

The Only One: Speculative Testimonies

An artistic research project by Sasha Kochetkova

Project description

The Only One: Speculative Testimonies is an artistic research project exploring memory, testimony, and the unstable boundaries between documentary evidence and speculation. It asks how a story becomes accepted as evidence, how knowledge travels through acts of testimony, and what happens when the authority of a document can no longer be taken for granted.

The project works with narratives told directly by women from different countries and social backgrounds. Rather than treating testimony as a transparent window onto an event, it approaches it as a form shaped by memory, language, mediation, repetition, and the conditions under which a story is heard. The resulting moving images and documents occupy an uncertain territory between a trace of lived experience and a constructed account.

The videos are generated from narratives collected directly from women, using an AI model based on an earlier model trained on the artist's own moving-image works. These works develop an unstable image that hovers on the threshold of figuration—a visual condition that echoes the project's questioning of truth itself. The generated videos do not simply illustrate the source narratives; they transform them into speculative images, making visible the distance between an account and its representation.

The project questions what can be called true, who or what is authorised to testify, and how testimony becomes a vehicle for transmitting knowledge. It approaches truth not as a stable endpoint, but as something negotiated through memory, representation, and the conditions under which an account is received.

Method

The research combines interviews and narratives collected directly from women with the gathering and reading of articles, online posts, and other publicly circulating material. These sources are treated as situated accounts rather than neutral or interchangeable data: each arrives through a particular voice, platform, context, and mode of circulation.

The video works are generated from narratives gathered directly from women. The AI model is not trained on these narratives; instead, the artist uses a model derived from an earlier model trained on her own moving-image works. This distinction is central to the method: personal testimony provides the narrative basis, while the model's visual language is shaped by the artist's prior image-making practice.

Alongside the videos, the project develops speculative documents based on collected stories, articles, and online posts. These documents borrow the visual and textual conventions through which information is commonly organised, recorded, and authenticated. They are not presented as genuine archival records; their speculative status invites viewers to examine the cues through which a document acquires credibility.

The process moves between source, model, image, and document. At each stage, information is selected, transformed, reframed, or partially lost. The project does not aim to resolve these transformations into a single authoritative version of events. Instead, it foregrounds the gap between lived experience and its mediated forms, asking how truth is negotiated when testimony is translated into images and documents.

A space for listening, viewing, and examining

Display format

The proposed installation is organised as a row of individual plywood workstations, recalling the functional architecture of offices, examination rooms, or administrative desks. The sketch shows eight stations; however, the installation is adaptable and can be configured with eight, six, or four stations depending on the available space and exhibition conditions.

Each station offers a focused encounter with the project through a screen and headphones. The repeated structure creates a rhythm of separate viewing positions: visitors approach the testimonies one by one, while remaining aware of the larger collective arrangement.

The screens present video works and related visual material. Headphones establish a private listening space within the shared gallery, emphasising the intimate act of receiving a testimony. Printed speculative documents are placed on the work surfaces as material to be inspected rather than merely viewed on screen.

Alongside the digital works, the installation includes 3D-printed objects conceived as artefacts of the narratives. These objects translate fragments, structures, or residues of a story into physical form. They are neither literal illustrations nor evidence in a forensic sense; they operate as speculative remains, occupying the uncertain position between an object that seems to have survived an event and an object produced through an interpretive process.

The installation brings together moving image, sound, printed matter, and sculptural objects. This combination asks the viewer to move between different registers of credibility: the voice heard through headphones, the image generated by a model, the document that resembles an official record, and the object that appears to materialise a narrative.



Exhibition sketch: a modular arrangement of plywood workstations with screens, headphones, printed material, and a 3D-printed object. The number of stations can be adapted to the exhibition space.

Questions for the viewer

What makes a testimony credible? How does a story change when it is collected, interpreted, generated, or turned into a document? Can an image or object testify to something, or does it primarily reveal the systems through which evidence is recognised? *The Only One: Speculative Testimonies* leaves these questions open, inviting viewers to consider truth as something shaped by acts of transmission.