

## **‘Cosmic Explorations’ aka INSAP XI Conference: Organiser’s Remarks**

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**S. George Djorgovski**

**Abstract.** This issue of *Culture and Cosmos* serves as the written proceedings of the eleventh conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena (INSAP XI), which was also titled ‘Cosmic Explorations: at the Intersection of Science, Space, Art, and Culture’, held in Pasadena, California on 20-23 September 2022. This is a brief summary of the motivation behind this conference and its various organizational matters

The series of conferences on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena (INSAP) started in 1994 as a mechanism for discussions of ideas related to the cultural impacts of various astronomical phenomena that would include a broad range of participants from different fields of the arts, humanities, and sciences. These conferences are held every three years or so in various locations around the world with a strong international and multidisciplinary attendance. For more details see the INSAP website, <https://insap.org/>.

In mid-2018 I was approached by Dr Ed Krupp, the Director of the Griffith Observatory, and a member of the INSAP Executive Committee with a suggestion to organize the eleventh INSAP conference at Caltech. In the series of conversations that followed, a programme committee was formed and ideas about the conference coverage, potential speakers, etc. were discussed.

One of the aims was to showcase the rich contributions of Southern California in this arena, in particular the sciences, mainly through the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and Carnegie Observatories, the exploration of space by NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), itself a part of Caltech, and the aerospace industry, but also through public outreach efforts by the Griffith Observatory, JPL and IPAC (Infrared Processing & Analysis Center) at Caltech, the Huntington Library, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and other local museums. Add

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to this the influence of university arts and humanities programmes and the ArtCenter, and that of popular culture, including Hollywood, science fiction, etc.

The impact of scientific and technological explorations of space on art and culture (both academic and popular) – and the inspiration of these explorations by the culture(s) – were both evident throughout the conference. One notable example of a cross-cutting collaboration between art and science was the joint presentation by scientist and Nobel laureate Professor Kip Thorne and the artist Lia Halloran, who gave us a glimpse of the forthcoming book that resulted from their collaboration. Another notable example was the presentation by the celebrated artist James Turrell, who could not attend in person but joined us for an on-line talk and discussion.

The original plan was to hold this conference in June of 2019, but then the Covid-19 pandemic intervened. After over two years of delays, the conference was held on 20–23 September 2022, with sessions at the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles and Caltech and the Carnegie Observatories in Pasadena, with additional institutional participation by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), the ArtCenter College of Design, and the Huntington Library, also in Pasadena. The conference was sponsored in part by Caltech, including the Center for Data-Driven Discovery, the Einstein Papers Project, and Caltech Optical Observatories, as well as by the Griffith Observatory and Griffith Observatory Foundation, the Carnegie observatories, and the ArtCenter College of Design; we hereby acknowledge their generous support.

There were 75 registered participants, including 28 invited speakers, 9 contributed talks, and 9 contributed posters. More details, including the links to the speakers’ slides and videos of the presentations are given on the conference website, <https://sites.astro.caltech.edu/cosmexp/>.

Judging by the reactions and testimonials from the participants, the conference was seen as a success. It reinforced the original motivation behind the INSAP conferences as a venue for an exchange of ideas on astronomical phenomena between researchers, artists, and scholars who would otherwise not cross paths, and thus generate inspiration on all sides. There is clearly an unmet need here that will be further realised by future conferences in this series.

Enjoy reading these contributions and visit the conference website for the videos of the talks for a flavour of the in-person meeting.

The author would like to thank our sponsors for their support, to all of the conference participants, who made it a success, the members of the

Program Committee and the INSAP Executive Committee, in particular Dr Valerie Shrimplin, who helped move things all along, the staff at Caltech and at Griffith Observatory who did much of the heavy lifting, and finally to Dr Ed Krupp, for persuading me to organize this meeting in the first place.