

UC Riverside exhibit explores the art of citizen space travel

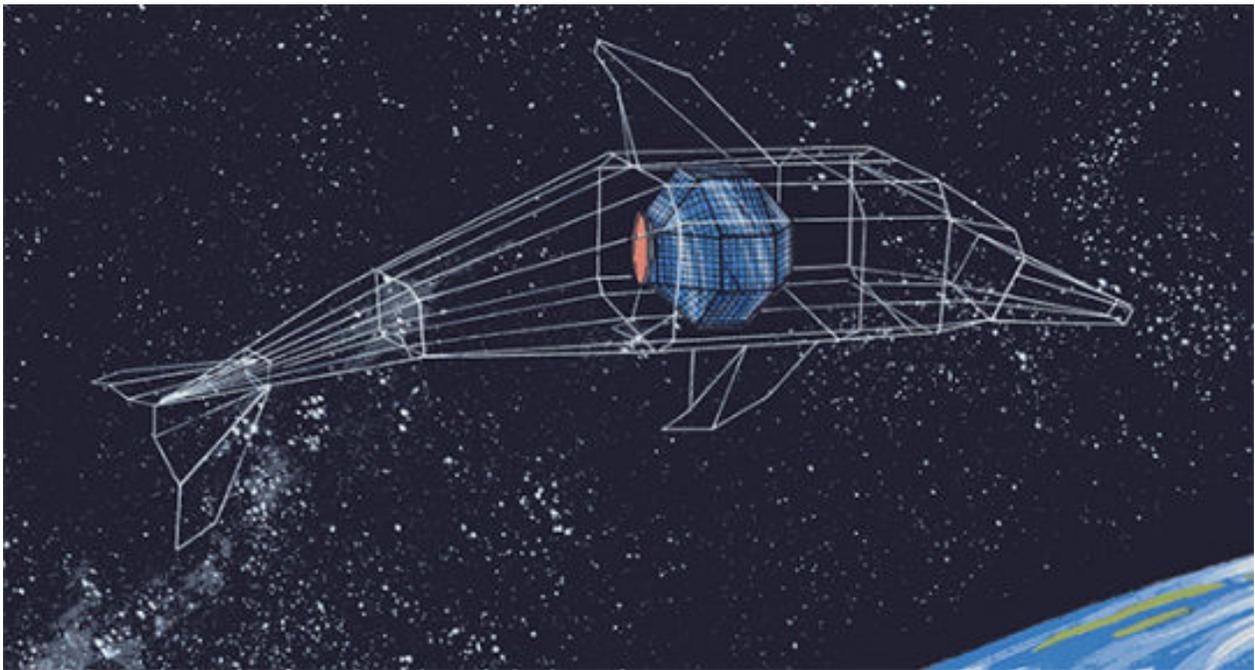


Illustration by Edgar Duncan

Richard Clar, Space Flight Dolphin, rendering of deployed satellite/sculpture in low earth orbit, 1982.

Imagine this: In the not-too-distant future, space might not be the place for just scientists or astronauts. It could be home to everyday people and artists too.

Sculptures will orbit the earth alongside satellites, dancers will perform anti-gravity ballets, and beyond our planet, artists might explore new worlds of creativity. Those ideas are already being explored in a new art exhibition at the UC Riverside ARTSblock called, "Free Enterprise: The Art of Citizen Space Exploration." Drew Tewksbury from KCET's Artbound has the story.

Curators at the University of California Riverside's ARTSblock aren't waiting for the future. Their current exhibit "Free Enterprise: The Art of Citizen Space Exploration" examines how the privatization of space travel could provide new opportunities for artists.

Tewksbury, Drew. "UC Riverside exhibit explores the art of citizen space travel", *KPCC-FM*. March 11, 2013

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"We believe that there is quite a crucial moment happening where private citizens have the ability to start constructing machines and apparatuses to leave the earth's surface and go into orbit," said Marko Peljhan, artist and co-curator of the show. "This is happening in Southern California, the main players are located here, so we are in the center of that moment."

This isn't a curated show of art featuring aliens or psychedelic planetoids airbrushed on the side of a conversion van. Instead, it uses high technology and high art to pose the question: What can artists really do with space?

As unlikely as it seems, art and aerospace have a special relationship in Southern California. For many years, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena has maintained an artist-in-residence program. There's also the new wave of private space companies like the Hawthorne-based Space X. They successfully launched a rocket which docked with the International Space Station last year.

All of a sudden, space isn't all that far away, and artists are exploring the real possibilities of making art up there. Tyler Stallings — the show's co-curator — says he wanted to showcase artists who are serious about space.

"We wanted to include artists who had actually had a very serious relationship or aspiration towards working with aerospace companies, as opposed to just kind of stopping in their work at metaphor and allegory," said Stallings. "We're standing in an installation by artist Carrie Paterson from Los Angeles...All of the different aspects of the project are dealing with the idea of smell and perfumes. In one of the projects, where it's this kind of high-tech perfume counter that looks like something from the future, and one of the items is this little ball that's in sections, kind of like an orange...It's a homesickness kit.

While the homesickness kit looks to future space travel, other pieces in the show look to the past. And some have even made the trip to space, like the piece, Moon Museum. The Moon Museum is a small white ceramic chip, the size of a postage stamp.

On it are simple drawings by six artists including Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg. Twenty identical chips were created by artist Forrest Myers and engineers at Bell Labs. In 1969, one of the chips was smuggled onto an actual trip to the moon during the Apollo 12 mission.

"The 'Moon Museum' is one of these works which, you know, is from, really I'd say, a pioneering era, from the heroic era of space art," said Peljhan. "And it happened also in a kind of a very covert, conspiracy between artists, engineers, and people that were working at Grumman Aerospace, who were building the Moon Lander. One of these pieces was covertly put between the blankets of the lunar lander."

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One of the chips is on display in the exhibition, and another one circles the earth still in the lunar lander. While this may be the most high profile piece in the show, other works highlight the collaboration between artists and scientists. Two particular pieces explore the weightlessness of space momentarily created in steeply diving airliners. One artist made Pollack-esque paintings free from gravity, and French choreographer Kitsou Dubois developed dance moves that were performed while floating through the air.

"Kitsou is special within the show because she was the first artist to go on a parabolic flight," said Stallings. "When she comes back to earth, she creates dances where she tries to incorporate some of the moves from microgravity but now being back in gravity, yet, you know, torquing the body in these very weird ways to try to capture that same weightless sensibility."

As Peljhan points out, artists — like scientists — are good at pushing the limits.

"We see it, art, as part of the sort of initial process. Because there's no better troublemakers than artists to ask the most difficult questions. Of Course, some people don't like troublemakers but, in general, you need them to really sort of stir things up when things are not going in the right direction," said Peljhan.

The exhibit will be at UC Riverside's Sweeney Art Gallery and Culver Center of the Arts until March 23.