



GALLERIES



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Universal Code

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BY DAVID BALZER August 26, 2009 21:08

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Aug 30. Thu, Sun noon-6pm; Fri-Sat noon-8pm. Free. The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, 231 Queens Quay W. 416-973-4949. www.thepowerplant.org.

This is the last weekend to see the Power Plant's summer group show, "Universal Code," which, while uneven, contains many pieces that make a trip worthwhile. (It's also the last opportunity to take advantage of the gallery's seasonal free admission.) And the unevenness can be justified as curator and PP director Gregory Burke's agenda: his theme is "cosmology and ideas of the universal," and since he's dealing with the contemporary and the conceptual, he's responsible for including distanced, absurdist approaches, as well as the rarer, awestruck ones.

Burke appears to have divided the gallery space to reflect this. In the bigger north gallery lie (with a few exceptions) the bathetic, snide and objectivist schools, which see the development of the universe in terms of humanity's futile, if highly prolific, attempts to parse it. Cerith Wyn Evans' wall text typifies this. Taken from astrophotographer Siegfried Marx, it concerns the banalities concomitant with scientific curiosity: in a looming reversal of Blake's "world in a grain of sand," Marx describes the mistakes made in capturing the universe with analog equipment -- "solar systems from particles of dust, galaxies from dandruff."

There is a different view in the south gallery and upstairs. Skepticism still abounds, but with chilling sublimity. Tania Mouraud's La Fabrique is a concatenation of monitors and screens showing weavers in Kerala, India, the gazes and sounds of which will overwhelm you -- they're globalization's version of the mythic Greek Moirae. Trevor Paglen's large illuminated globe indicating the US's active military and reconnaissance satellites is, while amusingly Kubrickian, primarily terrifying; Henrik Hakansson's butterfly-migration film loop, Monarch -- The Eternal, is gorgeous and unforgettable. Save Kimsoosa's Mandala: Zone of Zero (pictured) for last. Three jukeboxes, repurposed to look like Buddhist/Jungian mandalas, play, respectively, Gregorian, Tibetan and Islamic chants. The piece is cheeky, but never deflating. Here, in a nutshell, is art's universal code: a constant search for the eternal, be it through the mysticism of religion, the moral riddles of the subconscious mind or the escapism of high kitsch.

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