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Exhibit showcases museum sent to Moon

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Somewhere on the Moon's Ocean of Storms, you'll find The Moon Museum. That's the story, anyway.

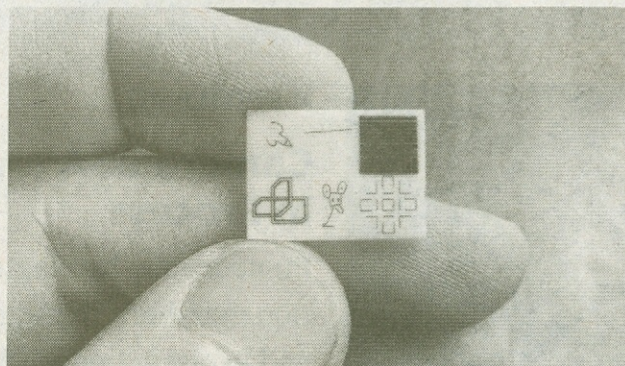
It's a hard tale to verify, of course. You'd need a rocket to get there, for one thing. And an astronaut's space suit so you won't die in the cold vacuum of outer space.

Why go through all that trouble, anyway?

If you want to see the artwork, it's so much easier just to get in your car and drive to Bob Rauschenberg Gallery.

That's where you'll find the next best thing to the mysterious Moon Museum: A replica of the fingernail-sized "museum" that six famous artists allegedly sneaked onto NASA's Apollo 12 lunar landing mission in 1969.

"It's just such a phenomenal object," says Jade Dellinger, curator for the exhibit and director of Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida South-Western State College in south Fort Myers (formerly Edison State College). "It's still just an incredibly powerful piece of art."



The Moon Museum features art designed by six of the best-known U.S. artists in the 1960s: Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain, David Novros, Claes Oldenburg and Forrest "Frosty" Myers.

The Moon Museum isn't a miniature museum building. Instead, it's a penny-sized ceramic rectangle inscribed with art by six of the biggest art stars of the 1960s: Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain, David Novros, Claes Oldenburg and the man who first proposed the Moon Museum idea, sculptor Forrest "Frosty" Myers.

The idea was to celebrate the Apollo 11 moon landing — the previous NASA mission that put man on the Moon for the first time — by leaving more than just flags and space junk on the Moon's

pock-marked surface.

They wanted to leave art, instead.

"(Myers) said, 'We're artists,'" Dellinger says. "'This should be about culture. It should be about humanity.'"

Rauschenberg contributed one of the most basic elements in human art: A simple line. Warhol drew something that resembles both male genitalia and a blasting-off rocket (depending on your viewing angle). Myers made a computer-generated geometric design.

Engineers at Bell Laboratories then took those drawings, shrunk

IF YOU GO

» **What:** "The Moon Museum (1969): Apollo XII's Secret Art Mission" Exhibit

» **When:** Now through Sept. 27

» **Where:** Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway, south Fort Myers

» **Admission:** Free

» **Gallery hours:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday

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

them down and etched them onto the lightweight, paper-thin ceramic wafer.

What happens next gets a bit vague. That's because no one is 100 percent certain the stow-away art actually made it onto Apollo 12's lunar landing module. Or that it survived blast-off or the long drop onto the Moon's Ocean of Storms plain.

Myers reportedly found a willing conspira-

tor within Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation, the company that manufactured the Apollo Lunar Module. But the only apparent confirmation that the engineer succeeded in his secret mission comes from a Western Union telegram dated Nov. 12, 1969 (two days before Apollo 12 launched).

The telegram was sent to Myers from Cape Canaveral with the message "YOUR ON. A.O.K. ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO." It's signed "John F." No one seems to know who that person is, though.

"There has been much speculation on who John F. could be," Dellinger says. Some think it might have been President John F. Kennedy, himself. Dellinger has his own theory: It could be a pseudonym for Julio Juristo, an artist and a NASA launch team member for Apollo missions 9 through 14.

Regardless, it's a tantalizing mystery, and that's one of the reasons Dellinger curated the show. And because Rauschenberg was involved, it seemed a fitting way to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the gallery adopting the late

Captiva art legend's name. Before that, the college gallery was called The Gallery of Fine Art.

The show previously has been displayed at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, The Tampa Museum of Art and The National Gallery of Art in The Republic of Georgia.

At Rauschenberg Gallery, the irradium-etched ceramic wafer sits in an open jewelry case atop authentic NASA gold Kapton foil, the same material used for insulating the lunar landing modules. The wafer apparently belonged to one of NASA's engineers, but Dellinger doesn't know which one.

The wafer is one of an estimated 12-16 of the mini museums created by Bell Labs. Only one of them actually made it to the Moon, theoretically. The rest were divided amongst the artists and engineers.

Other highlights include news footage of the moon landing, raw video footage shot by the astronauts during the mission, newspaper articles, photos and relics such as the passes issued to people watching the Apollo 12 launch.