

ARTS

The Many Deaths of Laila Starr and More Best Bets for July 20–26

This week's highlights include Keith Butler Jr., Tee-Con, Parallel Crossroads of the Americas, and two exhibits at the National Academy of Sciences.

JULY 20TH, 2023

Ongoing: *Blue Dreams* and *Poets for Science* at the National Academy of Sciences



From NAS' *Blue Dreams* exhibition.

The National Academy of Sciences is hosting an immersive video installation billed as “inspired by the intricate workings of microbial networks in the deep sea and beyond.” These gallant microbes may be crucial to earth and life, but—like “[Sea Ice Daily Drawings](#),” another gorgeously styled recent exhibit in the Academy’s curvilinear Upstairs Gallery—the scientific explanation leaves a lot to the imagination. *Blue Dreams*, the current exhibit, is an interdisciplinary collaboration involving **Rika Anderson, Samantha (Mandy) Joye, Rebecca Rutstein, Shayn Peirce-Cottler, and Tom Skalak**; it offers a looped video projected from floor to ceiling against the gallery’s semicircular wall. Visually, the work offers surreal shapes in shades of deep purple, red, and hot pink, washing over each other. They range from calming water waves to phantasmagoric flame-like forms to jiggly, sperm-shaped objects. But to the viewer, all the real-world good ascribed to them remains sadly

unelaborated. Meanwhile, downstairs in the West Gallery is the more self-explanatory exhibit *Poets for Science* featuring 24 poems that explore connections between science and poetry. Of these, the most compelling poems are those most divorced from politics: **Pattiann Rogers**' ode to the humble, one-celled organisms known as archaeans, **Peter Meinke**'s pairing of a close call with a subway pickpocket in Paris and his daughter's research into prehensile proteins known as zinc fingers, and Nobel Laureate **Wisława Szymborska**'s meditation on the number Pi, impressively translated from the Polish by **Clare Cavanagh**. *Blue Dreams runs through Sept. 15; Poets for Science runs through Sept. 8 at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. cpnas.org. Free.* —**Louis Jacobson**