

# LIGHT YEARS

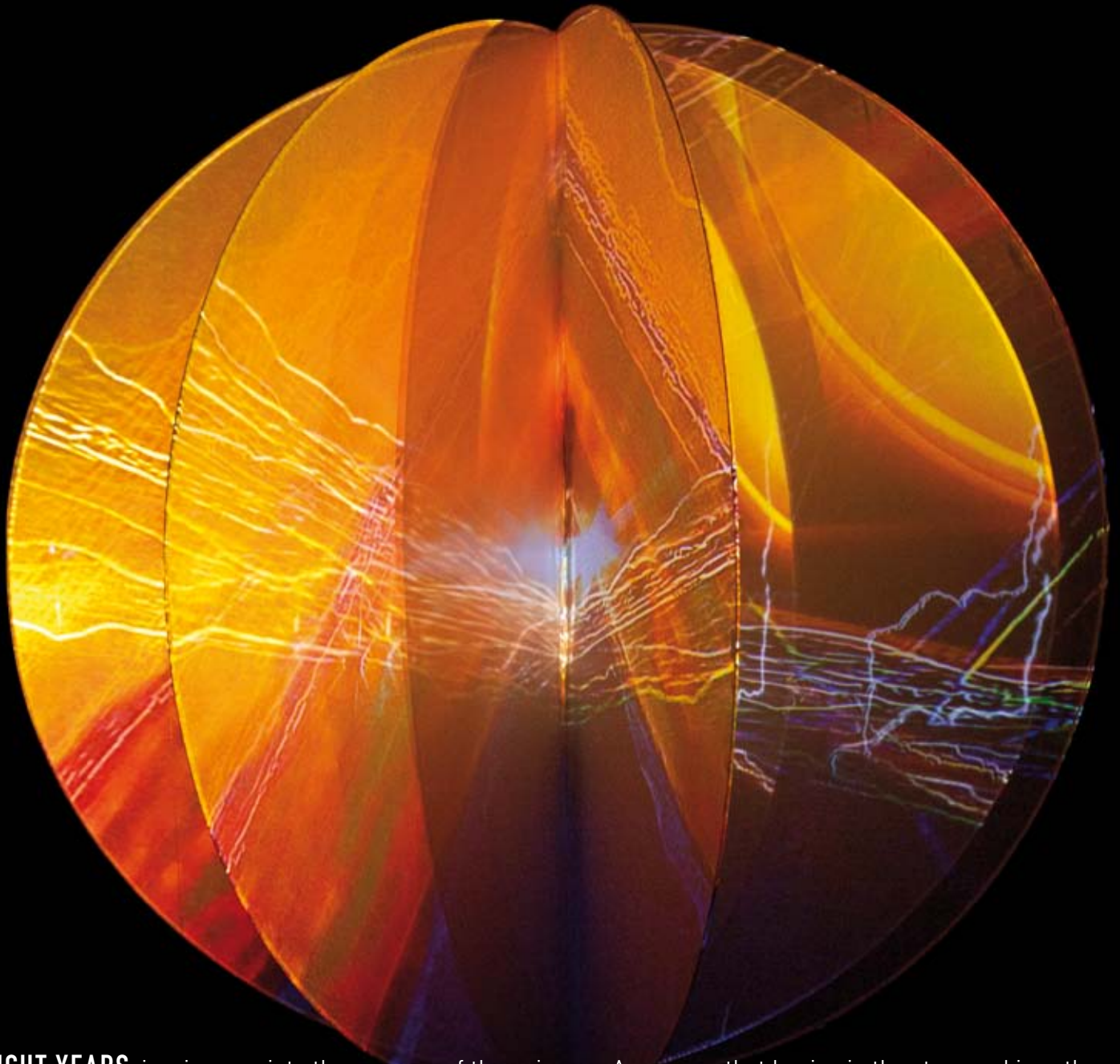
An Exhibition by  
**Eugènia Balcells**

curated by  
**Eulàlia Bosch**



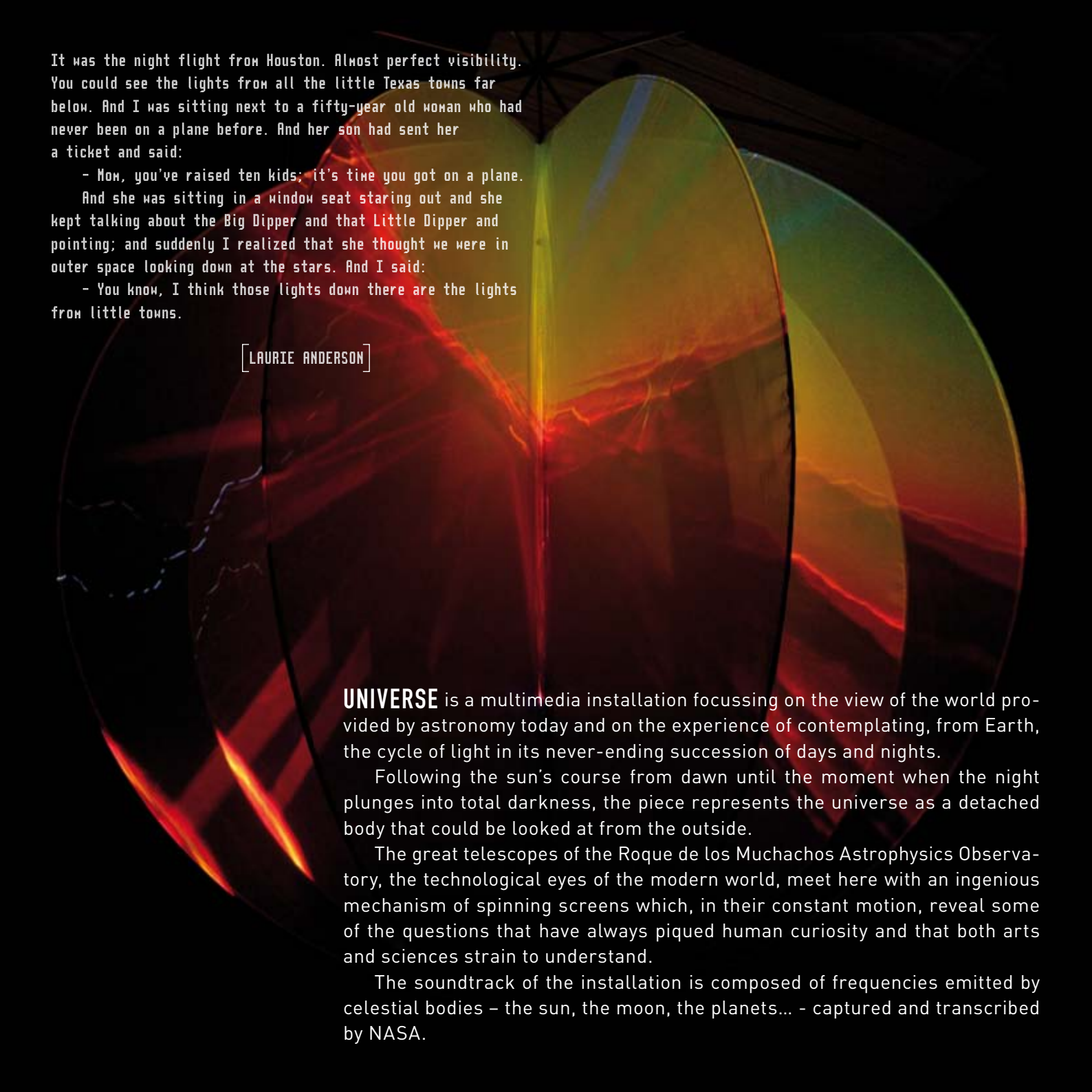
18/09/2012 - 18/11/2012

**Tabacalera**  
espacio Promoción del Arte  
MADRID



**LIGHT YEARS** is a journey into the memory of the universe. A memory that begins in the stars and is gathered inside the elemental particles that make up matter. It is a hymn to the complexity of the light that creates life in its path. It is an opportunity to remember that everything in existence was once nothing but star dust.





It was the night flight from Houston. Almost perfect visibility. You could see the lights from all the little Texas towns far below. And I was sitting next to a fifty-year old woman who had never been on a plane before. And her son had sent her a ticket and said:

- Mom, you've raised ten kids; it's time you got on a plane.

And she was sitting in a window seat staring out and she kept talking about the Big Dipper and that Little Dipper and pointing; and suddenly I realized that she thought we were in outer space looking down at the stars. And I said:

- You know, I think those lights down there are the lights from little towns.

[LAURIE ANDERSON]

**UNIVERSE** is a multimedia installation focussing on the view of the world provided by astronomy today and on the experience of contemplating, from Earth, the cycle of light in its never-ending succession of days and nights.

Following the sun's course from dawn until the moment when the night plunges into total darkness, the piece represents the universe as a detached body that could be looked at from the outside.

The great telescopes of the Roque de los Muchachos Astrophysics Observatory, the technological eyes of the modern world, meet here with an ingenious mechanism of spinning screens which, in their constant motion, reveal some of the questions that have always piqued human curiosity and that both arts and sciences strain to understand.


The soundtrack of the installation is composed of frequencies emitted by celestial bodies – the sun, the moon, the planets... - captured and transcribed by NASA.

**GLIMPSE OF THE UNIVERSE** is a film by Eugènia Balcells, in conversation with the astronomer Marc Balcells, director of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory (Canary Islands).

Eugènia and Marc share a long-standing complicity. As children they would scrutinise the skies together under the scientific guidance of the adults in a large family of architects headed by an inventor grandfather. Those childhood nights awoke in Eugènia Balcells a lifelong interest in light and the way it behaves. Her first work was in film production, which led her to study Fine Arts at the University of Iowa (USA) and to develop different forms of artistic expression in which space and time are always multiple and mutually penetrable. It is no accident that her degree thesis **MÖEBIUS SPACES** was a fold-out book, with no beginning or end, that opened to create a continuous, circular double space suggesting the paradoxical space of a Möebius strip.

Once she was settled in New York, where she lived for over twenty years, her growing interest in light and colour led her to conceive large installations such as **FROM THE CENTER**, prizewinner at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, NY, 1983; **COLOR FIELDS**, premiered at the First National Video Festival at the Círculo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Club) in Madrid, 1984; **TV WEAVE**, shown at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, PS 1, New York, 1985; **TRANSCENDING LIMITS**, shown at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, 1966 or **COLOR WHEEL**, shown at the Arts Santa Mònica centre as part of the exhibition **FREQUENCIES**, which won her the National Visual Arts Prize 2010, awarded by the Generalitat de Catalunya.

In **UNIVERSE**, Eugènia Balcells treats light as the messenger of the best kept secret, our origin, which may also be our destiny.



Patience, patience  
Patience in the azure sky  
Every atom of silence  
Holds the possibility of a ripe fruit

[PAUL VALÉRY]

In his desire to understand the night sky, Marc Balcells built his first telescope when he was 17 and was caught in the web of questions suggested by the stars. His interest in astronomy grew into a professional career that, since his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA), has led him to collaborate on and direct many research projects aimed at understanding the origin, growth and morphogenesis of the galaxies, following the trail of the expanding universe that is the object of his studies.

As Director of the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes, he currently enables astronomers from around the world to make the observations that may help reveal the mysteries of the sky.

**FREQUENCIES** is an installation exploring the composition of the universe from within matter itself. As opposed to the images of the cosmos offered by astronomy, this installation is based on the elements of the Periodic Table. It allows us to imagine how the trace of light that identifies each element interlaces with the rest, in a metaphor for creation.

**FREQUENCIES** emphasises the fact that everything in existence comes from a particular composition of these original elements that are, in truth, our vital alphabet.

With evening  
the two or three colors of the patio grew weary.  
Tonight, the moon's bright circle  
does not dominate outer space.  
Patio, heaven's watercourse.  
The patio is the slope  
down which the sky flows into the house.  
Serenely  
eternity waits at the crossway of the starts.  
It is lovely to live in the dark friendliness  
of covered entrance way, arbor, and wellhead.

[JORGE LUIS BORGES]



**C**

6 Carbono

**N**

7 Nitrógeno

**O**

8 Oxígeno

**Si**

14 Silicio

**P**

15 Fósforo

**S**

16 Azufre

**HOMAGE TO THE ELEMENTS** is a version of the Periodic Table that includes the chemical names of the elements and the trace of light that identifies them like a fingerprint. It accompanies **FREQUENCIES** like a blind man's guide: it shows us the unique nature of each element so that we can contemplate how they are interwoven in the installation and let our imagination wander amid the complexity of movements that engender life.

**Ge**

32 Germanio

**As**

33 Arsénico

**Se**

34 Selenio

**Sn**

50 Estaño

**Sb**

51 Antimonio

**Te**

52 Telurio

"...for not unknown are the immortal gods to one another,  
even though one dwells in a home far away."

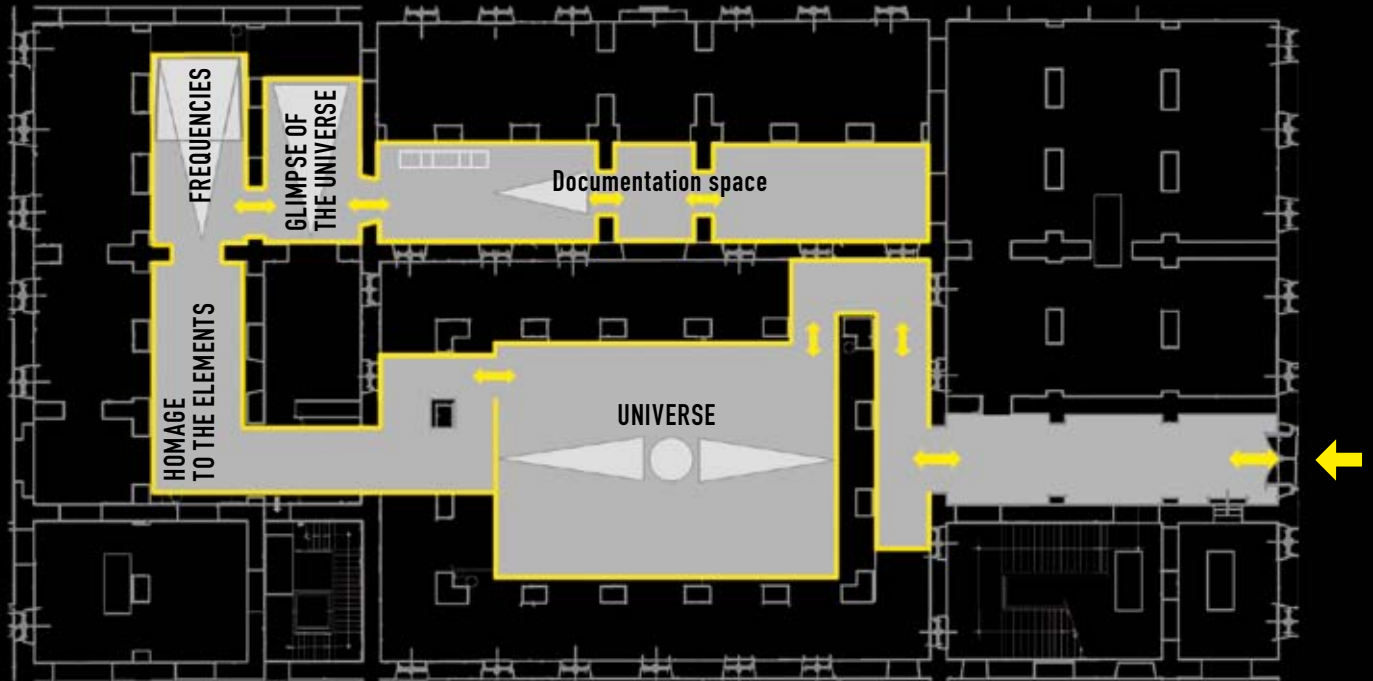
[HOMER]

**Po**

84 Polonio



**LIGHT YEARS** consists of two installations, **UNIVERSE** and **FREQUENCIES**, accompanied by the film **GLIMPSE OF THE UNIVERSE** and the mural **HOMAGE TO THE ELEMENTS**. These four pieces have been made by Eugènia Balcells in the past three years, during which time her artistic career has been recognised with the gold Medal for Merit in the Fine Arts 2009.



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## Tabacalera espacio Promoción del Arte

Calle de Embajadores, 51 · 28012 Madrid

### OPENING HOURS:

Tuesday to Friday: 12.00 - 20.00 h.

Saturdays, Sundays and holidays: 11.00 - 20.00 h.

Closed on Mondays.

**LIGHT YEARS** is a production by the Subdirección General de Promoción de las Bellas Artes del Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport Department for the Promotion of Fine Arts) of a project by Eugènia Balcells, with the participation of the Circular Asociación para la Difusión de las Artes (Circular Association for the Promotion of the Arts) and in collaboration with the Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes at the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias and NASA.



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