

Cultural event report



Prof's Cultural Event Report On a recent trip last October I visited the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and saw a wide array of their exhibits. One of thing that impresses you first upon entering that museum is the fact that the federal government is doing everything it can to impress you: the museum is massive, with a huge stair case leading up to its entrance, and huge open areas with full sizes aircraft as the first thing you see when you arrive. Though it is certainly a part of the Air and Space Museum's purpose to pass along information and create interest in the things it shows (as any Museum should) it was also plainly obvious that it was also the mission of the Air and Space Museum to impress you with the resources of the American government, and the American people and what they have done for air and space travel generally.

Many of the exhibits were historical in nature, such as Amelia Ehardt's plane, or rockets used to get people into space, or return vehicles from the mission to the moon. While I attended, however, there was an exhibit going on Entitled " NASA ART: 50 Years of Exploration," which detailed art that had been made as a result of NASA's effort. Two of these pieces struck me especially, " Fluid Dynamics" by Tina York and " Remembering Columbia" by Chakaia Booker. They are basically at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of what they do artistically, but both are incredibly interesting, and show the immense influence science has on our culture.

" Fluid Dynamics" was a very interesting piece: the artist spent several years working with NASA scientists research fluid dynamics before making it, and was trying to represent the motion that is inherent in his field of study through a still medium (Smithsonian 2011a). It really showed the huge impact that science has on art: we understand natural beauty, but science

can help simulate it better, and can create a huge influence on the mind of the artist.

“ Remembering Columbia” was, as mentioned previously, on the opposite end of the spectrum. It consisted of strips of rubber worked together to almost look like a bow (as in on a present, not the weapon), or a knot – or possibly an atom. This piece has physicality to it, and was created to remember those who lost their lives on the Columbia disaster in 2003 (Smithsonian 2011b). The pieces of rubber included those collected from the tire of the space shuttle itself, which were donated for the cause. This shows how deeply space exploration has entrenched in our culture: astronaut are cultural icons, and though we might not know their names any more, everyone is still aware of who they are and what they do, and the advancement of space exploration still holds promise to people the world over.

The exhibits in the Smithsonian, as mentioned previously, had a variety of purposes, from glorifying America to simply informing, to commemorating the history. But it was very interesting to see how science and art can coexists, co-mingle, and even spur each other on.

Works Cited

Smithsonian (2011a). “ Remembering Columbia” in NASA/ART from <http://airandspace.si.edu/imagetail.cfm?imageID=3345>

Smithsonian (2011b). “ Fluid Dynamics” in NASA/ART from <http://airandspace.si.edu/imagetail.cfm?imageID=3175>