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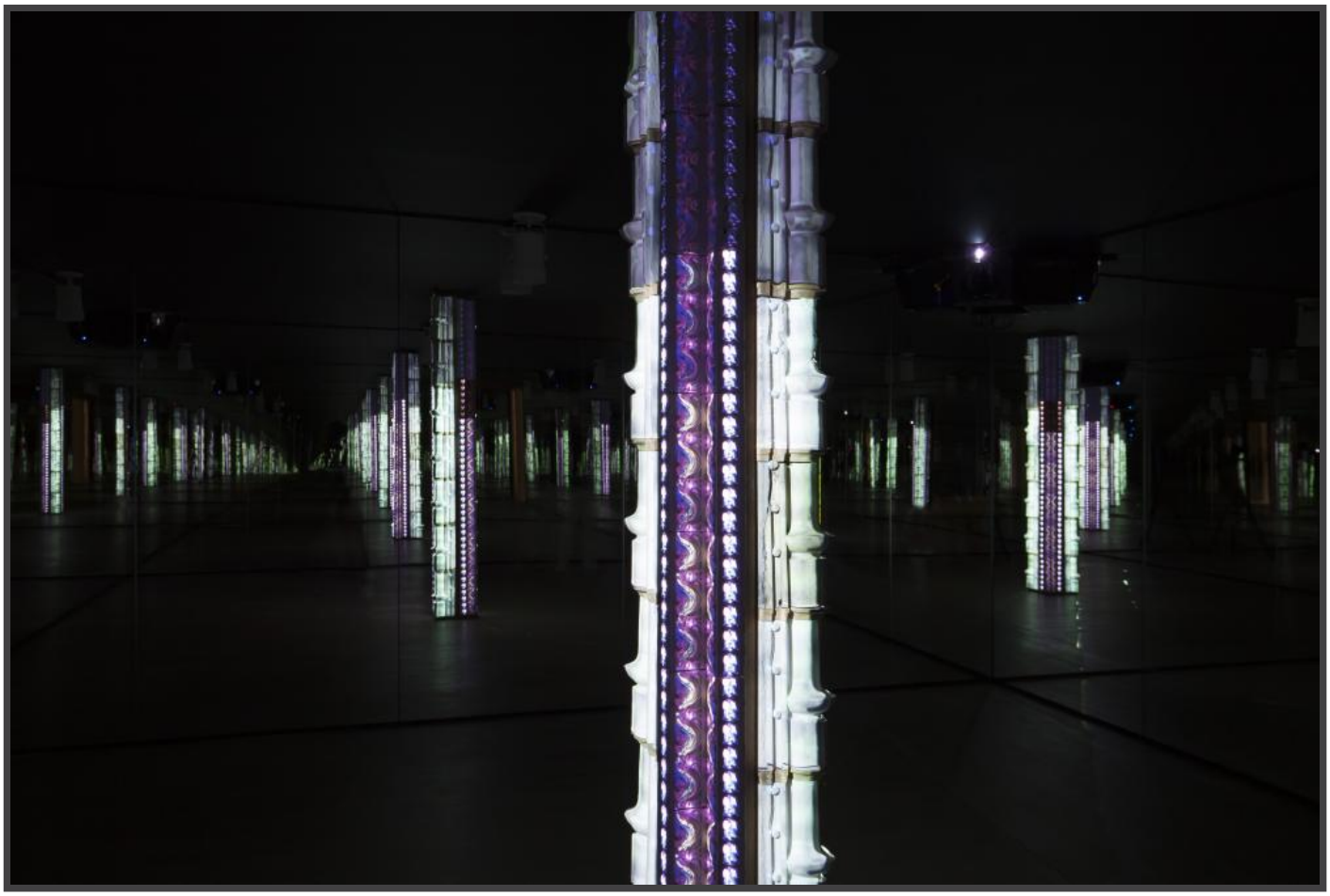
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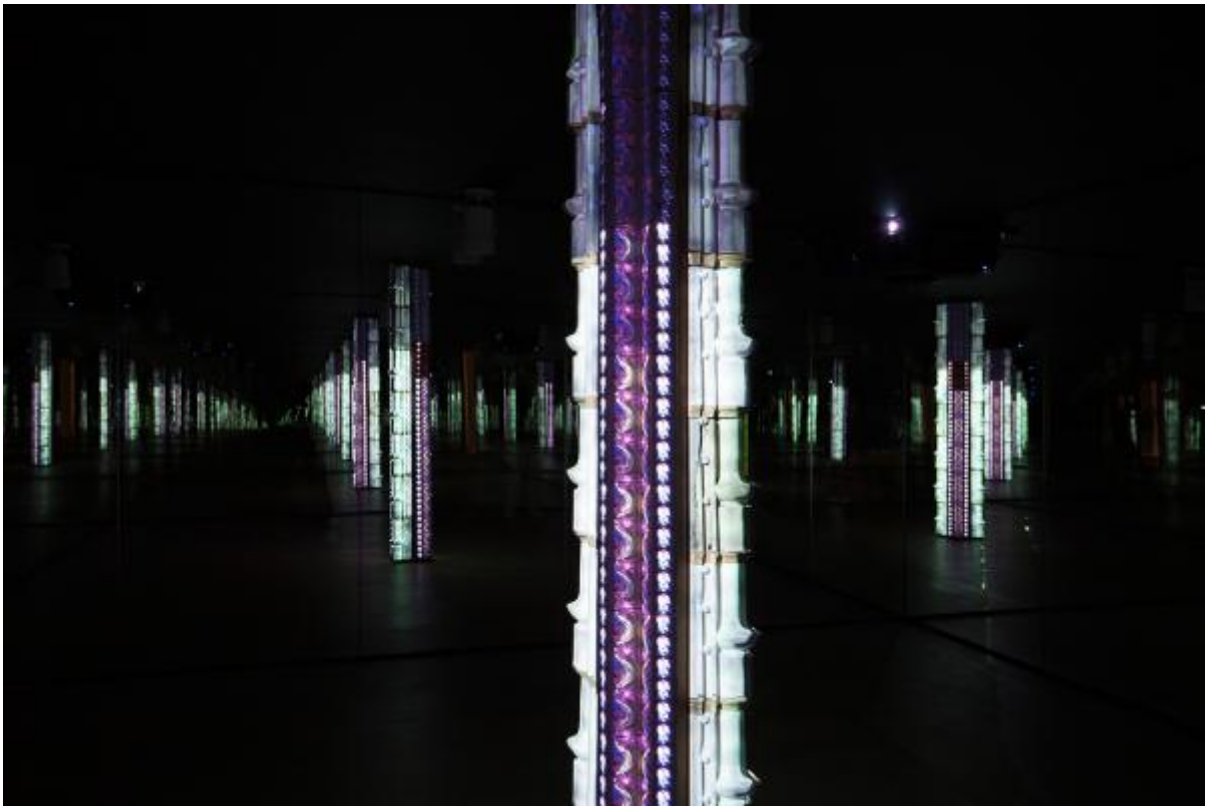
Myths of the Marble

A group exhibition at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Oslo and the Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia

Daniel Horn

Conceiving a thematic exhibition around a pioneering — or disastrous — moment in history has long become an accepted staple for exhibition makers seeking a reliable conceptual framework to lean on. Reconsidering this approach, the multi-faceted group show *Myths of the Marble* instead looks mostly to present fact and fiction.





Cayetano Ferrer, *Endless Columns (Chicago School)*, 2017, salvaged architectural elements, mirrors, quadrophonic sound and light projection, 8 x 18 x 18 feet, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Oslo. Photograph by Øystein Thorvaldsen / HOK

Myths of the Marble takes its cue from the crisp space photography depicting the so-called ‹Blue Marble›, i.e. Planet Earth, taken in 1972 by the crew of the Apollo 17 mission. The curators Milena Høgsberg and Alex Klein, however, essentially left it at the titular reference, instead focusing on locating and actively commissioning new works to transmit their research, not least to the benefit of the mostly emerging artists involved. In doing so, their project chose a markedly different route that departed from the convention of (art-)historical retrospection (in comparison to, for example, Anselm Franke’s and Diedrich Diederichsen’s research-heavy accumulative exhibition looking back to 1968 and its aftermath: T*he Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside* staged at Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt in 2013).

Not that the Blue Marble and the year 1972 as a whole wouldn’t have presented a historical marker to fully mine and extrapolate from, containing as it does an eclectic array of major and minor histories, starting with the fact that the Blue Marble image would become the final trophy attesting to the history of manned Moon landings to this day. In fact, no other than Harrison ‹Jack› Schmitt himself, a former U.S. senator and one of the mission’s three crew members who, at this point, is credited with having taken the iconic photograph, remains a vocal climate-change denier, stating as recently as 2016 in the Wall Street Journal: «a myth persists that is both unscientific and immoral to perpetuate: that the beneficial gas carbon dioxide ranks among hazardous pollutants. It does not.»[1] [/b-n-l/myths-of-the-marble/pdf#Endnote1]

Elsewhere, the 1972-born NBA legend Shaquille O’Neal recently made mystifying headlines for lending his support to the trending Flat-Earth theory, sowing doubt about satellite imagery — and, by extension, the very imaging systems responsible for generating said Blue Marble — as mere manipulative fakery, a claim he later explicated to have been a joke all along: «This world we live in, people take things too seriously …. Knowing that I’m a funny guy, if

something seems controversial or boom, boom, boom, you've got to have my funny points on, right? So now, once you have my funny points on, that should eradicate and get rid of all your negative thoughts, right?»[2] [/b-n-l/myths-of-the-marble/pdf#Endnote2]

In light of the recent «boom, boom, boom» yet already passé-feeling fake news-alternative facts mediascape surrounding and obscuring the U.S.'s drastic roll-back of progressive science-backed policies, the exhibition might as well have been titled *The Curse of the Marble.* Indeed, the curators' aim seemed to be a wide-ranging problematizing of the notion of the ‹virtual› as embodied by the awesome, pristine, and really too slick image of the globe, by untethering it from its techno-scientific as well as communalist-entrepreneurial epistemes and promises. Instead, some of the selected works on view addressed the subject through idiosyncratic and personal imaginations of the social, ecological, economic and racial foundations and motives informing the manipulated image worlds presently circulating.

An exception to this, perhaps, was the earliest work in the show, Daria Martin's sensuous 16mm film projection *Soft Materials* [3] [/b-n-l/myths-of-the-marble/pdf#Endnote3] from 2004 that captures a male-female duo of nude dancers interacting with robotic and motorized devices and contraptions. Conceived and shot at the Artificial Intelligence Lab of Zürich's Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), the film is tinged with the bohemian techno avant-gardism promoted by the 1960s Downtown collective Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), the Neo-Dada group in turn indebted to Russian avant-garde dance theatre and the interdisciplinarity of the Bauhaus. The video *Factor Green* (2011) by Sharyar Nashat shows another choreographed scenario for a dancer and his inorganic opposite, here partnered inside a museum and coming in the shape of a chroma-key green cuboid specimen [4] [/b-n-l/myths-of-the-marble/pdf#Endnote4]. Yet the onus on this staged dynamic here seemed to be on humorously accentuating the institutional and canonical underpinnings of this plinth-like thing which in the course of the video appeared to attain paranormal agency colonizing the museum's holdings.

Other such analogies, if foremost formal ones, continued through this very neatly installed show which for large parts unfolded as a succession of self-contained galleries occupied by the individual projects. While the exhibition design heightened the exploratory thrill for the viewer, it also made connections that existed between the works less fluid to parse. Nevertheless, patent sculptural affinities between the ‹feminine› *natureculture*s-inspired works by Ane Graf and Rachel de Joode quickly transpired; Unlike the rather unexpected parallels between Chris Marker's virtual-reality hermeticism envisioned in his late work Ouvroir. *The Movie* (2010) [5] [/b-n-l/myths-of-the-marble/pdf#Endnote5] — which is narrated and guided by his alter ego Guillaume-en-Égypte, a Garfieldesque cat — and the no-less peculiar screenscape of Jacolby Satterwhite's transhuman personal cosmos *En Plain Air: Music of Objective Romance* (2016–).

Myths of the Marble presented topical critiques of virtuality — here understood as a means rather than an end — most urgently in works that confronted and probed imaging techniques vis-à-vis the sites of ecological and commercial contamination they're embedded in. In *IT'S IN THE GAME '17 or Mirror Gag for Vitrine and Projection* (2017), Houston-based artist Sondra Perry audio-visually deconstructed a college basketball computer game developed and sold by EA Sports, the work's title already re-appropriating the company's slogan. As if in a cyber police line-up, Perry's brother identifies and names the game's individual yet anonymized and uncompensated players including himself, a virtual team of predominantly black college athletes whose 3-D vigor masks the identity theft they unwittingly are subject to.

Beautifully installed in a gallery overlooking the fjord, Susanne Winterling's multi-component video installation *Glistening Troubles* (2017) juxtaposed scintillating computer-animated images of a species of luminescent algae exclusive to parts of Jamaica with the comments of Gerry, a local Rastafarian expert on the topic. Through his account one learned of pollution posing a threat to this otherworldly organism and of the presence of outside Western research teams gradually erasing any ‹spookiness› of the algae as alleged by local myth, introducing if not the virtual as such than at least anthropocenic vision as a mixed colonial legacy and predicament to grapple with.



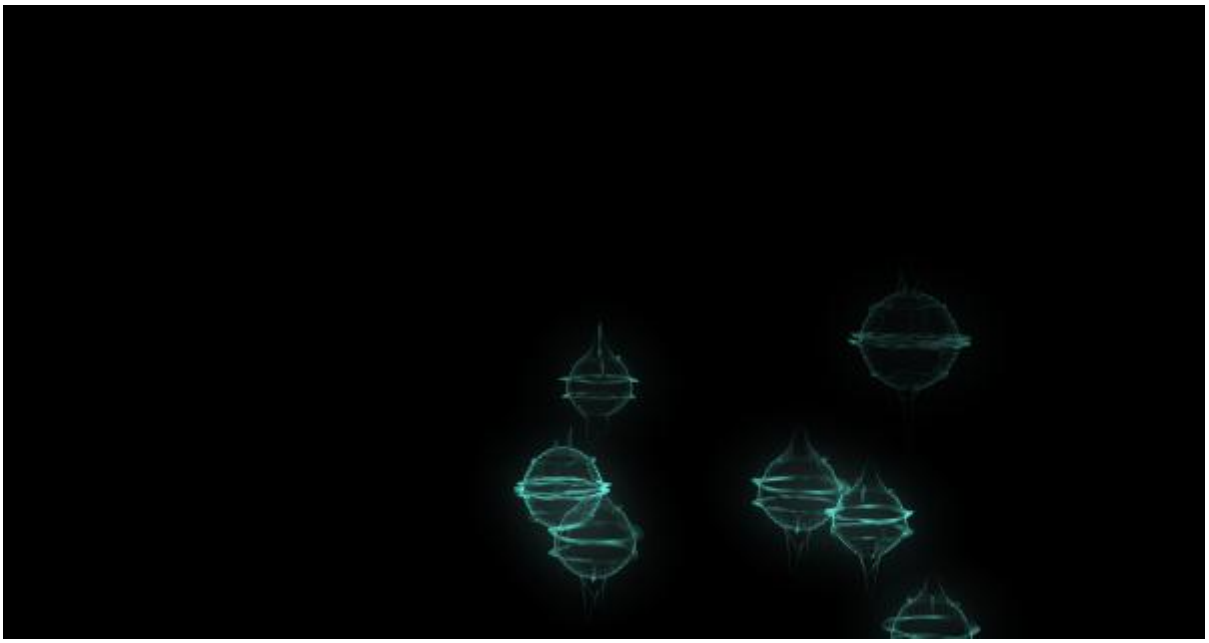
Myths of the Marble, (exhibtion view with works by Sharyar Nashat), Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Oslo. Photograph by Øystein Thorvaldsen / HOK



Sondra Perry, *IT'S IN THE GAME '17 or Mirror Gag for Vitrine and Projection*, 2017, mixed media installation, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Oslo. Photograph by Øystein Thorvaldsen / HOK



Susanne Winterling, *Glistening Troubles*, 2017, installation mixed media and CGI, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Oslo. Photograph by Øystein Thorvaldsen / HOK



Susanne Winterling, *Glistening Troubles*, 2017, installation mixed media and CGI (screen shot), Henie Onstad Kunstsenter Oslo. Photograph by Øystein Thorvaldsen / HOK

A catalog with essays by Tom Holert and Homay King accompanying *Myths of the Marble* is forthcoming in June this year, published by Sternberg Press. Myths of the Marble ran at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo from February 3rd – April 2nd 2017. A modified version of the exhibition opens at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia on April 28th, on view until August 6th 2017.

[1] https://archive.is/s1SbB
[2] http://sports.yahoo.com/news/shaquille-oneal-isnt-a-flat-earther-after-all-im-joking-you-idiots-183258371.html
[3] https://vimeo.com/186444865
[4] http://www.ubu.com/film/nashat_factor.html
[5] https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker/ouvroir-the-movie-by-chris-marker/

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