



Peter Hennessey, *My Voyager*, 2004. Plywood, aluminium, galvanised steel, 350 x 1000 x 800cm.
COURTESY: TOLARNO GALLERIES.

seeing how big these things actually are, which is a bit risky sometimes given that they often turn out to be quite big indeed..."

Hennessey is not content to restrict his activities to sculpture alone. His Ikara installation included a 20-minute video. *My Moon Landing* will utilise performance. The core of Hennessey's Tolarno exhibition in July this year is a plywood reproduction of the Lunar Rover Vehicle – the moon buggy that carried the NASA astronauts around the moon during the Apollo 17 mission. The show will also include *My Moonwalk* which at first glance appears to be a static sculptural work recreating a lunar space suit attached by springs to a long overhead rail. However, at specific times during the exhibition it will be used as the site for the performance of moonwalks across the space, with the performer donning the space suit and being harnessed into the track. The system will take a percentage of the walker's weight, "allowing them to recreate the particular movements of astronauts in low gravity," he says.

Hennessey will perform the first moonwalk in the space. "It is *My Moonwalk*, after all..." he says. This performance will be videoed and shown on a mission control structure built to display it.

At advertised times members of the public will be invited to perform moonwalks. In typical DIY-style, the space suit will be less than hi-tech; white overalls, a motor cycle helmet, white gumboots and gardening gloves along with a plywood life-support backpack.

Although not without a knowing sense of humour, his works take on far broader themes. "I choose objects not just because of their pure mediated and physically inaccessible existence," he says. "I choose [them] based on a perceived symbolic value that resonate to larger issues."

My Voyager looked at notions of "idealism versus pragmatism", he says, "as well as using the idea of communications with aliens to question our current treatment of the aliens in our own communities."

"Having spent many years involved in the worldwide conspiracy to digitise the world I am interested in reversing the process. Taking things that essentially start off as digital and media imagery and turning them into actual physical objects."

Hennessey's Ikara Missile, exhibited at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne, utilised technology developed at the Woomera Rocket Range, and led to "looking at Woomera as a place in Australian political history. Looking around I see many similar objects – both inaccessible but visible and symbolic – such as spy satellites, Donald Trump's office, Iraqi mobile chemical weapons labs or the Hubble Space Observatory."

Not surprisingly, Hennessey is an admitted *Star Wars* fan. "I saw *Star Wars* in the first week on my ninth birthday and a further 14 times at the cinema – on video doesn't count ... There was *Doctor Who* and the DIY aesthetic, Lego – this stuff is giant wooden air fix models..."

Indeed, once Hennessey has become fixated with an image, and has researched it exhaustively, he returns to a childhood fascination with model making, pulling out the plywood. His models are then laser cut into giant sheets, which can weigh up to 400 kilograms.

Despite his research into the objects he chooses, he is far from aiming to create an accurate fake. "A fake is something that attempts to fool the viewer into believing that they are seeing the real thing," he says. "The fact that the real thing is inaccessible is precisely my point, so I want the viewer to be able to have a physical experience of the object while still being able to experience the absence of the real thing."

In his statement for the Tolarno exhibition, Hennessey points out that there was no practical reason for the moon landings, despite the public rationale of potential colonisation and further exploration. "The moon landings were entirely politically motivated. They were pure propaganda," he comments. Despite *The X-Files* era of paranoia, Hennessey does believe, although he admits some doubts as to the rationalisation behind the moon landings.

Despite this, and the high potential for cynical readings of official reports, Hennessey adds: "Honestly, personally, I do believe. But my belief is based on my faith in the information and the institutions that are providing it. I can't prove it."

"This is the core of my interest in the moon landings – faith. To me they perfectly illustrate the extent to which contemporary existence is rooted in faith. Not so much religious faith – although this is definitely making a comeback – but faith in the veracity of the information we receive and in the institutions that provide us with it. With so much of what shapes our world – from the moon landings to the Iraq war – coming to us secondhand, this faith is both vital and a little worrying."

Hennessey's process is one of restaging; "literally 're-producing' the object in another material from accessible information. "My objects are as dimensionally and formally accurate as I can make them," he says. "But they will never be mistaken for the actual thing."

To this end, Hennessey works with such deliberately mundane materials as plywood, galvanised steel hinge and hardware in order "to make obvious the process of transformation that has taken place in order to physicalise the objects."

"This DIY aesthetic is important to the work," he says. "The fact that I make them myself is part of the project. This is my moon landing, not NASA's. It is not the moon landing but a moon landing; a particular instance of the idea of the moon landing made real by me."

Hennessey's choice of the Apollo 17 mission as the subject for the Tolarno show was inspired by numerous facts. This was the last manned mission to the moon, he points out in his artists' statement. "Since Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Jack Schmitt blasted off from the lunar surface on December 15th, 1972 no human has returned. Nobody has been back to check that any of the stuff they are supposed to have left behind is actually there."

"Also, the wealth of accessible information about the mission is overwhelming. This is not just practically useful but also conceptually interesting. It is almost literally possible to reconstitute the entire mission and relive it virtually. For us on earth, at the time when it happened the Apollo 17 mission existed only as media – images and sounds – and in that format it continues to exist, identically, today. It is as if the Apollo 17 mission both never happened, and never stopped happening."

Peter Hennessey is represented by Greenaway Art Gallery in Adelaide and Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne. His first solo exhibition with Tolarno Galleries, titled *My Moon Landing* is on until the 23rd July 2005. ■