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TODAY'S CREATIVE LOVING PROFILE



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Tomorrowland

This is the Future anticipates the shock of the new

By [Felicia Feaster](#)

Published 06.17.04

With the possible exception of stock market analysts, people who speculate on the future are like that guy on the subway wearing a knit cap in August -- someone it's best to keep a wary eye on. The oddball sport of placing bets on what's coming next belongs to rapture-eager fundamentalists, fringe cults, telephone psychics and mad Russian monks. Occasionally soothsayers slip in who can keep their feet on the ground while peering through a crystal ball.

The group show *This is the Future* at Saltworks Gallery adds artists to that list of mixed nuts and would-be visionaries. The third curatorial venture from the Dos Pestaños collective of local artists offers idealism, doom, wackiness -- and some wariness -- in an exhibition of cosmic navel-gazers.

Philosopher George Santayana's words, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," echo throughout this prescient show. The artists of *This is the Future* are steeped in enough 20th-century history to realize that the advancements meant to set us free -- i.e., atomic power and fossil fuel -- may not have been such great ideas after all.

There couldn't be a better image for how easily the glories of the past can become the dead weight of the future than Ben Fain's meticulously executed riff on public monuments. A life-sized human skeleton with sword hoisted on high sits astride a noble boneyard steed.

Many of the artists scramble primitivism and futurism into an oddball ragout. *Future* manages to both have fun with the prognost-icating tradition and convey the profitability of using the prisms of yesterday and today to imagine the prospect of tomorrow.

True Heart Collaborations' opening night performance, "Shelf Life," looked like an old-fashioned sewing circle crossed with the tongue-in-cheek futurescape of Woody Allen's *Sleeper*. Five women dressed entirely in white, sitting inside a white tent, knitted odd little yarn creatures and passed them through a Rube Goldberg circuit of plastic tubing snaking through the gallery space. At the end of the tubing, a pair of identical twins waited to carry the conceptual cozies to a *This is the Future* gift shop. The industrious hive suggested a commentary on women's labor executed in the style of Matthew Barney's reproduction-fixated films.

Dos Pestaños is not simply a curatorial venture, but a group of artists pondering their roles. Their other successful group show, *Use Your Illusion I*, provided a delightfully silly investigation of serious content, while *This is the Future* shows awareness of the potential folly of all creative endeavors. *Illusion* revealed artists as tricksters and illusionists, while in *Future*, they become prophets and dreamers. Imagining the future allows for the equal possibility of genius or buffoonery, and the artist's project -- the show suggests -- can often run the same risk.

A sense of experimentation, wistfulness and good humor infuses *Future*. A goofy tour guide in a grocery store apron offered aw-shucks insights into the artworks on opening night. The tentative but promising collaboration between Daniel and Lauren Clay, "Proposal for Pink Becoming White," sketches out cryptic devices in flesh tones of pink, ivory and brown, meant to create a different -- if not *better* -- world through scientific means.

Harrell Fletcher's DVD "Hello There, Friend" encapsulates *Future's* often tender, wry qualities. A resigned "so be it" shrug replaces fear of the future. In Fletcher's film, a woman repeatedly opens and closes her fist to reveal some object littering the city street. The images prove either familiar or



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"Stairs" by Jason Fulford

Jason Fulford

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I'm open minded to anything new...don't fear change and live for adventure. Just bought a house so I've been buried...

completely alien: a scrap of plastic, some mysterious metal part, a book of matches, a pink curler. These discarded objects become like urban hieroglyphics revealing cryptic details of the behavior of the world that created them. What a post-industrial society doesn't anticipate, an artist's vision captures: the odd little tokens of a formerly functional thing wear down into future detritus.

Alex White's velveteen forms molded from take-out containers and other garbage illustrate both our fascination and anxiety of the strange, manufactured world we have created. The surprising dreaminess of "Complex" might be due to its resemblance to 21st-century sand castles. White's architectural forms resemble equally lyrical things created from the byproducts of modernity. We are destined to fashion utopia out of the world around us -- whether from sand or Styrofoam -- and White both analyzes and embraces that notion.

Photographer Jason Fulford adds an even heavier, melancholic dimension to the idea of visuals embodying the contemporary paradoxes with his marvelously poignant photographs of objects on modernity's margins. Like the references to nature in Andrew Ross' installations of roots, worms and crickets, Fulford's black cow slips like Sasquatch through the landscape and evokes a burned-out culture increasingly searching for signs of the real and organic.

In place of the ancient ouroboros symbol of life in perpetuity, another Fulford photograph, of a wooden staircase built on the edge of a canyon, provides a vision of the future as a cliff dive into a vast chasm of the unknown.

In one of *Future's* most conceptually concise, witty projects, Scott Lawrence affirms that even with technology at our disposal, we are still primitives knocking our heads against our cage. In deference to futuristic themes, Lawrence has constructed a robot on wheels with a disembodied human arm holding a lit candle at its apex. That metaphorical icon of the human search for truth, even hitched to a robot apparatus, should mean greater knowledge. But the dangerously lit candle and the Sheetrock room in which Lawrence has placed the robot indicate the dangers and limits to our achievement.

Nat Slaughter makes a related proclamation that technology can weird-out our chance for true communication. His installation features an old-fashioned rotary phone hooked up to a garbling device that turns any attempt to connect into an exercise in frustration. Masochism becomes the mean mother of invention in *Future*. In Ashley Neese's "Letters to Benjamin," the artist documents her obsession with an unattainable love object, musician Benjamin Gibbard. Real human connection becomes supplanted by the kind of unquenchable yearning of Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*.

This is the Future anticipates not only a future we might all share, but one particular to young artists pondering the personal dimension of what might be. In the amusing wall text that accompanies his installation "A Current Affair," Wade Thompson imagines his future self as a beloved, eccentric college professor.

Future's gift shop puts various projects by the artists for sale and echoes that idea of an imagined creative future. The shop riffs on the crass museum tradition of offering trace elements of fine art for instant consumption. But there is something far more wistful involved, too. In creating this clever selection of goods, the *Future* artists envision an alternative consumer culture made of ideas. In this imagined space, the artists profit from their work as conceptual manufacturers, but still try to create some essential shift in the way people live and think. Maybe, the gift shop display suggests, there *is* a future where these tokens of artistic prophesy will insinuate themselves into our lives.

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