

**REPLACING A MOON
ROCK WITH A PIECE OF
PETRIFIED WOOD AND HOW
THIS CHANGED OUR
PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD**

[excerpts from press release,
September 2006]

FLY ME TO THE MOON
Moon rock from Rijksmuseum
collection on display as part
of art project
October 6–November 17, 2006

In connection with the renovation of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the art project *Fly me to the Moon* will be opened on Friday October 6. Artists Bik Van der Pol took as core item of the project one of the oldest objects in the collection of the Rijksmuseum: a moon rock. The crew of the first manned lunar landing mission, Apollo 11, brought this rock back to earth in 1969. That same year the three astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin and Michael Collins visited the Netherlands. Willem Drees, a former Dutch prime minister, received the rock on that occasion as a present from the United States ambassador. Later, this piece of stone was donated to the Rijksmuseum.

Since the “discovery” of the moon, people have laid claim to it, whether symbolic or genuine. The moon has resources that could potentially be extracted using technologies yet to be developed. Pending future developments, there is a lively Internet trade in deeds to pieces of the moon, available at bargain prices.

The moon rock creates links between the site of the museum, the city, the collection and its own origins. These

links are examined from various perspectives. Through this object, the artists address issues such as the exploration of the unknown, colonisation, and authenticity, as well as questions concerning the public, public interest and the significance of a public collection.

Fly Me To The Moon consists of guided tours—following a so-called “dynamic script”—to the exhibition in one of the empty and now fully stripped towers of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The project also manifests itself in the public realm of Amsterdam with posters in 100 public lightboxes. Part of the project is the publication *Fly Me To The Moon*, designed by Ben Laloua/Didier Pascal, published by Sternberg Press, containing texts by Jennifer Allen, Bik Van der Pol, Wouter Davidts, Frans von der Dunk and Jane Rendell, reflecting on the presence and potential significance of the moon rock in the collection of the Rijksmuseum.

[...]

* Please see the bibliography for further information.

[excerpts from blogs following the news that ‘Moon rock’ in Dutch museum is just petrified wood]

BertL,
27 August 2009, 05:52 PM

Heard the news yesterday. I was thinking of how this would be taken up in the “moon hoax” discussion. From the articles I read it seems that this information was known for almost a year. I also found an article from July saying the same.

One thing that makes me pretty sure this is not going to give hoax believers a field day, is that it only took a quick geologist’s look to determine that this was fake. If other moon rocks were fake, geologists would have known after only some quick inspection.

On top of that we have to remember that this fake moon rock was given to a Dutch ex-Premier as a gift 40 years ago, and has never been in scientific circles before. Only three years ago it went to the Rijksmuseum for an exposition named *Fly Me to the Moon*. Here’s a piece of text from the article I linked to, translated into English:

As early as October last year physicist and space flight entrepreneur Arno Wiolders found out the rock wasn’t real. Wiolders saw the stone at the *Fly Me to the Moon* exhibition. “I thought: this can’t be real. The size was a big surprise to me, and the colour wasn’t right as well.”

A phone call to the American organisation that administers the Moon material was confirmed Wiolders’ suspicions. “The conservator there was immediately convinced that this couldn’t be Moon rock.

On top of that, a quick inspection of the rock by petrologist Wim van Westrenen of the VU University Amsterdam confirmed the deceit. “After two minutes it was pretty clear,” says Van Westrenen. “The texture, the colour, nothing was right. This is not a stone you’d find on the Moon’s surface.”

[...]

Last month, further analysis at the VU University in Amsterdam confirmed what Van Westrenen and Wiolders already suspected. Van Westrenen got permission to chisel a small piece from the rock and research it with a microscope and spectroscope, a device that recognizes chemical elements.

In the sample, wood cells were visible. On top of that, it turned out that the piece was made of a certain variety of quartz. Further research will be done to find out more about the origin of the tree.

Slang,
27 August 2009, 06:46 PM

Why did it take so long before someone got the idea to investigate it? By the way, I also heard that the museum did not want to give the moon rock to have it examined by specialists if it was real. Makes one wonder what they were so afraid of.

BertL,
27 August 2009, 07:33 PM

Err, but it only took a quick examination of *Eoanthropus dawsoni* (“Piltdown man,” a famous paleontological hoax) by properly suspicious investigators to ferret that fake out. And it still occupies a post of honor in the Creationist’s examples of how science fails. I’m sure this rock, eh, tree, will have legs among the Apollo Hoaxers. That doesn’t seem comparable though, as this particular rock had never been examined for 40 years until a physicist got to take a glance at it in a museum.

Though, I recently read that the original recordings of the first humans landing on the moon 40 years ago were erased and re-used. NASA now says, the newly restored copies of the original broadcast look even better. This will also fuel the conspiracy theories, no doubt.

Gwiz,
27 August 2009, 07:45 PM
So the Dutch just assumed it was a moon rock

because they got it with a rather ambiguous plaque: a jagged fist-size stone with reddish tints, it was mounted and placed above a plaque that said, “With the compliments of the Ambassador of the United States of America ... to commemorate the visit to The Netherlands of the Apollo-11 astronauts.” The plaque does not specify that the rock came from the moon’s surface

BertL,
27 August 2009, 08:30 PM

So it was Drees (the ex-Prime Minister who originally got the rock) who assumed it was a moon rock. When someone from the Rijksmuseum phoned with NASA to check whether it really was, NASA said it was possible. But still, the museum curators were still pretty careless with the whole deal.

Pzkipfw,
27 August 2009, 08:43 PM

I can’t imagine the U.S. Ambassador played a trick; I would assume (if the plaque is real) that the “rock” had some scientific or other merit and was perceived to have some kind of relevant value. Then something got lost in translation.

Slang,
27 August 2009, 08:59 PM

Maybe there’s a display in a museum somewhere, labelled “Petrified Wood.”

Since no actual “proof” or “theories” arose from this particular sample, I’m inclined to characterize it as about as important as a 5th-grade reader having a picture of an Atlas rocket with the title “Saturn V.” Someone put the wrong label on something. This doesn’t mean the better-documented objects in the museum’s collection, aren’t what they appear to be.

The underlying truth though is—science can do a pretty good job of finding errors like this, once given a chance to work.

Novaderrik,
27 August 2009, 11:14 PM
So how did the petrified wood get to the moon?

Van Rijn,
27 August 2009, 11:25 PM
Right, that’s the other suspect side of this story: somebody is first claiming that this really was from the moon, and they’re now denying it. What is the agenda?

Ong,
29 August 2009, 07:29 PM
Interesting, though. How many other moon rocks are mislabeled fakes, or meteorites?

Pzkipfw,
29 August 2009, 10:46 PM
I’m compelled to note:

1. It is misleading to say “fakes” as that implies “deception on purpose.” The event in question is simply a silly mistake.
2. It is incorrect to imply that the people who study these things can’t tell the difference between rocks gathered from the Moon and meteorites (some of which we know do come from the Moon).
3. As noted in the story, this rock wasn’t studied. When it was, the error was picked up. No big deal; and again, no reason to cry “fake.”

Zvezdichko,
30 August 2009, 10:49 AM
It’s the next idiotic journalammz sensation.

1. A moon rock in a Dutch museum turns out to be burnt wood. Let’s paraphrase it:
2. NASA faked the Moon landings and the moon rocks brought to Earth are actually burnt wood. It’s plainly silly.



Neil examines a rock sample during the Sierra Blanca trip. He is holding a geology hammer in his left hand and is wearing an *Omega Speedmaster* watch.

Journal contributor Dan Buchan notes "his watch shows 1:12:33." February 24, 1969, Scan courtesy NASA Johnson.

JonClarke,
30 August 2009, 12:16 PM
Petrified wood is not the same as burnt wood.

Zvezdichko,
30 August 2009, 02:21 PM
Whatever. It makes no sense.

Gillianren,
30 August 2009, 06:17 PM
“Whatever?” Do you know how much more stupid they'd look had it been burnt wood?

Slang,
30 August 2009, 06:47 PM
Yeah. Wood can't burn on the moon, there's no oxygen!

Nomuse,
30 August 2009, 06:52 PM
That's because there are no trees on the moon to create it.

BertL,
30 August 2009, 07:31 PM
If a tree falls on the Moon, does it make a sound?

Zvezdichko,
30 August 2009, 07:52 PM
My point was: There's no way you can fake a Moon rock.

captain swoop,
30 August 2009, 08:22 PM
Yes you can, you can use petrified wood, it worked for 40 years, that's as long as the Apollo Conspiracy. This stone may be the proof of that conspiracy.

Alan G. Archer,
31 August 2009, 03:21 AM
I haven't looked into this in any real depth, but has

any archival photos or detailed documentation of ambassador Middendorf's "Moon rock" been found? From what I understand, the ambassador gave the specimen to Prime Minister Willem Drees as a private gift in 1969. Later, in 1988, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, which is not a formal science museum, acquired it. Has it been established that the specimen that was given to Drees in 1969 is the same specimen that the museum owns today?

Slang,
31 August 2009, 06:54 PM
Those are really good questions, and I have not read anything about the story going into such detail. I'm not sure anyone here (as in this country) cares enough about this embarrassing mislabeling to figure out exactly how it came about. Mistakes happen. Shrug. Everyone laughs, and the attention turns to the next round of the football competition. :)

DrRocket,
31 August 2009, 10:07 PM
I can't imagine the US ambassador played a trick; and would assume (if the plaque is real) that the "rock" had some scientific or other merit and was perceived to have some kind of relevant value. Then something got lost in translation.

The article stated that the value of the rock was no more than \$70.

That raises the really important question. Who is paying \$70 for a small piece of petrified wood? Inquiring minds want to know!

Jeff Root,
01 September 2009, 05:55 AM
The rock is described as "fist-size," which apparently was the first clue that it wasn't an Apollo rock. For sure, that would be considerably larger than the rocks given to the various nation/heads of state. I wonder if Middendorf (the US ambassador) would

have any recollection of the size of the rock he presented to Drees. Probably not, but if Middendorf could remember it being much smaller, that would eliminate some possibilities.

The most likely possibility seems to me that there *was* an actual Apollo rock with the plaque, but that somebody took it and put the petrified wood in its place. Perhaps Drees had the petrified wood near the Apollo rock, and the thief used it to fill the empty space.

The original rock would have had a container or mount; probably both.

Where is it and how large a rock was it designed to hold?

It was on show in 2006 and a space expert informed the museum it was unlikely NASA would have given away any moon rocks three months after Apollo returned to Earth.

I saw and photographed several Apollo 11 regolith and rock samples in September 1969, at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, just two months after they were brought to Earth.

R.A.F.,
01 September 2009, 05:19 PM
There is absolutely no reason to believe this speculation, unless, that is, you have some evidence to present.

BetaDust,
01 September 2009, 07:45 PM
The original rock would have had a container or mount. That was my first thought also.
But I could not find much on the web.
I'm going to email the Rijksmuseum tomorrow, and ask them if they know of any container or mount.

I'm also looking into contacting the Dutch Labour party, PvdA, to see if they have records of it. Mr. Drees was a member of the Dutch Labour party.

Starfury,
05 September 2009, 03:51 PM
Reminds me of a joke:
NASA decided to parcel out their collection of moon rocks to universities around the country to allow for their study, and requested that principal investigators make presentations of their findings. However, by the time they got to Texas A&M, they had run out of rocks. So they sent A&M a cow chip, thinking, "They're just a bunch of Aggies, they won't know the difference."

The day came for the symposium, where the researchers would summarize their findings about the moon rocks. First up was a researcher from the University of Colorado, who stated, "Our tests showed that this rock has a high level of titanium, which could be mined to manufacture spacecraft taking off from a future moon base." The next presenter was from UCLA, who concluded, "Our sample has a high oxygen content, which we could extract and use to create breathable air and water." Next came the Aggie, who approached the podium, cow chip in hand, and proclaimed, "Now we have proof that the cow jumped over the moon."

Trystero,
05 September 2009, 09:22 PM
I found a web page of Paolo Attivissimo, an Italian debunker, the author says that there are many clues to think the object in origin was not a moon rock, little or big. <http://complottilunari.blogspot.com/2009/08/la-falsa-roccia-lunare-del-museo.html>

The text of the plaque says nothing about the object: "With the compliments of the Ambassador of the United States of America J. William Middendorf II to commemorate the visit to The Netherlands of the Apollo-11 astronauts Neil A. Armstrong, Michael Collins, Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr. R.A.I. International Exhibition and Congress Centre, Amsterdam, October 9, 1969."



From the left, Neil Armstrong (blue shirt), Buzz Aldrin, Jim Lovell, Fred Haise, Bill Pogue (blue flight suit), and Jack Swigert collect samples.

February 24, 1969. Scan courtesy NASA Johnson.

Apollo 11 Support Team members Jack Swigert (left) and Bill Pogue (right) discuss a sample during the Sierra Blanca geology trip. Pogue has a tape recorder and Swigert has a weigh bag and a pack of individual sample bags.

February 24, 1969. Scan courtesy NASA Johnson, post-processing by Kipp Teague.

It could have been any other “relic” of the Apollo 11. The object came to Rijksmuseum from the private collection of Willem Drees an old ex Prime-Minister who died in 1988. But Willem Drees was 83 years old in 1969, and he was not involved in Netherlands government in that moment. He was Prime Minister from 1948 until 1958.

The object was shown for the first time in a 2006 art project called “Fly me to the moon.” As part of the project, Rotterdam artists Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol will ask various questions about this item, which has never before been revealed to the public, including whether the Rijksmuseum has plans to open a museum on the moon. In the web site of he artist duo we can read sentences like “Art is either plagiarism or revolution.”

For these reasons I think that it was either an artistic joke, or Conceptual art http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conceptual_art

ToSeek,
30 September 2009, 04:47 AM

The latest issue of the museum’s magazine has a one-page article about the fake Moon rock.

BetaDust,
30 September 2009, 08:32 PM

I like this (<http://www.rtvnh.nl/player.php?stream=ItemRadio&item=41510>). It is a radio-interview, on 30 September 2009, of RTV–Noord-Holland about the moonrock, with Xandra van Gelder, editor of magazine *Oog*, published by the Rijksmuseum. In the interview they say they had this rock insured for a 100.000 gulden (± €45.000).

Witch is a lot of money, for a peace of wood. :)

Slang,
30 September 2009, 09:38 PM

Thanks. About the only thing new in this interview is the amount of insurance. She says that it will be very difficult to find out what exactly happened

when this item was given, because all involved are deceased. It was presented during the visit of the Apollo 11 crew to the Netherlands, and one other gift they brought was a copy of the plaque (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunar_plaque) attached to the lander. Apparently this was given to all heads of state of about 30 countries the astronauts visited, but a moonrock was not normally a gift.

At some point, after the “rock” was displayed briefly twice, the museum started hearing some comments that something was up with it. Apparently they learned that Apollo 11 did not bring back a lot of moon rock, so it was extremely unlikely that some of it would be given away in 1969. So finally some qualified people looked at the thing, and the rest we know.

In the interview, the host asks: “So how old is this piece of wood then?” answer: “No doubt it is just as old as moonrock [...].” Ok, this lady may be a good editor, but she’s not entirely up to speed on the topic. Not a problem, not everyone can be a planetary science specialist, and certainly not in a museum focused on art and history. But it was clear she had at least looked into the matter, several of the other facts she had completely correct.

To me it sounds more and more like this petrified wood was a gift to 83 year old Drees for some other reason, but since it coincided with the Apollo astronauts there was probably confusion about what it actually was and what for. These days most Dutchies can have at least somewhat of a conversation in English, but I don’t know if that was as common in 1969. Of course I’m wildly guessing here, but it’s hard to believe that something so easily proven to be false would intentionally be given as a genuine moon rock.

Showboat,
11 October 2009, 10:00 PM
Think Lex Luther, Kryptonite [if greenish moon meteorite].

Just stolen and replaced.

Going be hurting superman. I think the artists replaced the moon rock.

Slang,
11 October 2009, 10:57 PM

And they used the set-up of the exhibition *Fly me to the Moon*, to get close to the moonrock, to be able to take it. It took them years of preparation.

So maybe Drees did get a real moonrock after all, I am thinking; after Drees died his family allowed the museum to take things from his possessions, among which this rock, and it was put in storage. It was briefly displayed in 2000, and again in 2006. This 2006 art project called “Fly me to the Moon” caught the attention of some space experts, and the rest of the story is known.

It was insured for HFL 100.000, about EUR 45.000 after we switched to that currency. Drees died in 1988, so that might add some inflation to it, I don’t know how that works with art insurance. Half of the article is about how it was discovered that the rock is not a real moon rock, there’s only one line on how it allegedly came into Drees’ possession.

I am really surprised that nobody thought of the artist! There might be some more lines of inquiry possible to investigate how it’s possible that this “rock” came to be identified as a moon rock.

I can think of some ways that this misidentification might have happened, but I’m unable to turn up any kind of evidence for or against the artists at this moment, so it would be just more speculation. Maybe later, or maybe someone else.

They definitely cannot be excluded as suspect just yet.

Jeff Root,
11 October 2009, 11:52 PM
First, is there any reason not to assume that the plaque is authentic?

Assuming that the plaque is authentic, exactly what reason(s) do we have to think that it was accompanied by any kind of rock?

If the plaque was accompanied by a rock, where is the rock’s mount?

Photographs were taken by someone, probably local news media, of the presentation of the stone to Drees. If there was a rock, the photos included close-ups.

Numerous close-ups if the rock was thought by the photographer(s) to be from the Moon. Even if none of the photos were published by anyone, there will still be copies in their libraries or archives. I want to see them!

Slang,
12 October 2009, 12:27 AM

Yeah, there is no reason to assume that the plaque is authentic?

They were (apparently) not presented at the same time and location. Why offer a copy of a plaque to the Queen, and offer a real moon rock to someone with just an honorary title, if it happened at the same opportunity?

I want to see them!

Donnie B.,
12 October 2009, 11:06 AM

From the information that’s been presented so far, it seems to me that the “presentation” of the supposed Moon rock to Mr. Drees could have been a private matter rather than any sort of public event. One could imagine a small dinner party or a visit to a private home. If this is the case, there may be no public record of the occasion.

In such circumstances, the misidentification might have been a simple misunderstanding. Mr. Drees may have been given the rock as a “souvenir” or “memento”, and may have simply assumed it was a Moon rock.

Another possibility is that Ambassador Middendorf was himself misinformed or mistaken about the rock in question. If so, he may have told Drees it was a Moon rock in all honesty.

One suggestive fact: Middendorf was closely associated with Arizona Republican senator Barry Goldwater. Arizona is the location of the Petrified Forest, and petrified wood is common throughout that region (that is, the “moon rock” need not have come from the National Monument itself). Could Goldwater have given the rock to Middendorf, misinforming the latter about its origin (knowingly or inadvertently)?

It appears that Middendorf is still alive. He would be around 85 now. I wonder whether anyone has attempted to contact him and ask for his recollections of the incident. Mr. Drees died in 1988.

I doubt that the rock may have been genuine but was later stolen and replaced by the petrified wood (either before or after Drees died). It seems unlikely that a true Moon rock would have been given to a relatively minor diplomat, especially after only the first landing when such material was quite rare and precious. As others have pointed out, if such a gift were to be made, why not make it part of the official presentation along with the plaque?

NEOWatcher,
20 October 2009, 04:37 PM

I know of a Cleveland museum that has learned that what it thought was a lock of hair from Amelia Earhart is just thread.

It has been said the museum acquired the artifact 20 years ago from the Smithsonian Institution, which had gotten it from a Pennsylvania man.

It sounds like the Smithsonian didn't think there was enough evidence to take the time for verification, and was happy to rid themselves of it.

A.DIM,
20 October 2009, 04:54 PM

Heh, it sounds like other stuff might be on museums' shelves:

What should museums throw out? Look at (<http://www.newscientist.com/gallery/dn18003-disposal-throwing-out-museum-artefacts>)

Note there's some NASA original film up for grabs: These are images and photographs of planets taken by NASA spacecraft. Note the year and the planetary body.

It's odd that we have here an instance where something is not what it is (I'm trying to avoid the word “fake”) and the museums are keeping it anyway. At the same time, they are struggling to decide whether or not to keep genuine artifacts that may still hold some research value, or will be a very interesting piece if it were displayed in the correct context.

Gillianren,
20 October 2009, 06:21 PM

I have autographed books, and they're significant to me. It's the idea that the author has actually handled my copy of the book. That it has been in the presence of someone I admire.

It is not “just an autograph”... I guess if you get it, it's the joy, again, of having talked to a person you admire in some way. For others, there may well be a historical aspect—there are people who collect the autographs of people like Lincoln or Washington or whoever. Though, of course, people are more likely to forge those—Abraham Lincoln's grandson, Abraham Lincoln II, used to sell his own signature on the grounds that it was, after all, a genuine signature from Abraham Lincoln.

Fazor,
20 October 2009, 07:24 PM

I understand autographs obtained in person more than I understand, say, buying an autographed jersey off of eBay.

I just don't think I admire anyone that much to want an autograph. There's certainly people I'd love to get a chance to hang out with and chat-up ... there's just nobody I idolize that much.

As for historic signatures; that's a bit different. I'd cherish a signed document from, say, George Washington. It'd be cool. But the signature itself is irrelevant. It's the piece of history. It'd be like owning one of his old hunting knife's or pistols. There's something magical about being able to see, hold, and examine a piece of history.

In all honesty though, it doesn't even have to be someone famous. I think I'd enjoy an old revolutionary-era antique equally well, were it from some John Q. Everyman. It's just neat, even if it's not “worth” as much.

Anyway, more on topic, I do think it's important for museum artifacts to be accurate. Not that I'm saying they should be beyond making mistakes. But as soon as something is identified as being false, like the “moon rock,” it either needs to immediately be identified and explained as such (which I believe it has?) or taken out of the collection.

A misidentification or a forgery can be just as interesting to the story, and thus still museum worthy. But there's no excuse for intentional misrepresentation in such institutions.

Slang,
20 October 2009, 10:26 PM

In the case the moonrock, it's still something from the private collection of a pretty famous VIP (Drees). Considering the type of museum the Rijksmuseum is, and the types of collections they have, there's something to be said to just keep it. For now, anyway.

NEOWatcher,
21 October 2009, 05:30 PM

If it was part of a specific collection of a specific person, then maybe I can go along with that.

But: the exhibition was called *Fly me to the moon*. Either put it away, or put it in an exhibit of the VIP, or one with strange stories, or the history of wood, or something like that.

And: whether or not you think it crosses the line into noteworthy or not, my intention of the statement was that there are other items that can be considered much more noteworthy than museums are struggling with.

Slang,
21 October 2009, 07:31 PM

Re: If it was part of a specific collection of a specific person, then maybe I can go along with that.

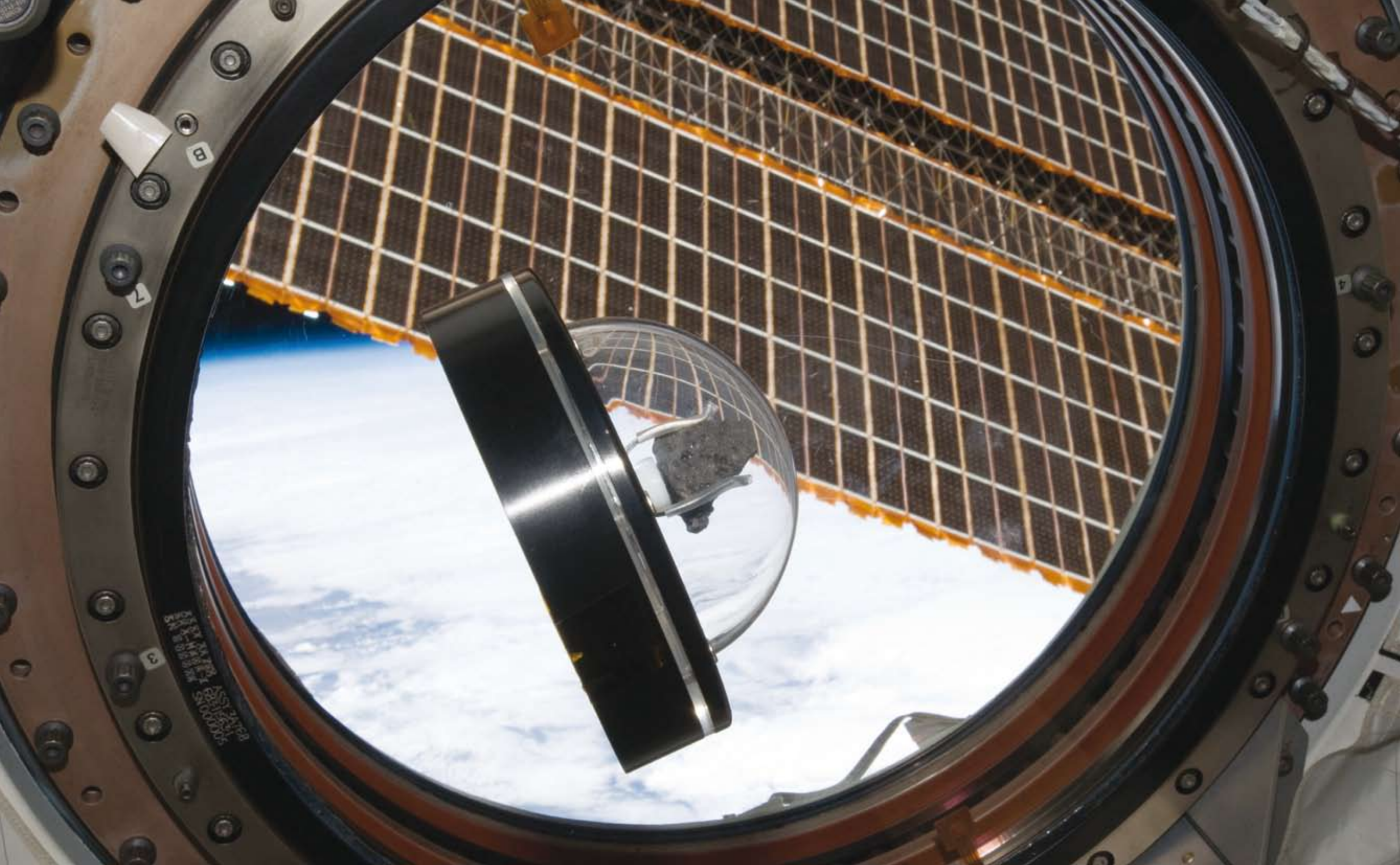
It is. It was in storage at the Rijksmuseum as part of the collection of private items they store that belonged to Willem Drees. Other items in that collection might be his favorite pen, personal correspondence, etc.

Re: But: the exhibit was called “Fly me to the moon.” Either put it away, or put it in an exhibit of the VIP, or one with strange stories, or the history of wood, or something like that.

It was exhibited for about six weeks as part of an art project (2006) with that name. Note that it was not a science exhibition, nor a Drees exhibition, nor a rarity exhibition. It was just something done in connection with the renovation of the museum building.

The rock was temporarily taken out of storage, only to be displayed as part of that temporary art project. Since at that time this object was still believed to be a genuine moon rock (by the museum, at least), it made sense to do so. (Whether it's currently back in storage, I don't know, it may be on display now in connection with the news story. Visitors may be asking about it. I can call the museum tomorrow if it's important to the discussion.)

Re: whether or not you think it crosses the line into noteworthy or not, my intention of the state-



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ment was that there are other items that can be considered much more noteworthy than museums are struggling with.

More noteworthy to whom? Different museums have different missions. This is the national museum of the Netherlands. It's state owned. Keeping items formerly owned by people that played an important role in our history is their job.

If the Rijksmuseum would need to choose between *The Night Watch*, and this piece of wood, nobody would think twice about it. But if the choice is, keep stuff that belonged to Willem Drees or stuff from another noteworthy politician, or to compare item X from person A to item Y from person B, the choice is less obvious.

Your statement absolutely makes sense, but it can only be evaluated in the context of the museum in question.

Jeff Root,
22 October 2009, 01:36 AM

Back in our discussion, I asked some questions, and you answered the first question with the word "No."

But it isn't clear to me what you meant.

It seems possible that you might have misread my question, because of how I worded it.

I'm not in a position to do much myself, but if you or anyone else is sufficiently interested, I'd like to see some action on the questions I asked. To repeat: first, is there any reason not to assume that the plaque is authentic?

Assuming that the plaque is authentic, exactly what reason(s) do we have, to think that it was accompanied by any kind of rock?

If the plaque was accompanied by a rock, where is the rock's mount?

Photographs were taken by someone, probably local news media, of the presentation to Drees. If there was a rock, the photos included close-ups.

Numerous close-ups if the rock was thought by the photographer(s) to be from the Moon. Even if

none of the photos were published by anyone, there will still be copies in their libraries or archives. I want to see them!

It is possible, as suggested, that the presentation to Drees was in a small, private meeting, but I think that is unlikely. I do not know the reason for the presentation. Discovering that reason could be key.

Gillianren,
22 October 2009, 04:10 AM

My understanding is that, for example, the Smithsonian in the US has a huge storage system, because they have way more stuff than they can display. Honestly, I'm quite certain that they have things in storage that are more significant or what have you than some of the things which are on display, but they do know what'll get visitors.

Jeff Root,
22 October 2009, 05:01 AM

I've had several large meteorites belonging to the Smithsonian right here in my apartment, that were loaned back to the donor for display, which I subsequently borrowed for short-term display elsewhere.

I even lost a small one when I turned my back on it for a few minutes and someone picked it up and walked away with it. Since then, we've put them under display cases. One time a group of blind people came to our display, so we removed the case and handed one of the biggest rocks to the first person in line to hold and pass to the others. It was a stony chondrite, formed when the Solar System and the Earth were just forming, so it is about 4.6 billion years old—much older than any rock native to the Earth.

Slang,
22 October 2009, 08:14 AM

Sorry for being unclear. I think I misunderstood

your question on the plaque, thinking you meant the copy of the Apollo 11 plaque.

I still say no, there's no reason not to assume it's authentic, but there's no indication whatsoever on what was presented.

There's nothing that I'm aware of that indicates there was a rock given with that plaque or card. I'm not prepared to do a local newspaper or magazine archive search, unless such an archive is freely available online. What I can do is try to send an email to the author of the museum magazine article, to find out how much checking she did.

Perhaps you, or someone else in the US, might attempt to contact former ambassador Middendorf, who appears to still be alive and active.

NEOWatcher,
22 October 2009, 02:01 PM

To go back to the moonrock in the collection: It was in storage at the Rijksmuseum as part of the collection of private items they store that belonged to Willem Drees. But not exhibited that way in *Fly me To The Moon*. It was exhibited as the central piece whose theme relied on the fact that it was a moon rock.

I didn't know it was a temporary exhibit. I am probably the first one to say they blow things out of proportion, but when that's the center of discussion, what can you do? I'm not saying, as a Dutch piece, or one of a private collection, it is meaningless. I'm just saying the contexts that this item can be placed might not be as universal as some others.

This item was just part of a general statement. It wasn't supposed to put a specific worth on an item or group of items. It was mostly to put worth on the idea of a story. I equate museum pieces more as items with research value. Art, that's something else. In my view, this only adds to the objects' provenance. Now we can put a sign next to the stone saying: Moon rock given by US ambassador to Dutch government, which turned out to be totally fake!

But, I still wonder what happened to the original. I bet you can find it on the black market. Or the artists have it, and they keep it a secret. And once in a while they take a peek at it, enjoying the pleasure of knowing for sure that their stone is the real thing.

Previous image: A moon rock brought to Earth by Apollo 11, humans' first landing on the moon in July 1969, is shown as it floats aboard the International Space Station. Part of Earth and a section of a station solar panel can be seen through the window. The 3.6 billion year-old lunar sample was flown to the station aboard Space Shuttle mission STS-119 in April 2009 in honor of the July 2009 40th anniversary of the historic first moon landing. The rock, lunar sample 10072, was flown to the station to serve as a symbol of the nation's resolve to continue the exploration of space. It will be returned on shuttle mission STS-128 to be publicly displayed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY – 351

=== Benoît Maire
Text translated from the French by Laetitia Queyranne, November 2009

=== Alexandre Singh
Part of *The Alkabeth (Part Three)* is an extract from the larger novel *The Alkabeth* edited by Ella Christopherson.

=== Gabriel Lester.....
1. ONE was originally a spoken text for Gabriel Lester's one-man-band project, as staged at *The Prompt* for Performa 2009.
2. The drawings were made between 11.2002 and 01.2003 by Mats Ebraert, who was hired as draughtsman, sketching potential objects and installations.
3. The music scores are some of the fruits of a research on generic silent movie soundtracks in the archive of the New York Public Library. This research has resulted into a record including 16 soundtracks and several piano performances.

=== Matthieu Laurette.....
Matthieu Laurette makes *Apparitions* on television, newspapers and magazines since 1993.

All images courtesy: Matthieu Laurette—Gaudel de Stampa, Paris (c) Matthieu Laurette/ADAGP

=== Barbara Visser.....
General credits with special thanks to:
Bart Haensel
Senf Productions/Barbara Reijs
United Decor, Hilversum
Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery

=== George Cup & Steve Elliott.....
Original text and images published in the catalogue for *Blacked Out: George Cup & Steve Elliott Retrospektive—The French Collection*, Kunstverein Wolfsburg September 26–November 16, 2008 and *Blacked out: George Cup & Steve Elliott Retrospektive—The Greenspan Collection*, Städtische Galerie Nordhorn December 13, 2008–February 1, 2009.
Courtesy the artist

=== Oscar Neuestern
From Mario Garcia Torres'
"Transparencies of the Non-Act," 2007

=== Bik Van der Pol
Photo credits: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Scans of photos taken during the missions were done from the original film.

=== Michael Blum
Cape Town—Stockholm (On Thembo Mjobo)
Produced by Mobile Art Production
Stockholm, 2007

The book was produced in collaboration with Propexus.
Translation: Maria Lekteus (Swedish-English)
Copy-editing: Pat Blashill
Thembo Mjobo (1949–2000) was an ordinary, yet crucial actor and witness of the political developments that ended the apartheid regime in South Africa. From his early involvement in the ANC's military wing to his position of European representative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigations unit, a good share of Mjobo's discrete life was spent in Sweden. *Cape Town—Stockholm (On Thembo Mjobo)* offers insight into the recent yet hardly known relationship between two opposite countries, Sweden and South Africa, made one in the figure of Thembo Mjobo.