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'Earth-Like Planet' Says Extinction, Shmextinction

The Irvine Fine Arts exhibit avoids icky humans and focuses on the greener future

By **STACY DAVIES** Thursday, Jun 16 2011 Comments (0)

A lot of Earth-themed art shows seem to be popping up around Orange, LA and Riverside counties lately. There was "Spaceship Earth" and "The Weight and the Magnitude" up in the Pomona Arts Colony/Claremont Village and Sant Khalsa's "River Run" in Riverside, and at the end of the month, "Speak for the Trees" opens at Irvine's House of Balsamic. Before that show, there's the Irvine Fine Arts Center's pro-green-themed exhibit, "Earth-Like Planet," opening this weekend.

The interesting thing about this influx of consciously minded shows is that unlike some of the environmental-awareness exhibits of years past, none of these collections is anywhere near the in-your-face activism we saw in the early Aughts, '90s or even '70s. Thus far, the approach by curators and artists appears to be purely philosophical, with a clear acceptance of the destruction and eventual revitalization of the Earth. It's almost as if after decades of being told we're orchestrating self-extinction, and then witnessing the actual fruition of our nasty habits over the past five years, we finally get it: We are totally screwed. Only Jesus or aliens can save us from ourselves, and obviously, the only thing that can save the environment is human extinction. So, instead of fight or fret over it, everyone seems to be climbing aboard the locomotive of doom, figuring, I suppose, that at least we won't have to pay our mortgages or

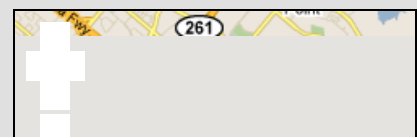


Andre Yi, Sequoia

Tree of tomorrow?

Location Info

Irvine Fine Arts Center



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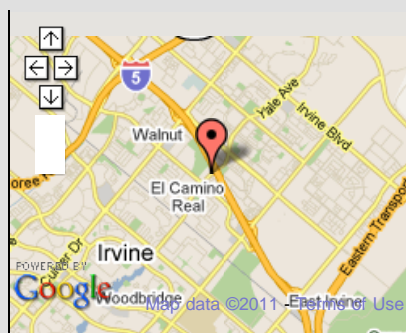
student loans anymore—forget about the hassle of securing a livable-wage-earning job. It's like the liberals' Rapture!

Whatever the motive might be of the artists and curators I've been running into lately, it does appear this environmental Armageddon might be, in part, what's driving the nature shows of late, and it seems to be making them better. Most are very future-hopeful, often quite exceptional. Instead of focusing on the horrors we *know* are just over the landfill hillsides, the artists and curators have decided to take a leap into the future and look at the planet with fresh, non-scourge-y human eyes.

Curator Matt May's green show, "Earth-Like Planet," absolutely does it. Billed as a place where "art and science intersect," you can't get much more future-positive (sorry for sounding like the Reverend Robert Schuller, but it's the best possible term to use here) than skipping over decades of chaos and focusing on what enlightened nerds in labs might develop to save what's left. Space also plays heavily into many of these new Earth-encompassing exhibits, and it's refreshing to see the universe once again considered a viable realm from where possible solutions could be mined, instead of just a place where one gets one's brains slurped out by mutants, one's soul twisted by Borgs or that expedites a chunk of rock the size of Texas to whip up the next ice age.

Virginia Katz avoids all catastrophic scenarios yet seems to already be floating in the chilly vastness above; her eight mixed-media pieces look very much like space-eye views of our squiggly coastlines, ruddy mountain ranges and blotches of blue seas. The terrain is void of speckled dwellings or mechanizations, which makes it a perfect vision of the planet post-Homo sapiens or pre-nouveau-Neanderthals.

Andre Yi's hyper-spiritual acrylics perfectly embody the future/science/nature ideal with their twisty, gnarly tree trunks and stumps surrounded by green Kubrickian monoliths—the generators of universal life, if science-fiction films are to be believed. Ephraim Puusemp's funky sculpture *Satellite* reminds us of how truly moronic we are, with its suspended desert island



Irvine Fine Arts Center
14321 Yale Ave.
Irvine, CA 92604
Category: Community Venues
Region: Irvine

Details

"Earth-Like Planet" at Irvine Fine Arts Center, www.cityofirvine.org. Opening reception, Sat., 5 p.m. Open Mon.-Thurs., 9 a.m.-9 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Through July 30.

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Orange County Classifieds

sprouting clusters of palm-tree cell-phone towers, and **George Katzenberger's** photographs of real trees with branches armored in mobile-phone transmission metals means it won't be long before the birdbrains are dropping off from fowl little tumors.

Wild stuff from other worlds also makes an appearance. **Claudia Bucher's** installation of a horde of real succulents and cacti enveloping a plasma screen might be a transport from another galaxy or even a vision of "Life After Man" 50 years down the line, just like in those neat **Discovery Channel** specials. **Jason Rogenes** definitely envisions little flesh and bone with his minimalist ink-and-watercolor worlds of chunky-tubed space stations orbiting psychedelic planets, with swirls of colors brighter than **Jupiter** on acid. Carolie Parker's ink-and-charcoal *Internal Combustion* is the collision of dirty, linear worlds, and the photographic *As the Ocean Lies* is a fractured sea of gray, choppy waves that warns travelers instead of beckoning them.

All of these future pieces focus on the possibilities that await instead of the idiocy that has passed or the tragedy that is soon to occur. And it's probably all we can really do: take our medicine like the adults we've claimed to be but have never truly acted like. And, perhaps, one day, millennia from now, some of these relics will have survived, and then at least the Thetans will know we weren't *all* total douchebags.

This review appeared in print as "Extinction, Shmextinction: 'Earth-Like Planets' avoids icky humans and focuses on the greener future."

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