HOPE 1: SPACESUIT ART PROJECT

Project Overview
The Hope 1: Spacesuit Art Project consists of the fabrication of three uniquely different custom life-size spacesuit replicas made from hand painted pieces of art on canvas that pediatric cancer patients create while in the hospital receiving cancer treatments. ILC Dover, the contractor who makes NASA’s Spacesuits, stitched together the children’s art work to make the spacesuit replicas. All of the spacesuit replicas will travel to events, museums, conferences and other relevant places as a communications tool for childhood cancer awareness.

The project is a collaboration between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, ILC Dover, and the University of Texas MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital’s Arts in Medicine Program to help to raise awareness to the issues surrounding childhood cancer and reveal the positive connection between the arts and the healing process. This special project brought childhood cancer patients, their families, NASA scientists, astronauts, engineers, and MD Anderson doctors and staff all together on this unique endeavor. The project is an amazing story of human triumph and hope by combining science, technology, the arts, and the indomitable human spirit. The spacesuits are a stunningly beautiful representation of what can happen when art, science, and the healing process unite.

The Arts and Medicine Program
The University of Texas MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital Arts in Medicine Program’s one goal is to help young patients going through cancer treatment feel better. Ian Cion, artist-in-residence and director of the Arts in Medicine Program at MD Anderson, works with pediatric patients and their families on collaborative, large-scale projects and one-on-one art sessions. These activities give patients a sense of control and purpose, reduce anxiety and pain, make patients more comfortable in the hospital and build community among patients and families.

NASA’s mission engenders hope and inspiration by exploring the unknowns of the universe. Many times this exploration of the unknowns is analogous to the journey the children are on while fighting cancer. The project helps children battling cancer feel better and, at the same time, makes them feel a part of something bigger than their current circumstances.

Project Background:
While working with patients and families on small- and large-scale art projects, Ian realized patients enjoyed both social and medical benefits through the arts. Patients shared with Ian during his art classes that they felt calm and much better about their treatment when they were participating in art. Group art projects like the Hope 1: Spacesuit Art Project also help young cancer patients overcome isolation, a challenge both for space explorers and children battling cancer often face. Often, the kids paint images of the sky and space, and they talk about future dreams of becoming astronauts and explorers. That inspired Ian with new vision for a collaborative project of creating artistic spacesuit replicas. The idea was for pediatric cancer patients to paint on pieces of art canvas that could be crafted and sewn together to make replicas of the iconic NASA spacesuits.
Project Timeline:
Ian contacted NASA’s spacesuit engineers at the Johnson Space Center to get actual spacesuit dimensions so the replicas would be as life like as possible. During one of Ian’s trips to NASA’s spacesuit lab, NASA contractor ILC Dover became interested in participating in the project. ILC Dover has manufactured all NASA space suits since the launch of the space program in the 1960s. They offered, at no charge, to help sew and build the children’s spacesuit replicas for the project.

In December 2015, well over 600 art pieces painted on canvas from MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital were delivered to ILC Dover for the stitching and fabrication process. Some of the ILC Dover employees donated their time on weekends to ensure the suit would be completed on time.

During a visit to NASA’s Johnson Space Center, a few of the patient artists were able to meet the engineers, and technicians involved in the suit design for a progress update of the spacesuit fabrication and a tour of NASA’s facilities. The impact of the visit was profound. One patient artist remarked, “One day, I hope to work with the space exploration vehicles at NASA.”

“Paint with the Astronaut” Art Studios
Several of NASA’s current and retired astronauts have joined in the Spacesuit Art Project to help make art with the kids at mini art studios at the MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital.
Project Partnership Announcement and Celebration
The “HOPE” suit debuted at a special unveiling event at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. The Johnson Space Center’s Director Ellen Ochoa, MD Anderson President Ronald DePinho, and ILC Dover’s Chief Engineer, David Graziosi made remarks to a packed house. Also making comments on the positive power of art in the healing process were Ian Cion, Nicole Stott and Jacob Ballard, a 17 year-old childhood cancer survior. After the remarks, many participated in a large art studio session to paint panels for the third international spacesuit replica called “UNITY.”

Space Suit Art Project Expedition 1 World Tour
NASA Astronaut Nicole Stott and Ian Cion, take off August 31st on a historic 12 day global Art Expedition to visit three of the four headquartered cities of the International Space Agencies that built the International Space Station. Along with international astronauts from the respective International Partner Space Agencies. They will visit various cancer hospitals in those areas and paint artistic pieces on canvas with pediatric cancer patients. The children’s art will travel back to NASA’s Johnson Space Center and ILC Dover will assemble the pieces of art in to a third space suit replica called “UNITY”. The making of this suit is an international collaboration between international space agencies, hospitals, and space companies that will bring global awareness to the issues surrounding the fight against childhood cancers.
Childhood Cancer Awareness Month Space-to-Ground Conference
The month of September has been designated as National Childhood Cancer Awareness month. To honor that and help raise awareness, the children at MD Anderson Children’s Cancer Hospital along with help from NASA Astronaut Kate Rubins, Nicole Stott, and Ian Cion they painted a NASA type flight suit. This hand-painted flight suit was launched on a cargo resupply spacecraft to the International Space Station where Astronaut Kate Rubins is now living and working. On September 16th Kate will do a live space-to-ground conference from the International Space Station with NASA’s Mission Control Center and several of the children from the hospital who helped her paint the flight suit before she left on her Expedition mission.

Museum Exhibitions
The Hope 1: Spacesuit Art exhibit opened at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston with a presentation on the “Power of Art in Medicine” and the spacesuit stayed for a four day exhibit which was seen by over 2,500 visitors.

Project Partnerships
The Project will reach a global audience and not only spread the word about the battle against childhood cancer but also to inspire children around the world to become the next generation of scientists, researchers, doctors and explorers. The current partners on the project are NASA, the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center Children’s Cancer Hospital, ILC Dover and Space Center Houston.

Some of the Spacesuit Artist