



**External  
Space**



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Philip Ocampo

***Space Song***

February 28- April 10, 2018

*The wisdom of the past is the light of the past*

*The light which is to be is the wisdom of the future*

*The light of the future casts the shadows of tomorrow*

-Sun Ra<sup>1</sup>

All is still and silent in a starlit galactic realm.

Bursting out of a womblike trance, a foreign object rotates slowly as it is flung through space, gradually picking up speed as it zooms towards Earth.

Uncovered by human life, countless inquisitive pairs of eyes puzzle over the origins of the strange object. A vessel of sorts? Serving what purpose? Emblazoned with otherworldly symbols, the object depicts some kind of ethereal lore, long forgotten by the human race. In all of our institutional retellings of humanity, the narratives depicted on this peculiar object feel obscure and impossible to most.

What is the object? Some kind of repurposed asteroid? A sacred relic from an ancient civilization that existed light years before ours on Earth, whose subsistence ceased upon our discovery of it, like that of a star in the night sky?

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<sup>1</sup> Sun Ra, *The Shadows of Tomorrow*, 1974

Philip Ocampo's 2018 vessel *Space Song* is just that: a physical remnant of queer cultivations of Utopian dreams. The work, a hand-built ceramic urn, painted with queer symbology, appears as though it should be a static object. When it rotates, bringing the symbols to life, a deeper narrative emerges from the interstellar void. The symbols align the vessel in three rows: twinkling star-like glitter near the top, a solitary figure fiercely voguing through space in the middle, and a single eye opening and closing at the base. The piece exists in its physical form and also as a stop-motion video work, in which the vase rotates, galvanizing the illustrations in their digital realm.

Ocampo will be receiving his BFA in Digital Painting and Expanded Animation from OCADU this year.<sup>2</sup> Prior to building *Space Song*, he created a body of smaller ceramic works during a residency at Toronto Animated Image Society. These smaller works cultivate the same universe as *Space Song*, but served more for continuity of theme and object. The symbols began as individual digital stop-motion animations, from which each frame was then painted onto the urn. Though they reference Greco-Roman aesthetics and even hieroglyphics, Ocampo feels that the linear symbols are also reminiscent of coding. Such an aesthetic choice offers another channel of connection between the historical and the future, Earth and outer space (which may very well include cyberspace). The transition from digital to tactile-and back again- speaks greatly to the development of his practice as a whole and to the ways that this work simultaneously embeds its roots in the past and future.

The outward appearance of the urn, and the use of stop motion practices for its moving pictures are Ocampo's nod to Greco-Roman pottery and its widespread depictions of male homosexuality and nudity, as well as historical

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.philipocampo.com/about>

animation practices such as the Zoetrope. In referencing antiquated relics with his work, Ocampo is forcing the subject matter of the urn itself to exist within the continuity of the past.<sup>3</sup> The voguing figure is the most blatant nod to queer history; a reference to the iconic underground Ballroom Scene, which was championed by queer black and Latinx youth and boasts a timeline of over 50 years of queer resistance and culture. *Space Song* works to reconcile the ways that queerness is erased from our chronology of culture and forced into its own separate dimension. It re-inserts itself into that canon from which queerness has not had the privilege of existing as a 'legitimate' part of history. Its existence as a pseudo-artefact is evidence of that other, queer-er dimension within the world we inhabit, and works to assert the actuality of queerness in the collective knowledge of civilizations ancient to present.

In José Esteban Muñoz's dazzling work *Cruising Utopia*, readers are immediately informed: "Queerness is not yet here."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, assuming we are, then, "not yet queer", we can indeed "feel [queerness] as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."<sup>5</sup> Queerness floats through space- queer people float through space. Within queerness there exists shared feelings of immateriality because of the lack of collective knowledge and representation of what queerness looks like. Even the possibility of queerness as an expansive identity feels far-fetched at times, especially when the disconnect between academic understandings of queer identity and personal, lived experience compete for some semblance of a concrete truth. *Space Song* might very well be a physical representation of what that floating looks like. It is an exemplification of the intersections between self-examination and exploration of the 'great beyond'- both from an introspective approach and from the aesthetic of

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<sup>3</sup> All conceptual information is gathered from a transcribed conversation with the artist held on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, where queer futurisms were discussed at length in regard to *Space Song* and beyond.

<sup>4</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pg.1

outer space as a free, neutral environment for queer futures to manifest. Assigning queerness to 'the void'-in this case, simultaneously outer space and time travel,<sup>6</sup> gives it a chance to develop more possibilities, whatever those may be. In its entirety, *Space Song* exists as an assertion of queers past, with a foretelling of queerness to come.

-Alessia Dowhaniuk

*Philip Ocampo's "Space Song" is produced by the artist as part of TAIS' 2017-18 Microres program - a series of 3-week residencies in TAIS studios in which guest artist are invited to initiate production of a new work of animation. Ocampo was in TAIS studios from September 11 – October 2, 2017, and his residency was presented in collaboration with Xpace Cultural Centre, and in partnership with [OCAD University](#)'s Digital Painting & Expanded Animation (DPXA) Program.*

*[Toronto Animated Image Society - TAIS](#) is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to exploring and promoting the art of animation through production, screenings, workshops, and exhibitions. TAIS directly supports independent (non-commercial) animation art and film making, with a focus on skills development. We provide affordable access to studios and equipment and hold workshop programs. TAIS has a growing membership of 180+ animators, artists, and animation enthusiasts. Our studios support classical and digital hand-drawn, stop motion, 3D and VR animators, who work in narrative and/or experimental forms, installation, web-based, and animation as craft. TAIS also welcomes multi-disciplinary artists to explore animation and incorporate it into their artistic practices. [www.tais.ca](http://www.tais.ca)*

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<sup>6</sup> (is queerness not whimsical and incorporeal?)