

Necrocracy

Where do we find ourselves?

– Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Lo! how they jibe at loss, for

Kind heaven fills their little paunches!

–William Carlos Williams, “Hic Jacet”

DiverseWorks ArtSpace is proud to present *Necrocracy*, an immersive art exhibition exploring geology, time, nature and petrochemical production that combines video animation, drawings and sculpture by Brooklyn-based artist Marina Zurkow. *Necrocracy* questions the inherited, Romantic-era division between the natural and the human, as it navigates the critical-creative edge between human manufacturing of petroleum-based products and the ecological history and geological chronology of oil.

In January 2011, DiverseWorks supported a two-week research trip for Zurkow to the Permian Basin. From Marfa to Midland, the artist met with geologists, naturalists, cattlemen, oilmen, and activists. She traversed the high southern plains of the Llano Estacado—the ecosystem stretching from Lubbock to the Edwards Plateau—a landscape so subtle most people call it The Big Empty. During the trip she became hyper-aware of several things: “We—all of us who live on the USA grid—are soaking in petroleum and we wouldn’t know how to live, feed, shelter, clothe, or express ourselves without oil-based products.” In the Permian Period 250 million years ago, the geological riches of the area were formed, as marine microorganisms accumulated in sediments on the floor of a vast saline sea. Over millions of years, the seas dried out, the landmass itself moved more than 2,000 miles into its present location and these creatures transmuted into hydrocarbons. In the past century, we have pumped over 100 billion barrels of oil and a hundred trillion cubic feet of gas from these Texas hydrocarbon reservoirs. The exhibit asks us to think about how we disturb, worship and are dominated by these long-dead beings: *Necrocracy* or the rule of the dead.

Thanks to

Thanks to: Diane Barber, Veronique Brossier, Ellen Anne Burtner, Lucie Fink/DuPont, Lara Grant, Kevin Loutzenhiser/ Global Protection USA, Mary Magsamen, Bobby McKnight, Michelle Mayer, Timothy Morton, Lindsay Nordell, Nancy Nowacek, Ruth Ozeki, Paul Paradiso, Petroleum Museum Archives, John Pluecker, Jon Read, Steve Sacks/bitforms gallery, Daniel Shiffman, Abigail Simon, Sixto Wagan, Burr Williams/Sibley Nature Center, Tom Williams/Williams Oil Co, and The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Mesocosm (Wink, Texas) (2012)

Software-driven animation, color, sound

Custom software, computer

Code design: Veronique Brossier

Animation assistance: Michelle Mayer

Occasional sound: Lem Jay Ignacio

Edition 1/5

Mesocosm (Wink, Texas)—the feature, large-scale video installation in *Necrocracy*—is part of an

ongoing series of animated landscapes that develop and change over time in response to software-driven data inputs. The title is drawn from the field of environmental science and refers to experimental, simulated ecosystems, which allow for manipulation of the physical environment and are used for biological, community, and ecological research. They are drawn by hand, frame-by-frame, yet their choreographies are dynamic—not predetermined or canned—dictated by constraints in real-time. Each of the works in *Mesocosm* is long in duration and recombines perpetually as inputs determine order, density, and interrelationships. They are looped, and have no beginning or end. Because change happens slowly, but can be radical over time, the works are intended to be seen in public places where people gather or pass through frequently, or lived with like a painting—in living rooms and meeting spaces.

Wink, Texas is the most recent landscape to be animated as part of this *Mesocosm* series. In the animation, a large sinkhole—the “Wink Sink 2” located on located on private oil company property in the small Texas town of Wink—boils, gushes, flows and expels objects: plastic bags, oil and dark clouds that whirl out of the sinkhole’s vortex in ghostly choreography. Oil refineries burn off gases in plumes in the background as an occasional train or coyote lumbers past. This sinkhole has been widening steadily since it emerged in 2002; here, it appears as a natural geological event, complete with picnic rest stop furnishings. By day, the landscape is inhabited by a diversity of bird life, prairie dogs, insects, pronghorn antelope, HazMat workers and—depending on the season—by migrating monarch butterflies, snakes and sandhill cranes.

The Thirsty Bird (2012)

Two-channel animation, black and white, silent

5 min, 12 sec loop

Animation assistance: Lindsay Nordell

Edition 1/5

The movement of a pump jack (known colloquially as a “thirsty bird”), and a public water fountain are synchronized in a delicate dance. As the pump pulls oil upward, the water fountain spurts water. An array of archetypal individuals—cowboys and Indians, a father and his son, a county sheriff, a cow, a soldier, a girl with her dog—emerge in endless succession to drink from the fountain. The graphic treatment is based on Gerd Arntz’ ISOTYPE (*International System Of Typographic Picture Education*), developed with Viennese social scientist and philosopher Otto Neurath (1882-1945) as a method for visual statistics.

Hydrocarbons (2012)

Single-channel animation, color, sound

2 min 32 sec loop

Edition 1/5

Extracting and manipulating a clip from *The Inside Story of Modern Gasoline* an industrial film (1949), endless chains of anthropomorphized hydrocarbon molecules dance until they blot out the screen. Hydrocarbon chains are the base material for all plastics. They know not what they become, they simply proliferate. Hydrocarbons are indeed dispassionately lively actors, taking an indiscriminate variety of forms: they may be rotting garbage, they may be gasoline, they may be corpses; all energy and potential.

NeoGeo I - IV (2012)

Marina Zurkow in collaboration with Daniel Shiffman

Processing development: Dan Shiffman
Single-channel animation, color, silent
Quicktime renders of Processing sketches, custom computers, speedrail, mirror
12 minutes each
Technical Assistance: Paul Paradiso
Edition 1/5

NeoGeo I-IV is a set of four 12-minute Quicktime renders of algorithmic, moving image work created in Processing. They visually represent the work of an oil drill as it penetrates through an infinite series of geological layers, which auto-generate continually based on pre-programmed computerized parameters. These videos are mounted and hung from the ceiling, each with a mirrored shadowbox that creates the illusion that the video image is replicated an infinite number of times.

The environment is composed of tiny bits of hand-drawn rock, created in code, and activated by rules of physics and the formation of strata; rules affect the density and behaviors of the strata, as well as the possible location of hydrocarbon particles, all of which come into contact with a drill bit. Cap rock (salt and shale) form barriers under which hydrocarbon particles accumulate. An oil “gush” occurs if conditions are right. *NeoGeo* visualizes the density and graphical, mutating formations of rock, as well as the liquidity of the earth over unfathomably long periods of time.

HazMat Suits for Children (2012)

Tychem® TK fabric, acrylic , Velcro, rubber, mannekin
Fabrication : Lara Grant
Tychem® TK fabric courtesy of DuPont(tm)
Approx 45” tall
Edition of 5 suits

Dupont’s patented Tychem hazardous materials clean-up suits are used in petroleum industry disaster response to mitigate ecological disasters. These suits have been re-scaled to outfit them for toddlers. The suits are sealed to prevent actual toddlers from entering them, thus assuring that no children are harmed in the process.

The Petroleum Manga (2012)

50 banners
Solvent ink on Tyvek
10 ‘ x 54”
Research: Miriam Simun
Drawings assistance: Ellen Anne Burtner
Printing: Vista CRC Lab, NY

Originally, manga was used in Japanese to refer to “whimsical drawings” or picture books. For *The Petroleum Manga*, the organization of this “picture book” on oil is drawn from Hokusai’s thirteen volume manga, depicting everything from trees to demons, from squirrels to shingles. Each *Petroleum Manga banner* represents items made out of a specific petrochemical: PET, PVC, HDPE, PMMA, polystyrene, polyurethane, ammonia, nylon, paraffin and more. These heroic banner-size drawings on Tyvek divide up the gallery space into a labyrinthine maze, with their images of oil-derived products: garbage bags, water guns, plastic chickens, balloons, food containers, credit cards and more.