

Apollo's Cave Art: Surfaces and Symbols Under a Moon Era Launch Pad

Seeking meaning of the human exploration of space, *Apollo's Cave Art* is a film-based photographic investigation that explores time, space, mystery and loss by contextualizing the surfaces and symbols discovered under a Moon era launch pad with Paleolithic cave art.

While on a grant documenting a human spaceflight mission, I discovered in the highly restricted launch pad landscape of NASA's Kennedy Space Center, an obscure, soccer field-size trench with otherworldly, frozen-in-the-moment scorched surfaces and evidence of hand painted symbols.

This cave-like environment connected me to the abstractness of planetary images captured by space probes, notions of time and distance and the evolution of human tool-making and cave art uncovered at World Heritage sites like the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, the Blombos Caves on South Africa's southern coast, the Lascaux caves in France and the Altamira caves in Spain.

Over 4 years, I was able to journey into and document the metamorphosed layers, mysterious burn marks and textured flaking surfaces on black & white and color negative films. These features had been forcefully created from the brute sun-like fire, heat exhaust and water from over 45 years of rocket launches. Likened to cave art remnants, I felt these abstracted surfaces were the signatures from the man-made machines that had first transported humans and their tools to the unknowns of space and time.

And so like space itself, the images are intentionally devoid of scale to intensify the unknown – the metaphysical.

There was also evidence of imperfect hand painted symbols that further accentuated the cave art connection. Although technicians had hand painted imperfect + ○ 0 ▽ □ □ — often in black, white, and red ochre to reference structural changes or utilitarian repairs before or after a launch, their geo-archaeological context to similar color schemes and patterns found in early human cave art became evident.

It's was though a "Lascaux" of the space age had been unintentionally created.

Influenced by the scientific display of overlapping sequential imagery from decades of space probe's reconnaissance of planets and moons, I photographed the flame trench sequentially in order to create varying mural size montages and panoramas up to 60 x 96 inches. Printing silver-based black and white prints from some of the project's negatives is an unexplored goal.

However, what should have seemed historic and permanent became fleeting. By 2014 NASA had leased this historic launch pad to SpaceX. So to facilitate their 21st century rocket systems, the 1960's era flame trench was destroyed and then modernized.

~~Display: mural size images have been printed on archival inkjet papers ranging from 24 x 30 to 60 x 96 inches. Printing silver based black and white prints from some of the project's negatives is an unexplored goal. (37) = 462 (424)~~

~~*Apollo's Cave Art* is my photographic response to documenting the evidence from both the machine rocket and man's hand during the initial explorations of transporting humans from Earth to space between 1967 and 2011. (425)~~

453

448