

## Into the Stars



This project begins with a simple question at the foundation of astronomy. What happens when we actually pay attention to the sky? Every major shift in human understanding comes from noticing something small that others overlooked. Galileo watched Jupiter's moons drift a tiny amount each night and realized the motion had meaning. Early observers created structure out of scattered stars building worldviews from movement of constellations. Kepler and the James Webb Space Telescope detect changes in starlight so small they barely register yet show planets, galaxies, and the larger architecture of the universe. Astronomy advances because curiosity and observation turning small details into meaning, showing one moment of attention can create a new way of seeing the cosmos.

The mural is built around that idea. It sits on the George Sherman Union where thousands of students walk by every day, without looking up from their phones or breaking their routine. It is meant to interrupt that familiar path and force attention. The piece does not rely on volume or drama, but uses scale, stillness and detail. A single astronaut floats above a cratered planet with deep space and a faint Milky Way behind them. At first the scene feels distant and calm. A quiet reminder of everything that exists beyond daily life and the constant motion of campus. Then the viewer notices the stars. They are not only decoration but form a QR code. The meaning becomes visible when someone takes the time to look, and the mural rewards the same attention that drives scientific discovery.

The astronaut is intentionally realistic. The NASA style suit shows exploration instead of fantasy, and the details on the suit are the structure of a modern EVA design. The posture is relaxed and observant, almost weightless. I wanted students to imagine themselves in that position, suspended between Earth and something larger and unknown. The red BU insignia makes that connection and brings the figure back into the campus environment even in the surrounding space. Galileo's discovery began with a small shift in his eyepiece. This mural creates a similar moment for anyone passing by, where a subtle detail changes the entire experience once it is recognized.

The world beneath the astronaut is ambiguous. It uses crater patterns, lighting angles and rough terrain inspired by lunar images, but it is not meant to be the Moon. This keeps the scene grounded in scientific reality while leaving room for imagination. Astronomers interpret incomplete data into full models by studying patterns in light and shadow, and the mural mirrors that process. The viewer fills in the missing information, creating a personal version of this world.

The QR code starfield is the central design choice. It functions as a real code but blends into the sky. Each star has a slight halo so it feels natural inside the cosmic background. Extra stars soften the edges so the pattern does not seem rigid. This reflects the way astronomers work, as they find structure inside what seems like noise. Kepler found planets through tiny dips in light curves, and JWST identifies chemical signatures that look almost invisible in infrared spectra. The mural recreates that experience on a visual level. What looks random becomes intentional when the viewer decides to pay closer attention.

Scanning the code brings the viewer past the mural. It opens a site that outlines BU's astronomy and space related paths. Students can explore courses in astrophysics, cosmology, planetary science, aerospace engineering and Earth sciences. They can see opportunities in labs and can also learn about internships with NASA, JPL, SpaceX, Blue Origin and other organizations shaping the future of space exploration. The structure reflects how scientific interest develops. A moment becomes a path to deeper understanding, and a simple piece of art can become a starting point for academic and professional exploration.

The mural is painted on aluminum panels for both practical and conceptual reasons. The panels satisfy installation requirements and stay within the project's budget. Their reflective quality also echoes the surfaces of spacecraft and satellites which are the tools that extend human attention into space. The material reinforces the message that discovery happens when observation and technology interact and when human curiosity meets engineered possibility.

The goal is to turn a familiar campus wall into a point of perspective. The mural links art and science through a shared process where attention leads to structure and structure leads to meaning. The moment of awe comes first, and the QR code turns that moment into action. The project argues that astronomy does not begin with a telescope or a lab. It begins when someone decides to look closely at what the universe is already showing.

*Chat GPT, "Image generation of astronaut in space with QR code." Open AI,  
December 2025*