

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR

Friday, September 19, 2008

Intricate Collages of Sight, Sound by Leah Ollman

"You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth" -- or so say the titles of Simmons and Burke's extravagant sound and image collages at Kim Light/LightBox. But would you want to, if this is what it looked like and sounded like, if this is how it made you feel?

The four huge light-jet prints at the heart of the show are the kind of horrifying, magnificent spectacle on which your eyes cannot help but be hungrily, stubbornly fixed. They aren't images of car crashes or natural disasters. They are expressions of the digital present, hellish and heavenly, decadent and sophisticated, frightening and wondrous. This is what we wished for.

L.A.-based collaborators Case Simmons and Andrew Burke don't just surf the Web, they steep in it. All the imagery in their prints and the sounds in their accompanying audio tracks derive from Internet sources. This is a 21st century collage, the hyperactive, disembodied progeny of Dadaist experimentation with scissors and glue. The art of Hannah Höch and others, irreverent as it was roughly a century ago, now seems quaint compared with this luridly beautiful bombast.

Each print is a richly endowed landfill of imagery, obsessively cut and pasted, Photoshop style, and arranged with just enough structure so the entire heap doesn't come toppling down. It stays suspended in a baroque quasi-landscape pumped with Vegas-caliber artifice and energy: Tiepolo meets Trump.

Bozo the Clown neighbors Madame Blavatsky. A koala clings to the whiplash curve of a roller coaster. Crows swarm and bats flutter in plague-like numbers. Appearing in a roll call of media notables are Andy Warhol, Condoleezza Rice, Justin Timberlake, Ronald Reagan, the pope, Laura Bush, Tony Blair, Mister Rogers and Miss Piggy.

Homemade porn shares the stage with Hollywood polish. Overcrowded and overwhelming, the images are also impeccably precise. Each component is chromatically vivid and legible to an unnatural degree. Pulsing through the obscene excess are the forces of sex, violence, temptation, danger and material indulgence.

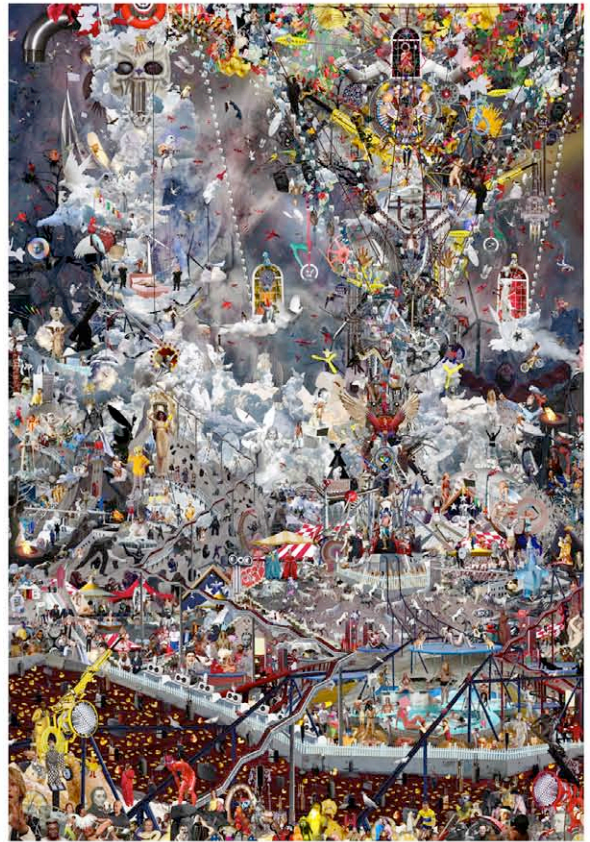
A headset at the base of each print allows viewers to hear an ever-shifting audio montage made especially for it. Comparable in their confetti-precious aesthetic, the tracks play a stream of overlapping passages of music; snippets from films and TV news and game shows; and the sounds of galloping horses and rushing water.

Simmons, a recent graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute, and Burke, who earned a graduate degree from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, also present a 25-minute independent sound piece, "Bodies of Water." It's a three-movement, oddly compelling tapestry of speech, popular and classical music, gunshots, bagpipes and screams.

Rounding out the show are a few smaller prints and a wallpaper installation, all of them digital collages of photographed cloud formations. In the same spirit of excess as the "You Can Live Forever" prints, these bulge and bloom, packed with puffs and bursts and clots. They turn up both the volume and speed on traditional treatments of clouds but skimp on emotional resonance.

Simmons and Burke have ravaged their (online) art history texts, peppering their prints with excerpts from ancient Greek and Egyptian art, Chardin, Basquiat, Fuseli, Leonardo, Smithson and more. They point to the surreal collages of Max Ernst and the brilliant, politically incisive photomontages of John Heartfield as inspirations.

Bosch is an equally likely antecedent, since Simmons and Burke's visual work, especially, has the quality of moral parable. Freakish in its detail and complexity, and fantastically exaggerated, it mirrors the ambivalence of our present condition: Everything is within reach and nothing is special; we are ever connected but rarely touched; blessed with possibility, we flounder from lack of intention. Is it paradise on Earth we've made or merely an exhilarating distraction from it?



Simmons & Burke, *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth #2*, 2008 Lightjet print and custom audio software 79 x 54 inches (framed) Edition of 5

KIM LIGHT

2656 S. LA CIENEGA BLVD
LOS ANGELES, CA 90034
T 310.559.1111 F 310.559.2911
info@kimlightgallery.com
www.kimlightgallery.com

LIGHTBOX