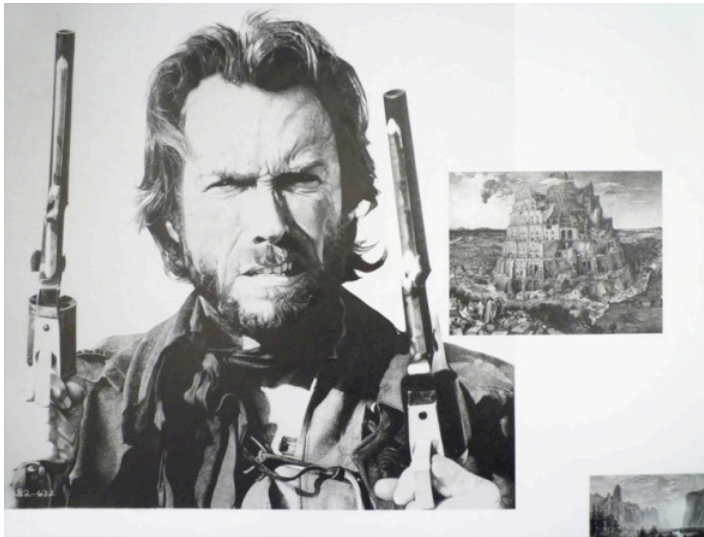


...might be good

ISSUE #48 MAY 2010

Emilie Halpern and Eric Zimmerman
Art Palace, Houston
Through June 19, 2010
by Wendy Vogel



Left: Eric Zimmerman, *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, 1593. Albert Bierstadt, Yosemite, 1868| Starscape (Dispersion), 2010, Graphite on Paper, 50 x 65 inches . **Right:** Emilie Halpern, *Campo del Cielo*, 2010, Meteorite, magnets, and glass, 60 x 20 x 5 inches.*

Cosmos, the documentary series from 1980 narrated and produced by Carl Sagan, described the origins of the universe using state-of-the-art special effects and trippy electronic music. Departing from the straightforward filmic conventions of PBS documentaries, it remained the network's most-watched program throughout the 1980s, igniting the intellectual curiosity and burgeoning aesthetic sense of Generation Y. This shared generational and interpersonal sensibility unites Emilie Halpern and Eric Zimmerman, who appropriate Sagan's title for their two-person exhibition at Art Palace. In what can be most aptly dubbed an artistic duet, Halpern's dreamy photographs and subdued installation work play whimsically against Zimmerman's "collages" of images of muscle cars, bomb sites and scientific phenomena obsessively rendered in graphite. Together, they touch upon the conflicting desires for utopia and domination embodied in the quest for scientific knowledge.

Harmony resonates in the exhibition's centerpiece, a collaborative piece entitled *You Are Here (Endlessly)* (2010). Two tape players set atop a gold space blanket play recorded tracks on TDK "endless" looping cassettes of Halpern and Zimmerman reciting a passage from Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot*, written in 1994. The selected excerpt describes the formal difficulty of capturing an image of Earth from the edge of the solar system, the subject matter of the "Pale Blue Dot" image captured by the satellite Voyager 1 in 1990.

The sculpture's formal qualities recall *The Golden Record* sent into space on the Voyager in 1977, a compendium of greetings in dozens of languages, everyday sounds and music that, according to NASA's website, "suggest that the message is as much for Earthlings as for aliens [...] A diversity of tongues aboard a craft leaving the solar system emphasizes the shared global significance of the endeavor."

Excerpts from *The Golden Record* form the basis of an audio collage by Zimmerman situated in an installation modeled after functionalist furniture design, *After Rodchenko (Points in a Constellation)* (2010). A deeply moving assortment of greetings and instrumental music from Ennio Morricone to Brian Eno, the broadcast lends a universal human element to the cold-seeming utopian design. In this installation, visitors may also browse Zimmerman's two artist books and audio programs. The books contain reproductions of artworks, letters, photographs and more, collected through the Internet, research libraries, NPR programs or personal mementos. *Spirit Over Matter* (2010) charts instances of supernatural occurrences disrupting human reason in both the arts and the sciences. *The Historian & the Astronomer* (2010) also brings together snippets of interdisciplinary research material. As Zimmerman stated in his guest-edited issue of this journal, both occupations "search for points of connection—bonds between seemingly disparate elements—that congeal to establish a new framework."

These books, a partial index and visual inventory of research material, become the testing grounds for Zimmerman's compositions. Surrounding the installation are small etchings and drawn copies of documents from our shared database of cosmic knowledge. Most notably, in *The First Words Spoken From The Moon (Apollo II Onboard Voice Transcription)* (2010), a straightforward, drawn replica of a typed transcript, a warning label of "CONFIDENTIAL" is scribbled out. The interference of the individual's hand mobilizes the ideas of interpretive fiction, erasure and subjectivity in history — the place where the historian, astronomer and artist occupy the same position. Equivalences between the intellectual curiosity of the arts and scientists are brought to bear in Zimmerman's large drawings as well.

Larger compositions in the main gallery juxtapose historical references with pop-cultural ones, lightly burlesquing machismo in the process. The titles are descriptive and evocative at once, such as in the exceptional *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, 1593. Albert Bierstadt, Yosemite, 1868 | Starscape (Dispersion)* (2010). There, the images shrink in inverse proportion to their actual grandeur: Clint Eastwood is writ large, while the replicas of paintings shrink in relationship to the landscape depicted. These compositional choices may also serve as a key to the shrinking influence of certain historical figures.

Halpern's works ride the line between staged scenario and straightforward encounter more openly. In *Campo Del Cielo* (2010), a meteor of dubious authenticity purchased on Ebay is affixed precariously to a leaning mirror via a magnet. The artist creates a fictitious constellation from paper and light titled with the artist's projected death date in *June 29, 2055*, which is installed next to a re-photographed image of the Rover landing in *Martian Sunset* (both 2010). In addition to the works referencing Carl Sagan, a figure admired by both artists, Halpern juxtaposes imagery another pop-cultural icon and political activist: Yoko Ono. In *Yoko* (2010), the artist re-photographs a black-and-white portrait of the artist with brightly colored lovebirds perched on her hand. Next to

Zimmerman's graphite drawings of craters, explosions and intrepid journeyman, Yoko signifies hipness, a respect for nature and fruitful collaboration. This photograph also links the symbolism of Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot*, (a text that suggests the relative scale and unimportance of earthly life in the greater sense of the cosmos,) to ideas put forth by hippies, feminists and conceptual artists alike in the 1970s.

Perhaps nowhere is this more poignant than in Halpern's sculpture, *Cosmos* (2010). The words "you are here" are printed faintly atop 703 stacked pieces of paper (the number of days between Zimmerman and Halpern's first meeting and the opening of the exhibition.) A simple Kawara-esque gesture, the title also refers to one of John Lennon's last songs. His lyrics below, in homage to love and idealism, resonate with gravity and brevity in simple form. I can think of no better coda to this exhibition.

*From Liverpool to Tokyo
What a way to go
From distant lands one woman one man
Let the four winds blow*

*Three thousand miles over the ocean
Three thousand light years from the land of the rising sun*

*Love has opened up my eyes
Love has blown right through
Wherever you are, you are here
Wherever you are, you are here.*

Wendy Vogel is a Critical Fellow in the Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.