

Constellation Art

Inspired by the work of Erika Blumenfeld



Erika Blumenfeld, *Plate No. 16914 (Small Magellanic Cloud)*, 2022. Cyanotype, chine colle, and 24k gold leaf on Hahnemuhle Copperplate, 11.25" x 9". Courtesy of the Artist and Inman Gallery, Houston.

Erika Blumenfeld is a transdisciplinary artist, writer, and researcher. Her practice is driven by the wonder of natural phenomena, humanity's relationship with the natural world, and the intersection between art, nature, science, and culture. Blumenfeld found inspiration for a lot of her work from the notion that "we are made of star stuff."

BACKGROUND

Tracing Luminaries is a print edition by Erika Blumenfeld that references the work of the Harvard Computers. The Harvard Computers were a group of women in the late 1800s who worked at the Harvard College Observatory, studying and making observations to preserve glass negative plate images of space. Recently, there has been an effort to digitize these images, but the process required erasing the hand-written notes of these women. To help preserve their hard work and elevate their many discoveries, Blumenfeld created these pieces that include the the notations. The materials that Blumenfeld chose are meaningful as well. For instance, she used cyanotype, or light-sensitive paper, and exposed that to starlight.

VOCABULARY

Constellation: a group of stars forming a recognizable pattern that is traditionally named after its apparent form or identified with a mythological subject.

Myth: a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.

Luminary: (1.) a person who inspires or influences others, especially one prominent in a particular sphere [the Harvard Computers in this case], (2.) a natural light-giving body [stars in the artwork].

MATERIALS

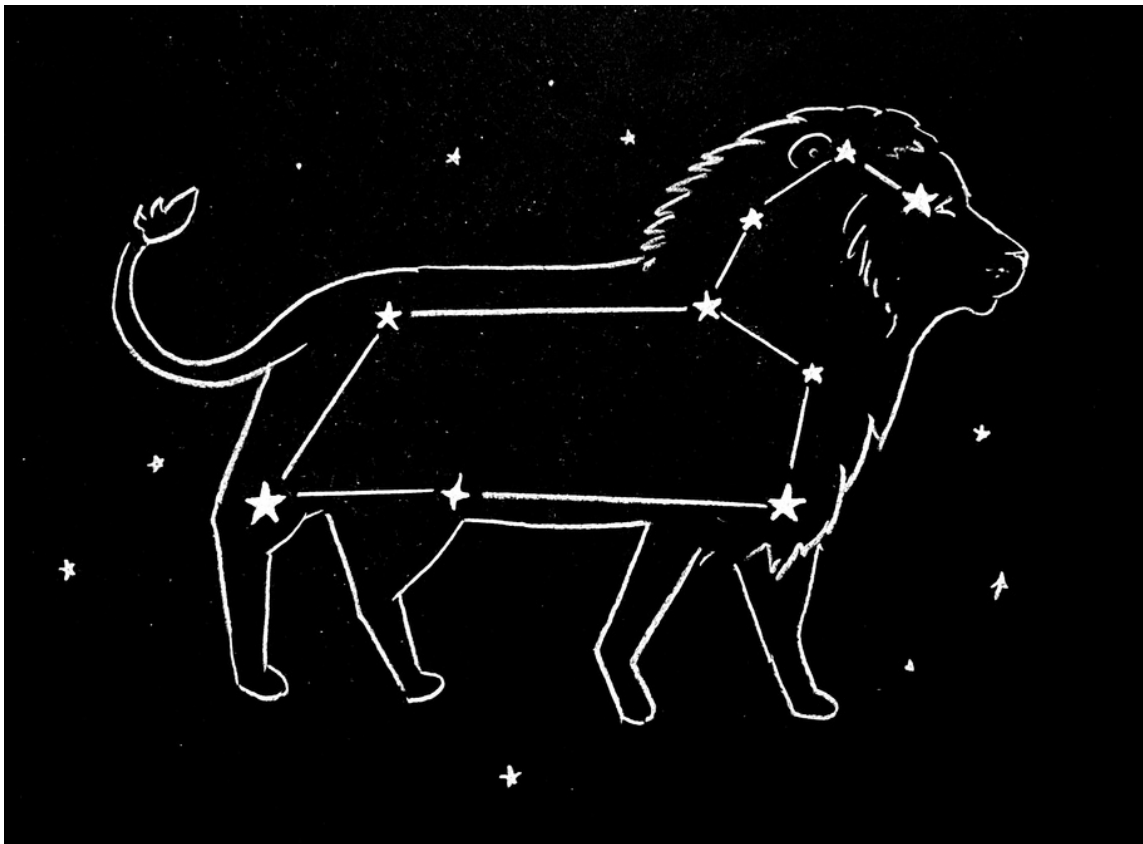
- Scratch paper and an etching tool such as a toothpick or a wooden skewer
- OR**
- Black paper and a white colored pencil (or crayon)

Variation: if you do not have either of these materials, a white piece of paper and a drawing utensil will work as well.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.) Gather all of your materials.
- 2.) Using a book or the internet, search for some examples of constellations. Choose one and learn about the mythology behind it.
- 3.) Draw your constellation. Feel free to incorporate the myth into your drawing.

Optional: See if the constellation you chose can be viewed from where you live!



Activity example.