

VISIONS OF FLIGHT



From the earliest of human activities to modern space flight, artists have applied their special talents to important historical events. Much of what we know about early American settlers, the Wild West, the Industrial Revolution, and cultural changes, has been shown to us by artists. Today, artists are as involved as their predecessors were in recording the passing parade of life. These are just some of the reasons the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) chose artists to document many of its programs and projects.

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For more than 25 years, NASA has conducted an active art program, through which it documents major activities of America's aerospace program. The idea originated with James E. Webb, NASA Administrator from 1961 to 1968. Webb believed that "important events can be interpreted by artists to give a unique insight into significant aspects of our history-making advance into space."

Mr. Webb's words have since been borne out. Artists' visions and interpretations of aeronautics and space have appeared in large and small museums and galleries around the world. Artworks have been reproduced in books, magazines, newspapers, and motion pictures, and have been shown on television. The artists who have so generously participated in the program have provided NASA with a historic record of achievements, and have given the public a new and fuller understanding of U.S. aerospace advancements.

The Artist and the Space Shuttle

Artistic documentation has become a NASA tradition. On April 12, 1981, a team of artists from across the United States was commissioned by NASA to record the first launch of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. A second team of artists viewed and recorded *Columbia's* first landing in

the Mojave Desert 2 days, 6 hours, and 21 minutes later. Many of the artists produce preliminary color studies or paintings on location. Some work directly on watercolor blocks, while others work in oils and acrylics, using makeshift easels for support. The working environment is understandably hectic with the noises and movements of observers, television crews, and the press. Yet, each artist presents his or her own personal perspective. Each painting is an intimate human record.

The artwork produced for the NASA Space Art Collection represents a wide range of techniques and styles from realistic to abstract. These varied techniques give to the collection exciting visual elements, which add significantly to the historical record.

For example, impressionist painters depend upon instinct, spontaneity, and inspiration of the moment. They observe effects of light and shade on objects, figures, and landscape, experimenting with and studying color exclusively. Impressionists do not necessarily copy colors in nature, but prefer to paint an object with colors they sense rather than merely see.

Some artists present the space program with a sense of humor. The Space Shuttle, *Columbia*, for example, has been portrayed in a whimsical, bright, almost Day-Glo style of flat colors with precise line work which gives the Shuttle a cartoon-like quality.

This work can be compared with second generation Pop Art, which is particularly effective because of its broad appeal. Pop Art is also understandable and can be interpreted at many levels.

Other artists may choose to capture interpretive images through the use of symbolism, while still others may sometimes use color in a way completely unrelated to the object, creating dramatic and vibrant images.

Artists may also choose a style that combines colors and shapes to create an expressive abstract composition.

Traditional artists, on the other hand, approach their work through more representational techniques.

Traditionalists have depicted the Space Shuttle in classical styles as it lifts off from a pastoral landscape. Still other artists have depicted the Shuttle almost photographically, in super-realistic styles.

A Unique Archive of Talent

Besides documenting the Shuttle, artists have been commissioned to depict test flights of experimental aircraft, space science satellites, deep space probes, and tracking and data transmission systems. Artists have also given the world its first conceptual glimpses of future space efforts, such as the National Aero-Space Plane and the Space Station.

As the United States continues to push back the

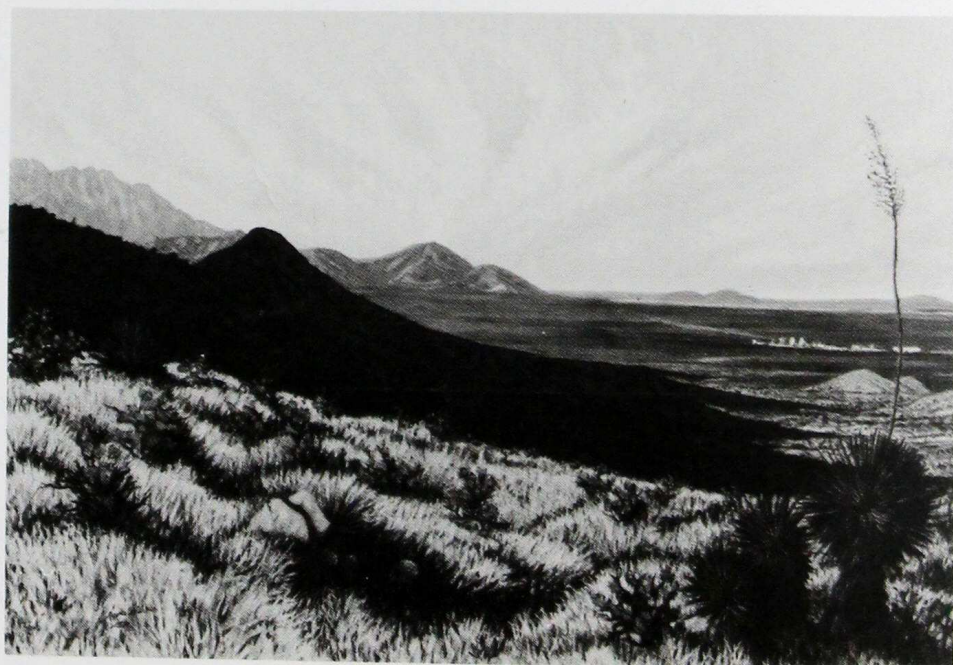
frontiers of space, artists will continue to document these efforts through artistic interpretation. Because art transcends politics, religion, war, and language, it can be understood and appreciated by both young and old throughout the world.

Former curator of painting at the National Gallery of Art, Dr. H. Lester Cooke, who guided the NASA Art Program during the Apollo/Saturn lunar missions, has said of the collection: *"Painting is the most lasting of all visual records. Perhaps this project will help to prove that the United States produced in the 60s not only the engineers and scientists capable of shaping the destiny of our age, but also the artists worthy to keep them company."*

Robert Schulman
Director
NASA Art Program



Wilson Hurley
*Development Motor-8
 Test Firing (DM-8)*, 1987
 Oil, 40 x 34 in.



Bruce A. Aiken
*Morning Over the White Sands
 Facility*, 1986
 Acrylic 24 x 36 in.