

PETER STICHBURY: ANATOMY OF A PHENOMENON

New Zealand-based artist Peter Stichbury has created a series of paintings and drawings linked to unidentified flying objects (UFOs). Fascinated by the stories of individuals who claim to have witnessed UFOs and/or extraterrestrials, he explores their motives, objectives, and reliability through portraits and related works. The artworks are informed by his meticulous research, which includes reading books and newspaper articles and consulting websites and video documentation.

The works in this gallery, the artist's first museum exhibition in the United States, are inspired by national and international occurrences. Stichbury took a special interest in the 1994 southern Nevada UFO sightings at Nellis Air Force Base. This incident began when someone inside the facility leaked video footage of a flying object to the media. The video appeared on the television show *Hard Copy*, igniting intense interest and debate among UFO believers and doubters alike. Officials at both Nellis Air Force Base and the Pentagon declined to comment, leading Stichbury and many other members of the public to wonder about the motives behind the leaked footage. Was the individual a genuine whistleblower, or did this represent an incident of sanctioned disinformation, disseminated by an arm of the U.S. military?

There is a history of reported incursions into military facilities by UFOs, specifically over nuclear weapons storage areas. In the 1967 Malmstrom Air Force Base UFO sighting, for example, an object hovered above the base, causing missiles to become inoperable. Was the perpetrator extraterrestrial, or could this have been a human-caused incident related to espionage and national security? How can citizens grasp the sophistication of human technology, its parameters and capabilities, and the shroud of secrecy surrounding such technology? These questions, and the ongoing tension between reality and folklore embedded in UFO culture, provide compelling subject matter for Stichbury's uncanny psychological explorations.