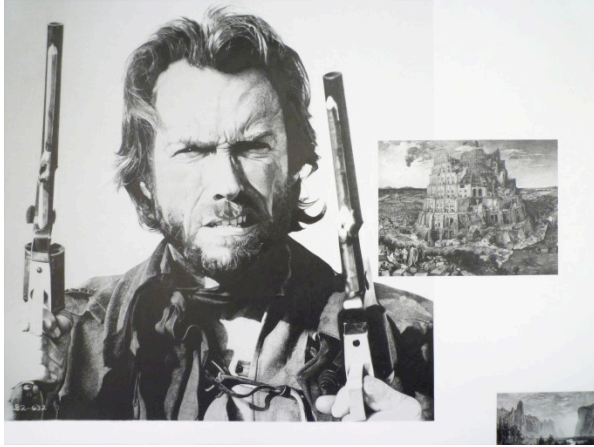


ART PAPERS

JULY/AUGUST 2010



Left: **Eric Zimmerman**, detail of *There I Was (Nothing is the Rule, Something the Exception) Production Still of Clint Eastwood as the Outlaw Josey Wales. / There I Was/ Pieter Brueghel, Tower of Babel, Albert Bierstadt, Yosemite, 1868. Starscape (Dispersion)*, 2010 graphite on paper, 50 x 65". Right: **Emilie Halpern**, *Feather Lips*, 2010, c-print, 11.5 x 15 inches.

EMILIE HALPERN + ERIC ZIMMERMAN HOUSTON

Depending on your perspective, the relationship between science and art can seem quite fraught. For some, science conjures up images of precision and utility while art is the realm of free expression, dreams, and formless abandon. For others, they are two parallel paths that allow us to understand the surrounding world, collecting data and interpreting it by holding it up to our worldview. In today's stratified and professionalized world, there is a tendency to separate the two but we forget that both practices test our understanding of the world and point us in an unknown direction to a territory that is rife with wonder.

Cosmos, an exhibition of new work by Emilie Halpern and Eric Zimmerman, dives deep into the territory of this comparison and comes up into a poetic and sublime realm [Art Palace Gallery; May 8 –June 26, 2010]. The exhibition abounds with references to art, music, astrophysics, geology, film, entomology, and space travel. The collaborative piece *You Are Here (Endlessly)*, 2010, marks the intersection between these two artists' very related bodies of work. On a circular gold space blanket, two tape decks play Halpern and Zimmerman reading a passage from Carl Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*. In the chapter, "You Are Here," Sagan describes Earth as a pale blue dot as seen by NASA's Voyager. For Sagan, this act of representation allows us to see the relative insignificance of humanity in relation to space's vast void and the absurdity of our divisions over centuries of warfare. For Halpern and Zimmerman this is a call for collaboration.

Sagan's discussion of space exploration and its implications for social pronouncements is just one of many ways in which this show uses the cosmos as metaphor. In Zimmerman's drawing *There I Was (Nothing is the Rule, Something the Exception) Production Still of Clint Eastwood as the Outlaw Josey Wales. / There I Was/ Pieter Brueghel, Tower of Babel*,

Albert Bierstadt, Yosemite, 1868. Starscape (Dispersion), 2010, an image of Eastwood snarling with two .44 Smith and Wesson handguns raises the specter of violence against which Sagan warned. To the right of an upturned pistol is a copy of Pieter Brueghel's *Tower of Babel*. In this biblical allegory about the perils of utopianism- literally reaching for the heavens- the punishment was a division of language so that cooperation had to be built with as much care as the edifice designed to find God. Finally, tucked next to this image is a copy of Albert Bierstadt's *Yosemite*, in which a glowing light at the horizon signals American manifest destiny and the exploration of the Wild West. But the underside of this divine glowing light is the genocide of the indigenous people justified by the discovery of a new Israel.

Beyond the initial frontier of space and the American West, the show addresses another model of failed utopia: the great beyond for which the Russian Avant-Garde sought to design a new social order. Zimmerman has created a reading table modeled after a design by Alexander Rodchenko. With two chairs sitting face-to-face, this table offers an illustrated book that is meant to be read while wearing headphones. The book and audio program offer an encyclopedia covering the diverse references that populate the rest of the show- a photograph of Robert Oppenheimer jumping; two boys sitting inside a giant meteorite in 1911; Yoko Ono and John Lennon wearing a shirt that says "You Are Here;" and an 1888 portrait of Gustave Eiffel. The sound recordings are as diverse as their source- the audio recording on *Voyager* meant to communicate to alien life forms, Bach, greetings from whales and the UN Secretary General, and a piece by Brian Eno.

This compendium of photographs and diagrams seems to spill off the page with Emilie Halpern's minimal and enigmatic photographic images. Her *Lunar Meteorite, 2010* depicts a closely cropped shot of an eye in which we can see the reflection of a small geometric object, possibly related to an astronaut's vision of earth. Whether or not this tiny speck of light glinting off the figure's cornea is a meteorite or earth, the photograph is an image of perception and its necessary distance. *Blue Coral, 2010*, and the cluster of stars in *June 29, 2055, 2010*, present beautiful images of the natural world that put our own mortality and materiality into perspective.

Halpern's sculpture *Cosmos, 2010*, comprises 703 sheets of stacked paper with the words "you are here" printed in tiny text at their center. Each page represents a day that has passed from the moment of Halpern and Zimmerman meeting and this exhibition's opening. This piece seemingly traverses multiple vast spaces. First, the tiny script places the text at a great distance to anyone reading it. In addition, the artists met in Vermont but Halpern lives in California and Zimmerman in Texas. Finally the "here" referenced by this phrase shifts with each turning page, passing moment, and position in space that we occupy.

Ultimately, *Cosmos'* thematic exploration of repetition, representation, and reproduction through photographs, drawing, prints, and sound offers us an inter-textual, inter-visual, and inter-aural experience in the bizarre compression of this pale blue dot of ours.

- Noah Simblist