

# SPACE DREAMS



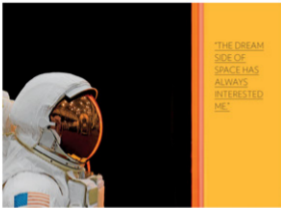
IN HIS NEW BOOK, *SPACE UTOPIA*, PHOTOGRAPHER **VINCENT FOURNIER** MELTS FANTASY WITH REALITY AS HE DOCUMENTS HUMANKIND'S DRIVE TO EXPLORE THE SOLAR SYSTEM WITH FRED O'NEALE



very since he was a boy. French photographer Vincent Foarrador has harbored an obsession with the stars. "I had this moment when I was a child—no probably all did—when I looked at the sky and had this very strong feeling of being part of the universe, part of something more," he says. Tipsy with his grandmother in Paris' Palais de la Découverte science museum only deepened his fascination. "I had this desire to understand when our bodies were just atoms existing through the cosmos," he says. "The idea of there being another dimension connected with the stars fascinated me."

Now, as an accomplished visual artist, he has captured a series of striking images in his new book, *Space Utopia: A Journey in Space Exploration History from the Apollo and Space Shuttle Programs to the Future Mission on Mars*. In it, Foarrador explores the link between art and science by focusing on various space >

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Apollo 16's  
helmet, visor  
and visor-  
mask gloves  
used for space  
walks in the  
International  
Space Station



exploration sites and artifacts. The result is five-gain resolution in settings that often take on a surreal quality. "My dreams were influenced by the fiction that I read as a child, so that side of space has always interested me," he says. "I like the images to feel very authentic, like a documentary. In while the objects I photograph are real, the photos are carefully staged to make it feel like a dream in an aesthetic way."

In preparing those images over the course of a decade, Fournier visited space research centers in Europe, Russia, Asia and the U.S. A recent visit to the European Space Research and Technology Center in Noordwijk, Netherlands, was perhaps the most artifact-like moment of the project. He shot inside an anechoic chamber, whose sound-absorbing surfaces mimic the absolute silence of outer space. The room had been used to test noise pollution from satellites and equipment, and seldom had humans in it for long. "When I worked in the room I didn't close the door. Otherwise there is no sound at all and your ears listen to the blood rushing through your veins," he says. "I read somewhere the maximum time people can stay in this room is



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Top: Subzero wind tunnel on 2 at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia; Above: Fournier's 1:4 human-scale suit to help humans walk on space at Johnson Space Center in Houston

to get oxygen or they will begin to hallucinate, because they are running out of their oxygen. So your mind creates another world to compensate."

There was also someone whose Fournier experienced firsthand the history of space exploration. While visiting NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, he went inside the 140-foot-tall subsonic wind tunnel, which the agency built in 1951 to simulate the friction of re-entering Earth's atmosphere—a rough experience for satellites and space capsules.

Most poignantly, Fournier also photographed personal items: the astronaut gloves, helmets and suits dating back to the Apollo missions of the 1960s and '70s. The objects, which take on special meaning this July, the 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing, were a potent connection to humankind's pioneer spirit. "These items felt like relics from history, very crunchy and old," he says. "And for me it crystallized the journey I was taking, tying together science with dreams. It was very moving."

Though Fournier's images are meticulously composed, he often had to scramble under tight time constraints, particularly at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, and Johnson Space Center in Houston. "I really didn't know what I was going to see at NASA until I got there," he says. "I had lots of ideas and expectations, but when I arrived, I only had a few minutes, so I had to make decisions very quickly."

Conversely, the ease of working with companies such as Virgin Galactic or the Mars Society demonstrated to Fournier the benefits of space exploration being driven by a



the private sector rather than government agencies, freeing the pursuit from political point-scoring and cumbersome bureaucracy.

"Private companies are smaller, they can make decisions much quicker than a big group and they don't need hundreds of people signing off on their choices," he says.

Looking to the future, Forrester spent four days with the Mars Society in the Rubial Peak, Utah, a beautiful but brutal desert location with ridged sandstone and limestone formations and its own unique plant species. Here, he photographed scientists studying living conditions on Mars in order to develop key knowledge needed to prepare for human exploration of the planet.

"I was out there working mostly at dawn and dusk," Forrester says of the experience. "I was using walkie-talkies to direct the

subjects, composing the images like a painter, trying to recast the dreams I had as a child."

Moving forward, Forrester plans to continue his own peculiar brand of space exploration, possibly by producing another book on the subject. "I have an obsession about discovering this big world that you can see through so many lenses," he says. "This is a playground that keeps growing, so I feel very lucky that as an artist I can continue this work around my passion." ■



**Space Utopia: A Journey in Space Exploration History from the Apollo and Sputnik Programs to the Future Missions on Mars (and More)** by Robert Lamb is co-published by Stiebel and Bone.

Along with space, there's another much-loved subject in the book: the search for conditions on Mars in preparation for human exploration of the Red Planet.