

"93% of our merchandise is purchased by grandparents."
Mary McGit, Loch Ness shopkeeper



July 2 - August 2, 2008

Featuring Nessie, Chupacabra & Bigfoot
items with a special installation by
Adam Maron and Quincy Pearson

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apexart's exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Edith C. Blum Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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ISBN-10: 1-933347-27-9
ISBN-13: 978-1-933347-27-1

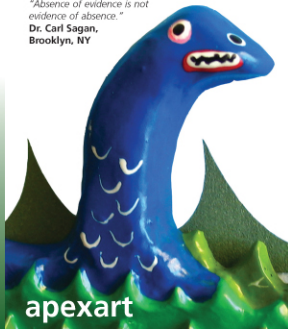
Cover image courtesy of Adam Maron and Quincy Pearson.

Nessie Does New York

Monetizing Myth,
Legend & Culture

"Absence of evidence is not
evidence of absence."

Dr. Carl Sagan,
Brooklyn, NY



"The first promotional coffee mugs were not produced in the U.S. but rather in England for the shops celebrating the monarchy."
Diane Arnold, London Ceramic Museum

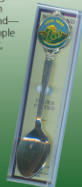


Mythical Marketing 101 by Chris A. Kenny

At the outset of what will no doubt be one of the most pivotal and inquisitive essays on this subject, please note all findings are based on the sound and widely accepted scientific practice of Comparative Internetology (CI) (also referred to as Webologicism). Using this methodology, you simply ask the question and then disprove the "null Googlethesis," which states: "If your answer isn't on the first page of the search results, then it didn't happen or doesn't exist."

As a native of the Pacific Northwest, my first encounter with Bigfoot came at the age of eleven—and it was pretty scary. I'll never forget it. One night, I awoke to an ominous, menacing sound—and it spoke: "Many people do not believe in Bigfoot, but a lot of people do. Some of them feel they must kill it to prove it exists." I bolted up and peered at the flickering TV screen which read, *In Search of Bigfoot*.

It was the voice of
Leonard Nimoy.



Then a hazy, grainy image of a large man or woman dressed in a gorilla suit lumbered across the screen, looking only once, annoyingly, toward the camera—as if to say, "I told you not to film me! My fur looks terrible today."

I knew then, as I still believe today: Bigfoot lives.

And so does the Yeren (Bigfoot's distant cousin by marriage), as well as the Loch Ness Monster, the Chupacabra, and an entire kingdom of mythical creatures (some already extinct). "But how can these mythical creatures exist without any scientific evidence?" you ask? The explanation is simple and two-fold:
1) cryptozoology—the study of hidden animals; and
2) marketing.

Marketing has always been associated with myth, and, arguably, it's why myths survive. Taking the argument a step further, it's this same marketing that leads to the commercialization and ultimate creation of key chains, bumper stickers, and all the other kitsch. For example, I have no proof of the existence of these creatures. But I can either choose to believe, or be persuaded to believe—and that's where marketing and the monetization of myth unite! Just like when I was eleven: good marketing (that's debatable) sold the myth, and I bought the story.

This brings us to one big question: Is it the marketing of myth, or the myth of marketing that keeps these creatures alive? (Who knows?)

In other words, is it that we want to believe there's a small chance Bigfoot might show up on a logging road after we've savagely clear cut his habitat and ask for a room at the zoo and a royalty check? Or because no trip to Scotland would be complete without the requisite photo on the banks of Urquhart Bay while eating a sack of chocolate Loch Ness "droppings," and then buying a shot glass and a set of Nessie-embellished golf balls "for your friend"?

Since these questions are too lofty for cryptozoology (can't even form a "null Googlethesis"), and there's no right or wrong answer anyway, let's just see if we can figure out where the monetization of myths all began and start pointing fingers.

Mythsplaitation



The earliest creators of myths and legends did so to explain the wonders of the Cosmos and things on Earth they didn't understand. A definitive canon, the *Encyclopedia of Things That Never Were*, states: "A scientist might deplore the notion that there is any link between science and fantasy, but fantasy always comes first. It is the creature of imagination, and without imagination there would be no science." And I would add without fantasy, there is no kitsch.

So who is to blame for taking our myths and legends (hopes and dreams)

and exploiting them for capital gain? Research indicates there are at least two probable causes: Marco Polo and Unicorns.

Marco Polo's travels kick-started the age of European exploration. Globe trotters like Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci (sound familiar?) returned with spices, gold, jewels (Old World kitsch), and tall tales of the existence of mythical animals. Since discovering New Worlds is very costly, these explorers would sometimes exaggerate the truth, and promise the King or Queen great treasures and riches upon their return.

Blame the Unicorn

Back in the Old World, there were at least six mysterious natural treasures craved and sought after from the New and Other Worlds: walrus ivory; the coco-de-mer, a 50-pound nut that grew beneath the sea and bestowed health and bliss; a mammoth tusks, which the Chinese believed were from the teeth of a giant mole that died when it surfaced; the gyrfalcon; polar bears, a status symbol for royalty; and, last but not least, the magical horn of the unicorn (also called an alicorn).

Rare and mysterious, the horn of the unicorn commanded extreme value—and made them ideal gifts among rulers. Unicorn horns were a great way to win friends and influence neighboring monarchs. And they worked! Alicorns were bought and sold and owned by monarchs and popes alike throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Everyone wanted one. The scepter of Russia's czars and the scepter of Austria's Hapsburg were both made of unicorn horns. The treasures of Japan's imperial palace included two alicorns.

The problem was the New World had a serious deficit of alicorns. (In fact, some people think they didn't exist at all.) So the great explorers and conquerors needed a



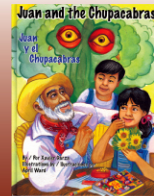
solution if they were to continue their exploitation of myth. What else looks like a unicorn horn? Answer: the narwhal!

The "unicorn horns" that remain in royal treasuries today are in fact all narwhal tusks—the huge elongated and spiraled tooth of the 15-foot High Arctic whale. The tooth is ivory and so closely resembled the depictions of the mythical unicorns, they became easy prey for commercial value. As soon as those pillaging future capitalists, the explorers and conquerors, figured out they could dupe their royal beneficiaries and return with the most valued treasure, it was on.

The narwhal-unicorn scheme was probably one of the best kept secrets, and remains one of history's most successful marketing strategies. All along the supply chain—from Vikings to Arabs and Spaniards alike—the trade was carried on in complete secrecy for over 400 years. The bottom finally dropped in the 17th Century as a result of increased trade between Greenland and North America.

Bigfooters and Ness-watchers

Today the commercialization of myth is alive and well. And the good news is, so is the desire to confirm the myths. On May 26, 2007, a 55-year old lab technician named Gordon Holmes captured a digital video of



what he called "this jet black thing, about 4 to 5 feet long, moving fairly fast in the water." Even skeptics described the video as "the best footage ever seen." Unfortunately, the credibility of Holmes came under question due to his past claims of filming black fairies. And many wrote it off as an otter.

"People from very different backgrounds and different parts of the world have described very similar creatures, behaving in similar ways, and uttering some strikingly similar sounds. As far as I am concerned, the existence of hominids of this sort is a very real probability."

Jane Goodall, London, England



Nonetheless, the media interest in Nessie skyrocketed, and sales of trinkets and kitsch hit an all time high not seen in years.

The next time you're surrounded by miles of key chains, shot glasses, tee-shirts and other beautiful kitsch, don't curse business and marketing; just blame it on Marco Polo and the Unicorn.

Chris A. Kenny
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"What were my parents thinking? They terrorized me with a mythical killer to eat my peas. Now I'm afraid of the dark."
Paolo Isaac Gringalez, age 12
Juarez, Mexico

