

EXHIBITION

Water works

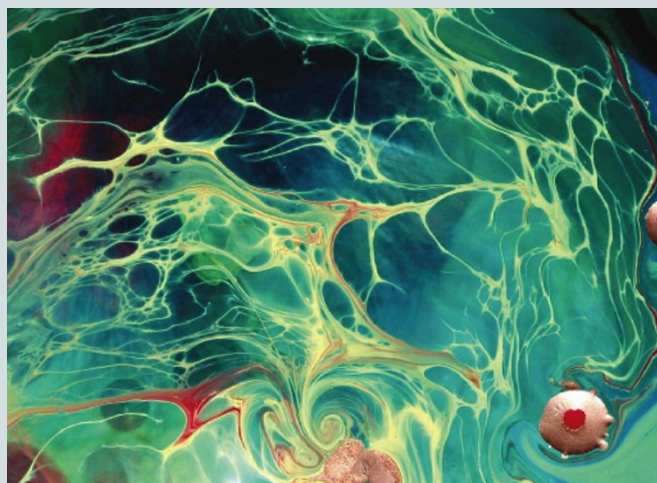
Nick Thomas

After an injury left her temporarily unable to hold a paintbrush, British artist Pery Burge discovered a new way to produce art while recuperating. She began mixing inks in water and was inspired by the patterns that formed as the ink diffused. Now, the artist, who is based in Devon, UK, focuses on three-dimensional radial spreads — the outward movement of liquid from a central point — and uses time-lapse photography to create a permanent record of these colourful explosions of abstract beauty.

Burge mixes water and ink with droplets of gold paint, oil and the organic solvent xylene in a small, stainless-steel bowl. Complex

shapes develop depending on the properties of the ink, such as flow rate and surface tension when the liquids first mix. "I think of myself as a catalyst for nature," says Burge. "I make careful choices about the ink and then watch what happens as the spread develops." She photographs the results in full sunlight and with a flash to highlight the colours. "My aim is to show that nature is the best artist."

Burge feels that the movement of ink through water has aesthetic and scientific aspects, with links to patterns that are commonly found in nature. Some images seem to be alive and organic, reminiscent of unicellular organisms; others look like hexagonal rock formations, crystalline structures or even



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cosmic phenomena. "Everyone reads them differently," says Burge. "People see figures, landscapes, faces. Your imaginative contribution completes the creative process."

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Burge's work will be on show from 9-27 April at the National Society Summer Exhibition, Jersey Galleries, London. See www.chronoscapes.co.uk.

Galileo the artist

Galilei der Künstler. Die Zeichnung, der Mond, die Sonne

by Horst Bredekamp

Akademie-Verlag: 2007. 525 pp. €44.80 (in German)

Thomas de Padova

As a young man, Galileo Galilei considered becoming a painter. He acquired extensive knowledge of perspective from Ostilio Ricci, the court mathematician in Florence, who later taught at the Florentine Academy of Design. Galileo was a close friend of the painter Lodovico Cigoli and was in great demand as an art critic, advising Bronzino, Empoli and the cream of Tuscan painters. His trained eye and practice in drawing proved to be extremely useful when Galileo suddenly turned to the study of astronomy at the age of 45.

Galileo was not the first scientist to observe the Moon through a telescope. The Englishman Thomas Harriot did so a few months earlier, in the summer of 1609, and Galileo followed suit, building better telescopes using top-quality lenses. But Galileo did more than that. He saw more. And he drew what he saw, delineating the features of the Moon's landscape, its mountains and craters.

In *Galilei der Künstler* (*Galileo the Artist*), German art historian Horst Bredekamp contends that Galileo's mastery of the modulation of light and shadow made drawing an instrument of learning for the great scientist as well as a method of documentation. Just as Galileo's

Moon sketches convinced people — who at the time trusted images more than words — that the Moon was not a perfectly smooth sphere, so Bredekamp's intriguing book succeeds in showing that the act of seeing is itself a powerful tool of analysis.

Bredekamp gained access to unique sources. A few years ago, a previously unknown copy of Galileo's ground-breaking collection of his telescopic discoveries published in March 1610, the *Sidereus Nuncius* (*The Starry Messenger*), was acquired by a United States art dealer. Bredekamp, a professor of art history at Humboldt University in Berlin, suspected that the Moon drawings in this copy were forgeries. Nevertheless, he flew to New York to compare them with the renowned Galileo drawings from Florence held in Italy's National Central Library.

"I spent weeks examining everything meticulously, and finally concluded that they were indeed originals," says Bredekamp. Independent studies by scientists, paper experts and restorers from Berlin and the United States confirmed his view. It was an astonishing

and exciting find. Bredekamp believes that these Moon sketches, drawn by Galileo himself, served as templates for the better-known copper engravings in the published *Sidereus Nuncius*, a view that is yet to be corroborated by other experts.

Posterity's judgement of Galileo has varied more than that of any other scientist — books about him have ranged from *Galileo the Martyr* in the seventeenth century to *Galileo, Heretic* and *Galileo, Courtier* more recently. Now the author of *Galileo the Artist* argues for the extent to which the astronomer's artistic talent furthered his scientific achievements, as also illustrated by his discovery of sunspots, detailed in the second part of the book.

Galileo studied these cloud-like structures on the surface of the Sun through drawings he made around 1612. Much as with the Moon, this solar phenomenon had previously been misidentified, this time by the Jesuit

astronomer Christoph Scheiner, who thought that they were heavenly bodies orbiting the Sun. Galileo's sunspot

drawings, Bredekamp argues convincingly, enabled him to discover that the Sun, like the Moon, is not the perfect sphere that Aristotle had claimed. These pictures alone make the book worth reading. ■

Thomas de Padova is a science journalist and columnist at the newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* in Berlin.

