

## Artist hopes to increase knowledge of outer space through galactic images

Vancouver man is mapping out the universe with high-quality photographs of star systems.



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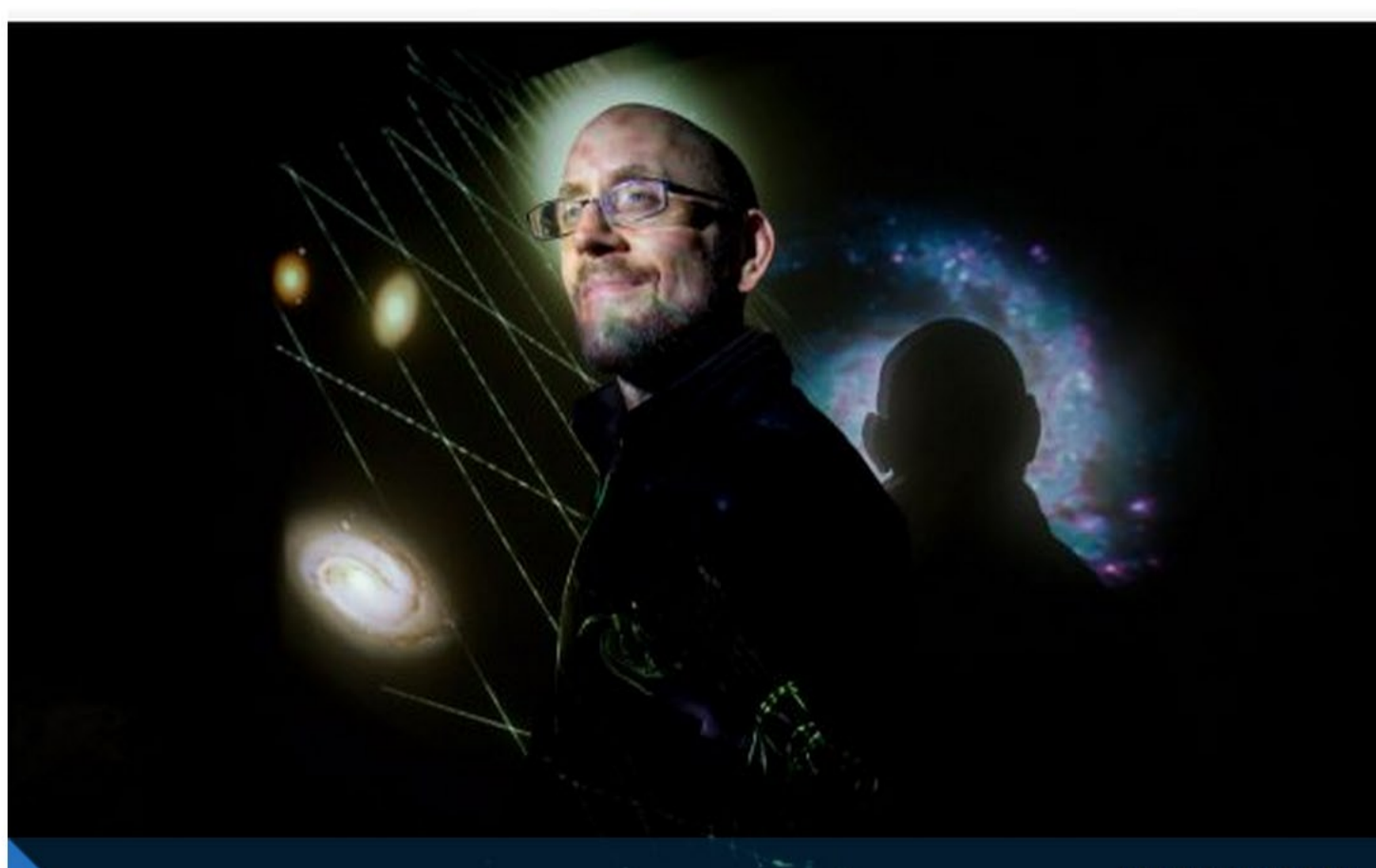


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Forty-one-year-old former computer programmer Matt Mazur has built a universe simulator that projects a three-dimensional rendering of the Earth's galactic neighbourhood in his quest to map our corner of the universe.

By: Tamsyn Burgmann The Canadian Press, Published on Mon Aug 25 2014

VANCOUVER—When a storm of magazines and major dailies published an astronaut's photograph of the Earth cresting above the moon in January 1969, the image spurred a new era of global consciousness.

We were a small, united society sharing one large playground.

Today, a 41-year-old Vancouver man with a laptop, a cache of space telescope images and 15-year passion for outer space is mapping our corner of the universe in a quest to do the same on a galactic scale.

Matt Mazur has built a universe simulator that projects a three-dimensional rendering of the Earth's galactic neighbourhood onto two massive white screens, giving any user the power to scroll far beyond our own solar system with a hand-controlled motion sensor device.

"It's hard to think about something until you can visualize it," said Mazur, noting that people living thousands of years ago believed the Earth was just a big, flat area because they lacked the tools to view a sphere suspended in space.

"I think global consciousness is a stepping stone in consciousness. The next logical step is a type of galactic consciousness.

"Some people might say, 'That's too science fiction.' But you've got to start at some point. Galactic consciousness still might take a while before it actually kicks in, but it's a process."

By day, the ex-computer programmer with degrees in computer science and interactive multimedia animates ads for YouTube. But by night, he scans cyberspace for high-quality photographs of star systems.

Mazur has already digitally stitched together and enhanced 64 galaxies and is cataloguing 50 more, as he charts the brightest galaxies in the region labelled the Virgo Supercluster. He hopes to eventually render 250 galaxies, amounting to 1/38-millionth of the observable universe.

The project is dubbed "Multiverse."

Mazur, who moonlights as a live visual artist under the moniker "VJ Elfmaster," has been touring it around the music and festival circuit in British Columbia, giving workshops and demonstrations.

"I think anything that gets people going, 'Oh wow' — that captures their imagination, that makes them look up at the stars, think about our place in the universe — is valuable," said Jennifer Kirkey, a physics and astronomy instructor at Douglas College in New Westminster, B.C.

The human species will benefit from reminders in our daily lives that we're all aboard the "Big Blue Marble," said Kirkey, who observed Mazur's simulator last month at the opening party for [MakerLabs](#), a Vancouver studio for technology-oriented artists.

"To me, it's definitely more than a toy."

The project is a labour of love, but Mazur envisions Multiverse as a teaching instrument combining the addictive pleasure of motion-controlled video games with the sparkle and magic of computer-generated artistry.

He's striving to make space education as accessible to youngsters as to university students, because he believes the future of humanity lies light-years beyond our planet.

"Either we're going to annihilate each other within the next 100 years, or, we figure something out ... and then space is going to have a very pivotal role," he said.

It's therefore critical people begin shifting their mindsets now towards accepting space as a viable reality, he said.

"And from a children-perspective, (I hope the project) inspires them, so that they might grow up and seriously want to become engineers so they can build spaceships — like, for real, build spaceships."

The United States government's cuts to its NASA space program is "a theft from the future of the world," Mazur said.

The Multiverse images were mainly obtained from [the NASA Hubble space telescope](#) and European Space Agency.

Mazur is motivated to provide the vicarious exploration of the universe by the hope that a critical mass of such projects will spur society to adopt space as a plausible future home amid a galactic community.

Naysayers may object to such far-flung ideas, he said, but in his head it's only logical that life and intelligence exist in the cosmos.

"It's time for us to grow up, and grow up past our adolescent years on the Earth," he said.

"(Let's) get with the program and realize that there's a lot out there that's far beyond what humans are cooking up on this planet. Maybe we should stop killing each other and get together and work on projects together.

"Because the world is far bigger and the universe is far bigger than what you see on television."