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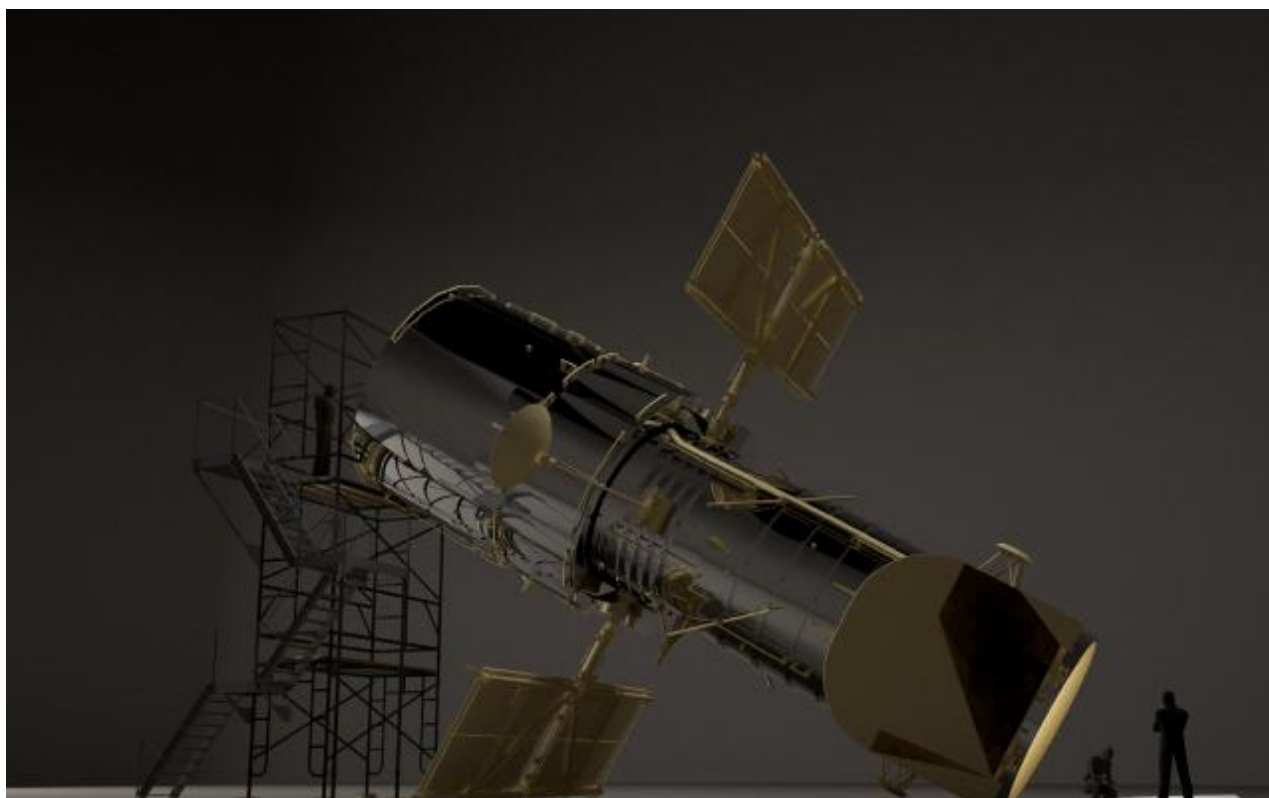
Posted by [Andrew Frost](#) • June 4, 2010 • [Printer-friendly](#)


Whoa man - the universe is big - really big! Andrew Frost has a meltdown...

Of the Australian artists exhibiting in BOS2010 **Peter Hennessey's** *My Hubble: The Universe Turned in on Itself* [2010] can justifiably lay claim to being one of the most spectacular. Following on from the artist's previous projects such as *My Voyager* and *My Apollo*, this massive full-scale replica of the Hubble Space Telescope sits in a room that appears almost too small to hold it. Since the work is sited in one of Cockatoo Island's huge rooms this alone is remarkable, but there is even more to Hennessey's sculpture – a speculative universe that isn't just the artist's imagination, but the universe – you know, all that - out there.

Hennessey's *My Hubble [The Universe Turned in On Itself]* has the trademark exactness of the artist previous sculptures. Built in recycled wood and waste Mylar from available blueprints and photographs of the Hubble, the sculpture sits uneasily between votive object, nerd tribute and technological simulacra. There is a world-wide subculture of people making their own spacesuits, cobbled together space technology and other left-overs from the age of can-do. Google any of these as subject searches and it soon becomes apparent that Hennessey is a master craftsman among the devotees.

This space tech subculture is concerned with the detail - and so too is Hennessey – and you'll find mind boggling examples where these enthusiasts of NASA have recreated colour schemes, flashes and emblems right down to the stitching. Hennessey's work by contrast is far more schematic, an outline, which suggests the object in front of us is at remove from the original. Despite its size, scale and exact replication of the outline, Hennessey's work makes no claim for simulation – he signals that the sculpture is more a reference point – yet the referenced [the original] hovers as a ghost image over the work.





Peter Hennessey, *My Hubble (The universe turned in on itself)*, 2010.
Artist impression of final piece: plywood, steel, life-size, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist; Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide; and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

There is within the work an act of collaboration with the audience. For this work to have true resonance its necessary to know what exactly the **real Hubble has achieved** since its launch into orbit in 1990. Outside the atmosphere – and with a lens that can capture objects so distant they were created soon after the birth of the universe – the Hubble has changed scientific understanding. It has been used to make discoveries that include an estimation of to within 10 percent accuracy the age of the universe, measured the rate of expansion of the universe and discovered hitherto unseen supernovae. It has also of course captured tens of thousands of beautiful images of the night sky that, until its launch, had never been seen.

Hennessey's work has an even better pay off. Aside from the gob-smacking size of the thing, gallery visitors can climb a staircase to a viewing platform at the top rear of the sculpture. Gazing through a small table-top telescope you catch glimpses of what appears to be a glinting night sky – but really, all you're doing is looking through the hollow bulk of *My Hubble* to a table with a mounted piece of wood painted black with glitter on it.

Like his achingly depressing re-imagining of the Voyager spacecraft sent out beyond the solar system with a hope of one day finding intelligent life, Hennessey's *My Hubble's* conceptual engine turns on the tension between the real and the simulation. But where *My Voyager* suggested a cruel and solipsistic disregard for the infinite, *My Hubble* underscores the imaginative leap that is required to imagine the infinite. Have you ever sat out on the beach and looked up at the stars and just went – *erggggghhhhh* – at the size of what's out there? Somehow Hennessey's managed to squeeze it into a tiny, tiny space.