

CORK

George Bolster

Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre
Skibbereen

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By Brian Curtin



View of "Communication: We Are Not the Only Ones Talking," 2023.

George Bolster's exhibition "Communication: We Are Not the Only Ones Talking" immerses viewers in a mixture of fact and fiction, of documentary and mythology. A rounded alcove, *The Impermanence of Protection: Big Bend National Park*, 2023, constructs a panorama from a Jacquard tapestry of the Texas land preserve, a recent target of then-President Trump, who wanted to roll back land protections along the Mexican border. The tapestry has a cinematic quality about it, but, on closer inspection, the imagery reveals itself as pixelated and frayed in parts, upsetting the illusion. The installation *Reality is more than We can Comprehend*, 2022, presents another desert scene, this one nearly fifty feet long. The awe in the face of nature—it is no surprise the American Southwest is often used as a backdrop for science-fiction films—is offset by implications of the fictional or constructed aspect of the scenes and thus by political implications about the meanings of landscapes. Some sections feature an overtly unnatural palette, as if the colors had been skewed in Photoshop, while another large weaving, *We are Neither Above Nor Apart from Nature*, 2021, boasts both day and night skies.

The exhibition developed from Bolster's ongoing research with the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) in California. The artist's new forty-five-minute five-channel film, *Communication: We Are Not the Only Ones Talking... or Ulysses: Animal Syntax and Non-human Intelligence*, 2022, juxtaposes footage of a whale with that of figures like Laurance Doyle, a scientist who discovered syntax within the calls of humpback whales and is currently researching alien transmissions. Bolster translates these insights into questions of how humans respond to recognition of their place in the universe.

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