

KELLY O'CONNOR

Last Resort



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 21 - MAY 9, 2013

AUSTIN, TEXAS

KELLY O'CONNOR

On the Diving Board

Macabre humor rests in the *Bottom of the Pool 3*, a collage in which Kelly O'Connor has replaced the turquoise water of a 1950s California swimming pool with a deep underground cavern. Blissfully ignorant people stand at the edge of the pool gazing in; a woman is walking out on the diving board, preparing to jump. O'Connor's art hovers on the edge of this metaphorical precipice, the last bask of sunlight before falling into the abyss. These moments are especially poignant from our contemporary vantage point. O'Connor summons the hopes, dreams and ideals of an ostensibly simpler America, when the United States was in the Cold War, and students hid under their desks during atomic bomb drills. But this fear was mediated by a future ideal in which technology might save humanity's inherently destructive urges.

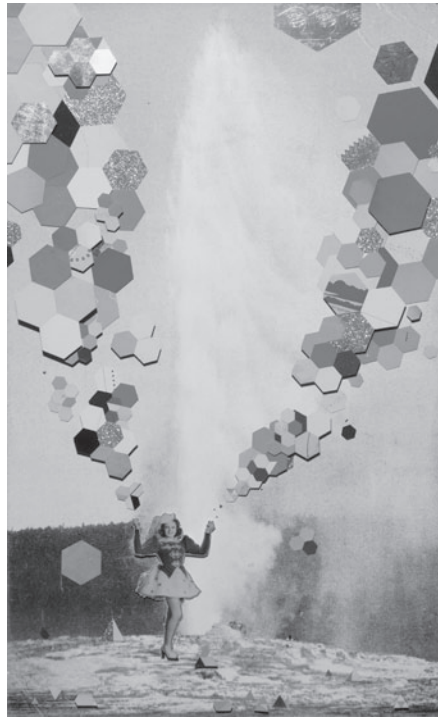
The dichotomies O'Connor portrays in her visual narratives give her work a shock, as if touched by magic. O'Connor scans and blows up found pictures from the 1950-60s to use as foundations for her collages. With color, sparkle and mystery, she alters the past so that her art illustrates many elements of sci-fi including time travel, fantasy and parallel worlds. Margaret Atwood explains that all science fiction comes

“from the same deep well: those imagined other worlds located somewhere apart from our everyday one: in another time, in another dimension, through a doorway into the spirit world, or on the other side of the threshold that divides the known from the unknown. Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Sword and Sorcery Fantasy, and Slipstream Fiction: all of them might be placed under the same large ‘wonder tale’ umbrella.”

Writers like Ray Bradbury and Atwood combine the real with the imagined, setting

up fictional narratives that awaken the reader's real-world awareness. The unimaginable becomes real, with new words and worlds. O'Connor does this visually.

Several recurring stylistic themes bring about her art's visual paroxysms. In combination with the found photographs and constant presence of a mid-century modern aesthetic, there are brilliant color palettes; sunbursts and rays of color made from yarn and paper; gilded wasp nests with colored eggs; hexagons; and haunting characters from popular culture, such as Judy Garland. Like cairns or a graffiti tag, they lead the viewer into O'Connor's alternative world.



Snap. Found image digitally printed with found paper and glitter, 47" x 30", 2013.

The sunbursts and hexagons behave like codes or mutations, taking over the graininess of the historical image; masking certain parts of the photograph; rewriting, in stark contrast, the original narrative. These alterations visually demonstrate

how we perceive history and the psychological tricks our brains play on us about projections and memory.

O'Connor's alterations are performed with a focused precision, so much so that from a distance they appear digital, but upon closer examination, they are clearly and adeptly hand-cut. The complexity of her images is striking. O'Connor uses a variety of stencils to create hexagonal shapes from record album covers. She then cuts them out with an X-Acto knife and inlays them, setting them into tight patterns that exist in layers and reliefs. For example, the hexagons or starbursts may be 1/4" over the image, which adds a three-dimensional depth. These paper tessellations are as ornate and exact as the Alhambra's tile work.

O'Connor's influences include Trenton Doyle Hancock, Anna Gaskell and Tony Feher, artists also engaged in the practice of creating imaginative worlds that inform us of our own. O'Connor's art corresponds with the weird and mysterious presence of Hancock's mounds; the unimaginable beauty that Feher brings out in colored masking tape or PVC pipe; and Gaskell's evocative photographs which leave a lingering sense of unease.

Disneyland, Yosemite National Park and the Grand Canyon entered O'Connor's psyche as a child, when she visited them during summer family road trips. Her selection of images in *Last Resort* includes the natural features of these parks along with contrived environments of intended fun, such as swimming pools, geodesic domes and Disneyland. As opposed to free form, novel experiences, controlled environments are designed with the recreation already imagined and mapped out. Like the experience of riding a monorail, visitors submit themselves to these spaces' authority.

Though designed with the best of intentions, things can go wrong within these environments, and, like a microcosm of real life,

people who are trying to escape get jolted back into reality. *Monorail* is a found photograph of the HemisFair 1968 monorail accident, when two trains collided and fell off of the rail, causing one person to be killed and 48 injured. Starburst images blot out the most dramatic parts of the photograph.

Twirl is an image of Disneyland's Mad Tea Party, the ride with giant turning and swirling teacups, pixilated with O'Connor's colorful hexagonal patterns. The dizzy whorl reminds the viewer of how, in dreams, it is the unconscious that twists and spins ephemera from each of our respective histories into metaphorical narratives that shed insight onto our contemporary lives.

In *Color Me*, a costumed Judy Garland perches jauntily on the edge of a geyser that may spew at any moment. Beneath her, concealing the boiling waters within the cavity, O'Connor's hexagonal shapes are inset and adorned with clusters of starbursts to form a brilliant, colorful pool that masks the impending disaster, like a visual rendering of unconscious denial. *Color Me* reflects how Garland's tragic personal battles with drug addiction and depression remained invisible from her screen personae.

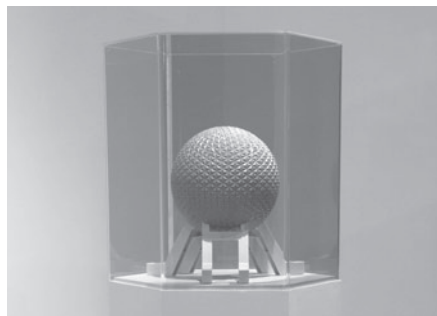
At the entrance to *Last Resort, Monument (EPCOT)*, a model of Disneyworld's "Spaceship Earth," sits inside of a hexagonal sunny yellow Plexiglas vitrine. Beyond this model, and slightly off center of the room, is *Ruin*, a life-sized, 9' high x 18' wide geodesic dome made from gold, white and light blue painted wood panels. A few of the panels are removed to frame views from inside and outside of the dome. The back part of the dome remains open enough to allow viewers to walk inside. Ominous music from *The Shining* plays inside the dome's blackened interior. The space allows for a "whispering gallery" acoustical effect, causing the off-pitch shrieking wind instruments to reverberate inside. Glitter and gilded wasp nests dot the black interior, filled with colorful "eggs,"

some glittered, so that when the light shines off of them they sparkle like stars.

Rays of yellow, gold, pink, blue and orange string stream from floor to ceiling like beams of light. These rays are intermittently placed throughout the space, amidst the dome and broken up rubble of cement, rebar, and powdery white gypsum, all of which sparkle with multi-colored glitter. This fantastical sparkle tells viewers they are in mythical territory, under the spell of its narrative.

In another corner of the gallery rests an abandoned 1960's-era metal umbrella and white chaise lounge molded out of fiberglass. Each of the fans of the umbrella is painted in a different color of O'Connor's palette: white, light blue, gold, pink, orange and red. More wasp nests hang inside the umbrella's canopy, echoing the threat of menace from the dome. These nests mark the time that has elapsed since the umbrella was actually serving its intended use. The nests' presence and the umbrella's colors indicate their appropriation from contrived resort confines into the new context of O'Connor's art.

These features fit well within Atwood's "wonder tale umbrella." O'Connor's parallel universe allows the viewer to step, like Alice through the looking glass, into a beautiful, magical space. Even so, the presence of the wasps and the eerie music tapers this delight, signaling danger. She travels back in time to capture past hopes unmet, and invents a parallel world that holds these tensions.



Monument (EPCOT). Wood, acrylic, and found plastic model, 60" x 18" x 18", 2013.



Sunburst. Aluminum umbrella, fiberglass chair, and golden wasp nests, 8 feet in diameter, 2013.

Inventor, futurist and architect Buckminster Fuller patented his mathematical formulas for the design of the geodesic dome in 1956. Built at world fairs and exhibitions, the geodesic domes became popular as beacons of a promising future. These domes were models of "ephemerality"—doing more with less. Other progressive ideas by Fuller include Cloud Nine cities that could migrate to optimal climates around the globe. Fuller and Bradbury collaborated on the 18-story geodesic sphere at Epcot Center. "Spaceship Earth" gives visitors a ride through the inside that documents humanity's technological progress.

This progress continues today, yet there are still political fights against scientific advances. Writer and scientist C.P. Snow warned against the consequences of scientific ignorance in his 1959 essay, which argued for artists and scientists to build bridges that may connect their fields.

With its nod to Fuller's geodesic dome, *Last Resort* locates itself within the chasm between these two fields. O'Connor's art is filled with a melancholy that evokes Snow's and Fuller's expectations that the work of scientists and artists might someday intersect on the neutral and fertile ground of the imagination. Instead, our society stands poised on O'Connor's diving board.

Wendy Atwell received her M.A. in Art History and Criticism from The University of Texas at San Antonio. She is the author of *The River Spectacular: Light, Color, Sound and Craft on the San Antonio River*.

KELLY O'CONNOR

Lives and works in San Antonio, TX

EDUCATION

- 2005 University of Texas at Austin, B.F.A, Studio Art
2003 Santa Chiara Study Center, Texas A&M University,
Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *Last Resort*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX
2012 *Texas Contemporary Art Fair*, (solo booth),
David Shelton Gallery, Houston, TX
2011 *Post Utopia*, David Shelton Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2010 *Neverending Story*, Thunderbird Hotel Lounge, Marfa, TX
Worn by the Sun, Sala Diaz, San Antonio, TX
2009 *Magnetic Fields*, Joan Grona Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2007 *Wonderland*, Project Room, Conduit Gallery, Dallas, TX
Kelly O'Connor: New Work, Joan Grona Gallery,
San Antonio, TX
2005 *Dissecting Disney*, The New Gallery, University of
Texas at Austin
Insulation Incubation, Closet Space Gallery, Austin, TX

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 *Prelude: Beginning a Conversation*, David Shelton Gallery,
Houston, TX
2011 *New Works on Paper*, David Shelton Gallery, San Antonio, TX
Artists Looking at Art, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX
Col-lage, Bank of America Center, curated by
Kinzelman Art Consulting, Houston, TX
Suite Art Fair, Belmont Hotel, curated by
David Shelton Gallery, Dallas, TX
Works on Paper, David Shelton Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2010 *Invited 6*, Clamp Light Studios and Gallery, San Antonio, TX
In-Appropriate, Joan Grona Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2010, Flight Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2009 *Lonely are the Brave*, Blue Star Contemporary Art Center,
San Antonio, TX
2008 *Chalk it Up*, Artpace, showcase artist, San Antonio, TX
And so the story goes... Unit B Gallery, San Antonio, TX
2007 *Medicine Show: The Poster Art of Ballroom Marfa*,
Ballroom Marfa and ArtLies, Marfa, TX
Serious Fun, Dougherty Arts Center, Austin, TX
Dark Objects, Light Matter, Galleri Urbane, Marfa, TX
Texas Biennial, Bolm Studios, Austin, TX
2004 *Sprout*, Austin Museum of Art, Laguna Gloria, Austin, TX
2003 *Food Concepts*, Santa Chiara Study Center,
Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy

AWARDS & NOMINATIONS

- 2011 Artist Foundation of San Antonio,
Rick Liberto Award for Visual Arts
2010 Artist Foundation Finalist, Arthouse,
Nominated for the Texas Prize

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2011 Snyder, Hills, *Kelly McCool*, David Shelton Gallery, San
Antonio, Might Be Good, Issue # 176, October, 14, 2011
Goddard, Dan, David Shelton: *Kelly O'Connor's*
"Post-Utopia," Glasstire, September 28, 2011
2010 Atwell, Wendy, *Sala Diaz*, San Antonio, Might Be Good,
Issue #154, October 1, 2010
Morris, Jerid Reed, *The Mother Country*, San Antonio
Current, September 8, 2010
2009 Silva, Elda & Bennett, Steve, *Best of 2009: Visual Arts*,
San Antonio Express News, December 26, 2009
Judson, Ben, *Lonely Are the Brave*, Artlies, No. 63.
Page 102, Fall 2009
Fisch, Sarah, *Lately Come the 'Brave,'* San Antonio Current,
Page 26, August 12, 2009
Goddard, Dan. *"Lonely Are the Brave" at Blue Star*,
Glasstire, August 2009
Bennett, Steve, *Dark Cloud Hangs Over Artist's Happy*
Places, San Antonio Express News, June 2009
2008 Ras, Barbara, *Art at Your Doorstep*, Trinity Press,
editor Riley Robinson, May, 2008
Wolff, Elaine, *Happily never after*, San Antonio Current,
February 20, 2008
Belasco, Jessica, *Childhood stories turn to the dark side*,
210SA, Page 27, January 30, 2008
2007 *Galleri Urbane artists weave heavy subjects with light materials*,
The Big Bend Sentinel, Page 6, April 5, 2007



Monorail. Found image digitally printed with
found paper, 32 1/2" x 38 1/2", 2013.



Last Resort. Gallery View, dimensions variable, 2013.

Cover Panel: *Last Resort*. Gallery view, dimensions variable, 2013.



Color Me. Found image digitally printed with found paper, 49" x 79", 2013.

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 35th anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,868 artists in 280 visual art exhibitions, 119 music, dance and theater events, 14 film festivals, 23 literary readings and 484 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, ArtForum and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from

the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 950 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



women and
their work

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