

## Conceiving the Whole

John Beebe

It is often presumed that our challenge as humans is to withdraw projections from the world around us so that we see its reality as objectively as possible. But people also rise to the occasion of being human by making projections, by allowing the empathy they have found for themselves to wend its way back into the universe and manifest as a greater caring for the world we inhabit. The alchemical principle, as above, so below, was founded on the insight that patterns and transformations working on a grand scale in the heavens are mirrored in small ways here on earth. Johanna Baruch's *Cosmos* paintings seem to live out the reverse corollary: as we discover how to accept and even to love the shared unconscious that underlies our individual egos, that hard earned empathy for the Self can renew our vision of the universe. The cosmos that Baruch lets us see is one in which it is possible, with a certain strength of spirit, to feel at home.

Baruch's universe is bound by color, by enduring form, and an integrative capacity, yet dark matter is alive all through it. We see a world that is empty of knowable destiny, but one that appears to take pleasure in its endless unfolding. To watch her paintings is to dance along with her own wise eyes, which do not simply imagine, but manage to divine the colors and forms not just of the stars but of the raw matter that binds them. Through a direct and intimate knowing, Baruch allows us to see the universe in a more essential and organic way than scientific instruments can disclose. Her cosmos is sympathetically lovely rather than beautifully lonely

What remains unknowable is not erased by the confidence of her brush. Her universe continues to tantalize with void, an emptiness our imaginations are invited to try to fill. The constructions that give us art, from alchemical renderings of the earth's interior (see Kircher's copperplate engraving) to the historical discoveries that make archaeology cutting-edge, have always depended upon catapulting what we think we know into a strange and distant place. That we can imagine ourselves into the complexly volatile wholeness of her paintings validates the power of Johanna Baruch's work beyond its immediate appeal. These paintings push us to join her in completing a vision of our constantly changing world.

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