The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life is the primary project of the Space Song Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by artists and scientists to promote long-term thinking at the intersection of art, science, and design on Earth, and in outer space. The Tree of Life project began with the premise that we must transcend current frames of technological obsolescence in order to build spacecraft that can possibly complete a mission to an interstellar destination, such as Proxima B. Meanwhile, we need to think past obsolescence to design sustainable technology here on Earth, too, and to communicate with spaceborne technology over decades or centuries. The Tree of Life project presents the challenge of building both Earthbound and spaceborne technology that can operate for 200 years as a means of working towards a future interstellar mission, while expanding the notion of longevity in the public cultural sphere.

The Tree of Life is a public art & science project that includes a CubeSat deployed in low-Earth orbit for 200 years, during which time it will transmit data about its operational status to a series of terrestrial trees that have been augmented to act as living, Earthly antenna. At the site of the trees, simultaneously, a 200-year dataset describes the tree’s health and environmental conditions. The data points collected in space and on Earth are translated into audible sonic frequencies that can be transmitted via radio between the trees and CubeSat, so that effectively, the trees and the spacecraft can sing together in a 200-year duet. This “song” will be made available online for the public to study, sample, and remix, and the tree sites will be presented as public sonic artworks.

At the ISSC, Space Song Foundation President Julia Christensen and Board Chair Steve Matousek will present about the art, science, and design behind the Tree of Life project.