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A packed La Esquina gallery reflects the curator's themes

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In his curatorial statement for “Humanature,” B.J. Vogt proposes that, as humans, we are “a natural event unfolding within the evolutionary timeline of the Earth.” He suggests our choices, combined with an element of chance, determine the shared course of humanity and nature.

With “Humanature,” a group exhibition of sculpture, photographs, sound and video art on display at the Urban Culture Project’s La Esquina gallery, Vogt sought to bring together works by artists exploring that relationship.

The result is a crowded gallery of artworks loosely connected by themes the curator enumerates in his statement: architecture, biology, cultures, and the history of humanity and nature.

David Johnson and Jamie Kreher draw attention to often overlooked life forms in artificial settings. Johnson, who lives in St. Louis, photographs vegetation — floral bouquets, potted plants, a Christmas tree — in domestic or office settings. Kreher, also St. Louis-based, contributes pictures of grassy parking lot islands adrift in blank white backgrounds. By focusing on plant life in human habitats, both artists ask viewers to consider the symbiotic relationship between flora and Homo sapiens.

Unfortunately, curatorial choices water down the meaning behind Johnson’s and Kreher’s work. Vogt hangs their photographs sporadically throughout the gallery, mixing them with works by other artists and diluting their effect. Additional photographs from entirely separate series, such as Johnson’s pictures of campgrounds in Kerrville, Texas, and Kreher’s collages of empty office interiors, further distract.

Other participating artists create works resembling natural forms but constructed from man-made materials. Vogt's own contributions, "We Are Better Volcanoes Than Volcanoes," a spray foam peak erupting with plastic foam peanuts, and "A Human Geology," a 20-foot-tall sculpture of striated bands of cardboard resembling a natural bridge rock formation, are just that.

Rather than focusing on the overlap between the man-made and natural outlined in his curatorial statement, as an artist Vogt seems most interested in examining man and nature as binary, opposing forces.

Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.-based artist Eric Troffkin merges technology and the organic in his plaster and plastic sculptures. His gray-colored, egg-shaped "Can You Hear Me Now?" sculptures sport tiny antennae like the ones seen on cellphone models from a decade ago.

Perhaps unintentionally, Troffkin's hybrid egg-phones contrast the slow-to-change forms of natural design with the constantly updated forms of today's gadgetry.

Cameron Fuller uses mythmaking and mysticism to approach the age-old topic of humanity's relationship with nature. Fuller, who grew up in Washington State and lives in St. Louis, finds inspiration in the culture of native people of the Pacific Northwest.

Fuller's "Remembering Washington," an installation created in collaboration with Sara Paulsen, consists of longhouse-style drawing and a video of a person dancing while wearing a bear costume, all based on childhood memories of American Indian culture.



Fuller's other works in this exhibition play off natural history museum dioramas, underscoring their not-so-natural origins. In "From the Collection of the Institute for Perpetuation of Imaginal Processes," Fuller places a taxidermy fox in a vitrine decked out with sparkly sequins, fake plants and a painted geometric background.

His critique of the "truths" put forth by history museums is undermined somewhat by his trendy, hipster primitive aesthetic. His combination of glitter and fur in a pastoral scene calls to mind pop culture phenomena like MGMT's music video for "Electric Feel" or Ke\$ha's video for "Your Love Is My Drug."

Karen McCoy, who teaches sculpture at the Kansas City Art Institute, exhibits work with the most literal connection between humans and nature: McCoy uses her own body to create prints with pigments found in nature.



The results are reminiscent of human and geological forms. In “My Thighs as Port Miou,” from 2000, McCoy displays an imprint of what appears to be buttocks and thighs next to a picture postcard of the port in the south of France. The slender blue line of the water curves sinuously through its banks, resembling the curve of negative space between the imprint of the two thighs.

Vogt smartly places McCoy’s two-dimensional work behind his own monumental sculpture “A Human Geology.” Viewers must step through the work’s arch to take a closer look at McCoy’s print, making them aware of their own bodies as they examine the trace of McCoy’s.

For her series of “Model Landscapes,” dating from 2006 to 2009, Pittsburgh-based Carin Mincemoyer assembles tiny green landscapes in throwaway plastic containers. The word “model” in her title has more than one meaning — in the sense of a small-scale representation of a proposed structure and model, and in the sense of an example or thing to imitate.

Of all the works in this exhibition, Mincemoyer’s models best embody man and nature’s shared evolutionary course as outlined in Vogt’s statement: her artificial landscapes forewarn a future where natural and man-made are one in the same.