Mysterious MCE On Lisa

by Arslohgo

Arslohgo, Mysterious MCE On Lisa. Digital composite, black and white. CMYK, 300 dpi.

How present is the past, how past is the present? How ghostly is the modern, how modern is the mystical? A pioneering computer with a graphical user interface, set in a fog-laden polder landscape, its screen displaying a seer-sorcerer presenting Escher in his glass sphere — in an age when everything but the landscape should be a thing of the past.

— Arslohgo, Artist's Statement

Layers of Time in the Fog

Arslohgo's *Mysterious MCE On Lisa* is a work built on productive anachronisms — a composition that derives its power from layering temporal registers that have no business coexisting, and in doing so exposes just how porous our notions of progress and obsolescence really are.

At its center sits an Apple Lisa,[1] that legendary 1983 machine that was among the first commercial computers to offer a graphical user interface, revolutionizing the way humans interacted with machines. Arslohgo places this device — once the epitome of technological avant-garde, now a museum piece — in a fog-shrouded polder landscape. The choice of polder is more than atmospheric set dressing: a polder is land reclaimed from nature through engineering, a quiet monument to technical mastery that nonetheless begins to blend back into the natural world the moment maintenance ceases. The Lisa and the polder are, in this sense, kindred spirits — both testaments to the human will to shape the world, both dissolving into the timelessness of a gray, diffuse atmosphere.

The Image Within the Image Within the Image

The real conceptual density unfolds on the screen. A figure hovering somewhere between seer, sorcerer, and archaic sage holds out a glass sphere that Arslohgo explicitly borrows from Escher's *Three Spheres II* (1946).[2] In Escher's original, the reflective sphere served as a surface in which the artist observed himself in the act of drawing — an image that collapsed the boundary between the one depicting and the one depicted. Arslohgo transplants this motif into an entirely new frame: the sphere shifts from a tool of self-reflection to an instrument of divination. Where Escher explored the epistemic loop of self-observation, Arslohgo stages a loop of temporality — a mystic on the screen of a machine that once promised the future, presenting within his sphere yet another scene that seems to fold inward toward infinity.

Smoke envelops the figure, further dissolving the already precarious boundary between the material and the immaterial. The monitor — historically a window onto the digital future — becomes a shrine, an oracle's chamber. The graphical user interface, once celebrated as the democratization of access to the machine, appears here as something it arguably always was: a surface behind which processes unfold that remain just as inaccessible to the user as the mechanics of a miracle were to a medieval believer.

Monochrome Dissolution

The consistent black-and-white treatment — the file is in CMYK mode, suggesting a print intention, yet operates within a purely monochromatic spectrum — strips the scene of any marker that might anchor it in an identifiable present. Gray is the color of fog, of memory, of transition. Arslohgo creates a visual space in which the categories "modern" and "mystical," set up as opposites in the artist's own statement, actually converge. The grass of the polder, the plastic of the housing, the smoke on the screen — everything is leveled to the same material consistency, as though time itself had erased every distinction.

On the Artist's Statement

Arslohgo asks: *How present is the past, how past is the present?* The work doesn't answer that question — it embodies it. In an era, the artist notes, when "everything except the landscape should be a thing of the past," it turns out that the landscape is the least enduring element of all: it vanishes into the fog, while the machine and the mystic — both supposedly obsolete — stand there with a presence that unsettles. The Lisa should be e-waste. The sorcerer should be a relic of pre-Enlightenment modes of explaining the world. Instead, they form an alliance suggesting that humanity never truly secularized its relationship with technology. We swapped

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[1] The Apple Lisa, released January 19, 1983, was one of the first personal computers to offer a graphical user interface (GUI) in a consumer product.
[2] M.C. Escher, Three Spheres II, 1946. Lithograph, 26 cm × 46.3 cm.

incantations for command lines, crystal balls for screens, oracles for algorithms — but the gesture of looking, of hoping for revelation, has remained the same.

Verdict

Mysterious MCE On Lisa is a quiet but conceptually dense work that draws its force from the collision of seemingly irreconcilable temporal registers. Arslohgo succeeds in productively extending the Escherian tradition of optical self-reference: where Escher interrogated the perception of space, Arslohgo interrogates the perception of time. The result is an image that lingers in its foggy stillness — a reminder that every technological present already carries its own archaeology within it, and that the mystical never disappeared but merely found new housing.

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