SPACE SCIENCE IS ALIVE WITH ART
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Abstract

The history of human space flight and analogue and ground-based space science is alive with art. Artists, scientists and engineers working together build upon diverse frameworks of understanding, but also share tools and processes of investigation. By jointly stepping into new worlds and territories – with common purpose and mutual respect for curiosity – there emerge opportunities for encounters that offer an alternative viewpoint on things. Artists can introduce a meta-perspective (taking a step back and inquiring into the practice of research), a historical, conceptual or aesthetic view, all of which can invite those who are researchers, engineers and inventors toward new insight and discovery. Scientist’s methods of inquiry and their particular ways of dealing with natural phenomena and technology can also be a great source of inspiration for artists. Often with technical curiosity, artists can also contribute to concrete R&D just as science can directly impact art and inform aesthetics. So combined, the different philosophies, the experiments and the field work can lead to collaborative outcomes that are positively contributing to research, exploration and advancement.

Artist and biologist Angelo Vermeulen has been working together with the European Space Agency (ESA) MELiSSA research program since 2009. In response to the ESA invitation to reflect on the development of future space habitats, Vermeulen set up SEAD (Space Ecologies Art & Design), a platform for artistic research on the transfer of terrestrial ecosystems to space to facilitate space settlement. Artist and diver Sarah Jane Pell has been working with the underwater technology and biotechnology community since 2003. She joined NASA’s Luna Gaia team and the League of New World Explorers analogue space subsea habitat exploration mission Atlantica in 2006. Current and future work by these, and similar partnerships, illustrates a dynamic culture of fieldwork, lab protocols/studio practice, research and development, experimentation, demonstration/exhibition, publication and dissemination made possible by including artists in the fields of science and engineering. As ‘real’ collaborators, artists can truly move science and engineering forward; and by co-creating art works, they can improve science and technology communication. Collaboration between the arts and science should therefore be encouraged and fostered.