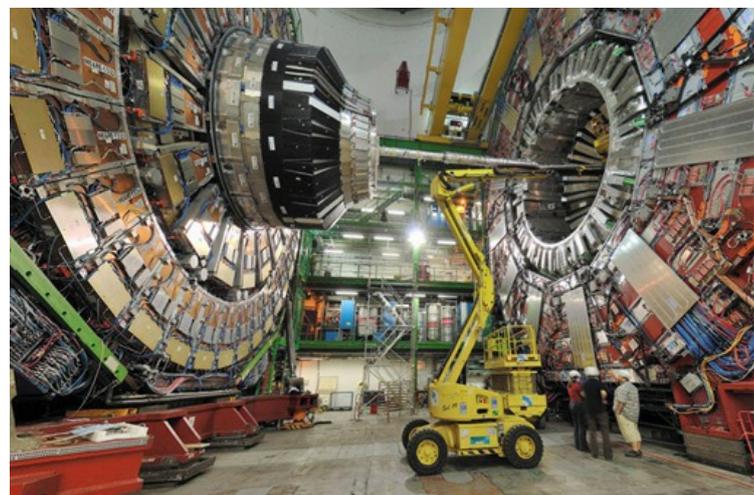
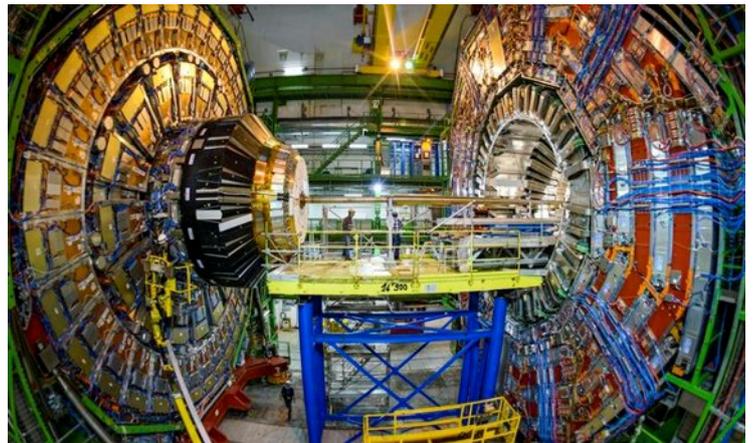


Icelandic Journey

by Sarah Firmin

This is the year of LIGHT and also of DARK since the eclipse of the sun took place on March 20th and another will not occur for 67 years in this country.

The history of darkness is now taking on a new twist with experiments at CERN and the hunt is now on for dark matter or in scientific terms the hypothetical, WIMPS or weakly interactive massive particles. In the Large Hadron Collider streams of positively charged protons are accelerated in both directions around the 27 kilometre long tunnel, until they are finally brought to a head on collision in the giant Atlas and CMS detectors. Now that the LHC is being restarted after an upgrade that has taken two years, it will be running at twice the energy. The hunt is now on for Dark energy but this is still unknown territory and we are reaching back into the first nano seconds of the 'big bang'. In 2008 when the Large Hadron Collider started up I began a



project called COSMIC. The project takes the form of paintings and digital drawings and is being added to from time to time. They are not copies of NASA photographs or illustrations but are personalised images as seen by an artist rather than a scientist. Stephen Hawking's new light on black holes made these concepts more real to people like me who are steering around the edges of science and informed my art work. The pieces are based on the belief that as human beings we undergo the same energetic processes as the universe and are made of the same material as stars.



Dark Energy Acrylic , Ink, watercolour, oil pastel, metallic 110 x 150 cm.

Interestingly enough dark and light have been at the centre of art investigation for decades and Light has been traditionally a cornerstone of visual art involving effects of light, shadow, space, climate, materials, affects of time and so forth. It is now 100 years since Einstein proposed that light not only travelled in waves but could also be represented as discrete particles of energy called photons. A photon is the smallest amount of energy that can apply to any form of electromagnetic energy and that over vast distances was not straight as Newton

thought but bent in space by gravity. Proof came from Sir Arthur Eddington's expedition to Africa in 1919. It recorded a total solar eclipse, and light from very distant stars was deflected by the Sun's gravity so they did not appear in their expected position. These predictions alongside the general theory of relativity revolutionised the scientific basis which was now called quantum physics. Now of course as is the nature of change and discovery we are after the mysteries of the smallest, the subatomic, as well as the biggest, the cosmic.



Light Energy Acrylic, Oil, chalk 110 x 150 cms

However, what intrigues me is that analogous discoveries in art practices happened almost simultaneously. The rigid central one point perspective was virtually abandoned by the end of the 19th century in favour of relative viewing points. Theories and works produced by cubism, the futurists and vorticists all involved the distortion of shapes and portrayal of effects of time, energy and change on materials used. Now we are existing in an open-ended field of vision. With some of this in mind I decided that I had to see the Northern lights, so four of us got together, and spent 4 days and nights in Iceland. Andrea Carr

scenographer, the word now for theatre designer, Karen Hann, former high powered business woman from Toronto, with a devotion to animals and wild life, Peter Williams photographer and I searching dark and light in any form, set out for Reykjavik and after some treacherous sliding and driving along mountain roads in the dark found our hide out on the side of a volcanic mountain in Illagil pingvellir National Park.



We did not see the lights as it so happened, but this was amply made up for by experiencing the extreme, awesome beauty of black volcanic mountains patterned by snow, extremely unusual quick changing weather from snowing, hailing, raining, sleeting and hurricane winds and an equally extreme isolation of being at least 50 miles away from townscape or human scape. We stayed in a wooden cottage on the side of a mountain with windows on all sides almost like a lighthouse. A stunning description of the Northern lights was given to us by Karen who stayed on an additional day in Reykjavik (see below).

My most memorable moments are: never having seen so many bright stars in an endless blackness and having the planet Venus practically sitting outside my window as a regular nightly visitor, big, round, and sexy. Drawings of changing snow patterns, standing next to a thermal vent belting out sulphur, (not so good) otherwise the cleanest air I have ever breathed, the stark black and white

mountains, drawing my own imagined version of the Northern Lights from sitting up most nights, and having to be held down on each side by two heavy weights to prevent my lift off when seeing the waterfalls. The blue lagoon is really pale blue.

Iceland is thermal with active volcanoes. It is the only place on earth where the tectonic plates can be seen splitting apart at sea level and this chasm can be swum in. We crossed over it where the America side meets the European side and a very flat plane can be seen with steep ridges each side of route 36.

It appears also, strangely enough, that Iceland's eco footprint is huge with lots of consumer tourist stuff and imports. You can follow this on the web/Iceland and its foot print/However recycling did happen from our isolated cottage.

Karen did not see wild life as walking in the weather conditions was sometimes impossible, but did see 3 white ptarmigan grouse and also delicate looking new growth of plants on the volcanic surfaces in an otherwise barren and treeless terrain.

A description of the lights as seen by Karen

"The best way I can describe the light is that it is like being under a glass dome...a very cold glass dome. It is almost as if someone were standing over the dome and pouring iridescent liquid over the centre. The liquid cascades over the dome slowly like its freezing in mid air ...sometimes it drips down in rivulets and sometimes it drips down in ..rivulets on most sides of the dome ..sometimes it concentrates on one side of the dome and sometimes cascading down all of it. Sometimes I saw the lights gently moving like they were being blown by a breeze and sometimes



Photo Peter Williams

they intensified and eventually faded. As when we saw them at the cottage they were mostly white, at least they did look white to me. Although, when I saw them at the hotel they did look green. I did try to take pictures with both my ipad and my camera, but as expected they just turned out black."