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Critics' Picks

New York

"The Future as Disruption"

THE KITCHEN

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In his essay "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), Robert Smithson diagnoses his contemporaries with an addiction to B movies: "The movies give a ritual pattern to the lives of many artists, and this induces a kind of 'low-budget' mysticism, which keeps them in a perpetual trance. The 'blood and guts' of horror movies provides for their 'organic needs,' while the 'cold steel' of Sci-fic movies provides for their 'inorganic needs.'" One can certainly catch in the titanium (or tinfoil) of midcentury sci-fi schlock the first gleam of a "Juddian 'specific object'" (Smithson's coinage). But what of now, when—in

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the wake of Blade Runner, or William Gibson's burned-fuse hackers, or even that barnacled adjective Ballardian—the future has become a decidedly dirtier place?

From the perspective of the artists surveyed in “The Future as Disruption,” tomorrow is already a relic. Mungo Thomson's audio piece of “replicant” voices reciting an oral history of Blade Runner's production comes piped through a noticeably dingy alarm-clock radio. Jonah Freeman plays off his previous imaginings of a labyrinthine superstructure called the Franklin Abraham with a museum display of deteriorating texts. Simone Leigh's sculptures become weathered artifacts occupying an uneasy space between a Louise Bourgeois tribute exhibition and the cover of Bitches Brew.

Several paintings and digital renderings of dystopian landscapes are disappointing in their directness. That said, the exhibition's most memorable employ of science fiction as raw material is perhaps the most literal: Julieta Aranda reduces dime-store sci-fi novels to a sandy pulp and encases them in a Perspex cube, the interior of which is agitated by the spasmodic bursts of an attached air compressor. In an accompanying series of close-up photographs, the resulting environment resembles the vast desert expanses of Frank Herbert or George Lucas—or, strangely enough, the famous 1920 photograph of dust accumulating on the “Large Glass.” When finally we reach the future, Duchamp will be there waiting.

--Colby Chamberlain