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## Why Is Everyone Obsessed with UFOs Right Now?

By [Carlos Valladares](#) June 19, 2026 5:00am

The world, it seems, now really wants to believe. Look toward the skies: that ball of light could be, at last, Visitors. Or it could just be us, converting anything in front of us—be it sky, land, light—into a mirror.

The latest UFO craze is seizing the big screen, the White House, the New York gallery scene. Mise-en-scène master and freelance E.T. truther Steven Spielberg leads the charge with his glorious Disclosure Day (2026), his best film in decades (despite what you may have heard online). In it, a cybersecurity specialist (Josh O’Connor) and a Kansas City weather lady (Emily Blunt), both tapped into extraterrestrial language, uncover a government conspiracy to hide the truth about close encounters from the public.

This chilly, regal, maligned work arrives just at the right time alongside three other great shows that have popped up around Manhattan, all orbiting the subject of UFOs. And across the pond, at Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger, [Chloe Wise](#) is premiering a new UFO-themed video starring names like Delaney Rowe, Martine Syms, Ben Ahlers, and Lucas Bravo. Inside a Chelsea Hotel room this summer, Prada threw a celebrity-strewn, UFO-themed “immersive exhibition” curated by Nicolas Winding Refn and the Japanese game creator Hideo Kojima. And outside the Tribeca Festival, a bunch of young protesting dudes passed by me, waving signs with bug-eyed aliens drawn on them that read TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER and WE COME IN PEACE.

Many among us are reactively obsessed, too, with the “threat” of “aliens.” In May of this year, the Trump White House made the obsession official, launching Aliens.gov, a website that links its hyped-up, A24-esque campaign of declassified UFO files with their ICE-led manhunt and persecution of “illegal aliens.” Emily Blunt’s riposte to such breathtaking state depravity—clicking her throat and tongue to deliver the aliens’ unfiltered message to Americans on a Kansas City newscast—is typically Spielbergian in its awed curiosity in the face of the unknown.

At Andrew Edlin Gallery downtown, [Karla Knight](#)’s funky, colorful paintings have a humane spark that aligns them within and against the moment. They are intricately rendered to resemble odd sorts of objects, here a pulsingly red motherboard with Knight’s familiar orange orbs built into it, there an ocean-blue tapestry dotted with ciphers and planets. Her busy canvas Watching for the Planets (2025) slows the eye down while pulling it into its orbit, offering relief from a smartphone world training

our eyes to manically scan. Approach the edge of her canvases, and you'll find phrases like ASTRONOMY FOR EVERYBODY, PLANET — ANY WORLD THAT MOVES, and alluring kennings like SPACE BREAD and the oddly ubiquitous SHY TEETH. That befuddling last phrase gives away Knight's concern: human language and its chattering inability to cope with what it can't pronounce. Accordingly, other swaths of her canvases are painted in a language of her own making. How to communicate with the big Other? A blank is drawn. The craze chez Knight points, if anything, to the limits of human perception.

The curiosity is sweeping our puny planet. We go, with the architect Dr. Thandi Loewenson, to a pitch-dark, unassuming exhibition frontloaded with the voice of one Cynthia Hind, a leading African UFOlogist who gathered tons of encounter stories over the latter half of the 20th century. At the Storefront for Art and Architecture, Loewenson has given these stories a narrative container in the form of projected drawings and endless wall texts: It takes upwards of an hour to read through it all in the dimly lit room, but it's worth the deep dive into a little-explored corner of UFOlogy. We learn how many of the sightings reported to Hind in African countries are divided along colonial lines: Whites in Zimbabwe narrativize by the globalized familiar clichés of post-Roswell encounters—UFOs, abductions and magical visitations—yet their aliens sport the complexion of not the trademark grey or green, but Black. (Cue Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet*, 1990.) Meanwhile, Black Zimbabweans, who don't pine for the days of Rhodesia, report their encounters not with "alien" creatures, but with "ghosts" of ancestors, lost spirits who exist in a purgatorial, queasy state, neither here nor there. Both Spielberg's movie and Loewenson's exhibition historicize and question those ubiquitous images of big-eyed aliens.

Uptown at Gagosian, [Eliza Douglas](#)'s magnificent show "Ghosts" pays homage to the investigative journalist largely responsible for the current craze: her own aunt. Aunt Leslie Kean co-wrote the 2017 New York Times article about the Pentagon's mysterious U.F.O. program that provoked Spielberg to finally make *Disclosure*, a film he'd been thinking about for decades. Kean is in every one of Douglas's "Ghosts" paintings, fields of spirits meant to be walked into and expunged from. Her canvases layer selfies that Kean took of herself against a night sky, amid unidentifiable visual material, right over Douglas's own past paintings. Blurry orbs perambulate round a Pop Art "Shh!" A cartoon creature that looks like a 99-cent-store Marvin the Martian hovers near Kean, as does Sailor Moon. Yet my favorite painting is the one where none of this obvious imagery juts out, and we're just left with Kean in an Afro-halo swathed with psychedelic colors. We wait for the UFO to emerge, but can find nothing concrete amiss in this painting, just vibes.

Well, are there aliens? We're hungry for them, that's for sure. For Spielberg at least, it's arrogant to assume that we are the only ones in the vast universe. And for the artists, it's equally arrogant to think we have mastered the image, the idea, of what an extraterrestrial entity looks like, or even to think that we need to go to another planet to encounter aliens at all. We have always been in contact with the Other—

and the Other resembles neither E.T. nor a Mexican boogeyman. We can only follow the counsel of Emily Blunt's final, awesome word in Disclosure Day, the first word of a discourse that spills into eternity. The word is not "look", or "uncover," or "deport." It is a synonym for "attend to," "hear," "heed," or just plain "mind."