

Polk Museum of Art Presents 'Moon Museum' Exhibit



ADAM JUSTICE, curator of art at the Polk Museum of Art, looks at one of the items in the exhibit titled "Moon Museum," on view July 7 through Oct. 3.

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LAKELAND | Apollo 12 astronauts landed on the moon on Nov. 19, 1969 and some say they unwittingly left behind an important piece of art history.

NASA's second manned trip to the moon had a secret mission, according to Jade Dellinger, director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College, previously called Edison Junior College in Fort Myers.

According to legend, original artwork by Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, John Chamberlain, David Novros, Claes Oldenburg and Forrest Myers and is hidden inside the lunar module on a small ceramic wafer called the Moon Museum.

From July 7 to Oct. 3, a copy of the Moon Museum from the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery will be on display at the Polk Museum of Art in Lakeland.

The idea to put art on the moon occurred to Myers after watching the first moon landing, Dellinger said.

"Everyone was sort of celebrating this great triumph that we have landed on the moon and Forrest in the midst of the celebration posed a question ... 'Shouldn't we be thinking about we've left behind?'"

After official discussions with NASA leaders about putting art on the moon stalled, Dellinger said Myers decided to move ahead with the project in secret.

But because no one could know about the Moon Museum, it had to be small and almost weightless.

So Myers started working with engineers at Bell Laboratories to transfer drawings by him and five contemporaries to a 1/2-inch by 3/4-inch ceramic tile.

"You can't send a big sculpture, you can't send a painting, every ounce counts," Dellinger said. "In addition to that, it would have to be tiny, almost weightless. You couldn't have anything that had magnetic properties or anything that could interfere with navigation or compromise a mission like this."

Dellinger said it is unknown how many copies of the ceramic wafer were produced but it was likely fewer than 20. One for each artist, one for each key Bell Labs engineer and one to be placed in a pocket of the gold foil that surrounds the lunar module by one of the engineers.

Because of the Moon Museum's size, Adam Justice, curator of art at the Polk Museum, said work on it is very minimalistic in style.

Oldenburg's contribution is an abstract drawing of Mickey Mouse while Rauschenberg simply drew a line.

"Andy Warhol's is the most noticeable because, from what I understand, Andy Warhol said he was going to draw his initials," Justice said. "So if you turn it a certain way it looks like 'AW.' It also looks like a rocket but it could also look like a piece of anatomy. It's up to interpretation."

In addition to the Moon Museum, a copy of the telegram from the engineer who placed the ceramic wafer on Apollo 12 to Myers that signals the mission's completion will be displayed.

Dellinger is scheduled to speak about the Moon Museum at a reception on Sept. 25. The reception is free for members, \$10 for guests.

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