

## **AFROFUTURISM:**

### **ARTISTS VISION THE CYBERTECHNO FUTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON BLACK CULTURE**

#### **CURATORIAL STATEMENT**

Over the last decade the art world has had an on-going dialog around the phenomenon of Afrofuturism and the question, “What is Afrofuturist art?” While many believe that it is just another manifestation of post modernist art others believe the philosophies stand on their own.

This exhibition gives almost thirty talented and accomplished artists from across the country that work in various mediums an opportunity to examine and explore the tenets of Afrofuturism and have it inform their art. The artists sought a technological and cultural intersection while showcasing their art in new and different ways.

The viewer will sometimes be engaged in quiet reflection and intellectual debate, have visceral experiences at installations or be an interactive participant at some works like *Freedom Road* a video game designed to have the player encounter obstacles in the manner of a runaway slave.

So, what is Afrofuturism about anyway? The simple answer is that it is a one word philosophy to describe a way of thinking about things and looking at the world. It is not an art movement or a particular school of art but an overarching cultural system. One of the early proponent’s, Dr. Alondra Nelson, Yale University explains it this way:

“ Afrofuturism means using the past in the future--not forgetting the past lives of Africans and African-Americans and our culture. It’s an exploration of how scientific and technological innovation is changing in the face of black art and popular culture.” In other words; creating in the present, referencing the past while visioning the future.

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This art encompasses all art disciplines and types. Its expressions are diverse as the experiences that the artist have as a frame of reference. There will be aesthetic breaks for the past and the present. It samples broad cultural references, literature, music of the past and present, spirituality and cosmology. It interrogates identity politics. In *Sleep Box 1.0* M.R. Daniel explores questions of who we are as ethical beings in our waking and dream lives. This mixed media installation will include field recordings of ambient sound as well as dream oral history. The viewer will step into the contained space of the *Sleep Box 1.0* and experience the dream world of an anonymous person's questioning, sometimes torturous dreams.

“It's a process of figuring out the intersections between technology and blackness and finding the artistic expression that resides in the places that overlap. It's a way of looking at art that acknowledges the blackness in technology and technology of being black” explains Cinque` Hicks, artist and internet magazine editor.

For example few in the general public understand the sophistication and complexity of sampling technology. While Afrofuturist music is not exclusively about hip-hop it draws on some of its thinking. Black technology is often drawn from and driven by a need for new and changing cultural expression. Its intrinsic value is not monetary but rather a survival necessity.

Fundamental to the understanding of Afrofuturism is the importance of the concept of time. being in the real present moment while understanding that the future and the past are ever changing and sometimes repeating. *Mutropolis*, the work of Charles Nelson Jr. and Kevin Sipp takes Fritz Lang's 1926 classic *Metropolis* and uses “green screen” technology to place African inspired elements within this film creating something quite different than the original. They seek to reclaim the idea of the future as something that is all inclusive. This interplay between time, available technology, reinvented technology, race and culture is what makes this particular form of artistic expression so fascinating: The future meeting the past in the state of the present.

While there have been a few shows in Europe that have taken a look at this subject matter, this is the first show of its size in the United States. This exhibition gives the viewer a glimpse of an artist's personal view when they peek at the impact of technology on black culture in the future.

