

WHITE CONDUIT PROJECTS

Fragments of a Lost Future

Karen David, Liz Elton, Lana Locke, Susie Olczak, Mimei Thompson

21 Feb - 24 March, 2024

Opening Reception on Wed 21 February 6:00 - 8:30 pm

Fragments of a Lost Future presents work by five artists who consider themes of the non-human, the city, fiction, the passage of time and sustainability to question the nature of our current reality.

The Planet's mineral, energy and agriculture resources have been efficiently, and even ruthlessly, exploited... They have harnessed energy of the atom, deciphered the molecular codes that oversee their own reproduction... Despite these achievements the people of this planet have in other respects scarcely raised themselves above the lowest level of barbarism. The enjoyment of pain and violence is as natural to them as the air they breathe.

J.G. Ballard ["Report From an Obscure Planet", 1992]

The fears of the near future described in J.G. Ballard's science fiction novels are now our reality.

Earth is accustomed to the phenomenon of shifting temperatures and to changes in the degree of saturation of its soils: the Sahara Desert has cycled through wet and dry periods since the last Ice Age 12,000 years ago, and over tens of millions of years solar radiation energy changes the earth's surface. But now human existence is threatened through the results of our own activity, where we hasten the progress of desertification. We know we can and should promote measures to slow this progression yet on the contrary, we maintain a momentum.

Even a one degree rise in temperature will cause negative effects, such as increased coral bleaching, damage from floods and storms, and changes in the distribution of vectors for infectious diseases. The inhabitants of our soils, the earth's microbiome, fungi, bacteria, algae, protozoa and worms are essential to our survival, yet current mainstream agricultural practices that use pesticides are making vegetables toxic, and the overuse of antibiotics and fungicides deplete our future resilience. When corporations and politicians are busy monopolising airspace and arguing amongst themselves, whose voice will communicate this urgent crisis. We go about our daily lives with our heads partly buried in the sand, often too busy to fully engage with our current polycrisis. Activists rightly convey outrage, but can we embed these urgencies into our everyday lives?

In 'Report from an Obscure Planet', Ballard describes the critical state of the Earth as viewed from another place. White Conduit Projects brings together these five artists who bravely and playfully incorporate this sense of crisis into the core and surface of their work. Starting with their everyday surroundings, they attempt new ways of communication, quietly bringing a Ballardian nuance to artworks that inhabit our domestic space.

Karen David's multidisciplinary practice exams notions of belief systems through paranormal fictions. David's series of works here are based on the UFO poster found on the wall in Agent Mulder's fictional FBI basement office with the text "I Want to Believe". These four words have become the unofficial motto for the 90s TV series *The X-Files*, relating not only to the show's alien mythology but to wider questions of the paranormal and belief. What does the phrase 'I Want to Believe' offer in our current crisis? Ballard's only true obscure and alien planet was earth, so what do we 'want to believe' from now on? Can we consolidate ideas of belief with science, of fiction with fact, and is there a sensible space in-between? David asks these questions, without answers, through the objectification of spirituality, through pop cultural artifacts, through liquid paint experiments and through repeated material embroideries.

Liz Elton dyes food refuse bags with pigments extracted from scraps from her own kitchen and stitches them together with silk. She moves between 2D and 3D, incorporating seeds she harvested herself into her sculptures, and collages her work into abstract paintings. Natural pastel colors are gentle and calming. It seems that the goodness of the earth is condensed into her works. The remains of flowers and rescue boxes of vegetables acquired from her local market are composted, and the fragile beauty of their decay captured in photographs of her bin. Her work does not pursue longevity but embraces its own demise, whilst seeds embedded in its seams suggest the possibility of new life.

Lana Locke's sculptures appear to have been struck by a sudden disaster. Her family's daily life has been frozen in place, and plants and domestic parts have become fossilized and covered in minerals. She has exhibited many installation-based works, but in this exhibition, the objects are isolated from the set, and the viewer feels as if they are looking at an archaeological object in a museum glass case. Objects excavated from dusty ruins are museum exhibits, and experts' opinions enhance their value. (The fact that many were auctioned on eBay is testament to the fact that the general public appreciates the value of history, too.) As such, Locke moved the dusty infused installation to the clean environment of a gallery, then she challenges viewer to confirm the value of her wish, "we can collectivise to look after this fragile ecology."

Susie Olczak has transformed Crystal World, one of Ballard's masterpieces about end-of-the-earth themes, into a ceramic piece. Trees, birds, buildings and people gradually crystallize. A world that shines with unparalleled beauty, resembling a jewel. I wish I could be intoxicated by its beauty, but this is a world where time and life are sealed away. By being crystallized, life gains eternal life. Is this the image of a person who gets pleasure from suffocating little by little? Is the Earth slowly heading toward destruction due to global warming? It's like a model for a city, and like Noah's Ark trapped in eternal time. Susie often uses salvage and natural materials, and the city of the future may use soil as an authentic material, like a virgin desert region. Having lived in Japan and experienced autumn the colours of the Sakura season have been imagined within future works. Bringing the experience to her practice, adding playfulness and irony.

Mimei Thompson's brushstrokes are like magic wands, and a natural world is created followed after each exaggerated paint mark. Her paintings move back and forth between the known and the fantastical worlds. She paints the landscapes in her mind by wiping the canvas and moving the brush minutely but boldly. They look like an ancient land where insects, reptiles, and plants were the living things on earth, and they also look like the nostalgic futuristic landscape of Day-Glo a future where humans have disappeared. They are comical, optimistic, hallucinatory and surreal. Her plants remind us of a shop selling singing flowers in the desert resort Vermilion Sands which is a setting in J.G. Ballard's short story. The everyday is elevated into the miraculous or vibrant.