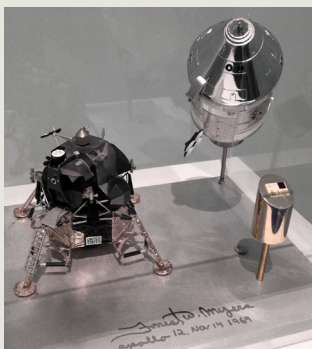


09

A museum on the moon? The Moon Museum, exhibition space off limits

Rafael Guridi

The idea of a 'museum' on the moon seems to be taken from a B-movie or a pulp science fiction magazine, although the surprising thing is that it actually is a reality, of sorts. Just how a miniature artwork by six of the most important American artists of the 1960s came to be surreptitiously etched onto a small ceramic wafer the size of a SIM card attached to one of the legs of the lunar module of the Apollo 12 mission and secretly dispatched to the moon in November 1969 (the second manned mission), has all the ingredients of a mystery film and questions the very notion of what a museum is, representing as well one of the most exciting adventures in the history of 20th Century art, embodying the spirit of a decade of optimism and faith in the redemptive power of technology



The Moon Museum, 1969. Various artists with Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, David Novros, Forrester Myers, Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain.

"The Moon Museum is thought to be the first artwork to have travelled to the moon. American sculptor Forrester Myers worked with scientists from Bell Laboratories to produce an edition of tiny ceramic tiles onto which drawings by him and five other artists were inscribed. He reported that he had one of the tiles covertly attached to the Apollo 12 spacecraft and that it was left on the moon along with other personal effects transported by the astronauts".

MoMA Collection Files¹

On November 19, 1962, the lunar module "Intrepid" from the Apollo 12 mission landed on the lunar surface. Three days later, during his trip back to earth, the *New York Times* reported that it had secretly transported the first "museum of the moon", a ceramic chip with miniaturized reproductions of artworks by Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, David Novros, Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain, and Forrester Myers. The story had all the ingredients of a mystery film. Of course, one question is whether the so-called 'Moon Museum' survived the harsh conditions of the trip and remains in place, as no one has been able to check the fact – even though the installation was later acknowledged by organizations such as the *New York Times* and MoMA in New York (fig. 01).

Its existence breaks several records: the farthest museum from anywhere in the world and the tiniest in the solar system. Its unique size, the way it was installed and its artistic components,

which include mini-works from six well-known artists, lead one to question the very notion of what a museum is. Some might argue that it also represents one of the most exciting adventures in the history of 20th Century art, embodying the spirit of a decade of optimism and faith in the redemptive power of technology.

THE STORY

The idea stemmed from the sculptor Forrester "Frosty" Myers. Born in Long Beach in 1941 and educated at the San Francisco Art Institute, Myers had been living in New York since the early 1960s. In 1969, Myers participated in the "Experiments in Art and

Technology (EAT) meetings organized by Johan Wilhelm "Billy" Kluver², an engineer from Bell Telephone Laboratories who was seeking to combine art and technology by getting artists and engineers to cooperate in creative projects.

According to his memoirs³, Myers had been obsessed with space travel since the Soviet Sputnik mission of the previous decade. This led him to propose, in the moon landing year, the installation on Earth's satellite of a tiny 'museum', to be transported by the next scheduled space mission, Apollo 12. The museum, in effect a micro-art installation, would contain works from some of the most important American artists of the time. To that purpose, he spoke to Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, David Novros, Robert Rauschenberg and John Chamberlain, who gladly agreed to be part of what would become the first moon-based art exhibition.

Myers contacted NASA, first directly and later through a major institution, the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York, whose American Art director, Henry Geldzahler, supported the idea. But as the launch date approached without a response, Myers and the group of artists decided to proceed illicitly by contacting an engineer working at Grumman Aircraft Corporation⁴, the company that manufactured the lunar modules. This individual's name was kept – and still remains – secret. He is only known by the code name, "John F". (probably an allusion to President John F Kennedy, promoter of the Apollo missions).

Given the secretive –not to mention illegal– nature of the operation, it was decided to make a small artwork featuring reproductions of works by the artists –including Myers himself– to be installed secretly in one of the legs of the "Intrepid" module. Thus each artist contributed a drawing, which was reproduced and miniaturized in Bell Telephone Laboratories. Under the guidance of laboratory director Fred Waldhauer, engineers Robert Merkle and Burt Unger etched the drawings on a 19.05mm x 12.7mm ceramic wafer 0.64 mm thick, about the size of a SIM card (fig. 02).

The laboratories used pioneering techniques for printed circuits and Merkle was an expert. Each of the drawings was reduced photographically so it fitted the dimensions of the wafer, which was mounted on glass. In all, twelve official copies were produced. Each tiny ceramic plate featured a metallic layer of tantalum nitride and a layer of photosensitive material. Both pieces (glass and ceramic) were combined and exposed to light, which produced a kind of photographic contact copy, leaving the drawings engraved on a ceramic piece resistant to the extreme conditions of both the space trip and the ultimate resting place⁵.

Several copies were made, and the glass molds were destroyed in order to prevent future unauthorized copies. There is debate over the final number of plates since some of them found their way to Bell Telephone laboratory technicians. Robert Merkle says twelve copies were made in total⁶, but Jade Dellinger, director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery in Florida, has stated that the total number could have reached forty, although he recognized that far fewer have actually been located⁷.

Finally, John F, the secret contact of the artists and technicians, was assigned to Cape Canaveral. On 12 November 1969, two days before launch, John F sent Myers a confirmation telegram:

“YOUR ON ‘A.O.K. ALL SYSTEMS GO” (fig. 03). The telegram forms part of the Moon Museum legend: it’s been included in exhibitions about the museum and its text, including syntactic errors, has led to titles of publications and conferences⁸.

The Apollo 12 mission spacecraft, with astronauts Charles “Pete” Conrad, Alan L. Bean and Richard Gordon, took off on 14 November at 16:22 UTC. The lunar module “Intrepid” landed at the Oceanus Procellarum Selenita on 19 November at 06:54 UTC. Since then, the Moon Museum has remained attached to one of the lunar module’s leg without anybody being able to confirm its presence.

During the mission’s return trip, Forrest Myers sent the *New York Times* a summary of the facts, along with a reproduction of one of the plates. The newspaper published the news on 22 November –“New York sculptor says Intrepid put art on moon” –and included the photo of the plaque, giving credibility to the story and triggering the legend of the first museum on the moon (fig. 04)⁹.

ARTWORKS

According to Myers, all the artists took the project very seriously¹⁰. Due to the diminutive size of the object and the agreed reproduction technique, every artist opted for simple line drawings, generally linked to their personal interests at the time (fig. 05).

The upper left corner features a drawing by Andy Warhol, in which he combines his initials AW with the outline of male genitals. Some people also see the basic shape of a rocket, which would link better with the project’s aim¹¹. To the right, Robert Rauschenberg drew a simple horizontal straight line. According to Jade Dellinger, the works of Warhol and Rauschenberg attempted to portray a kind of conceptual footprint, equivalent to those left by Neil Armstrong’s boots on the moon surface¹².

The rest of the artists presented drawings in line with works they were making at that time. David Novros produced a photo-negative composition of white lines on a black rectangle. For Dellinger, the white lines were a two-dimensional representation of the discrete box shapes he’d been working on. John Chamberlain produced a geometric scheme with echoes of a printed circuit.

We must give a special mention to the drawing of Claes Oldenburg, whose work is characterized by the large-scale enlargement of commonplace or ‘banal’ objects taken from popular culture. Forced this time to work on a tiny scale, the artist presented a micro-version of his gigantic stylised head of Mickey Mouse, a work in progress under the name of *Mouse Museum / Ray Gun Wing* (1965-1977).

Finally, Forrest Myers himself contributed a drawing that depicted a 3-D geometrical shape, echoing a series he was working on called *Computer Drawings*. Along with Chamberlain’s effort, this was the closest work to the technological spirit of the mission.

It should be noted that in the photo published by the *New York Times*, a thumb held the chip by its upper left corner, concealing Andy Warhol’s phallic drawing.

A MUSEUM WITHOUT VISITORS?

The idea of a museum without visitors seems, at first, a contradiction. The most prestigious dictionaries define the term ‘museum’ as being linked to works or items on public exhibition. The Merriam Webster, a significant reference in the English

language, gives two meanings, the second of which defines ‘museum’ as ‘a place where objects are exhibited’. In the RAE Dictionary (the Spanish language’s supreme authority), the term is defined in an almost identical way: ‘Lugar donde se exhiben objetos o curiosidades’ (*Place where objects or curiosities are exhibited*). The other meanings refer to the institution or the building itself.

Hence the museum concept encompasses the idea of public exhibition, just as paintings are on display in an art gallery or

a concert or recitation involve listening. However, the 20th Century has provided numerous examples that contradict the previous statement: In 1961 the Italian conceptual artist Piero Manzoni put on the art market his famous “merda d’artista” (artist’s shit), hermetically sealed in 90 cans six centimeters in diameter and five centimeters high. Weight for weight, the suggested price was the same as gold, which has seen the price soar for any items resold at a later date. Apparently, no can have been opened so far to verify its contents.

The well-known musical work “4’33” by John Cage (1952) consists of four minutes, thirty-three seconds of absolute silence, divided into three movements. Since music is a combination of both sounds and silences, governed by different time signatures, nothing prevents a work being composed of silence alone. The literary work *Bartleby y Compañía* by Enrique Vilamatas (2001), includes an array of textless writers (scarce or non-written work), if this notion is possible. Apart from the prologue, the book is only readable in the footnotes accompanying a blank text. In 2003, artist Santiago Sierra was named curator of the Spanish pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale. The artist decided to exhibit nothing, leaving in the pavilion the empty spaces and the crumbling remains of former exhibitions. In effect, his only input was to rigorously control access to this artistic vacuum so that only those people with a Spanish ID card or passport (in Italy!) could enter the pavilion.

Artworks that cannot be seen, music that cannot be heard, wordless literature, exhibitions with no content, would all seem to contradict the communicative imperative inherent in every artistic creation. The above-mentioned examples exemplify a frequent strategy in contemporary art: replacing sight/vision with conceptual awareness. Manzoni’s work questions not only the limits of art’s commodification –as the author himself pointed out– but the very essence of the artistic nature of a commonplace or ‘banal’ object, following the lead already given in 1917 by Marcel Duchamp and his *Fountain* sculpture, a urinal. Sierra exposed the arbitrary character of the concept of national borders and the Kafkaian (but very real) consequences of this arbitrariness. Cage, meanwhile, indicated that “4’33” emphasized the value of silence as a musical element, but feared his work would be interpreted as a mere “boutade” (a witticism) and would not be taken seriously. That same seriousness was the general attitude held by the artists of the Moon Museum, according to Myers (fig. 06).

ARTISTS’ MUSEUMS

The idea of the Moon Museum seems to fit into a tradition recently referred to as “artists’ museums”. These are private art collections assembled by the artist himself or by others, usually featuring smaller transportable artworks. They don’t need to exist in museums but they have, in a limited way, the minimum features to be considered as museums.

One of the first examples of this concept can be seen –once again– in Marcel Duchamp’s famous *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935-1945), a portable suitcase-museum where the artist stores miniature samples of all his works. This idea was taken up three decades later by various artists. In 1968, another Marcel (in this case Broodthaers) opened his *Musée d’Art Moderne* in his own Brussels house, which contained his own or other people’s artworks –often *objets trouvés* (found objects) or commonplace items.

More ambitious and personal is the *Schubladenmuseum* (the drawer museum), devised by the Swiss artist Herbert Distel in the 1960s and 1970s. It offers a selection of 500 artworks from both decades, miniaturized and housed in small boxes about five centimeters wide and displayed in twenty cupboard drawers¹³.

Closely linked to the Moon Museum concept, the American artist Claes Oldenburg also developed his own artist’s museum, the *Mouse Museum / Ray Gun Wing*, conceived between 1965 and 1977. This is an accessible container with an outline of a stylised

Mickey Mouse, housing 400 objects that range from sketches and works by the artist to ready-mades and other objects. It is precisely this drastic reduction of scale that the artist uses for his contribution to the Moon Museum (fig. 07).

Since the sixties, artists' museums have proliferated, with examples such as the Salinas Museum, dedicated to vilifying Mexican president Salinas de Gortari. It was installed by the Mexican artist Vicente Razo in the bathroom of his own house; the artist appointed himself director of the Salinas Museum and even published a guide, the official Museo Salinas Guide. Other examples of 'personal museums' include the *Homeless Museum of Art* (HOMU), a movable street cart devised by Filip Noterdaeme (2002), the *Museum of the street* by the Cambalache collective (Bogotá, 1999) and the *Food Culture Museum* by Catalan artist Antoni Miralda (Hannover Expo, 2000).

Artists' museums have been the subject of recent studies, such as the one by Mexican Tomas Ruiz-Rivas¹⁴, or exhibitions such as *Museum Show*, held in the Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts, from September to November 2011 in Bristol, UK¹⁵. Starting from Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, the exhibition featured a good sample of artists' mini-museums, including, of course, the Moon Museum.

BACKGROUND

The Apollo program was the culmination and symbol of a decade characterized by great optimism, faith in scientific progress and economic progress, demonstrating how the western world had overcome post-war hardships. It was also the Baby

Boom era of huge demographic growth and empowerment of younger generations, something unprecedented in recent history. The 1960s remains the decade of the counterculture, beatniks, hippies and other alternative lifestyles, and witnessed the so-called sexual revolution – known in English-speaking countries as the "Swinging Sixties" – the explosive years of pop-rock and psychedelia, of James Bond and 'flower power'.

At the time, science was widely viewed as a force for optimism and redemption spanning all of society, from popular culture to academia. In architecture, these were the years of Archigram, Superstudio or Archizoom, of Yona Friedman, Frei Otto and Buckminster Fuller, Kenzo Tange and the Japanese Metabolists. Certain developments in the final years of the decade give us a perfect portrait of the era's zeitgeist: the 1967 Montreal Expo, with pavilions by Buckminster Fuller and Frei Otto, and for which Peter Cook even designed a tower; in 1968 James Stirling finished the Seeley Historical Library at Cambridge University, Johana Mayer-Archigram presented his *Instant-City* (fig. 08), and Robert Venturi set up a research group at Yale, called *Learning from Las Vegas or Form Analysis as Design Research*.

That same year saw the release of films like *Yellow Submarine* (Georges Dunning) and *2001: a Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick), the latter depicting moon colonization with great scientific realism only one year before Apollo 11's arrival (fig. 09).

The Moon Museum shared the optimism for the future shown by contemporary projects, merging art and technology as suggested by the EAT meetings, where the idea was born. Linked to this, the lawless –possibly illegal– nature of the project gave it added meaning as a transgressive action or an act of cultural 'micro-terrorism' –harmless but highly symbolic, connecting it to the rebellious values of the time.

The Moon Museum was one of the first projects to link art with the space race: the idea was soon followed by other initiatives, albeit with different goals. In July 1971, the Apollo 15 mission placed a new artwork on the moon, *Fallen Astronaut*, an aluminum figurine a few centimeters high that represented a stylised astronaut. The idea came from a Belgian sculptor, Paul van Hoeydonck, and

his gallerist in New York. Finding similar obstacles that Myers had confronted two years before, they contacted the astronauts directly and the latter agreed to leave the work with certain conditions: a minimum size, the absence of gender or identifiable race and the addition of a plaque bearing the names of Soviet and American astronauts who had died in space missions.

Commander David Scott deposited the figurine at the Mare Imbrium landing site, photographed it and made it public at the press conference that was held on their return. Unaware of the Moon Museum, both Commander Scott and artist van Hoeydonck claimed to have placed the first artistic object on the moon. The *New York Times* responded, claiming that accolade for the Moon Museum and criticizing the operation as a mere marketing stunt by the artist and his gallery, who were relatively unknown in New York's artistic circles. The controversy snowballed when the sculptor attempted to commercialize copies of the statuette, despite a previous agreement not to do so¹⁶.

Recently, the planet Mars has replaced the moon as the target of some artists. In 2003, the European Space Agency (ESA) launched the Mars Express mission, whose landing module, Beagle 2, incorporated a 10cm aluminum plate with colored circles (quite similar to a watercolor palette) by British artist Damien Hirst. This plate was also designed to calibrate the onboard X-ray equipment. Unfortunately, Beagle 2's signal was lost on landing, due to an unidentified systems failure.

Hirst's plate, probably still attached to the module, or to its remains, was not alone on the Martian surface for long. In January 2004, NASA introduced a new rover, called Spirit, to the red planet, featuring another artistic object. This time it was a DVD, conceived by the Australian artist Stephen Little, containing four million names of people who wished to leave their mark on the planet. The landing was successful and Spirit was operational until 2011.

One might question the artistic nature of both creations, since the Hirst plaque was a calibration tool and Little's DVD was merely a list of names, but that is not an issue to be discussed here.

Art may return to the moon in future, thanks to the initiative of Japanese millionaire Yusaku Maezawa, who plans to make a private trip to Earth's satellite accompanied by six artists in order to give a joint artistic performance. The *Dear Moon* project will not take place before 2023 and neither the nature of the performance nor the names of the chosen artists have been revealed¹⁷.

Such projects are very different from the Moon Museum. All of them are conceived via personal initiative (such as the artist van Hoeydonck and the promoter Maezawa) and could be seen as self-promotion. Alternatively, as exemplified by the Mars cases, it would seem that the two space agencies, European and American, sought out well-known artists as a kind of advertising initiative. Both objects (colored calibration plate and DVD of names) could have been transported to the planet without the mediation of famous artists.

CONCLUSIONS

Though positioned at the very limit of what it means to be a "museum", the Moon Museum meets the minimum requirements to be declared as such. It involves a collection of artwork by prominent artists exhibited in an open space, just not on Earth. The difficulty of public access does not invalidate its museum status since future technological advances could enable access. Other museums are very difficult to reach, such as Lanzarote's submarine museum or those located in the houses (and bathroom) of Marcel Broodthaers and Vicente Rizo.

As mentioned above, "conceptual displacement" can replace the physicality of artistic work with an underlying idea or concept: such as the value of silence in Cage's work, or the arbitrariness of borders in Sierra's. The Moon Museum claims for itself the

value of technology and scientific discovery as part of its creative identity. The important thing is that the object is on the moon and that it was placed there in the same year that man arrived. The way the project was carried out, as a kind of "guerrilla art" which leaves objects in unauthorized places, at minimal cost, adds to the whole adventure's significance –imparting a far greater value than that of the individual works alone.

Conceptual displacement allows us to value, first and foremost, the idea of the museum itself; not forgetting the faith needed in accepting that the artwork is actually on the moon. Manzoni's sealed cans, while featuring a different content, also demand a certain belief. The advantage of the Moon Museum is that we can contemplate the twenty or so facsimile copies of the micro-artwork that circulate in museums and galleries without the need to visit the moon.

Tiny, distant, unreachable (for the time being), transgressive (if not actually illegal), cost-effective in its installation, the Moon Museum surely represents one of the most ambitious projects in the artistic field, a worthy representative of a decade of technological optimism and faith in the future that sought to bring "all power to the imagination".

(English translation: Rafael Guridi & David Worwood)

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10. DELLINGER, Jade, ANNICK Bureaud, *op. cit.*

11. "He created a stylized version of his initials which, when viewed at certain angles, can appear as a rocket ship or a penis". STINSON, Elizabeth. "We Sent a Dick Pic to the Moon-And We're Doing It Again" en; WIRED: <https://www.wired.com/2015/05/we-sent-a-dick-pic-to-the-moon/>

12. "Like Neil Armstrong's boot impressions on the lunar surface, both can be interpreted as the conceptual footprint of an artist". DELLINGER, Jade, et ANNICK Bureaud. *op. cit.*

13. En la actualidad, en el Kunsthau de Zurich: <http://www.kunsthau.ch/de/sammlung/restaurierung/beispiele-aus-der-praxis/herbert-distel/> (última consulta: 10, febrero, 2019)

14. RUIZ RIVAS, Tomas, *Museos de artistas*, Edición digital del Antimuseo, Ciudad de México 2014. www.antimuseo.org

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17. <https://dearmoon.earth/>

Images

01. Model of "intrepid" lander from Apollo 12 and chip (original, right angle) with signature from Forrest Myers. Exhibition *The Moon Museum* en: E.A.T. Experiments in Art and Technology, Museum der Moderne Salzburg

02. *The Moon Museum*, MoMA Files, NY, 1969 (Code: 0156592)

03. Telegram from "John F". a Forrest Myers (12/November/1969) announcing the successful setting of the chip in the lander module (Wikimedia commons/ Wikipedia)

04. *The New York Times*, *The Moon Museum*, 22 de noviembre de 1969 (fragment), *The New York Times*-files

05. The Moon Museum, Artworks (Author, on n. 2)

06. *Moon art scale fingers*, http://www.forevergeek.com/2010/06/nasa_astronauts_smuggled_artwork_onto_the_moon/

07. Claes Oldenburg: *Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (April 14–August 5, 2013). Photo: Jason Mandella. © 2013 The Museum of Modern Art.

08. *Instant City*, Jhoana Mayer, Archigram, 1955-1968

09. 2001 *An Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968), Scene on the moon. (Matthew J. Cotter / Flickr2Commons).

10

Oteiza and Oíza: the Exhibition Space as temporal Perception

Jorge Ramos
Fernando Zaparaín
Pablo Llamazares

There are not many examples in the architectural panorama of museums built to house the visual artwork of a single artist. Even less when the artist actively collaborates in the architectural conception of the space that should receive his legacy. This research establishes a relational reading to understand the connections between the way in which Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003) proposes that his sculptures should be exhibited, exemplified in the exhibition montage suggested for his participation in the IV São Paulo Modern Art Biennial in 1957, and the project for the Foundation and Museum in Alzuza, Navarra, the work of his good friend Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza (1918-2000). In both cases, the use of time as an instrument for controlling perception will be essential to achieve greater coherence between the museum space and the displayed work.



The very concept of a museum revolves around the dialectic relationship between the works it houses and the exhibition container. In the last few decades, the focus seems to have shifted towards architecture, which has tried to share the importance of the collection it should represent and has sought the expression of the exhibition itself¹. The *Khunsthall* in Rotterdam (Koolhaas), the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Helsinki* (Steven Holl) or the *Guggenheim* in Bilbao (Gehry) could illustrate this assumption.

Although fewer in number, there are also buildings that are intended to be built according to the institution they house. This is the case of the *Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza* in Alzuza, Navarra (1992-2003), the latest project by Sáenz de Oíza, carried out in active complicity with the sculptor, as on previous occasions² (fig. 01). The itinerary through the museum, the concatenation of exhibition areas and the museographic project itself are indebted to a specific way of understanding the relationship between pieces, space and spectator that Jorge Oteiza established throughout his artistic career.

In such a specific museum as Alzuza's, it seems reasonable to expect that the experiences accumulated by Oteiza would have come together when he had to face the exhibition of his works, and even those of other artists³. In his career, the intimate experience of the Chalk Laboratory stands out but, above all, his participation in the