

## THE THIRD EXPEDITION

Erica Bohm

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### THE MISSION

For most of us, our knowledge of outer space is second-hand. These scientific “facts” are learned through the pages of a book, the television screen and the computer display --a conglomeration of “evidence” that, for the average person, is impossible to verify with our own eyes. This science is the kind that sparks the imagination with a mixture of fact, mystery and intrigue perfectly poised for artistic interpretation. Contributing to the lineage created by the generations of science fiction storytellers before her, Erica Bohm thrives in this uncertain context of fact and fiction, of the testaments of the select few scientific authorities and the fantastical speculation of great artistic minds. This exhibition, “The Third Expedition,” is an ode to the artist’s lifelong love of the science fiction genre, as well as a reference to the way we use our imaginations to lessen the physical and conceptual distance that we have from the true subject matter.

In depicting outer space in visual art, the notion of authorship becomes tenuous territory. Sourcing imagery can only come in one of two ways: via the publicly released materials from scientific establishments or from the vaster output of laymen artists. In Bohm’s “Galàctica” series, massive space modules hover suspended in inky black infinity, and inanimate space suits stare blankly from their desolate, cryogenic chambers; this imagery was photographed by Bohm at the Houston NASA facility and reworked into the artist’s glossy Plexiglas pieces, which are emphatically cinematic, as if viewers are peering into high definition television screens. Directly sourced from the medium of television are the prints from the series “My own private collection” in which alien landscapes are superimposed atop one another in an indistinct mashup of 1980s cinematography paralleling the artist’s nebulous memories of the sci fi television miniseries, *The Martian Chronicles*, based on a Ray Bradbury short story collection of the same name.

“The Third Expedition,” a story from *The Martian Chronicles* as well as the exhibition title, echoes the thematic “3” in the layering of time at the core of Bohm’s conceptual processes. The works in “My own private collection” feature triple timeframes: Bradbury’s “futuristic” stories from the 1940s and 1950s refashioned for the 1980s TV audience, ending up here translated into digital prints. In “My own private collection,” the homogenization of time is manifested through a contemporary medium, while Bohm’s process of taking Polaroids of existing photographs uses outmoded means to obscure the imagery’s origins. Whether these original photographs of otherworldly landscapes and astronaut boot prints were taken during the Apollo missions from the 1960s and 1970s, the 1990 Magellan mission to Venus or last year’s Mars Exploration Program, the viewer experiences this series of Polaroids, “Planet Stories,” as a new narrative independent from any one period in time. A witty take on the notion of the intimate, first-person snapshot, this series of tiny vignettes reminds us of the present day impossibility of seeing these wonders for ourselves, and that for the meantime at least, we’ll have to continue relying on the

amalgamation of our knowledge and our imaginations as Bohm does here --“This is my fiction, my own visual novel.”

--Robin Dluzen