

Our Place in Space **Venice and Chiavenna, Italy**

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Abstract

The *Our Place in Space* exhibit, a blend of striking *Hubble* images and art reflecting *Hubble's* influence on the public and culture, opened in Venice, Italy in February 2017 and moved to Chiavenna, Italy in May 2017. The exhibit has captured the imagination of visitors and engendered much positive commentary by the press and social media. Several notable events were held in conjunction with the exhibit in both locations.

Introduction

The remarkable *Our Place in Space* (cf. [2016 Newsletter v33 no. 1](#)) was designed by Antonella Nota (ESA) and Anna Caterina Bellati (Bellati Ed.), and sponsored by the European Space Agency in cooperation with STScI to be a traveling exhibit showcasing the core of *Hubble's* public appeal—imagery of the cosmos. The regional art community further connects by depicting humanity's presence in the Universe, and its relentless quest to explore. The exhibit is scalable and easily adaptable to the physical space available.

This unusual mixture of science and art demonstrates how *Hubble* has transformed our knowledge of the Universe but also how it has impacted culture, society, and art. The exhibit has appeal on many levels, inspiring curiosity and awe about the universe and our place in it. It stimulates thinking about fundamental questions: where do we come from; where we are going? Are we alone? These are reflections that are of great interest to professional astronomers, but also have deep meaning for each one of us inhabitants of planet Earth.

The first venue for *Our Place in Space* was in the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, on the banks of the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy. The Venice exhibit had close to 30,000 visitors during its run 1 February to 17 April 2017.

Then the exhibit moved to the city of Chiavenna, Italy. Chiavenna is a medieval town in northern Italy, which hosted the exhibition from 13 May 2017 until 20 August 2017 at the Convento dei Cappuccini, Piazza Bertacchi.

The Imagery

Hubble imagery was selected to reflect the broad range of research done with the telescope. The visitor journeys from a location on Earth, through the Solar System, out to the stars, galaxies and the universe. Not only are *Hubble* images displayed, but a video journey from near to far, and depictions of servicing *Hubble*—astronaut activities, and segments of the solar panels are included. These themes are carried along with the exhibit as it moves to new venues.

The Art

The spirit of the art accompanying the exhibit is identified by a local curator, who selects the artwork for the exhibit. For the venues in Italy, the art selected for Venice traveled with the *Hubble*

images, along with a few new additions. The participating artists in Chiavenna were Antonio Abbatepaolo, Marco Bolognesi, Paola Giordano, Ettore Greco, Mario Paschetta, Alessandro Spadari, Marialuisa Tadei, Sara Teresano, Mario Vespasiani, Dania Zanotto and Alberto Salvetti.

The selection of the images and art, and the flow of the exhibit is crafted by the curators, Antonella Nota and Anna Caterina Bellati. The executive committee for the exhibit is Ken Carpenter (NASA HST), Lars Lindberg Christensen (ESO), Carol Christian (STScI), Roger Davies (University of Oxford, UK), Mathias Jäger (ESA/Hubble) and Hussein Jirdeh (STScI).



Fig. 1: Left photo: The alabaster sculptures by Sara Teresano (center) facing *Hubble's* views of interacting galaxies: the Whirlpool galaxy, M51 (top right) and the Antennae galaxies (top left) as shown in Venice. Photo Credit: P. Jeffries. Right photo: Fabric sculpture by Dania Zanotto and the PHAT mosaic as shown in Chiavenna. Photo Credit: M. Jäger, Imagery Credit: NASA/ESA.

Accompanying Activities

In Venice, the opening of the exhibit was launched with an event attended by primarily Italian and International press which resulted in very positive reviews. A few weeks later, the exhibit venue also hosted the *Science with the Hubble and the James Webb Space Telescopes V* conference, one of the signature series of conferences sponsored by ESA in collaboration with STScI, specifically celebrating 26 years in orbit for *Hubble* and the promise of exciting new science with *Webb*.

Chiavenna hosted an "Astro Day" at the Teatro Società Operaia after the exhibit opening, where a number of invited guests gave presentations on astronomy, the excitement and beauty of the exhibition, the science of *Hubble*, the progress of the *Webb* program towards launch, a discussion of light, color, and visualization of imagery and the *Gaia* mission. Over 100 visitors attended and later, the local amateur astronomy group treated the speakers to a night of star gazing up on the mountains in Montespluga.

Reactions

Visitors from many places, a few quite far flung, could write their comments in a journal at the venue. Among the comments were phrases such as:

...most interesting and inspiring exhibition...amazing...

...a gift to sit at the feet of the Universe and travel... through its beauty...

...To know we belong—we live—in this beautiful eternal night full of the dusting stars is truly heaven...

...Thank you all for your work...

...exhibition is marvelous! The space is vast and mysterious...

...Combination of art and science, alongside inspirational quotes from ancient philosophers and scientists takes visitors on a journey through space and time, provoking a sense of wonder...

Next

Our place in Space will next be exhibited at the the ESO Supernova Planetarium & Visitor Centre in Garching, Germany in Spring 2018. Come and visit!

Acknowledgements

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