

## A tale of two planets

Luke Jerram's touring artwork Museum of the Moon had been on the periphery of my awareness for a few years. In August 2021, I finally got to see this spectacular piece of art for myself. At 7m in diameter, and at a scale of 1:500,000 (with each cm representing 5km), the Museum of the Moon is a beautifully lit replica of the *actual* moon, using detailed NASA imagery so that every crater, every fissure, and every ocean is captured in miniature.

When the Museum of the Moon tours different venues (globally), a programme of lunar-related events often runs alongside it, but I visited Bristol Cathedral during a general viewing afternoon. This was an event in itself as the artwork draws a veritable crowd wherever it goes, and a constant stream of viewers flowed in and out of the Cathedral. Humankind has always been fascinated with the moon, and so it follows that a piece of art which brings the moon to within an arm's length – tantalisingly close, holds an irresistible appeal.

The large crowd at the Cathedral that day generated a hushed yet voluble hubbub which rendered the Moon's accompanying sound composition inaudible, but that didn't matter – the visual spectacle was enough. I found it hard to take my eyes off the moon, even to read the lunar information inscribed at various points on the floor of the aisles. Looking up at the night sky can put one's worldly concerns and anxieties into perspective, and the Museum of the Moon invites a similar sense of peace and contemplation. It also gives a real taste of what it might have been like to have been on one of the Apollo missions, and for once you can get to see the dark side of the moon.

Luke Jerram's artworks cannot be compared to buses, and I hesitate to use such a cliché, but when you wait for a few years to see one of his artworks and then two come along together...You can imagine my surprise when, on my first ever visit to Othona in September 2021 for a 'Welcome Back to Community' weekend (barely three weeks after my Moon viewing), an optional trip to see Jerram's touring Earth artwork, 'Gaia', was on the timetable.

After supper on Friday 24 September, a small group of Othona residents and visitors set off for the woodland glade venue near Bridport. Sturdy footwear was suggested and we were warned of the threat from marauding Dorset ticks as we strode into the darkness, with friendly Inside Out Arts Festival volunteers pointing us in the right direction along the way.

Maybe this moonlit pilgrimage along the gravelly tracks of the Symondsburry estate, which also afforded a stunning floodlit view of Bridport's iconic Colmer's Hill, contributed to the breath-taking sense of admiration for Gaia when we finally arrived. The artwork is the same size as the Museum of the Moon and like the Moon, NASA imagery is used to replicate this planet that we call home. (The discrepancy in scale between the two artworks means that each cm on Gaia represents 18km).

The natural setting was in complete contrast to Bristol Cathedral; seeing Gaia at night-time lent an extra magic and intimacy to the whole experience and the large crowd who had also made the journey did not detract from this. Most walked mindfully beneath Gaia or stood gazing in awe.

Again, I had a feeling of 'cosmic insignificance' – the UK really is a very small northerly speck and correspondingly my personal worries and ruminations suddenly seemed rather small and insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Yet at the same time, I was struck the Gaia artwork

shows how precious this immensely beautiful orb really is, and I felt a renewed sense of responsibility to play my part in its care.

Given the effects of climate change that we can already see, any contribution that I might make could feel very minuscule – and the magnitude of the task does indeed feel depressing sometimes. It was therefore heartening to visit Gaia and reflect on such matters within the context of a weekend at Othona. Sustainability and healthy relationships with spirituality/God, other people and the planet seem to be lie at Othona's core and for the community of White Ladies who pre-dated Othona at Burton Bradstock. Othona is a living, breathing exemplification of the 'Think global, act local' concept and this gives reason for some optimism, whether it's the larger scale initiatives such as the photovoltaic panels, the poly tunnels, the reed bed sewage system and the management of the grounds for biodiversity, or the smaller gestures such as the predominantly vegetarian menu or the ecological handwash. I'm sure that many visitors leave Othona with an idea about something they could do, however small, to further their own endeavours on this front. For me, the experience of visiting Gaia (especially during the run up to COP26) added an extra fervour to my resolve to do more.



Photo credit: Georgina Lammin