

Objektiv



Scott Hocking, DETROIT NIGHTS, 2007-present, ongoing photography project.

SCOTT HOCKING

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*Our forthcoming issue, Subjektiv part II, invites different artists, curators and thinkers to give us their recent critical perspectives on the issues at stake and on the status of the subjective as an artistic strategy in the current political climate. As a warm up, we'll share some statements here. **Scott Hocking:***

As I write this, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake has struck near Mexico City. Unbelievably, it has struck on the exact same date of the magnitude 8.0 earthquake that leveled Mexico City in 1985, killing more than ten thousand people and destroying much of the city. Today's earthquake comes just two weeks after a magnitude 8.2 quake struck off the coast of Oaxaca. In the meantime, Hurricane Maria barrels through the Caribbean Islands as a Category 5 storm, on the heels of Hurricanes Jose, Irma, Katia, and others. The 2017 Atlantic Ocean hurricane season is quickly becoming historical—not only in quantity, but in the intensity of each storm. Many scientists point to warming ocean waters and climate change as the culprit. Severe rains, landslides, and flooding in Bangladesh, China, Colombia, the Congo, India, Nepal, Peru, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe have killed thousands this year, and additional recent disasters include avalanches in Afghanistan, drought in Somalia, wildfires in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and record heat waves on three continents. The list of natural disasters seems never-ending, and yet this is only *one* aspect of the many trials and tribulations we humans are currently dealing with.

I was in Brazil when Donald Trump won the United States presidency last November. The bar patrons were watching a soccer game on the television, oblivious to US politics. I was nervously refreshing the live feeds on my phone, watching the *Guardian*'s little animated Trump and Clinton figures dance when one or the other won the electoral votes of a given state. My state, Michigan, a perennial swing state, was too close to call. The entire US map was turning red. A surreality set in. The impossible was happening. A reality-television star whose fame hinged upon his bombastic, arrogant personality, his extreme wealth, and his ridiculous hair was winning the Electoral College. I was incredulous. As the night wore on, I continued to check my phone for errors: there *had* to be a mistake, one of these news websites was going to report the mistake. Alas, it was true. Clinton conceded, CNN posted the most demonic red-tinged image of Trump they could find, and I fell into a state of shock. In the bar, nothing had changed. If anything, more people had crowded in to watch the football match. The island of Itaparica felt the same. The city of Salvador felt the same. I imagine the majority of Brazil felt the same.



As I spoke to Brazilians about how devastated I was—and how fearful for the world—I began to hear a similar refrain regarding Brazilian politics. Corruption upon corruption, scandal upon scandal, militant police who do what they want, drugs and money influencing everything. Having a rich, bullshitting figurehead as president was nothing new to Brazilians. “Welcome to our world,” they would say. In the coming months, I would visit Mexico as well. The sentiment was similar. Here I was, a US citizen who had never felt this before, discovering this circumstance was common for Mexicans and Brazilians. A Mexican acquaintance listed the US and Canada as the only countries in North and South America to have avoided having some kind of megalomaniacal dictatorship. She said we have been lucky, but implied that we have actually been spoiled. In her eyes, we have finally received our comeuppance. “Welcome to America,” she said. Welcome to America, indeed.



Humans have repeatedly believed that their particular time was the “end time.” Additionally, we have a tendency to think we’ve evolved far beyond the “primitives”—that somehow, we know more, understand things better, and live in an advanced age compared to the antiquated past. I call bullshit. Nearly every indigenous tribe or people has its own creation and destruction mythologies. Nearly every religion has its branch of eschatology. Whether through man-made means, natural disasters, angry gods, or other factors, the idea that the world as we know it will end during our lifetimes is as old as mankind. Just a few days after the Mexican quake, a Christian-based prophesy targeted September 23, 2017 as the beginning of the end, when a hidden planet (known as Planet X or Nibiru) would appear from its elliptical orbit and wreak havoc on the Earth’s gravitational field. (This did not happen.) In 2012, I made an installation based on ideas of how and when the world would end - from the scientific to the spiritual - aligning the exhibition with the end date of the Mayan calendar. The Mayans, like the Aztecs, Hopis, and others, believed that humans had been nearly wiped out several times before and that it would likely happen again. Prophets saw this calendar end date as a sign of the next cataclysm. (This did not happen.) Interestingly, the word *Maya* has another meaning in Hindu mysticism: that this world is an illusion. I wondered, how can the world end if it doesn’t exist?

When I was a teenager, I came across a nineteenth-century book titled *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. I still think of this book, which compiled many unfulfilled prophesies and illusions, as a reminder of how often humans mistakenly think they know what will happen. It’s an attempt at understanding the world we live in, I suppose, at having some knowledge or control over the complete unknown. Alas, one certainty is that we have no fucking clue where we came from, nor when, if ever, the human race will come to an end. We don’t know. But we worry. And we guess.

And here we are, seemingly at another precipice. The Earth appears to be bucking and blowing and spitting fire—like an animal trying to shake off insects that keep landing on its back. And on the human scale, we have Trump, pushing us ever closer to a potential world war with his narcissistic counterpart in North Korea. The threat of atomic destruction is once again a headline, as it has been periodically throughout my entire life. The threat of planetary chaos and destruction looms heavily in the air. Yet, has it ever been different? Haven't we always felt this way? It might be the most consistent of human conditions: to repeat the same horrible errors, always thinking we're somehow different from those morons in the past. I'm not sure. Who knows? Disaster and suffering are inescapable, but perhaps the world is actually coming to an end this time. After all, this is *definitely* a different scenario because we live in the *most* important, *most* advanced time, and we are so much smarter and better than those fools in the past... right? Welcome to America.



Scott Hocking, THE END OF THE WORLD, 2012. An installation of over 200 books covering destruction mythologies, eschatologies, transformations, and ideas of end times. Based on archetypal and alchemical imagery, Bruegel's Towers of Babel, and the use of the word Maya as both an ancient Mesoamerican civilization and the Hindu word meaning illusion. Along with the book mountain, the installation is accompanied by a 400-page End of the World Compendium.

<http://www.objektiv.no/realises/2017/10/4/scott-hocking>

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