her piece, Shimmer, is a steel sculptural installation fit with LED lights and motion sensors. It is located at the Georgia Museum of Art.

Closer to home, "Sky Terrain" is situated on the campus of Temple University. The installation depicts floating clouds that light up the exterior of a parking garage.

And much further from home, Rutstein plans to take a third trip with Alvin under the sea in the Spring.

"I'm very grateful to have these opportunities and I want to take it back into my studio and create work that can really inspire people," she said.

Full article: <https://6abc.com/philly-proud-artist-oceanic-explorer/13816618/>