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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

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CURATING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF SPACE—A COLLABORATIVE, INCLUSIVE APPROACH

Abstract

From new and renewed space programs in developed and developing countries to innovative technologies and commercial services from private industry, we are seeing a strong push on space exploration. Along the way, cultural production for outer space becomes crucial for humanity as we expand beyond the earthbound. In the past, science fiction, such as Star Trek, has had a profound impact on our imaginations of planetary futures. What shall we read and imagine now? In this talk, I share my work as the arts curator of the Space Exploration Initiative at the MIT Media Lab, where my objective is to create broad and inclusive new dialogues and to envision the future of outer space. Our effort addresses outer space as a critical territory that must be inhabited—imaginatively, artistically, scientifically and collaboratively.

My talk centers on the activities of designers, artists, scientists, engineers and social scientists at MIT, and the structures we have created to connect different efforts surrounding the arts in space outside of academia. In the talk, I will share our strategies and methodologies for fostering these projects in three aspects:

From Science to Arts: we are supporting, giving feedback, and encouraging research projects created with an arts and design audience in mind; helping connect students to arts resources such as critics, scholars, other artists, and designers who have experience in this area; and finally, introducing the Initiative's projects to exhibition opportunities and curating exhibitions for venues such as Ars Electronica.

From Arts to Science: arts in space is not a new area, but it is by no means a mature field. Due to the complexity and uniqueness of the outer space environment, we see a desire in culture producers to seek for scientific and engineering rigor in their practice. We have established several collaborations with cultural institutions including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the New Museum in New York to share resources and allow artists to gain working knowledge and feedback from scientists and engineers.

Space for All: future imaginations of space have an enormous impact on contemporary ideas and practices concerning how societies relate to everything from first nations' habitation, to class and labor organization, and to nature and ecological impacts. In the initiative, we also investigate our planetary future along historical dimensions, and provide research opportunities for multicultural cosmologies and indigenous knowledges about outer space.