



# *Drawings of the Aurora Borealis*

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NEW WORK BY OLIVIA PETRIDES

Olivia Petrides transcribes the coruscating energy of the illuminations produced by solar winds colliding with earth's magnetic forces with pen, ink and paper. Her drawings of the aurora borealis can be fairly small in size, but the swirling, weaving kinetic masses of tiny marks reveal more as one follows them across the paper and absorbs their sidereal energy.

Petrides became interested in the phenomenon of the northern lights during her travels in Iceland, Greenland and as a resident of the Museum of Natural History in the far-flung Faroe Islands. She begins each piece by painting her paper a deep rich black and then makes her marks with a hand-made pen, working from dark to light and back again. Intense storms of white ink and gouache on the deep dark ground challenge the limitations of drawing, capturing the scintillations of light with earthly materials. And she works predominantly in black and white foregoing the power contributed by color. These meetings of the material and celestial, of observable phenomena and abstraction, are only the latest in a series of investigations including icebergs, caves and volcanoes for Petrides, who teaches landscape drawing and scientific illustration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. And while the Fulbright winning Petrides is extraordinarily skilled and practiced in the rendering required for illustration—where science and art intersect for a moment before they part company—she pursues the aesthetic tradition of the sublime landscape. Emerging from the Romantic period, this interest in the terror and awe of remote and wild landscapes, waterfalls and stormy seas fed poets and writers like Shelley and Melville and painters like Turner and Bierstadt. Petrides' sublime works are mysterious and resonant, but more focused, leaving out narrative and context, concentrating on the flows and collisions of ions, particles and molecules illuminating the vast skies over dark northern landscapes.

—Janina A. Ciezadlo is an artist and critic in Chicago. Her reviews appear in *The Chicago Reader*; *Afterimage*, *The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*; *Bridge*; *Artscope* and *The Chicago Art Critic's Association* publications.

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*Aurora XV, 14.5x40.5, ink and gouache on paper, 2009*



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August 15 - December 24, 2011

Purdue University North Central  
Technology Building  
1401 South U.S. Highway 421  
Westville, Indiana

Monday - Friday, 7am - 11pm  
Saturday, 7am - 5pm  
Sunday by appt: 219-785-5719 or  
email Liz Bernel, ebernel@pnc.edu

Opening Reception:  
Saturday, October 22, 5 - 6:30pm  
Remarks at 5:30

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