

Rober Racine

"Faraway, High in the Night Sky, Earth Shines upon Herself"

Third and final part of *Lunar Cycle* - March 11th to April 15th 2017



Since 1999 these three images confront me daily. They're printed on a small length of photographic paper and glued to cardboard which leans against the base of my desk lamp. Everyday I look at them. When I travel, they come with me.

I placed this card in the showcase. Two small astronaut figurines are examining the three images. These photographs are at the heart of three exhibitions which make up *Lunar Cycle* : *Les Diapasons of Eva Lm* (2012) ; *The Rotations of Solitude* (2013) and now: *Faraway, in the Night Sky, Earth Shines upon Herself*. (2017).

They pay homage to the astronauts of the Apollo missions 11-12-14-15-16 and 17 and to all those who walked on the Moon from 1969 to 1972.

In the beginning, this exhibition was to be called : *The rendez-vous, Re-entry* : names of the two operations vital for the return of the astronauts to Earth. *Rendez-vous* : the lunar module and her two astronauts (*The Diapasons of Eva Lm*) leave the Moon to join the command module orbiting around the Moon where the third astronaut awaits them (*The rotations of solitude*). Once reunited on board the command module, the three astronauts fly toward Earth for the return. *Re-entry* : They must cross the Earth's atmosphere to finally land in the Pacific.

Over the course of years, each image imposed itself upon me and inspired new works.

First: *Footsteps on the Moon* was taken by the astronaut Edwin «Buzz» Aldrin on board the Lunar Module *Eagle* of the Apollo mission 11, in 1969.

Second: *Faraway Earth* was probably taken by astronaut William Anders the person in charge of photography during Apollo mission 8, in 1968. This was the first passengered flight to circle the Moon.

Third: *The Lunar Module* taken by astronaut Ronald Evans during Apollo mission 17, in 1972. We can see part of the lift floor of the lunar module *Challenger* at the moment of rendez-vous.

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The triptyque presents some missions of the *Apollo* program. It shows one of the very first photos of Earth, the first human steps on the Moon, and the rendez-vous of the last mission on the Moon before the return to Earth. The image of a distant Earth quickly became central for me. It was as though I wished to remain on the Moon and gaze at the faraway Earth to better paint it. I would have liked to have taken the photographs myself. For this, I would have had to go to the Moon. I would have enhanced with gold leaf some parts of the lunar module, drawn some fine pastel lines as lunar dust. I would have liked to paint them. The group would have been presented on the little cardboard in front of the two astronaut figurines, to scale. But I was unable to find that particular dense black, immobile and immateriel, at once deep and without dimension, the tactile unreality of space ; the black of the universe. This black does not exist on Earth. It is way up high, faraway, in the night sky.

So, there are these three photographs in the gallery; one vision and its encircling satellites. To complete the homage, here are three observations from astronauts concerning Earth as seen from the Moon. They were with me throughout the journey of the making of this *Lunar Cycle*.

«I was lying there, looking out the window as we moved across the terminator. I was listening to the Symphonie Fantastique, and it was dark in the spacecraft. I was looking down at dark ground, and there was Earthshine. It was like looking at a snow-covered Earth scene under a full moon.»

Ken Mattingly. Apollo 16.

«The Earth is surrounded by blackness though you're lookinkg through sunlight. There is only light if the sunlight has something to shine on. When the sun shines through space it's black. All because the light doesn't strike anything. The light doesn't strike anything, so all you see is black. What are you looking at ? What are you looking through ? You can call it the universe, but it's the infinity of space and the infinity of time.»

Eugene Cernan. Gemini 9, Apollo 10, Apollo 17.

«We went to the moon as technicians ; we returned as humanitarians. Instead of an intellectual search, there was suddenly a very deep gut feeling that something was different. It occurred when looking at Earth and seeing this blue-and-white planet floating there, and knowing it was orbiting the Sun, seeing that Sun, seeing it set in the background of the very deep black and velvety cosmos, seeing - rather, knowing for sure - that there was a purposefulness of flow, of energy, of time, of space in the cosmos, that it was beyond man's rational ability to understand, that suddenly there was a nonrational way of understanding that had been beyond my previous experience. There seems to be more to the universe than random, chaotic, purposeless movement of a collection of molecular particles. On the return trip home, gazing through 240,000 miles of space toward the stars and the planet from which I had come, I suddenly experienced the universe as intelligent, loving, harmonious.»

Edgar Mitchell. Apollo 16.

R.R.