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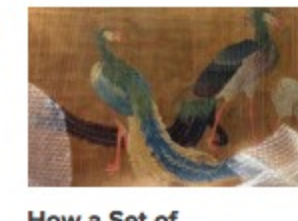
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Conjuring Art Between Magic and Outer Space

by Devon Van Houten Maldonado on March 12, 2015

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"Lunatic," Nahum's hypnosis performance at the Zapopan Art Museum

MEXICO CITY — Last year, London-based polymath Nahum became the first artist recognized by the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) as a young leader in space exploration. Using hypnosis, sound composition, video, and performance, the Mexico City native launches investigations into the unknown and collaborations between artists and scientists.

For millennia, the cosmos was the origin of both metaphysical forces and magical ideas. In the 20th century, space became a tangible destination. Nahum focuses on the spiritual and fantastical ideas that have long led us to look toward the heavens, first as a source and then a destination.



Nahum (click to enlarge)

"In a world where we are confronted by so many walls, we need to think of magical ways and really work on those things," the artist says. "At the end of the day it's a creativity exercise. Our technological and scientific achievements have been motivated by these magic ideas."

"We have to think about it like a tool for being able to devise or conjure possibilities that are apparently completely nuts or impossible."

Since 2008, Nahum has been the space projects associate for the Arts Catalyst in London, working to create alliances between artists and scientists. He also serves as coordinator of the astronautical federation's Committee for the Cultural Utilization of Space (ITACCUS), working on advocacy and communication within international space and cultural communities.

Nahum, who is 35, studied computer science and philosophy in Mexico, then went on to earn a master's in music composition at Goldsmiths, University of London. He'd become interested in magic as a child, through figures like David Copperfield, and living in London, he became fascinated with the Victorian era as a time of great scientific achievement, but also great mysticism and spirituality. In 2011 he began to experiment with magic in his work and probe its relationship to scientific exploration and achievement.

"There was a point where magicians were considered real magicians, and the magic they were performing was absolutely real," he explains. "And that's the point where I have a little bit of conflict. Like, I don't believe in that kind of real, real magic."

Nahum's work is less about extraterrestrial miracles or smoke and mirrors than it is about inviting the audience to peek behind the curtain. It hinges on the validity of magical ideas and of human ability, rather than blind faith.



"Lunatic," Nahum's hypnosis performance at the Zapopan Art Museum

When we spoke, he had just returned from the Mexican city of Guadalajara, where he hypnotized 15 participants at the Zapopan Art Museum and sent them on a mental journey to the surface of the moon. The project evolved out of a concern about access to space, he said. Only around 500 people have had the privilege to travel beyond earth's atmosphere and, of course, the vast majority have been rich white men. Nahum wields certification from the University of Birbeck International School of Hypnosis.

Other recent undertakings include organizing a group of Mexican artists to travel to Russia and perform artistic experiments onboard zero-gravity parabolic flights. The exhibition that resulted from that experiment is now on view at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda (Alameda Art Laboratory) in Mexico City's historic city center.



"The Gravity of the Issues" at the Alameda Art Laboratory (click to enlarge)

The Gravity of the Issues, as the show is titled, is the culmination of a years-long quest to answer the question: how can artists work in space? Nahum teamed up with artist and designer Alejandra de la Puente to coordinate the artists and scientists involved, secure private and public sponsors including Mexico's National Council for Culture and the Arts (Conaculta), and travel to the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia.

The project was literally record breaking: the group took more than 50 cameras onboard the specially designed aircraft, breaking the Guinness World Record for the most cameras onboard a zero-gravity flight. The resulting material explores the conceptual possibilities of future creative practices in space. Despite being confronted with the alien experience of making art in a zero-gravity environment, the work in the exhibition arrives at formal presentations using video, performance, sculpture, drawing, and installation.

For the show, Nahum created an encompassing video and sound installation with larger-than-life projections and ambient noises that vibrates through your body. The video documents the awkward proposition of hugging without gravity, asking viewers to consider how humans can be intimate in space. It offers an introspective look at how attached we are to our pale blue dot.



Still from Nahum's work in "The Gravity of the Issues" at the Alameda Art Laboratory

"The beautiful thing about being a contemporary artist these days is that the possibilities are endless. Even though it sounds like I do very rogue things, at the end of the day they are very specific. I do three things: I do space, I do magic, and I do music."

While Nahum's investigations actively engage with the cosmos, his work also suggests a more down-to-earth and self-conscious undertone to humanity's quest to conquer the unknown: understanding ourselves and where we come from.

"Ultimately my work is about us, humans and this planet," Nahum says. "So that we can feel more connected — to everything, and especially to each other, in this place, at this moment of cosmic history."

"I am very interested in giving people very intimate and personal experiences that relate to the cosmos and eventually bounce back to us for a better appreciation of what is happening here on earth, in this time," he adds.

The Gravity of the Issues continues at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda (Doctor Mora 7, Centro, Cuauhtémoc, Mexico City) until March 22.

Arts Catalyst International Astronautical Federation Laboratorio Arte Alameda London

magic Mexico City Nahum outer space Zapopan Art Museum

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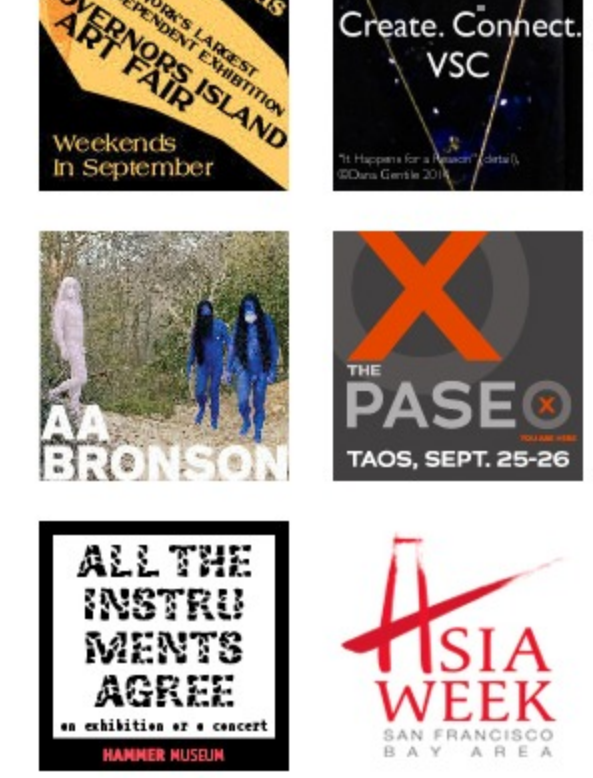
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