

2011 Selected Artist: Helen Schell (Work In Progress)

Statement

Durham University's Ogden Centre for Fundamental Physics is one of the best departments in world science, exploring the phenomena of the Universe. Last summer I was artist in residence there and created a project as part of a series of installations exploring real and fantastical cosmic theories. I made the components for a Space-Time Laboratory, which consisted of invented devices to explore the Universe, including The Kathedra, Space-Time throne and small glass observatories. These are devices to peer into other worlds, like telescopes. There were also souvenirs collected from these invented space travels. As well as meeting brilliant scientists, this remarkable residency afforded me the opportunity to lunch with Space Shuttle Astronauts and to visit the UK Dark Matter laboratory.

Previously, I worked on ideas about ritual practice, and ritual buildings, asking the question why humans need to reach beyond planet Earth, investigating the physical and spiritual structures which we have built to achieve this. These sacred symbols have been integral to my artwork, but recently they have evolved into expressions about our new sacred structures of metal and engineering. All these remarkable devices and theories are ways of thrusting up to the heavens, to the inexplicable and possibly the unattainable. These once religious theories have now become scientific, but many are still guesses beyond our current knowledge. This makes them irresistible to the artist's mind.

With the predicament of our planet, they have also become a political statement using these works to invent cynical contraptions to exodus Earth before we destroy it through environmental breakdown. They take the form of site specific installations exploring the presumption of an 11th dimension, vast drawings of rockets and time machines, and glass observatories. This information was also enhanced in 2008, when I attended the International Astronautical Space Congress in Glasgow, and talked to rocket scientists and engineers.

Over 4 years, they have become part of a series of exhibitions, residencies and projects called 'Escape Velocity'. During this period, I have created 3 x 10 metre high rocket drawings, which were shown in a disused church, The Centre for Life and Discovery Museum in Newcastle, also at Aardman Animations in Bristol. The 11th Dimension is a changeable installation consisting of 15,000 green lenses exploring light, reflection and darkness. This was shown as a river of glass flowing out of the altar and down the nave. In the lighting conditions, it took on the liquid appearance of an oil slick with moirés of rainbow light. In 2009 it was shown next to the tomb of The Venerable Bede in Durham Cathedral. Here, it had fantastical reflections of altars and architectural features. A series of 3 time travel drawings were shown at the Tron Theatre in Glasgow. This year, I have made a Time Travel Throne for a show about recycling.

On a residency in the summer of 2009, in The Netherlands, I made a glass house, which was called 'The Astronomer's House', with a narrative tale of the day before the end of the world where an astronomer had sat planning their escape, using hand engraved images of rockets, satellites, star maps and systems.

Lunar Laboratory

First Artist on the Moon – First Woman on the Moon Research, Development & Practical Experimentation

For the Meltdowns' Residency, I wish to create a Lunar Laboratory researching and making art works about the Moon. This will examine current knowledge about Lunar resources, other artist who work in the area of the Cosmos, zero gravity and existing Moon projects. This will

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use real science, exploring NASA plans to build a colony there, examining its mineral assets and water resources. Also, how does the body function in zero and micro gravity conditions, and how does the Moon effect the Earth? I will create an environment to invent Lunar art contraptions and documents. I will contact The Centre for Astrophysics & Planetary Science at University of Kent, based in Canterbury with the intention of collaborating and gaining specialist information.

There are 173 known moons in our Solar System and more to be discovered, and I wish to create an artwork that uses characteristics of these extraordinary natural satellites.

This, of course, makes an environmental statement about the plans to abandon Earth now we have used up its resources and strangely to move to a place that cannot sustain human life, and where we could only exist in the most unnatural of structures. However, they have now proved there is water on the Moon, making the most basic requirement for life available, but still no air.

There are current plans using American artists to programme a robot to draw in moon-dust, which will be sent on the next Lunar Mission in 2012. There are also artists working on zero gravity flights and NASA realises with long periods off this world, space travellers require culture and entertainment. ITACUS now exists to collaborate with scientists and artists in this area.

Research Questions:

- To investigate contemporary art and creative practises in Space and Zero gravity conditions.
- To examine why, and to communicate with organisations, artists and scientists in this area.
- What type of habitat would you need and who might live with you?
- What type of artworks are likely to be created?
- The nature of the physicality of dwelling there, dust, micro gravity, minimal atmosphere.
- Procreation and sexual activity, can we colonise and evolve there.
- To develop initial works and proposals for the Science Gallery, Dublin and for international residencies in the USA and Europe.
- How to communicate concepts and developments about Space and art.
- To invent a pseudo Space journal about Lunar adventures.
- To explore and create an artwork about our Moon and the other 173+ Moons of our Solar System.