

From Earth to the Universe: Image Exhibitions in the International Year of Astronomy 2009

Megan Watzke

Chandra X-ray Center/SAO
E-mail: mwatzke@cfa.harvard.edu

Kimberly Kowal Arcand

Chandra X-ray Center/SAO
E-mail: kkowal@cfa.harvard.edu

Lars Lindberg Christensen

ESA/Hubble
E-mail: lars@eso.org

& the IYA2009 Image Exhibition Task Group

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Summary

The fantastic images of the Universe are largely responsible for the magical appeal that astronomy has for lay people. Indeed, popular images of the cosmos can engage the general public not only in the aesthetics of the visual realm, but also in the science of the knowledge and understanding behind them. The International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) is an unprecedented opportunity to present astronomy to the global community. *From Earth to the Universe* (www.fromearthtotheuniverse.org) endeavours to bring these images to a wider audience in non-traditional venues, such as art museums, public galleries, shopping malls and public gardens.

As we plan for IYA 2009, there remain many unknown factors. Issues such as funding, location availability, and other major planning elements are still waiting to be determined. Therefore, we suggest that this concept has the greatest likelihood for success if we can create a flexible plan that can accommodate a wide range of support in a host of different settings. Below we outline the basic categories we have designed. These “levels”, however, should not be seen as absolutes. Rather, a particular exhibit may incorporate various elements based on the sensibility of that location and the local interest and support.

Platinum Exhibit

As the name suggests, this is the most ambitious and, of course, expensive outline. We envision a semi-permanent outdoor exhibit in a prominent location such as the National Mall in Washington, DC, or the Champs Elysee in Paris. Such “under the sky” installations would require proper illumination at night and high-quality weather-proofing treatments. The core exhibit of images could be enhanced with such features as interac-



Figure 1. *The Universe from the Earth* — An Exhibit of Astronomical Images. Credit: The authors



Figure 2. *The Universe from the Earth — An Exhibit of Astronomical Images.* Credit: The authors

tive kiosks, large-scale sky maps, and alternatives for visually-impaired and other challenged visitors.

Gold Exhibit

As with the platinum level, the gold exhibit would consist of up to 100 astronomical images in large printed format, roughly 120 cm x 90 cm (4 ft x 3 ft) in size, with appropriate captions. In order to keep costs to a minimum, these images could be directly mounted on pre-existing walls or less expensive stands with less sophisticated or no additional lighting. Simple packaging could be developed so that it would be relatively inexpensive to ship these images to multiple locations. Or, depending on printing costs in a particular location, the exhibit could alternatively be duplicated.

Silver Exhibit

This is the “do-it-yourself” version of the image exhibit for science centres, planetari-

Call for images

Individuals, organisations and observatories that missed the last call for images, now have a last opportunity to submit their images. Submit one image that will print well at 120 cm x 90 cm (4 ft x 3 ft) and ideally is colour corrected for printing. Upload to [ftp://cxc.harvard.edu/incoming](http://cxc.harvard.edu/incoming) (anonymous, use E-mail for password). It will be difficult to accept new images after this call.

ums, and other interested groups. The images would be available for “off the shelf” or pre-existing technologies such as light boxes, large-scale prints, or other formats already being used at any given location.

Financing

As a recognised Cornerstone project for both the international and US IYA efforts, the image exhibition concept is acknowledged as a worthwhile project to proceed for 2009. However, at this point, it is not obvious that any significant funding can be obtained from the major agencies (NASA, ESA, IAU, etc.). Therefore, in order for this project to succeed, financial backing must be found.

We propose that corporations, foundations, and other entities be approached and asked for their support. Each individual location will most likely need to obtain its own funding. Hence, if there is interest in having an image exhibit come to a location, the organiser for that location must take the responsibility to secure the funding for this to be possible. (See more details in the “How to Participate” section.)

It is difficult to supply specific costs for each level of the image exhibition concept because many of the expenses will vary from location to location. For example, the costs of printing — which will be done as locally as possible — will change. Also, if there are

fees to use a particular site, this will have to be factored in as well. There are many other details that may also affect the ultimate cost. But, in order to begin planning, we provide a very loose estimate below.

- Platinum: \$250,000—\$500,000
- Gold: \$25,000—\$50,000
- Silver: \$2,000—\$10,000

Again, these numbers encompass a very wide range and should only be used in general planning. We hope to expand upon these numbers and other details of planning soon.

How to Participate

If you would like to see an image exhibition in your area in 2009, please consider the following responsibilities.

1. *Serve as Point of Contact:* A lot of logistical planning will be necessary to secure locations. We need people who are willing to pursue and coordinate with all of the necessary local officials and act as an intermediary with the IYA Image Exhibit Task Group.
2. *Scout locations:* Suggest a public space with room to house large format images (wall mounted or on stands)

with high traffic — parks, metro stations, art museums, etc.

3. *Find local printing and related companies.* We would like to have these images printed locally, when it makes sense. Therefore, the local organiser would need to find suitable companies that could provide the quality required (details will be forthcoming). Also, lighting, mounting and other elements of the exhibit — again, to be determined by the specific location — will also need to be solved.
4. *Find funding:* As mentioned above, it is imperative to the success of this project to identify and secure funding from outside entities: corporations, foundations, etc. The local organisers of the host country or region must take responsibility for acquiring funding for the scope of the exhibit they would like to see go forth in their area.

Conclusion

We believe that exhibitions of astronomical images across the world in 2009 will serve as a powerful way to engage potentially millions of people in the wonders of astronomy. It is a large project that could involve many agencies, companies, governments, and of course individuals. We hope to serve as a catalyst for this project, providing core materials that can be used freely and openly in a multitude of ways. The success of this project will depend on the combined efforts of the local organisers, the Image Exhibition Task Group, and many more. If you are interested in serving as a local organiser, please contact us as soon as possible. We look forward to working on this exciting project.

References

- <http://www.fromearthtotheuniverse.org>

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Bios

Kimberly Kowal Arcand is the visualisation & media production coordinator for NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory. Along with Megan Watzke, she is co-chair for the IYA2009 "From Earth to the Universe" Task Group.

Megan Watzke is the press officer for NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory, a position she has held since 2000. Both she and Kim Arcand are based at the Chandra X-ray Center at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Mass., USA.

Lars Lindberg Christensen is a science communication specialist heading ESA/Hubble EPO group in Munich, Germany. He is IAU Press officer and Secretary for the IAU Executive Committee IYA2009 Working Group.

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