

A Space Oddity



cover: Denis Arcand and Adiaf Hamah
Sfâr 2011
3-channel video installation,
courtesy of Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain,
Montreal and Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts

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A Space Oddity

Akira Akira

Antoinette J. Citizen

Denys Arcand and Adad Hannah

Colin Harman

Will Pappenheimer

Dominic Redfern

Darren Sylvester

Philip Samartzis

Masato Takasaka

Graphic Essay by

Matthew Perkins and Bruce Mutard

Curated by Jan Duffy and Matthew Perkins

A Space Oddity responds to the human condition in a contemporary world characterised by a sense of identity that is de-centred and multiple. In this expanding and contracting world perceptions of the self and the spaces we inhabit are continually challenged. While the screen has become a prominent way to engage in new ways of thinking about ourselves and the world we inhabit there is still a human need for tangible engagement.

Our proposition to those engaging with this exhibition is for them to consider what our 'presence' means in a world that is increasingly defined by spaces that are difficult to demarcate. From the physical to the virtual, from the screen to our everyday environment, from the quiet contemplation of the gallery to the cacophony of visual noise in the urban landscape – our perceptual awareness is continually challenged by new ways of understanding space.

How do we understand a world where the mixing of digital information with reality is becoming commonplace? What cognitive adjustments do we need to make when we see things that are not really there but have both cultural and commercial value? Our sense of space is becoming increasingly fractured and delineated. Indeed, how does our brain know where we are?

The artists we have selected for *A Space Oddity* engage with this sense of spatial enigma and how these ambiguities effect not only our sense of being in the world but also how we perceive and navigate our way through it.

Jan Duffy and **Matthew Perkins**

A SPACE ODDITY BY MATTHEW PERKINS AND BRUCE MUTFORD

On August 26th, 2012, an unusual phenomenon took place in outer space...



the reception of two intermingling voices - one from July 16th, 1969, and one from the present...

I've got a comment about the point on the Earth where the sun's rays reflect back up toward us-



- the region about one-eighth of Earth's radius in diameter where the blue ocean looks... grey.

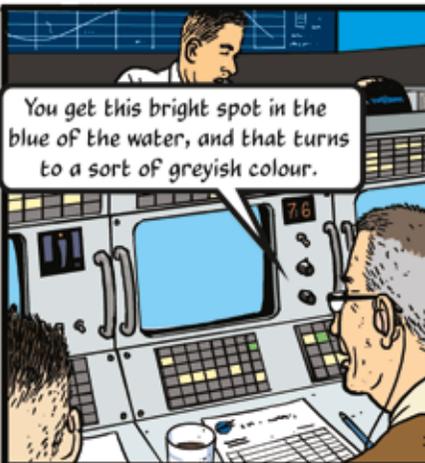


Planet Earth is blue. There's nothing I can do.

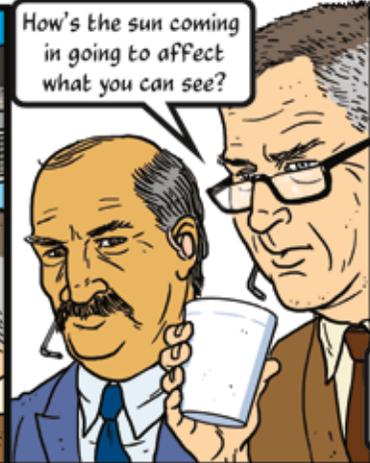
Roger, Neil. We noticed the same thing. It's very similar to looking at a light skining on something like a billiard ball or bowling ball.



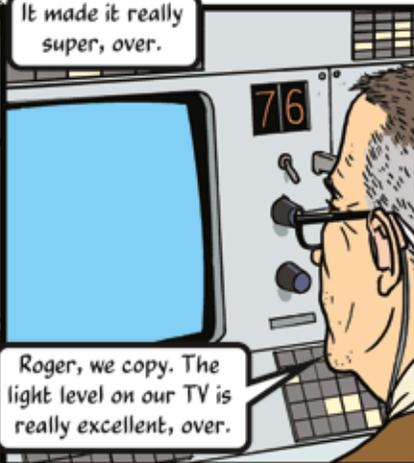
You get this bright spot in the blue of the water, and that turns to a sort of greyish colour.



How's the sun coming in going to affect what you can see?



It made it really super, over.



Roger, we copy. The light level on our TV is really excellent, over.

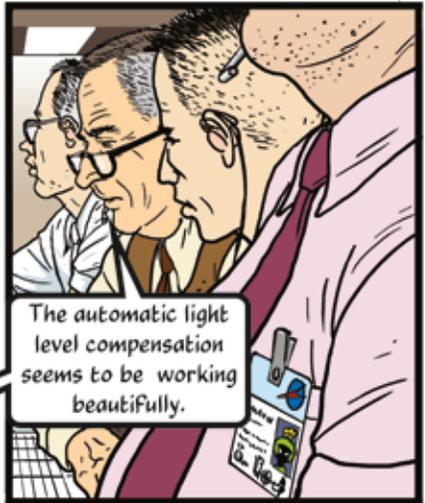
How's the brightness of the picture you're receiving? You think we ought to open the F-stop some, as we approach the terminator?



Yes, the brightness is still doing quite well. You can go ahead and open it up a stop or two.



The automatic light level compensation seems to be working beautifully.



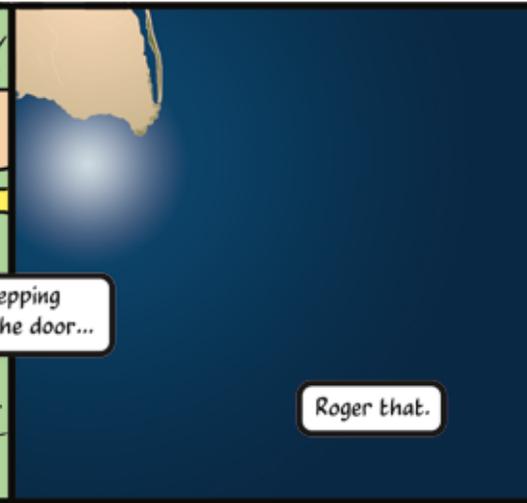
About to proceed with the space walk...

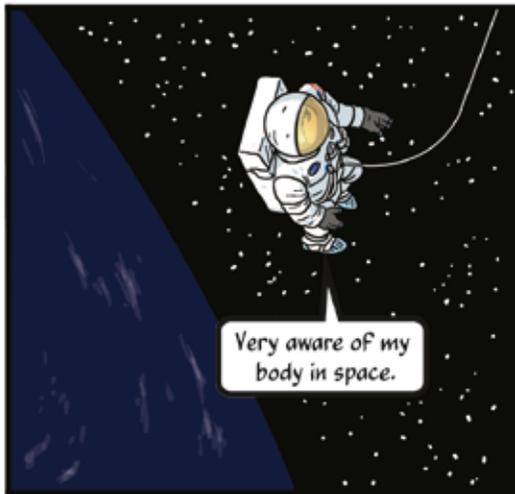
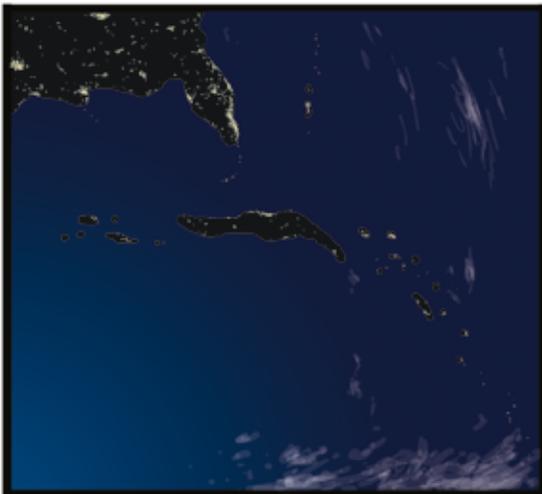
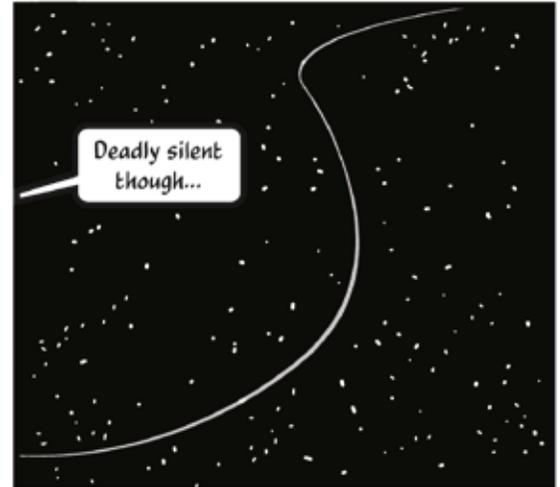
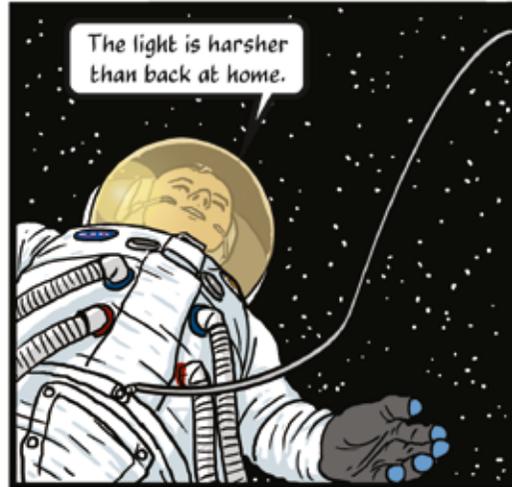
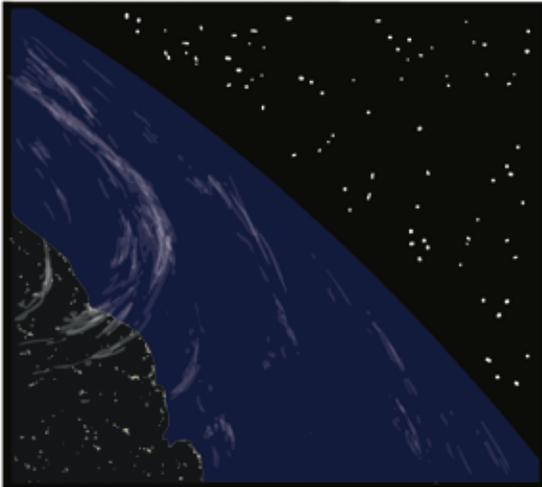
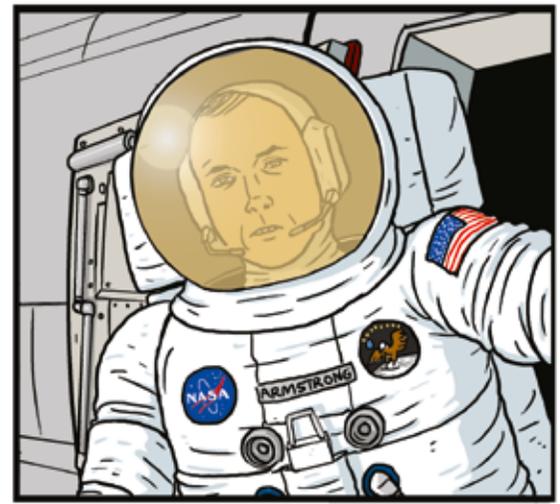
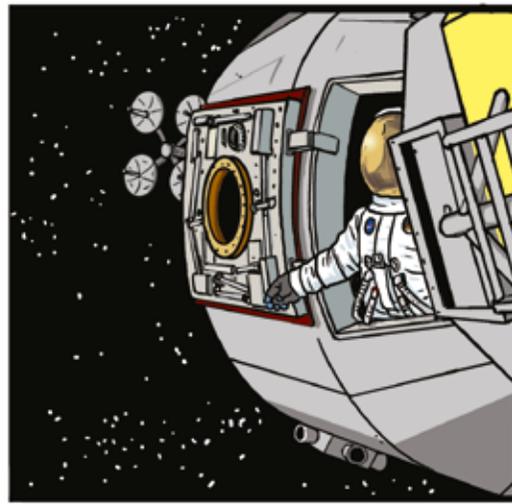
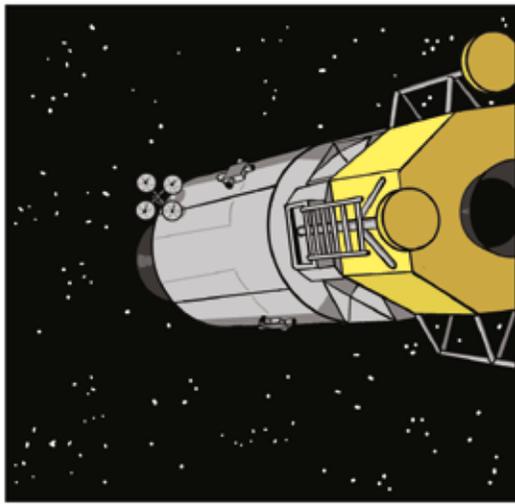
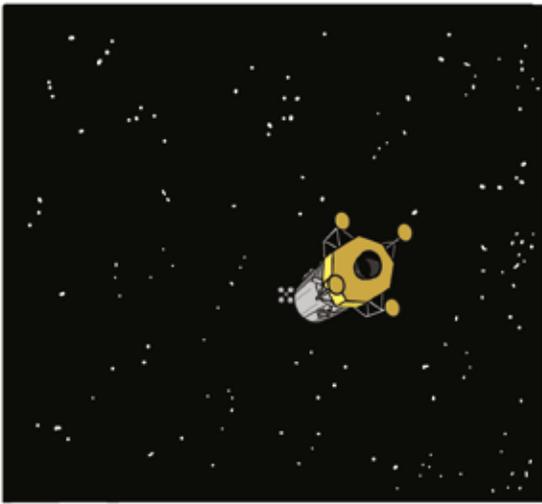


I'm stepping through the door...



Roger that.







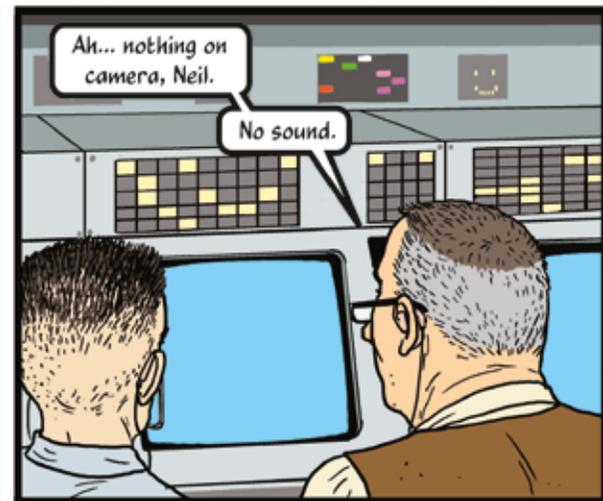
There's an apparition not far away - an older man floating in space.



I am sure I can hear him-

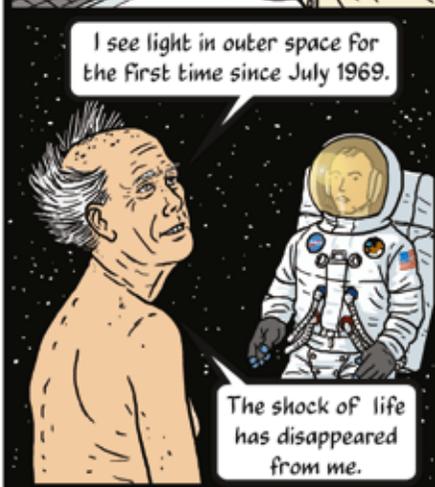


Sound in outer space - is that possible, over?



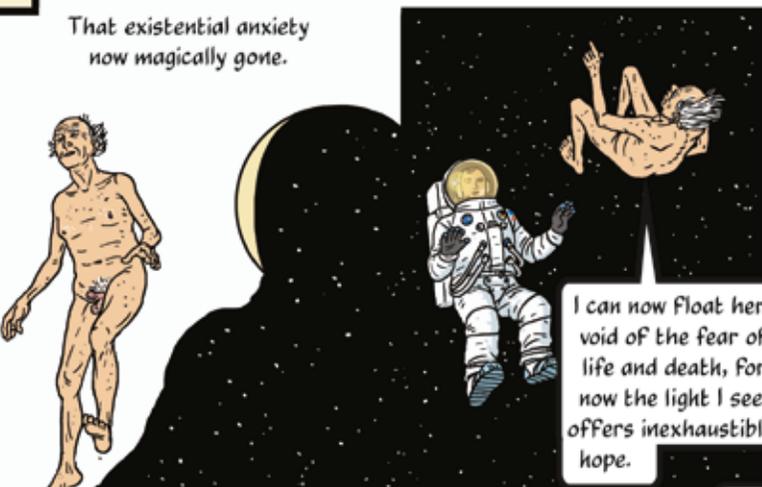
Ah... nothing on camera, Neil.

No sound.



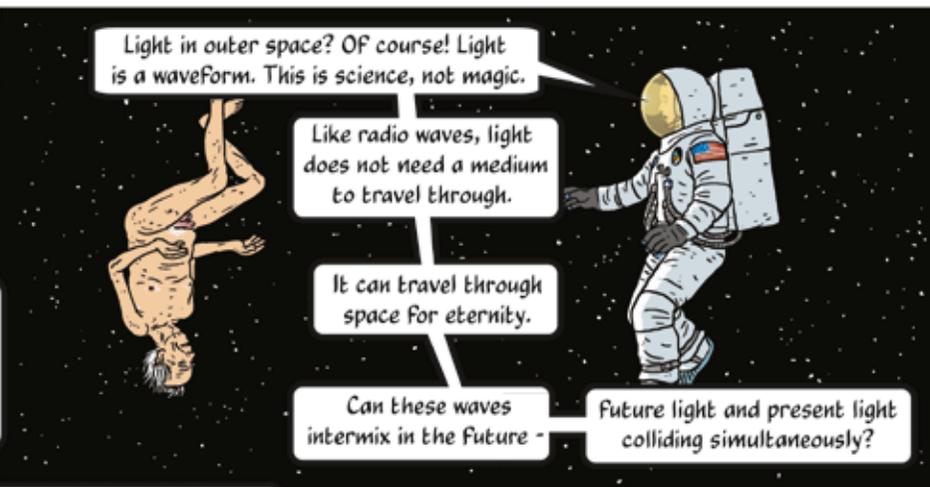
I see light in outer space for the first time since July 1969.

The shock of life has disappeared from me.



That existential anxiety now magically gone.

I can now float here void of the fear of life and death, for now the light I see offers inexhaustible hope.



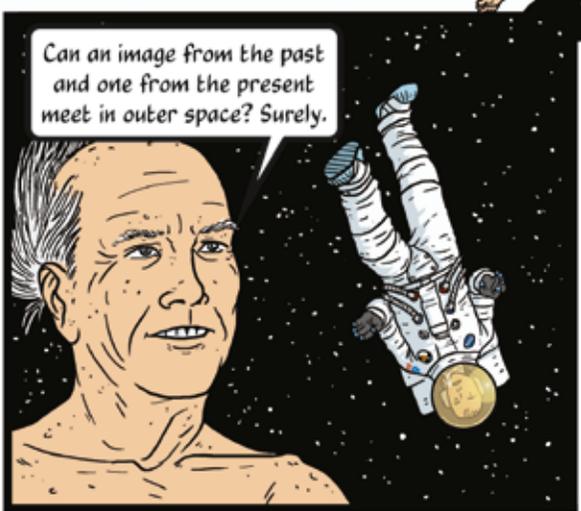
Light in outer space? Of course! Light is a waveform. This is science, not magic.

Like radio waves, light does not need a medium to travel through.

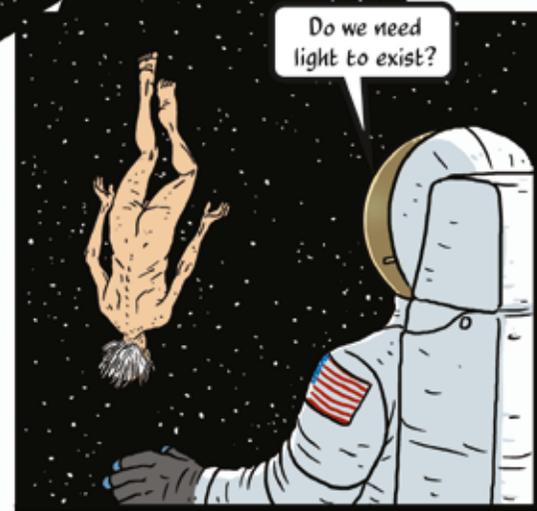
It can travel through space for eternity.

Can these waves intermix in the future -

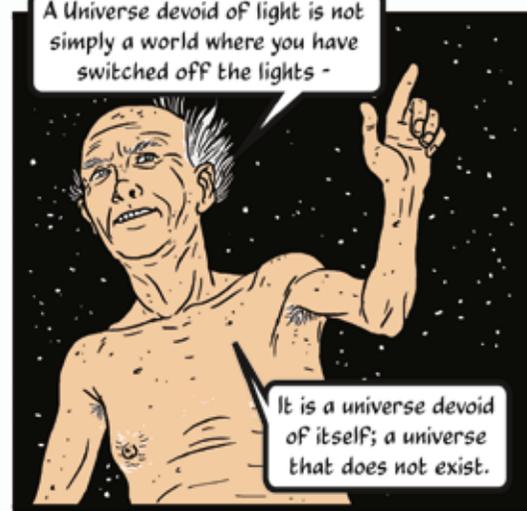
Future light and present light colliding simultaneously?



Can an image from the past and one from the present meet in outer space? Surely.



Do we need light to exist?



A Universe devoid of light is not simply a world where you have switched off the lights -

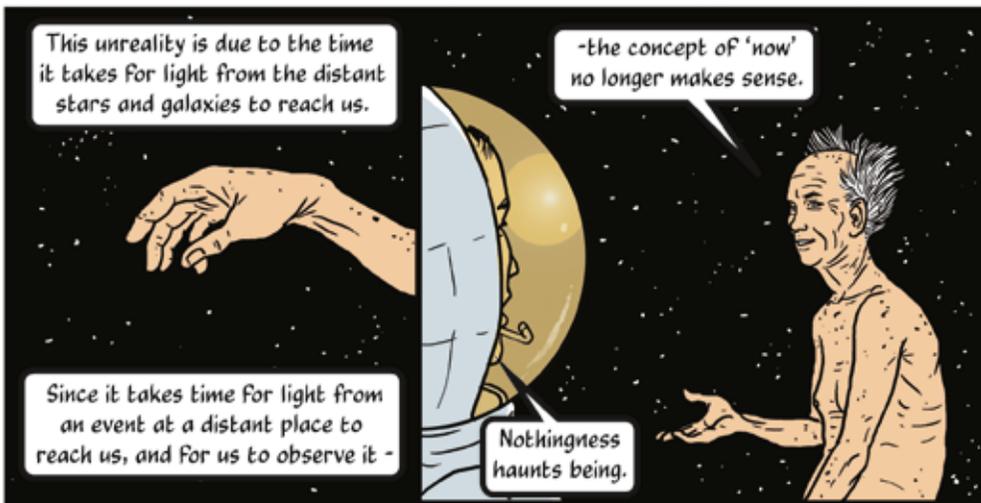
It is a universe devoid of itself; a universe that does not exist.



Reality, as we sense it, is not quite real.

The stars we see in the night sky for instance, are not really there.

They may have died by the time we get to see them.



This unreality is due to the time it takes for light from the distant stars and galaxies to reach us.

-the concept of 'now' no longer makes sense.

Nothingness haunts being.

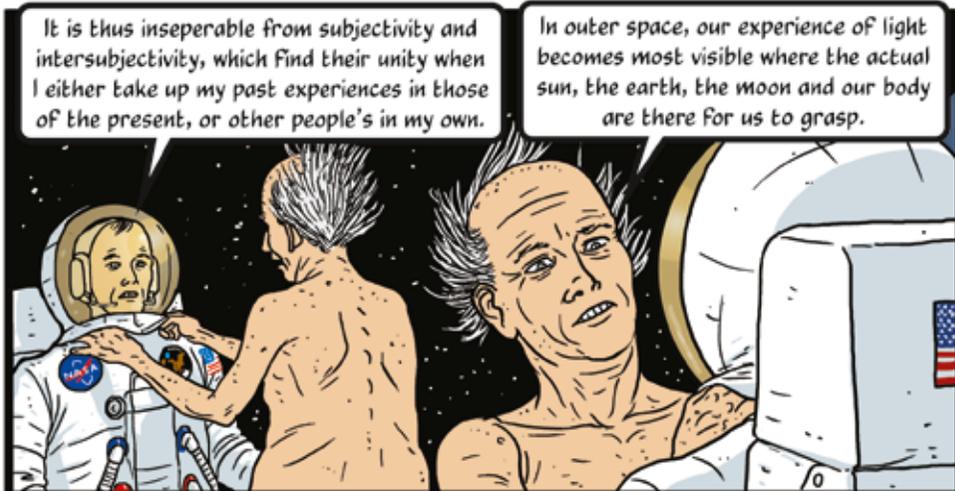
Since it takes time for light from an event at a distant place to reach us, and for us to observe it -



So, in non-being, the fear of nothingness evaporates?

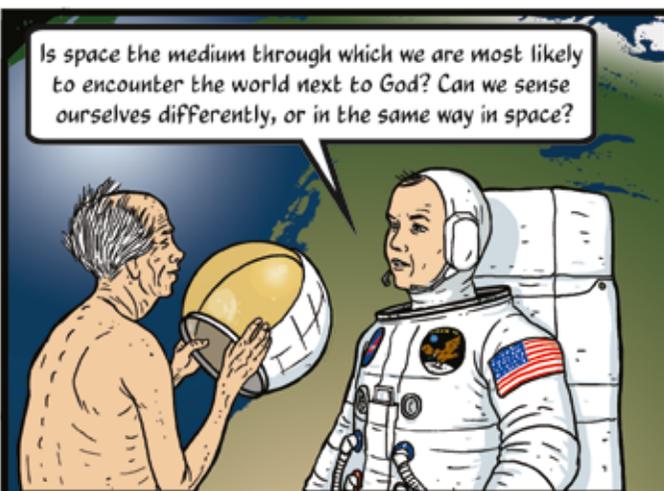
In a word, man must create his own essence. It is in throwing himself into the world, suffering there, struggling there that he gradually defines himself.

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of our various experiences intersect and, also, where our own and other people's intersect and engage with each others like gears.



It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own.

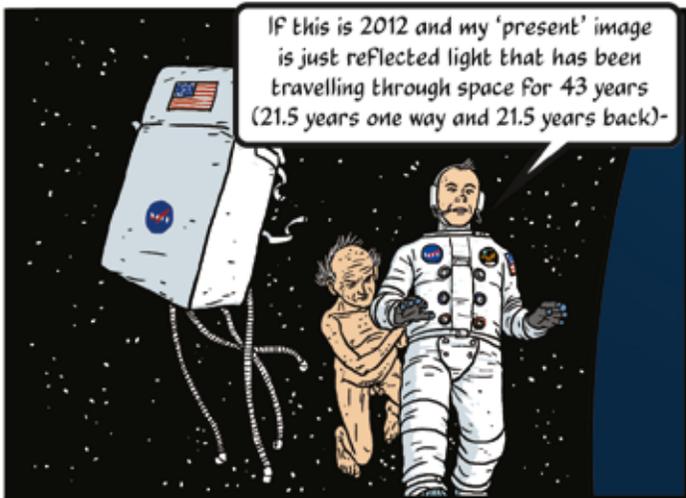
In outer space, our experience of light becomes most visible where the actual sun, the earth, the moon and our body are there for us to grasp.



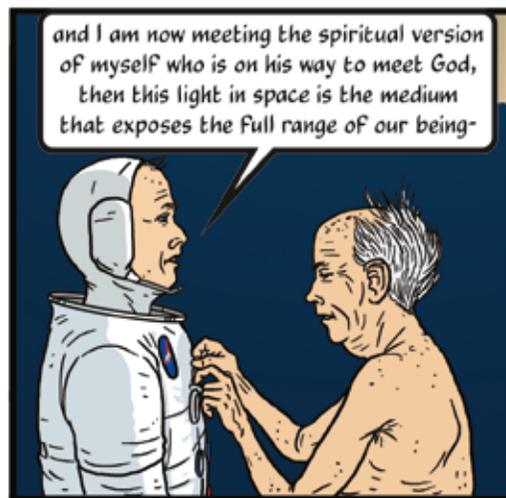
Is space the medium through which we are most likely to encounter the world next to God? Can we sense ourselves differently, or in the same way in space?



If being is relative to my temporal existence and 'now' no longer makes sense, I am not sure where that leaves our perceptual awareness of our physical and mental selves.



If this is 2012 and my 'present' image is just reflected light that has been travelling through space for 43 years (21.5 years one way and 21.5 years back)-



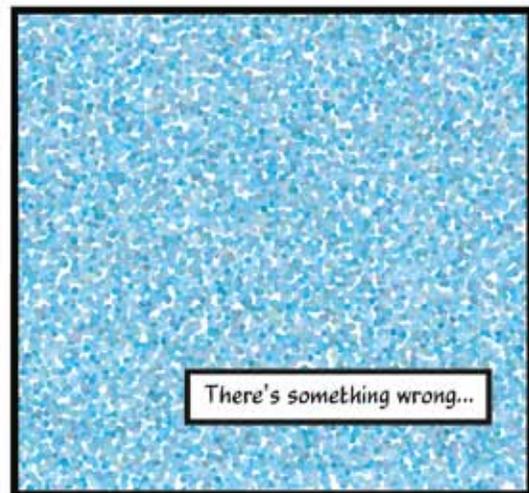
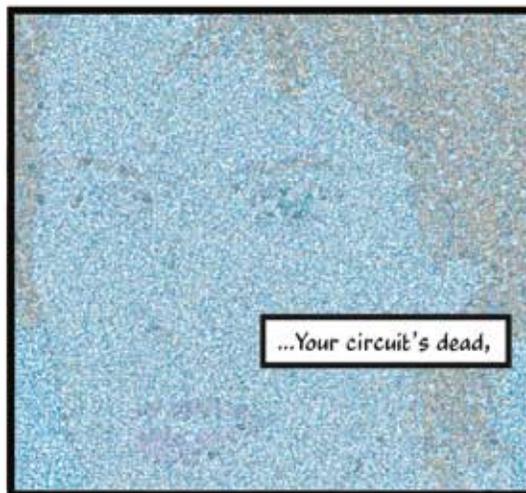
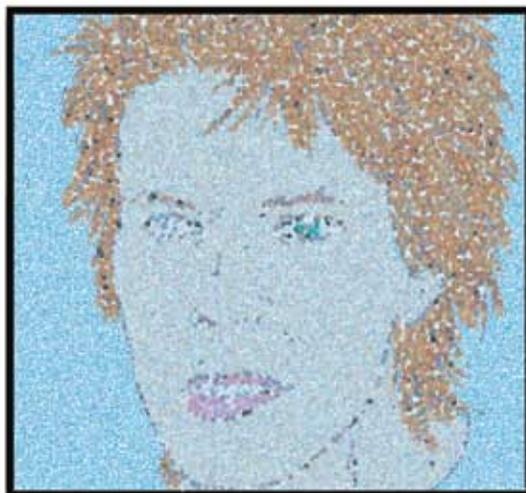
and I am now meeting the spiritual version of myself who is on his way to meet God, then this light in space is the medium that exposes the full range of our being-



-our material self, our image as it's transmitted to others and our soul.



Somewhere between these ends the full light of our sun softly hits my face as a comforting felt experience, and I realise that the images of my imagination come into existence via words on the page.



Neil Armstrong was born on August 5, 1930 and died on August 25, 2012. Matthew Perkins was born in 1968 on Neil Armstrong's birthday. Nearly a year later Armstrong was in space while Perkins was in Sturt Crescent, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia.

The words in this graphic essay have been based on the Apollo 11 voyage transcript, David Bowie's Space Oddity (1969) and a variety of other quotes found on the internet.

Matthew Perkins is the BFA & BVA Course Co-ordinator, Department of Fine Art, Monash Art Design & Architecture.

words © Matthew Perkins 2013
images © Bruce Mutard 2013

Endnotes

1. Page 4, panel 11. A majority of the preceding dialog is taken directly from the original NASA Apollo 11 air-to-ground voice transcription, tape 18/6, 1969.
2. Page 6, panel 12 & 13 - page 7 panel 1. Manoj Thulasidas, 'Perception, Physics and the Role of Light in Philosophy', in *The Philosopher, Journal of the Philosophical Society of England*, Volume LXXXVI No. 1, spring 2008, <http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk/unreal.htm>, accessed 10.09.2012.
3. Page 7, panel 2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*, trans Hazel E. Barnes, Part 1, Chapter 1, section III, Philosophical Library, 1957.
4. Page 7, panel 3. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'A More Precise Characterization of Existentialism', first published in *Action* (newspaper), 1944. <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/sartre03.htm>, accessed 15.09.2012.
5. Page 7, panel 4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xix.
6. Page 6, panel 4. Lyrics from David Bowie's *Space Oddity* have been used throughout this 'transcript'.

SPACE: vast, empty & never ending. Space is where we locate ourselves, the background for a marker on its way to somewhere else. How is space experienced? As spaces that emerge, through habit, out of coordinates, locations, and grids. But habit also drains spaces of their novelty.

Some spaces we make ours. Some lure us in, consciously or otherwise; others we don't think twice about passing by. From time to time, spaces can even reconfigure our perceptions of the world around us. These spaces are *odd*, and they have the potential to re-order spatial experience. This is what *A Space Oddity* tries to accomplish by exhibiting artworks in a number of places. It seeps out of the confines of the Gallery walls in to a series of sites around St Kilda, and to the virtual spaces of an augmented reality application (AR app).

When we are reminded that we inhabit bodies, and when we are estranged from our habitual uses of technology, we might just be able to see the world differently - and think of other ways of locating ourselves within it.

I. Inside the Gallery

We inhabit a multitude of real and fictional worlds every day. **Denys Arcand** and **Adad Hannah's** *Safari* probes the transitional zone between fictional worlds and reality, shattering their illusive surfaces to probe the mechanics of immersion obscured beneath.

Safari depicts amateur actors - museum workers - performing deliberate choreographed actions that loosely follow a narrative set in a fictional eighties' club. The six camera angles, used to dissect the actor's movements, intrude into this fictional space and heighten the viewers' observation of the actors' discomfort. The tense atmosphere captured by Arcand and Hannah's scrutinising cameras lends an awkwardness to their actors' attempts at iconicity, exposing the artificiality of the world they create.

As I watch the subtly stuttering motions unfold around the *Safari* seating environment - designed by Archizoom Associati in 1968 - the actors themselves begin to recede. Choreography inscribes space with movements. When those movements lose their smoothness, the utter strangeness and the singularity of each body is revealed. Space, meanwhile, is exposed as much more than a framework for action: it can also be a performer.

Superficiality and surface are the quintessential characteristics of today's most pervasive (and pernicious) cultural form: celebrity. **Darren Sylvester's** *Won* asks the question: what does it take to stage celebrity - and success - in an alternate context, like an art gallery? *Won* attempts this feat by reproducing the Oscars' post-award press conference setting.

Sylvester has tried to reduce this scene to its bare elements: a red carpet; a microphone and speaker; freshly-cut flowers; and, of course, a logo-bedecked curtain. Gallery-goers are invited to give their own acceptance speech through a live microphone. Incidental spectators play the role of an impromptu audience - or even makeshift paparazzi, if willing and equipped.

Sylvester describes this setting as "a monument to winning". His screenprinted curtain impressed with Oscars statues creates a space for the performance of fleeting celebrity; and, perhaps, a moment of idolatry, that exposes our culture's idolisation of victory, fame, and success. Our timeless moments need to be orchestrated. But, like the flowers in Sylvester's installation, they will eventually wither and rot.

The relation between timeliness and time's flow is also a concern of **Masato Takasaka's** work in this exhibition. Takasaka's installation recycles materials used in past constructions. Projected videos of these previous iterations will overlay the structure in the gallery. Takasaka describes these videos as "bootlegs of bootlegs". They are, literally, videos of videos made by friends: an original document and a lo-fi copy.

Takasaka's work presents us with a paradox. Each work is an iteration of a single installation that uses the same elements: an instance of an ideal that only exists conceptually. But, each work is also *singular*. Each instance of this installation pushes it away from an originary moment of inception, *degrading* its fidelity to a previous time.

As Takasaka jokingly explains, his practice transforms the relation between artist and stuff: as he put it, "the objects start collecting you". The work-space's convoluted spatial structures are also a temporal paradox, hiding the artist's gesture - and the artist himself - in an indissoluble conceptual knot. Like the stills of the bootlegs of bootlegs, this description might be considered another iteration of Masato Takasaka's perpetual self-installation.

The time occupied by the self is a concern shared by **Antoinette J. Citizen's** work. Aided by ubiquitous devices and the insidious marketing promise to make us more efficient, technology has begun to colonise our daily routines. As Citizen shows us in *System and Method for Predicting the Future*, this has been happening in ways that are exceedingly banal but also kind of scary. Citizen has been collecting data on her gallery-hours habits. Her installation uses this information to predict what she might be doing in a given 15-minute block, and mechanically writes this prediction on a whiteboard at Linden.

The ideology of productivity closes us in a feedback loop between what we strive to do and where we'd like to be. It dissolves the lived moment of the present into targets reached, goals accomplished, and things remaining to be finished. That is, it dissolves spaces into infinitely deferred *time*, time that is never actually experienced. In this context, Citizen's studio reconstruction, and her *ad hoc* habit predicting machine, strike me as an ironic - and political - gesture. Her home-brew constructs *take lots of time to make*, and time squandered, is time not spent productively.

One of the questions posed by the works contained in the gallery might be, where do you find time? An obvious answer: in space. And, anyway, it depends just where you are. Getting closer to spaces changes the way they're experienced, which is one reason why *A Space Oddity* leaves Linden and explores the space around us.

II. Out: Specific (and Virtual) Exhibition Sites

I find myself walking my way to somewhere. To get there, I follow signs: the grid presented by my phone's satellite-eye-view of where I happen to be; or, more primitively, markers distinguishing streets. Maybe I know of a route already: I might have walked this way before. It's rare that I might wander idly. There's always something to look at or to buy, and the modern city isn't very hospitable to simply *being there*.

But, there are other ways of abstracting the space around us. The city can be mapped topographically, depicting passages from place to place; or, as the Situationists realised, aesthetically: by hunting for spaces' resonances and atmospheres.

Akira Akira's *Work for Disappearance* uses an AR app to lead us to sculptures of chewed pieces of gum. There's nothing remarkable about finding discarded gum in the city. Yet, there's more to this work than its treasure hunt framework suggests. Akira's gum pieces are cast in silicone moulds after he chews them until their flavour dissipates. What remains is a form bereft of function - waste - which happens to preserve the material impressions of a laborious process.

This work calls to mind the word *ruminate*, which derives from the word "gullet" and which can denote both thinking and chewing. To turn something over in the mind, rumination suggests, is an active physical process; labour, conversely, is always a kind of thinking with and through the body. Gum left under a seat is not *just* waste. It's also the residue of a body, a process, a whole world of thought. A bubble, that is, sculpted from time and space by the living yearning being of another human and left there for us to find.

Akira also told me that he sometimes chews without thinking. Some small moments need large ones to organise them and give them meaning.

Will Pappenheimer's *Halo* has a simple premise: that people have a desire to leave messages for others to see, and that the sky is a perfect canvas.

This premise is enabled by the aid of an AR app that layers virtual interfaces over our vision. To scan for messages left by others, users of the app need to turn their devices 360 degrees - and to hold them aloft. This simple ritual *relocates* the embodied user, whilst also posing the question: are virtual spaces any less wondrous than the sky above?

Pappenheimer's work resists colonising this advertising-resistant horizon with digital noise. Opening this space to a public conversation marks it out as one that is held in common. The content of this conversation doesn't completely matter. As a *gesture*, Pappenheimer's work raises a finger to the encroachment of technologies into our common spaces.

The urban walking trail in the streets surrounding Linden soon turns our attention from the heavens to our place within them: to, that is, our atmosphere. In *Low Pressure* **Philip Samartzis** records locational sounds using accelerometers, or industrial contact microphones. Given the date of these recordings,

these sounds are quite specific: August 12, 2013, when a storm hit St. Kilda with 100 km/hr winds.

The primal thrum and throbbing ratatat of the four compositions created by Samartzis turn our attention to the microcosmic aural atmospheres that exist at the limit of our normal capacity to hear. Amplified technologically, space can be made to speak for itself - bringing specific aural atmospheres into conversation with those present now. By capturing the sounds of spaces in agony, Samartzis shows us how atmospheres can turn against us and how they can transform our experience of space.

It's not just weather that configures our urban atmospheres. They're also pervaded by media. Media translate the world for our senses. In doing so, they also habituate our perception - and *attention* - to particular temporalities.

For **Dominic Redfern**, contemporary media and advertising damage our ability to think of the world in ecological terms. *#tweetforendofworld* is a series of episodes broadcast on an electronic advertising billboard at St. Kilda Road junction. They depict an iconic character in a hazmat suit wandering in nondescript post-apocalyptic scenes, accompanied by flip tweets about the world's predicament.

There is no indication which looming global catastrophe has struck this world. Despite this, *#tweetforendofworld* is not wholly pessimistic. It also uses dark humour and ironic doublespeak to re-appropriate contemporary media forms, compacting its critiques into one hundred and forty character bursts. Humour, Redfern shows us, can be used to corrode the hold contemporary media have on our senses. By encouraging passersby to participate through the hashtag *#tweetforendofworld*, Redfern also suggests that humour might be used to build communities of people capable of paying attention to the rhythms of our shared lifeworld, the horizon of human being.

Samartzis and Redfern attune us to alternate spatial ambiances by paying close attention to atmospheres.

Colin Harman, on the other hand, shows us another way to do this: by alienating himself from his own body and from spaces he knows intimately.

Harman's work in this show merges several modes of seeing. In his short videos, we see the artist enveloped

in a bulbous papier mache orb as he wanders through various locations familiar to him. This head has been converted into a primitive and anachronistic mediating device with the aid of an ancient optical technology: a portable camera obscura.

Harman uses this contraption to defamiliarise otherwise familiar spaces. The lens projects what he sees behind him as an inverted, 360 degree image, using the warped inner sphere of his portable camera obscura as a screen. Shown alongside the wandering figure is footage of Harman's perceptions when wearing this thing. Harman is *dis-located* by this device: sweat-streaked, disoriented, and imprisoned in a body disconnected from a functioning sensorium, he loses himself in space.

In a recent essay, Bernard Stiegler argues that it is the task of the artist "to produce an eye".¹ In other words, to look is to learn the technique of looking, and art is the technology that most attentively teaches us how to hone our sensibilities.

Thinking of Harman's work, it strikes me that the vision machine he wears produces radically other ways of seeing, transforming him into a disembodied, wandering eye. All of the artworks scattered outside of Linden do this to different senses. Space can be made different - weird, wondrous, or odd - for a period of time. Long enough, hopefully, to shift our habitual ways of perceiving and experiencing our environment and our bodies.

Endnotes

1. Bernard Stiegler, "The Tongue of the Eye: What "Art History" Means", in *Releasing the Image*, ed Jacques K Halip & Robert Mitchell, Stanford University Press, 2010: 227).



Akira Akira

Work for Disappearance (work-in-progress)
2013, chewed chewinggums on perspex



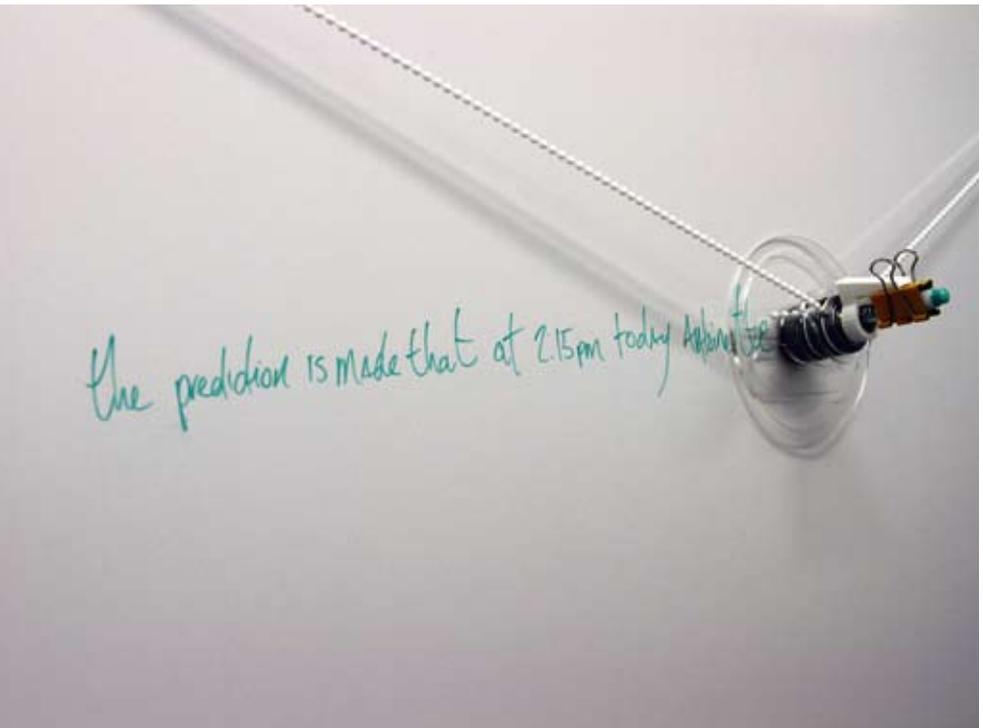
Denys Arcand & Adad Hannah

2011
3-channel video installation,
courtesy of Pierre-François Quillette art contemporain,
Montreal and Equinox Gallery, Vancouver



Colin Harman

Dig Reach
2011, mobile camera, obscura, paper machine, magnifying
glass, mobile phone, video camera, digital photograph



Antoinette J. Citizen



Dominic Redfern

#areforanidnworld
2012, video



Will Pappenhheimer

Will Pappenhheimer and Zachary Brady
Halo
2013, a Splywrite AR for Space Oddity, custom augmented
reality application, geo-located virtual objects



Wool
2013, wool, carpet, flowers, microphone, speaker,
mixed media, 275 x 670 x 120 cm (detail)
courtesy the artist and Sullivan-Strumpf, Sydney

Darren Sylvester



Phillip Samartzis

on-location sound recording,
Sunda River, Tokyo, 2011
photograph by Kristen Sharp



Masato Takasaka

untitled film stills from ANOTHER PROPOSITIONAL MODEL FOR THE STUDIO MASATO TECTURES PAVILION FOR THE THIRD/FOURTH MELBOURNE ARTIST-FACILITATED BIENNIAL (LUKEMIKE OLD STUFF BETTER THAN NEW STUFF) - even more prog rock sculptures from the 5th dimension part IV (Regimes of Value remix (1994-2013) 2013, mixed media, DVD looped 7:56 mins, Film by Lisa Radford on i-phone 5, Installation view, Third/ Fourth Melbourne Artist-Facilitated Biennial, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne
Photography Credit: Virginia Overall courtesy the artist and Studio Masato Tectures, Melbourne

Augmented Reality Trail

An exciting feature of *A Space Oddity* is an Augmented Reality (AR) application that will not only guide the audience around the off-site exhibition but will reveal hidden virtual artworks such as photographs, movies, sound and text that can only be seen through the use of smart phone and tablet devices. These works are visible through “Layar,” an easily downloaded mobile application.

By viewing the St Kilda streets around Linden through a mobile devices camera you can discover these Augmented Reality (AR) works.

This AR has been developed by Yun Tae Nam, currently undertaking a PhD by research at Monash University.

Setup Instructions

- On your smart phone or tablet download “Layar - Augmented Reality” App through the App Store or Google Play.
- Type ‘Space Oddity’ in the Search tab of the Layar App.
- Tap the ‘Space Oddity’ tab that appears and use your device to navigate the urban trail we have developed for the exhibition.
- Share through Layar’s direct link to Facebook, Twitter and email in the Layar action section.

Will Pappenheimer’s Halo work

“Halo” exists in geo-located augmented reality space high above St Kilda Beach near Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts.

- Launch Layar and tap the screen to SCAN the QR Code below
- Or use the upper right lines menu to click “Geo Layers” and then “Search layers” for “Halo”
- When the “Halo” layer launches, use your finger or a stylus to draw an image or text in the blue sky canvas area.
- Click “ERASE” to start over
- Add your initials to sign your work
- Click “SEND TO SKY” and the AR Layer viewer will automatically launch
- Your drawing will appear in the centre of a huge halo in the sky above St Kilda beach.
- When the next person sends a drawing, yours will move to the ring halo.



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1-5pm Tuesday - Friday
11am-5pm weekend

www.lindenarts.org
free entry

**Linden
Centre
for
Contemporary
Arts**



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