

# AN INFINITE AND OMNIVOROUS SKY

## ARTWORK

*An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky*, a group exhibition about the mysteries and militarization of outer space, features twenty-nine works by artists that critically engage in poetic, scientific, and geopolitical views of the cosmos. Although the sea of celestial bodies has incited philosophizing and dreaming throughout time, the sky has also become militarized. It serves as a site of international power struggles and an omniscient point of view for surveillance via countless satellites. Our knowledge is constantly evolving with the generation of new data via Mars and moon rovers, Hubble telescope images, Voyager and New Horizons probes, and the Large Hadron Collider, among others. As the human race faces unprecedented crises due to climate change and related global unrest, the sky may hold the key to our collective survival.

The works in the exhibition prompt dialogue about the need for rigorous scientific exploration, unrestrained artistic practice, and informed political action. For example, Amy Balkin's *The Atmosphere, A Guide* is a poster-essay that, in the artist's words, "depicts various human influences on the sky and their accumulated traces, whether chemical, narrative, spatial, or political." The thirteen cotton flags in Kambui Olujimi's installation *T-Minus Ø* feature photographic collages of failed rocket launches and shuttle attempts, while Kerry Tribe's video *The Last Soviet* addresses cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev's 311 days spent on the Mir space station during the fall of the Soviet Union. Cauleen Smith's video *Space is the Place (A March for Sun Ra)* follows a rainy Chicago performance of Afrofuturist composer and musician Sun Ra's "*Space is the Place*" by a high school marching band, and Brittany Nelson's large-scale Bromoil photograph *Tracks 1* centers around an image the Opportunity Rover took of its own tracks in the Martian landscape. The series of nine clocks comprising Katie Paterson's *Timepieces (Solar System)* tells the time on Earth's moon and the eight planets in our solar system, while the green embroidered text spelling "THERE IS NO RETURN" in Dianna Frid's *NYT, AUG. 22, 2015, JACOB BEKENSTEIN* is excerpted from the physicist and black hole theorist's obituary in the *New York Times*.

## THE ARTISTS

Participating artists: Amy Balkin, Jen Bervin, James Bridle, william cordova, Rohini Devasher, Ala Ebtekar, Spencer Finch, Dianna Frid, Carrie Gundersdorf, Basim Magdy, Brittany Nelson, Demetrius Oliver, Kambui Olujimi, Lisa Oppenheim, Trevor Paglen, Katie Paterson, Dario Robleto, Cauleen Smith, and Kerry Tribe.

### structural frame

- What formal qualities do you see repeated throughout *An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky*?
- How do the artists' materials and processes relate to the concepts and subject matter within their work?



Kambui Olujimi, *T-Minus Ø*, 2017. Installation of 13 mounted flags. Digital print on cotton with aluminum pole, artist-made finial, and zinc pole mount. Courtesy of the artist.

### subjective frame

- What is your immediate response to the exhibition?
- Which artwork stands out most to you and why?
- What do you associate with the subject matter in these works?

# VOCABULARY

## APPROPRIATION

the use of pre-existing objects or imagery in one's own work<sup>1</sup>

## CONTEMPORARY

something that belongs to the present or current time

## CONTEXT

the situation in which something happens

## FORMAL QUALITIES

refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, balance, movement, contrast, and unity

## INSTALLATION

artwork that responds to and alters a space

## SUBJECTIVE

something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

## SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

<sup>1</sup> Tate. (n.d.). Appropriation - Art Term. Retrieved January 10, 2020, from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/appropriation>.

# EVENTS

- **Curator-led tour with Kendra Paitz:** Jan. 28 at 6 pm
- **Screening of Kambui Olujimi's *Skywriters*:** Feb. 1 at 2 pm and 7:30 pm at Illinois State University Planetarium.
- **Artist lecture by Kambui Olujimi:** Feb. 1 at 4 pm
- **Exhibition reception:** Feb. 1 from 5 to 7 pm
- **Additional screenings of Kambui Olujimi's *Skywriters*:** Feb. 6 at 9:30 am; Feb. 8 at 2 pm; Feb. 11 at 11 am; Feb. 15 at 2 pm; and Feb. 19 at 9:30 am at the ISU Planetarium.
- **Exhibition tour and workshop co-presented with the Children's Discovery Museum:** Feb. 8 at 1 pm at University Galleries.
- **Stroller tour:** Feb. 10 at 9 am
- **All ages artmaking workshop:** Feb. 15 from 12 to 1 pm led by Tanya Scott, University Galleries' Curator of Education. No registration required.

Field trip programs, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment. Please contact University Galleries at [galleries@illinoisstate.edu](mailto:galleries@illinoisstate.edu) or 309.438.5487 to schedule an appointment.

\*Field trip stipends are available thanks to a Town of Normal Harmon Arts grant.

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**



# cultural frame

- What historical and contemporary references do you recognize in *An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky*?
- How does reading the label affect how you perceive the work?
- In what ways have artists in *An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky* appropriated and recontextualized pre-existing content?

# ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- The stars are an ancient source of inspiration that continue to serve as a muse for the human imagination today. Analyze how artworks in *An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky* draw influence from the night sky. Design an artwork based on this theme and write a narrative or a poem to accompany the work.
- Inspired by Katie Paterson's *Timepieces (Solar System)* (nine clocks that tell the time on the eight planets in our solar system and Earth's moon), and Lisa Oppenheim's *Lunagrams* (re-creations of 19th century images of the moon exposed using the light of the moon), create an artwork that documents the passing of time.
- Analyze and discuss James Bridle's use of research and data to generate predictive weather patterns in *Cloud Index*. Research a topic of your choice. Design an artwork, or body of work that integrates data related to your research.
- As a class, discuss the history of appropriation in art. Consider Dianna Frid's use of text from obituaries, Kambui Olujimi's flags consisting of collaged images of failed rocket launches, Brittany Nelson's adoption of photographs from NASA, Dario Robleto's digital amalgamation of stage lights from album covers of deceased musicians, and Cauleen Smith's integration of music from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and Sun Ra's "Space is the Place" (1972) in her videos. Plan and produce a work of art that appropriates and recontextualizes pre-existing content.



Katie Patterson, *Timepieces (Solar System)*, 2014. Nine adapted clocks. Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York.