

ALICE DOS REIS
16.11.2024 | 11.01.2025

HAGIOGRAFIA

Text by Alice dos Reis

Long after his famous split with Freud, psychotherapist Carl Jung focused on the growing UFO phenomenon that had captured imaginations since World War II. A lifelong scholar of symbols and their manifestation in both individual and collective consciousness, Jung saw the flying saucer as a new kind of myth for modern times. Writing in 1959, at the peak of the Cold War, Jung refrained from making any judgment on whether these "visitations" were real or imaginary; instead, he approached them psychologically. Using both reported sightings and dreams his patients had about UFOs, he saw a symbol of unity and completeness in the pristine, metallic roundness of the flying saucer. This stood in contrast to the prevailing psychology of "separateness" across postwar society. Considering the emergence of never-before-seen technologies of mass destruction, such as the atomic bomb, Jung regarded the flying saucer as a collective projection—a vision of an incomprehensible, unified, and machinic "Other" poised to save us from ourselves.

Despite my long-standing interest in science fiction, I'd never been particularly drawn to ufology. UFOs only came onto my radar when I revisited my family's home in Portugal's Serra da Gardunha during the pandemic. This mountain range in Beira Interior is known locally as a paranormal hub. Where people once claimed to see visions of radiant Virgin Saints rescuing young girls, local B&Bs now advertise as prime spots for UFO sightings. I became curious about how this transformation happened—how the lady saint became the alien machine. This generational story of shifting symbols, beliefs, and technologies became the focus of my film "Our Lady Who Burns" and later evolved into a series of figurative needlepoint tapestries. I thought my interest in the iconic UFO shape—a small oval above a larger one—might end there, but it wasn't exhausted yet. I kept experimenting with abstract versions of this simple outline. My first attempt resulted in a vertical embroidery piece, "Eventos", capturing an interplay of rising and falling, apparition and camouflage. UFO silhouettes rise and descend over a nocturnal landscape—a town or mountain road—dotted with distant night lights. Like Orthodox Christian icons of saints, each piece is a small, portable work, at once distinct and part of a unified whole.

ALICE DOS REIS
16.11.2024 | 11.01.2025

A series of ten embroideries, "Cards 1–10", inspired by early Southern European playing card designs and my study of the Tarot, is a kind of proposition for a new card deck. The same UFO shape morphs, merges, and collides in each numbered piece. There's a sense of pareidolia here: at times clear, other times hidden, the series encourages viewers to search for and stumble upon the same icon again and again, counting each recurrence. This playful repetition hints at an obsessive quest for patterns and meaning in chaos—a nod to, and perhaps a satire of, Jung's concept of synchronicity. Like a countdown for a spaceship launch, we're primed to expect a takeoff, but with the UFO, it's the opposite: it's descending toward us.

"Monastery on the Moon" is a series of three tapestries showing the same scene from different perspectives, almost like stills from a film. Two out of the three pieces are in 16:9—the widescreen format of contemporary screens—while the third is a 4:3, a screen format common until the early 2000s. Fusing past and future, they depict a monastery, reminiscent of late European medieval architecture, perched alone on the moon and gazing at a distant blue Earth. Presented in acrylic cases, the tapestries look like preserved relics; yet, with threads messily dangling from their backs, they resemble tangled wires behind an LED screen.

"Hagiography" traditionally refers to the biography of a saint or revered figure—an idealized portrayal that emphasizes their virtues, miracles, and the figure's spiritual import. Over time, the term has expanded to describe any narrative that idealizes its subject, often glossing over flaws or complexities. But if the saint now appears as a machine—and an alien one, at that—what name do we give to the narratives we project onto it?