

Bmore Art

ART AND CULTURE / INTERVIEWS / VISUAL ART / SEPTEMBER 4, 2014

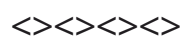
as close as our dreams, as far as our fears



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An interview with Ryan Murray by Adam Farcus

Ryan Murray's solo exhibition, *Lost*, will be on display at Hood College's Whitaker Gallery from September 4 through 29. The opening reception is this Friday, September 5, from 5pm until 7pm. The gallery is located on the second floor of Hood College's Whitaker Commons building, at 401 Rosemont Ave, Frederick, Maryland.



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Console: Entertainment System. Broken Nintendo Entertainment System, polyurethane foam, and latex paint

Farcus: One of the first things you notice in *Lost* is that the materials are very specific. There is foam, latex paint, a globe, old gaming consoles, and inkjet prints on letter-size paper, to name a few. How do you think these material choices communicate content?

Murray: Materials come with a meaning. I guess that a lot of traditional art materials are used as defaults so that artists can import meaning onto them, as though graphite or paint don't mean anything in and of themselves. But I like to use materials for the meaning that comes with them. When I chose a globe to make into a space helmet, I was specifically looking for one with enough topographical information that it could still be seen as a globe after a few layers of silver paint. I want the materials to color the meaning of the work.

Even when things are "found," rather than fabricated or altered by me, I'm doing a lot of searching to get exactly what I want and exclude what I don't. For *Console*, I wanted video game systems that clearly displayed their age. And I wanted them to be broken (it would be sad to ruin one that still worked!) And you wouldn't believe how hard it is to find plastic sheet protectors that don't have visible branding. But that's important – the only word the viewer should be reading when they see my *Lost* flyers is "LOST." Not "Staples®". But they should be thinking about the staples that I hung the posters up with!



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Lost. Inkjet on paper, exposed to water and sunlight, in plastic sheet protectors

Farcus: Can you share some of your working process for this exhibition? How do you go from idea to object? And were these pieces created individually, or did they inform one-another?

Murray: I tend to be driven by the idea. I often feel a little out of place when media/disciplinary categories are discussed – I do not define my art practice by the use of a particular medium so I'm not really a video-maker, sculptor, or painter as such. Concepts develop in notebooks or little notes on my phone, and then I consider the form that they should take. Because of that working method, I often find myself using materials or methods that I don't have experience with. These works involved a lot of prototyping, because I wanted to get certain effects out of the inkjet prints, out of the polyurethane foam, and out of the rephotography of screens for the video-sculpture.



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Once I was able to make the manipulations that I wanted, the flyers series involved a lot of repetitive production. There are close to 200 flyers in the show. It was a bit like making a large series of monoprints. I would start in Photoshop, and then go through the process of printing images, exposing them to water, leaving them out in the sun, and then drying each one with a blow dryer. I was doing that for months!

But on the matter of individual or related works, there are three separate series of work in this show. They were being made simultaneously, and they are very much conceptually related.

Farcus: What are the over-arching themes that tie the three types of works (Lost, the three Console pieces, and Space Helmet) together in this exhibition?

Murray: Each of these pieces was chosen to be included in *Lost* because it addressed a common sense of, well, loss. There is a kind of nostalgia in each work, but for me they go beyond simple romantic wishing for the past. Each of these works is about something loved that has gone away, but that has left in its place something visually and conceptually compelling.



SINGLE CARROT THEATRE



INTERVIEWS



**Frank Zappa
Questionnaire: Ian
Goldstein**

DECEMBER 17, 2014



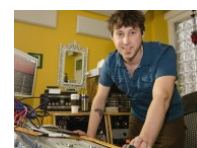
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Levy Interviews
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**Frank Zappa
Questionnaire: Mat
Leffler-Schulman**

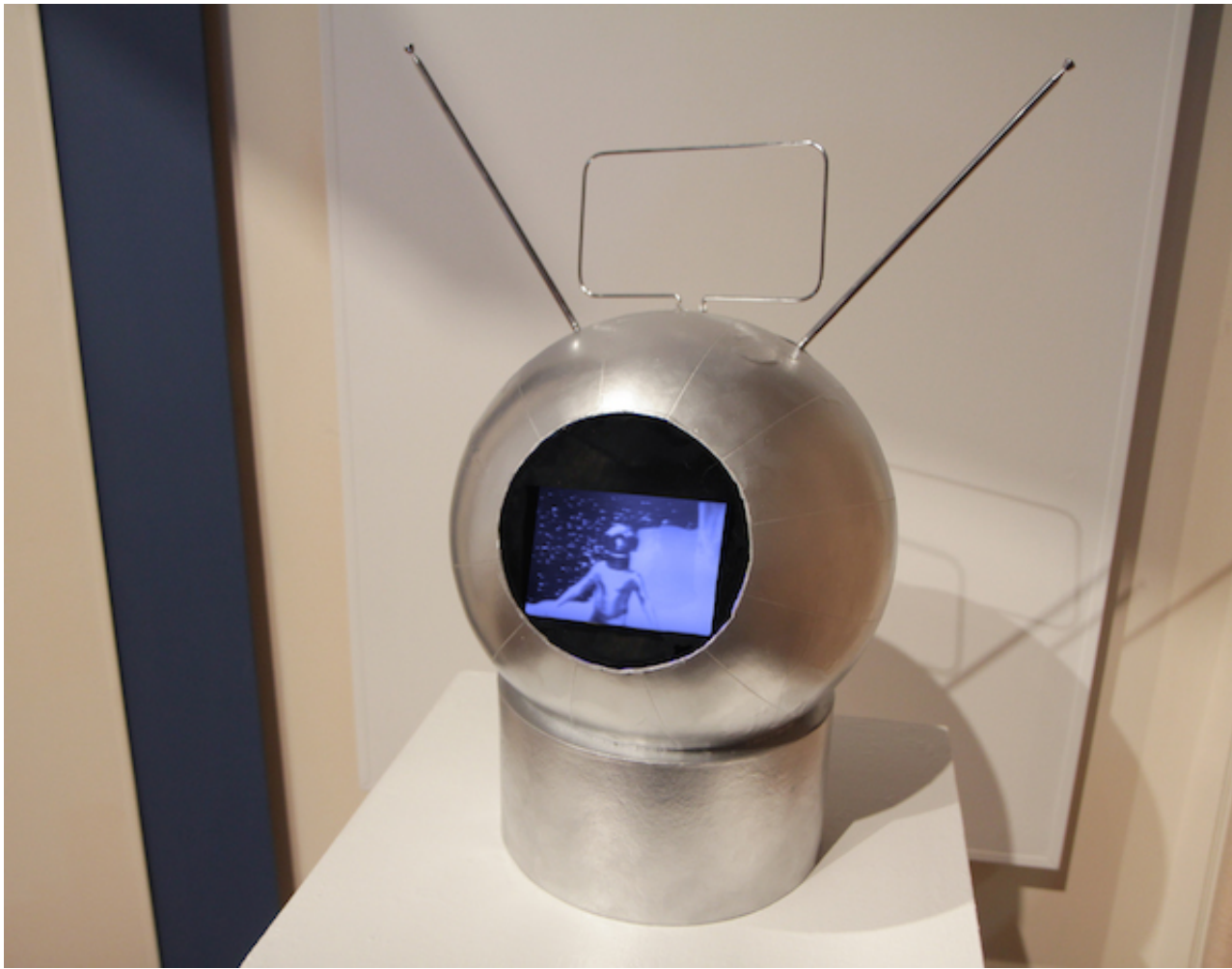
NOVEMBER 22, 2014



**Thoughts on On and
On**

NOVEMBER 21, 2014

OTHER PEOPLES PIXELS



Space Helmet. Globe, papier mache box, antennae, plastic tubes, spray paint, plastic film, video monitor, 2 minute digital video loop

Farcus: *Space Helmet* resembles a space helmet from a 60's science fiction B-movie or a middle-school science fair. Can you talk about why referencing a DIY helmet, as opposed to a real space helmet, was important for this piece?

Murray: This space helmet design is based, in particular, on the look of the space helmet from the 1953 sci-fi film *Robot Monster*. I love the look of the helmet on the monster in that film (who wears it on top of a huge gorilla suit), but it's also typical of the costume-design in a lot of those movies from that period. It could reference any similar film, but I like that one for its zany costume-design, and for the deadpan life-lesson-speeches that the monster delivers at the end. "To live like the hu-man! To laugh! Feel! Want! Why are these things not in the plan?"

For me, it was really important to point to our imagined aesthetics of space travel just before we actually made it there. The piece isn't as much about the realities of space travel as it is about our imagination of it. In that era right before space travel became science-fact, science fiction had a really appealing view of what the technological aesthetics of space travel could be. It's an amazing challenge – how do you make something that's supposed to look too advanced for the human race to conceive of? And further, how do you do it on a B-movie budget? So there's this wonderfully inventive and ramshackle look to the space-gear in 50's sci-fi that, for me, is poetic and evocative. It's all about imagining this impossible, seductive future, and striving to create it despite a complete lack of the requisite skills and materials.



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Visual Arts and Literary Arts

REVIEWS

Baltimore as Patchwork Quilt

DECEMBER 22, 2014



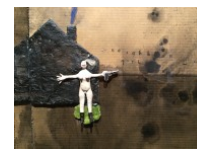
Space Helmet. Globe, papier mache box, antennae, plastic tubes, spray paint, plastic film, video monitor, 2 minute digital video loop

Farcus: How does the recent decision for NASA to end its manned space program inform the meaning of *Space Helmet*?

Murray: That's exactly it. This piece comes out of a very acute sense of missed potential – a feeling of being cheated. When I was a child, I loved the idea of outer space. And at the time, the feeling really was that by the time our generation grew to adulthood, we would have walked on many more extraterrestrial worlds. At the very least Mars. It did not seem far-fetched at all that we might be landing on planets, moons, and asteroids, and running colonies on the moon within my lifetime.

But the realities of economics and public opinion have made those things seem as outlandish and fictional as space travel must have seemed to someone in the theaters watching *Robot Monster* in 1953. And I find that quite sad. It really is nothing less than the human race giving up the potential for its greatest legacy, its greatest achievement, and maybe its only really hope for long-term survival. And to do so in favor of the petty, short-term, and destructive things that we often spend government budgets on... what a misstep!

So in this piece, I created a sci-fi-style space helmet from a globe, and then wore it in a video shoot to create fantasy planetary landings. Like the conspiracy theories about faking the moon landing footage on a sound stage, I created green-screened landing footage and put it through a process that gave the videos the look of a broadcast from space. The images were broadcast through a wireless video monitor and rephotographed, kinescope-style off of low-res screens. In each video, I speak a "historic" quotable sentences akin to "one small step..." that I composed. I was thinking, "If we had gone to another world, what might we say?" I came up with things like, "And so it seems the next frontier is as close as our dreams, as far as our fears." I wanted to point out that these achievements used to seem possible, and even inevitable. Now,



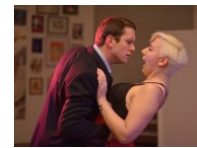
Pervert or Detective? David Lynch as Fine Artist

DECEMBER 19, 2014



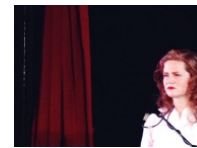
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DECEMBER 1, 2014



It's not all Fun and Games

NOVEMBER 28, 2014



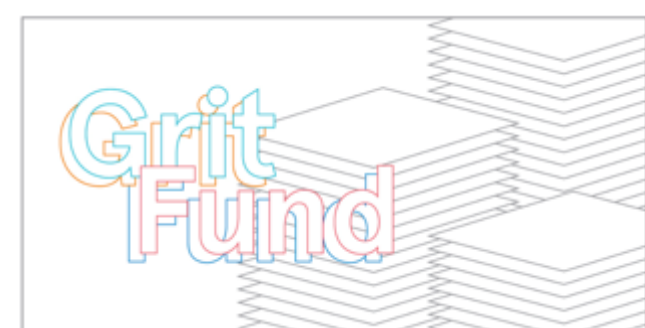
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they seem to me like they've returned to the realm of fantasy.

There are only a few people left on Earth today who have walked on the moon, and the youngest two are now 79 years old. So it's very likely that by the time my son is old enough to be excited about outer space, there will be no one alive on Earth who has walked on another world. *Space Helmet*, for me, is all about that situation – a great human achievement that starts as science-fiction, becomes science-fact, and then returns to being fiction once more.



Console: Super Entertainment System. Broken Super Nintendo Entertainment System, polyurethane foam, latex paint

Farcus: The bright colors in the *Console* and *Lost* pieces seem to refer to psychedelia, in particular tie-died shirts and fungus. Looking at some of your other work it seems like this is something you have used many times. How does psychedelic imagery fit into this world of 90's game consoles and LOST posters?

Murray: Psychedelia is one of my major visual and conceptual touchstones as an artist. Much like science-fiction, I am drawn to it because it featured a really wide-eyed, fantastical idealism that led its adherents to create visually unique cultural productions. Like sci-fi, too, though, I think that psychedelia became a kind of kitsch, easily dismissed in more practical and cynical times. And I think video games can be mapped to this same model. They are, of course, way more popular – the gaming industry is larger than Hollywood. But there remains a notion that they are better left in one's childhood; they are often seen as an inappropriate form of entertainment for adults.

Video games are also complex and intricate cultural productions concerned with fantasy and alternative worlds, whose fans have a kind of social stigma attached to them. Sci-fi, gaming, psychedelia... each of these has a devoted sub-culture and a really passionate fan base. It's not like they are sub-cultures that have been driven to extinction. But I feel they are related in the idealism and the stigma that they share. Their time is seen as, perhaps, over, and the people who are excited about them are

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Lost. Inkjet on paper, exposed to water and sunlight, in plastic sheet protectors

Farcus: The images in *Lost* are purposefully weathered to the point of abstraction. Why was it important to remove the representations in the images and is it possible for viewers to be able to make out the images?

Murray: When I walk my dog around the parks and paths in the city, I often see lost flyers. It's very sad – I would feel terrible if my dog were lost. They are a sign that something is loved enough for it to be missed. But one summer, I noticed that a person had hung all of their flyers inside plastic sheet protectors. The idea, of course, was to protect them from the weather, but the reality was that they caught the dew and the rain and didn't let it escape.

The plastic sleeves had been put there to protect the image, but in actuality, they made things worse. The ink ran and the image itself was lost. But the abstraction that was left from the smeared ink was quite beautiful. I thought that was really notable. It was a sad thought for the loss of the pet, and an odd visual pun since the image itself had been lost, but the resulting object was compelling for me. So I wanted to get to the essence of that object, removing everything except the word Lost, the dissipated image, and the failed protective sleeve.



MORE



BmoreArt's Picks



**Galleries, Opening
September 4 - 7**

BmoreArt's Picks for
weekly art openings,
performances happen
Baltimore and surround

The images themselves are carefully chosen – they aren't random. I went out and shot hundreds of photos for the project, and collected quite a lot of found images as well. They are places and ideas that feel especially lost for me. But I won't say what they once were. I'm not trying to be coy, but the images have been lost. That's the point for me. I do think that viewers may get suggestions of their lost content, and they may have their own associations, but the resulting abstraction, the play of liquid color on the page, and the sense that something is gone was my end goal.

Farcus: In this exhibition there is a fixation on what I will call the "past future", where the future is unknown. In Lost we see images of what used to be posters for (presumably) missing pets. The animals went missing in the past, the posters look like they have been up for quite a while, and they have not been taken down. We are left to wonder about the fate of the pets. The Consoles and Space Helmet also present an uncertain view of the future, from a specific point in our history. For you, why does the future need to be presented through the lens of the past?

Murray: The future doesn't really exist. There is just the ongoing present. There are patterns that we can guess will continue; we can make predictions based on understood trajectories. Ultimately, though, what we thought would be the future always ends up as the present, and it is rather different than we expected it to be. We can only be slightly more sure about the past. It seems to have happened, and there are major events that we can agree on, but our memories and our interpretations are so varied and unreliable. I find our past selves' view of what the future could be quite interesting. I think it is telling to see what we thought would happen, what we thought we were working towards versus where we are presently. I think you can only navigate by knowing where you were and where you are.

Farcus: What do you think the future holds for humans?

Murray: I think that I'm a cynical optimist. People often phrase optimism versus pessimism as "glass half full" versus "glass half empty." But I think it's more accurate to say, "do you believe that we take two steps forward, one step back, or one step forward, two steps back?" I generally fall into the former camp. I think we will continue to screw up royally from time to time, falling victim to our age-old character flaws as a species. But I do believe that we lumber, haltingly, towards progress.

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More of Murray's work can be viewed on his website, and more information about the exhibition can be found on the Hood College website and the Facebook event page for *Lost*.

Adam Farcus is an artist, teacher, and writer who lives in Orlando, Florida, where he is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Rollins College. He also co-curates, with Allison Yasukawa, for the Baltimore art space, Lease Agreement. Farcus has exhibited his work at numerous venues, including Box 13, Houston; Vox Populi, Philadelphia; and A+D Gallery, Columbia College, Chicago. He has lectured on his work at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Performance Studies International 16 conference, among many others. He received his M.F.A. from the University of Illinois at Chicago and B.F.A. from Illinois State University. His work can be view on his website.

Tags: Adam Farcus Hood College Lost Ryan Murray

Whitaker Gallery



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BmoreArt's Picks: Baltimore Art Galleries, Openings, and Events September 4 - 7

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