

Content: Venus, Web of Life, Gaia

Donna J. Cox

Working collaboratively with scientists revealed new visions, an enormous web of life unfolding through the integration of art and science, where bridges between disciplines are as important as the nodes. Interrelationships with others in the creative process were paramount to the research here.

Scientific visualization is a very conceptual and rational process where symbols represent real data. The visualization of the supercomputer simulations seemed more real than my individualist artwork. Yet, “real simulations” is an oxymoron and reflects key elements in postmodern thought: simulation is the map that has become the territory, and such visuals are icons of truth to the public.

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We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us about our ends, since ultimately we have never believed in them.

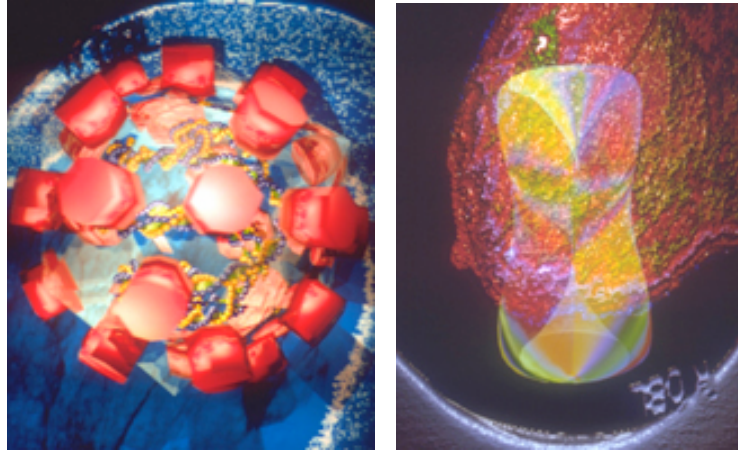
A myth offers the best of what it has when it ceases to dictate over reason and is released into the realm of possibilities. Myths offered playful possibilities in a transformed context. Many of these cosmological simulations appeared to me and my colleagues as Rorschach impressions of male and female forms. I often exhibited astrophysical images using alternate titles for the work. For example, I entitled an astrophysical jet *Cosmic Sperm*, and *Colliding Neutron Stars* appeared as Georgia O'Keeffe female flowers and Judy Chicago feminist art. People seem to have a propensity to identify male and female icons in these astrophysical forms.

There are potentially not only an infinite number of *pathways* in a brain but also an infinite number of *symbols*. As was pointed out, new concepts can always be formed from old ones, and one could argue that the symbols that represent such new concepts are merely dormant symbols in each individual, waiting to be awakened.

Collaborative work with George Francis, mathematician Ray Idazsak, computer programmer, resulted in the new raw material needed to build archetypal forms from mathematics. *Venus on Glass* presents geometric surfaces as figurines displayed on marble pedestals under glass. These activate into a protagonist character in the narrative, humorous animation, *Venus & Milo*. The Venus eats and burps chocolates in a synthetic postmodern art museum and mathematically transforms while interacting with Milo, the museum janitor.

Scientific forms, animations, and mathematics provided new ways to realize transformations. *Venus in Time* juxtaposes an ancient archetype to a postmodern supercomputer Venus. This juxtaposition implies many levels of transformation and alludes to change from representational form into abstraction. An individual hand created the Paleolithic Venus, while a collaborative team generated the supercomputer postmodern Venus.

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Papilloma Virus, Third Edition (1990) and *A Tribute to Sadie Elmo* (1988) PHSColograms by Ellen Sandor and Stephan Meyers, (art)ⁿ, in collaboration with Donna Cox, National Center for Supercomputing Applications, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

At (art)ⁿ, artistic collaboration is the primary mode of working and provides collective synergism for invention. Ellen Sandor acts as creative producer and director and organizes, coordinates, and participates with her creative team. *Human Papilloma Virus* was created in collaboration with Stephan Meyers and (art)ⁿ, representing female sexuality and issues surrounding cancer-causing HPV. Likewise, *A Tribute to Sadie Elmo* relates to female breast cancer. (art)ⁿ collaborations are some of the most important in the contemporary art world. Such interdisciplinary collaboration potentiates important educational directions.

Many of the visual icons produced for science became extremely popular with the public and are well-documented in media. *Visualization Study of the NSFnet* creates visual connection between the Internet and dendritic web of life. Likewise, *Garbage* delivers an animated environmental public-service announcement; however, its visual message also relates to Gaia and Mother Earth. The mythic-rational work incorporates rigorous techniques in scientific visualization as well as symbolic forms that extend beyond rational thought.

Excerpt from:

Malloy, Judy (2003). Women, Art & Technology. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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