

The Believers



by Geert van Kesteren

18:20 min video-loop, colour, 27 monitors, soundscape



The Believers by Geert van Kesteren

The Believers is an audio visual installation by Dutch artist, photographer and documentary maker Geert van Kesteren (1966) that examines how the human need for concrete answers to existential questions continues to be renegotiated in the age of big data.

What are believers searching for? Van Kesteren poses this question in the Holy Land, the bedrock of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Israel / Palestine attracts pilgrims from all over the world, who participate in contemporary and centuries-old ceremonies and traditions, through which their faith becomes tangible. While many of these rituals

seem miles away from the consciousness of Western atheism, are they really any different?

Consider for a moment God as the first virtual reality ever created by man; is our current belief in data and algorithms not equally religious? The answer of historian and thinker Yuval Noah Harari is clear: recording, uploading, and sharing our experiences with others seem for many a new life goal. Becoming part of the worldwide data-flow has become synonymous with meaning and fulfillment. Today, rather than looking to God for answers to difficult questions, we look to algorithms with all their omniscient grandeur.





Synopsis

Over the past six years, Van Kesteren filmed and photographed various manifestations of faith in Israel / Palestine. The cinematography places the viewer in a variety of mass gatherings - from religious pilgrimages to secular festivals -, alongside intimate moments of personal sacrifice, worship, and self-expression. The footage also shows how big data intermingles with rituals and ceremonies, and has become a part of modern worship.

Believers fall on their knees, candles burn spontaneously, half-naked revelers merge with techno music, prayer notes are crammed between stones at The Western Wall, devout pilgrims climb steep hills, teenagers nervously immerse themselves in water, thousands of worshippers kneel and bow rhythmically in prayer, while CCTV's and the smartphones seem to register everything.

The various illustrations of 'the human condition' are paired with, and interrupted by long-shots of natural processes, such as bird migrations, and waves crashing against the shore.



The installation

The Believers immerses the viewer in an all encompassing sonic visual experience. The first thing people hear when entering the space is a soundscape in which religious music is incorporated with theatrical sound waves. A large video-wall made up of 27 monitors (3 X 9) stands in the middle of the exhibition space, visible from all angles.

The video-wall plays an 18:20-minute video-loop made of 1500 video clips. The montage is characterized by a frenetic choreography; at times each monitor plays a different clip simultaneously, whereas at other moments a single image takes over multiple monitors.

The back of the video-wall is open, rendering the technology that supports the video-wall visible to the public.

Two small 24 inch monitors, concealed in a small room, play a large selection of Van Kesteren's extensive photo archive from Israel-Palestine. These monitors are connected through a thick wire to the video wall, representing the massive amount of images which flood our data servers on a daily basis.

The video-wall seems to allude to the presence of a super-computer which has taken on the attributes of human thought.





No Cable Connected
NOTE
1) Check the cable connections and the setting
of the source device.
2) Press [Source] or your remote control to
select the connected source device.

No Cable Connected
NOTE
1) Check the cable connections and the setting
of the source device.
2) Press [Source] or your remote control to
select the connected source device.

No Cable Connected
NOTE
1) Check the cable connections and the setting
of the source device.
2) Press [Source] or your remote control to
select the connected source device.



Technical specifications

The installation can be altered to suit the needs of potential exhibition spaces and available budgets. In general, the exhibition space requires between 150 m² up to 500 m².

The videowall is made of 27 linked HD LCD panels operated by 27 BrightSign media players. The video wall can be built from 27" up to 75" monitors, while the sound can come from 4 speakers, up to a surround 28 speaker system.

The preferred monitor size is 55", as was used at the first presentation of The Believers at BredaPhoto18.

Black PVC strips (made from the same material as the LCD's edges) are layered on top of the monitors, creating a clear distinction between the different monitors.

The production strategy, detailed here, can serve as a guideline for future 'venues' and is open to local adaptations and initiatives. A detailed budget can be sent upon request. The producers will collaborate with the venue to generate the necessary funds.

(size pending space and budget)

Video wall 12-meter long (standard size)

Required Space: appr. 400 m²

Monitors: 55" HD LCD panels (27 x)

Operating system: BrightSign media players (27 x)

Dimensions: W 1200 cm x H 250 cm

Media format: NTSC / PAL / SECAM

Hanging system: ground support system to set-up video wall

Shielding: wood and black cotton

Grid: black PVC strips

Audio system: 4 up to 28 speakers

PA, PC or media player

Photo grid: 24" monitor (2 x)W

media player

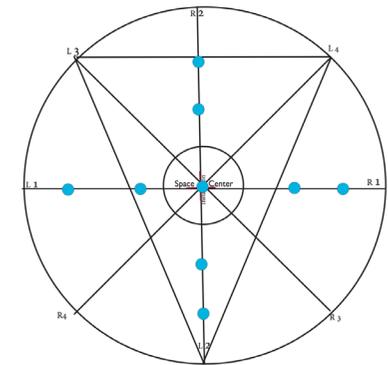
speaker

Other:

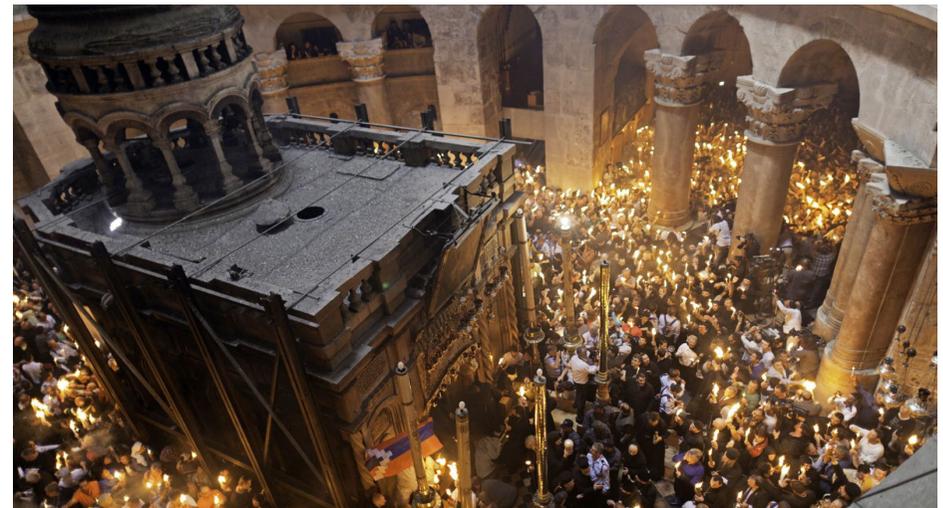
black carpet

five benches

exhibition text



The Audio Architecture Plan by Eli Shargo



First presentation at BredaPhoto 2018

The Believers was first shown during BredaPhoto, the photo festival in the south of Holland, from September 5 - October 21, 2018. The exhibition was presented in the impressive 'Dome Prison' (Koepelgevangenis), where World War II collaborators were held captive. The prison was constructed as a panopticon, as invented in 1791 by Jeremy Bentham.

This allowed the guards to continuously watch the prisoners from the centre of the building. Inspired by this unique architecture, Van Kesteren and his team decided to tailored the exhibition according to the space.

The 12-meter long video-wall was placed as an altar in the center of the panopticon, and the audio used the dome as a sound box. With a 7 second reverb, the acoustics of the dome-prison inspired sound artist Eli Shargo to use the space as an instrument, in the same way as has been done for centuries by religious traditions in cathedrals, mosques and more specifically in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

 **BredaPhoto**

Upon entering the space, the visitor is confronted with the impressive architecture of the prison, and the soundscape. After a short observation of the prison, visitors tended to congregate on benches that were placed in front of the video wall. Remarkably, almost all visitors watched the 18-minute video loop several times, as if in a trance. The grandeur of the space, the acoustics of the soundscape, and the compelling display of 27 screens immersed viewers in a harmonious cacophony of image and sound.

BredaPhoto received 5-star ratings in the Dutch media, while The Believers was acknowledged as the highlight of the festival. The Believers received attention in the (inter) national media, with coverage on Kunstuur TV, and a notable mention in the British Journal of Photography's 'Cool & Noteworthy' 2018 issue.

Several lectures were given in Belgium and the Netherlands, which attracted some 650 people.

The production was undertaken by Forhanna, a Dutch non-profit production house, the technology was carried out by MK2, a specialist in audiovisual technology.



The Believers at BredaPhoto attracted 13,000 unique paying visitors, an average of 500 per day.



Contact

Geert van Kesteren

Photographer

Tel: +972(0)54 8700 873

geertvankesteren@mac.com

Skype: geertvankesteren

Yoffi Yaffa Productions

Noa Ben-Shalom

noabenshalom@icloud.com

Danny Kaye Kaminsky 8

Jaffa Tel-Aviv 6809746

FORHANNA

Jan Paul Reij

info@forhanna.com

Nieuwendammerdijk 327

1023 BJ Amsterdam

forhanna.com



Geert van Kesteren

Geert van Kesteren (1966) is a Dutch photographer, filmmaker, writer, and artist whose work focuses on the Middle East, where he currently lives . He started as a war photographer for magazines such as Newsweek and Der Stern. In 2004, he made the transition from front line photojournalism to long term documentary projects, using innovative and experimental methods of reporting and presentation. His photo books *Why Mister, Why?* and *Baghdad Calling* are widely considered the two most relevant photo books about the United States' Iraq war, redefining the role of the photo book as a medium for photojournalistic expression.

The work received numerous awards, such as the Infinity Award in Photojournalism of the International Center of Photography in New York. Associated exhibitions have been shown in important institutions, such as the Barbican Art Gallery in London, and the photographs are part of various art collections, including that of The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. As Van Kesteren's work reached the frontiers of still photography, he began to implement moving images and sound into his practice.

For the past four years, Van Kesteren has worked in collaboration with creative partner Noa Ben-Shalom (Israel 1975). She studied at the Bezalel Art Academy and her photo book *Hush* was nominated for the prestigious Paris Photo Book Award.

Ben-Shalom and Van Kesteren have created Yoffi Yaffa, a production company which is devoted to creating documentaries and experimental art installations, resulting in *The Believers* and the documentary *Jerusalem - God's Address* which was recently sold to PBS.

Photos and illustration material

bit.ly/presskit-TheBelievers

This map contains the following images:

1. Age of Data
2. Baptism
3. Hadj
4. Holy_Fire
5. MidBurn
6. Samaritans
7. The Believers_Bliss.jpg
8. The Believers_CCTV.jpg
9. The Believers_Ecstasy.jpg
10. The Believers_Inspiration.jpg
11. The Believers_Paraphernalia.jpg
12. The Believers_Selfie.jpg
13. The Believers_Videoscherm-Koepel_18050404.jpg
14. The Believers_Worship.jpg
15. The Believers.jpg

The Believers is produced by Yoffi Yaffa and Forhanna, a non-profit to co-produce world class documentary projects that encourage public debate through exhibitions, installations, books, seminars and films, among others.

The Believers was first shown at BredaPhoto 2018. The Believers is made possible with the generous support of: Forhanna, The Mondriaan Fund, voordekunst, BredaPhoto and MK2.

The installation is dedicated to the late Dutch photographer Willem Poelstra, founder of Forhanna.

Vimeo presentation - download

<https://vimeo.com/311047257>

CREDITS

The Believers by Geert van Kesteren © all rights reserved

Producer - Jan Paul Reij

Editor - Noa Ben-Shalom

Sound scape - Eli Shargo

Supervising editor - Tal Shefi

Production Israel - Yoffi Yaffa Productions

Sound recordings - Noa Ben-Shalom & Edmèe van Rijn

Technical support - Arne Verbrugh

Color correction - Laurent Fluttert

FORHANNA





The Believers by Geert van Kesteren