

# FIELD STATION

November 5, 2019 – October 17, 2020

CHARLES  
LINDSAY



MARIANNA KISTLER  
**BEACH**  
MUSEUM OF ART

**KANSAS STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

# ARTIST'S STATEMENT

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Charles Lindsay

Before becoming an artist, I worked as an exploration geologist in the Canadian arctic, which morphed into a career as a photojournalist. Geology suited me, with its long view of time, and time in the 'bush.' However, cameras quickly replaced rock hammers to become the tools granting access to even more diverse inquires, from years living with an animistic tribe in Indonesia to exploring remote parts of the Himalaya.

After a decade spent living for periods of time with remote traditional cultures (at which time I was based in the futuristic metropolis of Tokyo) my attention focused on the promise of the digital revolution. Mediums for expression became many, including sound, interactive sculpture, and CARBON: a camera-less process I invented. Suddenly the future became accessible.

CARBON led to a serendipitous meeting with the astronomer Dr. Jill Tarter, who is famously portrayed by Jodi Foster in the movie *Contact*. Visiting SETI's Allen Telescope Array with Jill led to my becoming the first artist in residence at the SETI Institute (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) in Silicon Valley where I worked with the information theorist Dr. Laurance Doyle, whose algorithms proved that humpback whale communications exhibit syntax — strongly inferring the humpbacks have language. Our collaboration resulted in an installation called *Code Humpback*.

SETI is not only a hunt for ET, it is also a search for proof that a technologically advanced civilization can survive into a 'mature' stage. Humanity's current level of development is considered to be early adolescent at best — and precarious. What might we become in a million years, if we survive?

I'm inspired to create artworks probing the concept of collapsing time, making possible simultaneous encounters with the deep past and the acute present — in the service of survival. Our species' challenge is ultimately to get smart quickly. It seems to me the challenge for artists working now is to provoke new ways of understanding, in both intellectual and emotional realms.

Eventually my far-flung interests coalesced in the *FIELD STATION*, an evolving architectural form based on the mineral exploration camps where I worked as a geologist, and on the laboratories at NASA Ames where I've made art. I've also engaged with archeological and biological field stations. My interests range from the front edge of empirical science to mysticism, from tribal knowledge and music — with its transcendental polyrhythms — to the severe challenges humanity faces right now, in this period of mass extinction and climate change. Earth seems poised to catapult us into fossilized remnants of what was and what might have been. This is the territory of philosophy, speculative fiction, fear, and wonder.

I explore ways to expand the seemingly polar tenets of science and mysticism, juxtaposing an emphasis on understanding the universe through empirical data and mathematical calculations, along with the knowledge gained through encounters with the inexplicable, the immeasurable, and the ineffable. For me the two philosophic poles offer sympathetic approaches capable of amplifying each other. In my artistic practice the things I make emerge in a highly intuitive manner, with rapid improvisation, free association, and a beginner's mind approach to seeing what rises from a dance with impulse, materials, light, and space. After the initial creative explosion, I attempt to parse what it is that has manifested, and why.

In developing installations, I imagine a framework, but meaning inevitably evolves as viewers expose themselves to the experimental space. The art making precedes the conceptual explanation. There are, of course, themes I return to explore and territories I prefer to mangle and merge. However, it is in observing and writing about the work, after the fact, that I truly discover what I am doing. Because I am an artist who prefers to work this way, it is perhaps not surprising that I have little tolerance for repetition. The raw learning itself is the goal and the reward.

A celebration of wonder, and of not knowing, is both a target and a running theme in my work. So is humor. Metamorphosed, folded in time, and regurgitated as nodes in some new mental map, perhaps we'll achieve a glimpse of a different space-time continuum through some tear in the fabric of time. *FIELD STATION 4* is designed as a place to detach from the outer world, to tune out, or in, to contemplate the nature of information, reality, the other, the future.

– **Charles Lindsay**

Charles Lindsay's latest book *Recipes for the Mind*, published by Terra Nova / MIT Press, is available through independent book stores and online.

## INSTALLING *FIELD STATION 4* AT THE MARIANNA KISTLER BEACH MUSEUM OF ART

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Top and bottom photos by Jui Mhatre

## NOTES FROM THE ARTIST ON KEY OBJECTS IN THE INSTALLATION:

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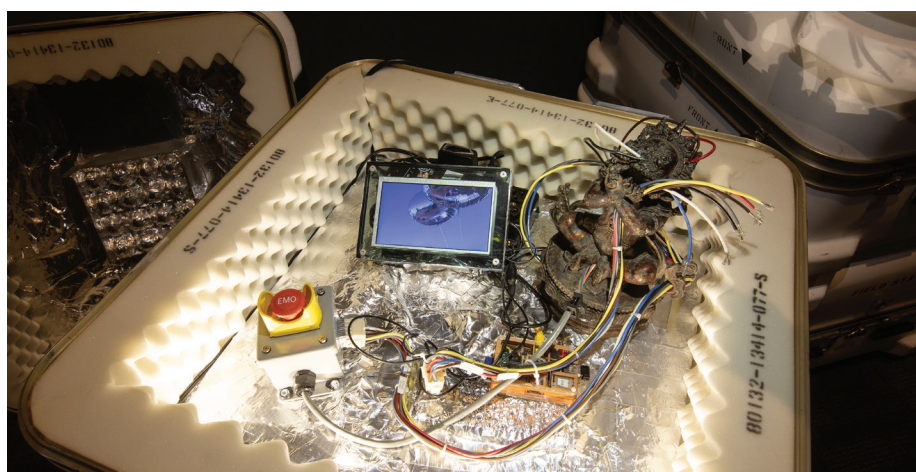
*FIELD STATION 4* includes the first pieces I've made employing actual Tibetan artifacts and an early computer modified with yakk horn "antennae."

The 'Crab Cage' (at bottom) contains horseshoe crabs — 450 million year-old "living fossils" — shrouded like satellites in gold leaf for long-term survival in the harsh conditions of outer space. Amid the crabs is a 15th century Vajrakilaya panel (below) attributed to the Drepung Monastery in Tibet. It is inserted experimentally as a sort of visual koan, a cross-epoch conflation-airy trigger. According to Wikipedia, Vajrakilaya is a wrathful type of "deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the buddhas and whose practice is famous for being the most powerful for removing obstacles, destroying the forces hostile to compassion..."



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Another device channels visions from a 19th century Mahakala bronze (below). Again, according to Wikipedia, in Tibetan culture “Mahakala represents the power to dissolve time and space into themselves to exist as Void at the dissolution of the universe. Typically black, the total absence of color signifies the nature of Mahakala as ultimate or absolute reality. This principle is known in Sanskrit as ‘nirguna,’ beyond all quality and form.”



The aluminum ‘EMO’ device (right and on back cover) assumes the rectangular format conventional for framed paintings, the most ubiquitous form in western art. The ‘art’ and its shipping crate are unified. Aerospace metal tape covers its topographic surface. Horseshoe crabs, a multitude of camera sensors, a ten-digit countdown clock, an emergency off button, and a ‘lava pillow’ all combine upon its surface.



The ‘Capsule’ (below) houses rare fluorescent minerals collected during an expedition I made to Greenland in 2012. The rocks were extracted from within the Ilimaussaq complex, a deposit formed 1.6 billion years ago when a volcanic intrusion rose through an ancient coral reef. Ice cap melt has increasingly exposed this deposit and uranium is found nearby, which adds a geopolitical aspect to the conversation. The capsule itself is a modified chromatography column from the biotech sector. Sensors monitor your movement. Custom circuits channel ancient Earth sounds from within.

**Want to know more about the objects in *FIELD STATION 4*?** Check out Smartify, a free smartphone app that helps museum visitors make meaningful connections with the art and artists represented in the galleries. Download Smartify FREE for Apple and Android devices from the Apple Store or Google Play Store. To use it in the gallery, open the app and point the camera at any of the four key objects in *FIELD STATION 4* described here. The app will instantly scan and recognize the artwork and load information onto your screen. Happy exploring!

More on Smartify at:  
[beach.k-state.edu/explore/apps](http://beach.k-state.edu/explore/apps)





'EMO' device (detail)

All photos by Charles Lindsay, unless otherwise noted.

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