

FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

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WEEK OF AUGUST 20-26, 2014

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TRACKING DOWN FLORIDA'S ELUSIVE SKUNK APE

BY ARTIS HENDERSON

Florida Weekly Correspondent

BEFORE YOU SET OUT INTO THE Everglades looking for a Skunk Ape, you will need the following items: map of the area, ladder stand, leaf rake, rope, plaster, bucket, binoculars, a pocket knife, and, curiously, lima beans. This is according to the expedition checklist included in the Everglades Skunk Ape Research Field Guide, necessary reading if you hope to find one of South Florida's most mysterious and perplexing creatures.

According to the literature, the male Skunk Ape stands more than 7 feet tall, weighs over 300 pounds, has four toes

SEE APE, A8 ▶



Skunk Ape

- >> Has eight toes
- >> Estimated between 7-10 live in Florida
- >> Enjoys lima beans
- >> Much like the Sasquatch, Bigfoot and Abominable Snowman there have been only a few supposed sightings.

— skunkape.info

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INSIDE



To the moon

A secret mission to put art in space. C1 ▶



Grouper Grapple

Society snapshots around town. C19-20 ▶



Robert Rauschenberg's top secret Moon Mission



And it contains the work of six major artists of the '60s: Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Forrest Myers, David Novros and John Chamberlain. Their works were shrunk down and are contained on a 3/4-by-1/2-inch ceramic wafer. **SEE MOON, C4** ▶

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THERE'S A MUSEUM ON THE moon. Most people aren't aware of its existence, and even the astronauts who transported it there did so unknowingly. It's been on the lunar surface since November 1969, when Apollo XII landed in the area called the Ocean of Storms.

BY NANCY STETSON • NSTETSON@FLORIDAWEEKLY.COM

>> **inside:**
Check out the 'Moon Museum' at Rauschenberg Gallery.
C4

Moon detail of Copernicus-Rheinhold.

WEEK OF AUGUST 20-26, 2014 | A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT SCENE

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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MOON

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than a postage stamp and as thin as paper.

Although you can't travel to the moon to see the installation that was placed surreptitiously, you can see a copy of the Moon Museum multiple (a sheet with a dozen or so of the ceramic wafers was originally produced) Aug. 22-Sept. 27 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the Fort Myers campus of Florida South-Western State College (formerly Edison State College).

The idea for the project came about when the six artists met at Max's Kansas City, a New York City bar, to celebrate the first manned moon landing. At the invitation of NASA, Mr. Rauschenberg had been onsite for the launch of Apollo XI and was inspired to create his "Stoned Moon" series. He'd also been a major figure in creating E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology), an organization that encouraged collaboration between artists and engineers.

While the men were hobnobbing at the bar, Mr. Myers proposed sending art to the moon. They all thought it was a great idea.

So each contributed an image.

Mr. Rauschenberg drew a simple line, Mr. Oldenburg, a kite in the shape of a mouse. Mr. Warhol drew a penis that looks like a rocket (and that some say is his initials). Mr. Myers offered a drawing of a geometric figure of interlocking forms. Mr. Chamberlain created a template pattern, and Mr. Novros drew a black square divided by small, thin white lines.

With the help of Fred Waldhauer using cutting-edge technology at Bell Telephone Laboratories, the six images were reduced and etched onto a handful of identical ceramic wafers, one of which the artists hoped would be sent to the moon.

Despite the stature of the artists, however, officials at NASA would not agree to send their miniature museum into space.

So a Grumman engineer who worked at Cape Canaveral secretly placed one of the tiny art objects on the leg of the landing gear of the Apollo XII lunar module.

"It's the size of a fingernail," says Jade Dellinger, director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. He curated "The Moon Museum (1969): Apollo XII's Secret Art Mission" as a means of celebrating the 10th anniversary of the renaming of the college gallery after Mr. Rauschenberg. (This fall's gallery programming will focus heavily on the late artist's legacy and impact, including the next exhibition, "Rauschenberg: China/America Mix," Oct. 22-Dec. 17.)

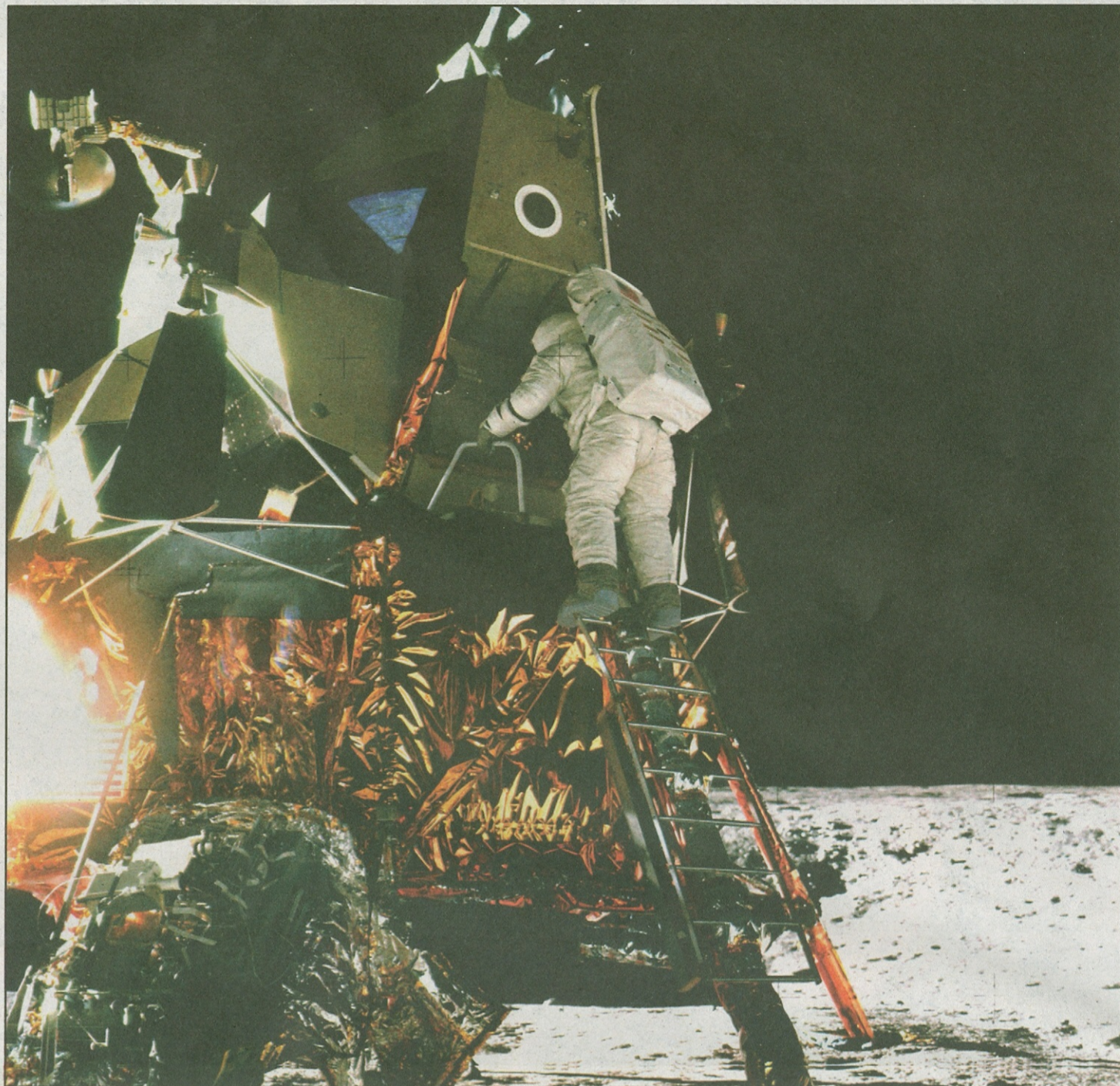
An immersive experience

It's not known exactly how many Moon Museum multiples were made or how many still exist. "We think there could have been as many as 16," Mr. Dellinger says.

Each of the contributing artists was given one of the wafers "as a souvenir of sorts," he says. "We know Chamberlain lost his and Novros gave his to his father, but after his father died, it was never found — which is easy to understand because they're so tiny."

One of the wafers resides at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Another is at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, donated by Mr. Waldhauer's widow after her husband's death. "It is the smallest art object in MoMA's permanent collection," Mr. Dellinger says.

The Moon Museum on exhibit at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery originates from one of the engineers who had worked with Mr. Waldhauer at Bell



Apollo 12 astronaut Alan Bean beginning the lunar module ladder descent. It was on this mission that Rauschenberg's Moon Museum traveled.

Laboratories. It was featured at The National Gallery of Art in Tbilisi, the Democratic Republic of Georgia, last November in an exhibition that was co-organized by the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, the U.S. Department of State and National Geographic Magazine. It's also been on display at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and was part of a project Mr. Dellinger did five years ago for the Tampa Museum of Art.

To exhibit it in such a way that allows viewers to have an immersive experience, he has created a smaller gallery within the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. There's one light purple wall and another that's deep purple. A third wall is for the projection of uncut footage shot by the Apollo XII astronauts. In another corner, a flat screen TV plays a French documentary on a loop, showing highlights from the Apollo XII mission.

Ambient music from Brian Eno's 1983 "Apollo: Atmospheres and Soundtracks" plays in the background.

Mr. Dellinger describes it as "an immersive, surreal environment."

The tiny Moon Museum itself is on a glowing opaque stand with a light hanging over it. Mr. Dellinger asked that *Florida Weekly* not publish the image, so as to not ruin the experience for visitors.

Although this Moon Museum has not been part of an actual lunar landing, it sits in the vitrine on a bit of gold-colored Kapton foil that has been to the moon, on one of the Apollo missions, Mr. Dellinger says.

"It will be the focal point of the room, holding the singular object," he says about the display. "A glowing beacon monolith." Vintage NASA press photographs and mission-related artifacts are also part of the exhibit.



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Jade Dellinger

Meaningful presentation

Mr. Dellinger wants to transform the gallery space for every exhibit it hosts. "I want people to have a very different experience every time they're here. It's about doing this in the most meaningful way we can present the art properly." For the Moon Museum, he adds, "We've created a gallery within the gallery to show a miniature museum."

It's an artist-conceived museum space, he says, noting that Marcel Duchamp, who influenced Mr. Rauschenberg, created a piece called "Box in a Valise" that was a retrospective of all his art — in miniature, contained in a single suitcase. "So there was a miniature 'Nude Descending a Staircase,' a miniature of the urinal," Mr. Dellinger says. "It's about telling a story ... the idea that an

THE PROJECT APOLLO ARCHIVE / COURTESY PHOTO

in the know

"The Moon Museum (1969): Apollo XII's Secret Art Mission"

>> **When:** Aug. 22-Sept. 27

>> **Opening reception:** 6-8 p.m. Aug. 22; regular gallery hours 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday

>> **Where:** The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Florida SouthWestern State College, Fort Myers

>> **Cost:** Free

>> **Info:** 489-9313 or RauschenbergGallery.com

artist could create his own museum."

When the Mr. Rauschenberg and his fellow artists decided to create the Moon Museum, it was important to all of them that their effort would be considered a museum, a group exhibition, a permanent collection.

Wanting nothing more than to put something soulful where typically NASA had left detritus and hardware behind, nearly half a century later, the Moon Museum is still a compelling art object and continues to resonate profoundly in the imagination, Mr. Dellinger says.

"This is an extraordinary opportunity for Southwest Florida to see it," he says, adding neither MoMA nor the Warhol Museum has even loaned out their Moon Museums.

"It's such an inspiring idea. It has such appeal. Anyone who's gazed up at the moon, to know that there's been art there, secretly, for 45 years, art by Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol — but for us, most meaningfully, Rauschenberg ..."

The Moon Museum might be small, he adds, "But the idea here is huge." ■