



# Picturing Extraterrestrials: Alien Images in Modern Mass Culture

*John F. Moffitt*

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## **Picturing Extraterrestrials: Alien Images in Modern Mass Culture** John F. Moffitt

In this witty, erudite, and thoroughly researched book, art historian John Moffitt discusses the popular iconography depicting alleged extraterrestrial (ET) visitors and the widespread appeal of this New Age craze as a mass cultural phenomenon. A thorough skeptic, Moffitt is interested in kitschy ET portraiture, not as evidence of aliens among us, but for what this imagery reveals about contemporary culture. By brilliantly placing the present cultural moment in historical context, he demonstrates how typical portrayals of aliens reflect long-running (even ancient) cultural motifs.

Whether we realize it or not, among ET's precursors are the ecstatic maenads of ancient Greek art, early depictions of Christ in Byzantine icons, the religious visions shown in 15th-century Spanish paintings, and the popular images of witches and incubi from the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, in our postmodern space age, these timeless figures of imagination and art have taken on the otherworldly trappings of alien creatures. By the same token, centuries-old beliefs, whether in nature gods and goddesses, demons, witches, Satan, or saints, have evolved into the current New Age mythology that often surrounds the stories and pictures connected with aliens. Fueled by a huge entertainment industry, mass media, and the relentless profit drive of capitalism, alien imagery has become ubiquitous, and in the process the line between fantasy and reality ever harder to discern.

This sweeping and above all entertaining perusal of popular culture presents a sophisticated yet very accessible and often funny dissection of our current obsession with the possibility that "we are not alone."

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