

Artist to send picture disc into orbit to serve as time capsule

October 10 2012, by Bob Yirka



(Phys.org)—Multimedia artist Trevor Paglen, part of a group known as Creative Time, has created a gold-plated crystalline silicon disc with bit mapped re-creations of photographs etched onto its surface. The disc is to serve as a form of time capsule that will orbit Earth for billions of years—if all goes according to plan. The disc, containing 100 images and referred to as the "Last Pictures" project, has been attached to the EchoStar XVI satellite, scheduled for launch from the Baikonur Cosmodrome sometime over the next few months.

The idea behind the project is to provide a record of human existence to intelligent life forms—as yet undiscovered—from other parts of the galaxy. The group at Creative Time notes on their [website](#) that they expect [human civilization](#) to disappear long before the disc is destroyed by the Sun, five billion years from now when the Sun becomes a red giant. They believe the disc, along with its images, will survive. Because, unlike the copper discs sent with the [Voyager spacecraft](#), it's made of silicon which has a crystalline structure.

Paglen has been assembling the collection of pictures for nearly five years, speaking with scientists, artists, geologists, philosophers and mathematicians about ways in which to represent the history of Earth's people. Despite his work, Paglen has also spoken publicly about his belief that no one will ever find the disc and view his work. Also, his assumption that the disc will survive in orbit for billions of years might have one fatal flaw: it's quite possible that scientists will develop a method to clear the [space debris](#) circling the planet, consequently removing the EchoStar XVI satellite from its geosynchronous orbit long before we as a civilization go extinct. Which, of course, is also not a certainty.

The pictures aren't meant to offer a chronological history of the planet or of the human beings that evolved to become its dominant species. Instead, they are meant to convey a sense of who we are in the event that "anyone else" ever wants to know.

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