

Visual Vernacular: Patrick Turk



Patrick Turk, *The Demiurge* (detail), 2017

Stitched together with pieces that seem otherworldly, the work of Patrick Turk collides collage with cosmic notions that stir both curiosity and creativity within the viewer. In his latest work on display at Mystic Lyon, *The Demiurg*, there is something intriguing yet jarring that seems to resonate between the parts used to create this momentous piece. Perhaps the reason the work includes such all encompassing, almost scientific materials yet holds back on its true nature allows for such vague questions to be raised and explored. The vagueness is all wanted though, for as a viewer you are tuned into the actual visual of colorful complexity, noticing the sharpness of every edge and the symmetry involved with this artistic puzzle. The work is enchanting, especially at night. Best of all? You can view the piece at any time.

“The pulsating lights attract from afar like a moth to a flame, then the closer one gets the more finely the beauty is realized,” states Emily Sloan, owner and curator of Mystic Lyon. “It’s enthralling. It has been such a great experience seeing this project come to fruition. A lot of time, effort and thought has gone into it, and now it’s here and we’re savoring it. Neighbors are excited — people began stopping by to peek as we installed the work and sending messages of excitement — including a request to shoot a music video here.”

The Demiurg is made possible by an Individual Artist Grant Award, funded by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance. Patrick answered some questions for us about his cosmic journey as an artist and what the new work means to him.

Free Press Houston: *Did the love of science fiction and things other-worldly happen at a young age?*

Patrick Turk: I think so. I mean, I wasn't a hardcore sci-fi/fantasy kid but I think I always liked and related to it at some level. I got more into it as a teenager but I still think I like the idea of science fiction more than I like a lot of actual science fiction.



Patrick Turk, *The Sentinel*, 2016, hand-cut paper and mixed media on panel, 35 x 30 x 13 inches

FPH: *Seeing you have been a part of various opportunities and residencies, what are some of the experiences through these things that have impacted you as an artist the most?*

Turk: I think one of the most important things we can do as artists is work continuously and consistently which is not always easy to do when you have to balance everything else life throws at you. Any time an artist is awarded time and space to concentrate their focus into their craft you can expect growth and learning that may not necessarily come about solely from an artist's regular studio practice. Special projects and residencies are really validating because you have somebody saying: "it's ok to dive into this whole heartedly and put everything you can into it. This frees up a lot of head space and allows artists to stretch out creatively and ultimately drives a concentrated growth in skills and techniques that might otherwise take a longer time to figure out.

FPH: *In your latest work, you have chosen to center around a main form that is both mystical and physical. Tell me about how you developed this concept and how it reflects in the work:*

Turk: The initial concept for this show was to make a representation of God creating the universe and sort of oozing or sweating all of life into it. From this idea, I started doing research on early Greek and Gnostic creator beings and creation stories and I came across the demiurge. The idea reflects in the work by the fact that the Being is entirely composed of tiny plants, animals, protozoa, parts of people, and all types of other biological materials that appear to be dripping off the body. It is placed in the middle of a “space cave” that is covered in repeating images of nebulae and galaxies and other cosmic elements and lit by color changing flood lights. The result is a sculptural creator being that is kind of walking/floating through this breathing, glowing, color changing universe, creating and casting off life into its surroundings.

FPH: *What are some of the materials you have used over the years to make your work and are they still present today?*

Turk: Early on working with collage, I had this idea of keeping things as simple as possible. The thought was to explore collage techniques more than collage materials and always trying to keep the material side of things very pure and uncomplicated but doing complicated things with them. The physical materials remain largely the same, it’s basically just books, paper, and glue. I also think the visual language of materials I use is still very similar to what I have been using for the last twenty years. I’m always looking for all types of illustration; be it medical, scientific, religious, advertising, botanical, instructional, etc. What has changed over time are the techniques I use to re-structure and manipulate these materials. For example, I find it more and more rare to be making 2-D collage these days, instead focusing nearly all my attention on 3-D collage. To do this requires completely different processes which I develop as I go along.



Patrick Turk, *Beguiled* (detail), 2016

FPH: *I found a quote recently that made me think of your work:*

“Science fiction is any idea that occurs in the head and doesn’t exist yet, but soon will, and will change everything for everybody, and nothing will ever be the same again. As soon as you have an idea that changes some small part of the world you are writing science fiction. It is always the art of the possible, never the impossible.”

How does your art work within your life and mind? What are some of the magical elements you hope others absorb through your work?

Turk: I love the manifest destiny element of science fiction. Nearly every technological invention since the 30’s and 40’s existed in fantasy in science fiction literature before becoming a reality in our lives. That idea is amazing to me because it means that we as humans are capable of shaping and creating absolutely anything we want to. If we can think it can become reality, that is magic to me. This is exactly what artists do, we invent something in our minds and then set about finding ways to make that thought into something real and tangible. That is one thing I hope people take from my work is the understanding that this thing they are looking at did not exist before. When people start to think like this I think it can extend to their lives and help them think about making something that has not existed before.

FPH: *What’s in the works for you this fall?*

Turk: I’ll be communing with the demiurge at The Mystic Lyon from now until the end of September in an effort to keep a psychic portal open between its plane of existence and our own so that it may return home when its work is finished here. I’ll also be doing a show with Apama Mackey this December. It’s going to be a black light poster bonanza! Think 60’s basements and vans, spiritual awakenings, astral travelling, and mystical rites of passage and lots of stuff that glows in the dark.

“Patrick Turk: The Demiurge” is on view through October 17, 2017 at Mystic Lion (5017 Lyons Avenue). The piece is on view 24 hours a day from the outside of the venue, lit up after sunset.

—MEGHAN HENDLEY-LOPEZ