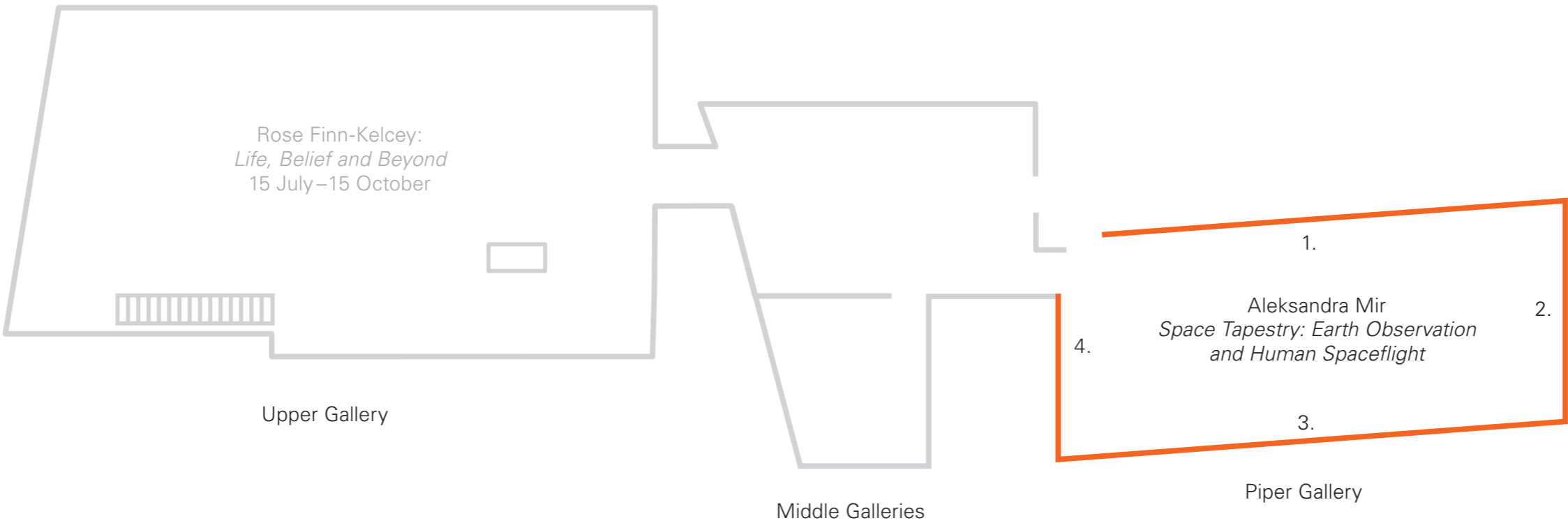


All work descriptions by Aleksandra Mir

1. *We Believe Communication is a Basic Human Need*, 2015–17
Marker pen on synthetic canvas, 300 x 1000 cm

This drawing combines the views from two satellite network control centres, sources brought to life based on my site visits to two of the main satellite operators in the UK—Inmarsat in London and Catapult in Harwell. They are fantastical spaces filled with screens, blinking lights, all sorts of monitoring systems and advanced technologies that transmit live information. While the main business focus is on day-to-day communications, they also monitor sea traffic, from providing emergency relief to cracking down on piracy. I was intrigued by the relationship between these live maps and the dramas they depict. The slogan ‘We believe communication is a basic human need’ is a third party Space industry slogan aimed at expanding the reach of the satellite market to every living human on Earth, no matter their lifestyle or actual need.



3. *This is not a Satellite, This is an Educated Nation*, 2015–17
Marker pen on synthetic canvas, 300 x 1400 cm

This is the largest work in the series, fourteen metres long. Twelve people worked on it for two months. It depicts a series of satellite designs, starting with the very first, Sputnik, which has a very recognisable round shape that makes it look like a spider.

The work’s title is a satellite industry slogan aimed at the developing world. With over 2,000 satellites orbiting the Earth today and 70 Space-faring nations, the industry is now a fully global operation: a costly yet effective way of improving a country’s infrastructure.

This drawing reflects on how satellite technology has changed the world we live in, and how much complex Space technology is taken for granted in our everyday lives. We are all ‘using Space’ every time we use our mobile phones, check the weather or make a bank transaction. I thought it would be interesting to place this drawing in Oxford, a seat of higher learning, but also a town with social problems and inequality as well.

2. *Get on da Spaze Buz*, 2015–17
Marker pen on synthetic canvas, 300 x 600 cm

This Space bus travels past a depiction of Halley’s comet drawn 1,000 years ago by the anonymous artists of the Bayeux Tapestry who drew the comet in a pictographic style.

As the original inspiration for this work, the Bayeux Tapestry’s frieze-like progression and dramatic narrative arc are transformed into a contemporary manifestation of the common space shared by art and science. In this particular drawing, I am using the bus as a metaphor for where we are heading; the democratisation of Space travel, at the cost of the romance currently vested in its exclusivity. Eventually, the trip back and forth to our permanent outpost – the European Space Agency-planned moon village – may come to resemble a regular commute on a bus.

4. *Slogans*, 2015–17
Marker pen on paper, fifty sheets, each 50 x 70 cm

In 2015, I was invited as the first ever artist speaker at the UK Space Conference in Liverpool. The event brought together 1,000 delegates from the Space industry and academia to give talks and listen to each other’s presentations. There was also a whole trade show floor where companies, from the largest to the tiniest entrepreneurs and university departments, showcased their innovations. I walked around and photographed all the slogans I could find, mostly banal catchphrases about future progress in slick corporate fonts. I then brought these lines back to the studio and had my workshop participants rewrite the lettering in their own wonky and creative styles. The whole ensemble is a poetic and personal response to the Space industry lingo, rendering these young artists’ ideas and hopes for their own futures. So now, even these young humanists are ‘Proud to be part of the UK Space Industry’.

Space Tapestry drawing assistants:
Aliyah Coreana, Anna Rekas, David Maina, Denis Shankey, Grace Kaluba, Joana Groba, Joanna Vanderpuije, Laura Jones, Moira Lam, Simone Russell, Yasmin Falahat, Anna Lytridou, Kayleigh Handley, Ioana Pioaru, Anna Lytridou, Anna Salomon, Joanna Rogers, John Fletcher, Lola Moreton-Griffiths, Laura Moreton-Griffiths, Kayleigh Handley, Belmin Pilevneli, Arielle Tse, Esi Essel, Inês M. Ferreira, Radu Nastasia, Jerome Ince-Mitchell.

All works courtesy the artist

Aleksandra Mir’s book *We Can’t Stop Thinking about the Future* (Strange Attractor Press) accompanies this exhibition and is on sale in the Modern Art Oxford shop.

Please ask our Visitor Assistants if you have any questions.



MODERN ART OXFORD

EXHIBITION NOTES



works intensely on one specific area of the canvas. It is also mentally involving; according to the collaborators, sometimes time slips by, and on other occasions it slows down. The background music in the studio is important, and everyone takes turns to choose it. In *Get on da Spaze Buz*, the energetic, gestural scribbles of the bus's undercarriage were produced while listening to 1980s Michael Jackson!

I only use Sharpies, which were invented in 1964 so most contemporary to my lifetime. In the 15 years that I have explored this simple marker I have yet to see the same stroke repeated twice or be bored with it. I have even achieved watercolour-like washes by violently destroying a thick Sharpie and using the innards like a delicate brush – Aleksandra Mir

With her experimental approach to the common marker pen, Mir expands the rigid binary of monochrome drawings into a greyscale range of hues. Strict black and white makes way for clouds of tonal variation across the drawings, hinting at the contours of every individual's contribution. Mir's collective strategy underscores the intensity of each individual's hand-drawn marks, and their cumulative contribution to the graduated, greyscale space of the drawing.

Space Tapestry's visual appearance owes a debt to contemporary long form comic books and their text/image compositions that demand simultaneous processing of words and pictures. This method is reflected in *Space Tapestry's* eclectic fusion of different sources, from the medieval embroidery of a comet, to the artist's documentation of contemporary satellite control rooms, Space industry trade fairs and company mottos. In this way, the tapestry reminds us that Space is woven into every facet of our lives on Earth.

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Cover image: Aleksandra Mir, *Slogans*, 2015–17. © Aleksandra Mir.
Installation photo by Norbert Miguletz.

The artist's embrace of the unpredictability of collective drawing is evident when viewing *Space Tapestry* up close. In Mir's studio, her young collaborators sit or kneel on yoga mats, both to protect their knees from long periods of crouching or kneeling atop the large drawing, but also to protect the surface of the work from damage or smudging. The process is physically exhausting as each person



Aleksandra Mir, *Work in Progress*, 2015–17. © Aleksandra Mir.

From the efforts of this collective labour, the drawing's realisation over time assumes a performance-like quality. Executed by multiple 'actors' on the stage-like area of the vast unfurled canvas, the work is captured by the studio's time-lapse camera. Each drawing is calculated and scaled-up by Mir to a carefully researched and measured plan. It is completed via a collective physical connection between the bodies of her collaborating artists and the drawing surface. In this production of linear traces and stamped, washed and painted marks, drawing is equally an act of rules, of gesture, and of repetitive labour.

**The work blends many art forms into one continuous process and activity where a lot is determined beforehand, but even more is left to the energies and personalities of the people who are enmeshed in the process. As each drawing grows slowly over time, the team and individuals explore their potential, pushing the pen to the extreme...
– Aleksandra Mir**



Aleksandra Mir, *Work in Progress*, 2015–17. © Aleksandra Mir.

Space Tapestry is a drawing project on an epic scale that tells a visual story of Space exploration and its impact on our day-to-day lives. Informed by researchers and experts in the Space industry and academia, the drawings were created with a team of young assistants in the artist's London studio. *Space Tapestry* is an inquiry into cutting-edge technology realised through the analogue medium of drawing.

On display at Modern Art Oxford are two chapters of the project, *Earth Observation* and *Human Spaceflight*. These focus on the possibilities for future civilian Space tourism, and the satellites that look down on our planet to provide communications and observations of Earth. In the *Faraway Missions* chapter, on parallel display at Tate Liverpool, the focus is on faraway planets and the unmanned probes travelling to the outer reaches of our solar system and beyond. Together, Mir's drawings celebrate and ask questions of today's advanced technologies, opening up our ideas of Space to include a new visual language rooted in fact.

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Aleksandra Mir Space Tapestry: Earth Observation & Human Spaceflight

