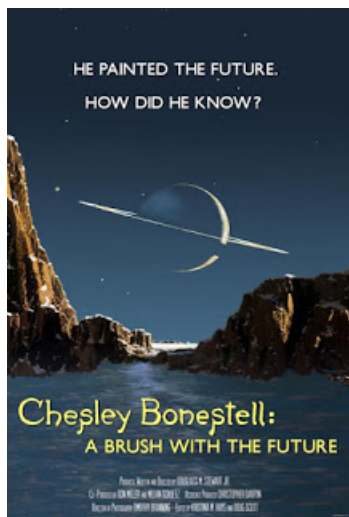


## LBIFF '18: Chesley Bonestell—A Brush with the Future



He was a figure who spanned eras, much like Jack Williamson, the science fiction writer whose family relocated to New Mexico in a covered wagon and is now remembered for coining the terms “terraforming” and “genetic engineering.” As a young architect, Chesley Bonestell (1888–1986) literally helped rebuild San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake, but his astronomical paintings directly inspired the astronauts and engineers of the Mercury and Apollo missions. The artist and his art finally get their due in Douglass M. Stewart Jr.’s *Chesley Bonestell: A Brush with the Future*, which screens during the [2018 Long Beach International Film Festival](#).

Even if you do not recognize any of Bonestell’s specific paintings, the look of his oeuvre will ring a bell. He contributed matte paintings and design work to classic science fiction films, like *Destination Moon* and *The War of the Worlds*, both produced by George Pal. Even though he did not work directly on Kubrick’s *2001*, special effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull readily credits Bonestell’s influence. Still, it was Bonestell’s work illustrating popular science magazine articles and books that really fired the imaginations of NASA’s future best and brightest.

Yet, there is even more to the story. Stewart and his interview subjects fully survey Bonestell’s work, notably including his posters and explanatory renderings that helped bolster public support for the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge (he helped shape the future in many ways). Irene Edwards, the editor-in-chief of *Sunset* also highlights some of the early illustrations the very young Bonestell drew for the western lifestyle magazine. Nevertheless, it is paintings like *Saturn as Seen from Titan* (incorporated in the one-sheet) and *Exploring Mars*

that truly define his career.

Bonestell's vision of space exploration was filled with awe and wonder, but he also instilled a sense that it was all just within our grasp. It was not just a possibility—we'd be fools not to realize our grand potential in space. Although his art will inspire nostalgic feelings for many admirers, it is not accurate to call them retro. In many cases, they are still futuristic and may very well remain so for years to come. It would probably break Bonestell's heart if he learned America is no longer a space-faring nation, but that is how things stand. As a country, we have lost our optimism and become much more risk-averse, which makes it nearly impossible to do things on the scale of the Moon Landing.

Arguably, that is why we really need a film like *Brush* right now. It is also high time Bonestell received his overdue ovation, as an artist and a figure of inspiration. There is no question his work stoked the enthusiasm for the space program and scientific education in general. Plus, his images are really cool. Shrewdly, Stewart incorporates a great many of them, as while as commentary from the like of Trumbull, Science Channel astronomer David Aguilar, *Star Wars* effects supervisor Richard Edlund, and rare archival footage of Ray Bradbury.



Stewart's approach is pretty straight forward, but Bonestell's art is so significant, there is no need for distracting bells and whistles. Frankly, we'd like to see this film get picked up by *American Masters*, because it persuasively makes the case that he was one. Enthusiastically recommended, *Chesley Bonestell: A Brush with the Future* screens this Saturday (8/4), as part of this year's Long Beach International Film Festival.

