

GARAGE SALES

Moon Rock Found at Garage Sale

NASA and President Richard Nixon handed out 379 slivers of moon rock, one to the state of Louisiana. A Florida gun collector looking for plaques to reuse found it last year at a garage sale.

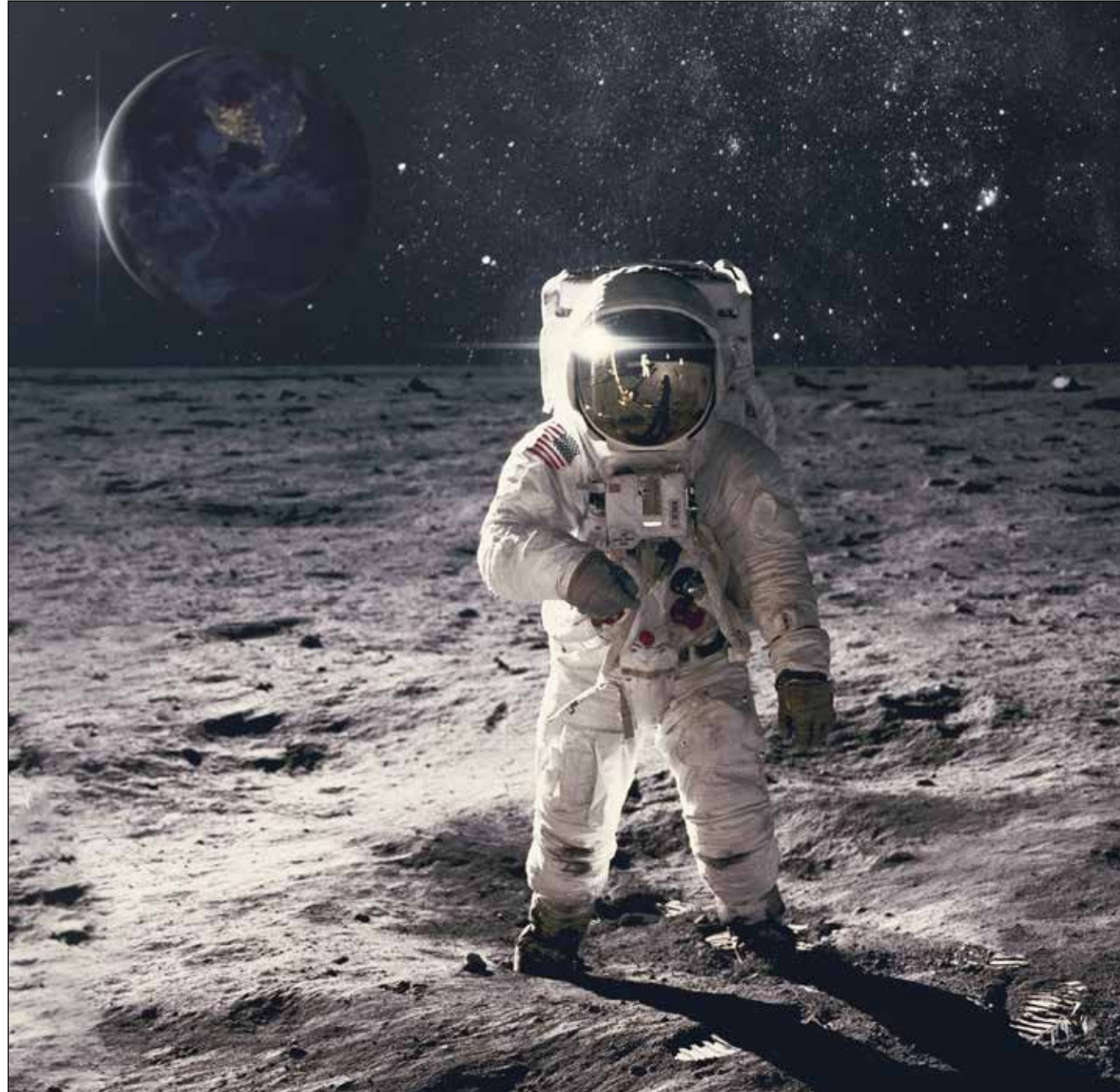
“What the hell is this?” the anonymous buyer said he remembered thinking at the time. “Before I start stripping things off, I generally take a moment to read them.” The plaque read: Presented to the people of the state of Louisiana by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

“Oh! They are looking for this puppy,” he told CollectSpace. “I can’t even tell you how long I owned it for. I’m not even sure how much I paid for it.”

The collector bought the plaque not for rock but for the wood, and he put it away for years before unearthing it. He uses them in repairing gun stocks.

“The wood is such nice wood,” he said. “That is what I buy them for.”

The collector donated the rock and the plaque back to



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the Louisiana State Museum, where it’s now with a second moon rock, collected during the 1969 Apollo 11 mission.

This newly found rock was collected by astronauts Eugene Cernan and Harrison

Schmitt, part of the Apollo 17 mission in 1972, who spent 22 hours on the lunar surface collecting more than 240 pounds of rocks and dust. NASA keeps most of it in a vault, but this fragment and several others

were handed out.

It bears a Louisiana flag that the plaque says was carried to the moon.

“This flag of your state was carried to the Moon aboard Spacecraft America during the

Apollo XVII mission, December 7-19, 1972,” the plaque says, adding that the rock comes from the Taurus Littrow Valley of the Moon. “It was part of a larger rock composed of many particles of different shapes and sizes, a symbol of the unity of human endeavor and mankind’s hope for a future of peace and harmony.”

CollectSpace says that 200 of the original 379 pieces are unaccounted for.

The man hand-delivered this rock back to the state of Louisiana himself, not trusting it to a mail or delivery service.

“He joked, ‘You know, there’s no way [he] was going to go to FedEx and just ship it to them because then it could get lost in the mail and be lost again for another 50 years,’” CollectSpace’s Robert Pearlman said. “It’s the literal definition of the loss of institutional knowledge.”

The state of Louisiana is just happy to get it back.

“It is an extraordinary piece of Louisiana history,” the museum’s acting director Steve Maklansky said.

“Obviously then, the Louisiana State Museum would be appropriate place for it to be held for posterity and it would also be offered for public display. We are excited to take ownership of this piece and share it with our audiences.”

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BUYER’S TIP

Look for Hidden Treasures

While you’re unlikely to find a moon rock at your next garage sale, you may find a hidden treasure if you look hard enough. Check the labels and tags on artwork, furniture and more to see if you’ve got a real gem.

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