

## FANTASTIC JOURNEYS

### UTOPIA [yew-tope-ee-a]

***any real or imaginary society, place, or state considered to be perfect or ideal***

The ten artists whose works have been selected for the exhibition *Fantastic Journeys* create art that explores the intersections between real and imaginary, aspiration and actuality, potential and certainty. This exhibition is as much a representation of the dynamism of contemporary practice in the region, as it is a celebration of artistic individuality. Artists in *Fantastic Journeys* convey a spirit of adventure, mystery, and drama in their subject matter, as well as a constant curiosity to experiment with new materials and art forms.

For adults, the realm of the imagination sits comfortably within the world of children—who unselfconsciously develop strange and wonderful scenarios where the nonsensical exists harmoniously with the everyday. Jeff Huntington's paintings rupture this space. He brings his subjects into a 'grown up' world, one where they meet the gaze of the viewer. Huntington's on-going interest in the transformative capacity of portraiture addresses concerns with history and contemporary life. Echoing the traditional format of a portrait, his subjects are gowned in wigs, hats, and oriental robes. In *Spiracle*, an aura seems to radiate from the boy, yet his intense gaze and tracheal hole conveys a sadness that saturates the picture with uncertainty.

In contrast to Huntington, Isabel Manalo's silver-shot images of children in forest landscapes are quiet and mysterious. Manalo's subjects appear to be very much part of their landscape, it is as though they are formed in the fragility of foliage and light; delicate, ephemeral, and ghostly. This persistence of the landscape within contemporary art continues to reinforce the fascination we have with our natural environment. Josephine Haden creates strange, prophetic images that seem to slide between a contemporary wasteland and a post-apocalyptic fantasy. In *Campfire*, eight brumbies rise and gallop

through the silvery landscape. In the centre of the work, eight children congregate around a blazing fire, seemingly unconcerned with the presence of the animals. Haden's images depict the dreamy stillness of dawn and dusk, and delve into the uncertain relationship humans navigate with the land.

Marise Riddell's vibrant video works—made by layering abstracted, amorphous shapes, color and forms—are the natural extension of her painting practice. Akin to the mitosis of cells in a petri-dish, these elements wriggle and twist across the picture plane. Riddell's images trigger notions of the beginnings of life; or the activity of the forest floor; or the beauty of natural systems and rhythms.

The sense of saturation and immersion found in Riddell's works are echoed in the paintings of Sabine Carlson, who creates a world of color and mysterious journeys. Carlson's paintings are both sanguine and disconcerting; in *Long before they come, he curls up tight around tomorrow*, a dark mechanical form appears lodged in the edge of a forest. In *Unstuck in time they know where they are going*, a dog, accompanied by its shadow, emerges from a dense tangle of trees and vines, padding out into an empty space. In the center of the image floats a spiral-bound notebook; suggesting a map that may help decipher this imaginary place.

The desire to substantiate our surrounds through maps, systems, and photographs is suggested in the work of Lindsay McCulloch. Like stills from a fractured narrative, McCulloch captures a certain rhythm and movement of the freeways, underpasses, and urban structures as observed from a train carriage, bus window, or car seat. The 20 panels installed here imply both the impersonal repetitiveness of the daily commute, but also suggest a quiet reflection of transitory scenes, bound by solitude and the passing of time. Moving through a city in a vehicle, or on foot, presents scope for adventure and exploration. Lina P. Vargas De La Hoz explores through performance and photography what it means to walk within the world, to occupy a place, and be present in time. In *Finz-Umzug* she takes her art to the street, and allows her clothing to literally become her shelter. Like a parasite, her repurposed tent becomes an extension of her body and

the surrounding architecture; part prosthesis, part exoskeleton.

This interest in the potential of materials also takes shape in the work of Joel D’Orazio. Utilizing industrial wire, tubing, and cable, D’Orazio transforms functional chairs into playful and ornate sculptures. *Orange Dread* and *Sculptura* are at once mischievous and vibrant; poking fun at, and repurposing the traditional role of the object. Adapting new methods to interpret and explore existing systems and concepts is also paramount for Amy Glengary Yang, and her *Phosphorflock* is a combination of found objects and new technologies. Employing the labor-intensive photographic process of cyanotype, Glengary Yang distorts color by using light boxes, creating an eerie green glow. Her interest in the natural world and the fragility of existence is poetic and menacing, the phosphorflock calls to the delicate relationship between science and nature.

The cycles of birth and death, and the aspiration to live harmoniously with nature, and indeed with each other, could be the inspiration for Rebecca Katz’s *Recycle*. Using a stencil; a direct and adaptable process that has had a recent resurgence in political and street art, Katz’s poetic and quirky text encourages both individual and collective action. If it is true that ‘an elephant never forgets’, then perhaps we can decipher the essence of this message as a fantastic journey of karmic regeneration, and an optimistic nod to the creative spirit. In times of uncertainty and instability, we are reminded of our own fragility, the impact of our patterns of behavior, and always, the possibility for change.

Beatrice Galton

**Beatrice Galton, Juror**  
**Evelyn S. Nef Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art**  
**Corcoran Gallery of Art**