

Rachel Schmidt's Eccentric Urban Vision at Hillyer Art Space

Posted by **Louis Jacobson** on September 17, 2014 at 3:49 pm



It's hard to know just how seriously to take **Rachel Schmidt's** mixed-media exhibit at Hillyer Art Space, "Apocaloptimist: A Future True Story." For starters, Schmidt defines the title of her show as "someone who knows things will go to s#!*, but still believes it will work out for the best." She goes on to suggest that her works explore "myths created in a constantly expanding urban wilderness" that will ultimately become both "magical" and "dystopian."

To say her works are eccentric is an understatement. In several collages, Schmidt situates hand-drawn, masked characters within a hilly landscape crammed, *favela*-style, with a multiplicity of structures—apartment buildings, mosques, even a supersized can of "kale." (What's this supposed to represent, a Park Slope brownstone?) The sketched figures alternately play catch with miniature buildings, walk their dogs, point quizzically at the sky, and hold a picnic. The viewer is offered their choice of masks to don while they take it all in. More impressive, and nominally less peculiar, is a room-sized scale model of a city, featuring a bevy of skyscrapers, some of them sprouting from the ground at Pisa-like angles (top). Both the skyscrapers and the ground are covered by decontextualized, repetitive photographs of actual building facades, a nice meta trick.

But what sets Schmidt's visionary tableau apart is a pair of small, lo-fi video images projected on one of the miniature walls, including one of a man kicking a soccer ball. Their herky-jerky movement suggests the early zoetropes of **Eadweard Muybridge**, rooting the scene in seminal photographic works of the nineteenth century.

Also on view: a group show with Hillyer's Artist Advisory Committee, elevated by a caged-heart sculpture by **Renée Stout**, as well as a series of prints by **Michele Montalbano** that combine letterpress imprints, faux-illuminated illustrations, and arrays of letters in various typefaces. Special props for the work (below) in which Montalbano uses the centuries-old Germanic font Fraktur to print the word "tweet."

Through Sept. 27 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Court, N.W., Washington, DC.



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