

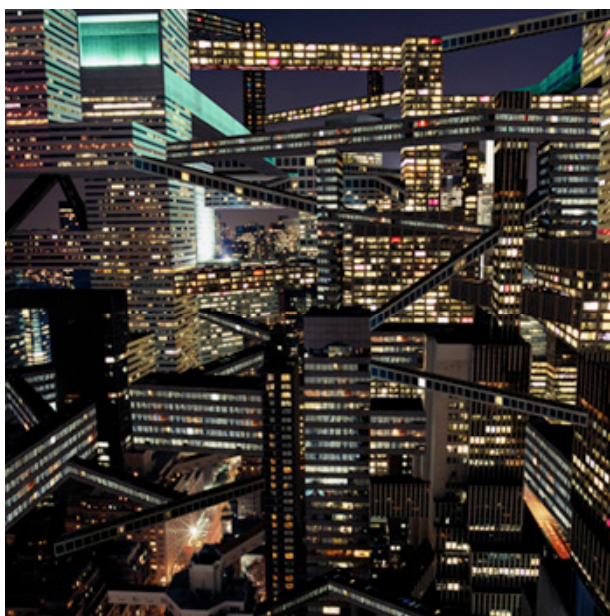
NY ART BEAT

June 30, 2008

Future (Im)Perfect

[*The Future as Disruption*] considers a global perspective on technological advancement and its impact on issues ranging from race and gender to economic exchange, but it is also relevant to the more localized anxieties of its New York audience.

By Rob Sgobbo



As Norbert Wiener, applied mathematician and scholar of cybernetics, once wrote, “Progress not only imposes new possibilities for the future, but new restrictions.” Similarly, *The Future as Disruption*, a collaborative exhibition on view at The Kitchen in Chelsea from June 18-August 1, 2008, seeks to question our notions of human progress and its possibilities for our future.

The show provides a strong showing from a variety of artists using different mediums to portray “human progress” in its diverse forms. Taking inspiration

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from contemporary science-fiction writing, television and movies, the pieces seek to provide a critical eye to what many believe are the benefits of technological advancement, globalization and the construction of megacities.

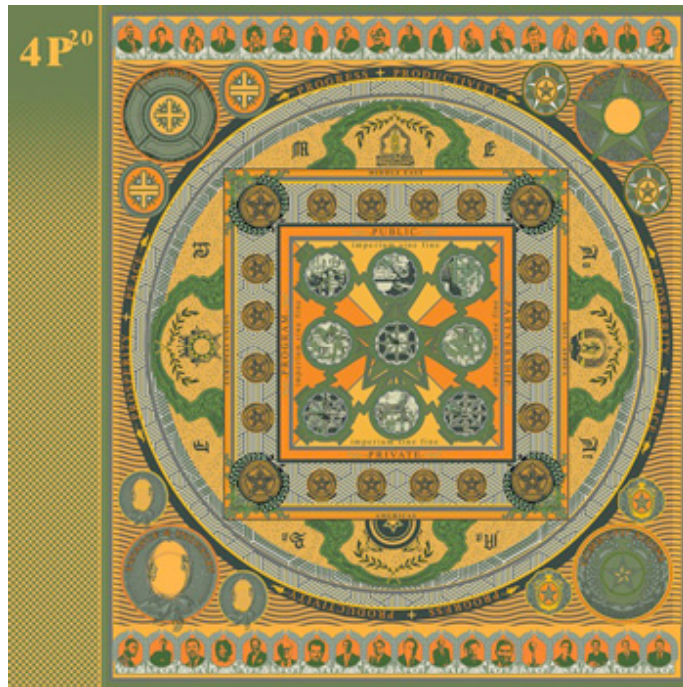
One of the show's centerpieces, "1986_ (2007), a photograph created by Jonah Freeman, is a spliced and reconstructed image of a picturesque megacity. Featuring towering skyscrapers connected by arching causeways, Freeman provides the viewer with a certain dark beauty found in the construction of his "city of the future." With the gleaming lights of buildings reflecting against a dark foreground, one can't help but notice the absence of people in this gigantic metropolis. The photograph's title pays homage to George Orwell's sadistic classic 1984, while its causeways connecting the skyscrapers are eerily reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham's prison panopticon—an architectural "all-seeing eye" of a central security power. In the photograph, Freeman gives a dual vision of progress: one of gleaming Jetsons-esque architecture created by enhanced human technology, and one of a city devoid of human presence and interaction. Despite the visceral beauty shown in Freeman's constructed megacity, one can't help but question the implications of such progress.

The duality found in "1986_" is reiterated throughout *The Future as Disruption*, and acts as the show's central theme. Matthew Lyons, who cocurated the event with Rashida Bumbray, spoke to the meaning of the show as a whole saying, "Having direct influence from Sci-Fi and from fictional worlds, the show takes a global critical perspective of hyper-urban spaces. These spaces of seeming human progress have consequences for commerce, human identity, race and gender. All of the pieces exist and give full attention to this central theme. Their placement and movement throughout the gallery allow this theme to make sense." In touring through The Kitchen's high-ceilinged second floor gallery, it is evident Lyons and Bumbray have paid close attention to the placement of the 10-piece exhibition, guiding viewers through the gallery and allowing them to develop their own perceptions of the messages conveyed by the works of different mediums.

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A particularly poignant piece created by Julieta Aranda, Sean Dack, Adam Pendleton and Mungo Thomson employs sculpture, text, printed books, video and sound to explore the darker aspects of the 1950s Atomic Age. Consisting of a Plexiglass display case filled with worn and destroyed copies of futuristic science-fiction novels such as *Dune* and *The Kaleidoscope Room*, the piece begs the viewer to question the nature of such imagined technological advancements and their effects on human life. Torn newspaper clippings with headlines like “Elevator Debacle Linked To...” and “UFO... Unidentified... 7 Dead...” express the anxieties of the political and social climate characterizing this era of “progress” in our human history.



While the individual pieces of *The Future as Disruption* each hold their own in providing social commentary, as a collection this show provides an eloquent and topical statement on the condition of the world today. The exhibition

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considers a global perspective on technological advancement and its impact on issues ranging from race and gender to economic exchange, but it is also

relevant to the more localized anxieties of its New York audience. Freeman's mega-city, in particular, plays to anxieties of urban development in a dialogue with New York and its recent crane collapses, ongoing gentrification and other growing pains. Aranda's Atomic Age piece also invokes current fears over terrorism and "weapons of mass destruction."

Although these artists have created a refined perspective on the world today, their sometimes abstract, multi-layered pieces are open to different interpretations, giving us liberty to come to our own conclusions—and perhaps more importantly, our own questions—about the condition of progress.

Related Film Program:

The Kitchen will be screening three films, all having their New York premiere, on Tuesday, July 1, 2008. At 7pm is The Otolith Group's Otolith I and Mark Aerial Waller's Superpower Dakar Chapter. At 8pm is Cauleen Smith's The Fullness of Time, followed by a conversation with the filmmaker and artist Paul Chan. The film was part of Creative Time and Paul Chan's recent project Waiting for Godot in New Orleans. Admission is free.