

Kubrick's Aries 1B

by **Joe Fordham**

Posted on **March 31, 2015** by **Joe Fordham**

Sunday morning, *Deadline Hollywood* broke the news:

Academy Museum Buys Rare '2001: A Space Odyssey' Model For \$344,000



— “2001” key art by Robert McCall © Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Fans were stunned. As any Stanley Kubrick aficionado will tell you, it has long been legend that all the spaceship miniatures from Kubrick's landmark science fiction film were destroyed after filming at the filmmaker's request, to prevent recycling in cheap imitations. Could this be the real McCoy?

Before the facts were known, a small studio in El Segundo, California, became mecca for a pilgrimage of visual effects professionals who arrived to gaze in awe at the *Aries 1B* – the spherical trans-lunar spaceship from *2001: A Space Odyssey* – that, miraculously, had been found after 47 years in obscurity.

The miniature was up for auction and the curator, Premiere Props, welcomed guests to verify the find. Facebook images began appearing of spectators posing with the ship — Dennis Muren, Greg Jein, Matthew Gratzner, Ian Hunter, Shannon Gans, Dave Jones, Bruce Logan, Pat McClung, Harrison Ellenshaw, Peter Anderson, Bill Taylor, André Bustanoby, Gene Kozicki, Rob McFarlane, Ted Rae, Dan Winters, John Goodson and Kim Smith (and guest appearances, by phone, from Douglas Trumbull and Steve Gawley). The general consensus: the miniature was real.

The AMPAS Museum of Motion Pictures eventually acquired the ship for a princely sum. Prior to finalizing the sale, event organizer Dan Levin allowed Visual Effects Society Archive Committee co-chair Gene Kozicki and VFX artist André Bustanoby to make detailed photographic record of the ship; and Gene shared the experience with *Cinefex*:

“I have to admit that when I first heard that the Aries-1B filming model was up for sale at a local auction house, I was skeptical. Model makers, prop makers, and costumers have been making replicas of key items for years and quite often they show up in an auction as the authentic item, only to be ‘de-bunked’ later. At first I thought that would be

the (unfortunate) case here. But the photos and story had a ring of authenticity to them and I figured it was worth seeing it in person.

“Upon first examination, the model appeared to be in pretty good shape. It was covered in thick layer of dirt and dust, but structurally it was sound and aside from the landing gear shrouds, was largely intact. It was what I expected a model that was made in 1966 to look like. The story that the auctioneer provided about how the consignor obtained it lined up somewhat with the story I had been told by Dave Larson (who's researched the making of 2001 extensively and has worked with Doug Trumbull on presentations).

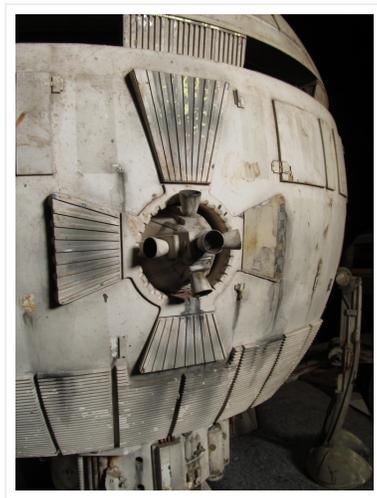
“Within about five minutes of looking it over, I was pretty much convinced it was the genuine filming model and not a replica. What clinched it for me was a phone conversation that I had with Doug Trumbull just after I left the auction house. He mentioned details about the nature of some of the materials – something

that wasn't readily apparent in photos. (Some of the panel detailing was done with thin metal foils cut to shape. The foils featured a subtle embossed texture that don't really show up on film but can be seen up close with the naked eye. Doug said they used that material because it looked like quilted insulation.) The model was built as a one-off using some pretty heavy-duty industrial model making techniques. The body is thick acrylic and fiberglass. The landing gears are a combination of steel and brass. The model parts are individually glued on – not castings. (This lack of shortcuts played no small role in its survival. I've seen younger filming models in worse shape due to 'modern' materials and the need to get it done quickly and cheaply.)

"From a design aesthetic, all of the models in 2001 were so unlike anything we had seen before that it helped sell the concept of a believable future. Up until that time, space travel and lunar landings were done in ships that looked far more elegant than practical. Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon journeyed into space standing up. The public had seen a few real launches and it was clear that the way we were going to get into space was not the way our fathers had envisioned it. In 2001, space travel wasn't fantasy, it was plausible. In fact, it was mundane. Doctor Floyd (William Sylvester) sleeps most of his way to the Space Station and the moon. They have stewardesses and receptionists just sitting there, reading a magazine. In 2001, space travel was boring. That I think made it far more realistic than anything we had seen prior. And that's why it still holds up.



— Aries 1B – photo courtesy Gene Kozicki



— Aries 1B detail – photo courtesy Gene Kozicki.

"So how did this thing get here? A lot of the stories surrounding the filming of 2001 have grown to legend or myth status, probably due to time and the fact that the director was Stanley Kubrick. The 'myth' states that Kubrick ordered everything destroyed in order to prevent cheap imitations from beating 2001 to the screen. The reality appears to be far more mundane. Like most movies, post-production ran longer than expected and during this period the models were just stored away – either on a stage or in a building at M-G-M's Borehamwood studio, in England. And they stayed there even after the film was released in 1968. Why? Probably because it was easier to just leave the stuff there than figure out what to do with it.

"Finally, at some point in the early/mid 1970's, M-G-M finally decided to clear the material out. Kubrick was offered the models but reportedly refused. (Obviously the logistics involved in moving and storing them were considerable. With the 'small' Discovery model being around 15 feet long and the 'large' Discovery being 54 feet long, it would require several trucks and a large shed to store them.) But I think there's something else we should consider – by the time this reportedly happened (mid-70's), Stanley Kubrick had tried to get Napoleon off the ground, directed A Clockwork Orange, and was working on Barry Lyndon. Given Kubrick's tendency to go 'all in' on a given film, it seems reasonable to me that he simply wasn't interested in anything from one of his (by then) old films.

"Over the years, there were rumors that some of the models survived. In fact, the Aries 1B, along with the Orion Clipper (the 'Pan-Am' ship), and the Moonbus were thought to have been set aside for Kubrick to claim. But we've also 'heard' that the Moonbus was taken home by a crew member and eventually suffered an ignominious fate at the hands of that crew member's son and some fireworks. And of course, there were the photos of Space Station V rotting in a field. The problem with all of this was that the only evidence we had as to the fate of the models were those photos – and those photos supported the 'myth' that everything had been destroyed. (Despite the fact there was no mention of any of the other models being in that same field.) Now that the Aries has shown up, obviously that lends at least some credence to some of the models being put to one side. (And if they were put to one side for Kubrick, how did the consignor get his hands on the Aries?) Hopefully, this discovery will allow new research and we can get a better picture of what happened.

"As this item was coming up for auction, we really didn't know where it would end up, or if we would ever be granted access again. Premiere Props' owner Dan Levin allowed us to come in and document the model several times. It was his hope that if enough industry people saw it and talked about it, it would remove any lingering doubts from people's minds that this was the real thing. (He was skeptical at first, too.) Additionally, Dan recognized the significance of the prop and wanted to make sure it wound up in some institution that would not only restore it but display it. We all recognized that it had a unique story apart from the basic fact that it was used in a movie.

"Joining us in examining the model were John Goodson from ILM, model maker Greg Jein, the folks at New Deal Studios, visual effects designer Dennis Muren – and everyone else who saw it was almost giddy that this thing survived. André Bustanoby and I set up tracking markers and took photos from all sides, and inside.

"With the removal of the hardware that controlled the landing gear, we noticed that the model was sitting a bit lower than what was seen on screen. The landing gears still move, albeit manually. The main part of the body appears to be made from a blown plexiglass

dome about 30 inches in diameter. The endoscope was a handy gadget I picked up at a hardware store that transmits imagery to your iPad or cell phone via an app. I got it to see inside the guts of the model. I was curious to see if any of the landing gear linkages were still inside the model. (Like Al Capone's vault, it was empty.) I was also trying to see if the mount points for the model were still intact. The last thing we wanted to see happen was the model get damaged as it was being moved back into its shipping crate. Thankfully, the mounts and inner structure appear to be in good condition. The Academy will have to come up with some way to mount it securely — I wouldn't want to rely on a 50 year old mount point as the sole method of support. But it seems sturdy enough to get it into a crate and to a facility where it can be examined further.

"Given the influence of 2001 and all the legends surrounding the making of the film, the significance of this model cannot be overstated. This is the equivalent of someone discovering Orson Welles' cut of The Magnificent Ambersons or Dorothy's ruby red slippers from The Wizard of Oz. 2001 set the bar very high — without 2001 and the contributions of the artists that worked on the visual effects, we wouldn't have Star Wars, Blade Runner, The Matrix, or Interstellar. I am very pleased that the Motion Picture Academy is the new custodian of this iconic artifact and I hope that its eventual display will inspire future storytellers as much as it has inspired ourselves."



— Special effects technician Rodney Fuller (R) attends to the Aries 1B at Borehamwood, 1966. Image courtesy Matte Shot © Hawk Films / M-G-M.



— Gene Kozicki, André Bustanoby, Harrison Ellenshaw and the Aries 1B. Photo courtesy Dan Levin.

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Special thanks to Brian Johnson and to Peter Cook at [Matte Shot](#).



mik
on **March 31, 2015 at 10:57 pm** said:

why cant they put the models in a warehouse somewhere?



Rod Munday
on **April 1, 2015 at 8:01 am** said:

The famous photos of Space Station 5 from 2001 rotting away in a field in the UK were supplied to me by the photographer Trevor Parsons in the later 1990s I think. I can confirm that Brian Johnson later emailed me to confirm that this was the model used in 2001. The particular octagonal form of the mounting structure that is seen in one of the photographs is what convinced him.



Joe Fordham
on **April 1, 2015 at 8:16 am** said:

Thanks, Rod. I always wondered who shot those. Those images of the derelict Space Station are so sad — all those weeds growing up around that majestic structure, the misty winter light, and the grim frame of the gas-works in the background! Did Trevor mention when he shot those pictures? If that field was the Borehamwood backlot, I believe that's now the site of a Tesco's supermarket.



Rod Munday
on **April 1, 2015 at 8:21 am** said:

Hi Joe,
Great article Btw. Trevor emailed me the photographs he has taken. All of the information he supplied was included in the FAQ <http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/faq/index4.html#slot51>. It shouldn't be that hard to work out which field is was. There cannot be that many art schools in Stevenage.

Best, Rod



portland182
on **April 2, 2015 at 5:15 am** said:

The MGM Borehamwood shut in 1970 causing the TV series UFO to relocate to Pinewood mid shoot. It is likely that this was when the storage was emptied too.

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