

A CONVERSATION WITH LUIZA MILEWICZ

**SUBLIME LIGHT
CATALOGUE ESSAY BY
PROF. C.C. SORRELL**

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DISORDER GALLERY

**DOOR 108 CORNER OF STANLEY & BOURKE
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BY PROF. C.C. SORRELL

Tell us about your personal and artistic background.

I was born in Poland and emigrated to Australia at age 6. Although I came from a family of artists and always was interested in art, this was given more form when I attended high school and participated in Artexpress, working mainly in painting, mixed-media, and sculpture. After this, I attended UNSW Art & Design, where I obtained both Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Over this time, I had something of an eclectic trajectory, starting in textile arts under Liz Williamson and then deviating into jewellery under Wendy Parker. During the latter time, I became interested in the use of illuminating body ornamentation, which then evolved into fibre-optic sculpture for interior and commercial settings.

Subsequently, I completed a Bachelor's degree in teaching from the University of Notre Dame Australia, which led to high school teaching appointments in design, visual arts, and technology. Following this, I produced my two greatest works of art, which are my children. I currently juggle my time between these two and the evolution of the light paintings that are the subject of this exhibition.

Tell us a bit more about the evolution of your light paintings.

The respective titles of my Bachelor's and Master's degrees were "Motivations, Mechanisms, and Transformations of the Body Image" and "Illuminated Transformations: Light, Jewellery, and the Body". These titles reveal my long-standing interest in identity, particularly its transformation through body image and the accompanying conflicts between self-perception and persona. The personal and professional quest that motivated these explorations was underpinned by thoughts of interiority and hence the question "Who am I?" However, as I progressed, my journey diverged and led to ruminations of exteriority, which is to say my sense of being and thus the question "What am I?" This question was inspired by the births of my two children, which led to subsequent wider reflections on the processes of birth and the universal cycle of life as well as my place in the universe. These had a profound influence on both me and my work. As a result, it was my meditations on these concepts that led to the two trajectories that my work has followed.

In the first trajectory, my more overtly sculptural works incorporate light as a focal point but the light sources are housed within solid forms of cement mortar, Styrofoam, resin, and acrylic. These works provide the basis for the introduction of my growing interest in the spiritual themes of art. However, as this work progresses, I have gained a greater appreciation of the possibilities of acrylic as structural forms themselves as well as design surface. As acrylic can be transparent to translucent and it has colour potential, it allows me to utilise light and its associations as electromagnetic radiation and so a key aspect of the physics of the universe. Moreover, for myself as an artist, light becomes an essential medium and mechanism in my search for a unifying theme to embody concepts of our terrestrial and celestial environments.

The second trajectory is my present body of work, which is my light paintings. I feel that these works reveal an increasing coherence because they are invested with a set of synchronised themes. They feature the use of acrylic under uniform or accentuated illumination, individually or together. Most importantly, acrylic also provides the opportunity to incorporate the central motif of symmetry and its panoply of variations. So the integration of light, symmetry, and materials is critical because these are not only pervasive throughout the universe but also central foci of my artistic instincts.

Even so, there is bigger picture. You might ask: How can you get bigger than the universe? Well, I approach these works by combining both secular and spiritual aspects. From the secular perspective, while the design of these artworks develops intuitively, often using earthly themes such as ocean waves and landforms, considerable planning is required in terms of the light source, the materials, and the interaction of the former with the latter. From the spiritual perspective, I am fascinated by the diverse cultural and spiritual traditions throughout history, many of which have incorporated ideas of the symbolism of light and symmetry within conceptions of universal order. These elements are embodied in many of the motifs that I use, including the mathematical orchestration of creation, the implications of the golden ratio, the arithmetical foundation of orbital motion, the sacred geometric allusions of the five platonic solids, the purity of crystallography, the symbolism of mirrors and haloes, the mandala as a dreamscape, and the complex symmetry of the micro-mandalas of earthly diatoms.

What physical aspects were required to achieve this evolution in your works?

I've already mentioned that this chapter in my life was precipitated by the intellectual and emotional transition from "Who am I?" to "What am I?" What followed on were three developmental stages.

First, my previous bodies of work were conceived in terms of three-dimensional works in sculptural form. As nature always favours simplicity, I applied this in a form of reductivism to two dimensions. Although my light paintings could not be considered panel works, they are conceived as three-dimensional works in which the layered design gives them two-dimensional connotation as wall-hangings. Even so, they effectively are relief works that combine two- and three-dimensional elements. The layering is critical because it not only gives depth to the works but it also reveals details that transform the works.

Second, I had to rethink the materials that I was using. I felt that I was working well with cement mortar but moulding was complex and tedious. This led to explorations in Styrofoam but this eventually was superseded by resin and acrylic. In the end, as mentioned before, acrylic assumed a dominant role. It also offered the advantage that I could apply jewellery-making techniques to this lightweight material.

Third, in order to take advantage of the design possibilities of acrylic, it is necessary to be able to laser cut and engrave it. So this required me to develop the software skills to design the shapes and textures that I desired. I had explored industrial design techniques during my Master's degree, so it was a relatively easy progression to use Adobe

Illustrator to these ends. I was aided enormously by Geoff Whipp of B.A. & N. Whipp with the laser cutting and engraving. While I currently outsource the electronics and look after the circuitry myself, I also am collaborating with a company in the design of complete lighting units to integrate with my designs.

What is the role of aesthetics in your work?

In some parts of the art world, “aesthetics” is a bad word. In my case, it is essential. The universe is an amazing work of art of light, symmetry, and materials that is in complete harmony and balance with itself. The precision and regularity of stellar and planetary motions have given rise to many philosophies over the centuries. Our earthly environment, when left to its own devices, also displays equivalent wonders, from the shapes of waveforms to those of sand dunes. Both the secular and spiritual aspects of my work reference these forms of harmony and balance, which are inseparable from the beauty of nature. I feel that these works transmit the calm aesthetic presence of the universe.

What other influences play a role in your work?

My works are not limited solely to those that employ strict symmetry. In fact, the most recent of my works incorporate clear elements of asymmetry in them. I have been moving toward concepts of amorphous and fractal forms as a counterpoint to the symmetry often imposed on computer-based imagery because these beautiful forms also are part of nature. This attraction can be seen in my references to the irregular contour lines of topographical maps and isobaths of the ocean’s depth contours. As these elements are incorporated with other more symmetrical elements, this process brings together the contradiction of randomness combined with predictability, which appeals to me.

On a broader palette, I feel that the works come through me rather than from me. I hope that I can be something of an artistic conduit between my earthly environment, which I perceive as largely secular, and the universe, which I perceive in largely spiritual terms. In particular, I want to absorb my spiritual environment and project the connectivity of all things through my works. In so doing, I hope to find equanimity in my thoughts and feelings. Although my works won't last forever, they reference forever. In the end, the universe and spirit are forever. I would like to be part of that.

What do you see as the next stage of your artistic trajectory?

The first future direction is that, while my light paintings are conceived as three-dimensional works with two-dimensional overtones, it is clear that the layering provides the sculptural aspects of the works. Although the idea of a wall-mounted sculpture is not mainstream thought, I would like to challenge this limitation by examining the layering and other concepts to see where they take me.

Second, some of my early fibre-optic pieces made kinetic allusions. Some of the smaller forms responded to wind and the larger forms, which were chandeliers, used programmed lighting sequences to give motion to them. I soon expect to be able to incorporate some novel light-patterning ideas to the LED sheets that I currently use.

Third, I want to go big. There are so many possibilities of scale when you use light and lightweight materials. I suspect that the only limiting factor here is the market. For private acquisition, there are limitations. However, I harbour ambitions of institutional acquisition, where the sky is the limit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR PROF. C.C. SORRELL

Chris Sorrell is the Professor of Ceramic Engineering at UNSW Sydney. His interest in art and its history, technology, and conservation has been his main passion for over 50 years. He is keen on nearly all forms of art but has specialised in prints of the French Etching Revival (~1840-1930). He has prepared several artist's catalogues, written catalogue essays, and published articles on artists' work over the years. His current activities include the preparation of catalogues raisonnés of the French printmakers Edgar Chahine (1873-1947, three volumes), Gabrielle Niel (1831-1919), and Georges Rubel (1945-).

The present catalogue essay has been constructed from an unstructured interview held with Luiza on 6 February 2024, extensive preparatory notes that she prepared for him, and subsequent discussions with her.

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