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In the galleries

A multidisciplinary group explores ocean interconnections



An installation photo of “Blue Dreams” by Rebecca Rutstein and the Ocean Memory Project at the National Academy of Sciences. (Kevin Allen)

By **Mark Jenkins**

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Rebecca Rutstein

Hugging a long, curving wall in the National Academy of Sciences’s second-floor gallery, the video installation “Blue Dreams” is as immersive and expansive as an ocean view. Yet the imagery that flits across the seven contiguous screens depicts the seas’ microbial networks, which a gallery note calls “our planet’s smallest yet most

vital living systems.” Devised by Rebecca Rutstein and the Ocean Memory Project, the video uses photographic, abstract and computer-generated material to render visible the infinitesimal.

Rutstein is a Philadelphia multidisciplinary artist who worked on “Blue Dreams” principally with four scientists: environmental microbiologist Rika Anderson, marine biogeochemist Samantha (Mandy) Joye, biomedical engineering professor Shayn Peirce-Cottler and bioengineer Tom Skalak. Their collaboration led from science to art, but sometimes went the opposite direction. Peirce-Cottler, for example, generated models of deep-sea microbial growth patterns based on Rutstein paintings.

Earthly life began in the ocean, a development evoked by the video’s suggestions of underwater volcanoes and heat vents, and its burbling soundtrack. Shimmering green waves resemble the northern and southern lights, while superimposed pixel patterns suggest everything from microorganisms to continental land masses. The video is short but presented in a loop that is suitably endless. Should the processes represented in “Blue Dreams” end, so would our existence.

Rebecca Rutstein and the Ocean Memory Project: Blue Dreams Through Sept. 15 at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. cpnas.org/exhibitions. 202-334-2415.