A new exhibition asks: Are we living in digitally-rendered cities?

By HALLE DARLING-RENKUNG • January 31, 2018

The show Rendered Cities, up at Apexart in Tribeca, addresses the problematic impact of architectural renderings on contemporary architecture. The show’s opening statement asserts that flashy renderings make cityscapes “real before reality,” with newly constructed buildings mimicking digitally rendered drawings. Because architecture today originates from computer drawing, built structures are becoming more and more dictated by digital renderings, leaving space for technology to be more deeply embedded into our surroundings.

The notion that architectural renderings create a fixed idea of what a city should look like is especially relevant to the present day, when cities seem more like construction sites than living spaces, and glass skyscrapers are rising in global cities around the world.

Featuring work by Felicity Hammond, Lawrence Lek, and Laura Yule, the show is organized by London’s ANGL Collective, a curatorial group comprised of Luis Manuel Arzú, Brenda Guenot, and Giulia Pistonesi. The three met in the MFA Curating program at Goldsmiths College in London, and they now put together shows that deal with architecture through fiction and imagination.

Hammond’s piece consists of a bright green wall and floor installation within which abstract geometric shapes are installed on wooden scaffolds or attached directly to the wall and floor. Her work resembles the world inside of a computer screen—a space with fractured shapes, voids of color, and nothing to orient one’s surroundings that blurs the line between real usable space and abstract computer space.

Lawrence Lek’s video essay uses footage from the game Assassin’s Creed to move through various cities. For example, the game's character scales Notre Dame in Paris and Egyptian pyramids, allowing a new and physically impossible perspective for the viewer. Rendered Cities notes that Lek’s work traces “the political symbolism of the skyscraper as the global repetition of an urban form and a contemporary manifestation of wealth and power.” It is an example of technology allowing humans to experience space in an enhanced way, allowing for commentary on real places by using digitally rendered ones.

Laura Yule’s installation view. (Courtesy Apexart)

Yule’s work includes an installation and a performance piece scheduled for February 10. The work present at the opening was comprised of three mannequins and a washing machine that had been taken apart and added onto. Yule’s installation will come to life during a performance piece, Laura Yule Performance of Unit #1, Maintenance #1. The artist described some of her materials for the piece on her Instagram: "Washing machine, soap, mannequins; clothing fibers, including human and animal hair and skin cells, plant fibers, and pollen, dust, and microorganisms from my neighbors clothing..." This variety of materials reflects the artist’s voice on familial structures, ways of living, and the effects of advertising.

Rendered Cities is on view at Apexart through March 17. Laura Yule’s performance piece will take place on Saturday, February 10, 2018, from 3:00–4:00 pm. More information on this show can be found here.