



Alternate Universes

A diverse group of artists push boundaries of perception with contrarian, immersive, and evocative works at Locust Projects.

by Jean Nayar



WITH ANYONE WHO sees Miami as an "art world mecca for wealthy tourists," the Huffer Collective begs to differ. It also aims to annihilate the notion with a group installation at the Locust Projects space in the Design District this month. The Miami-based artist trio—individually known as Swampdog, Jason Handelsman (aka The President), and David Anasagasti (aka Ahol Sniffs Glue)—have crafted a monumental pyramid here as part of a collective exhibition called "Save Your Selves," which exposes dimensions of the Magic City that contrast

sharply with stereotypical views, and stem from their own experience as Miami natives. "We are three friends making collaborative work that's intended to provoke," the artists say in a joint email. "From our office at Taco Bell on 36th and Biscayne, we're plotting Miami's first monumental pyramid. The three-sided structure will display personal treasures, objects that we've been collecting daily, and documentation of our past projects. We're not part of any scene. We exist to be creative and make stuff."

At the same time, four other rooms of Locust Projects' not-for-profit 5,000-square-foot exhibition space will showcase a video/performance opera entitled *The Comet and the Glacier* by Pittsburgh-based artist Alexis Gideon, who explores the idea of perception from a completely different vantage point with an amalgam of videos, paintings on

glass, clay reliefs, animation, music, and vocals linked by a dreamlike narrative cowritten by Gideon and writer Jacob Rubin. "Part of the work is about a sense of displacement, but it's also about memory as a creative act and a form of personal mythology," says Gideon, who trained as a composer and performer at Wesleyan University under the mentorship of jazz legend Anthony Braxton. Relying on music as the backbone of his work, the artist explains, "Music as an art form shapes the way I build a narrative. It affects how I work with other art forms, using ideas of consonance and dissonance, mood, lighting, color, and shading to elicit emotions and drama in a dreamscape that's not always linear."

This most recent video opera from Gideon merges memories of his childhood with medieval ideas of astronomy found in 15th- and 16th-century illustrated manuscripts, such as Hartmann Schedel's *Chronicle of the World 1493* (Nuremberg), *The Book of Miracles* (1550, Augsburg), and Johann Jakob Wick's *Die Wickiana* (1571, Küssnacht-Zürich), in a multifaceted fantasy performance

that blurs the lines between past and present, memories and imagination, and views from inside and out.

Having presented smaller-scale video operas at institutions like the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the New Museum in New York, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga in Spain, and Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, Gideon is poised for "a breakthrough moment," says Locust Projects Executive Director Chana Budgazard Sheldon. She adds that the 18-year-old Locust Projects was originally created by three Miami-based artists to promote the work of other artists without the pressures of gallery sales or limitations of conventional exhibition spaces. "It was founded by artists for artists with very ambitious ideas," she says, "and Gideon's immersive installation is a perfect example of how the artists we work with push new boundaries with their work."

Both shows, along with an updated and extended exhibition of works of found objects by Brooklyn-based artist Katie Bell, run from November 19 through January 21, 2017. **ABMB**



LEFT: Huffer Collective, *Save Your Selves*, 2016. ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Stills from Alexis Gideon's *The Comet and the Glacier*, 2016. SCARED UNPREPARED; SELF PORTRAIT; *Many Nights: Three Moons*; Gideon performing at a dress rehearsal of *The Comet and the Glacier*.