

Culture, Society, Technology and Unpredictable Realities

MAYDAY

Issue Two

by trouble

MARGRETHE VESTAGER

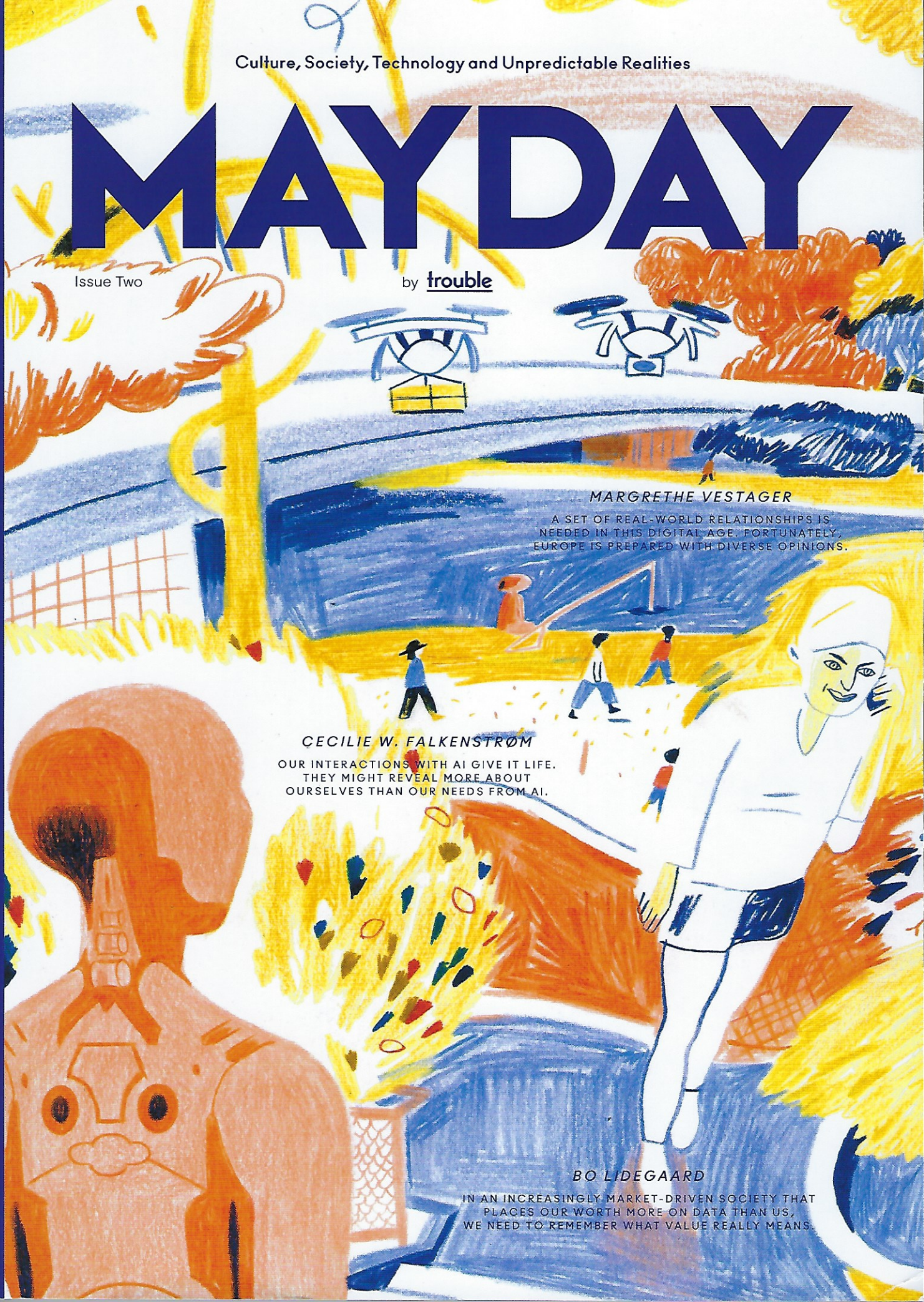
A SET OF REAL-WORLD RELATIONSHIPS IS NEEDED IN THIS DIGITAL AGE. FORTUNATELY, EUROPE IS PREPARED WITH DIVERSE OPINIONS.

CECILIE W. FALKENSTRØM

OUR INTERACTIONS WITH AI GIVE IT LIFE. THEY MIGHT REVEAL MORE ABOUT OURSELVES THAN OUR NEEDS FROM AI.

BO LIDEGAARD

IN AN INCREASINGLY MARKET-DRIVEN SOCIETY THAT PLACES OUR WORTH MORE ON DATA THAN US, WE NEED TO REMEMBER WHAT VALUE REALLY MEANS.





**BLUE
MARBLE**
IN ART AND
SPACE

WRITER
MARIE SÆHL

Contemporary artists are turning their attention to outer space in attempts to reflect on ourselves and our relationship to our planet in a time marked by an ecological crisis. We talked to Marie Laurberg, the curator of Louisiana Museum of Modern Art about four artists who are particularly preoccupied with the outer space. Some works are about the journey, others about the unknown and some on the journey home after having travelled beyond Earth's orbit. The common denominator is that they all raise deep questions about both human existence and the unknown out there.

IN RECENT TIMES, we have become more aware that planet Earth might eventually undergo such extensive destruction that it will become uninhabitable for humans. While some desperately attempt to curb the destruction of Earth, others view it as a matter of fact that the damage humans have done to Earth is so irreparable that we have to look to the stars for new places to live.

A new space age has begun, leading both major nations and private players, such as Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, and Jeff Bezos, founder of Blue Origin, to boost their space activities. The possibilities of colonising Mars are currently being explored, while others seek to find cleaner energy sources on the moon or on asteroids, in the hopes of solving our climate issues. And yet others see outer space as an opportunity to increase wealth. One of such examples is the mining company Planetary Resources, which considers space an inexhaustible source of economic growth.

The Curator

[Marie Laurberg] is exhibition curator and head of research at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Over the past few years, she has worked on some of the most prestigious exhibitions in Denmark and Scandinavia including those of Yayoi Kusama, Richard Mosse and Olafur Eliasson. Right now she is working on *The Moon* — a big upcoming exhibition focusing on a number of contemporary artists who are currently using the moon and outer space as motifs in their works. The exhibition is set to launch in September 2018.

← Katie Paterson

Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight,
(2008)

289 light bulbs, 28W, 4500K
Installation view Matthew Bown Gallery,
Berlin, 2010

"Accordingly, there is this idea that you can export the capitalist market economy to outer space and that there is no ceiling in terms of the wealth that mankind can generate there. But all the opportunities presented by outer space also have an ecological undertone, given that the way we talk about the technological and ecological development expanding to outer space, mirrors the approach that caused all the problems on Earth," says Marie Laurberg.

The renewed focus on outer space is reflected in contemporary art, with many artists exploring the human aspect in relation to the planetary aspects.

"There are two major movements that have prompted artists to take an interest in planets and outer space. One is the technology-based cultural acceleration. The other comes from the need to reflect on us humans inhabiting a planet. The ecological crisis that makes our planet seem more vulnerable. Viewing Earth from outside has been important to the ecologist movement since the first shots of Earth were taken by NASA from outer space — the photos of what we call the blue marble — which offered a different understanding of Earth. The picture of Earth suspended in the void and the understanding of the Earth being round. There are no other places to go."

In art, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that we live on a planet. In other words, a reflection on the frailty of our planet and an existential exploration that is motivated equally by ecological and political concerns as well as by technological progress.

Such an exploration must deal with the concept of *deep time*, also known as geologic time. Geologic time consists of long stretches that span thousands, millions, and billions of years, which can be difficult to grasp for a human whose life span is limited to years, months and weeks. By exploring this existential difference, artists help put our relatively brief existence on Earth into perspective.


HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto has created the photo series *Revolution*, which consists of photographs of the horizontal lines of the sea from various places around the globe. Through the use of a slow shutter speed, the moon's trajectory across the sky becomes a streak of light. Relating the experience in his own words, he says that in many places, he saw the horizon not as a straight line, but as a sectional view of an arc. The photos are tilted in an upright position in order to offer a view of the horizon, as one would see it from space where the horizon line is not necessarily horizontal.

“He has a very contemplative view of nature, which serves to illustrate that the human relation to nature is something you can connect with, while also attuning the mind in a certain respect. It gives way to a new perspective on Earth and is a call-back to the traditional romantic view of the landscape, where the artist searches for the soul of the world,” says Marie Laurberg.

Sugimoto describes how he underwent an out-of-body experience and suddenly saw himself from the outside as he was gazing upon the horizon in Newfoundland. His experience blew him away: **“I was far above the Earth’s surface gazing at the moon adrift over the sea, while another me — a tiny speck — remained spellbound on the ground.”**

The artist and architect [Hiroshi Sugimoto] (1948) treads along the line between fiction and reality. His photographs depict renaissance styled portraits of waxwork figures and rectangular slabs of white light formed by long exposures of cinema halls, making the world eerie and surreal, but worthy of contemplation. What remains real is how time grinds down every ego, leaving them as a blip in the history of existence.



Revolution 008 Caribbean Sea,
Yukatan (1990)

Photograph, Gelatin-silver print
119,5 cm x 239 cm

© Heroshi Sugimoto. Courtesy Fraenkel
Gallery, San Francisco

KATIE PATERSON

Scottish artist Katie Peterson explores the concept of deep time in her work *Earth-Moon-Earth*. The piece transforms Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* into Morse code, after which the signal is transmitted to the moon and back to Earth. To achieve this, she uses a technique called moon bounce, which is used to send radio signals to the moon where the signals are reflected off of the moon's surface and are cast back to Earth. This form of communication entails some degree of dropout, and in this case, some of the sounds of Beethoven's famous masterpiece will be lost and thereby assume a new, yet still recognisable form.

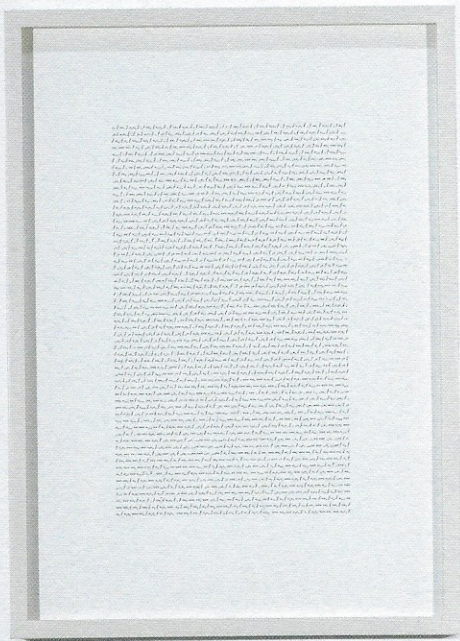
"The work itself is a score that will be full of holes as a result of having been sent to the moon and then played once the signal returns," says Marie Laurberg.

Another work is in collaboration with lighting manufacturer Osram, where Katie Peterson has created a light bulb, which shares the same light frequency and sound quality as moonlight. The work consists solely of the bulb, which will be hanging alone in a room.

"Moonlight is an experience of nature that has begun to disappear due to electric sound. There are only a few places left on earth where it is still possible to experience moonlight," says Marie Laurberg.

Because of this this, Katie Peterson has created bulbs with artificial moonlight, ensuring that she has a lifetime's supply of moonlight.

The multidisciplinary works of [Katie Paterson] (1981) consider our relationship to the Earth within the context of geologic time. In them the awe-inspiring concepts of global warming and interplanetary time differences are presented in personal terms, without being trivialised. Peterson therefore draws the viewer in and asks them to experience the world from a conceptually sublime perspective.



Earth-Moon-Earth, Moonlight
Sonata Reflected from the Surface
of the Moon (2007)

Ink on paper
Courtesy of the Artist and Ingleby,
Edinburgh



Earth-Moon-Earth, Moonlight
Sonata Reflected from the Surface
of the Moon (2007)

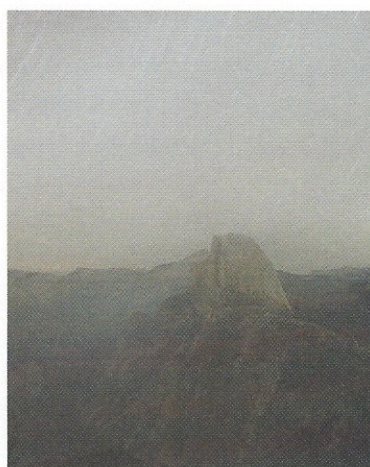
Disklavier grand piano
Installation view, Cornerhouse,
Manchester, 2011
Courtesy of the Artist and Ingleby,
Edinburgh

#MoonShots



They Watch the Moon (2010)

Photograph, C-print
91,5 cm x 122 cm
Courtesy of the Artist



Keyhole Improved Crystal
from Glacier Point (2011)
Optical Reconnaissance Satellite: USA 224

Photograph, C-print
76 cm x 109 cm
Courtesy of the Artist

TREVOR PAGLEN

Space is filled with junk left by humans. Used rockets, used spacecraft, and satellite debris. These things will take thousands, if not millions of years, to decompose, an absurd fact in light of how long humans have existed. This topic is what the American artist Trevor Paglen explores in his photo series *Debris*.

“He studies the scale gap between the mark we have left on Earth and the time span we have existed,” says Marie Laurberg.

As part of another work called *The Other Night Sky*, Trevor Paglen takes a critical look at space programmes, which are generally presented as technological advances or monumental human achievements. In Paglen’s view, these space programmes are actually secret military operations, serving to monitor what is transpiring on Earth. In the photo series *The Other Night Sky*, he has teamed up with amateur astronomers in order to shed light on the many unregistered satellites secretly orbiting Earth.

“He toys with the idea of the romantic perspective of nature where you gaze up at the starry sky. Here it turns out that you are actually looking at satellites,” says Marie Laurberg. **“He turns it all on its head. Usually, astronomy has to do with gazing outward to grasp certain things, but today, heading into space is just as much a matter of looking back and monitoring ourselves.”**

[Trevor Paglen] (1974) is an artist, as well as an author and a Doctor of Philosophy in geography. His photography attempts to capture a landscape of secret air bases, data collecting networks and surveillance satellites. It is the landscape constructed by the advanced technologies that we used and that are used on us every day. By producing these photographs, Paglen hopes that people would be able to truly see the society they inhabit.

RACHEL ROSE

The human body is equipped to withstand the conditions on Earth whereas we require high-tech equipment to endure outer space, as a result of the body being exposed to intense pressure. American artist Rachel Rose explores this subject in her video installation *Everything and More*, which, by and large, is a portrait of the body. As part of the work, former astronaut David Wolf describes the physical experience of returning to Earth after spending 128 days in space. The scent of grass is almost overwhelming upon returning from space, which is characterised by a near total lack of scents. He relates how, upon departing the spacecraft and taking only a few steps, he is forced to give up and let himself be carried from the scene. He feels gravity pushing him towards the ground and explains that it is like having bowling balls for hands. Even his ears feel heavy on his head.

“It is a very contemplative and sensuous work focusing on the return to Earth. Normally, travelling to outer space means being praised, but Rachel Rose focuses on what happens when you return. In this sense, *Everything and More* is a kind of counter-narrative that also serves as a reflection on Earth being the only place for mankind,” says Marie Laurberg.

The art of [Rachel Rose] (1986) manifests itself as installations, where she creates videos on subjects that inspires her. The videos range from the loneliness of a childhood to the potential of a sudden catastrophe. Rose researches the sites intended for her installations, so she can merge her moving images with the environment and amplify the emotions produced by her video.





Everything and More (2015)

HD video 10' 31"
Courtesy of the Artist and Pilar Corrias
Gallery, London.

Everything and More (2015)

HD video 10' 31"
Installation view. Kunsthau Bregenz,
Bregenz, 4 February – 17 April 2017
Courtesy of the Artist, Pilar Corrias
Gallery, London and Gavin Brown's
enterprise, New York

