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Visual Culture
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Project description

The Truths are out there

We have shifted to a multi-truth era, where we individually hunt for clarity and comprehension of what is happening around us. This personal and subjective quest intrigues me. I have taken the UFO as one of the archetypal truth-finding narratives that have lived for many years, surviving many decades of veracity. For me, UFOs serve as a metaphor for this existential and epistemological journey for truth.

By carefully selecting fragments from various stories around UFOs I illustrate and mimic truth-finding. My work presents truth as an assemblage of fractions of information and its interpretation. Therefore, I want the spectator to question the nature of truth, limits of knowing and speculate on how truth ultimately manifests in our reality.

Project Monoceros:

I named my project monoceros, which is Greek for unicorn. This mythical being has been depicted in Western art and literature since the antiquity, but a similar creature can be distinguished in various mythologies worldwide. Unicorns symbolize extraordinary encounters, fantasy, and imagination – much like unidentified flying objects. However, I don't make this connection in a derogatory way, quite the opposite. In my opinion, observing and documenting UFOs is about creating beautiful contemporary folklore.





My aim was to study the visual carrier of UFO: an elliptical, blurry shape. When does a blurry shape become a UFO? Or is the blurriness in itself an assigned trait of a UFO?

I believe that blurriness gives room for speculation, and a chance for imagination run wild. The ambiguous the form, the more it raises questions.

Some acknowledge a blurry light source as something intelligently designed, assuming that the blurriness hides the true form of the object, a magnificent state-of-the-art technological advancement.

And when something is designed, it raises questions: is it constructed by intergalactic beings or a rival country?

Here, Google Earth (Studio) becomes an extended limb to explore foreign and remote places where UFOs are believed to have visited. Also, this software became a time-machine to the near past, since Google Earth's satellite imagery is not live-feed.

Some locations are rendered in hi-definition, whereas some areas are blurred out. This creates a division of spaces: public, private and secret. Blurriness and glitches occurred when I was searching for UFOs in Antarctica and other locations. These traits only add to the mysticism around this phenomena.

For me, manipulating Antarctica (an unknown territory) through design software became a playground of truth. That's why it occurs in my videos. In other words, Google Earth turned into a tool for truth-finding.



Video sketches



The Truths are out there

00:13:46

SOFIA

How or why did you assume that this light phenomena would be an alien? Or a saucer occupied by an alien?

GINGER

I mean, of course it's probably swamp gas of something. But, I think when we see these pictures, or the really ornate [drawing of a UFO] one, you know, of course there's aliens in that. That's not swamp gas. The person who has dreamt that up or seen it - I allow both for the purpose of this conversation - but the person who has drawn that is of course imagining some wonderful advanced alien civilisation.

KIM

You could say that the UFO in this elliptical form is a carrier, a container that contains something, which is then the alien. It's like the chicken and egg -thing. Was first the alien then the-

MARISKA

-talk about UFOs, we only talk about the object, that's the unidentified object. That's the alien, not necessarily referring to whoever is inside.

GINGER

Yeah. Except when we start to get into the conversation of "I was abducted by aliens and they probed me."

(laughter)

(inaudible conversation)

I said nothing where the probe went. No, I mean, generally these things come in pairs, *right?*



Photos by Nami Kim

GINGER

I think, if I may, the moment we started talking about UFOs as design objects, we started admitting that there are aliens in it. You know, as soon as we started talking about aerodynamics and futuristic—, we stopped thinking of it as space junk, and started thinking about it as a vehicle.

SOFIA

And the vehicle needs someone to steer it.

GINGER

Or someone to design it.

DERK

I don't agree on that.

GINGER

Someone needs to design the vehicle.

DERK

Yeah maybe that's right, but...

GINGER

Or maybe it's self-driving.

00:55:27

MAYA

We can also turn this around. Look at the photo galleries of our smart-phones, and we all have like 20 UFOs captured altogether—

ESTHER

I actually tried to make a fake picture of a UFO for you [Sofia].

(laughter)

KIM

And? Can you show it?

ESTHER

Yeah, but now you know it's

(laughter)

ESTHER

So I was in a car, and there it is.

SOFIA

Can you send it to me?

DERK

It's an interesting picture if you would add a red circle.

(people agreeing)

SOFIA

Like a conspiracy visual.

KIM

It's interesting you got her to do that.

ESTHER

I wanted to trick you.

(laughter)

SOFIA

Thanks?

earcher the

Photo by Esther van Asselt

GINGER

I'm still hung up on the differences between a UFO and UAP ...because, if you think about it, the difference between an unexplained aerial phenomena and explained aerial phenomena, is just that we know what it is, and we go like *I know what that is.*

SOFIA

Yeah, so basically UFOs become identified although we identify them as unidentified. There's this paradox.

GINGER

As you said, 95% of them can be explained and then it becomes identified, because we know what it is. Like the Northern Lights. Whereas, for example, 400 years ago people looked into the sky and said *what the hell is that!*

SOFIA

Like it's a god or something. I think a lot of gods were created to explain the unexplainable weather phenomena. And I guess the same thing is happening with UFOs; UFO is an explanation of something we cannot yet comprehend.

GINGER

I said something earlier about now we know the truth about things, and I can't get over the belief that we know the truth now because we have spent the entire human history thinking that we know what the truth is and go like *Whoops, tomatoes don't kill you, but the lead plates we were serving them on.*

SOFIA

Yes, this is something conspiracy theorists try to address: what is the truth? They believe that there is The Truth out there, but it's not something that we know, it's something that *they* know... so it becomes this question of who knows, and how do we know that we know, and how can we know that they know...

GINGER

...and they claim that privilege.

01:00:02

GINGER

Is there a right side for [when it comes to dealing with] UFOs?

SOFIA

I think the right side is to perceive UFOs as something that can be explained 100%. If you say *I have encountered a UFO and saw someone steering the wheel*, people think you are crazy. So, UFO-believers are seen as irrational. In other words, being on the right side is about being rational. And by that, I mean, being rational is about finding a scientific explanation.

So, we were talking about Truth and Truth-finding, and how conspiracy theorists question the ways of knowing. I'm asking philosophical questions, but is there A Truth or The Truth? Or is it that we all have our own truths, and doesn't make sense to debate what the Truth is...

SUSANNE

How would you like it to be?

SOFIA

I would like that there to be One Truth, something that we could we can all agree on. But I think that's not the case. I don't believe that there is one truth, I would like it to be like this way but and that's why we discuss and debate.

KIM

What is your Truth?

SOFIA

My truth is that there is no Truth, and we just have to live with that and accept that. I guess living with multiple truths makes life more interesting...

KIM

Would you like to have it? You bring up the big questions, that's why it's hard to answer. So that's your Truth that there is no Truth.

MAYA

Well that sounds like mind control. Like, you control to get everybody on board.

GINGER

Providing that we all have the same perception. We can both smell the same thing and I can find it disgusting and you can find it delicious, even with mind control because we have different sensory perceptions.

BIEN

There are a lot of things we agree on which are accepted Truths. There are loads of things that we take in truths, for example timetables. Depends on how you define Truth and how to find it. Until the next decision comes along and throws everything in the bin. And then we start again, but we don't start from scratch. We build up from previous knowledge we have.

KIM

What is the motivation behind wanting to want Truth?

SOFIA

Good question. I think that could be one way of living in peace with each other.

However, we wouldn't be having this conversation if we would accept the same Truths. So, I see that there is both sides to the story of truth-finding, or rather, *truth-knowing*. It's not mind control, it's about living in mutual understanding with each other.

BIEN

It's recognisable throughout our history, —to tie up everyone together and not to go to war, so—

01:08:12

GINGER

I love the example of bus stop as truth. The vast majority doesn't look bus timetables as politics. It's a social construction. I can make decisions based on this small truth. It's a very practical truth and it's handy if we agree on it, like when the bus will turn up.

BIEN

I think recently they removed the kilo ball in France.

BIEN

It's an example of accepted Truth.

GINGER

Hold the phone! It's been replaced by another construction.

BIEN

They figured out the the ball lost weight-

GINGER

Wow wow wow wow. No. Sorry, this is one of my favourite areas.

(laughter)



GINGER

the IPK - the International Prototype of the Kilogram - which used to be, indeed, up until last month, the last of the physical standards in the metric system, because the metric system used to be about equal standards around the time of French revolution when it was originally created (inaudible) the kilo was the last one standing. This one kilogram resided in the suburbs of Paris, it was what all of the kilograms in the world were weight against, and formed the basis of the kilogram. The jury is out if the IPK has been systematically been losing weight, or, weather all the other kilograms have been gaining weight.

BIEN

It's still about what we accept-

GINGER

... as reasonable amount of Truth.

BIEN

... and now we have doubts about that as well, and we still take that [definition of kilogram] for granted.

WHAT? WHERE?

HOW TO CATCH A UFO
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
@
RESEARCH STATION, WDKA
TUE JUNE 4, 17:00-19:00

WHAT EXACTLY?

In June, I organized a public moment in cooperation with Willem de Kooning Academy's Research Station to discuss the UFO phenomena in the context of visual culture. The aim of this event was to investigate unidentified flying objects as a domain of visuality.

According to my external partner, Ufologist Mark Owen, the UFO-community lacks a proper platform to talk about this phenomena without prejudice and judgment. This piece of information inspired me to organize the event in the first place. However, the aim was not to state whether or not UFOs are occupied by intergalactic beings.

The title of the event refers to the CIA's guidelines for photographers of how to take pictures of UFOs. It reflects back to the topic of the evening: governance over image, and authority over visuality.

With a small group of students and teachers, accompanied by special guests, we discussed the aforementioned topics.

The event started with a short drawing exercise. I asked participants to visualize a UFO encounter that was based on Ufologist Mark Owen's experiences. The drawings served as a starting point for the discussion of UFOs as design objects, and speculation over alien existence. Despite my attempts to steer the discussion into a certain direction, it started to evolve organically. Together we contemplated on different forms of truth and its functions and nature. In addition, conspiracism and questions of reality were addressed.

SPECIAL GUESTS

GINGER COONS
DERK RENEMAN
AUBANE BERTHOMME
KIM DE GROOT

MY CONCLUSION

This event was documented in photographs, drawings and in audio form, which was transcribed. Unexpectedly, the transcription developed into a crucial part of my research document.

For me, the event itself turned into a tool for truth-finding and knowledge-creation. I gathered people around the same table, and witnessed the discussion form organically. This was the intention all along, however, I didn't realise how big of a part this would play in the end. I managed to gather interesting remarks during the event.

The purpose of sharing the transcription is to show what was exactly stated and by whom. However, some statements are left out deliberately, and some are added subsequently, for the purpose of advancing my own agenda. So, remarks and comments here are not twisted and turned completely, but rather carefully curated.

For me, the practice of editing and organising information forms the basis of my design profession. With this said, I'd describe my design practice to that of a perception manager: influencing one's emotions by presenting selected information, thus altering behaviour in favour of manager's desires.

I'd like to thank the guests, teachers, staff and fellow classmates who took time to participate. Thank you Nami for documenting this event.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to say a few words for everyone who were involved in this project.

Thank you Mark Owen for sharing your personal experiences, stories, insights and photographs: they proved more valuable than you might think.

Thank you Kim for asking the though questions.

Thank you Mariska for helping me with writing and assembling my research document.

Thank you Fusun for providing me streams of references about various discourses and projects in the realm of visual culture.

Thank you Marleen for sharing your experiences regarding graduation. Also, your feedback proved extremely worthwhile.

Thank you Mark for helping me organise How to Catch a UFO at the Research Station.

A big thanks to Aubane, Derk and ginger for being there for the roundtable discussion, and fearlessly sharing your thoughts about truth, reality and aliens. And thank you for other students and teachers who took time to participate. I'm truly grateful.

Thank you Saskia & Hanneke for giving me additional feedback (and free lunch).

Thank you Dr. Coen Vermeeren for taking your time to answer my questions about the current state of UFO discourse.

Thank you Sami for providing me a free copy of the documentary Hyperstition.

Last but not least, thank you for all my fellow classmates for sending me pictures and memes. I'm forever grateful for your support, references, thoughts and ideas. You guys rock.



Brilliant!