

# Artists Spare Room | Sarah Fortais

*On May 23rd 1964, Jim Templeton took his wife and 5-year old daughter Elizabeth to Burgh Marsh for a pleasant afternoon of walking and picture taking, but when he got the images developed they were forced to come face to face with the unbelievable... what appeared to be an alien being.*

...

*Templeton was an amateur photographer and wanted to take some photos of their daughter Elizabeth in her new dress with his Kodak SLR. He claimed that it was a normal afternoon except for the fact that the cow and sheep that would normally have infested the field were all bunched together feeding on the far side of the marsh.*

...

*A few days later Templeton retrieved his photographs back from the chemist that had developed them. In passing, the chemist expressed his disappointment that “some idiot” had ruined what he believed to be the best shot of his daughter. Templeton, puzzled, looked at the photograph in question. What he saw was the image of what appeared to be a tall humanoid figure clad in a spacesuit jutting out at an odd angle from behind his daughter’s head. [...] The “spaceman” only showed up in the middle of the three consecutive photos he had shot and was “missing” from the first and last.*

*Templeton, hoping to get to the bottom of this mystery, reported the case to the police and sent the picture back to Kodak where it was exhaustively examined by trained professionals for any signs of faulty film stock, tampering, or hoax. They found none.*

...

*The executives at Kodak were so intrigued by this dilemma that they offered a reward of free film for a year to any person that could solve the mystery of how this “spaceman” got into the picture.<sup>1</sup>*

At the time of writing this blog entry — 60 years later — the reward remains unclaimed.

When I arrived at Penrith early Sunday evening of April 28th, 2024, I was unaware of the Cumbrian Spaceman; however, this and many such mysteries began to reveal

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://cryptidz.fandom.com/wiki/Cumberland\\_Spaceman\\_\(Solway\\_Firth\\_Spaceman\)](https://cryptidz.fandom.com/wiki/Cumberland_Spaceman_(Solway_Firth_Spaceman))

themselves through the conversations I had with residents during my 6-day artist residency at Eden Arts.

I am an artist — have been for 15 years — and I make this specific designation because 2009 was the first year in which I made something where I felt like I was onto something, that it wasn't just a school project or hobby craft, but that it might reflect on my human experience and may be worth sharing with others.

The artwork was for an analogue, black and white photography course, taught by artist Wyn Geleynse, and the assignment was simply to “tell a story”. For my story, I chose to imagine that my brother wasn't my brother but was instead an alien that just decided to look like my brother, who was given the mission directive to attempt to assimilate and experience Earth for the first time. The night before I had planned to start shooting, we had a torrential rain which caused flooding of the Thames (in London, Canada) and several severe road closures. Many buildings on campus were evacuated and the city shut down for almost 24 hours. When Adam (my brother, and the original alien being in my story) set out in his unitard, tin foil belt, and bridal veil strung onto a broken umbrella, we both set forth into a mutually unknown landscape populated by mucky sidewalks, lost dogs, empty buildings, and strikingly, no humans. The resulting photos, one of which I'll share here,



didn't tell a story of my brother, the alien, but rather, revealed my own interest in decoding everyday rituals — reframing the banal, repetitive tasks that are part of being human — and solidified my creative mission: to invest these arbitrary moments with enough time and effort that we might collectively experience a type of self-reflective newness of our current situation (or, what Viktor Shklovsky calls the process of defamiliarization). According to Edward DeBono, this reframing of common materials is key to coming up with creative solutions. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, solving problems with everyday materials will always give an impression of the maker in the final result, because with limited materials comes improvisational, wonky, one-of-a-kind connections. And as NASA's Apollo 13 mission demonstrated, everyday materials such as socks and duct tape can become life-saving materials, if they're used in the right combination for the task at hand.<sup>2</sup>

When Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin reached the lunar surface on NASA's Apollo 11 mission, they stayed for a total of 21 hours and 36 minutes, which included a 7-hour rest period (i.e. sleep). While there, their objective was to document as much as possible. This involved deploying the *Early Apollo Scientific Experiments Package* (EASEP), taking photographs, and picking up geological material off the ground to take home. The amount of rocks that the astronauts could pick up was dictated by the size of their suitcases and the strict weight allowance of their *Lunar Module*.

When Aldrin and Armstrong landed on the moon, they were tourists at the middle point of a mission that had universally *never been done before*. As such, their every move, even something as simple as descending a ladder, or picking up a rock, became a spectacle. Nonetheless, the astronauts were simply doing their job and recovering as much material as possible.<sup>3</sup>

When I came to Penrith, I had four personal missions to complete: 1) to build a spacesuit for a sheep, 2) introduce my astronaut sheep to a local flock, 3) commute from Carlisle to Penrith in my homemade spacesuit, and 4) spend a day seeing the sites of Penrith as an astronaut-tourist (including ordering an obligatory cup of coffee after taking my pictures of the castle).

Both tourists and explorers frequently encounter new experiences. This newness is relative to the prior experience of the tourist/explorer, however. Perhaps then the difference between an explorer and a tourist does not lie in the

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/history/afj/ap13fj/08day3-problem.html>

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from my own report, partially viewable online: [http://sarahfortais.com/Sarah/Art/Pages/Tourist\\_\\_Explorer.html](http://sarahfortais.com/Sarah/Art/Pages/Tourist__Explorer.html)

experience of the person themselves but rather is determined by the prior experience of those who they are made visible to.<sup>4</sup>

## **Sunday**

Ed and I departed High Barnet at 10:22am and completed the drive to Carlisle at 5:07pm. Notes about the journey from mission pilot, Ed: *straightforward, long*.

The closer we came to Penrith, the more sheep and lambs abounded. Several breeds were evident, perhaps only one or two farms viewable from the road had sheep matching the body type to my analogue sheep, which is modelled after an adult female Shropshire sheep. My sheep has yet to be named, but may periodically be called *Sheepie* throughout the blog. I think we're passing through the tail-end of lambing season, and some of the lambs are grown enough to use Earth as their own personal bouncy-castle. I wonder if gravity will be as kind to me during my missions later in the week?

## **Monday**

Most of my day orbited around building spacesuit parts for *Sheepie's* hind quarters, which require a huge material investment since so many muscle groups and limbs intersect at this point. If eyes are the window to the soul, the butt might be the window to the ... I'll let you finish the analogy in whatever way you see fit. My initial recce of Penrith produced some notable sites of interest: the castle, a building marked '10 Marrs 10', a green gated-driveway, and a communal yard with chickens. These may be worth exploring during my excursion on Friday.

## **Tuesday**

My sheep spacesuit building continues in full force: helmet, shoes, and belly scutes<sup>5</sup> are produced in quick succession. I am wondering if a diet consisting of B&M long-life hotdogs and Fray Bentos is providing enough nutritional sustenance to endure two sheep film sessions and two spacesuit excursions — before the end of the day I will buy echinacea to supplement my (human) immune system.

While walking the route of the next Winter Droving festival, we pass a plague stone, which is in the communal yard with the chickens. I'll add the plague stone to my sites to pass during tomorrow's commute.

## **Wednesday**

Kevin, Daniella, and I attended a ewe auction. Specifically, sheep that can no longer bear lambs were being sold onto buyers who will become responsible for determining their fates. I can't quite work out the sheep selection process or what determines their final price, but the event caused me to reflect on NASA's animal selection process for spaceflight testing, where animals were put through strenuous activities and chosen for their relative health coupled with a 'calm and cool' demeanour. After speaking with some of the auction

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Scutes are more correctly a term used for reptilian skin plates but I'm using it here because the spacesuit plates kind of look like them and as far as I'm aware there is no official term for this part of a sheep spacesuit...

goers, I loaded *Sheepie* into the back of Kevin's pick-up truck and we shipped out to Jennie's farm.

We are in lambing season. By the time we departed the farm at least 2 more lambs ceased their in-utero suspension and began to experience our terrestrial atmosphere.



#### Thursday

I lay awake at night because I hear periodic laughter. At the crack of dawn the laughter culminates into an *AH HAAAAW* and I realise that all the night's sound was authored by nesting seagulls. I am happy to find out that I wasn't missing out on any topics that might have appealed to my human sense of humour.

I commute from Carlisle to Penrith (while wearing my spacesuit). 20m into the commute I find a hatched seagull egg. Some man leans into me and says, "Looks like you've found a dinosaur egg!".



Toward the town centre I pass a construction site where several site-staff attempt to make contact with me. I can understand their concern, but cannot hear their message — I intend to listen back to recorded footage to decipher their transmission. s



200m from Eden Arts I find a necklace with two interlocking hearts engraved with *Louis/Louise*. Does *Sheepie* finally have a name?

I spend the afternoon in Mayburgh Henge introducing *Louis/Louise* to the sheep there and the ancient stone circle. We end up meeting a human couple, each wielding a set of home-made divining rods (knitting needles) who politely ask to watch me gather the sheep and set up for filming. A single ram decides to start licking my sheep's rear end and rubs the helmet so hard that wool becomes stuck in the velcro. I think I will shorten my sheep's name

to *Louise*, as I believe the ram (*Louis* perhaps?) thinks a new ewe has joined his herd.



## Friday

Final mission. Six photos remain on my film roll<sup>6</sup> and I spend them documenting buildings and asking a group of students to photograph me in front of the castle. I can't speak, but I'd really like them to capture me standing in the empty fountain and have the big grass trench, the castle ruins, the factory, the road, the hills, and the sky in the background. Will my pointing up and flexing my arms help explain my request? The photographer exclaims that I look wonderful. As I walk down Castle Terrace an orange long-haired cat gives me a rolling, belly-up seal of approval. Mission accomplished.

While reading pages 33-35 of the *Apollo 11 Technical Crew Debriefing Document*, I come across a note made by Neil Armstrong, Mike Collins, and Buzz Aldrin, who are attempting to describe an unidentifiable object resembling an open suitcase that they saw moving away from their ship on their way to the moon. They reported that depending on the instrument used to view it, the object appeared to take on different characteristics and they could only conclude that it didn't look like part of the MESA (*Modularized Equipment Stowage Assembly*) and 'wasn't a cylinder'.

---

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing this blog, the film has not yet been developed.



At the time of writing this blog entry — 55 years later  
—The object remains unexplained.

What does outer space smell like?<sup>7</sup>

Sarah Fortais

[www.sarahfortais.com](http://www.sarahfortais.com)

---

7

<https://eaudespace.com/products/eau-de-space-the-smell-of-space-100ml#:~:text=Eau%20de%20Space%20%2D%20%22The%20Smell%20of%20Space%22%20Fragrance%2C%20100ml,-Sale%20price%20Price&text=Decades%20ago%2C%20NASA%20designed%20a,100ml%20custom%20bottle%20with%20atomizer.>