Disposable Modernity part 5: Stone Age Space Age

With the exception of the Platform detailed below, the piece is sculpted in laminated stone comprised of Italian alabaster (white), South African (black) and Indian (red) pyrophillite.

The total height of the rocket, including neither Platform nor Pad, is approximately five feet.

It is secured to the steel Platform, through the stone Pad, by a half-inch threaded steel rod running the length of the interior. The entire assembly weighs approximately [150] pounds.

Launch Platform – steel – 3” x 12” x 27”

Dimensions reduce to the ratio 1:4:9, which are the squares of the first three integers 1, 2, 3.

These were the proportions chosen by Arthur C. Clarke for the “black monolith” in his book 2001: A Space Odyssey, the film version of which the Apollo 11 astronauts had seen shortly before their mission.

The platform’s top surface bears two inscribed lines: the first delineating a Golden Rectangle, and the second deriving a Kepler Triangle from the first. Johannes Kepler is best remembered for his laws of planetary motion, but also for his fascination with the Platonic Solids, the Golden Rectangle, and the Pythagorean Theorem. His triangle refers to these last two.

Launch Pad – 13/4” x 10” x 163/16” – Golden Rectangle

The pattern provides a centering point for the rocket to stand on while also demonstrating the fullest iteration of the “flag” motif discussed later. It, like the Platform discussed above, incorporates a reference to the Kepler Triangle.

SASA – Stone Age Space Age – rebranding1

From the Paleo- to the Neolithic, through the Ages of Copper, Bronze, and Iron, as we “progress,” previous Ages do not end, but are expanded into new realms. We continue to live in the Stone Age – more than ever, in fact – with our vast rivers of concrete dotted with petrified parking lakes and towering forests of stone and concrete buildings custom-designed with computers relying on silicon pathways. We’ve learned not only to “fashion” stone, but to design and manufacture it according to specifications optimized for any given application. We are now living in an Info-lithic Age, in which information technology is a freight train running on silicon rails, powered by copper wires, and giving rise to iron-based alloys that are ever allowing us to do more and more with less and less.

This phenomenon of continuance can be seen in the non-material Ages of Faith and Reason, and in the very material Ages if Discovery and Industry, which have all continued to develop, elaborate, and flourish. In this view, the notion of “progress” appears to be driven more by a principle of accretion than of supercession.

Flags – rebranding2

Beginning with the simplest version, the single red triangle, in the “first position,” we can visualize a movement of the red around the centre-point of the squared rectangle as if it were on a kind of dial, appearing in its successive “positions” as the flag iterates around the circumference of the rocket cylinder. This movement ends in the fourth position with the red appearing in the shape that refers to the Kepler Triangle. This last flag is also an alter-image of the pattern already seen in the Launch Pad described above.

Bar Code – (SASA) – rebranding3

This bar code (which reads “SASA”) occupies the location of the words “United States” on the actual rocket, thereby completing its re-branding, recognizing that the Apollo mission was much more than the politically-motivated project of a single nation, but rather a fully human achievement, drawing on resources and capabilities from the entire planet and species. It was the Apollo images that gave us our first images of the entire Earth as a single location floating isolated in the cosmos. These images were obviously devoid of politically-defined borders. We, the inhabitants, are Earthians in a far deeper and more important sense than we can ever be Canadian, Syrian, etc.

The mere presence of a bar code makes reference to the commercial/industrial considerations associated with the space program, both in its development and in its aftermath, as well as to the overarching ramifications the project has had in the subsequent course of the development of human society these past nearly 50 years.

Command Module – Conic Sections

The astronaut’s capsule – the only part of the assembly that returned to Earth in one piece – displays the Conic Sections in the manner of the demonstration model used since ancient times to illustrate the definitions of the circle, the ellipse, the parabola and the hyperbola.

These Conic Sections, Golden Rectangles, Kepler Triangles, and proportions derived from squares, all allude to the kind of mathematical “messages” employed in NASA’s SETI program (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence). They demonstrate to any potential alien observers our understanding of these fundamental mathematical principles in the hope that this may lead to a basis for communication and mutual understanding.

LES – Spiral Arrow Pen

The Launch Escape System (LES) was designed to enable the crew to abort the mission by using it to separate the Command Module (CM) from the rest of the spacecraft, allowing them then to eject once clear of the remainder of the rocket. NASA’s design used a tapering square scaffold to connect the CM to the LES.

The SASA design replaces the scaffold with a spiral, evoking that of the Fibonacci sequence, itself implicit in the Golden rectangle. The steel spiral also playfully suggests a spring as the means by which the LES could be jettisoned once no longer needed. The LES rocket itself is the red pen that humans have launched to write our own chapter in cosmic story.