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"Dissident Futures" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts



Peter Coffin, *Untitled (Flying Fruits)*, 2012, Run time: 2:01 min., Audio-Visual/Time-based media. Courtesy of the artist.

Twenty-one artists have rendered their visions of the future for YBCA's "Dissident Futures" exhibit. There's film, video, photography, painting, installation, sculpture, and performance to see, but the piece that left the strongest impression on me was Coffin's *Untitled (Flying Fruits)* above. Set in its own viewing space, images of fruit float off the screen and toward the viewer. Coffin's work is reminiscent of the beginning of *Star Wars*, replacing the movement of stars in space with brightly colored orbs of fruit. The result is mesmerizing and humorous. Is form reducible to fruit? Does our existence hold no more meaning than fruit flying through space? I'm amused to think it might be a fruit cocktail version of *The Heart Sutra*: "Form is emptiness, emptiness itself is form; emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness..."



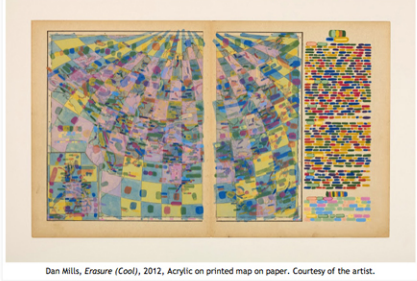
Basim Magdy, *An Abstract Reality Leaves You Lonely in The Spotlight*, 2010, Spray paint and acrylic on paper. Courtesy of Marisa Newman Projects, New York.

Within the theme of space and consciousness, Magdy contributes a number of compelling pieces to the exhibit. His video installation *Investigating the Color Spectrum of a Post-Apocalyptic Future Landscape* is made from images taken on a volcanic island in the Canary Islands. The installation straddles the line between creation and destruction, extinction and the potential for rebirth. Magdy has also created some witty images in paint and watercolor on paper. One shows a green silhouette walking through black space with floating text "Any series of fictional events can be magically projected onto a blank screen to become part of our reality." In another a space-meet-science-experiment image proclaims "We listen to the demons in your head." How, from the spacing of random thoughts and events, do we construct meaning?



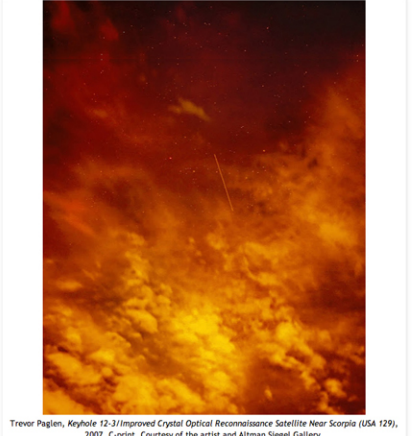
Jason Kelly Johnson and Nataly Gattegno, *Hydraspan Bridge Colony*, 2013, Thermoformed plastics, LEDs, various electronics. Courtesy of the artists.

Although much of the art in this exhibit takes space as its theme, some is grounded in the here and now. This model, created by Future Cities Lab, looks out over Mission Street. From the outside it's a little hard to see through the frit in the glass, but from the inside you can watch luminescence roll through the model against the rhythm of traffic outside. Entitled "The Hydraspan Bridge Colony," the work is a quarter-scale model of the old west span of the Bay Bridge. Fog-catching ribbons collect water to sustain agricultural projects, fish farms are located in the Bay, and the old structure is reclaimed as a space for people to conduct political and commercial interactions.



Dan Mills, *Erasure (Cool)*, 2012, Acrylic on printed map on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

With Dan Mills, the postcolonial cartographic project envisions the future. Mills works with old educational maps and atlases to examine national and regional power dynamics. By layering watercolors or acrylics over map lines, he reveals that the contemporary effects of American imperialism are not bound by traditional political representations of the world. The theme of "dissident futures" is wide, sometimes directly challenging me to see how each and every piece in the exhibit coheres. But such a broad theme allows for a great deal of flexibility. I was surprised to find the overall mood of the exhibit was not dystopian, but uplifting. Pulling together my obsession with *Homeland* and recent white-knuckled viewing of *Gravity*, Paglen's images of reconnaissance satellites overhead was a fascinating way to problematize, yet reveal the beauty, of the paths of machines in the sky over our heads.



Trevor Paglen, *Keyhole 12-3/Improved Crystal Optical Reconnaissance Satellite Near Scorpio (USA 129)*, 2007, C-print. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel Gallery.

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