

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



From Above and Below: Photographs by Sharon Harper
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Reviewed by Daniel W Coburn



Philosopher Alan Watts wrote, "Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself. Through our ears, the universe is listening to its harmonies. We are the witnesses through which the universe becomes conscious of its glory, of its magnificence."

There is no doubt that Sharon Harper's work bears testament to the magnificence of the cosmos. We are accustomed to seeing images of our solar system made with high-powered telescopes. Many of them are sent beaming back to the Earth's atmosphere from satellites or from unmanned spacecraft to provide scholars with invaluable scientific data. However, the profundity and poetry of Harper's work lies in her rejection of the photograph as a vessel of evidence or truth. Instead her photographs embrace the fallibility of the camera as an instrument of science, conceding to human impulses of creativity, curiosity, and discovery.

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Like a painter, Harper uses the light from stars and other celestial bodies to scribe lines across the sky. She creates multiple exposures of the moon in its various phases over ethereal landscapes. Seemingly unsatisfied with her view from the ground, she makes pictures in flight. We are presented with photographs of the distant earth and of the heavens from her place somewhere in between. At times, they are meditative and spiritual, similar to paintings by Mark Rothko or William Turner. But, these pictures are as much about the subject matter as they are about the act of making a photograph. She does not disguise vignettes or reflections created by the lens or telescope. Clamp marks and punctures at the edge of the film become essential elements of composition. As Phillip Prodger points out in the prologue, "The photographs record the act of observation as much as the things observed." These works are a collaboration between artist, machine and the celestial.

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From Above and Below is sophisticated and simple in its design, complete with informative essays by Jimena Canales and Phillip Prodger. Harper's images are beautifully reproduced and sequenced over 120 pages with 40 color illustrations. This book is a great addition to my library and its one that should be on your bookshelf as well.

Daniel W. Coburn is a photographer and graduate student at the University of New Mexico.

<http://fractionmagazine.com/reviews/coburn-harper#.UT-ATxxQEnV>