



There's a UFO in My Painting!

“UFOs are not a recent invention, they were seen by our ancestors as well!” This is one of the typical claims that can be found in books by Erich Von Däniken, Peter Kolosimo, and similar authors. The proof for it? A variety of strange objects depicted in paintings by some of the world's greatest artists.



The Madonna's Spaceship

A typical example is the *Madonna con Bambino e San Giovannino* (*Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John*) attributed to Sebastiano Mainardi or Jacopo del Sellaio. The painting is from the end of the fifteenth century and is now on display in the Sala d'Ercole in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Examining it, we see in the upper background, behind the Madonna, a strange oval shape suspended in the sky. Some UFOlogists describe it as “an airborne object, leaden in color, inclined to port, sporting a ‘dome’ or ‘turret,’ apparently identifiable as an oval-shaped moving flying device.”

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Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciazione* (Annunciation).

In order to understand what this and other ancient paintings really portrayed, however, it is essential to learn how ancient artists really worked. “Not one of those that see UFOs in paintings,” says Italian art expert Diego Cuoghi, “ever tries to understand the real symbolical meanings of those strange things in the art of that period, and so they take them as realistic depictions of unidentified flying objects seen live.”

The object in Mainardi's painting is a “radiant cloud.” “In those times,” says Cuoghi, “the subjects for paintings were almost exclusively of a religious nature and, in the case of the ‘adorations,’ like Mainardi's, there often appeared in the sky an angel or, as some apocryphal

Gospels have it, a radiant cloud. Another example of this kind is in the *Nativity of Lorenzo Monaco*.”

The little man on the right of the painting that shields his eyes looking at the sky is another typical element of such paintings. However, that man does not appear to look at the radiant cloud, but at the Nativity Star and three other small stars (or flames) to the far left, a symbol of the “trifold virginity” of the Madonna (before, during, and after the virgin birth).

Crivelli's UFOs

In Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciazione* (Annunciation), a 1486 painting now on display at the National Gallery in London, some believe that a UFO is in the sky and that from it a ray of light comes down to touch the head of the Virgin Mary. All mystery mongering prints of this painting show poor-quality reproductions of the details. However, it would be enough to visit the gallery or look at a better print of the painting to see that it is not a UFO at all. “It's a vortex of angels in the clouds,” says Cuoghi, “a very common artistic device used to represent the presence of God, and it can be seen in many Medieval and Renaissance religious paintings, like in Correggio's fresco at the Dome of Parma or in Gustave Doré's engraving of Canto XXI from Dante's *Paradiso* from his *The Divine Comedy*, but above all in most Anunciations and Baptisms of the Christ.”

Another Crivelli painting, the *Madonna con Bambino* (*Madonna with Child*) at the Pinacoteca of Ancona, is believed by some to show “objects very

similar to modern nuclear missiles ready to launch!"

Those making such claims, however, never take the time to research the life of the artist, his work, or the place where the painting was originally displayed. It would be enough to compare this with other paintings by the same artist, in fact, to establish that the "missiles" are actually towers and bell towers, like those that appear in almost all of Crivelli's paintings.

Another example is the famous Mayan bas-relief that Von Däniken and others believed represented an astronaut, but was actually a depiction of Pakal, the Maya king. One cannot simply give a modern interpretation to events and depictions outside of their original context.

God's Sputnik

The *Santissima Trinità* (Holy Trinity) by Bonaventura Salimbeni (1595), now at St. Peter's Basilica at Montalcino, is one of the most famous "UFOs" in a painting. The mysterious "spherical object with antennae" that appears between Christ and God has frequently been referred to as "Montalcino's Sputnik," due to his similarity in appearance to the old Soviet satellites.

In truth, the globe represents Creation, with the Sun on top and the Moon below left (some interpreted it as the periscope of the satellite!). The "antennae" are actually two sceptres held by Christ and God.

The same kind of astronomical illustration on the Globe of Creation can be found in a painting by Pieter Coecke, depicting the Trinity and now on display at Prado's Museum in Madrid. Here as well it is possible to see the Sun, the Earth, with the cone of shade, and the Moon, smaller, down below.

"The representations of Sun and Moon" continues Diego Cuoghi "have frequently misled some UFOlogists who have completely misunderstood their meaning. The majority of the crucifixion paintings and mosaics done in the Byzantine style, for example, show the same odd 'objects' on either side of the cross, the Sun and the Moon, and they are often represented with a human face or figure."

An example of this is the sixteenth-century fresco *Crucifixion of Christ* located on the wall of the Visoki Decani

Monastery in Kosovo, Yugoslavia. Some did interpret the Sun and the Moon as "spaceships with a crew." "Only those that are unfamiliar with artistic symbolism of the time," says Cuoghi, "can claim that these are mysterious elements."

The Flying Hat

In Paolo Uccello's *Tebaide* (also known as *Scene di Vita Ermetica*, or *Scenes of Monastic Life*), now at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, in Florence, some claim to see "a saucer object, suspended in the air and surmounted by a red domed top. Red in color, the object comes out over the dark background by contrast. The dynamic movement of the flying object is rendered by means of light brush strokes, again red in color, which provide the effect of a sudden turn."

One can't help but smile at such a description. When viewing the whole painting (not just a close up of the red object) it is quite clear that the object is located inside a cave, on the ground beneath the crucifixion, and that it represents a large red hat belonging to St. Jerome, who is seen praying before the crucified Christ.

The first one to write about St. Jerome was Giovanni di Andrea of Bologna, and in his writings legend overruled historical truth. The same author gave precise details on how artists had to depict the Saint: "Cum capello, quo nun cardinales utuntur, deposito, et leone mansueto" ("With hat, of the kind still in vogue for cardinals, placed on the ground, and with meek lion.") The hat in question is present in various representations of the Saint.

UFO Invasion

There are two other famous paintings where flying saucers are said to be represented. One is the *Baptism of Christ* by Aert DeGelder, now at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. In this painting, a UFO seems to light from above the scene of Christ's baptism. Actually, the "thing" in the sky is not a flying saucer but a circle of light with a dove inside, a typical representation for the Holy Spirit. The scene reproduces exactly the description in the Gospels and is also represented in

the same way in other paintings of the time.

The other UFOlogical painting is the *Miracolo della neve* (Miracle of the Snow) by Masolino Da Panicale, painted in 1428 and on display at the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. Here the mystery mongers claim to see "a UFO invasion" in the clouds above the scene. But those lenticular clouds are not infrequent subjects in the artworks of the fifteenth century. "It is a nonrealistic way to represent clouds," says Cuoghi, "such non-realism was seen in the sacred art of the first half of the fifteenth century." As for the event depicted in the painting, a snowfall in August, it can certainly be seen as an extraordinary event, but not an impossible one. Exceptional atmospheric events of this kind are sometimes recorded in Italy. Unseasonal snow, for example, took place on the seaside of Calabria on May 12, 1755; in Lunigiana on July 1, 1756, in Bologna on June 1, 1481; and recently in Prato on August 5, 2000. The memory of such an extraordinary events might easily be handed down through the centuries, gaining details and particulars and being transformed into the "miracle of the snow."

Aliens Everywhere!

"The method used by so-called UFO hunters," concludes Cuoghi, "requires no knowledge whatsoever on the history of art. What you need is just to pick up a book with reproduction of paintings, better if painted before the seventeenth century, and try to find any little object that may have a lenticular shape. This way, you will find no difficulty at all in locating elements that may appear bizarre and out of place. Now, you only need to claim that these objects are inconsistent to the time, place, or context of the artwork, and so you can certainly term them as 'alien' or 'unidentified.' And so, you can now call yourself an 'ancient UFOs' expert!"

Reference

A detailed study by Diego Cuoghi on UFOs in ancient paintings can be found at www.sprezzatura.it/Arte/Arte_UFO_eng.htm. □