

Essay by Susie Kalil 5.01.21

"I am a satellite I'm out of control – Queen"

Kirk Hopper Fine Art
Dallas, Texas

We are beginning to emerge from what is perhaps the most introspective period in American history. After a year of paralyzing pandemic, intense systemic racism, environmental calamities and economic shortfalls, all of us feel unmoored by gravitational forces. Maybe it's time to go outside, look up at the night sky and revel in a more superior and complex creativity. At its best, that world taps into the wonder that can come from new visions and realms.

As Charles Mary Kubricht sees it, the cosmos presents a densely interwoven series of narrative entanglements that extend across time, alternate universes and at least several multiple realities. Kubricht has obviously never been to outer space, but she has spent many years imagining it, tracking it, with the help of astrophysicists and intergalactic archaeologists at McDonald Observatory near her studio in Marfa, Texas. Kubricht's ability to dream up detailed worlds has served her in various contexts about that particular place: its geology, weather patterns, migrations and lost histories. To envision a location, and linking of geographic points, it helps to identify known analogues. As a child, Kubricht hiked and camped in the wilderness. Nature provided a feeling of comfort that was missing from the confines of home. She has continued to walk the landscape, while making connections between abstract properties of time, distance, speed and perception.

True to its title, "I am a satellite I'm out of control - Queen," Kubricht's multilayered, multidimensional installation of recent works at Kirk Hopper Fine Art, aims to connect the Earth to the Universe and all of the spaces in between. Entering the gallery is to be immersed in an energy field. The immediacy of her works acts upon our nervous systems, triggering responses that are various, questioning and transcendently, electrically alive.

"I am a satellite I'm out of Control-Queen" becomes a kind of metaphoric space opera, propelling us across a cosmos that changes and transforms us in the very instant of contact. The installation crosses conventional boundaries of art and science. It is about many things: worlds within worlds, the prospect of space travel and exoplanets, and our constant state of flux. Each series - Future Tense, South of Zenith, Almost Human/Almost Earth, The Red Planet, Visuality, Astronauts, Space Ships, Signals - presents a taut balance of inventive power and structural rigor, a back and forth play of alternating perceptions between elements of geometry and a new mythology. That lyrical sensibility and instinctive visual experience combine to summon the most anarchic of forces - the life force itself.

Kubricht works with breathtaking stamina and clarity, and her pleasure in this vision quest is palpable. She lays out particles of matter - electrons and quarks - and their essential properties: mass, charge, spin. She then overlays a lexicon of hieroglyphics, tessellations and scientific principles: electromagnetism, gravity, the strong and weak force. The bottomless black space and eerily luminous worlds beyond evoke primal forms of escape and adventure.

At 28 feet, "Future Tense" stretches across the gallery and the effect is exhilarating. Black gouache and acrylic, in addition to glazes, ink and graphite are applied on linen, describing galactic systems on the move through radial lines, geometric shapes and orbiting configurations that hold the entire surface in stasis, transforming it into a vibrant, transparent membrane. Ambitious, intricate and probing, it quickens the pulse, making us aware that there is no one place to stand before the vaporous space and cascading forms, no perfect vantage point from which to take in the shifting dichotomies. Kubricht transports us to a new realm, then brings us back as we were never before. The constants are motion, metamorphosis and transformation - a yearning for a different state. What will that be? Who will we become?

"South of Zenith" acknowledges the telescopic data used to find life in distant worlds. Inspired by SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) research and NASA's discovery of 4,292 exoplanets, the paintings become perceptual gambits of space, form and void, light and shadow. Kubricht binds her marks, circles and "portals" together in shifting structures of horizontal and vertical planes as a kind of hyperspace: images quake, the very air seems to jump. The surface glows with a light of incandescent energy.

In "Almost Human/Almost Earth," large scale photographs of quartz crystals representing anthropomorphized alien forms are transposed on canvas. The quartz properties split light into a spectrum and can amplify energy in computer memory chips, watches and radio transmitters. Here, Kubricht draws on the surfaces with silver ink, evoking symbolic languages of geometry, mathematics and signals from outer space. We approach the quartz forms as body-to-body, in which ghostly and physical recognitions merge. Kubricht conveys a sense of closeness at the same time she intimates a powerful yearning for what lies beyond.

In "The Red Planet," Exoplanet Cecilia 41020 investigates the fragility of human perception when faced with imperceptible and unfamiliar territory. The scientific narrative follows the disorienting explorations of an astronaut as she investigates the landscape of trembling, spewing mountains and crevices. For the KHFA installation, Kubricht interviewed people who have encountered UFO's in West Texas and Mexico, using the voice recordings as background sound.

Kubricht explains: "We are in the midst of a radical restructuring of the experiences of awe, wonder and curiosity. With new urgency caused by the accelerated destruction of the planet, I turn to outer space, exoplanets, UFO's, aliens and other strange medicines in my artwork as my life adjusts to continual disorientation, recalculation and uneasy utopias. While technology strives to exist at the edge of what can be modeled and observed, I believe it is the role of the artist to conceptualize new edges and explore unanswered questions."

Kubricht's galaxies offer a respite and reminder of how small and fleeting our own troubles are in the grandest scheme. Her paintings, drawings and photographs surround us with a vortex of magnetic fields that stream gas and energy across space at nearly the speed of light. She invites us to go along on the wild ride. "I am a satellite I'm out of control -Queen" is an epic poem to cosmic curiosities.