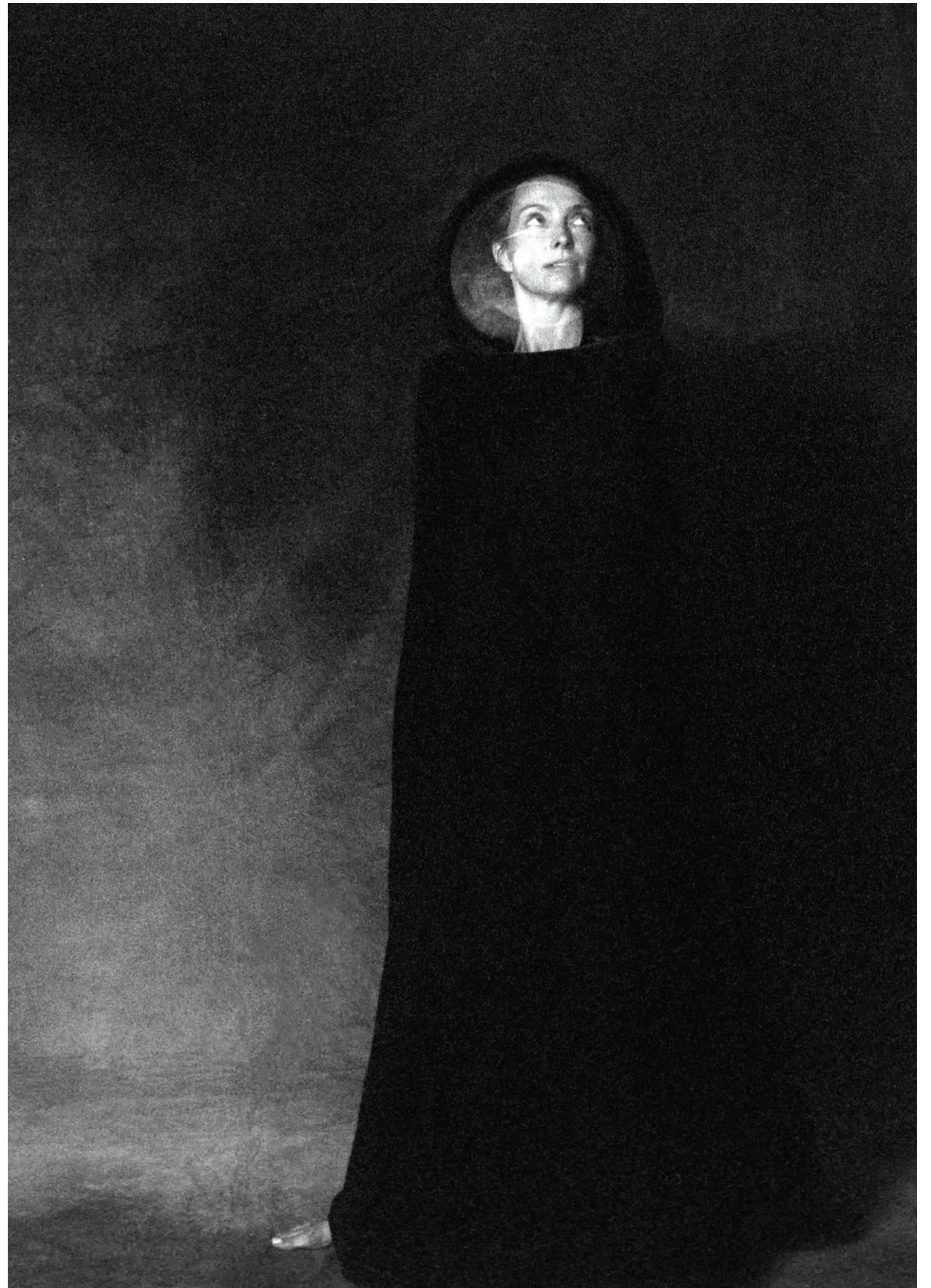
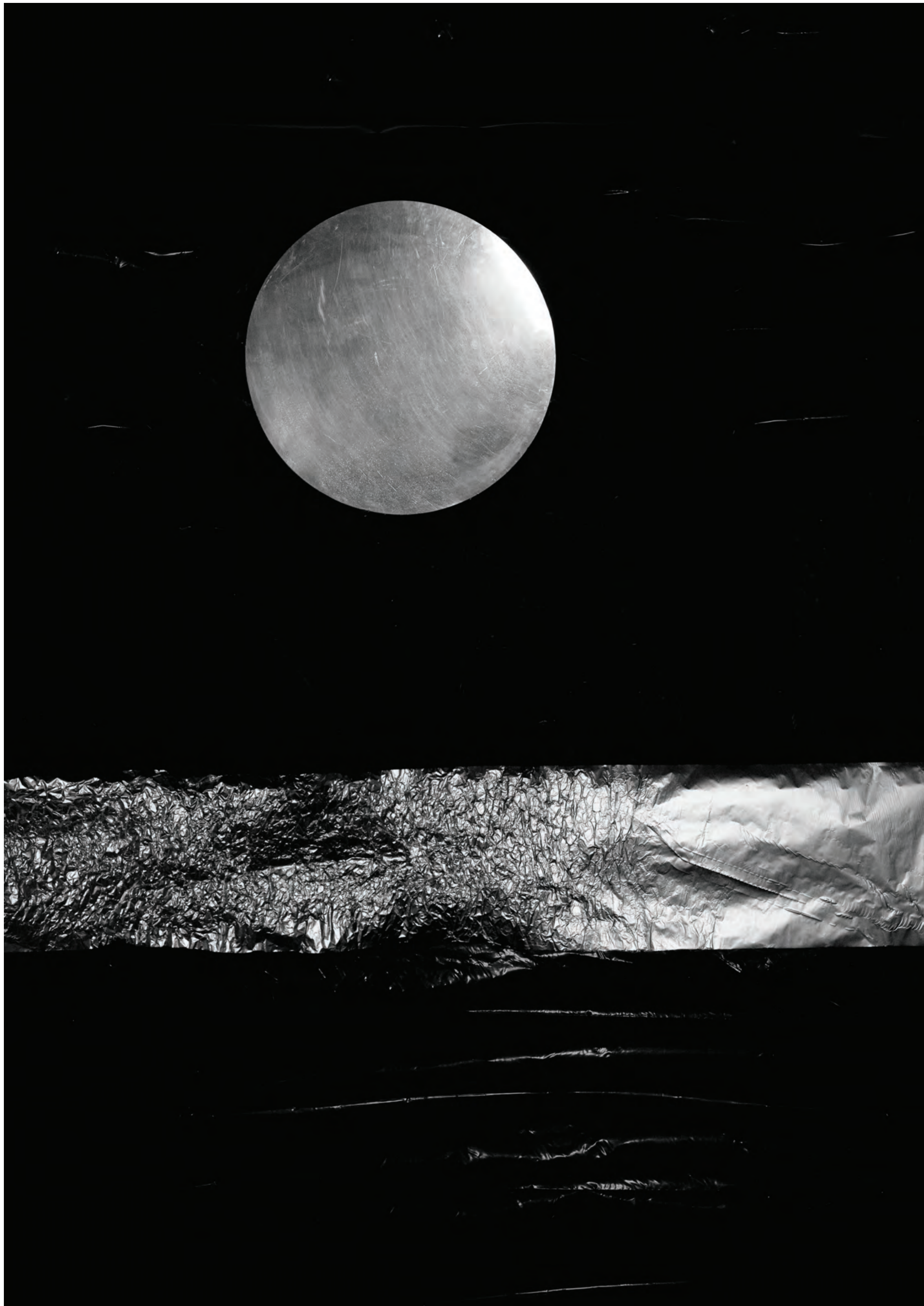


Paul  
Westlake

Model —  
**Lia Chavez**  
Fashion editor —  
**Jen Smith**  
Hair —  
**Dennis Devoy**  
For Kerastase at ION Studio NYC  
Makeup —  
**Dotti**  
Statement Artists Agency  
Photo assistant —  
**Isaac Schell**  
Fashion assistant —  
**Ayla Wayman**  
Concept —  
**Jen Smith and Lia Chavez**



Lyellworld hand sequined catsuit.  
Skin protected with Glossier  
Invisible Shield daily sunscreen.





Elanur Erdogan for Dobs NY bodysuit  
and headpiece. Skin nourished  
with Kjaer Weis 'The Beautiful Oil.'

(opposite)  
Lyellworld hand sequined catsuit.  
Escape gravity with 'Flying' Maison  
Margiela Replica Eau de Parfum.



Lia and daughter Ocean.  
Christian Joy spacesuit costume.





Norma Kamali poncho, stylist's own  
hood. Caserta Eye sunglasses.  
An interstellar must: Sunday Riley  
'Luna' sleeping night oil.



Sies Marjan trench, Elanur Erdogan  
for Dobs NY tulle helmet. Scent: Sci Fi  
by Ellis at Catbird.

Multi-media artist Lia Chavez explores the cosmos both outwardly celestial and deep within her mind, and the light and the dark created by them, in her otherworldly work. Chavez’s journeys, whether they are light-focused performances, deep meditation practiced in caves of the Himalayas, or experimental work done with cognitive neuroscientists, delve into the mysteries and origins of light, how they affect us mentally, spiritually and physically, and how, as an artist, she can affect them. She is an intrepid explorer who seeks the edges of our limitations and gracefully shares her discoveries. We are willing participants in her odyssey of revelation.

Interview —  
Jennifer Alfano

**Your work focuses on light and “probes visions of the radiant cosmos within”. What draws you to light as an artist? As a human and a mother?**

From a young age, the elegance and the mystery of light have had an indelible hold on me. I feel I could meditate on a dancing flame for eternity. To behold light is to experience the sensation of communing with the a beautiful mind in a supreme state of pleasure and undress. All the laws of the universe intuitively seem to be embodied within its dynamic form. As I have delved more and more deeply into the science of consciousness, I have also come to realize that light is the language by which super-consciousness expresses itself.

As a visual artist, I am always seeking out light and pondering its dancery optical qualities. But I am more intrigued by those intimate encounters with light when it comes to me. This occurs when I cultivate a heightened state of awareness. I have encountered light that has literally knocked me off my feet (and brought me to my knees). I value the elements of surprise and wonder above all else in my pursuit of Art. If one diligently seeks encounters with illumination, are they discoveries or revelations? I think somehow they must be both of these things.

**What do you look to explore or uncover in your use of light?**

Fundamentally, I aim to craft first hand encounters with light’s transfigurations with the aim of generating insights into how we humans experience illumination and inspiration. My work is interested in the relationship between light and consciousness. It is an invitation into the vast inner landscape of beauty. Through my art, I invite my audience into deep introspection, silence, and stillness. It is through this quieting of the senses that new perceptions are able to emerge.

There is much about the presence and structure of light that refuses the fragmented thinking of our present age, and so through my work with light, I aim to stimulate an awareness of this integration. Light is both a wave and particle. There is such an abundance of light in the universe that even seemingly vacant portions of dark sky are pregnant with the ancient light of the first galaxies. I am fascinated by the fact that much of what we perceive to be darkness is actually light. There is so much poetry hidden in the dark. Light is perhaps the ultimate paradox, and we dearly need the depth and wisdom of paradox at this moment in history.

In “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” William Blake writes, “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.” When I sit and meditate in a cave, it’s a declaration of this truth; just inhabiting that particular space is an acknowledgement of this human predicament. When I sit in the silence of darkness with the intention of inviting the light that is hidden from my natural perception to reveal itself, it’s an act of absurdity and social subversion which ushers the wild, untamed mind to free itself within me. In these moments of absurdity and performative nakedness, I get to become a brazen “fool” and listen to the voice of mystery. When I am alone in the darkness, I vocally call out to the light. I have found light to be a diligent teacher, faithfully bringing forth new breakthroughs in perception. This practice has opened new dimensions of the cosmos to me.

By probing visions of the radiant cosmos within, I desire to provide my audience with a reminder that our human reality (fragmented though it may seem) is held together by a mysterious continuity, and that our relationship to the world — both outside and within — is shaped by the interplay of time, space, and light.

**How is science integral to your work?**

My encounter with luminous visions in a deep state of meditation motivated me to engage science directly. In 2014, I initiated an ongoing collaborative research program committed to developing a scientific language, which helps account for encounters with radiant visions within the mind’s eye.

Currently, as a visiting artist-researcher in the neuroscience of creativity at Goldsmiths College and Queen Mary, University of London, I develop pioneering research on the topics of light, visual perception, and creative inspiration alongside a world-class team of cognitive neuroscientists. Combining the time-tested methodologies of contemplative practices with the latest science of the mind, my team and I investigate the frontier of optics through an extensive series of carefully documented meditation-induced encounters with light. For this research, I straddle the subject/observer divide: I am both conceptual inquirer and scientific subject. I help design the research, its philosophical trajectory, and the questions we probe. I also, in the style of an explorer, plunge into the inner world through the practice of darkness meditation. The researchers recreate the setting of a blacked out cave in the form of a darkened lab and I am connected to a specially designed EEG headset. I utilize the practice of durational meditation to cultivate the dazzling, primordial visions which appear within my mind’s eye. I report the frequency and aesthetic characteristics of my visions to my colleagues through a specially designed communication system while they simultaneously record the EEG data my brain generates.

This research could potentially lead to helping optimize not only my own creative process, but that of other artists, as well. I am dearly interested in how we might utilize neuro-technologies to more deeply explore the visionary experiences that result from super-conscious activation.

**How do time and space interplay with your vision?**

In my creative process involving deep meditation, the more still I become, and the slower and more deeply I breathe, the more rapidly I am able to travel through what I perceive to be an inner space. My cosmic visions accumulate and enrich as I delve more deeply into inner space. Since I trained as a photographer, I often reference optical science and the laws of the physical microcosm of the camera in describing these interior excursions.

My work, be it performative, environmental, or strictly visual and object-based, essentially captures the primal action of time and the motion of bodies in space. A “luminous object” in the world of physics refers to an entity, such as a star, which is capable of generating its own light. Hubble Ultra-Deep Field imagery collects the light of such objects by focusing a Wide Field Camera into seemingly vacant portions of outer space. Lengthy durations of exposure reveal black fields to be teeming with the ancient light of the first galaxies. As I have trained my mind to meditate for lengthy durations of time, I’ve discovered that the gradual intensification of brainwaves enables me to access a similar superabundance of otherworldly visions — but within the realm of interior space.

**Without light there would be no darkness. Are darkness and shadow important to your work?**

At the heart of my artistic program is a conviction that light’s spiritual and phenomenological qualities are revealed in literal darkness. So consequently, deep darkness — and the willful blindness that accompanies it — is at the core of my creative process. My commitment to probing this paradox between light and dark has led me through various forms of rigorous mental training which have taught me to trigger the perception of luminous visions systematically. One such practice that I have explored in depth is durational meditation within dark caves.

I’ve meditated in silence for a month in the pitch-black cave monasteries of the Himalayas. I have undertaken a 90-day fast while practicing darkness meditation in the cave of Saint Francis in Assisi, Italy where Francis spent his latter years exploring his own luminous visions encountered in darkness meditation. This was the place where I first experienced my encounters with luminous meditative visions. I’ve since undertaken numerous durational meditations in my New York City studio and within the context of various exhibitions that have lasted 10 hours per day for two weeks at a time. And more recently, this passion has taken me into the neuroscience lab, with an ambition to incorporate scientific consciousness into my exploration and to comprehend the implications these optical phenomena may have for creativity of the visual artist.

The human fascination with perceiving light in dark places is an enduring existential mystery that taps into the very essence of discovery. Whether gazing through a telescope to behold the most ancient galaxies in the universe, or training the mind through meditation to peer into the luminous, numinous recesses of deep inner space, one thing is certain: the Void is alive and teeming with light forms which challenge assumptions and transfigure with their presence.

The historical record of cross cultural contemplatives, mystics, and visionaries perceiving radiant visions in the darkness of the meditating mind is prolific — indeed, it is arguably the

longest artistic tradition known to humankind. A wide variety of artists have regarded their work in continuity with the visions gleaned from their excursions to the super-conscious mind going all the way back to Paleolithic cave artists, who carved shamanic visions upon stone walls during long stays in deep, dark earthen caverns — the world’s first galleries. My work belongs to this art historical lineage.

**What influences your thoughts?**

Anything I let into my mindscape. Since I perceive a direct link between my state of being and the artwork that I create, I am extremely careful in cultivating the richness of my inner life. This is why visual silence, frequent abstinence from communication technologies, and a minimalist material lifestyle in the natural world is essential for me. Each morning I awaken at 4 a.m. to sit with the precious stillness of the unfettered mind. It’s dark, and the clarity of the mind at this time of day is incomparable. I would be a lesser artist and human being if I were to deny myself this ritual. It’s in this stillness that the tenderness of compassion can conduct its surgical work on my heart and mind and prepare me to do my work.

**Your work is comprised of many mediums. What influences your decision to use a certain one?**

I work in a very specific way in which I delve into inner silence in order to perceive the voice of inspiration. Inspiration and its conceptual direction always determine the medium that I use. Since for me it always comes back to embodiment, my all time favorite medium is my own body.

At the moment I am creating a new body of work that incorporates sculpture, performance, photography, and architecture. The sub-medium used within all of these expressions is water. I am currently creating work about the varied interactions between light and water and how the physical substance of water, and by analogy our human consciousness, can refract various kinds of light. I have had many dreams and visions of water over the course of my creative life and I feel that I am at last at a point where I can embrace the depths, the darkness, and the challenges of this invitation. This transition was marked by my daughter’s birth. Her name is Ocean.

**What do you want to explore next?**

I want to go deeper into the neuroscience of light and creative inspiration. I am enthused to continue exploring the nature of human consciousness and the qualities that set us apart from the flattening tendencies of mechanism. I am enthused to develop and enhance the qualities that make the human organism distinct from reductive models of artificial intelligence. It’s an important time to gather our attention back from the periphery of creating inferior representational forms of intellect and instead to harness the great potentiality of the technological to engage in a deepened exploration of what makes organic human experience so peculiar, rich, and inter-dimensional. The human organism is an extraordinary instrument that will produce resonant notes if tuned properly. It’s time for further innovation in the art and science of being. ●

Lia Chavez  
Double Pointed Star (detail),  
2019, Light sculpture,  
mouth blown glass,  
purified water,  
and tempered steel.

