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Author: Ms. Lindsay Small
University of Toronto, Canada

DON'T PANIC: THE CURATOR'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Abstract

The cultural landscape of space is such that it is ever evolving. Far from being the barren frontier which is often depicted in popular TV shows and movies, the immediate space around the Earth is filled with the remnants of a collective heritage of working satellites and now inoperable machinery. The moon and Mars also bare the marks of Earth's voyages beyond the planet. The question now becomes: what do we do with it?

This paper presents emerging research on the intersection between heritage management policy and outer space objects. The fast approaching reality of space tourism requires a necessary look at how space heritage objects will be preserved and cared for in the future. An examination of current strategies employed by heritage sites and museums illuminates the need for careful consideration of space object/site management.

Employing a museological lens, this paper looks broadly at two models of heritage management: national and international. This research examines how space exploration, which is often a highly nationalized endeavour, interacts with these heritage structures. An important area of this research deals with ownership rights and control. Cases already exist that exemplify the tensions between international or human interests in space and nationalized models of heritage management. The transmission of information surrounding space heritage objects represents a power dynamic as well as an economic advantage for increasingly privatized forces. Issues faced by Earth-based museums and heritage organizations can be instructive as to what to do (and not do) in space and why.

The preservation of space heritage sites and objects presents a challenge that museums are uniquely positioned to speak to. Issues of colonialism, ownership and universal value are prevalent within heritage institutions and intersect with the common values and rhetoric of space exploration. Thus this paper examines the implications of creating a heritage management structure in outer space and how this structure can learn from and potentially improve upon current museological practice.