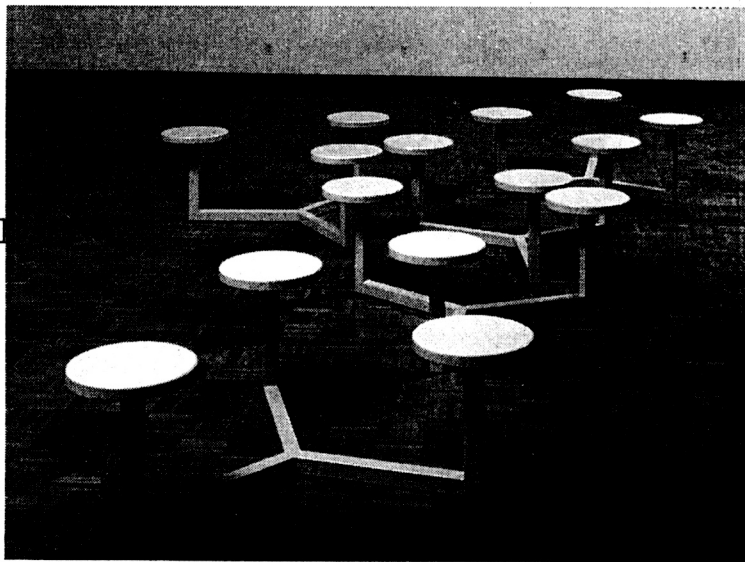


Futurama

Post-millennial déjà vu at Luckman Fine Arts

BY DOUG HARVEY

David Schafer, *Cluster 38/5 random* (1999)



NOSTALGIA FOR THE FUTURE ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO be. During my nephews' recent visit, when I finally laid eyes on Disney's new Tomorrowland, encrusted with its faux Jules Verne filigrees, I was once again amazed at how *they just don't get it*. Art Nouveau was truly hip in, what — 1961? Now here's the corporate Disney, maneuvering for some ill-conceived inversion of planned obsolescence, pitching the future as perpetual camp anachronism while once again bulldozing the idiosyncratic and intriguingly off-register tomorrows of more recent yesteryears just when they would have clicked with the kids.

Of course my nephews loved it.

AFFECTIONATE APPROPRIATION OF OBSOLETE FUTURES seems to have started in the early '70s, with wry boomers like John Carpenter (*Dark Star*), the Firesign Theater (*I Think We're All Bozos on This Bus*) and Devo (*Duty Now for the Future*) turning the naive techno-optimism of Captain Video and other postwar sci-fi in on itself, playing its sweet and orderly superficiality against the deep indeterminacy of psychedelic culture and the monolithic malignancy of the military-industrial puppetmasters. While it briefly made for some excellent art, this stance was swiftly absorbed into mainstream culture, becoming such

intricately constructed from pastel-tinted, vacuum-molded polystyrene and the like: untouched by human hands. Considering the state of the art currently in favor in Los Angeles, this hardly stands out as a daring or even perceptible position. However, the strength of this particular curation, of individuals whose work has been seen elsewhere, often to lesser effect, is that it reveals an unsuspected depth to the glossy modular design units that pepper the city's galleries.

The least aseptic work in the show is Dave Muller's *Supergraphic* (1999), a signature cluster of hand-crafted posters mimicking designs for other (mostly L.A.) artists' shows in endearingly fey washes of watercolor on paper. Laced with a fragmentary motif of stylized blossoms, these paintings give the impression of one of those proto-digital sliding-tile picture puzzles that eventually resolve into a meaningful image. This DJ-style mutational plagiarism neatly addresses the impending dissolution of authorial privilege with a psychological edge that teeters between egoless service and amoral predation.

Jason Rogenes also turns in a signature piece. His hovering assemblages of white Styrofoam stereo packing ma-

ciency. The fact that these collections of furnishings are nevertheless seductively designed to our very human visual prejudices subtly equates their anti-visceral progressiveness with formalist modernism.

Miriam Dym and Kathleen Johnson both make formally extravagant explorations of landscape devoid of such pungent self-reflection. Dym's massive laminated computer print *Blue and Slate Map With Orange Inserts* (1999) pushes the kineticism of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* into the utterly virtual, describing a hopelessly tangled schematic devoid of intelligible symbols or verbiage. Somehow, the density of the information and its utter muteness don't translate into a sense of futility, or maybe we just don't notice it in the orgy of entertainment afforded our eyes. Johnson's computer-altered cloudscapes create zones of digital incongruity that hint at a binary structure underlying our perceived reality. The strange sense of déjà vu that these images evoke gives an unsettling, dreamy edge to what is otherwise the