

- Galactic Center -

I was once told of the way that a Zen monk who was a renowned sculptor would approach the practice. It would begin with finding the piece of wood or stone that he intended to sculpt and before doing anything he would sit with the object in it's original state and for as long as necessary, meditate with the object until, over time, the form that needed to emerge from the material would arise in his consciousness.

In this way, I often begin with the patterned digital ground of a new piece and sit for hours, sometimes over many days, in meditation and wait for the form that emerges from the background to appear before I begin to apply the first layers of marks or gestures to the piece. From there the composition builds over time.

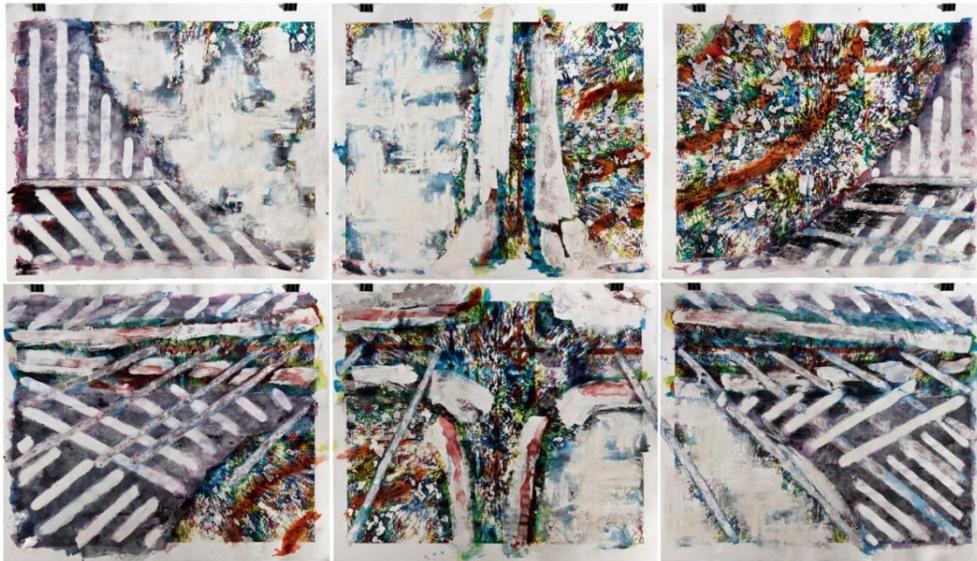
In 2010 I sat for some time meditating upon the large patterned digital ground of a piece I was beginning. As I meditated upon this field of pattern I became aware of a certain structure in my mind. The structure seemed vast and cosmic in nature, as if I was looking at something in outer space, radiating outward from a bright center far, far away.

As I sometimes do I made some quick sketches of the form I was seeing and feeling. It felt powerful, expansive, mysterious, beyond anything of this planet. The first sketch I made is below.



Over time the structure I was experiencing in meditation became the painting entitled "Galactic Center - Mysterium Coniunctionis". The image remained inexplicable to me for some time. Something I had seen as if in dream in a place far away almost outside of time or space. I didn't know what it was I was looking at or why I was seeing it. But somehow I felt that it was cosmic

in nature, "like looking at the galactic center or something" was a phrase that occurred to me regularly as I worked on the piece.

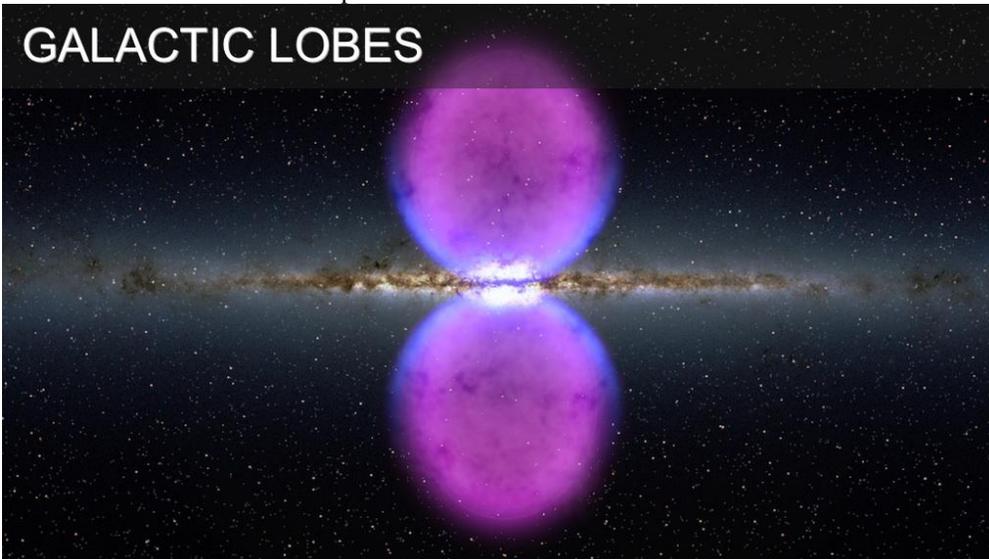


In March of 2012 I stumbled upon the images below from Nasa showing a vast energetic structure formed by the Milky Way galaxy. When I saw these images, there was a sense of instant recognition. This was undoubtedly what I was experiencing in my meditation on this piece and attempting so crudely to render out of the field of pattern in the painting above.



NASA Visualization Explore

GALACTIC LOBES



Gamma rays radiate from the Milky Way's center, but where do they come from?



Scientists have discovered gigantic structures 25,000 light-years tall ballooning above and below the Milky Way. Within each curved lobe, extremely energetic electrons of unknown origin interact with lower-energy light to generate the gamma rays that define these bubbles. The galactic-scale structures could be remnants from a burst of star formation or leftovers from an eruption by the supermassive black hole at our galaxy's center. Scientists aren't sure yet, but the more they learn about this amazing structure, which may be only a few million years old, the better we'll understand the Milky Way. While not immediately visible to NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope, these unexpected features were brought into sharp relief by a group of scientists who processed data from Fermi's all-sky map. The visualization below shows how artists imagine the lobes would appear if gamma rays were visible to the naked eye.

-<http://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/vis/a010000/a010900/a010918/>

These images were not created or published by Nasa when I made the painting . To me there was something very profound in this experience. Something about the way the Universe works, about mind, about creativity and connectedness that I feel is at the heart of my practice.

Michael Maxwell

8/1/12