

29th IAA SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE AND SOCIETY (E5)
Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

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THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF SPACE EXPLORATION FROM AN ARTISTS PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

In my artistic work I take a critical look at the technological forces drastically transforming the 21st century. My photo and video works exemplify an interdisciplinary understanding of art fusing science, art, and technology into visions and utopias of future social orders emerging under the impact of cutting-edge technologies. My work has been included in many international museum exhibitions and biennials and is featured in a wide range of international publications.

Since 2011 I am working on the “outer space” series which deals with the latest developments in space exploration and the way they will shape our future life on Earth, in Earth’s near orbit and on other planets. The cultural dimension represented by emergent cutting-edge space technologies is at the center of this series which started with the final launch of the Space Shuttle Atlantis and currently comprises 40 photographic artworks and 5 video works. I have traveled to the world’s most important spaceports like the Kennedy Space Center, Baikonur Cosmodrome and the Guiana Space Centre. I have met with numerous scientists, engineers and astronauts, and visited space laboratories around the globe constructing new spacecraft, satellites and telescopes. I traveled to the Atacama Desert to photograph the world’s most powerful telescopes located at sites across high altitude plateaus in the Andes. In China I photographed the world’s largest telescope hidden in deep forest; in Iceland I explored the issue of terraforming, climbing down into glacier caves to portray the melting ice sheets. The series blends documentary and fictive scenarios to create visionary enactments and unique artworks of current and future space exploration.

Being one of the pioneer astronauts of Virgin Galactic, I will be embarking on SpaceShipTwo to become the first artist to travel in space. I conducted an intensive and ongoing astronaut training program at Star City, the German Space Center and the NASTAR training center. My training sessions included a stratospheric flight in a MiG-29, zero gravity flights, centrifugal spins, underwater space-walk training and a HALO jump from an altitude of 10,000m. I captured these situations of extremity on camera to investigate my own physical and mental responses and exemplify them in artistic expression.

The main intention of this series is to translate the latest developments in space exploration into a different artistic language making these ideas accessible to a wider audience.

It would be a great pleasure to present my artwork at the conference.

images: www.michaelnajjar.com