

# Cosmo Dialogos: The Harmony of the Relative and Absolute

*Collaborative Essay by Adam Frank*



How are we to understand the world we find ourselves in? How are we to make sense of a Universe of stars and planets, matter and mind, feeling and sensibility? In 1959 the famous British novelist C.P. Snow decried the breakdown in communication between what he called “the two cultures” of the humanities and the sciences. This breakdown also seems to hold true between the arts and science. For many people, the world revealed through the creative arts and the vision of the Universe provided by science seem disparate and fragmented. The sciences seem to be the domain of facts and objective realities. The arts, on the other hand, traffic in feeling and subjective response. What makes this division puzzling is the well-recognized truth that both science and art are equally the domain of the creative intelligence. We celebrate both scientists and artists for their ability to manifest

new possibilities and interpret the world in previously unexplored languages. How can it then be true that our most creative endeavors for exploring the world are unable to talk to each other teach us something together?

Cosmo Dialogos is the rough latin translation of “Dialogue on the Universe”. These works by painter Steve Carpenter are the fruit of an ongoing discussion and collaboration with astrophysicist Adam Frank. Carpenter and Frank first met through the Rochester Zen Center, one of the oldest centers of Buddhist training in the United States. Both men had spent a lifetime exploring the nature of the world and its representations through their work – Carpenter as a both a figurist and abstract painter and Frank as a computational physicist studying star formation and stellar death. In their conversations about their work and its meaning Carpenter and Frank came to understand the profound similarity in the creative process between science and art as well as the interweaving of relative and absolute representations of the cosmos in the human imagination. While both science and strive for a truth which transcends the human perspective there is always an envious return to the view from our two eyes and our time-bound lives. As Carpenter and Frank’s discussion deepened they began to look for ways to collaborate to explore this harmony between the twin realities of the relative human perspective and the ideal of an absolute transcendent and objective frame of reference.

Through a innovative collaboration with LAZER Inc, Carpenter was able to transfer Hubble Space Telescope images of star forming clouds and other astronomical environments directly onto to canvas. These images, along with expressions of the governing equations providing by Frank, provide the entry point for Carperter's own process as a painter. In interpreting the images and equations Carpenter has manifested the dialogue with Frank into paint and texture, form and color. The questions Carpenter and Frank asked about where and how the human appears in its proper cosmic context are now translated directly into a imagistic language of astronomical data and artist's interpretation. In this way Cosmo Dialogos represents an attempt to frame a new narrative for human questions of place and meaning.