

Lost Astronaut: A Conversation

During Performa09, Alicia Framis becomes The Lost Astronaut by donning a real Russian spacesuit every day 3-17 November, leaving her astronaut's 'basecamp' on Wooster- otherwise known as Gallery APF Lab- and carries out a series of daily scripted actions across the city of New York. Rachel Lois Clapham went to Basecamp to get an update.

Rachel Lois: How did Lost Astronaut (LA) come into being?

Alicia: Roselee Goldberg invited me to make a project about Futurism for Performa09 and I really liked the character of the astronaut lost in space. Some astronauts are lost in space but it is not widely known. Apparently one woman exploded on a particular mission but you never hear about that. The authorities and the media try to suppress those aspects of space travel. It's taboo. They did all they could to erase everything about that woman. There was also one Russian man who got lost because he lost contact with the craft from outside, and became lost. The Russians also try to erase every mention of this man but it is impossible to forget that they went out as 5 person team and came back as only 4.

Rachel Lois: A terrifying notion, to be lost like that. Apparently, you carry on living in space until your oxygen runs out...

Alicia: I read that when you don't have oxygen you just go into a trance. Maybe it's like a last ecstasy for the astronaut?

Rachel Lois: What else is potent about this character of the lost astronaut for you?

Alicia: Well, the moon landing was the most important, the most iconic, performance in the 20th century. Apparently, when those first men touched down on the moon's surface more people were watching TV than ever before and only two people were killed in the whole world during that time. It was a collective act of witness, and a moment in history that involved very few global casualties. I am also interested in the feminist aspect. Women, we are never heroes, it is not in our nature to be heroes. The notion of heroism is very different in relation to being a woman. Men make heroes. LA not is not a hero, she is already lost! (laughs). LA does things differently. She makes models, she thinks about domestic things, fashion for the moon and the home. She is concerned with how to be 'prêt a porter' in space. Also, the figure of the lost astronaut is poignant in terms of space travel and how we think about the moon. Nowadays, everything about space – the funding, infrastructures- is military. I had to buy the LA's space suit from Russia.

Rachel Lois: talk about LA already being lost. Her mission to go to the moon is already doomed in a way. Can you talk about her relation to failure?

Alicia: LA is a successful failure. I love that phrase. The most important thing is that she is trying to get to the moon. It's the process that is important. In terms of failure and space travel, it's interesting, I

recently interviewed a Spanish astronaut, who is also the Director of Association of Astronauts. He told me the most important thing about going to the moon is all the inventions that come out from the mission. Things like Internet, Tefal and Velcro came out of 'failed' missions to the moon- failed in the sense that water was not discovered in those missions (finding water was always apparently the main aim).

Rachel Lois: The notion of a failed mission yielding success seems to fit well with LA. She is picking up from a failed mission in a way, and is lost. So she is not focused on the 'target' in the same way. Perhaps it is a male trajectory to be focused on conquering new land, getting to the top of a mountain and planting your flag?

Alicia: This is a very male gesture of power. But a female mission – LA's mission- is more about the journey, the making. Actually, I studied this gesture, of the flag, from the first moon landing. The original flag never stuck out straight parallel to the ground. There is no wind so the flag was...err, like this. (holds her arm out straight from her shoulder, and then droops it from the elbow towards the floor.)

Rachel Lois: mean, limp perhaps, or impotent?

Alicia: Yes...(laughing)

Rachel Lois: You mentioned the word serious. I'm interested in what way LA can contribute to the 'serious' research of space travel?

Alicia: I am evidencing the historical role and the potential of women in relation to space, and space travel. I do very small gestures, walking the street carrying out small actions in the spacesuit everyday, people always ask me what I am doing. I say I am a woman who wants to go to the moon. There is a feminist aspect also, I think there is still a lot of work to do in feminism. And in relation to LA, I am asking how can we democratize the moon? The space costume is military. The whole moon aesthetic is military. So how can we make a space for ourselves that is not military?

Rachel Lois: Feminist ... 'agenda' is perhaps a strong word, but I am interested in how LA 'does' research – strategically- in a different way. Deliberately and feministic-ally different from current NASA or scientific, militaristic research programmes. I mean, LA – her failure, her lost status, and the very speculative nature of her research - is critical in this context. This is very different from NASA funded, targeted scientific research, different also to that sort of success or results. Actually, even in the arts, 'speculative', or 'speculative results' are a difficult sell... But this difference seems important in terms of the kind of 'data' that is gathered by LA in her mission. For instance, you are not suggesting that LA will impact upon existing, scientific research or debate. The point is to contribute to- or perhaps create- a different sort of framework for thinking about the moon.

Alicia: Yes, it's about making possibilities with small gestures, opening up a different sort of space for the moon – both discursive and geographic.

Rachel Lois: Can you tell me about the space we are in now- LA's 'basecamp'? This wallpaper here, it has an old feel, it is quite faded along the seams.

Alicia: The wallpaper is from someone's home in the 1930's. I bought everything- the carpet, the wallpaper- all second hand. The carpet cost a lot, despite being old, and it came from Queens. I wanted to create a homely atmosphere. Far away from the galactic feeling. The only thing in here that is silver or shiny is the chair which is a replica because we could not get the original. 'The Galactic' aesthetic is the sci-fi of the future. But I want to suggest that this is only one part of the future of the moon. Daily life will not be not futuristic in that way. People said, and wrote, at the time of the first moon landing, that in the future people would all look the same, wearing the same costume. And that domestically, architecturally, our homes would all be entirely functional. But on the moon we will need nostalgia, we will still need customization of fashion and homes. We will need difference from one another.

Rachel Lois: So there is space for nostalgia in space?

Alicia: Yes, very much so.

Find out about Rachel Lois's work here www.opendialogues.com

Find out about Alicia's work here <http://www.aliciaframis.com/>

