

Marissa Lee Benedict & David Rueter

Dark Fiber

Single channel video, 10:00 minutes | 2015

As if their 9-foot high bedroom-sized structure was teleported from the side of a highway, Marissa Lee Benedict and David Rueter's telecommunication shelter fills nearly an entire gallery, creating an unfamiliar sense of scale. Though telecom shelters generally house bidirectional communication equipment, this shelter exists as an interactive sculpture. Made from basic construction materials, the recognizable yet strange structure houses a projection of a cinematic montage depicting the two artists dressed as laborers laying fiber optic cable as an unauthorized alternative network to the Internet. Emerging out of the Pacific Ocean with cable in hand, the laborers cross a scenic Western landscape eastward into the streets of Chicago. The video concludes with the artists threading the wire through University Galleries and connecting the long-traveled fiber optic strand to the very telecom structure the viewer is sitting in.

The labor portrayed in the video harks back to the physical infrastructure of the internet, from the first cables laid by phone companies in the early 90s to post-Y2K when Google-funded fiber optic cables stretched across oceans. Benedict and Rueter state that "one could be forgiven for thinking that the internet is simply carried along by a combination of blue icons, arrows, and boring magic" instead of a system that is as physical as several hundred hair-thin glass threads that bridge entire continents.

Dark Fiber provides the viewer an opportunity to consider the scale and complexities of place—how virtual interconnectedness physically spans vast landscapes, how a spark of electrical data can cross continents into a cable line in your living room, and how wires, outlets, and conduits not only inform the architecture around us but also allow us to escape our physical place to journey back out into a boundless virtual network that we know as the Internet.