

ARTINFO

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New York Summer Group Shows

By Claire Barliant

NEW YORK—You could devote a lifetime to the study of the sociological and aesthetic factors that go into curating group shows, and many have. But the summer group show? It's less conducive to scholarly analysis, and for good reason. The summer show complies with only two guidelines: cram as much work as possible into the gallery, and have a blast. As a result, some patterns have developed over the years. The artist-curated show is an old favorite, as is “pick a medium or subject and stick with it — no matter what.” Other themes come and go depending on the climate: “political” was hot two years ago (though its absence from the current crop is a little surprising, given that this is a presidential election year), and “ecology” was last year's hit.

So far, 2008 seems to be the year of the apocalypse. In June, Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* was judged superior to all other books of the past 25 years (by *Entertainment Weekly*, no less), and this summer's blockbuster film *Wall-E*, one of Disney's darkest yet, has met wild critical and popular success despite (or because of) being set on a dismal, depopulated planet Earth some hundreds of years in the future. So what does it mean about our current outlook that this year's hot theme is gloomy science fiction? We'll leave that one for the scholars to debate. It's time to head to the beach.

Disclaimer: Although I would have liked to, it was impossible to check out every show in New York, including those with such fantastic titles as the intriguing “A Rictus Grin” (at Broadway 1602) and the hilarious “Journey to the Center of Uranus” (at Canada), so consider this just a small sampling of some of the best summer exhibits up now, organized according to category.

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Sci-Fi

"The Future As Disruption" at The Kitchen, through August 1

One downside of the summer group show is that, while the press release often boasts a juicy theme and a titillating title, the exhibition rarely delivers on those promises. "The Future of Disruption" is an exception. Not only are the artworks all great, but they all fully support the premise, which, after all, is relatively simple: artists who incorporate science-fiction tropes to comment on an uncertain future. There's even a nice subtext, to boot – racial politics as envisioned many years hence. One standout work is Simone Leigh's video featuring the intriguing "Star Trek" character Uhura, who, I never realized before seeing this piece, was essentially the Starship's secretary, a role that is offensive on so many levels.

At left: Still from Simone Leigh, "Back and Forth (Uhura)" (2008)