

Virginia L. Montgomery: Blue Moon Cocoon

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I can hear the sizzle of newborn stars, and know anything of meaning, of the fierce magic emerging here. I am witness to flexible eternity, the evolving past, and I know we will live forever, as dust or breath in the face of stars, in the shifting pattern of winds.

—Joy Harjo

Virginia L. Montgomery's practice occupies a field of attentiveness, where observation itself constitutes an act of care and witnessing becomes a mode of participation. Grounded in patience and closeness, it unfolds gradually through lengthy interaction with the natural universe; through routines of observation and stewardship—both interstellar and earthly.

Montgomery's series of astrophotography works capture lengthy exposures of deep-sky objects. Taken onsite at the McDonald Observatory in West Texas during a 2024-2025 residency, this series of still and moving images prioritizes patience and perseverance ahead of conclusion and spectacle.

In contrast with the deep time and immense space charted in her astrophotography works, Montgomery's videos and photographs of luna moths depict their fleeting lifespans in intimate detail as they emerge from their cocoons and unfurl their wings against a blue-hued backdrop and tinkling temple bells. Her distinctive studio practice of raising luna moths by hand means accepting loss, fragility, and unpredictability as part of the process.

She and her moth familiars co-create this body of work based on their shared infatuation with the moon. In a series of black and white photographs, the artist brings cocoons to a lunar research telescope, a moon rock display at the SpaceCenter Houston, and lunar equipment at the Marshall Space Center in Huntsville, in a playful gesture of aiding them on their journey to reach the moon.

Through these works, Montgomery draws us into prolonged looking—into the small and the nearly imperceptible—until attention itself becomes a kind of threshold. They demonstrate a willingness to be present amid forces beyond the human—whether terrestrial, planetary, or microscopic—without the need to dominate or claim control.

While Montgomery's work frequently engages with scientific disciplines such as physics, neuroscience, and astronomy, it deliberately resists rigid categorization. Drawings of charts and diagrams made in collaboration with physicists around the country explore concepts like black holes and gravitational wells, without providing definitive explanations. In Montgomery's practice, these fields are not about control or certainty, but about recognizing limits—ways of remaining open, curious, and attentive to the material world as it is.

What further sets her practice apart is its resistance to hierarchy. Knowledge moves between human and nonhuman bodies, between careful study and intuition, and between lived experience

and inquiry. This way of working suggests a feminist understanding of the universe rooted in care, reciprocity, and in cycles that don't obey linear ideas of progress. It isn't so much a system of belief as it is a practice of attention—shaped by waiting, by return, by staying with what takes time.

In Montgomery's work, science and spirituality are not opposites, but sit alongside one another. Her astrophotography is built through precision and long exposure, but what comes through isn't certainty—it's awe. In much the same way, hand-raising moths is both scientific and devotional—an act of care shaped by closeness, responsibility, and quiet attention. What emerges isn't knowledge taken from the world, but knowledge formed alongside it. The viewer is invited into that relationship—to witness, to stay close, and to let meaning arrive over time.

This relationship to knowledge—part inquiry, part intuition—also informs how Montgomery translates complex systems into visual form, giving shape to forces that are sensed as much as studied. Circles, dripping apertures, orbit-like lines, and cocoons show up again and again across Montgomery's sculpture, film, sound, and performance. They work like a recurring language—something you start to recognize through repetition. Like natural cycles, meaning builds through return. Montgomery's work moves this way too, circling back and inviting us to stay with what we can't immediately name.

There is also a deeply embodied dimension to Montgomery's practice. Alongside her work as an artist, she maintains a parallel career as a visual ideation translator, traveling internationally to map the development of ideas in real time. In her fine art practice, this skill set turns inward with diagrams, loops, and recursive symbols functioning as records of thinking and sensing. They follow the flow of concepts through the body—the way perception is first experienced before being identified.

These threads unite in *Blue Moon Cocoon*, where cyclical time is not simply referenced but enacted. Moths and moons emerge as companions, influenced by forces both minuscule and immense—gravity, light, instinct, and persistence. Montgomery's work situates the human viewer within these same systems, asking not what we know, but how we stay with what is fleeting, unknowable, or beyond human control.

The result is a cosmology rooted in relationality rather than dominance. Montgomery's work does not aim for escape or transcendence; it stays with the material world, including its fragility and limits. In an age of acceleration and extraction, *Blue Moon Cocoon* proposes an alternate rhythm—one of patience, attentive observation, and trust in the quiet intelligence of cycles that persist beyond human presence and understanding.

—Jaime T. Herrell (Cherokee Nation)