

# CREATIVETIME

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## **CREATIVE TIME LAUNCHES A NEW WORK BY ARTIST TREVOR PAGLEN INTO OUTER SPACE IN FALL 2012**

***The Last Pictures* will Enter Perpetual Orbit and Remain on View For Five Billion Years, Becoming a Cultural Artifact of Our Time**

New York, NY — July 9, 2012 — This fall, Creative Time will launch *The Last Pictures*, an archival disc created by artist Trevor Paglen, into outer space, where it will orbit the earth for billions of years affixed to the exterior of the communications satellite EchoStar XVI. To create the artifact, Paglen micro-etched one hundred photographs selected to represent modern human history onto a silicon disc encased in a gold-plated shell, designed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Carleton College. *The Last Pictures* is both a message to the future and a poetic meditation on the legacy of our civilization. The images contained in the artifact constitute what the artist describes as “cave paintings from the 21<sup>st</sup>-century,” as they will become one of the longest-lasting material remnants of contemporary civilization. Following its launch from Kazakhstan in Fall 2012, the artifact will remain in the Earth’s geosynchronous orbit in virtual perpetuity. Audiences on earth will be able to experience the project through a series of public events and programs held in New York City, across the country, and around the world.

Paglen developed *The Last Pictures* through years of research and consultation with leading philosophers, scientists, engineers, artists, and historians and through a residency sponsored by the Visiting Artists Program at MIT. The project originates from the idea that the communications satellites in Earth’s orbit will ultimately become the cultural and material ruins of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, far outlasting anything else humans have created. These geostationary satellites, located above the equator at an altitude of 24,000 miles, experience no atmospheric drag, and will remain in orbit until our sun expands into a red giant and engulfs the earth about 4.5 billion years from now. *The Last Pictures* imagines a future Earth where there is no evidence of human civilization beyond the derelict spacecraft we have left behind in our planet’s orbit.

Creative Time Chief Curator Nato Thompson says, “In essence Copernicus used the skills of representation to transform our ideas of where the earth existed in the universe. In that spirit, Trevor Paglen’s project might just do the same for us, only by giving us a sense of the radically astonishing small space we hold in time. “

While the satellite-mounted artifact of *The Last Pictures* awaits deciphering by future civilizations, the project will also be shared with audiences on Earth. A display of a gold-plated disc at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City is planned for fall 2012, and Paglen and Creative Time will present a series of artist talks, a website, and an accompanying book co-published by University of California Press and Creative Time Books. In partnership with The New York Public Library’s *LIVE from the NYPL* program, Paglen and Creative Time will also present an evening of performances and conversations with leading scientists and philosophers to debut the project in New York City’s Bryant Park, coinciding with the EchoStar XVI satellite launch in fall 2012.

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“For almost forty years, Creative Time has been taking artists and publics to unexpected, exciting, thought-provoking places around New York City, the nation, and the world — and now, into outer space,” says Anne Pasternak, Creative Time’s President and Artistic Director. “As much as *The Last Pictures* is an opportunity for Creative Time to further its programs beyond our Earth, it is also an opportunity for artist Trevor Paglen to push his artistic practice into new realms. Trevor is known for stunning photographs that force us to rethink our environment in profound, historic ways. Now, with *The Last Pictures*, Trevor has created an artwork that will likely be a part of our skyline for billions of years—even longer than multi-celled organisms have been on Earth. It is a timescale so vast, it is difficult for us to comprehend.”

Joao Ribas, Curator of MIT’s List Visual Arts Center, says, “As human beings we’re used to thinking about time in terms of hours or years. *The Last Pictures* asks: how we do think about a deeper time beyond the human? Combining the metaphysical with the scientific, ecological, and technological, Trevor Paglen forces us to think about our relation to time in a deep way, by encoding information about our presence on earth in materials that can last for very long time. A “cosmic message in a bottle,” the artifact he produced as an artist in residence through the MIT List Visual Arts Center continues his interest in the sky as a place where the past and future meet.”

*The Last Pictures* is part of a long tradition of public intersections of art and space, with direct reference to NASA and Carl Sagan’s *Golden Record* of 1977, a project that attached to space probes phonograph records containing sounds and images portraying the diversity of life on earth and suggesting the possibility of communicating with extraterrestrial life forms and/or future humans. As much as Paglen’s project draws on past attempts at universal communication beyond the confines of time, it also recognizes the inevitable impossibility of this task—that such communication can only be partial, fragmentary, and quasi-intelligible. Aware that *The Last Pictures* may never be discovered, Paglen also intends this project to serve as a stark reminder of humanity’s fragility and as a meditation on our ultimate fate. Find out more at [www.creativetime.org/thelastpictures](http://www.creativetime.org/thelastpictures).

## EXHIBITION SPONSORS

*The Last Pictures* is made possible through the visionary support of Lawrence B. Benenson, Sheila Duignan and Mike Wilkins, EchoStar Corporation, Epner Technology, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Trevor Paglen has earned international renown for uniting disparate disciplines – including science, contemporary art, and journalism – to explore and document hidden worlds. He uses photography, video, data, and other sources to create artworks that reveal the unexpected and the profound. Paglen’s work has been exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Tate Modern, London; The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Institute for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams. Paglen is the author of three books. His first, *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA’s Rendition Flights* (co-authored with AC Thompson; Melville House, 2006) was the first book to systematically describe the CIA’s “extraordinary rendition” program. His second book, *I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have to be Destroyed by Me* (Melville House, 2007), was an examination of the visual culture of “black” military programs. His third book, *Blank Spots on a Map*, was published by Dutton/Penguin in early 2009. Paglen has held residencies at both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well as the Smithsonian Institution, and he received a B.A. from UC Berkeley, an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in Geography from UC Berkeley.

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## **ABOUT CREATIVE TIME**

Since 1974, Creative Time has presented the most innovative art in the public realm. The New York-based nonprofit has worked with over 2,000 artists to produce more than 335 groundbreaking public art projects that have ignited the public's imagination, explored ideas that shape society, and engaged millions of people around the globe.

Creative Time seeks to convert the power of artists' ideas into works that inspire social change and stimulate public dialogue on timely issues, while initiating a dynamic conversation among artists, sites, and audiences. A vanguard presenter of public art in New York, Creative Time recently began presenting national and global projects and initiatives, making it the only public arts organization with programs that have reached from New York to New Orleans, Haiti to Hanoi, and Dubai to Denver. These projects further Creative Time's belief in the importance of artists in society and the power of art to raise consciousness, expose injustices, and imagine a better world.

For more information on Creative Time's programming, please visit [www.creativetime.org](http://www.creativetime.org).

## **ABOUT ECHOSTAR CORPORATION**

EchoStar Corporation, which donated both the services of its engineers and space on its next satellite, is the premier global provider of satellite operations, delivering innovative network technologies and managed network services for private and government customers in more than 100 countries. As a multiple Emmy Award-winning company that has pioneered advancements in the TV industry and video technology for nearly 30 years, EchoStar has had a major influence on the ways in which consumers interact with visual information.

## **ABOUT THE MIT COLLABORATION**

Visiting Artist Trevor Paglen was in residence at MIT in 2011 to research and develop a new artwork designed to last billions of years in an extreme environment: geostationary space orbit around the earth. Paglen sought out MIT researchers Professor Karl. K. Berggren of the MIT Research Lab for Electronics, Associate Professor Brian L. Wardle from the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and graduate student Adam McCaughan from the Quantum Nanostructure and Nanofabrication Group to explore materials and fabricate a lightweight, encodable, ultradurable silicon wafer etched with images using specialized equipment in the Quantum Nanostructure and Nanofabrication lab at MIT. Paglen's residency was co-sponsored by the MIT Visiting Artist Program and the MIT List Visual Arts Center.

## **ABOUT THE CARLETON COLLEGE COLLABORATION**

Carleton College Astrophysicist Joel Weisberg collaborated with Trevor Paglen on the design of the scientific messages to potential discoverers etched into the artifact's cover. These messages were inspired by the first communications sent into deep space aboard interplanetary spacecraft in the 1970s, and have been updated in light of advances in human knowledge and understanding in the intervening decades. Weisberg and Paglen have written a refereed scientific article, accepted for publication in *Astronomical Journal*, describing in detail the contents of the artifact cover and the reasons for the choices made in its creation. The article, "A Temporal Map in Geostationary Orbit: The Cover Etching on the EchoStar XVI Artifact," is also available on the scientific preprint server on the web at [arXiv.org](http://arXiv.org).

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