

Evidence of Space Exploration ... On Earth

Anthropocene Cave Art: surfaces and symbols from under an Apollo era launch pad

I am a documentary photographer who explores obscure locations, objects and micro cultures. My current film-based project is a metaphysical exploration of surfaces and symbols in a high-walled trench under a historically restricted Apollo era launch pad in context to cave art.

At NASA's Kennedy Space Center between 1967 and 2011, this cave-like trench served as a utilitarian means of funneling out the sun temperature-like exhaust flames and clouds of white steam from the ignition and lift-off of the Saturn V and the Space Shuttle.

During the Apollo era, the burn marks from the Saturn V left a pitch black residue on the flame trench surfaces. Between 1981 and 2011 the burn markings from the Space Shuttle's fuel combination plus the thousands of gallons of water flooding the pad's flame trench began eroding the black residue.

By the time I discovered them in 2009, the flame trench had become embedded with layers of fleeting, frozen-in-the-moment abstract forms, shadowed shapes and textured flaking surfaces. It was as if these walls of unintended art were the unrecognized signatures from decades of forgotten launches that had forcefully lofted man and his tools above Earth into the time and space of the universe.

While the rockets (as tools) had left their signature on the surfaces of the transfigured trench walls and blast shield, there was also evidence of human signage. Although technicians had hand painted imperfect + O 0 ▽ □ □ — often in black, white, and red ochre to reference structural changes or the need for utilitarian repairs before or after a shuttle launch, their archaeological context to similar color schemes found in early human cave art became evident.

A modern era Lascaux of the space age had been created and nobody noticed.

Because of scale and natural lighting, I intentionally photographed the length of the flame trench walls sequentially in order to print varying scaled mural sized montages and panoramas. Some of these intentional image combinations aren't that much different in appearance than those initially inspired by planetary scientist during the analog era of space exploration when they assembled overlapping prints of images from a space probe's reconnaissance over a planet or a moon.

By 2015 the last fleeting shadows from the era of Apollo and the Space Shuttle were gone. NASA had leased this historic launch pad to the commercial aerospace firm SpaceX. Unfortunately the flame trench walls, flooring and blast shield were completely dismantled and replaced with newer ablative materials.

Anthropocene Cave Art is the only film and digital based evidence revealing what had been the surfaces and signatures created from both the machine tools and man's hand during the initial first explorations of transporting humans from Earth to space.

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