

The Arts for Humans in Space

By Richelle Gribble

We are exposed to satellite imagery every day, from navigating Google Maps to gazing at Yelp options to find our next meal. We see the world from above through GPS and weather reports on the news. Satellite imagery is integrated into our everyday experience, shaping our perception of the globe—do we take it for granted?

The first satellite images taken from space were photographed on the sub-orbital V-2 rocket launched by the United States on October 24, 1946 (Figure 1). For the first time, we could look outside of ourselves, humbled by the vastness of the connected world. Since then, satellite imagery has infiltrated all facets of our culture, from media to navigation. We have transitioned to mapping, documenting, and imaging Earth from space very quickly. The satellite perspective is part of our recent history.

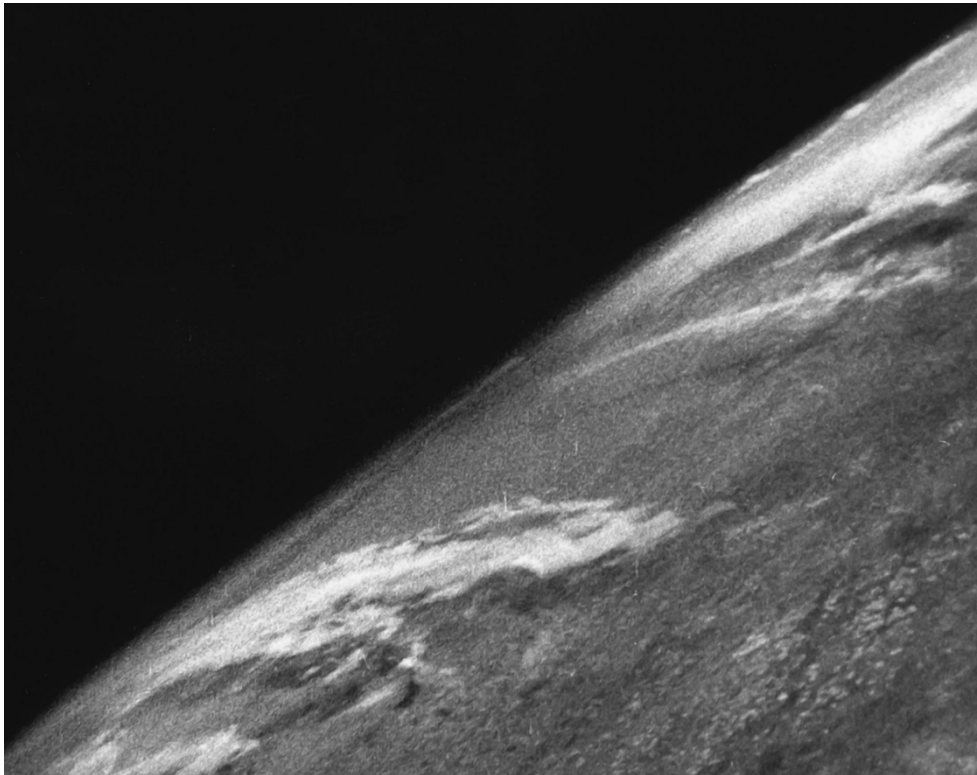


Figure 1: The first images from space taken on the V-2 rocket flight launched by the United States on October 24, 1946. Source: NASA.

Perhaps the novelty of satellite imagery dwindled as flight travel increased, making these scenes from above familiar to us. Maybe widespread use of satellite imagery made us less sensitive to it. Or, possibly we lost such ecstatic wonder for satellite photos when we interacted with them daily on our phones, after Google Earth launched in 2001 and Street

View launched in 2005. With so much exposure to aerial footage (in a short time), did we numb our senses to its uniqueness?

How can we reawaken awe for aerial views? We must personalize these seemingly distant places and consider our role within a greater context. If we maintain our curiosity, we can discover profound meaning from a bird's-eye view: here we see ourselves, our actions, our impact, our future.

I am the 11th artist to be selected for an artist residency at **Planet Labs**, an Earth-imaging satellite company based in San Francisco, CA (Figure 2). I was invited to create site-specific projects at Planet's headquarters inspired by planetary themes. With on-boarding sessions, company meetings and tours, introductions to business executives and engineers, and conversations with rocket scientists, I was fully immersed in Planet's culture and mission.



Figure 2: Artist Richelle Gribble in studio. Photo: J. S. Carson.

After I had conversations with Robert Simmon, Senior Visualization Engineer at Planet and former Lead Visualizer at NASA Earth Observatory, he acknowledged that we need to “humanize satellite imagery,” making it comprehensible and relatable to our lives again. This desire to make satellite imagery connect with us in a more personal way became the driving force behind my artistic endeavors at Planet.

I created an interactive puzzle, “Linked,” made up of 250 hand-painted pieces (Figure 3). Each puzzle piece depicts a different scene on Earth, ranging from plants, animals, humans, and technology to human-made systems. Employees and visitors at Planet Headquarters and the Terra Bella office were invited to assemble two modular

installations comprised of the pieces of our planet. This collaborative puzzle links living and non-living systems in various combinations, reflecting on the hive-like connectivity of Earth.



Figure 3: Collaborative puzzle “Linked” by Richelle Gribble at Planet Headquarters. Photo: Forest Stearns.

The next project is comprised of seven 3D mixed-media constructions of satellite imagery captured via Planet Explorer Beta (Figures 4 and 5). My goal was to reconstruct the aerial perspective using everyday, human-made objects (rubber bands, circuit board pieces, plastic figurines, etc.) to make these distant places relatable to the touch. Reconstructing scenes made from material we use daily or discard gave a tactile sensation to satellite imagery.



Figure 4: “Organized Chaos” (top) mixed media paintings by Richelle Gribble with source material from Planet and other sources (bottom).



Figure 5: “Organized Chaos” by Richelle Gribble installed next to SkySat satellite at Planet Headquarters. Photo: Forest Stearns.

As a capstone project to summarize my findings at Planet, I etched artwork onto two “Dove” satellites that were successfully launched to outer space aboard an Orbital-ATK Minotaur-C rocket destined for a Sun synchronous orbit, the first-ever orbiting art show (Figures 6 and 7). This was my second opportunity to send art to space since I created art that flew aboard Blue Origin’s New Shepard flight a year earlier. My next art commission for space is developing with Relativity Space, an aerospace startup building 3D-printed rockets based in Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 6: Continuous-line drawing of a crowd of people to reference our human interconnectivity for the “Dove” satellite. Art by Richelle Gribble.

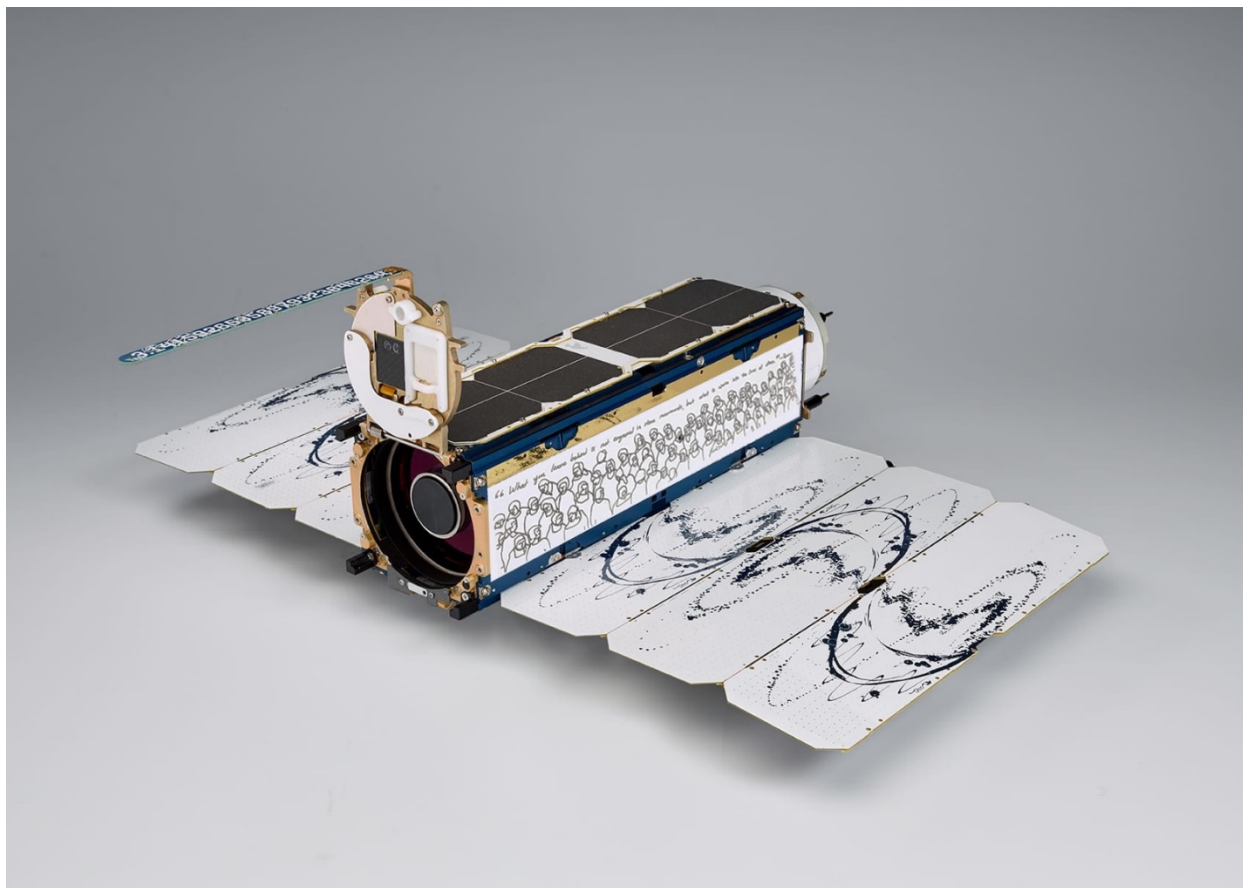


Figure 7: “Dove” satellite with artwork by Richelle Gribble.

After the three-month artist residency at Planet, I was invited to be a Planet Ambassador with access to Planet’s Explorer Beta, which provides comparative tools and daily satellite imagery to navigate global changes from space. This tool aids research and artistic projects beyond my residency experience, resulting in several cross-disciplinary collaborations bridging art and science.

Intersections between art and space are crucial to my artistic vision to inspire wonder about the world we inhabit. Perhaps what is most exciting about connecting art and space is they have a similar goal—to expand our human capabilities and imagination to transcend us. There is no better outlet for expressing our humanity and our impact on the planet than in the stars, reflecting back on Earth.

Copyright © 2018, Richelle Gribble. All rights reserved.

About the Author: Richelle Gribble creates mixed-media paintings and drawings, prints, videos, puzzles, and sculptures. Her artwork is inspired by concepts of virality, ecology, networks, group dynamics, and social trends that connect us all. In 2013, she earned a BFA in Studio Arts from the Roski School of Art and Design with dual minors in Social

Entrepreneurship and Marketing at the University of Southern California. She won the 2016 Grand Prize Award for solo exhibition and representation at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery with inclusion in Art Market San Francisco, Texas Contemporary, and the Miami Project. Her works have been exhibited on an LED screen in Times Square, Christie's Salesroom the Rockefeller Center, John Wayne Airport, and more. Her artwork was etched onto four Dove satellites in the first-ever orbiting art show in outer space facilitated by Planet Labs. Her art has been acquired by the Tides Institute and Museum of Art, Relativity Space, Kala Art Institute, USC Art & Trojan Traditions Collection, Awagami Factory, and various private collections. Her work has been presented in a TEDxTrousdale talk "What Is Our Role Within a Networked Society?" and published in the *Creator's Project*, the *Atlantic*, and *Vice Magazine*.



Editors' Notes: We thank Richelle Gribble for her first publication in the *Journal of Space Philosophy*. Her innovative contribution to Space Art literature and her ending comments perfectly reflect our Kepler Space Institute vision:

Intersections between art and space are crucial to my artistic vision to inspire wonder about the world we inhabit. Perhaps what is most exciting about connecting art and space is they have a similar goal—to expand our human capabilities and imagination to transcend us. There is no better outlet for expressing our humanity and our impact on the planet than in the stars, reflecting back on Earth.

There is another personal reason we are pleased to have her join our expanding group of professional Space authors. She is an alumna of Idyllwild Arts, in the San Jacinto Mountains of Southern California. Bob Krone's association with that music and arts school began in 1946, and it has continued until today. Idyllwild Arts has grown over seventy years to be one of the world's leading music and arts schools. The major reason it has done so is the vision of Bob's parents, Founders Dr. Max Krone and Beatrice Perham Krone, that has inspired administration, faculty, staff members, and students and propelled that campus in its beautiful environment to success. **Bob Krone and Gordon Arthur.**