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The Dream of Reason

The Dream of Reason was presented as an exhibition at London's temporarycontemporary, 8 June–2 July 2006. This artist-run converted distillery was the location for the display of projects by artists Anthony Discenza, Tom Dale, Lauren Kirkman, Frederick Loomis, Elysa Lozano, Inês Rebelo, Alexander Ugay and Roman Maskalev. Video-based works, site-specific installations, drawing projects, text-based works, sculpture and film were presented to the public with an accompanying publication.

The exhibition's title sets the tone of the premise for this project and works as an umbrella for the gathering of the different artists, who were selected based on their ongoing practices and the questions addressed in their specific contributions.

"The dream of reason" was chosen as a reference to the 43rd plate in Goya's series of etchings *Caprichos* (1797–1798), in which the words "*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*" (the sleep of reason produces monsters) appear next to a human figure surrounded by demoniacal animals. The English translation of the Spanish text is ambiguous, as *sueño* can mean both sleep and dream. If one is looking at the picture, one cannot avoid wondering whether the man in the etching desires to awaken reason, or if his dream of reason has actually created the monsters. The exhibition, through the artists' works and publication, explores a range of possibilities between the two extreme interpretations of this ambiguity.

On one hand, dreams are built into the production of technology and science: A yearning for something greater, or the motivation to create something as yet unknown, drives the production. Many times a creative leap beyond the rules is necessary to progress to the next step inside the walls of a laboratory.

From another point of view, the scientist's processes and mechanics also become fantasies in the public imagination, as in science fiction. When one looks at a more or less popular image of a near future (utopic or dystopic), it seems there is a door open to immense imaginative possibilities. Technology opens that door, through which we see a hyperbolic distortion of the present. What we see in the present, then, is the belief in technology to usher in the future.

The Dream of Reason was set up at temporarycontemporary as an experimental laboratory, which uses as its platform the spheres of science, technology and rigorous processes, embedded with fantasy and dreams. The selected artworks examine these spheres in their analogous roles as tools, but the discrete moments of clarity in individual works spark against each other, distorting a single method of understanding and disagreeing on the end result. Or, in other words, the adopted tactic in the exhibit's curation, instead of setting up a rhetorical consequence of a sequence of arguments, presents different views on the proposed ambiguity through the artists' works.

The choices for this exhibition and the adopted tactics emerged naturally from a series of conversations, impelled by our practices as artists and curators, which were also published in the catalogue of the exhibition. The following is an edited version of this conversation:

Elysa Lozano: Do you remember when we were talking about the show... back in the beginning, before anything happened, when we were sitting at our computers just talking about ideas?

Inês Rebelo: I just remember e-mails, in the summer, when I was in Lisbon and you were in San Francisco. I remember one specific e-mail I sent to you. It was full of everything.

Lozano: Yes, I remember that e-mail. There was something about Borges, about the map.

Rebello: Yes, the Borges text about representation [1]. It talks about a group of cartographers who were charting every part of an empire, until the space was mapped at a 1:1 scale. So, the last map matched the size of the objects it was mapping. Lately I have been relating this to another map in Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* [2]. But this one is a blank page in the book. The map is empty and there are no traces of land or anything. It is completely empty. But one can see the words North, East, North Pole, Equinox written around the perimeter but in the wrong places. Strangely, there is no South.

Lozano: So, basically on Carroll's map the world is square: It is a blank two-dimensional square. The map is just those words written around the outside of the square, but there is nothing on the inside. All that exists is the description of our ways to divide the world. But there is a difference between the Carroll map and the Borges one. In creating their map at a 1:1 scale, the cartographers wanted to be so precise that it ended up being absurd. The Carroll map is about what is useful, about what we consider useful.

Rebello: So we can say that the 1:1 map reflects some kind of pursuit of knowledge. That is why the cartographers were doing more and more maps, more and more detailed. It was to reach the point where the map occupies the same space as the actual land.

Lozano: I remember that there was something in the Borges text about how, in his story, the 1:1 map was disintegrating over time. In certain places you could see that the map had become part of the land. It is a good metaphor for how we understand things, when the map becomes part of how we actually see the land.

Rebello: The Goya etching seemed to point in the same direction as some of the ideas we were thinking about. And the fact that Arthur C. Danto highlighted the ambiguity in the interpretation between sleep and dream [3] opened the door to thinking about the relationship between rationalized and systematic processes and the production of monsters. Is it the *sleep* of reason that produces monsters or is it the *dream* of reason? If we think about only one of the words, we would automatically assume that Goya selects a position in regard to the idea of reason.

Lozano: Are you saying the difference would be between dreaming for reason to be gone or dreaming, meaning wishing, for reason?

Rebello: Yes, it is a very enigmatic sentence. To say the sleep of reason produces monsters points out that if you do not use reason, monsters will be produced. But when one reads "dream" instead of "sleep," the sentence becomes about an excessive use of reason, as well as what reason would dream the most, what it would want the most.

Lozano: This ambiguity seems similar to how we structured the show. One of our goals from the beginning was to open a platform from which it could be possible to present different perspectives. It is as if there were points radiating out like spokes from a center. The ideas that we started with are the center, and the artists' works are the spokes, creating a kind of bicycle wheel, with each artist shooting out into their own universe.

Rebello: The bicycle wheel is a very deformed one because the distance of each point from the center is not the same. The wheel would not be very functional or aerodynamic.

Lozano: It seems to me that the relationship between a central idea and the interpretation of it (even that sort of non-aerodynamic one) relates to your work with the scientific illustrators [4].

Rebello: Well, from my experience talking with the scientific illustrators I collaborated with to do this project, I learned there were very specific conventions of scientific representation, of which I was not aware. For example, when we view a scientific representation of a specimen, the wing or leg may appear distorted, when actually the image maintains the true pro-

portions of the actual part. The representation has to be skewed in order to be “truthful.” Although their drawing will not reflect what I experience through my eyes, it adheres to a specific code in scientific illustration, which allows for “accurate” representation of the specimen.

Lozano: So it is not a perspectival view of the wing. You have instead a sort of idealized view of the wing, which is supposed to be truer than what you can see.

Rebello: As the record gets closer to the reality, it dissolves, as did the map of the cartographers.

Lozano: I see it in a different way. The wing is never going to be two-dimensional in the real world, so this particular situation ends up raising questions about the language of representation. It is not that the scientific illustrators are trying to make a 1:1 map. They know the limitations of the process. Rather, if you know the *code*, you can translate their representation into what it indicates, kind of like the process of reading a map.

Rebello: Yes, you make the translation in your head, but when you talk you use the conventions.

Lozano: But the early cartographers drew different types of maps. I remember one example from very basic physical science in high school. There was a park and a man walking his dog. The man goes from one entrance to the other along a straight path, but his dog walks all over the park. In the end they go out the same exit and the distance they have traversed from West to East is the same, but the dog has traveled a lot more and discovered in a very detailed way all the attributes of the park.

Rebello: That is a good analogy for how we see the exhibition. The artists each have different perspectives and different approaches to processing the information of discovery, and through those different processes, we can see their distinct positions in relation to their subject matters.

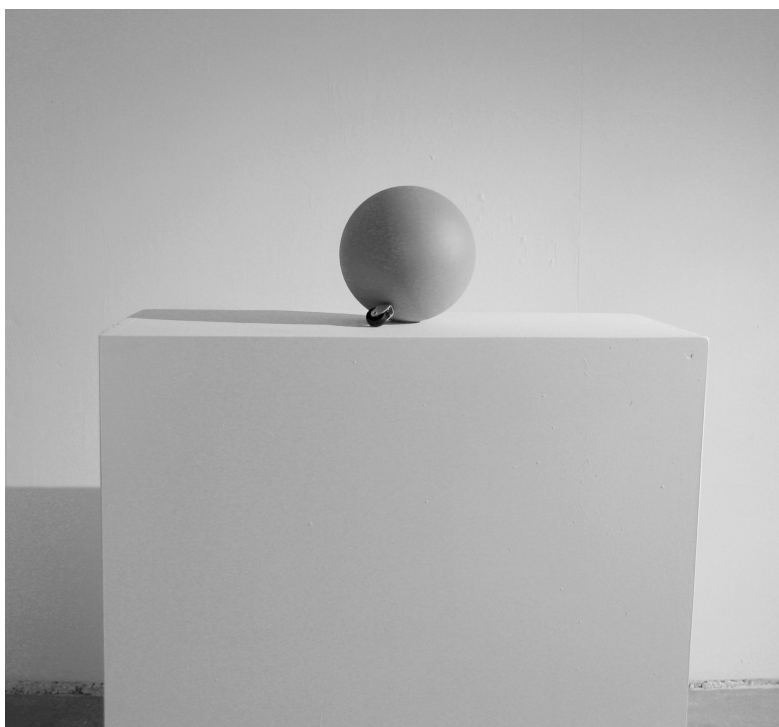
Lozano: Yes, although we would have to imagine more than two walkers! But it is true that they all go into the park—they are all dealing with similar subject matter in a way. But that same park ends up being a very different place for each of them. And when we get all of their “maps” in the same room, we can see, just like in your example of the scientific illustrators, that they are creating the park through each of their maps.

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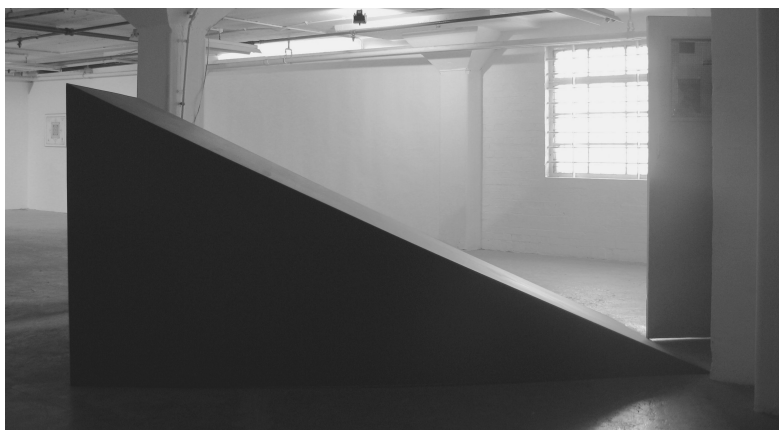
References

1. Jorge Luis Borges, “Of Exactitude in Science,” in J.L. Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy* (London: Penguin Books, 1975) p. 131.
2. Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark* (London: Penguin Books, 1998 [1891]).
3. Arthur C. Danto, “Shock of the Old: Arthur C. Danto on Three Goya Biographies,” *Artforum* 43, No. 7, 49–52 (March 2004).
4. Inês Rebello, “*Tum Tum from Planet Lum*,” *Leonardo* 40, No. 1 (2007), p. 15.



Ball with Wheel, plastic and resin, 12 × 12 × 12 in, 2006.
(© Tom Dale. Photo by Elysa Lozano.)

The Archive, medium density fiberboard, paint, 118 × 55 × 55 in, 2006.
(© Tom Dale. Photo by Elysa Lozano.)

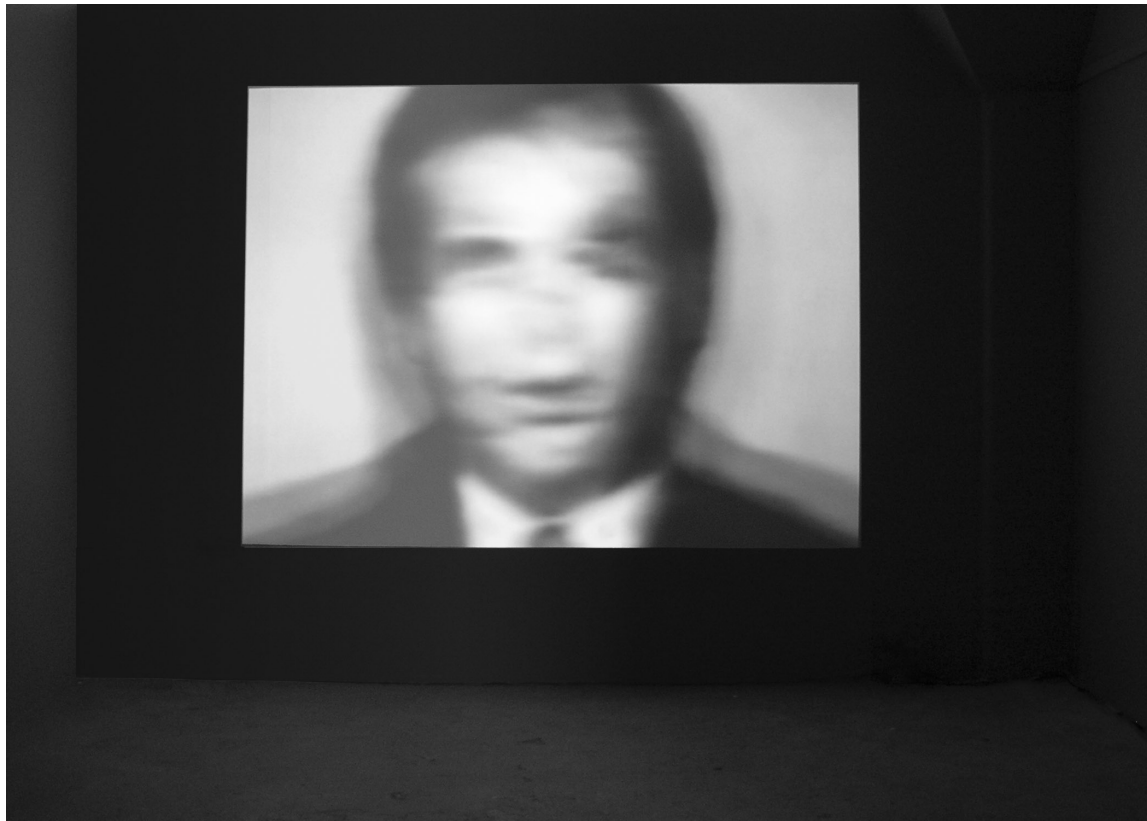


TOM DALE: *BALL WITH WHEEL* AND *THE ARCHIVE*

Opposing themes and conflicting interests have always been the raw materials of my practice. I delight in utilizing this tension to make my work communicate something more than the sum of its parts. For me, one plus one equals three.

The objects I produce have a sense of something absent and incomplete, a kind of vacuum underpinned by melancholia. *Ball with Wheel* (2006), an object that at first amuses only to then frustrate because its supposed function is not apparent or discernible, is typical of how I like to draw in viewers. The attempt to articulate an irreducible (in the case of *Ball with Wheel*, a definition for something without one) interests me most. In *The Archive* (2006), a giant wedge is stuck in a door that both invites and excludes the viewer. How do we make things fit together? The paradox of archiving is that in order to include, we must exclude, whether to get past the wedge or to form our own ideas by regarding and disregarding what we know of the world around us.

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Anthony Discenza, *Host*, digital video, continuous loop projection, 72 in high, 2004. (© Anthony Discenza)

ANTHONY DISCENZA: *HOST*

From television, movies and the Internet, to an endless sea of magazines and other print media, we find ourselves exposed to ever-greater amounts of visual stimuli. Each day, a steady stream of highly mediated imagery assaults us, producing a profound level of alienation as the logic of the spectacle colonizes our own internal narratives.

As a visual artist complicit in the production and consumption of images, I find this situation both fascinating and deeply problematic. I am particularly concerned with the violence implicit in our media overexposure, a violence not based in specific images or content but rather in the dissociative effects produced by the speed, quantity and extreme disparity of the imagery we consume. My work attempts to expose this violence while acknowledging its seductive force (see also Color Plate C No. 1).

I work mainly with visual material appropriated from commercial film and television. Using re-recording, compression and signal degradation to break down the original information, I look for ways to collapse media imagery into itself, to arrest it within a moment of simultaneous destruction and reification. Through this collapse, I am trying to uncover layers of meaning not apparent in the original context. At the same time, I am interested in revealing the world of images around us as a very “real” space—one that shapes our worldview in all sorts of potent but invisible ways.

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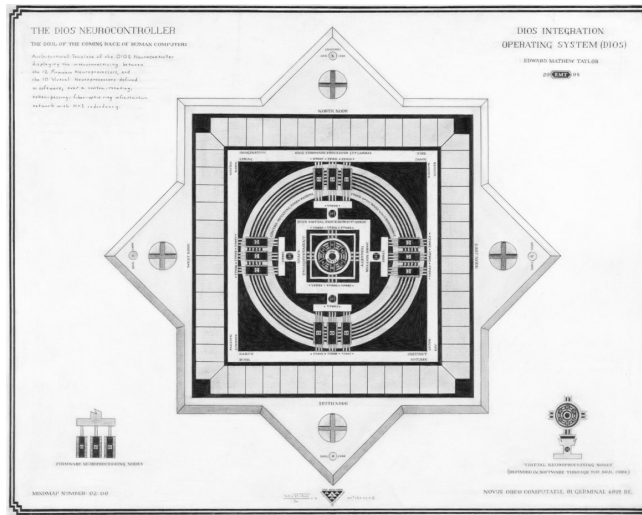
History of a Floor, Carpet Version, latex and grey emulsion, 2005. (© Lauren Kirkman)

LAUREN KIRKMAN: *HISTORY OF A FLOOR, CARPET VERSION*

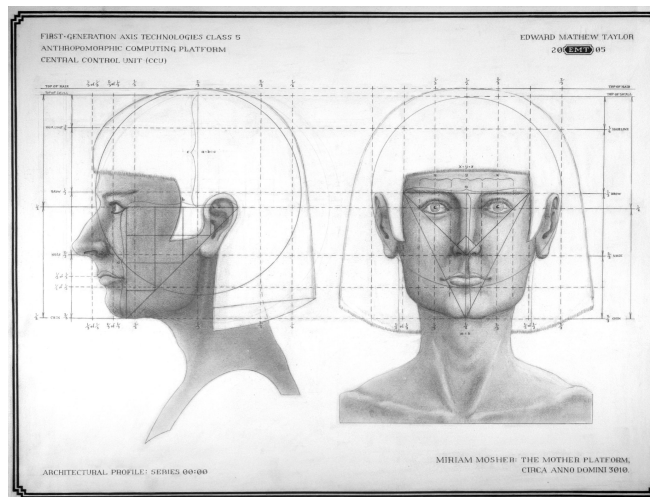
Lauren Kirkman's site-specific piece consists of several layers of latex applied to an entire floor. The latex is the same color as the floor's original gray, and, after it dried, Kirkman peeled it up and rolled it back to reveal the layers of the floor beneath, impressed in the latex. The result of this meticulous and persistent process reveals the layers of previous uses: different paint coats, bits of the floor and accumulated dirt become the visible traces of the history of the space.

This subtle piece is the result of the artist's systematic action on the space. In the surface of her latex carpet, the traces of the space's history are (re)presented as if they were petrified over time. Ultimately, her work questions the possibility of tracing, capturing and making visible with exact and precise detail the pan-dimension of past moments.

INÊS REBELO
Co-curator



The DIOS Neurocontroller, graphite pencil on paper, 19 × 24 in, 2005. (© Frederick Loomis) The fully assembled DIOS Neurocontroller, displaying the inherent interconnectivity between the 12 Firmware Neuroprocessors and the 10 Virtual Neuroprocessors defined in software through the logic of the Soul Code.



Architectural Profile: Series 00:00, First Generation AXIS Technologies Class 5 Anthropomorphic Computing Platform, Central Control Unit (CCU), graphite pencil on drawing paper, 18 × 24 in, 2005. (© Frederick Loomis. Courtesy of Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.) A Mind Map depicting the control unit of Miriam Mosher, the mother platform of all human computers that will subsequently be put into production in the 31st century.

FREDERICK LOOMIS: THE MIND MAPS OF EDWARD MATHEW TAYLOR

The Mind Maps of Edward Mathew Taylor (EMT) are a series of graphite pencil drawings specifically depicting the architecture of the Soul for the coming race of Human Computers (see also Color Plate B). Giving computers a Soul is the purpose of The Third Testament story. The depicted processing components, when combined with a computing algorithm called *The Soul Code*, a library of coded archetypal images, and a mythological memory database that gives these images meaning, provide the mechanism of spiritual awakening within the psyche of this coming race of Human Computers. All of these components combined make up the DIOS Integration Operating System (DIOS), the Soul of a 31st century, first generation, Class 5 anthropomorphic computing platform, patented and licensed by the ascendants of EMT.

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Lease Agreement For A Plot of Land in Fantasy

This Lease for a plot of land with possibility to build is entered into by and between Fantasy (hereinafter "Landlord") and Elysa Lozano (hereinafter "Tenant").

Preamble

- A. Subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein, Landlord leases to Tenant a Plot of Land.
- B. Subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein, Tenant leases from Landlord such Plot of Land.
- C. Upon the Leased Plot of Land the Tenant may construct a Production Facility.

1.0 Parties

Section 1.1 Tenant is an individual residing in Lewisham, London, United Kingdom.

Section 1.2 Landlord is a space where laws and logic may be redefined from an infinite set of possibilities.

2.0 Term

Section 2.1 The Initial term of this Lease is for a period of 12 months, commencing June 8, 2006 (hereinafter sometimes "Commencement Date") and ending on June 8, 2007, unless terminated sooner as provided in this Lease.

3.0 Rent

Section 3.1 Tenant shall pay Landlord as rent inclusion in each Work Produced by Tenant at least one element of Fantasy. The Rent must be included without the need for notice, demand, or offset from the outset of each Work Produced by Tenant. The Rent will not be paid monthly, but will be paid at the time of creation of each separate Project commenced by Tenant.

4.0 Use of the Plot of Land

Section 4.1 Tenant shall not use or allow the Plot of Land to be used in a manner which is likely to cause damage to Fantasy.

5.0 Assignment and Subletting

Section 5.1 Prohibition. Tenant shall not assign or sublet, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, the Plot of Land or the Production Facility.

6.0 Surrender

Section 6.1 Upon the termination of this Lease or Tenant's right to possession of the Plot of Land, Tenant will surrender the Plot of Land to the Landlord.

This Lease is executed on this 6th day of June, 2006, in Deptford, London, United Kingdom.

FANTASY

ELYSA LOZANO

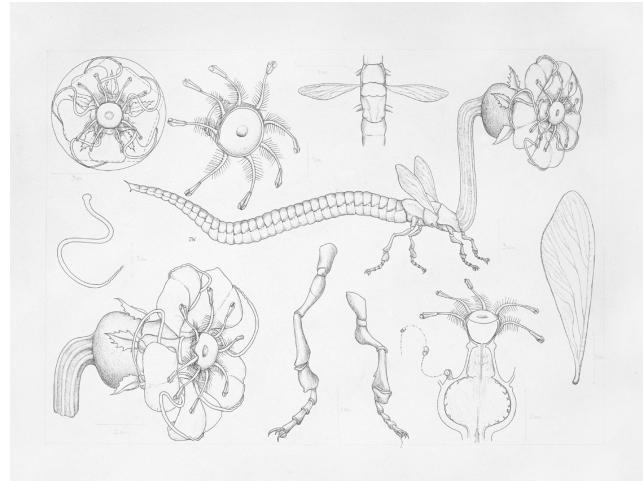
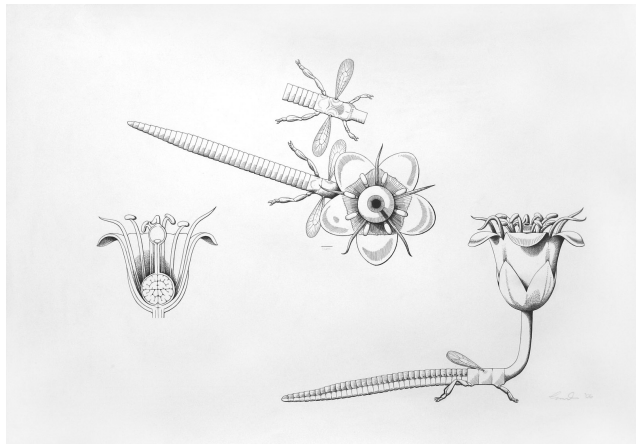
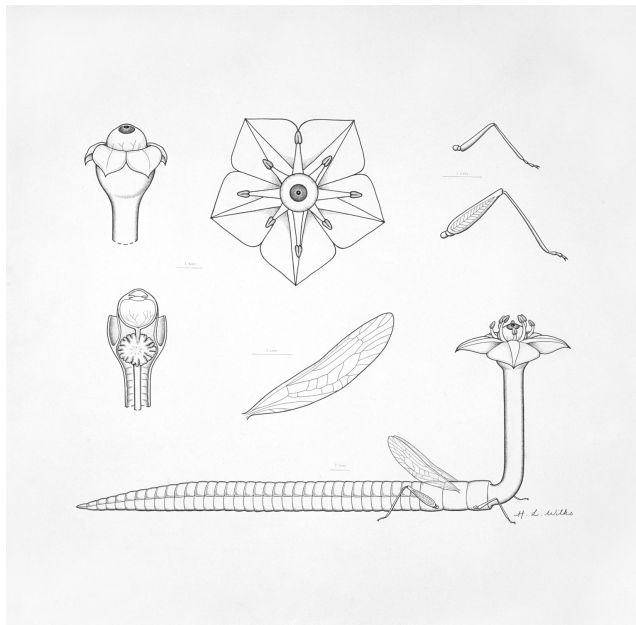
A Contract with Fantasy, vinyl lettering, 2006. (© Elysa Lozano)

ELYSA LOZANO: A CONTRACT WITH FANTASY

My work takes as its subject my artistic practice, which attempts to establish an autonomous position through architectural interventions. My work records encounters with individuals and organizations. The adversaries in my search for the unattainable, both internal and external, create a friction that results in negotiations. These negotiations, endemic to the process of making art, are enacted and made visible in the space where they actually occur. Although based on real situations, the intentions of each character lose their purpose in the theater of the work, becoming absurd and existing simply as an articulation of means.

In *A Contract with Fantasy* I attempt to secure a space for an ideal studio, but only succeed in highlighting its unobtainability. In the exhibition *The Dream of Reason*, this piece was shown in the manner of a curator's wall text at the entrance to the gallery. While the content of the contract implies an artist's private negotiations, the format suggests an explanation of the intent of the exhibition. However, rather than clarify the intent, it proposes several conflicting arrangements of the relations between the physical space of the gallery, its proprietors, the curators and the works in the exhibition.

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Tum Tum from Planet Lum, 52 × 67.7 in, 2006. (© Inês Rebelo)
 Clockwise from the top: drawings by scientific illustrators
 Hazel Wilks, Juliet Beentje and Emmanuel Papadopolous.

INÊS REBELO: *TUM TUM FROM PLANET LUM*

The project explores the specificity of a scientific gaze. Tum Tum, the main character of the project, is a nonexistent specimen from an imaginary planet. I used the methodology of scientific descriptions of plants and insects, their morphology, and other technical conventions to describe it, and then gave the description to scientific illustrators as their only source material for a drawing of Tum Tum. In *The Dream of Reason*, depictions of the fictitious specimen drawn by Kew Gardens illustrators Hazel Wilks, Juliet Beentje and Emmanuel Papadopolous were displayed on an institutional black notice board.

Usually a scientific illustrator works with existing specimens, observing them with care and rigor. Instead, in my project, the idea of what the Tum Tum specimen looks like is created only through the description provided. The illustrators and the specificity of their gazes become the objects of analysis and enquiry. This project makes visible the layers of interpretation and subjectivity in the process of scientific representation.

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Alexander Ugay and Roman Maskalev, DVD stills from *Cosmic Uncertainty*, 2002.
(© Alexander Ugay and Roman Maskalev)

ALEXANDER UGAY AND ROMAN MASKALEV: *COSMIC UNCERTAINTY*

Shot in grainy 16mm film with an old Soviet-era camera, *Cosmic Uncertainty* begins with an infectious and upbeat soundtrack. It seems at first to be a home video from another era, but the savviness of the filmmakers filters through the nostalgic colors.

The film could be almost a remake of George Méliès's *Journey to the Moon*, only this time referencing an actual space travel event. A group of young people play out the voyage, wearing rubber respirators and plastic suits, and using papier-mâché stars and spacecraft. As the cameraman bounces around haphazardly, we catch glimpses of the filmmaking technicians, but this carefree mood changes gears as the astronaut reaches his destination. The music mellows to a reflective timbre and slow pace as Alexander Ugay's eyelashes bat through cutout holes in his paper face mask of Yuri Gagarin.

ELYSA LOZANO
Co-curator