



BUILDING WORLDS

Building Worlds

July 21–September 15, 2018

Michael Booker

Rachel Guardiola

Timothy Harper

Laura Beth Konopinski

Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann



Michael Booker, *Just in Case the Devilman Don't Know*, 2017

A CHANCE TO SEE

By Erica Harrison

Associate Curator and Festival Director

Building Worlds is a thematic exhibition of work by five artists—Michael Booker, Rachel Guardiola, Timothy Harper, Laura Beth Konopinski, and Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann—who share an interest in the role of science fiction, scientific fact, and fantasy in the changing nature of our fears, ideals, and questions about being human. Recognizing that our retelling of the past changes constantly and that opening ourselves to new possibilities can help identify the biases of our accepted histories, the artists in this exhibition create their own worlds, including cultural references and artifacts, to question the assumptions of history-making and truth-telling.

The selection of works brings together concepts of scientific inquiry and fantasy to reflect on issues of social injustice, environmental disasters, and emotional turmoil, while examining the possibility of changing these dystopian elements to create an alternative outcome. Each artist is an exacting connoisseur of their preferred media and all are focused on indulging their imagination to create visual narratives of layered meaning and connections.

Dr. Helen Klus, assistant editor for the Royal Astronomical Society, describes the importance of science fiction in a post published on her website entitled “Imagining the future: Why society needs science fiction:”

Throughout much of human history, society did not change rapidly enough for people to be able to envision a future that was different from their own. At the same time, many parts of the Earth remained unexplored, and this may be why many older science fiction novels were

set in the present. (Early) science fiction is also more likely to address social rather than scientific problems, firstly because there was less science to utilize and secondly, because science fiction offered an ideal medium to make social comments that could not be published as fact...science fiction is the only genre that depicts how society could function differently. This is the first step towards progress as it allows us to imagine the future we want and consider ways to work towards it. It also makes us aware of futures we wish to avoid and helps us prevent them.¹

The artists in *Building Worlds* are responding to the world they know. Innovative uses of space and materials, and references to time invite the viewer to question their views of the past, present, and future. As in many science fiction and fantasy narratives, the role of lush vegetation and organic material is a key component in the creation of these artists' new truths.

With methodical and precise hatch marks and prismatic colors, Michael Booker creates a hypnotic series of drawings and paintings of a utopic environment called OMNI. The name is inspired by the song *Live at the O.M.N.I* by The Goodie Mob, a 1991 hip-hop act formed in Atlanta, whose music focused on social and political issues. Booker credits the group with creating, "a world where they could live," in the American South where he also grew up. Booker's inspiration for the works is multi-layered with references to ancient African culture, African-American history, art history, and more. In Booker's OMNI, the sharp patterned lines bring out a sense of luxuriance and growth, while paper collage elements frame areas highlighting brightly animated figures. These figures are reminiscent of African spirits or Gods—wearing hoodies, do-rags, and masks as ceremonial regalia—celebrating and uniting

¹ The Star Garden April 3, 2012 and updated May 28, 2018. <http://www.thestargarden.co.uk/Why-society-needs-science-fiction.html>

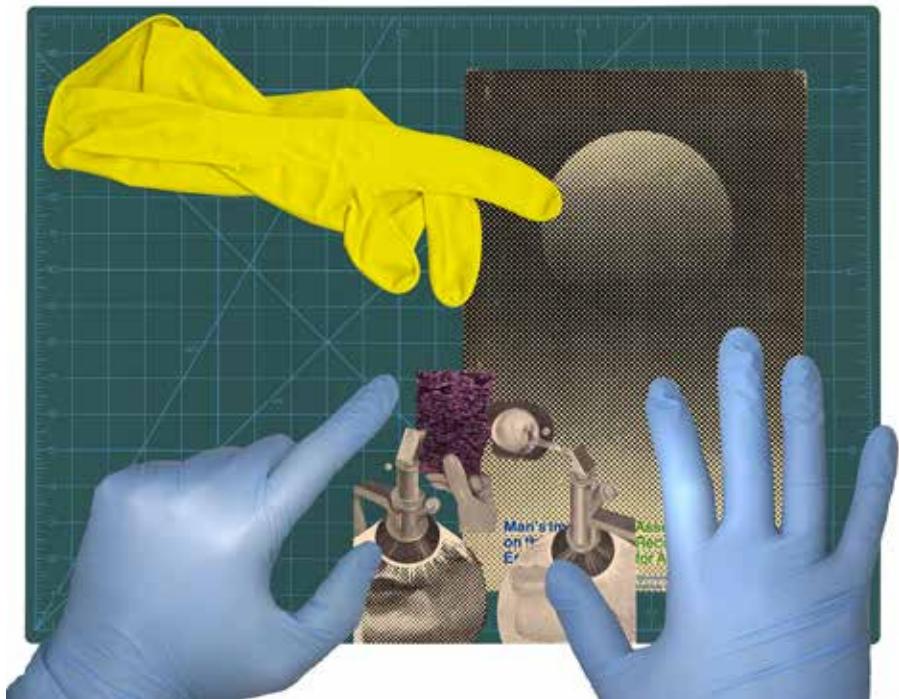


Michael Booker, *Stay Lost Until OMNI*, 2017



with their ancestry. The composition intentionally references embroidery, connecting the artist to his family's history of quilt-making and the passing down of traditions and memories through craft. Common objects signifying status from Black culture and southern hip-hop music like the Lincoln Continental and a Cadillac featured in Booker's *The Traveler*, are a main component of the OMNI world. The artist ponders questions posed in the song *Black America Again* by musical artist Common, "Who freed me? Lincoln or Cadillac." As Booker explains, "this line is a double entendre, referring to both the Emancipation Proclamation signed by President Lincoln and the chase for status symbols like fancy cars, jewelry, etc." He goes on to question, "How much did the Emancipation Proclamation actually do for black people?" In Booker's utopic world, modern Black culture is preserved in the future as a sign of past/present transformation.

Rachel Guardiola's performances, installation work, and photography are based on the artist's questioning of what the wilderness might look like without human presence. Her response is presented through the fantastic narrative of a Cyborg space-pirate named Madame VEGA—a character inspired by the Bene Gesserit, a powerful sisterhood in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, focused on advancing humanity and saving it from extinction. Her interdisciplinary approach draws on her background in botany and taxidermy; research into biomes, seed repositories, and wildcrafting; her experiences of living in the sub-Saharan area of Africa, and participation in an Arctic Circle Art & Science Expedition in the Arctic Archipelago. In the gallery, Guardiola presents a lush forest-like wonderland only visible through obscured glass and video documentation. We are invited to watch the remnant of Madame VEGA's act of discovery in this untouchable wild place where recognizable objects like shells, peppers, seeds, etc., are presented as oddities. Fragrant plant-based aromas waft throughout the space creating new unexpected associations to





the familiar objects and the photographs are evidence of the surveyor's horticultural research. All of this is an opportunity to reflect on our engagement with the natural world and what might be found once we leave it behind.

With an affinity for foraging in salvage yards, alleyways, and city gutters Timothy Harper's artistic bricolage are whimsical interactive objects comprised of obsolete machines, dismantled toys, and decaying plant matter. The revamped objects are given a new purpose—to contain or support their new discrete environments—unrelated to their original functions. Viewers are invited to interact with the works through cranks or knobs, which when turned, activate a chorus of discordant sounds of metallic plinking echoing from inside each piece. The cacophonous, imperfect sounds have simultaneous connections to emotional idealism, evoking memories of child-like experiences with music boxes and automated toys, and apocalyptic imagery of discarded materials tossed into the trash heap. Harper says he is, "giving deserving objects another shot at life, a chance to be something beautiful."

Laura Beth Konopinski sculpts glass, both in liquid and its solid state using grinding, carving, engraving, polishing, and sandblasting techniques to create biodomes and sculptures in which to explore emotional riddles. The pieces are reliquaries for moments of collision between reason and intuition that, "embody the emotional development of change and transformation." Influenced by human behavior, animal husbandry, daily meditation practice, and collections of biological specimens, the works encapsulate, "narrative stories to show the connection between our human experiences and animal instincts." In some of the works, recognizable organic materials occupy the hollow space between the thick glass layers, and in others figurative imagery is distinguishable. All the pieces have elements that are magnified and obscured simultaneously, offering little clarity despite their transparency. She states, "these optical variations distort the dimensional understanding of the



Laura Beth Konopinski, *Hang: Purge*, 2018



worlds that I build inside,” thus visually representing the complexities of the human experience.

Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann plays with tropes of landscape, using detailed drawings of leafy ferns, flowering blooms, and climbing vines combined with wildly fluid paint pours, explosive patterning, and thick ink lines to create a dense tropical thicket. Her site-specific painting on vinyl installed on the gallery windows, depicts a fantastical environment of overabundance. The tangled imagery gives the illusion of an otherworldly environment where, without human cultivation, plants have unconstrained ability to grow and expand. The “escapist possibilities of panoramic pictures,” are inspired by her training as a traditional Chinese landscape painter, visits to the Mogao Grottoes of the Buddhist Cave Temples near Dunhuang, China, research of the exuberantly decorative Rococo canvases from the 18th century, and her preoccupation with views from NASA’s Earth Observatory satellite. The resultant work creates space through layering rather than perspective and aims to transport the viewer out of the ordinary world into a sacred, utopic space of luminescent colors.

Building Worlds is a celebration in the diversity of life, artistic curiosity, and optimism. These artists illustrate the importance of employing artistic rigor in combination with a scholarly perspective of observation, questioning, and research. Each artist in this exhibition is pushing the boundaries of their practice, immersing themselves in a demanding creative process to provide us with new mysteries to explore.



Laura Beth Konopinski, *Weighted by your Heart of Gold*, 2015



Timothy Harper, *Gumball Two*, 2017



EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Michael Booker

*Chillin' Dead in the Pathway, the Po' Baby
Who Walked Slowly to the Candy Lady*, 2017

Oil on canvas
40 x 30 inches

Just in Case the Devilman Don't Know, 2017

Fineliner pen and collage on paper
40 ½ x 26 inches

Stay Lost Until OMNI, 2017

Fineliner pen on paper
34 x 24 inches

*Not Sure if that was Metaphorical or if He Had
Seen One Today*, 2018

Fineliner pen on paper
24 x 46 inches

The Traveler, 2018

Oil on canvas
48 x 36 inches

All courtesy of the artist

Rachel Guardiola

Artifacts from an Otherwhere, 2017–2018
Plaster, cement, cryptoflora extracts, and
rubber gloves
Dimensions variable

OEA_100049A9, 2018
Archival pigment print
20 x 24 inches

OEA_100049B7, 2018
Archival pigment print
20 x 24 inches

OEA_100055F2, 2018
Archival pigment print
20 x 24 inches

OEA_100056Z2, 2018
Archival pigment print
20 x 24 inches

Portholes in VEGA's Propagation Room, 2018
Live video feed, performance, and cryptoflora
extracts from a primordial forest
Dimensions variable

All courtesy of Hamiltonian Gallery,
Washington, DC

Timothy Harper

Thistle Music Box Two, 2014

Found objects

4 x 4 x 8 inches

Argus, 2015

Found objects

6 x 22 x 6 inches

Projector, 2015

Found objects

12 x 8 x 18 inches

Red Lantern, 2016

Found objects

12 x 14 x 29 inches

Gumball Two, 2017

Found objects

10 x 10 x 48 inches

Lantern Allium, 2017

Found objects

8 x 10 x 16 inches

Three Times Two, 2017

Found objects

21 x 21 x 43 inches

620 Film, 2018

Found objects

3 ½ x 5 x 13 inches

Polaroid 420, 2018

Found objects

7 x 7 x 18 inches

All courtesy of the artist

Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann

Trilled Tide, 2018

Acrylic and sumi ink on vinyl

Five panels: 105 x 154 inches each

Courtesy of the artist

Laura Beth Konopinski

Weighted by your Heart of Gold, 2015

Blown and recycled glass, sculpted, enamel,
and preserved organic materials

5 x 5 x 7 ½ inches

Displacing your Wishes with Truth, 2016

Blown and recycled glass, sculpted, enamel,
preserved organic materials, and mixed media

8 x 8 x 15 inches

Between your walls; the rubber exposed, 2018

Sculpted and repurposed glass, enamel
image transfer, and mixed media

14 x 13 x 22 inches

Hang: Purge, 2018

Blown glass, sculpted and repurposed glass,
enamel image transfer, and mixed media

17 x 8 x 8 inches

Shadows of Deep, 2018

Sculpted and repurposed glass, enamel image
transfer, and mixed media

12 x 13 x 21 inches

All courtesy of the artist

The mission of the Greater Reston Arts Center is to enrich community life by promoting involvement and excellence in contemporary visual arts.

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