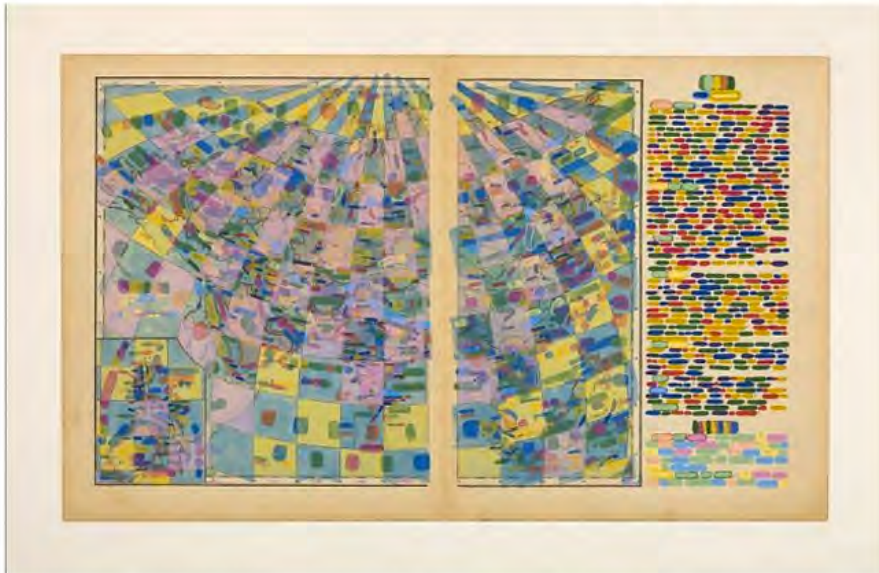


'Dissident Futures': What might be ahead for us

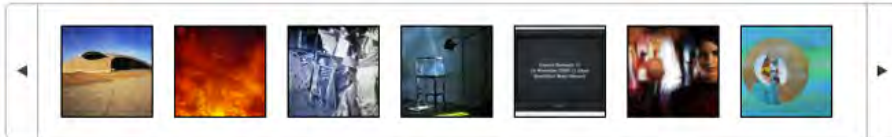
Nirmala Nataraj

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Dan Mills, Erasure (Cool), 2012, Acrylic on printed map on paper. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Courtesy Of The Artist.



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Most science fiction tends to be tinged with nostalgia and the fear of destruction that stems from our collective anxiety. In contrast, "Dissident Futures," a group exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, features artists who aren't simply going on their own personal speculations.

YBCA Director of Visual Arts Betti-Sue Hertz conceived of the show after a series of public conversations about the future. There are more than 20 artists in the show, who imagine everything from how technology will change the way we think of the body as an autonomous organism to the exploration of deep time. Hertz says she "organized the exhibition in a way that de-emphasizes good and bad, hope and fear, in order to focus more on approaches to the future," so the gathered perspectives are more measured than sensationalist.

The work includes the abstract paintings of Shane Hope, made with a DIY 3-D printer, to Neil Beloufa's movie "Kempinski," which films residents in Mali who tell fantastical stories about the future using the present tense. The collective Future Cities Lab offers a commissioned piece that investigates the possibility of colonizing the old eastern span of the Bay Bridge, proposing its transformation into 2 miles of functional living space.

U.S.-based Anthony Marcellini and Singapore artist Heman Chong collaborated on a film titled "Twenty Plots for Things to Come." Marcellini says the film "began with the assumption that the future can be defined by a state in which an object or a situation that we previously considered conventional and commonplace has changed." The two wrote brief 100-word plots imagining a future scenario and then made a film with these plots and a variety of images. Marcellini says the film could potentially go on forever, as the associations between image and narrative are always morphing.

Larry Gagosian

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Artist Cauleen Smith has two pieces in the show that embrace Afrofuturism and the experience of being black in America. She says, "Black people began their sojourn in North America and the diaspora as cyborgs. Therefore, my relationship to tech is not the fetishistic science-as-religion position that is so frequently posited in mainstream science fiction. I find it impossible to consider a future without attempting to make it converse, through space and time, with the past."

One of Smith's pieces is a "device" titled "The Ark of the Flood," which "fundamentally plays a video and makes a rainbow." The video is a remix of time-lapse nature photography from the 1978 film "The Secret Life of Plants," and includes audio from four solo pianists performing their interpretation of "Over the Rainbow."

"The images I make in the video and the objects I create are in some respects archaeological offerings," she says. "I am making them for the me of the past and the me of the future."

Hertz says the artists in the show are "stretching and expanding the palette for how we might experience the present differently. After all, future thinking can be diagnostic or speculative or analytical, but in the end it is a guessing game of one kind or another. And since art doesn't have to be functional or deliver a prognosis, there is a lot more breathing room to ruminate."

If you go

Dissident Futures: Through Feb. 2. Noon-8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, until 6 p.m. Sunday. \$8-\$10. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St., S.F. (415) 978-2787. www.ybca.org.

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