

# Cosmos

**Laura Ball**  
**Jan 20 - Feb 25, 2023**

**DAVID B SMITH**  
GALLERY

**Denver, CO**  
**[davidbsmithgallery.com](http://davidbsmithgallery.com)**



# EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

## Laura Ball: Cosmos

1. **Cosmos**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 51 1/2 X 42 in.
2. **Tulpa**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 36 X 30 in.
3. **Gateway to the Caverns of Universal Knowledge (Seraph Mandala)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 30 X 22 1/2 in.
4. **War Horse - Picasso**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 51 1/2 x 34 1/2 in.
5. **War Horse - Mars**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 51 1/2 x 34 1/2 in.
6. **The Perfect Moment (Solar Mandala)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 20 x 16 in.
7. **Celestial Map**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 20 x 16 in.
8. **A Spark and a Rush**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 30 1/8 x 25 3/8 in.
9. **Primordial Echo**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 22 3/4 x 21 in.
10. **Master of Secrets (Lion Gates)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 24 3/8 x 20 1/8 in.
11. **The Burning One (Leopard Gates)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 30 x 22 in.
12. **Tiger Gates**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 25 1/4 x 22 1/2 in.
13. **In the Sun of the Heart (Red Wolf)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 51 1/2 x 32 1/2 in.
14. **Separation of Earth and Sky (Blake)**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 22 x 20 in.
15. **Portable Universe**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 20 x 20 in.
16. **Let the soft animal of your body, love what it loves**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 30 5/8 x 24 3/8 in.
17. **Space/Time**, 2022, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 21 x 17 in.
18. **Siberian Tiger Creature**, 2020, watercolor, ink, gouache, acrylic and graphite, 51 1/2 x 33 1/4 in.

The deep well of shared knowledge, the collective unconscious, is a familiar and ancient source that we all draw imagery from. It comes to us in mythic tales and Hero's journeys, primordial origin stories and archetypal dream worlds. At this depth the artist's creative energy taps in to cosmogonies and the realm of the spirit to weave deeply significant images. These new watercolors represent access points and maps to these primeval places we all have in common, a familiarity outside of logical explanation, as if connected to the mycelium of the universe. The pieces in "Cosmos" lead you in to the labyrinth and provide a golden thread to follow. As the Egyptians made maps of the underworld, these pieces are maps of gates and portals to the glowing inner spirit. Follow this thread to the subconscious, non-verbal places, the antipodes of our daily existence.

"Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas , its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian Basins."1 These dark and fecund spaces, where creativity simmers with potential, illuminate a cosmic expanse populated by unlikely, preternatural creatures. The creative spark sets off an outpouring of tumbling, weaving plants, animals and parts that populate an interconnected cosmos, spilling out from the place of shared knowledge and empathy, from a deep core of coexistence that we have neglected. To reconnect with the greater energetic ecosystem of our natural world we only need find the entrance to the labyrinth; here, I offer you the thread that might lead you inside.

- Laura Ball

1. Aldous Huxley, "Heaven and Hell", 1955



## Cosmos

- Moon moths - Spanish, Madagascar and Indian. The name actually comes from “moon” spots on the wings that look like ringed planets, and these moths are huge. The Madagascar moon moth (EN) - aka the Comet moth - is bright yellow and has long tails on the wings that look like the fiery tail of a comet.
- Moths - drawn to the light - to fire and to their destruction. They merge with and become the fire.
- The leopard’s tail is a version of Shesha, the king of serpents and a primordial being of creation (Hinduism). Shesha is said to hold all of the planets in the universe on his hood, which I have used thematically in the current body of work as an object of reflection or introspection.
- “Everything out of nothing” - Egyptian creation. The black void has the potential to become everything. Bits and parts replicate, cells divide, separate and expand. This melanistic (black) leopard leaps thru the void, with constellations inside, bound gravitationally. It grows stars, moons and planets then spews them into space. The void fills with eyes, looking, flying and knowing, ancient knowledge.
- My work is very slow to make since every little interaction has to be constructed to fit into the “structure” of the greater image. I weave stories into some sections, which, no one will ever know about. Here I have an octopus in camouflage-mode, with a black feather wreath around his “third-eye”. A green macaw makes a lighter color patch and is eaten by a black snake, while a second black snake is being eaten by a raven. Ravens can be terrifying (though beautiful) as I have watched so many of them pull baby birds from their nests.



## **Tulpa**

- Tulpa - a being, object or deity which is created through spiritual or mental powers. If you focus energy it will manifest. It is sentient. The idea originates in Tibetan and Indian Buddhism. Part of the use of this idea was to teach pupils that dieties were creations of the human mind. The idea of a “tulpa” in my work has been sort of a wish, to save species, to take advantage of myth and mystical/subconscious realms to provide refuge for creatures as they are extirpated from the reality of our planet.
- He is a gateway into golden light.
- He is an aura, an emanation from a spirit realm.
- Frenetic. Fast and energetic, disordered and anxiety driven. Frenzied.
- A few years ago I went to LACMA to view some work from the flat files in Lesile Jones’s office. She pulled out several little studies by Charles Christian Nahl. He had pages of lion drawings and the faces were so wonderful. The eyes were odd and the mane was so alive.
- His mouth revisits an older piece I made for an Alice in Wonderland themed show in LA a few years back. I made a Jabberwocky with a living grotto mouth.



**Gateway to the  
Caverns of Universal  
Knowledge (Seraph  
Mandala)**

- Seraphim - I have been making these symbols (supernatural angelic beings) for years and didn't know what they were. A friend posted a seraph charm or medallion? and it was clearly the image I had been making over and over. Mine were cats or serpents with feathers bursting out, like a flower shape, a wild-flower, but the silhouette was the same. A seraph is the guardian to the seat of a holy presence. A burning spirit barrier with golden wings that protects the holy but also blocks your path to finding it. It is a warrior. They appear in Judaism, Christianity and Islam with origins in Egypt in the "Uraeus iconography". When the Uraeus cobra (with the universe in its hood) has additional wings... It becomes a seraph-like figure.
- This mandala is topped with wild and endangered French Camargue horses. A seven headed horse, Uchchaisravas, the king of horses, is a steed of the king of the gods in Indian myth.
- Guarding grottos and deep space - places we have to enter to find the hidden gems of ancient knowledge - spaces within, not spaces out there, in heaven or hell. They are guarded, until you are ready to mount your steed and ride in, willing and ready to fight dragons or demons or whatever awaits.





### **War Horse - Picasso**

- Pair with Mars
- Picasso is a pint mustang from the wild horses in the Sand Wash Basin in Colorado. He is famous - wild, but named. I love that certain animals have the power to be recognized as individuals, we of course personify them, but we see some quality that we connect with and the myth of that animal with its “super-powers” will spread and gain fame.
- Wild horses are like the elements. This creature is filled with light, fire, air and water, boulders even. He moves with these active forces bound into shape, against the odds. He is a self contained eco system with passengers, souls, the wild. He IS space.
- Water. It isn't protected, yet, but it is diminishing, and we will suffer horribly for its scarcity.
- Lands that lose protection under the governing bodies that are in place to protect them.
- We humans make terrible custodians.
- The San Diego Museum of Art had a wonderful Impressionist show that I saw so many times. There was a tiny Odilon Redon Pegasus that fed into this horse. It had the brightest red and a rough way about it that felt spontaneous and “in motion”.



## War Horse - Mars

- I have a collection of images I find exciting or inspiring with several images of rearing horses carrying warriors into battle (one is a Disney magazine spread with Beckham as Prince Phillip from Sleeping Beauty with the Disney castle in the background). If you don't know about my life-long love of Disney - well - it runs very deep. We lived in Los Angeles when I was a kid.



- This is a Sorraia Horse, critically endangered and a rare ancient breed. I am so interested in these small populations that have ancient origins. They are like a living island. I might focus a body of work on this topic in the future. Sorraia horses are from the Iberian peninsula, Portugal, the Sorraia River Basin. They have primitive features (convex profile, and a black dorsal stripe, a dark muzzle and horizontal stripes on the legs. They have a bi-colored mane and tail that has black and buff colors streaked through. They are gorgeous.

- There is a wolf in me... fangs pointed for tearing gashes... a red tongue for raw meat... and the hot lapping of blood - I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will not let it go. Carl Sandberg, Wilderness

- Wild horses are so impressively wild. We don't think of them the way we think of wolves - but "Mars" is like a wolf. This horse has teeth for tearing gashes. I can feel the wind winding up the mane and tail - whirling the hair into a frenzy that would drive an animal mad and set them running - so dangerous and so beautiful. A primordial steed.

- A battering ram as a chest plate for battle.

- The creature is an ark, self contained and mobile.

- Scalloped armor - with holes for passengers. Like holes in a giant block wall that birds nest in. I visited a wall like this in Puerto Rico.

- Gashes and scars earned in battle.

A blanket of woven birds for a saddle with needle beaks that fuss and buzz and never lie still. Don't ride me.

He carries and keeps his dead. Skulls and bones - I - they tag along and rattle out a drum beat. War drums.



### **The Perfect Moment (Solar Mandala)**

- GOLD - bright solar energy
- I have been looking at William Blake a lot. His drawings and watercolors feel so personal and true. My grandmother loved his little watercolors, she pointed them out to me when I was little, probably at the Huntington Library, or one of the other museums near Pasadena. She took me to museums frequently when I was young.
- Solar mandala - the solar day boat carries the sun god across the sky. Guardians protect the sun and the boat from Apophis the serpent. (Egypt)
- The first sunrise was “the perfect moment”, the first light (or sound) that starts the process of creation. Other origin myth images include a golden fiery bird and a blue lotus rising above the waters. Space was created by separating the earth and the sky so the sun had “space” to rise for the first time.
- The sun crossing the sky is a life cycle, a journey. It is born in the morning as a child, mid day it reaches full strength and is a triumphant falcon. At night it is an old man and at sunset it dies. The sun’s flesh and soul pass into the underworld reviving the inhabitants there with its light. At night it is replaced by barques for the moon and the stars.
- As the creator had overcome darkness and chaos to create the world, the sun and its defenders had to subdue the monsters that embodied darkness and chaos each day/night.
- Golden ouroboros in the center. The symbol for eternity, an ancient symbol. Decay and regeneration.



## **Celestial Map**

- This is the original version of the cosmic eagle and cobra that I started repeating. It is all-knowing and ancient. That form is a portal into a thoughtful space. It means “Once upon a time...” and my mind fills in a story.
- In the abyss, the dark, the space before separation there was chaos and it was all woven and all one. It contained the potential for everything. This was a place of “primordial ooze” which, of course, is green like the slime of algae.
- The distant and unknown spaces - deepest jungle where no light reaches the soil - roiling fecundity, or waters so deep and dark that light is again strangled out and creatures have been left to create their own foggy appearance - ghosts of the deep waters - a place haunted by glowing liquid creatures.
- Ouroborous. Cycle of destruction and rebirth - constant. That is the cycle of the eternal universe.
- The Sorraia horse (CR) pulls a chariot across the sky and melanistic leopards at the bottom spray stars into the sky from their rosettes.



### **A Spark and a Rush**

- Small cosmic leopard - a white leopard instead of a black one. The Arabian Leopard (CR) was in Egypt, Sinai Peninsula but was extirpated in the 1990s. It is a creamy white, sand color.
- The piece spirals out from one of a few different compositions that I keep reusing, an image that is stuck in my head and that I will keep using until I satisfy some need to revisit it. The King Cobra (VU) with the cosmos in its hood (Uraeus serpent) facing a Bateleur Eagle (EN) from Southern Africa. They are bound in orbit with each other while the universe spirals out. Newly formed nebulae, suns and planets pour out to fill the universe.





## Primordial Echo

- I broke my left arm and right hand on August 11, 2020, right after starting this piece. So there was a long pause...Taking such a long break on this changed my ideas as it progressed. I was also reading about Jung and mandalas which altered my thoughts as well.
- Critically endangered crows - the Hawaiian Alala and the Guamanian Mariana Crow. The Alala is currently extinct in the wild, hard to imagine that crows could be pushed out of any ecosystem.
- Central black space with woven snakes and feathers at the bottom. The Chaos demon (Egyptian myth) weaves - makes me think of giant webs... living web or fabric. The whole piece reads like a web over a black hole to me now.
- Central deep grotto, dark hidden crystals. "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek..."

...beneath the floor of the comparatively neat little dwelling that we call our consciousness, goes down into unsuspected Aladdin caves. There not only jewels but also dangerous jinn abide: the inconvenient or resisted psychological powers that we have not thought or dared to integrate into our lives. Joseph Campbell, Hero With a Thousand Faces.

- A journal entry about my local crows: "This morning I was out front and I heard what I thought was a hawk circling around a giant pine tree in my neighbor's yard. I looked up and only saw a crow flying around and around, the sound was coming from him, not from a hawk. The call was a bit off, squeaky sort of, and thin, but the notes were all in the right places. A hawk flew in from the west and chased the crow away, it flew off making the shrill "squeak" that hawks make. The real hawk settled into a nest high up in the pine tree. I am assuming that the crow was attempting to trick the baby hawks into revealing their hiding spot."



### **Master of Secrets (Lion Gates)**

- Gate and guardian - the first one I made out of a trilogy - I used lots of gold.

- Mandala with “life” in center - and four pathways moving out.

A mandala should

have a more “graphic” pattern but this is populated by wild animals and they just don’t sit still. These mandalas work into the primal spaces for me - they must represent movement not formal pattern. In Egyptian myth the world is held up by four monkeys, and here it is held up by just one (terrifying) mandrill. The monkey god comes from a sculpture I saw at the Denver Art Museum a few years back. I copied the pose from that carved, wooden sculpture.

- The dome in a cathedral is a representation of God’s eye - all seeing and all knowing. I added the pattern of stars on a cobalt ground in the bottom pathway above the Mandrill. The whole round feels like it could be a dome, like it could oversee a religious ritual or ceremony. I refer to “religion” in the way that Joseph Campbell uses myth and religions as individualized cultural stories or versions of archetypal themes that run through all civilizations.

- The cats and birds in the center are Ocelots (EN in Texas), Bay cats (EN) and Coastal Cactus Wrens (petition for EN status pending). I went into Red Rocks outside of Las Vegas to find and photograph Cactus Wrens - they are one of my favorite birds.

- Labyrinth - old and unkept in the subconscious - overgrown with the accumulation of time. The way through can be dangerous and complex, you might have to crawl or scramble and you probably won’t even have a lighted torch. The hidden doorways, thick vegetation and monsters, the roadblocks and diversions are the challenges we face and fight at the thresholds of life.



### **The Burning One (Leopard Gates)**

- The Burning One is a mandala with a seraph at the top, a seraph covered with eyes. This piece is part of a trilogy of gates and keepers.
- A guardian over a gate with four quadrants.
- I recently learned that Jung described a mandala as a tree of life in the center of a garden (Eden). It has four rivers running out in different directions and is bound by a barrier with a flaming guardian. This mandala satisfies those requirements. I made these three mandalas before I came across that quote in a recording of a Joseph Campbell lecture from the 60s.
- The center of the “spirit” is within the subconscious.
- In the middle are an Indian Gaur (Indian Bison), and an Iberian Imperial Eagle (EN) with only 11 pairs in Portugal, one of the most threatened birds of prey in Europe. Also a mandrill (which I am terrified of, even at the zoo) and an extinct Barbary lion encircle a golden ouroboros (snake eating its own tail).
- A gateway opening to an inner light. I was in love with this piece while making it - full swoon.





**Tiger Gates**

- Earth
- Quadrants = seasons or earth elements
- Socially - we are working on recognizing how important diversity is, appreciating that differences are a healthy part of a cultural ecosystem. Biodiversity is the same - it is overlooked and crucial to the health of the immediate and greater environment. The little quadrants here feel like little ecosystems, knotted together, made with threatened species.
- The Chocolate Lily (my family nickname is Lily) this flower is endangered and local. I go out to an area in Mission Trails, in March each year to see them blooming and photograph them.
- Mandala with blue center (Hyacinth macaws) in a life/death battle, spiraling. Waters or sky. Surrounded by gold. Four pathways lead out. Light, fire, water and air. The guardian of this garden is the Malayan tiger (CR) at the top, and the boundary is made up by two entwined albino Burmese pythons (VU). (my photos from the San Diego zoo)
- At the bottom are two corpse flowers opening downward. These are human sized blooms! Over 5 feet high. I went to the Huntington Gardens (before the lockdowns) and photographed the corpse flower blooming there in the green house. This is THE sexiest plant.



### **In the Sun of the Heart (Red Wolf)**

- Red Wolf - possibly 20 left in the wild, with over 200 in captivity at red wolf conservation facilities.
- Flames, burning bright, truth.
- See into the sun within the heart. Makes me think of an image of Hanuman showing his soul within (Rama and Sita in his heart).
- He is painted with the preternatural colors of a vision, of an antipodean, a creature from dreams.
- Internal black cobra and white cobra = opposites
- Botanical elements - the Brugmansia (extinct in its native habitat, but common all over the world) and a couple of lilies (the endangered Western lily and the Humbolt lily).
- Egypt - the jackal = was probably a small wolf = Anubis, the guard dog of the dead. There are myths about dogs (jackals) digging up buried bodies and running with limbs in their jaws.
- The inner landscape of each individual is wild and populated by fantastic beasts. Each of us has our own monsters and demons, our own dark and fertile spaces. ONLY the individual can explore these spaces. And we can not take cameras there to document so we must use creative means to describe inhabitants ourselves. Though we have been careless with the natural wild spaces and creatures in the world, we each have an opportunity to be better stewards of our internal wild lands.



### **Separation of Earth and Sky (Blake)**

- Primordial - happening first in sequence of time. Source.
- The rainbow references a William Blake study across the top. He had angels... I used Iberian Imperial Eagles (CR). Overall the piece was made with Blake in mind - the burst of light and the graying down of the background to push the light forward.
- There is a serpentine twisted form that I have used repeatedly, because I can't quite satisfy my need to draw it. I saw a version of this outline in a book on Persian art in a library. It was two lion heads on a long body that twisted together in the middle. But I envisioned a long row of heads, each eating or holding the animal in front of it... I will continue to use it until I get it right.
- In a way, this piece is a Peredexion tree also. With the tree above, twisting trunk, tree of life and knowledge, birds safe in the branches. The Grotto below, dark hole into the abyss, the underworld and the serpents at the base of the tree. I hadn't realized this until now, making these notes and looking at the shape of the image.
- The Atlas Moth, *Attacus wardi* Rothschild (VU) from Australia figures prominently in a lot of these pieces. It is huge! Wings span far beyond your palm if you are holding one. The color and pattern - I am enthralled. The wing tips curve outward and have a pattern that looks like a cobra in profile.



### **Portable Universe**

- The serpent and eagle motif I have been using. This piece is a celestial map with invented constellations all drawn out. I used a bear head from an Elisa Johns painting that I totally love. This is an image of the inner cosmos. These stars mark events, turning points, trials and battles. You connect the dots to form your own pantheon.
- Funny thing - I wish I could replicate images of sea storms, the aurora borealis, or nebulae... I have tried and I can't. It is a funny thought to me that I can't just paint anything I want to. Many parts of my work look like they do because that's all I CAN do. And with watercolor there isn't much I can do to change it. So, I leave it. Sometimes the paintings are partially, or largely, out of my control.





### **Let the soft animal of your body, love what it loves**

- My cat has little rainbows in the individual hairs on his body when he sleeps in the sun. Mostly in the white ones on his chin. I imagine that an arctic fox (all white) would burst with tiny rainbows if you saw him in the sunshine like that. I let myself follow the path of representing that idea fully - of enjoying that image so much that it turned into a whole piece. It just came out of things that I love. No need to repent and feel guilty for loving what I love.
- The fox gazes into the Albino king cobra hood - mirror surface - or light. They look at each other.
- Aurora Borealis
- Wild Geese by Mary Oliver:  
    “You do not have to be good.  
    You do not have to walk on your knees  
    for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
    You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
    love what it loves.”

## Space/Time

- Ethiopian wolf mandala with a bejeweled serpent (endangered Sinai cat snake from Egypt) and a Royal Sunangel hummingbird (NT). The serpent head is rare Australian opal which is dark and reflective, shot through with veins of rainbow light.



- These windows open to the unknown, unmapped dark spaces in the subconscious.

Presided over by the serpent (land) and the bird (air). In Egyptian origin myth, the cosmos was a dark empty space filled with potential. Space separated into parts. The sky was lifted from the earth's surface, making space for humans and for everything else.

- There are many layers of reality in an image, different spaces and even times. They are compressed to sit on the two dimensional surface of the paper.
- A quote from my journal: "I took some photos yesterday morning. The sun was low on the horizon and pouring into the sitting room, casting very dark shadows on the pale yellow wall. I made shadow puppets with one hand and awkwardly took photos with my other hand. I was trying to capture the "dog" or "ghost" that I was making, but ended up including the shadows of my head, arm, and phone as well as my "actual" hand, contorted into a dog shape. My favorite of all the images was one that contained all of the realities with the awkward hand and the edge of the phone. MY physical reality, the shadow "scene" and then the fiction of the dog on the wall. Each layer tells a totally different story."
- In Egyptian myth, time is measured by cycles of the sun. Each day is a lifetime of birth, mid-life and strength, old age then death, when the sun passes below into the underworld, bringing daylight to those who dwell there. The sun is born again at sunrise and starts its journey over.
- The project I have set for myself is to journey inward to collect and digest the exotic bits. Then to bring them back, a "boon for humanity" with the preternatural shimmer still glimmering. These distant places are mining grounds from which I am curating a collection of natural histories.



### **Siberian Tiger Creature**

- I was thinking about a “tulpa” for the first time when I started this piece. A tulpa is a supernatural creature you would manifest by concentrating your energy or mental powers. I think I might have even painted the symbol (sigil) for this into the tiger’s body. With the amount of time, energy and concentration I put into these pieces, I could manifest actual creatures, as replacements for the ones we are losing on the planet.
- I went to the San Diego Botanical Garden and also asked a specialist in endangered native botanicals about endangered plants in California - Cobra Lily, Golden Barrel cactus and the Brugmansia. We have several Brugmansia trees in our yard, but they are extinct in their original habitat. The trees have been naturalized to other areas over time and are grown all over.
- The Spanish moon moth, *Graellsia isabellae*, is a primitive “relict species”. It looks like stained glass, is endemic to France and Spain and has a protected status. Now found high in the Alps and Pyrenees, it originated in the ice age and took refuge in shrinking cold parts of the world. The climate in the Alps and Pyrenees has been stable so these populations have survived there for thousands of years.
- I made a little window into the cosmos in the back of the tiger’s neck, which I have done many times since, but I came up with the black and saturated blue/red watercolor section with crows drawn over it for this piece and loved it so much. That gave me other ideas which led to the large melanistic leopard called “Cosmos” in 2021-2022.





**Cosmos**  
**Laura Ball**  
**Jan 20 - Feb 25, 2023**

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