

The Moon Museum, First Art on the Moon

Sending a man to the moon in 1969 was the greatest technological feat of my generation. It was one of the rare instances where evolution could be made visible ie. Leaving this planet and stepping onto another celestial body. I had wanted to put an artwork into space ever since the Russians launched the first Sputnik. The 1960's were exciting times in both science and art. In 1969 I was working with an organization called 'Experiments in Art and Technology'. EAT as it was known was run by the eminent laser physicist Billy Kluver. Billy had been working at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey. Billy and the artist Robert Rauschenberg had the brilliant idea of pairing artists with engineers to help artists realize their more technological projects. Hopefully, this collaboration would introduce the engineers to the ways artists worked and thought, thus stimulating a cross pollination.

For my part, I proposed putting Art on the Moon. Dr. Kluver thought the 'Moon Museum' as I called it, a terrific idea and proposed that we try for the next moon landing which was set for the following November. Billy put me in contact with Fred Waldhauer a Bell Labs engineer who had helped Robert Rauschenberg on his electric 'Combine' pieces. My piece would consist of six drawings by prominent artists: Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, David Novros, John Chamberlain, Claes Oldenburg and Forrest Myers (clockwise from upper left on the chip). It would be reduced onto a small computer chip using tantalum nitride which was plated onto the chip – a ceramic wafer measuring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch high by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long by $\frac{1}{32}$ inch thick. Once the chip was finished it would be placed aboard the Lunar Lander which would eventually stay on the surface of the Moon. Although Fred Waldhauer was acting project manager the 'chip/artwork' was made by two other Bell Lab engineers, Robert Merkle whose expertise was computer circuitry and Burt Unger who ran the lab. Printing all six artworks on such a small surface was state of the art engineering in 1969. Using today's technology we could print these drawings on the head of a pin.

As the launch date approached, permission from NASA had not been formalized. I asked Henry Geldzhellar, who was the Director of American Art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York if he would come forward on our behalf to obtain permission from NASA. At this point we would proceed with the project assuming that Henry would be successful in his inquiries.

Fred Waldhauer was in contact with an engineer working on the assembly of the Lunar Lander at Grumman Aircraft out on Long Island. The engineer agreed to place the Art Work aboard the Land saying that this wouldn't be a problem.

Just days before the launch, permission still had not arrived and the Grumman engineer who was now in Cape Canaveral, Florida said he would just do it anyway and he would send Fred a telegram to that effect. As it turned out he sent one to me as well.

My telegram read, "Your on. A O K All systems are go." signed John F. The next day we had done it! The 'Moon Museum' was the first Art on the Moon.

Forrest Myers, artist

March 2, 2009

Apollo 12 was the second manned mission to the moon with astronauts Pete Conrad, Richard Gordon, and Alan Bean. *The Moon Museum, First Art on the Moon* remains attached to the Lunar Lander, which was left behind at the "Ocean of Storms" site on the moon.

- November 14, 1969 – Lift off
- November 19, 1969 - Land on Oceanus Procell Arum, "Ocean of Storms"
Conrad and Bean were the 3rd and 4th humans to walk on the Moon
- November 24, 1969 – Splash Down