Child of the Universe
Artist Christine Nguyen attempts to fuse natural elements with otherworldly visions

“POWERS OF THE COSMIC DUSTY SEAS”
New works and site-specific installation by Christine Nguyen
Opening reception is held Friday, Jan. 14 from 6-9 p.m.
Flagler College’s Crisp-Ellert Art Museum, 48 Sevilla St., St. Augustine
829-8630
The exhibit runs through Feb. 25

Oceans, skies and earth merge in the dreamy, sensual work of L.A.-based artist Christine Nguyen. Nguyen’s work has a hard slant toward science, culled from the growth of crystals, and merging that with Cyanotypes and other non-traditional photographic processes.

“My work draws upon the imagery of science,” says Nguyen, “but it is not limited to technologies of the present. It imagines that the depths of the ocean reach into outer space, that through an organic prism, vision can fluctuate between the micro- and macroscopic.”

The Crisp-Ellert Art Museum Gallery at Flagler College displays Nguyen’s new works, as well as a site-specific wall installation, in the exhibition “Powers of the Cosmic Dusty Seas.” The installation includes foliage, debris and a host of found objects that Flagler students and professors scavenged, then mailed to her. According to Gallery Director Julie Dickover, they sent 30 to 40 objects, including “palm fronds, Spanish moss, bark, seed pods, shells, glass and a bit of rope.” Dickover adds, “I sent her a dead lizard that was almost perfectly dried and intact. She was very excited!”

Since receiving the package, Nguyen has been growing crystals on the items. The crystal-infused objects will be shipped to the gallery and assembled into the “Cosmic Dusty Seas” installation — the focal point of the exhibit. Nguyen says she enjoys being the conduit for disparate elements, and that her art is based on a love of nature as well as a curiosity of how others perceive the world. “I’m interested in people reflecting on their own environment [and] natural surroundings,” Nguyen explains.

The daughter of a California fisherman, Nguyen grew up connected to the ocean. “It’s interesting to see how my influences with the ocean on the West Coast would translate being on the East and how people will perceive the work,” she says. Nguyen also finds inspiration in celestial bodies. “In the photo-based mural pieces, I was thinking about meteorites, and recently read somewhere that cosmic dust was found in the depths of the ocean,” says Nguyen. “I have been developing a personal cosmology in which commonalities among species, forms and environment become visible and expressive, suggesting past narratives and possible futures.”

Nguyen envisions an almost pan-galactic realm where all of these new forms and environs merge into one. It’s a planet that rotates on the axis of interdependency, rebuilding itself. “There are no waste materials in these worlds,” explains Nguyen. “Vision is a renewable resource.”

Her unique use of this crystallization process began like many other innovations — through sheer chance. After collecting and then drying out some seaweed, Nguyen noticed that little salt crystals had formed on the plant material. Enthusiasm followed discovery. “Something sparked, and I started to grow salt crystals on things and then became fascinated with geology. I started to collect and salt crystallize objects, thinking about if the ocean evaporated, this is what would be left behind.”

In addition to the installation, the exhibit features recent paintings, drawings and photographs made using non-traditional processes. Students will have the opportunity of attending Nguyen’s cyanotype workshop.

Nguyen sees a marriage between the arts and the sciences, and celebrates a union based on a shared, restless inquiry. “We are all able to see more images of space and microscopic images of things with the help of technology,” she explains. “But also, I think both [scientists and artists] are trying to find answers about the world we live in, what is out there [in outer space] and investigations on how we perceive things.”

For more information about Christine Nguyen, go to lephant.com