

# apexart

## BLOUINARTINFO

### IN THE AIR

Art News & Gossip



MARCH 25, 2013, 8:23 AM

## There's a Primitive, Cold War-era NASA Satellite Floating in Tribeca's apexart Gallery

[Pin it](#) [Tweet](#) 3

0 Comments

[SHARE](#)



While artists' adventures in space exploration have garnered a great deal of attention of late, curator **Greg Allen** (aka [@gregorg](#)) may be the first to reverse the polarities and examine astronomers' experiments with technologies for mapping and exploring space as aesthetic endeavors. Allen's cleverly titled new show at **apexart**, "Exhibition Space," examines the early moments of the Cold War-era space race, when primitive satellites allowed humans to insert themselves into a space — space — that they had previously observed at a remove. One such vessel, **NASA's "Beacon Inflatable Satellite"** (1958, reconstructed in 2013, above), floats dramatically in the gallery space.

291 church st. nyc, ny 10013  
p: 212.431.5270 f: 646.827.2487  
info@apexart.org; www.apexart.org

# apexart

The “Beacon” satellite prototype, which had been in development for four years when the U.S.S.R.’s launch of Sputnik in 1957 fast-tracked NASA’s efforts to conquer space, was developed as much for scientific use as it was designed to serve as a symbol of American ingenuity and power.

The engineers working on the “Beacon” initially “began with a 30-inch model,” Allen writes in the exhibition essay. “Then came the 12-foot diameter version, the Beacon, whose size had been determined by the ceiling height of the Langley workshop, but whose major success was as an earthbound prop. None of the test flights of these models was successful.”

The version of the “Beacon” satellite on view at apexart is a scale mockup of the much larger satellite NASA hoped to launch, which would be visible to amateur astronomers and thus provide a reassuring U.S. presence in the starlit sky. “When the first 100-foot diameter satelloon Echo I exploded soon after its October 1959 launch, it rained ‘thousands of fragments of the aluminum-covered balloon’ through the sky, creating a 10-minute light show all along the East Coast,” Allen writes, citing a [NASA account of the project](#).

Encountered in the gallery space, the “Beacon” initially registers as sculpture rather than primitive spacecraft, its crinkly reflective surface, palpable weightlessness, and towering proportions evoking some improbable **Kapoor-McCracken-Christo** collabo. Neither quite minimalism, nor pure finish fetishism, it hovers in the gallery gently and a little ominously — the space race being, after all, a largely military endeavor. It provides a welcome reminder of the tactility and materiality of our species’ extra-planetary pursuits.

— *Benjamin Sutton*

(Photo by the author.)

Tags: [apexart](#), [Benjamin Sutton](#), [Greg Allen](#), [NASA](#), [News](#)

<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2013/03/25/theres-a-primitive-cold-war-era-nasa-satellite-floating-in-tribecas-apexart-gallery/>