

PHANTOM BUSINESS

2-Channel Video Installation, Stereo, 2020

(Projection: 19:29 min Full HD, Stereo / Display: 19:20 min Full HD, silent)

Phantom Business was filmed on “Murphy Ranch”, an abandoned property in Rustic Canyon, Los Angeles, California.

The Ranch was built in the 1930s by affluent couple Winona and Norman Stephens, sympathizers of the anti-semitic, white supremacist Silver Legion of America. Designed as a base for Nazi activities in the U.S., it was intended to be capable of being self-sustaining for a long period. The activities on the compound were led by a mysterious German known only by the name of ‘Herr Schmidt’, who claimed to have supernatural powers. The site is currently owned by the City of Los Angeles.

Conceived as a 2-Channel video installation, Phantom Business combines differing aesthetics, sizes and rhythms: The first channel consists of a large-scale projection displaying digitally altered, fast-paste video footage shot on Murphy Ranch. Only the overlapping outlines of the filmed objects are visible; the actual image - the sensational center of interest - is not shown and must be deciphered by the viewer. The second channel is a slow-paste descriptive text montage presented on an OLED display that is positioned on the floor in front of the projection.

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Phantom Business wurde auf der “Murphy Ranch” gedreht, einem verlassenen Grundstück im Rustic Canyon in Los Angeles, Kalifornien.

Die Ranch wurde in den 1930er Jahren vom wohlhabenden Ehepaar Winona und Norman Stephens erbaut, die Sympathisanten der antisemitischen, weißen Rassisten der Silver Legion of America waren. Sie war als Stützpunkt für die Aktivitäten der Nazis in den USA gedacht und war dafür ausgerichtet, sich über einen langen Zeitraum selbst versorgen zu können.

Die Aktivitäten auf dem Gelände wurden von einem mysteriösen Deutschen geleitet, der nur unter dem Namen “Herr Schmidt” bekannt war und behauptete, übernatürliche Kräfte zu besitzen.

Das Gelände befindet sich derzeit im Besitz der Stadt Los Angeles.

Als 2-Kanal-Videoinstallation konzipiert, kombiniert Phantom Business unterschiedliche Ästhetiken, Größen und Rhythmen: Der erste Kanal ist eine Großprojektion, die digital verändertes, schnell geschnittenes Videomaterial zeigt, das auf der Murphy Ranch gedreht wurde. Nur die sich überlagernden Umrisse der gefilmten Objekte sind sichtbar, das vollständige Bild - das sensationsversprechende Zentrum des Interesses - wird nicht gezeigt und muss vom Betrachter entschlüsselt werden. Der zweite Kanal ist eine langsam geschnittene, deskriptive Textmontage, die auf einem OLED-Display präsentiert wird, das auf dem Boden vor der Projektion positioniert ist.

Installation:

Channel 1:

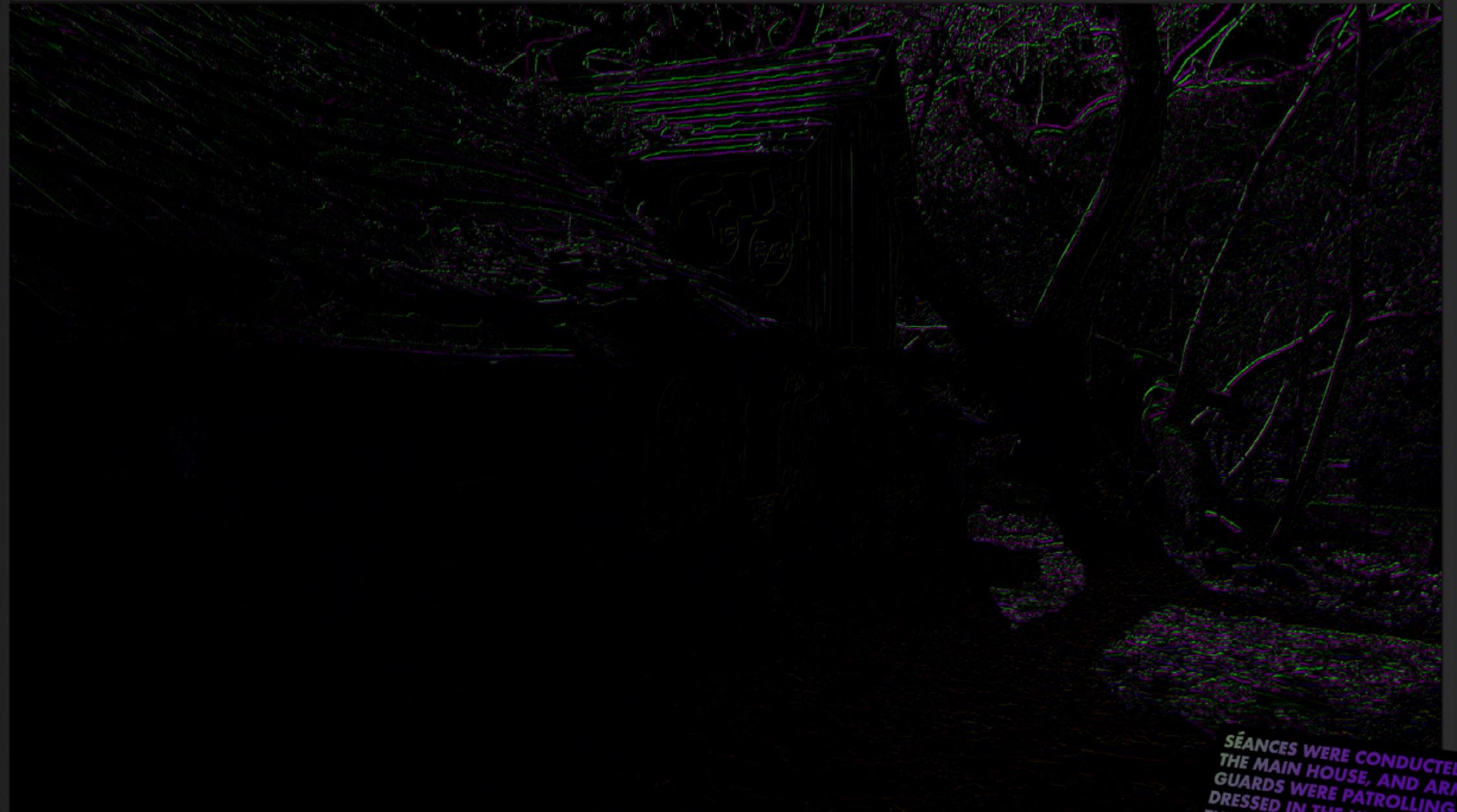
- Full-HD Wall-projection, minimum. 4 meters
- Media player with Startsync
- Stereo

Channel 2:

- 36 inch Full-HD OLED Display on the floor
- Media player with Startsync
- silent

- space needs to be as dark as possible
- no passage room
- light lock construction at entrance

- Media Player: start sync and high bitrate in HD (30 MB/s)



SÉANCES WERE CONDUCTED IN THE MAIN HOUSE, AND ARMED GUARDS WERE PATROLLING, DRESSED IN THE UNIFORM OF THE FASCIST SILVER LEGION OF AMERICA.

TEXT ON DISPLAY

PHANTOM BUSINESS

Eight staircases lead down to Rustic Canyon, hidden throughout the hillside.

This one is the longest, with 513 narrow concrete steps, dropping 200 feet down a lush slope that was once terraced and irrigated to harvest nuts, fruits, and olive trees.

The whole area is scattered with foundations, elevated gardens and other, unidentifiable structures of concrete, metal and stone.

They are leftovers of a much more ambitious enterprise, an open wound to a violent history.

During the 1930s, this site was home to a group of Nazi sympathizers, led by a mysterious German known only by the name of 'Herr Schmidt'.

Herr Schmidt was known to be member of the Silver Legion of America, a fascist, anti-Semitic, white supremacist group.

Sounds familiar?

Hate groups in the U.S. have increased almost 50 percent since 2017, according to a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center. They documented more than 1000 active groups in 2020.

Other reports suggest that Herr Schmidt was one of Hitler's agents in North America, a German spy with the mission to build a foothold for the dictator on U.S. territory.

He also claimed to have supernatural powers.

Winona Stephens, a fortune heiress, was a devotee of the occult.

She and her husband Norman were enthralled by the metaphysical powers Herr Schmidt claimed to possess.

He convinced the wealthy couple of the imminent fall of the United States to the forces of the Third Reich.

On August 28, 1933, the Stephens bought 50 acres of land deep inside the rugged canyon using the pseudonym "Jessie M. Murphy, widow."

Here, they would sit out the war and prepare for the arrival of the German army and the establishment of the New Order.

The Stephens invested the modern equivalent of \$75 million to build a self-sufficient farm based on National Socialist ideals.

Over the course of the 1930s, they employed several different architects from the Los Angeles area to draw up plans for their self-sustaining 'Utopia'.

The Drawings, preserved in the Lloyd Wright collection at UCLA library, contain several elaborate designs, including a four-story mansion "fit for a world leader".

By the time World War II started in 1939, the compound was up and running.

Local residents recall the sound of gunfire and military exercises echoing through the canyon.

Séances were conducted in the Main House, and Armed guards were patrolling, dressed in the uniform of the fascist Silver Legion of America.

On December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbour was bombed, the FBI stormed the grounds of Murphy Ranch and detained 50 members of the caretaker force.

The agents reportedly found code books and a powerful short-wave radio and they identified Schmidt as a German spy.

After the war, the Stephens lived above a steel garage, instead of the grand mansion of their dreams.

In 1948, they willingly sold their property to the "Huntington Hartford Foundation", which transformed the Nazi compound into an artists' colony and eventually a hippie commune.

Abandoned after a 1978 wildfire, the site remains as as a sinister reminder and a crumbling monument of the urge for mastery, wealth and hubris colliding.

Niklas Goldbach
2020

LINKS

1. web

https://www.niklasgoldbach.de/WORKS/PHANTOM_BUSINESS.html

2. Preview-Version:

<https://vimeo.com/420577584>

Password: murphy



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