

# ONE DAY I STUMBLED UPON A METEORITE

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CURATED BY  
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CAROLINA CIUTI

One of the first books ever read to me when I was a child, was Italo Calvino's *Italian Folktales* (1954)<sup>1</sup>. Published in two thick volumes with a white illustrated softcover (a detail that I still remember), it was a collection of two hundred short stories from all over Italy that Calvino patiently gathered together and transcribed.

As I was a difficult child to get to sleep, my parents developed a firm bedtime routine that involved reading books and making up stories until I finally dropped off. Sometimes, my parents would fall asleep too soon and I would keep fantasising with the book in my hands as if it were a cuddly toy – a habit that I still have.

Among the *Folktales*, my favourite was definitely *The Peasant Astrologer* – who in my personal version actually managed to steal the king's ring before travelling to the moon with it –. I certainly was not aware of what travelling to the moon really meant back then but I guess my imagination associated it with the possibility of a fantastic faraway journey.

It wasn't until some years ago, when I was visiting the National Central Library of Florence for my BA dissertation, that I encountered another book by Calvino, which I had not read before and that would stick with me forever. The girl next to me in the reading room was casually browsing through its yellowed pages: the cover of the old edition read "*Cosmicomics*"<sup>2</sup> and featured a geometric illustration of a galactic landscape – which I would later learn was Escher's –. I asked the girl if she would lend me the book when she was finished and she whispered that I could have it right away because she couldn't find what she was looking for.

This 1965 book was a collection of twelve short stories on the creation of the Universe through the adventures of an always-extant being named Qfwfq. In each story, witty humour constituted a filter through which Calvino responded to complex questions like "Where do we come from?", "Has the universe always been infinite?".

In the first account I read that day, titled "*The Distance of the Moon*", the love story between the protagonist and Earth's satellite represented a perfect metaphor for human will in relation to unattainable goals. It made me think of an iconic engraving by William Blake, meant for a children's book called *The Gates of Paradise* (1793). The image shows a tiny figure standing at the bottom

of a long ladder leaning against the moon; next to him is a couple holding on to each other and at the bottom, in bold lettering, the words "I want! I want!". For a moment I identified with the longing figure, yet the object of my desire wasn't exactly clear. Then, I dozed off.

Directing our gaze towards the starry sky is a vertical impulse that human beings have always responded to. An impetus of the body that discloses questions about the origin of the world, the need for belonging, the quest for inspiration or the inclination to explore. Likewise, and in different historical eras, this ascending action has also embodied the form of the utopian dream, of the fear of invasion, to the point of opening the way to a future of interstellar colonisation.

Since the Space Race era, the possibility of an expansive 'territorialisation' of the universe has been related to the uncertainty of the future of life on Earth, thus reducing the seeming distance between the otherness of the cosmos and our daily lives. It is as if the space we inhabit, "infinite, indistinguishable and uniform in all its directions" (according to the Cambridge Dictionary), acquired physical and tangible substance and forced us to wake up from our self-absorbed path.

When the already complex debate about the nature of 'space' exploded at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as detailed in correspondence between German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz and English philosopher Samuel Clarke<sup>3</sup>, two of the main positions confronted each other: the rationalist, according to which space corresponded to the relationship of distance or proximity between things, and the absolutist that identified it with an omnipresent entity and partly conducive to something divine. Later, Immanuel Kant would talk about space as an abstract concept that human beings have created to make sense of the world. According to contemporary physics, space-time is explained and represented as a container within which we move and flow, an imperceptible system that determines, organises and affects our existence.

In other words, space (as in the one we physically inhabit or outer space) would correspond to the dimensions of height, depth and width within which all things exist and move but it would also refer, by extension, to a fundamental reference point through which our knowledge of the world can be formulated and constructed.

The first time I had the impression that the universe wasn't as far or abstract, I was 7. My science teacher had planned a school visit to an astronomical observatory in Gavinana – a small town in the Tuscan mountains and close to my own –. We were to learn about the universe and witness the transit of Hale-Bopp, an unusually bright comet that, in 1996, flew by Earth and remained visible to the naked eye for almost 18 months. The comet, said one of the astronomers, had travelled thousands of years through our solar system and it was one of the brightest stars ever to be observed.

Through the lens of the telescope, the comet seemed so close that I had the impression I could touch its twin blue-and-white tails. That day, we learned that comets, asteroids and meteoroids were all leftovers from the formation of our solar system 4.6 billion years ago, a lot like fossil records of the evolution of our planet. The meteoroids that survived a trip through the atmosphere and hit the ground were called meteorites; 66 million years ago, the impact of a huge meteorite was believed to have caused the extinction of about three-quarters of the plant and animal species on Earth. I thought that was scary. When I got back home, I remember explaining to my father that there were many objects populating outer space and that some of them were time capsules that bring messages to Earth, inscribed with the history of the universe: that night, I almost touched one.

Years later, NASA's Meteoritical Bulletin<sup>4</sup> registered almost 1180 meteorite falls – namely, the fragments that were collected after people or automated devices in different parts of the world observed a fall from space –. I would also learn that the Solar System not only housed natural debris like comets, asteroid and meteoroids but also a concentration of so-called 'space garbage' that testifies to the passage of mankind.

Among the most paradoxical and representative effects of the inherent contradictions in space exploration (also known as the Kessler syndrome), this progressive accumulation of fragments of collided satellites and rockets will indeed impede any galactic flight in the long run and add to the already numerous infringements of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. Ratified by 109 countries to date, the Treaty establishes the 'free use of space by all nations', among other things, and ends up being a controversial permit for a regulated colonisation.

When I opened my eyes, I felt distressed, as if someone had just woken me up from a very animated dream. I must have slept for a long time because the reading room was empty and one of the library assistants was urging me to pack up my stuff. She then pointed at the *Cosmicomics* that I was still holding in my hands and asked me to return the book. The girl who was sitting next to me before I fell asleep was also gone. On the desk she had occupied, she had left a pencil, a piece of paper with a series of convoluted scribbles and what seemed to be a small piece of rock.

As I was walking back home, the sky was incredibly bright. The constellations seemed to form a series of maps that organised the underlying world into an orderly grid system. Thinking back to Blake's engraving, I thought that the 'spatial gaze', or that vertical impulse towards the sky, offered a way to narrow the distance between the infinitely large and our daily microcosm, according to a reversed movement that from the cosmos would seek the body. As if walking down the street, or among the halls of a library, we were to stumble upon a meteorite.

**As part of the 2019 edition of the LOOP Festival, this exhibition gathers together the work of eight artists who differently deploys outer space as a filter through which to represent human desires, life on Earth and the organisation of knowledge. With different formats, the pieces by Regina de Miguel, Irene Grau, Abel Jaramillo, Julia Llerena, María Molina Peiró, Francisco Navarrete Sitja, Belén Rodríguez and Pedro Torres, thus, seem to reduce the apparent distance between the universe and everyday life. As if walking down the street we were to stumble upon a meteorite.**

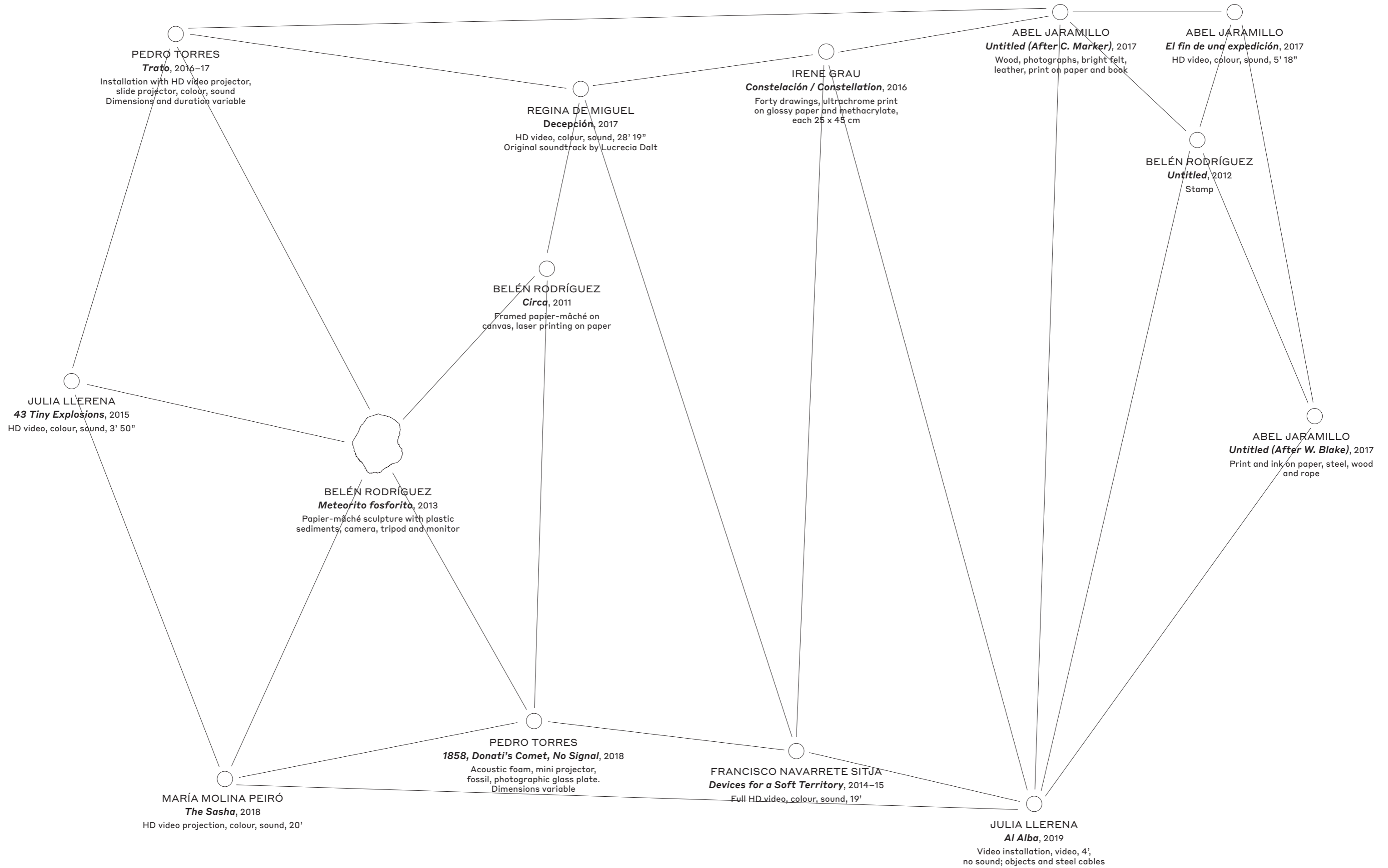
**Throughout the exhibition, a series of activities by artist Cris Blanco and researchers Núria Gómez Gabriel and Alexandra Laudo, will also be held.**

<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Fiabe italiane* [Italian Folktales], I Millenni Einaudi, Segrate, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Italo Calvino, *Le Cosmicomiche* [The Cosmicomics], Einaudi, Segrate, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, *Correspondence*, (ed.) Roger Ariew, Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/meteor/> Last access, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019.



# ONE DAY I STUMBLED UPON A METEORITE

ABEL JARAMILLO

**Untitled (After W. Blake)**, 2017

PRINT AND INK ON PAPER, STEEL,  
WOOD AND ROPE

An iconic 1793 engraving by William Blake shows a tiny figure standing at the bottom of a long ladder leaning against the moon; next to him is a couple holding on to each other and at the bottom, in bold lettering, the words “I want! I want!”. In the adaptation of the work that Abel Jaramillo created for his research project *El fin de una expedición* (2017), the tiny figure is left wondering all alone, looking up at an indefinite object of desire, a perfect metaphor for human longing; the ladder, in turn, is soft and pliable, evoking the manifold and unexpected possibilities inherent to the creative process. Would you embark on this journey?

BELÉN RODRÍGUEZ

**Untitled**, 2012

STAMP

To look towards the sky is an impulse that human beings have always responded to, whether in search for answers, dreaming about an *outer* world, or determined to expand their ‘possessions’. Presented by the artist as an *objet trouvé*, the stamp proposes a reversed look towards the Earth, organised in a coherent grid system through the image of a satellite. While it relates to Belén Rodríguez’s interest in geometric structures as systems of control or tools to schematise knowledge, the minuscule illustration also recalls the notion of domination and the conquest of territories. As seen from the amenity of space, Earth’s frontiers stand out as sharp diagrams.

ABEL JARAMILLO

**Untitled (After C. Marker)**, 2017

WOOD, PHOTOGRAPHS, BRIGHT FELT,  
LEATHER, PRINT ON PAPER AND BOOK

**El fin de una expedición**, 2017

HD VIDEO, COLOUR, SOUND, 5’ 18”

Drawing on a similar reversed gaze, Abel Jaramillo turns to cosmic imaginary and science fiction to talk about political conflicts and the representation of history. Departing from the 1932 novel *El fin de una expedición sideral (Viaje a Marte)* [The End

of a Space Expedition: Travel to Mars] by anarchist writer Benigno Bejarano, the artist scrutinises the memory of the 1930s riots in Extremadura through the account of a voyage to Mars. This speculative exercise of historical reconstruction openly questions the nature of the sources at hand while it problematizes the notion of the archive and the transmission of documents. The answer seems to lie in a small guide to the red planet, which references Chris Marker’s collection of handbooks *Petite Planète* (1954–1964), as presented in Alain Resnais’ short film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1957). Because as Jacques Rancière would say: “*the logic of fiction is the only means to the logic of facts*”.

JULIA LLERENA

**Al Alba**, 2019

VIDEO INSTALLATION, VIDEO, 4’, NO SOUND;  
OBJECTS AND STEEL CABLES

A proposal for an unconventional archive, which would allow for a polyhedral representation of facts beyond written history, is put forth in Julia Llerena’s installation *Al alba*. A series of objects and imperishable materials sourced by the artist in Barcelona, Burgos and Madrid, reference the place and time of the last executions in Spain on 27 September 1975. Meticulously set up to form a pentagram, the objects recall the frequency range of *Al alba*, a love song composed by Luis Eduardo Aute a few days before the shootings and later celebrated as an allegory of the death sentences. A firm witness to the tragedy, the recreation of the luminous sky, like the dawn of the executions, completes the installation. And “the stars (...) that hurt like threats” inscribe the memory of those historical facts.

IRENE GRAU

**Constelación / Constellation**, 2016

FORTY DRAWINGS, ULTRACHROME PRINT ON GLOSSY  
PAPER AND METHACRYLATE, EACH 25 X 45 CM

At first glance, the forty drawings by Irene Grau seem to form a series of unidentified constellations. Yet, after a closer look, the lines that join the fictitious celestial bodies reveal a series of recognisable symbols that comprise a walking map. To different extents, resonating with the artist’s interest for landscape, painting and abstraction, the

drawings depict the route of the Pyrenean trail (GR 11), each one referring to a day of walking. Usually showing different layers of information, these abstract maps instead bear no direct reference to a specific place or territory. As in a constellation, neither a hierarchy between the elements nor political boundaries are traceable. Each piece condenses two apparently incompatible scales into a single image: that of the topographic map and the immeasurable extension of the universe.

FRANCISCO NAVARRETE SITJA

**Devices for a Soft Territory (Aparatos para un territorio blando)**, 2014–15

FULL HD VIDEO, COLOUR, SOUND, 19’

Regardless of their apparent distance, there are places on Earth of cosmic resemblance. The Alto Patache coastal fog oasis in Chile is one of the driest areas in the region and looks similar to Mars. Protected by the state for its rich biodiversity and home to the world’s most important astronomical platforms, it is a “soft territory” where space and time seem to obey different laws. Stuck in between its material reality and an outer dimension, it is a controversial site where interests related to scientific research, industrial progress, ecosystem protection and environmental education mingle and overlap. In his extended research project *Devices for a Soft Territory*, which began with a residency at the Atacama Desert Centre in 2013, Francisco Navarrete Sitja set out to explore the precarious ecosystem of the area in relation to human activity and outlined the need for a contextual knowledge beyond economic and instrumental reasoning. A reflection that seems equally poignant when applied to the colonisation of outer space.

REGINA DE MIGUEL

**Decepción**, 2017

HD VIDEO, COLOUR, SOUND, 28’ 19”  
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK BY LUCRECIA DALT

Deception Island is another of the most singular places on our planet. Part of the Shetland Islands Archipelago in Antarctica, and the caldera of an active volcano, its complex ecosystem is believed to be the most direct analogue to what a natural environment would look like in outer

space. A scientific outpost and disputed by different countries over time, it is the elected site for the study of extremophiles, singular organisms with excellent growth in extreme environmental conditions – like high and low temperatures –, and believed to be able to survive on Mars and the Moon. The film originating from Regina De Miguel’s expedition to the Island and the numerous encounters with scientific groups of researchers, results into a great example of speculative fiction where the artist questions anthropocentric sovereignty in favour of new forms of microbial lives. Guided through a voiceover that references Jules Verne, H.P. Lovecraft and Clarice Lispector, among others, the multi-layered script leaves the viewer wondering about the precariousness of our planet and the future of interspecies colonisation.

BELÉN RODRÍGUEZ

**Circa**, 2011

FRAMED PAPIER-MÂCHÉ ON CANVAS,  
LASER PRINTING ON PAPER

In space exploration, the moon is the furthest point ever reached by manned missions. Framed and hung on the wall, this conglomerate of space dust and mouldy growths of lunar resemblance is a subtle reference to the conquest of the Universe by mankind. Overlapping with the representation of a diagonally transposed constellation, the frame recalls the multiple satellite images that we have seen of both Earth and the Moon, while it also emphasises the idea of a “screened view” of the cosmos present in other works of the artist.

BELÉN RODRÍGUEZ

**Meteorito fosforito**, 2013

PAPIER-MÂCHÉ SCULPTURE WITH PLASTIC  
SEDIMENTS, CAMERA, TRIPOD AND MONITOR

What are meteorites if not time capsules that inscribe the history of the Universe? After having survived their passage through the atmosphere, meteorites can reach the Moon or the surface of a planet and suddenly become archaeological artefacts. Created on the occasion of the exhibition *After Sputnik* at Josh Lilley in London (2013), *Meteorito fosforito* testifies to Belén Rodríguez’s interest for the unexpected, the notion of

# WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

chaos inherent to every orderly system. Made of moulded paper and tiny pieces of plastic that were washed up and collected on a beach in the north of Spain, the sculpture is a believable replica of a meteorite. While it subtly functions as proof of the impact of human activity on the environment, it also alludes to the aesthetic consequences of natural phenomena.

PEDRO TORRES

**1858, Donati’s comet, no signal**, 2018

ACOUSTIC FOAM, MINI PROJECTOR,  
FOSSIL, PHOTOGRAPHIC GLASS PLATE  
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

As with meteorites, we could say that comets are time travellers although they extinguish during their trajectory. When passing close to the Sun, they warm up and start releasing gasses, forming a nebulous envelope and sometimes also a tail. Named after Italian astronomer Giovanni Battista Donati, Donati’s Comet was the brightest ever to be observed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first to ever be photographed. Each part making up this tiny work (the image of the comet on the glass plate, the fossil and the projector itself) speaks of time – a central theme in the works of Pedro Torres –. The temporal nature of things is considered here from both a formal and a conceptual perspective.

MARÍA MOLINA PEIRÓ

**The Sasha**, 2018

HD VIDEO PROJECTION, COLOUR, SOUND, 20’

Having been the subject of grand utopian narratives for centuries, after the first space walk in 1965, outer space did not seem so distant anymore. Over the years, numerous anecdotes around the different space missions filled the records of NASA and international press alike. On the occasion of Apollo 16 in 1972, for instance, the first astronomical images were taken with a Far Ultraviolet Camera/Spectrograph. During that very same mission, astronaut Charles Duke left a family photo, which remains on the moon to this day. A gesture rich in meaning, besides showing the most human facet of space exploration, it more generally references men’s desire to leave a mark in history and be remembered by posterity. Taking this episode as a starting point, in

her latest film, María Molina Peiró reflects on human beings’ struggle with temporal and spatial limitations, while she tells a story about a parallel universe lost between frames and interfaces.

JULIA LLERENA

**43 Tiny Explosions**, 2015

HD VIDEO, COLOUR, SOUND, 3’ 50”

The small flames lighting up the pages of an old encyclopaedia about the Universe in *43 Tiny Explosions* suggest different readings. In Greek mythology, for instance, fire was associated with the gift of intellect among mankind; at the same time, the powerful image of a burning book could directly remit to censorship or the laborious task of preserving knowledge. In particular, here the flames seem to reference the occurrence of natural phenomena in outer space, or even imply an expanding threat to the Universe itself.

PEDRO TORRES

**Trato**, 2016–17

INSTALLATION WITH HD VIDEO PROJECTOR,  
SLIDE PROJECTOR, COLOUR, SOUND  
DIMENSIONS AND DURATION VARIABLE

The installation formally and conceptually overlaps two equally urgent questions: the exploitation of space as controlled by the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and the consequences of global warming, as discussed in Natasha Myers’ contribution to the book *Art in the Anthropocene* (2015). Ratified by very few countries at the time of the first explorations, the objective of the treaty was to function as a binding agreement that would protect space from uncontrolled colonisation. Today, in what seems to be a renewed Space Race, most of its principles have been disregarded and the tragic consequences of human activity seem to be bound to be repeated in open space. While a sci-fi audio track constitutes the backdrop for the slides and the superimposed video of a rising sun, past, present and future seem to collapse onto one another and we are left wondering about the sustainability of life on Earth.

# ACTIVITIES

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November, at 19:00

NÚRIA GÓMEZ GABRIEL

***“The Case for Letting the Stars Determine Who I Date”***

Researcher Núria Gómez Gabriel proposes an audio-visual reading around the transformation of our emotional relationships after the introduction of new technologies and artificial intelligence. Through a compilation of case studies such as applications, consumer products and contracting services, but also films, publications and interventions by artists and activists, the reading traces a journey through the universe of emotional surveillance.

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019, at 19:00

ALEXANDRA LAUDO

***How to Observe a Nocturnal Sky***

*How to Observe a Nocturnal Sky* is a performative lecture in which curator Alexandra Laudo considers some astronomical phenomena and outstanding moments in the history of astronomy, in relation to philosophical reflections on the night, the darkness, and our ways of seeing. Throughout the conference, Laudo also talks about different artistic works that have explored these questions, thus constructing a story that is also a curatorial exercise, a narrated exhibition.

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January, at 19:00

CRIS BLANCO

***ciencia-ficción***

Cris Blanco's *ciencia-ficción* is a performance, a concert, an audio-visual reflection on the cosmos and beyond. In the quantum world, they say that until something is observed all possible situations are occurring at the same time. Until someone observes it. At that moment nature chooses one of the different possibilities. Thus, in *ciencia-ficción*, everything is happening, all at the same time. That is until you go in and see it.

This exhibition is co-produced by LOOP and Fabra i Coats - Contemporary Art Centre of Barcelona

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**Opening Hours**

Tuesdays to Saturdays, from 12:00 to 20:00  
Sundays and Holidays, from 11:00 to 15:00  
Guided tours of the exhibitions  
Every Saturday at 18:00 and Sundays at 12:30

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