



HERNÁNDEZ  
STALLINGS  
SZUPINSKI-HIENES

# MUNDOS ALTERNOS

ART AND SCIENCE FICTION  
IN THE AMERICAS

MUNDOS  
ALTERNOS

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IN THE AMERICAS



**MASA—MeChicano**  
Alliance of Space Artists  
(Luis Valderas and Paul Karam)  
With selected participants Luis  
"Chispas" Guerrero, Sergio  
Hernández, Miguel Luciano, Tony  
Ortega, Laura Molina, Raul Servin,  
Luis Valderas, and Debora Kuetzpal  
Vasquez  
Jillian Meyer  
Mundo Meza  
Irvin Morazán  
Glexis Novoa  
Rubén Ortíz Torres  
Rigo 23  
Alex Rivera  
Clarissa Tossin  
Carmelita Tropicana  
Luis Valderas  
Ricardo Valverde  
José Luis Vargas  
Simón Vega

**ADÁL**  
AZTLAN Dance Company  
Guillermo Bert  
Erica Bohm  
Tania Candiani  
Beatriz Cortez  
Robert "Cyclona" Legorreta  
Claudio Dicochea  
Faivovich & Goldberg  
Sofia Gallisá Muriente  
Guillermo Gómez-Peña /  
La Pocha Nostra  
La Gravedad de los Asuntos  
(Nahum and Ale de la Puente)  
With selected participants Tania  
Candiani, Juan José Díaz Infante,  
Nahum, Ale de la Puente  
Hector Hernandez  
Gyula Kosice  
**LA VATOCOSMICO c-a**  
Chico MacMurtrie /  
Amorphic Robot Works  
Marion Martínez

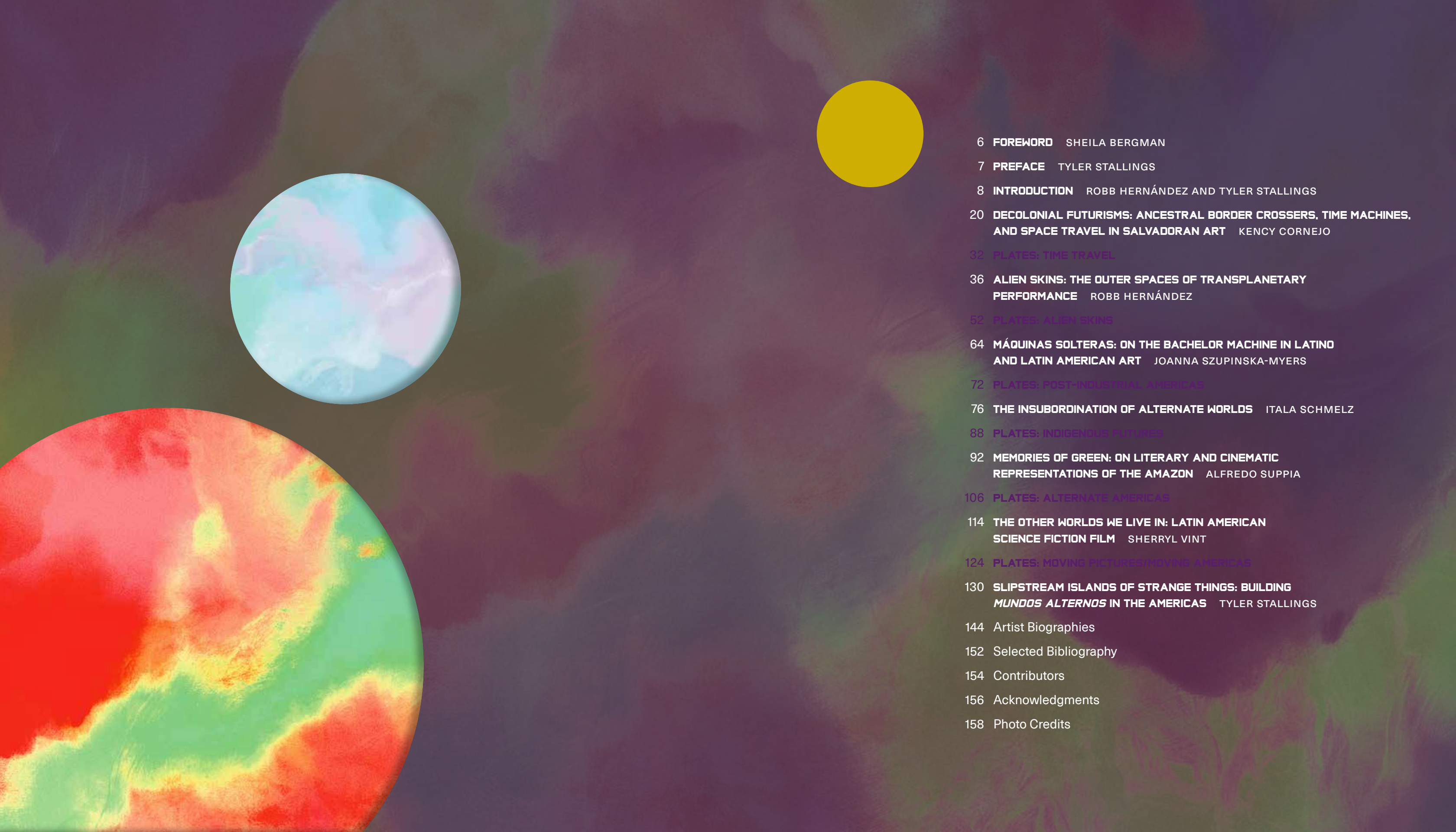
\$34.95  
ISBN 978-0-9823046-8-6  
53495 >



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6 **FOREWORD** SHEILA BERGMAN

7 **PREFACE** TYLER STALLINGS

8 **INTRODUCTION** ROBB HERNÁNDEZ AND TYLER STALLINGS

20 **DECOLONIAL FUTURISMS: ANCESTRAL BORDER CROSSERS, TIME MACHINES, AND SPACE TRAVEL IN SALVADORAN ART** KENCY CORNEJO

32 **PLATES: TIME TRAVEL**

36 **ALIEN SKINS: THE OUTER SPACES OF TRANSPLANETARY PERFORMANCE** ROBB HERNÁNDEZ

52 **PLATES: ALIEN SKINS**

64 **MÁQUINAS SOLTERAS: ON THE BACHELOR MACHINE IN LATINO AND LATIN AMERICAN ART** JOANNA SZUPINSKA-MYERS

72 **PLATES: POST-INDUSTRIAL AMERICAS**

76 **THE INSUBORDINATION OF ALTERNATE WORLDS** ITALA SCHMELZ

88 **PLATES: INDIGENOUS FUTURES**

92 **MEMORIES OF GREEN: ON LITERARY AND CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AMAZON** ALFREDO SUPPIA

106 **PLATES: ALTERNATE AMERICAS**

114 **THE OTHER WORLDS WE LIVE IN: LATIN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION FILM** SHERRYL VINT

124 **PLATES: MOVING PICTURES/MOVING AMERICAS**

130 **SLIPSTREAM ISLANDS OF STRANGE THINGS: BUILDING MUNDOS ALTERNOS IN THE AMERICAS** TYLER STALLINGS

144 Artist Biographies

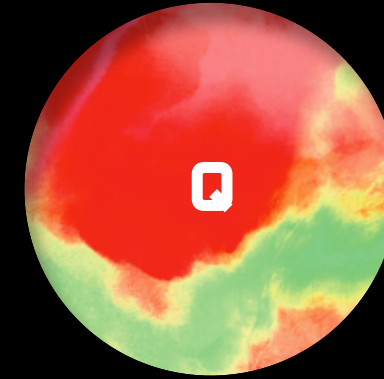
152 Selected Bibliography

154 Contributors

156 Acknowledgments

158 Photo Credits





uite possibly one of the most significant texts of Latin American science fiction is not “México en el año 1970” (1844), published by Fosforos-Cerillos in the short-lived literary periodical *El Liceo Mexicano*, which pontificated national progress. It is not the broadsheets of Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada and his astronomic imagining of Halley’s Comet as an ominous sight of disaster and sign of the impending Mexican Revolution in 1910. And it is probably not *El Eternauta* (1957/1969), the Argentine serialized comic by Héctor Germán Oesterheld that uses alien invasion to comment on dictatorship, U.S. imperialism, and militant uprising in Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is Jacqueline Barnitz’s *Twentieth Century Latin American Art* (2001), a text more restrained in its historical gravitas and stature in science fiction studies.<sup>2</sup>

A foundational textbook used and reused in university surveys on the trends, currents, and aesthetic genealogies in modern and contemporary Latin American art, the book’s back matter presents one of the most unusual and strange manifestations of art geography. A map of the Americas is generously provided, which follows a timeline that designates art movements, national periods, and timely events. Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Chile are among those charted in Barnitz’s rendering. And yet, Puerto Rico is absent. Central America appears as a darkened empty landmass, unmapped like a black hole to a nameless elsewhere. It remains as a negative space, an inverse of Latin America’s artistic sophistication attuned to Mexico and the Southern Cone. Despite being an isthmus of profound consequence in the colonial project of the Americas and agribusiness expansionism in labor and trade, Central America is there and not there—a region with no past.

Barnitz’s circumscription of Central America echoes Joaquín Torres-García’s drawing *América Invertida* (1943),<sup>3</sup> in which the Uruguayan artist subverted national hierarchies by inverting the map of the Southern Cone, placing the south north. His vision of South America from the perspective of the “upside down” is a telling reminder to students in his School of the South workshop that art training need not happen elsewhere. Of course,



his conceptual intervention does not reverse Central America's positionality.<sup>4</sup> Even in the "upside down," it is still central to the Americas' axis. For these reasons, *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* foregrounds the otherworldly existence of sites/sights like Central America—a place with no past; a place whose dual proximity to Los Angeles and Latin America is quite present and yet speculative; a place left with only its future. This alien(ating) existence is but one "mundo alterno" from which we challenge the blind spots undergirding the "LA/LA" dyad. Science fiction's visual potentiality grows. As an analytic, it makes this vision clearer.

*Mundos Alternos* brings together contemporary artists from across the Americas who have tapped into science fiction's capacity to imagine new realities, both utopian and dystopian. As a mode of analysis and image creation, science fiction offers a unique artistic landscape in which to explore the colonial enterprise that shaped the Americas as well as contemporary perspectives that speculate on the present and past via a viewpoint from the future. More than thirty artists and collaborative groups participated in the show, with most of the works created over the last three decades. All employ science fiction imagery to suggest alternative modes of being "alien" and "alienated" in the global flows of transnationalism, trade expansionism, and post-industrial capitalism. Given the current political climate, increased surveillance, and militarized borders, Latino and Latin American artists intimately know the violent consequence of "alien" discourse in a U.S. ocular regime. In this way, science fiction in the visual and performing arts of the Americas permits a powerful perspective and alternative vision on histories of colonialism, military occupation, political dictatorship, and immigration in the United States, Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Hispanophone Caribbean.

The organizing principle for the exhibition and accompanying book is a constellation inspired by Latin American curator Mari Carmen Ramírez's call to organize works through a synecdochical approach based on "luminous points."<sup>5</sup> *Mundos Alternos* draws from a range of media and genres, including paintings, graphite drawings, mixed-media sculptures, video projections, site-specific installations, costume design, and a smaller exhibition within the exhibition. By engineering "alternate worlds," it creates immersive media environments and experiences that challenge the Earth-bound sites from which citizenship, borders, and national bodies are traditionally viewed and understood in Latino, Latin American, and American studies.

After visiting six nations in Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico), as well as numerous U.S. cities (Austin, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, and Santa Fe), the curatorial team and transnational specialists in art and science fiction confronted challenging lines of inquiry from the outset. What constitutes a Latino and Latin American "science fiction" art practice? Is it based on a recognizable set of generic

science fiction tropes like time travel, space exploration, or cyberpunk? Is it a question of figurative icons like UFOs, cosmic representations, or rocket semiotics? Is it a regional art formation drawing on local folklore, paranormal encounters, or the influence of extraterrestrial sightings? Our task was to organize an exhibition that elucidates national boundaries and subjectivities through the visual vocabulary of alternative world-making and speculative models.

For the curatorial team,<sup>6</sup> there were few exhibitions that could serve as precedents, especially on this size and scale. The most notable was *Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas* (2015), presented at Bowdoin College Museum of Art and curated by Sarah J. Montross. *Past Futures* featured artists working in Latin America and the United States who witnessed the achievements of the space age and the influence that actually going into outer space had on the science fiction genre. Examining "expressions of anxiety about nuclear annihilation, government surveillance, and threats of dehumanization,"<sup>7</sup> Montross explored these conjoined states of space travel, science fiction, and domestic and international politics, focusing on post-World War II relationships in the Americas, such as after the 1959 Cuban Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to that exhibition's emphasis on the interaction of nations during the Cold War, we decided explicitly not to organize the exhibition around the fraught nature of national boundaries. Identities, borders, and histories are important; however, we were mindful of area studies that have been the subject of intellectual and political fodder in Latin American studies as extensions of U.S. State Department policy, Cold War militarism, and geopolitical isolationism. In art history, nation-period rubrics in Latin American art parlay curatorial approaches that generate rigid definitions of national patrimony, oftentimes circumventing alternative or hemispheric connections that Latino art, especially art practices situated in a science fiction idiom, can more clearly unsettle and redefine.

Some of the earliest science fiction shows in the realm of Chicano art emphasized a cunning social satire. In San Diego, artist Perry Vasquez curated *Plan 9 from Aztlán* (1995) at Centro Cultural de la Raza and *Alien Attack: Outer Visions in Popular Art* (1996) at Virus Gallery. These shows were among cultural responses to the racist and xenophobic discourse surrounding California's Proposition 187, a ballot initiative championed by Republican governor Pete Wilson in 1994.<sup>9</sup> The campaign to pass the measure, which tried to deny public services to undocumented immigrants, played into nativist fears by warning of "illegal aliens" invading California. Vasquez's exhibitions exemplify science fiction's capacity for biting political critique.<sup>10</sup> Of course, these are happening in and sheltered by Chicano cultural institutions and not necessarily fine art museums, suggesting the false divisions between science fiction as a genre of commercial and "low brow" popular culture and not necessarily contemporary art writ large.

This dynamic persists under the creative lens of Tejano or Texan Mexican border artists. San Antonio's Luis Valderas is heir apparent to



Vazquez's mantle. In 2005, he formed Project MASA, or the "MeChicano Alliance of Space Artists," spurred by the ways in which Chicano artists were using speculative technologies, celestial motifs, and pre-Columbian cosmologies to reframe the future and rethink Latino perceptions of outer space. Valderas's main curatorial guideline to artists was "establish an awareness of outer space as an integral part of the Chicano(a) Modern Mythos / Reality / Iconography,"<sup>11</sup> implicitly asking, with some defensive satire with regard to terminology and political rhetoric, "Who is an alien?" MASA became an ongoing venture of three thematic shows between 2005 and 2007.

The second exhibition held at Joe Lopez's now-defunct Gallista Gallery on San Antonio's West Side featured San Diego's Chicano Aeronautic Space Agency (CASA). As *Los ChicanoNauts*, they created a multimedia installation that told the tale of a team of transborder explorers going to the "brown side of the moon."<sup>12</sup> Set to the music of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" (1972), "Major Tom" was dubbed "Major Juan." They installed a time capsule from the future, and the found object led audiences to decipher its entombed remnants from a long-extinct Aztec space civilization. The linguistic playfulness, such as the rhyming of MASA, CASA, and NASA, demonstrates the power of language and its bilingual slippage, re-creating cultural identity with reference to pre-Colombian culture, space technology, and humor. Together, these groups illustrate contradictions certain to offend but ultimately subvert anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican vitriol in California and Tejas, respectively.

The importance of curatorial precedents from Montross, Vazquez, and Valderas interjects a reimagining of science fiction arts across the Americas, and while there are rich histories of Latin American science fiction literature and film in Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil, there have been only a handful of critiques about U.S. Latinidad, mainly under the guise of technoculture and speculative technology. These case studies expand the definition of Latino technofuturism in unexpected ways. Take, for instance, the little-known science fiction imaginary in Puerto Rico. A society ravaged by U.S. neocolonial occupation, corporate pharmaceutical experimentation, and economic exploitation, Puerto Rico has produced a striking science fiction visual vocabulary that responds to the ways in which American military, agricultural, and biomedical technologies control and monitor the island. The result produces what media scholar Manuel Aviles-Santiago calls a "technological embodiment of colonialism," where new technologies provoke political dissidence, pitting Boricuas against the machines.<sup>13</sup>

Another instance is *Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology*, which was presented at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2001. An exhibition less about Latino science fiction, per se, and more about the relationship among representation, technology, and Chicana feminism, its curator, Tey Marianna Nunn, asked, "I wondered

how these women negotiate the borders of identity as it pertains to combining tradition and technology?"<sup>14</sup>

Alma López's digital print *Our Lady*, which was included in *Cyber Arte*, gained national attention because it depicts Our Lady of Guadalupe—an apparition of the Virgin central to the iconography of Catholicism in Mexico—in a bikini composed of roses conveying a lesbian sensibility. The bishop of Santa Fe called for the removal of the work and there were public debates, state regents meetings, warning labels mounted to alert visitors of the disturbing image, and threatening phone calls to the curator; finally, the state legislature held hearings on whether to withdraw funding from the museum.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, the museum decided to close the exhibition early as a gesture of reconciliation. The debacle is an example of what can happen when icons confront and question traditional representations through new technologies and digital art processes. The cultural impact of Nunn's show had reverberating aftereffects in Latino cultural studies, influencing Catherine S. Ramírez's polemic 2004 article "Deus ex Machina: Tradition, Technology, and the Chicanafuturist Art of Marion C. Martinez" in *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*,<sup>16</sup> followed four years later by another article in *Aztlán*, "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin," in which a feminist framework for Chicana futurism is first enunciated at the intersection of Afrofuturist art, literature, and cultural theory.<sup>17</sup>

The tenets of Afrofuturism have become a foundation on which specific notions of Chicanafuturism and general notions of *Mundos Alternos* have been built. Coined in 1994 by writer Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future,"<sup>18</sup> the term "Afrofuturism" refers to a creative and intellectual genre that emerged as a strategy to explore science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, and pan-Africanism, perhaps best exemplified by African American musicians such as Sun Ra and George Clinton, and writers such as Ishmael Reed, Amiri Baraka, Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, and Samuel Delany.

In 2006, *Space Is the Place*, organized by New York City-based Independent Curators International, traveled the United States as a group exhibition with work inspired by nostalgia and speculation about outer space. The title was taken from a 1974 science fiction film of the same name that featured Sun Ra and his Arkestra.

During the late 1960s and early '70s, Sun Ra traveled to California and taught a course titled "The Black Man in the Cosmos" at UC Berkeley. The film is based, in part, on the lectures he gave there, in which he articulated many nuanced views such as: "I'd rather a black man go to Mars . . . than to Africa . . . because it's easier,"<sup>19</sup> referring to the difficulty of a Westernized African American seeking roots back in Africa. The basic plot is that Sun Ra lands on a new planet in outer space and decides to settle African Americans there.

Seven years later, in 2013–14, the Studio Museum in Harlem presented *The Shadows Took Shape*, an interdisciplinary exhibition exploring



contemporary art through the lens of Afrofuturist aesthetics.<sup>20</sup> In one of the exhibition catalogue essays, Tegan Bristow, nearly twenty years after Dery, updates a definition of Afrofuturism:

Afrofuturism uses science fiction and cyberculture in a speculative manner, just as cyber-feminism does. It is an escape from the externally imposed definition of what it means to be black (or exotically African) in Western culture, and it is a cultural rebellion drawing on techno-culture, turntables and remixes as technological and instrumental forms. By placing the black man in space, out of the reach of racist stereotypes, Afrofuturism allows for a critique of both the history of the West and its techno-culture.<sup>21</sup>

These handfuls of examples that stretch between 2001 and 2015 indicate how the visual arts have historically been looking at race and social difference through a lens of science fiction cultural production. It is from here that *Mundos Alternos* proceeds.

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In this book that accompanies the exhibition, more than thirty contemporary artists and groups from throughout the Americas who employ science fiction for social, cultural, and political critique are organized under several thematic constellations. Many of the themes are common tropes in science fiction literature and film, and here are infused with an eye on the Americas.

Post-Industrial Americas features works by Chico MacMurtrie, Rubén Ortiz Torres, and Simón Vega that highlight low-tech production, expounding on the forces of advanced technology that create radical change in the social order, for good and bad. In Western science fiction, the tendency has been to present this in a dystopian context, while in much of Latin America, it presents an opportunity to reimagine a self-empowered future in both a post-colonial and post-dictatorial context. In her essay in this volume, co-curator Joanna Szupinska-Myers discusses these artists and others through the concept of the “bachelor machine.”

Alternate Americas explores landscapes beyond Earth that appear familiar, perhaps even true—such as images related to the moon landing—but in fact may be simulated. ADÁL, Glexis Novoa, Erica Bohm, and several works by MASA (MeChicano Alliance of Space Artists) examine the political realities of the Americas, which sometimes suggest that citizens in one nation are living in a simulated environment created by people from another, far-off nation. In this respect, the artists in this section create alternate histories and origin-myths in which historical events unfold differently, telling stories that refract other realities in parallel space and time.

Indigenous Futures includes works by Rigo 23, Guillermo Bert, and Marion Martinez that use indigenous subjects as foil against colonial visions of white space explorers hungry to conquer new worlds. Here,

pre-Columbian symbolism features prominently, forming a neo-Aztec mysticism, as scholar Itala Schmelz argues in her essay.

Time Travel looks at journeys between the present and eras of the future. An investigation into time travel provides meaningful new perspectives on several issues of ongoing hemispheric importance. For artists Beatriz Cortez, Tania Candiani, Faivovich & Goldberg, and Clarissa Tossin, the only possible remedy for historically profound social ills seems to lie in the fictional mechanism of manipulating progressive time. The idea of artwork being a portal to alternate worlds is explored in co-curator Tyler Stallings’s concluding essay. Additionally, several of these artists can be viewed in the context of fantastical science fiction landscapes in popular filmic imaginary of the Amazon, as argued by Alfredo Suppia, or Argentine science fiction films, as analyzed by Sherryl Vint.

Alien Skins presents the work of AZTLAN Dance Company, Carmelita Tropicana, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta, Irvin Morazán, Mundo Meza, LA David, Hector Hernandez, Claudio Dicochea, Luis Valderas, and Ricardo Valverde, who employ shape-shifting (through costume, performance, or imagination) as a means of physically embodying cosmic personae. Discussed in depth by co-curator Robb Hernández in his essay, these transformations contest the spatiotemporal structures of our current reality and open another way of being and seeing one’s “alienation.”

Moving Pictures/Moving Americas features works by La Gravedad de los Asuntos, Sofía Gallisá Muriente, Gyula Kosice, Jillian Mayer, José Luis Vargas, and Alex Rivera. The work of these artists creates immersive media worlds and relational experiences with speculative technologies. These offer new perspectives on colonialism, imperialism, surveillance, labor, immigration, and quests for utopia.

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The seven essays in this book are organized in a manner that makes hemispheric exchanges in the Americas visible through science fiction as a source of cultural analysis and visual dialogue. The opening essay foregrounds the provocative work of diasporic Central American artists. By questioning Central America’s alternate and negated place in “LA/LA’s” cultural paradigm, Kency Cornejo’s essay “Decolonial Futurisms: Ancestral Border Crossers, Time Machines, and Space Travel in Salvadoran Art” asks a provocative question undergirding this exhibition and book: Can the future be decolonized? Her work on science-fictional intersections with Salvadorans, a vast population besieged by the struggle to forget in the aftermath of U.S.-sponsored terror in the 1980s, implicitly asks: Is there a future for a past erased? The answer lies in the decolonial epistemologies of Central American visual and embodied knowledge. Cornejo builds on her argument using the Salvadoran diasporic work of Irvin Morazán, Beatriz Cortez, and Simón Vega. In an effort to repair the devastation wrought by

the civil wars in Central America, the toxic agribusiness machinery of the United Fruit Company, and the infusion of Maya cosmology with technoculture shamanism, she fathoms a decolonial visual art formation that adapts science fiction to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Performing otherworldly personae similarly undergirds Hernández's essay "Alien Skins: The Outer Spaces of Transplanetary Performance." Hernández explores how contemporary Latino and Chicano artists disorient the temporal-spatial alignment of national borders and citizenry through the re-embodiment of alternate worlds in performance and impromptu art happenings from Tejas, Los Angeles, and New York. He argues how these "cosmic personae intercede with performance repertoires ranging from aeronautical proposals of airborne Latino subjectivities, interstellar space travel, and clandestine fashion technologies remolding the brown body." These alien personae look elsewhere toward a future Aztlán, seeking a transplanetary vision for Latinidad by turning skyward.

For Hernández, the idea of "look[ing] skyward" was an incipient practice during his studio and fieldwork visits to Puerto Rico, during which he explored the island's extraterrestrial landscapes, supernatural folklore, and aerial aberrations. The work of ADÁL was deeply influential here. His "mind fictions," *Sightings: UFOs over Utuado* (2011), are part of a photographic series that explores the idea of alien visitations to his hometown of Utuado and the resulting impact on the local community. Considering mixed feelings about Puerto Rico being a U.S. territory, ADÁL also suggests that the aliens may have chosen Puerto Rico over the mainland for their visitations, that is, the United States' sense of exceptionalism does not translate necessarily on an intergalactic level.

Szupinska-Myers's essay "Máquinas Solteras: On the Bachelor Machine in Latino and Latin American Art" explores the concept of the "Bachelor Machine as a means to grapple with technology's possibilities as related to the living body." She springboards from Marcel Duchamp's concept of "La Machine Célibataire," or "the Bachelor Machine," as an entry point for discussing the oscillation between "self and other, male and female, ego and superego, robotic and organic, and science and faith." Szupinska-Myers explores what she defines as the *mestizo* object in the works of Rubén Ortiz Torres, Chico MacMurtrie, Roberto Matta, José Clemente Orozco, Graciela Iturbide, and Frida Kahlo. For her, these artists grapple with machines and the mechanized body in order to "generate narratives of empowerment and liberation as well as dark, dystopic readings about gender, technology, and power."

*Mestizaje* is constitutional to Schmelz's essay, "The Insubordination of Alternate Worlds." She interweaves thoughts on colonialism; tropicalism; U.S.-Mexico border relations; humor, and parody; and the ways in which representations of Mexico's indigenous population weave in and out of all these political and social threads. Focusing on Mexican science fiction films, such as *The Aztec Mummy vs. The Human Robot* (1958), she

draws on Bolívar Echeverría's concept of *la blanquitud* or "whiteness" to explore the dialectic between Mexico's indigenous world and the nation's strides toward modernity as represented allegorically in Mexican science fiction film. Schmelz concludes that such films become sites of resistance within globalization when they become "an unintentional parody . . . that is a form of appropriation, or a parodic *tropicalization*, of the colonizers' imaginaries that is aimed, not at imitating, but rather sabotaging the dominant models of identity." She brings this analysis to bear on artists such as MASA, Rubén Ortiz Torres, ADÁL, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, as a way of showing how neo-Aztec mysticism has manifested itself through border transmigrations in which the ancient Aztecs, modern-day Mexico, and Hollywood science fiction films overlap in a hybrid or *mestizaje* universe "in which the ancient Mesoamerican gods are situated face-to-face with the cyborg gods of progress."

The mythologizing of not only indigenous people but also Brazil in science fiction films from the United States and Latin America is central to Suppia's essay, "Memories of Green: On Literary and Cinematic Representations of the Amazon." Suppia's point of departure is Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World* (1912) and its cinematic adaptation, which provide some of the earliest literary and cinematic representations of the Amazon as an enigmatic place. They contribute to a body of writing, film, and visual discourses in which, as Suppia writes, "the Amazon is set as a utopian/uchronian landscape, and a repository of both power and damnation." He discusses Brazilian films alongside those from the commercial Hollywood industry, such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *Anaconda* (1997).

The Amazon's science-fictional conveyance fascinates Suppia, particularly as a demonstration of how "the monster persists usually incarnating the jungle in all these commercially oriented films," a stand-in for Western and European invaders, whether from the Conquest in the past or from today's encroaching globalization. As if Schmelz and Suppia are nodding to one another across the Americas—he in Brazil and she in Mexico—he also discusses Brazilian films that use parody, in the manner that Schmelz discussed in her essay, to offer a different perspective on the Amazon. Suppia examines Ivan Cardoso's Brazilian comedy *A Werewolf in the Amazon* (2005), which satirizes, as he writes, "foreign cinematic representations of the Amazon by overtly undermining the relevance of white male characters, and by 'carnivalizing' ancient myths and the encounter between Westerners and native Amazonians." In essence, for Suppia, the Amazon is represented as both a utopian resource of life's abundance and a dystopian setting in which its dense foliage and hungry fauna devour those who stray away from their "civilized" worlds.

Vint's essay, "The Other Worlds We Live In: Latin American Science Fiction Film," situates the use of science fiction motifs in Latin American art in a larger conversation about science fiction studies. She brings into focus how Hollywood-style filmmaking is often countered by a Latin

American style that emphasizes realistic storytelling and documentaries. But by drawing on science fiction scholar Darko Suvin's influential premise that the genre functions as a reflection *on* reality rather than a reflection *of* reality, Vint explores "why many Latin American countries, particularly those in post-dictatorship contexts, have used science fiction to capture aspects of their reality that exceed the representational possibilities of realism." According to her, "sometimes an invented reality can prove the best way to confront and ultimately transform an existing one." Focusing on two Argentine films, *La Sonámbula* (1998) and *La Antena* (2007), she writes that "post-dictatorship Argentina is perhaps the Latin American country that has most embraced the possibilities for science fiction cinema" as a way to bring to light painful times during the *Guerra Sucia* (or Dirty War), a period of state-endorsed terror between 1974 and 1983 that could not be voiced then, and is still difficult to voice today.

Unhinging science fiction cinema from contemporary art and spatial aesthetics is central to Stallings's essay, "Slipstream Islands of Strange Things: Building *Mundos Alternos* in the Americas." Although original book cover art, comic books, and movie posters are classic visual texts within the science fiction genre, he argues that they are produced ready for reproduction and absorption through other reproducible media such as magazines and computer screens, so to interact with them is simply to view them in their reproduced, mostly illustrative, sense. Stallings emphasizes artist-made physical objects, or slipstream, science-fictional artifacts, by thinking through the tangled and alternative worlds these artists build albeit in the art studio, collector's home, plaza, or museum environment. The profound phenomenological effects of interacting with the materiality of the artworks as speculative technology and as portals were critical to the encounter. Glaxis Novoa, LA David, Rigo 23, Beatriz Cortez, Faivovich & Goldberg, Gyula Kosice, and Alex Rivera engender complex domestic constellations of art, artifact, and space.

These science fiction environments are keys to "alternate worlds" or "slipstream islands," as Stallings puts it. *Slipstream*, a term coined by science fiction author Bruce Sterling in 1989, is applied to speculative fiction in order to create a sense of the uncanny, of weirdness in the world, of dissonance between what one thinks is real and the feeling that other layers exist beyond the senses upon which we rely, or at least the dominant manner in which they are utilized for perceiving the received world around us. In essence, he argues, art making itself represents a kind of science-fictional process that results in a slipstream artifact, or strange thing. Thus the science fiction collectible and popular ephemera are jettisoned for the otherworldly "touch" of artists' alien environments in a pseudo-pilgrimage.

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While Chicano, Latino, and Latin American science fiction is a burgeoning area of study that has gained momentum within the past ten years, with an emphasis mostly in literature and film, our hope is that this book

and the accompanying exhibition, with their focus on visual art, will be groundbreaking. The swath of artists selected from across the Americas—the States, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America—have created artworks that point to *Mundos Alternos* in which self-determination and autonomy can occur in a present that is already the past pointing to a future.

As you read this book and view the work in the exhibition, we hope that you feel like your thoughts and experience are part of proto-science fiction, Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges's unbounded library, or that you have inklings of the Aztec empire existing on the moon. Or perhaps you may walk the streets of Los Angeles and have a moment in which you feel that you are part of the first Xicano science fiction novel, Ernest Hogan's *Cortez on Jupiter* (1990),<sup>22</sup> in which Pablo Cortez sprays graffiti across Los Angeles and paints in zero gravity, all in an effort to make a masterpiece for the universe and his barrio.

#### NOTES

1. For more on "México en el año 1970," see Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), pp. 18–19. For Posada in relationship to Halley's Comet, see Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado, "Saudade for Space, Utopia, and the Machine in Latin American Art," in *Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas*, ed. Sarah J. Montross (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College Museum of Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), pp. 50–51. On *El Eternauta*, consider Adam Rosenblatt, "The Making and Remaking of *El Eternauta*," *International Journal of Comic Art* 9, no. 2 (2007): 81–92.
2. Jacqueline Barnitz, *Twentieth Century Latin American Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 358.
3. Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Inversions: The School of the South," in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 73.
4. This comment was brilliantly relayed to Hernández by contributor Kency Cornejo.
5. Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Constellations: Toward a Radical Questioning of Dominant Curatorial Models," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (2000): 14–16.
6. *Mundos Alternos* was curated by Robb Hernández, assistant professor in English at UC Riverside; Joanna Szupinska-Myers, curator of exhibitions at UCR ARTSblock's California Museum of Photography; and Tyler Stallings, interim UCR ARTSblock executive director.
7. Sarah J. Montross, "Cosmic Orbits: Observing Postwar Art of the Americas from Outer Space," in Montross, *Past Futures*, p. 19.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–31.
9. *Plan 9 from Aztlán* is a riff on Ed Wood's infamous B movie, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959).
10. Vasquez's curatorial contributions are conveyed in Matthew David Goodwin, "The Fusion of Migration and Science Fiction in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the United States" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2013).
11. Irma Carolina Rubio, "Project M.A.S.A., MeChicano Alliance of Space Artisans," *Chicano(a) Art*, July 2006, p. 15.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
13. Manuel G. Aviles-Santiago, "The Technological Embodiment of Colonialism in Puerto Rico," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 12, no. 2, (2015): 1–20.
14. Tey Marianna Nunn, "The Cyber Arte Exhibition: A Curator's Journey through Community and Controversy" (paper presented at the Interpretation and Representation of Latino Cultures: Research and Museums national conference, Center for Latino Initiatives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, November 2002), <http://latino.si.edu/researchandmuseums/presentations/nunn.html>.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Catherine S. Ramírez, "Deus ex Machina: Tradition, Technology, and the Chicanafuturist Art of Marion C. Martinez," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 29, no. 2 (2004): 55.
17. Catherine S. Ramírez, "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 33, no. 1 (2008): 185–94.
18. Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 180.
19. Recorded lecture from 1971 when Sun Ra served as artist-in-residence at UC Berkeley and offered the course African-American Studies 198, "The Black Man in the Cosmos," [https://ubusound.memoryoftheworld.org/ra\\_sun/Ra-Sun\\_Berkeley-Lecture\\_1971.mp3](https://ubusound.memoryoftheworld.org/ra_sun/Ra-Sun_Berkeley-Lecture_1971.mp3).
20. For more on "Shadows Took Shape," see Naima J. Keith and Zoe Whitley, eds., *The Shadows Took Shape* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013).
21. Tegan Bristow, "We Want the Funk: What Is Afrofuturism to Africa?" in *ibid.*, p. 81.
22. Ernest Hogan, *Cortez on Jupiter* (New York: Tor Books, 1990), <https://www.create-space.com/5026216>.





World building is a major element of the science fiction genre. History, geography, economics, demographics, physics, cosmology, transportation, religion, technology, food, and the culture of an imaginary world are the elements to be considered by authors, filmmakers, and game makers. The test for a reader, viewer, or participant is to suspend their present-day logic so that they can feel present in a virtual future.

The challenge for the maker is to reconsider ongoing tropes, like anything called "Empire" being absolutely evil; an entire world being defined as if it had one purpose, such as the desert world of Arrakis in Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* (1965); and of course, the altogether prevalent, homogenous alien race that populates an entire planet or galaxy. In other words, the task is to bring diversity to one's imaginary world, which, one would assume, also reflects the author's take on diversity in the real world. Embracing diversity is, of course, a major underlying theme in *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas*.

It is hard to say that the genre of science fiction fine art exists, at least within the context of the international, contemporary art world that the artists of *Mundos Alternos* inhabit. More familiar cover art, movie posters, comic books, and illustrated stories are a separate issue. Contemporary art making itself represents a kind of science-fictional process that results in a slipstream artifact, or strange thing.

**SLIPSTREAM IMMIGRATION**

*Slipstream*, a phrase coined by science fiction author Bruce Sterling and his colleague Richard Dorsett in 1989, is primarily applied to literature that includes elements of science fiction, also called speculative fiction, in order to create a sense of the uncanny, of weirdness in the world, and of dissonance between what one thinks is real and the feeling that other layers exist beyond the senses upon which we rely. More than twenty-five years ago, Sterling wrote, "It seems to me that the heart of slipstream is an attitude of peculiar aggression against 'reality.' These are fantasies of a



kind, but not fantasies which are 'futuristic' or 'beyond the fields we know.' These books tend to sarcastically tear at the structure of 'everyday life.'"<sup>1</sup>

A recent and notable Latin American slipstream example is the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz. With settings ranging from New Jersey to the Dominican Republic, it features a science fiction-obsessed boy who eventually dies, though the reasons are ambiguous. His death is either the result of a *fukú* curse; the lingering vestiges of a corrupt society stemming from the rule of the Dominican Republic's former dictator, Rafael Trujillo; or, of course, an inseparable mixture of both family, political scourges, and colonialism as filtered through the allegory of the science fiction genre.

Commenting on his attraction to science fiction, Díaz said, "I fell for genre because I desperately needed it—in my personal mythology, genre helped me create an operational self. I suspect I resonated with the world-building in many of these texts because that's precisely what I was engaged in as a young immigrant." He added, "Alien invasions, natives, slavery, colonies, genocide, racial system, savages, technological superiority, forerunner races and the ruins they leave behind, travel between worlds, breeding programs, superpowered whites, mechanized regimes that work humans to death, human/alien hybrids, lost worlds—all have their roots in the traumas of colonialism."<sup>2</sup>

#### CONTEMPORARY ART AS SPECULATIVE TECHNOLOGY

For a visual artist, the magic of their own making occurs when a preconceived notion takes a different turn during the process, leading them down a road that they could not have expected without taking the first step of manipulating materials with their hand. It is a method that intertwines haptic, optic, and cognitive processes. This approach is probably the same for an author or filmmaker, who starts with an outline or script but allows his/her imagination to wander from the original path. With regard to contemporary visual art then, an artist's methodology of process and product are inseparable from one another, so they inherently slipstream.

The slipstream aspect in visual art is where the difference lies between it and writing or filmmaking. There is a physical manifestation of the artist's idea in the world; that is, it does not remain imaginary in a reader's mind nor an untouchable screen image. Rather, it is a physical object that rests in a world where viewers can interact with it through touch, smell, and sound, or perhaps walk back and forth from it, around it, or through it.

Art critic Jan Tumlir expressed a similar notion about the relationship between contemporary art and science fiction when he wrote about Orange County Museum of Art's 2007 California Biennial: "The young artists on the West Coast are operating in an idiom closely linked to science-fiction."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to list some of the science fiction tropes with which they are engaged: future and alien civilizations, time travel, colonization, "the redefinition of the idea of the human in response to the other, either alien or handmade," and so on. But more specifically he wrote that,

due to the materiality of visual art, "intensive concentration on these various artifacts is aimed at somehow 'breaking through.'" In other words, as Tumlir has suggested, these artworks were, for him, like gateways or portals to help a viewer's engaged mind consider other realities.

The emphasis on artist-made physical objects, or slipstream, science-fictional artifacts, is the major reason for the absence here of classic visual memorabilia that one associates with the science fiction genre: book cover art, comic books, and movie posters, just to name a few. In other words, these objects are produced ready for reproduction and absorption through other media such as magazines and computer screens, therefore to interact with them is simply to view them in their reproduced, mostly illustrative, sense. This is as opposed to the unique object generated by visual artists that can exist in only one location; thus, it requires a pilgrimage to the site, such as a gallery, museum, collector's home, public plaza, or artist's studio.

A turn toward re-engagement with materiality, and its place within an increasingly screen-based cultural environment, is underscored by a recent exhibition at the Leopold Museum in Vienna, Austria. *The Poetics of the Material* (2016) was a group exhibition in which "contemporary art, which can be regarded as being aligned with 'new materialism,' attempts to give expression to the interpenetration of material phenomena and immaterial aspects of reality. The latter reveal themselves in the meaning of language or in the influence of cultural narratives on the perception of reality."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout visits with artists for *Mundos Alternos*, I engaged in a type of "retro-labeling," as described by Rachel Haywood Ferreira in her seminal book, *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction* (2011). Ferreira outlined the process of defining science fiction in Latin American literature in light of the genre's already prescribed nature in the States and Europe: "Although the genealogy of science fiction has been actively traced in its countries of origin since the moment Gernsback formally baptized the genre, in Latin America this process did not get underway until the late 1960s and continues today."<sup>5</sup> Initially, her process identified late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin American texts, primarily from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia (due to the strength of publishing in those countries) in which there were science fictional tendencies. The most immediate and prominent examples of retro-labeled works were the ubiquitous and highly marketed "magic realism" novels and short stories of Argentine Jorge Luis Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935), Colombian Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), and Chilean Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982).

In this regard, the curators of *Mundos Alternos* sought contemporary visual artists who employed science-fictional or slipstream thinking rather than literal science fiction elements. Driven by the theme of the show, these artists demonstrated a commitment to and influence from science fiction literature and film. The main theme that occupied them was a



consideration of the future, with a focus on post-colonization, labor, surveillance, environment, and hemispherical connections, viewed through the lens of art.

However, the biggest difference—and hopefully the contribution of this exhibition and book to the burgeoning scholarship around Latino and Latin American science fiction studies—is the effect of the material nature of visual art whose subject matter is science fictional. In other words, literature and film remain abstract and distant with less emphasis on the tactile, while the visual arts assert their objects into the world, as if building, literally, speculative technologies.

Visual art exists as a magical or yet-to-be speculative technology that has in fact manifested itself from the future into the present. These strange objects have ambiguous message(s). This requires work on the part of its viewer, who must be willing to engage with an object in order to receive its meaning. However, this does not suggest that there is a single, hidden meaning to be ascertained, but that an object's meaning is determined in part through a viewer's interaction with it, as if experiencing a close encounter of the third kind, in which contact is made with alien beings, whose language we do not yet know.

Meaning being determined in part by a book's reader, for example, is not an original notion, but a classically postmodern one that accounts for paradox, unreliable narrators, and undermining the authority of the writer through metafiction techniques. However, it is employed here in order to demonstrate that this postmodern methodology can be different when dealing with strange objects versus literature and film.

#### FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE

The artistic inclination to pastiche disparate materials and ideas together generates uncanniness through its physical manifestation. This technique creates a slipstream or science-fictional effect of “cognitive estrangement,” to borrow a phrase from notable sf theorist, Darko Suvin, in which the material and conceptual mash-ups provide a platform for viewers to look at their immediate society differently. Suvin might suggest that one's viewpoint could be shifted to the point that there is recognition of one's oppression and therefore, with a new view of the world, an individual begins to resist, which is the major subtext for *Mundos Alternos*.<sup>6</sup>

Or, to illustrate further, as Ernest Hogan, the U.S-born author of the seminal Chicano science fiction novel *High Aztech* (1992), wrote, “I've always been more interested in science fiction as a confrontation with changing reality rather than escapism. And as a Chicano, I'm plugged into cultural influences that most science fiction writers don't have access to.”<sup>7</sup> Three years later, after participating in the “Day of Latino Science Fiction” symposium at University of California, Riverside, he wrote, “One difference between Anglo and Latino science fiction is that making it to the future is something that can't be ignored. The future isn't a given, it will have to be fought for. And if you don't fight for it, you might not get there.”<sup>8</sup>

(fig. 1) Hogan's use of the phrase “plugged into” is embodied, literally, by *Mundos Alternos* artist Alex Rivera's film, *Sleep Dealer* (2008): nodes that are inserted in one's body allow Mexican workers to work in the United States virtually, thus, the States get their labor, but do not have to deal with the laborers' bodies.

Sherryl Vint, professor of English, science fiction studies scholar, and *Mundos Alternos* research team member and contributor, invited both Hogan and Rivera to UC Riverside's campus. As the organizer of “A Day of Latino Science Fiction,” she said, “Our event will foster discussion of the specific ways Latino writers negotiate science fiction's relationship to the

colonialist imagination, and its possibilities for imagining more ethnically inclusive futures.”<sup>9</sup>



#### ACCESSING GATEWAYS OR LAS PUERTAS

For curators of the visual arts in general, it is necessary to travel in order to see the work. This experience is different for film or literature where one can go to the local cinema or read in the comfort of a home. In the context of the works presented here, the materiality of a unique, strange object required one's presence. Footwork was involved, rather than being desk-bound or screenbound, in order to access gateways, or *las puertas*, to *mundos alternos*.

The proposition that one would need to travel to a physical location in order to experience art seems quaint in its seemingly romantic notion that values analog, handmade, and strange objects. This notion runs counter to today's prevailing narrative of connectedness through globalization and electronic social networks that allow one to remain local yet be aware and interact globally.

Following the notion of traveling to slipstream islands of artistic materiality, one of the more profound experiences during the research phase for *Mundos Alternos* was a trip to Cuba during the 12th Havana Biennial (2015). There, a major outdoor installation by Cuban-born artist Glexis Novoa, now based in Miami, encapsulated much of what was outlined in the preceding paragraphs.

In the installation *El vacío* (*Emptiness*) (2015), as in much of Novoa's work, including that produced in the studio, he conflates decaying architecture with drawings of utopian, totalitarian-like architecture drawn primarily on marble, a material that is often used in government buildings worldwide. Novoa renders his buildings in miniature to diminish the authoritarian government that his imaginary, futuristic buildings are meant to evoke. He creates a looped, doubling, and time-travel effect as these totalitarian buildings of the future are inscribed on totalitarian-tinged fragments of marble from the present.

For *El vacío*, Novoa created a site-specific installation in which he positioned his drawings on the remaining concrete columns of a building beyond repair. He excavated the building in a semi-archaeological manner through the removal of dirt accumulated over decades. When you looked

FIGURE 1  
Ernest Hogan  
Drawing from *la Bloga*  
2002  
© 2002 Ernest Hogan  
Image courtesy of the artist



out from the building, situated along the Malecón, the horizon lines of Novoa's imaginary, tiny cities lined up with the horizon of the Caribbean Sea, also known as the Straits of Florida (figs. 2–4).

For a viewer, the drawings of an imagined, authoritarian utopia were in the foreground of their vision, while they stood within one of the many ruins of a building unsustainable by a Communist government that began



FIGURE 2  
View of deteriorated building in Havana containing Glexis Novoa installation  
*El vacío*  
2015  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photo by Tyler Stallings

FIGURE 3  
View of miniature drawing of a stealth bomber drawn on plaster applied to the concrete column by the artist with the drawing's horizon lining up with the horizon line of the Caribbean Sea, looking toward the Malecón  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photo by Tyler Stallings

FIGURE 4  
View of miniature drawing of city with totalitarian monuments, such as Vladimir Tatlin's proposed *Monument to the Third International* (1919–20) drawn by Glexis Novoa on plaster applied to a concrete column by the artist  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photo by Tyler Stallings

with utopian visions in the late 1950s. As time has progressed, the building and the political vision have deteriorated, mainly during the Special Period, or *Período especial*, a time of economic crisis that began in 1989 and extended into the late 1990s, primarily due to the scattering of the Soviet Union, which had been a major financial investor. The viewer was also looking to the real horizon line of the ocean, toward the States, a country of both refuge and exile, but also consternation, as it was in part its influence on Cuba up until the revolution that supported much of the inequality that Fidel Castro wanted to combat. In essence, estrangement and dissonance were created through the conflation of two realities—that of Cuba and the States—and of two imaginaries, one government claiming a history of spreading the wealth to the exploited and another purporting a history of providing access to wealth for its citizens.

When addressing how he conflates perspectives in his work, Novoa said, “My work repeatedly turns to the architecture of power and politics as its main subject. The collected images and information are ultimately used to demonstrate the eventual loss of significance of the very systems and archetypes they represent, and the disarticulation of discourses through pragmatic processes.”<sup>10</sup>

Walking in the barely standing building, shuffling through the dirt, smelling the ocean air, and watching others interact with Novoa's drawing would have been impossible without travel to Cuba, a literal island. Once there, one entered Novoa's temporary and, again literal, portal. It collapsed

two geographical and political viewpoints on either side of an intangible horizon line, as if a wormhole where space and time fold so that you could easily traverse point A to a distant point Z without obstacles—whether the sea or an embargo.

Nearly thirty years later, after the Cuban Revolution (1953–59), a more recent revolution in Chiapas, Mexico, was explored by Portuguese-born, Los Angeles–based artist Rigo 23. For several years, he worked with indigenous groups in Chiapas that aim for equal rights or autonomy from the Mexican government. Rigo 23 chose to extend Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation's (EZLN) use of poetics through workshops with the Good Government Junta of Morelia, Chiapas. (“The Good Government Juntas represent both the poetic, populist and the practical nature of the Zapatista struggle to build workable alternatives of autonomy locally, link present politics to traditional ways of organising [sic] life in indigenous communities, and contrast with the ‘bad government’ of official representational politics in Mexico City.”<sup>11</sup>)

Through this art making with Rigo 23, they envisioned autonomy as having occurred already. They asked how they would then represent themselves beyond Earth, on an intergalactic level, emphasizing an indigenous, technoculture imaginary and calling their project the *Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program* (2012). In other words, Rigo 23 suggested that to imagine autonomy and to begin to materialize strange objects around this notion puts one on the path toward generating a new vocabulary in the present to be used in the future, such as negotiating between indigenous communities in Chiapas and the Mexican government.

In this context, Rigo 23's corn-husk spaceship from the project, which arose from southern Chiapas, was destined to become an interplanetary traveling vegetable that nurtured recognition of any being, whether on Earth, or elsewhere, as one who deserved freedom, justice, and equality. From an intergalactic sensibility, social justice for the indigenous in Chiapas translates to all Earthlings, who become indigenous collectively, in the context of encountering other beings beyond our blue dot in the solar system (fig. 5).

In an *ART21* interview, Rigo 23 recognized the value of traveling and through his presence becoming a wormhole in which he collapsed geopolitical events in order to generate kinship:

I have come to realize that, often, the further one comes from an area of intense conflict, the more likely the locals are to give you the benefit of the doubt. So, as one talks about Leonard Peltier in East Jerusalem, or about going to Palestine in Wounded Knee, links and kinships that are invisible to most manifest themselves in wonderful and affirming ways. There is a mutual recognition that one is globalized in an entirely different way.<sup>12</sup>

In kinship with Rigo 23, Salvadoran-born, Los Angeles–based artist and professor of Central American studies Beatriz Cortez created several





FIGURE 5  
**Rigo 23**  
*Autonomous InterGalactic Space Program*  
 2009–present  
 Installation view at REDCAT,  
 Los Angeles  
 Photo: Scott Groller

projects in which she aimed to enunciate a positive, future imaginary for an indigenous population. *La máquina de la fortuna* (2014; *The Fortune Teller Machine*) is an interactive sculpture, developed in collaboration with the Guatemalan Kaqchikel Maya collective Kaqjay Moloj, that prints fortune messages in Kaqchikel and in Spanish. When a viewer presses a button, a thermal printer ejects a message from their collective desires that were programmed into the fortune-teller machine. The messages are written in a future perfect verb tense, as if predicting what will become, hopefully, a reality soon. A sample list of possible, future-tense messages that a viewer may receive from this portal to the future include:

Xtik'oje' jun raxnāq k'aslen.

*Habrā justicia.*

There will be justice.

Xtiqetamaj achike ru ma xe kamisāx ri qawinaq.

*Sabremos la verdad.*

We will know the truth.

Xtiqaya' ruq'ij ri kib'anob'al ri qatit qamama'.

*Estaremos orgullosos de nuestro pasado.*

We will be proud of our past.

Xti ak'axāx ri k'ayewal qa chajin.

*Nuestra voz será escuchada.*

Our voice will be heard.

Chiqonojel xtiqil ru b'eyal ri qak'aslen.

*Tendremos oportunidades.*

We will have opportunities.

Xtik'oje' jun qak'aslen ri man xkojyax ta pa k'ayewal.

*Seremos libres.*

We will be free.

Brought together under the *Mundos Alternos* moniker, these artists from Cuba, El Salvador, and Portugal demonstrate cross-cultural affinities with one another. They also currently live in the States but continue to have exchanges with their home countries in North and Central America, connecting the dots across the States, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America.

#### STRANGE OBJECTS IN ARGENTINA

Orienting toward Argentina in South America is the collaborative duo of Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolás Goldberg, otherwise known as Faivovich & Goldberg. Their project, *Meteorit "El Taco"* (2010), explored a north region of the country where four thousand years ago a meteor shower deposited several meteorites. "El Taco" was a fragment of an eight-hundred-ton iron mass, older than Earth itself, which came from the asteroid belt located between Mars and Jupiter. Discovered in 1962, the meteorite was retrieved by a joint scientific expedition between the United States and Argentina. It was shipped to the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Germany where it was divided into two halves. One part went to the Smithsonian Institution in the States, where it is kept at a distance from the public in a typical museum-display style, and the other half is at Buenos Aires's Galileo Galilei Planetarium, commonly known as Planetario, where it sits outside the entrance, barely protected, permitting patrons to touch this bit of our solar system in a most casual manner (fig. 6).

FIGURE 6  
 One-half of the meteorite at Buenos Aires's Galileo Galilei Planetarium, commonly known as Planetario, where it sits outside the entrance, barely protected, permitting patrons to touch this bit of our solar system in a most casual manner, 2016

Photo by Tyler Stallings



The artists were fascinated with the meteorite being an object older than our own world, but now here as an intergalactic immigrant. Truly a transcendent object, it existed before humans. As the artists said, it is a "cosmic readymade" that celebrates—at least provisionally—the possibility of reintegration when the two halves were brought together from two continents in the Americas for their project at Portikus in Germany.

Argentine artist Gyula Kosice looked to the clouds, too, but instead of engaging with ancient artifacts that fell from space, he conceived futuristic, floating cities. A Hungarian transplant, he took root in Buenos Aires, where he co-founded the Madí group in 1946, a proponent of Bauhaus ideas within Latin America. Interested in the intersection of art and technology, and how such work could be a platform for speculating on the future, Kosice often used neon in his sculptures and incorporated water in his works, not only as a kinetic feature but also as a way of considering his sculptures as architectural models, which led to his theoretical *Hydrospatial City*, begun in the 1970s (fig. 8).





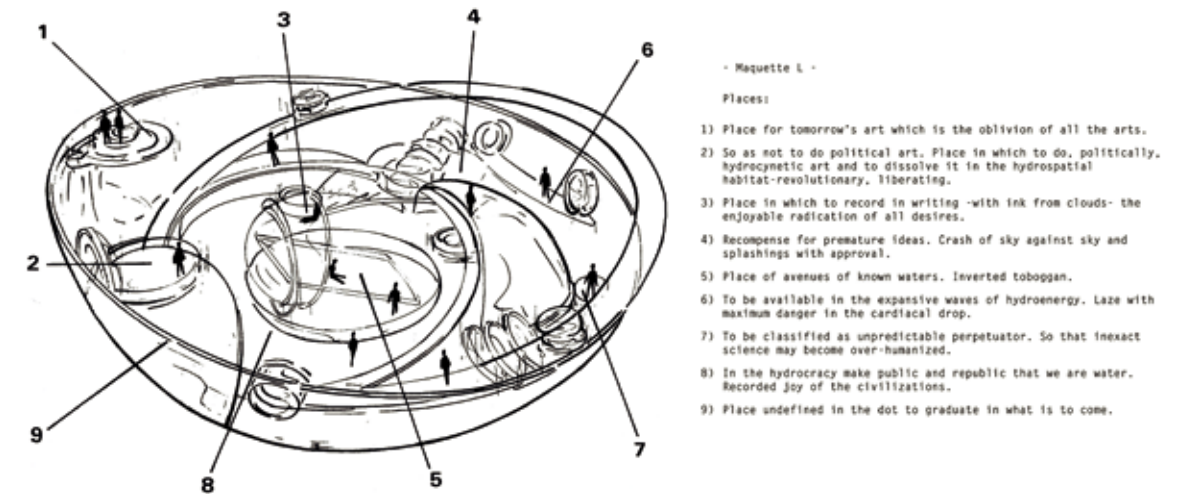
The resulting works were both hanging, sculptural mobiles and Plexiglas maquettes of visionary architecture. Kosice conceived of them as living pods that would float in the sky, using water as the main source of energy to keep them aloft. His visionary speculations are akin to Paolo Soleri's concept for Arcosanti on the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona, and Buckminster Fuller's conceptualization of "Spaceship Earth" and architectural designs like the geodesic dome. However, Kosice's designs were not built. They became conceptual platforms for discussion that exemplified nicely through the world-building aspect, inherent in the title, of *Mundos Alternos*, since they were intended as literal islands in the sky that function as testaments to the importance of far-reaching speculations arising from the intersection of science and imagination, that is, science-fictional thinking.

Kosice's futuristic poeticism is typified by some of the descriptive tags in his 1972 diagrams for a *Hydrospatial City*. In the one for *Maquette L*, Kosice indicated spaces designated for: "1) Place for tomorrow's art which is the oblivion of all the arts; 3) Place in which to record in writing—with ink from clouds—the enjoyable radication of all desires; 7) To be classified as unpredictable perpetuator. So that inexact science may become over-humanized; and 8) In the hydrocracy make public and republic that we are water. Recorded joy of the civilizations."<sup>13</sup> (fig. 9)

Kosice imagined his *Hydrospatial City* during the time of the Argentine military junta's seven-year Dirty War (1976–83). Conceivably, his off-planet, floating pods were imaginary places that, if built, could be literal islands to escape from dictatorship. The thoughts that he expressed in *La Ciudad Hidroespacial Manifesto* suggest how he saw his strange objects as sly and veiled reactions to an oppressive moment in history: "The centers of power and of economic and political decision-making can do no more than uselessly try to slow down this tendency which will transform man the moment his body and his mind begin to be concerned with universal projects and he comes thus more universal."<sup>14</sup>

It was also during this time that Argentine comic strip writer Héctor Germán Oesterheld and artist Francisco Solano López resurrected their science fiction comic, *El Eternauta*, after it was first published in the late 1950s. In the sequels, published in 1969 and 1975, the script became politicized in light of the military junta and neoliberalist policies. In brief, the story starts with a devastating snowfall that covers Buenos Aires, eradicating most life-forms in a short span of time. Juan Salvo and his friends and family survive. The environmental catastrophe was caused by an alien invasion of Earth, but Salvo and other survivors fight back. At one point, the aliens try to reel the survivors back in to "snow-free zones," but the ploy is discovered by Salvo's group. They escape in one of the alien's spaceships and activate a time-travel mechanism by mistake. The result is that Salvo escapes the aliens to some degree but now traverses different time periods in search of his friends in other time continuums, thus becoming an *Eternauta*, that is, traveling for eternity.

FIGURE 8  
Gyula Kosice  
*Fotomontaje de la Ciudad Hidroespacial*  
2007  
Courtesy of the Kosice Museum,  
Buenos Aires  
© Gyula Kosice



In a sense, Oesterheld created Salvo as someone who disappeared and became a form of escape from the aliens but also became displaced from his home planet and time zone. The story's elements amounted to an allegory for the Dirty War, in which the aliens represented the military and also the influence of neoliberal policies from the States. In essence, Oesterheld found a way to provide a gateway for his readers in which he demonstrated, through a science fiction story in the form of a comic strip that tyranny could indeed be questioned.

"Profoundly disturbed by the Dirty War and the political repression, Oesterheld criticised [sic] the dictatorship in *El Eternauta II*. He introduced himself as a narrating character ('Germán') within the story and reflected deeply on survival in extreme conditions in a future inhospitable Argentina destroyed by invaders."<sup>15</sup> As a result, it was assumed that Oesterheld became one of the thirty thousand *desaparecidos* when he "disappeared" in 1977, as he was not seen or heard from after 1979.<sup>16</sup> Solano López fled to Spain.

On this note of science fiction as allegory during a time of Latin American dictatorships, J. Andrew Brown discussed cyborgs as an expression of the post-human in Latin American texts in his book *Cyborgs in Latin America* (2010). He wrote that in Latin America, "one increasingly finds cybernetic bodies and technological identity at the sociopolitical intersection of military dictatorship and neoliberal policy."<sup>17</sup> Brown further argued that the cyborg functions differently in Latin America than it does in North America or Europe, where theorists such as Donna Haraway have put forward the cyborg in a feminist context, for example, as a way of questioning patriarchal and heteronormative values due to its hybrid nature of being human and machine, thus transgressing the aforementioned categories for controlling bodies.

Brown exemplified his counter-narrative to the North American cyborg with an analysis of Manuel Puig's novel *Pubis angelical*, which was published in 1976, just two years after the oppressive Dirty War began to

FIGURE 9  
Gyula Kosice  
*Maquette L*  
1965–75  
Courtesy of the Kosice Museum,  
Buenos Aires. © Gyula Kosice.



take effect when the Perón government weakened. The story is about an Argentine woman who travels back and forth through time. “In all time periods and with each female character, the woman’s body is presented as traumatized, ravaged by illness, by heartbreak, by surgery; all these traumas are represented symbolically in an artificial heart that ticks like a clock within her.”<sup>18</sup> A 1982 film adaptation by Raúl de la Torre, which was produced toward the end of the Dirty War, provides a serendipitous bracketing of that time period with the same work in two different media. Brown writes, “The painful experiences that produced the figurative loss of her heart occasion, then, the need for an artificial replacement. What this establishes is the idea of the cybernetic body as an emblem of trauma; the prosthesis that the cyborg bears testimony of the violence that caused the need for its presence.”<sup>19</sup>

In other words, for Brown, this representation of a cyborg is different from one in a North American context, which may represent a cyborg as the result of neoliberalist policies in which the body becomes a commodity, in the extreme, by merging with machine. Cyborgs become slaves of a privatized industry that has replaced services traditionally attached to government agencies, such as the slave androids in *Blade Runner* (1982), the privatized police cyborg in *RoboCop* (1987), or the police robot that gains human consciousness in *Chappie* (2015).

#### SCIENCE-FICTIONAL CONNECTEDNESS

From a curatorial perspective, the necessity of travel in cars, trains, planes, and by foot throughout the Americas became an experience in which the circulation of the kind of artwork that we sought became slipstream islands of materiality. Our radars were attuned to artists who viewed their art as platforms for investigating and questioning the immediate culture that surrounded them and the world at large, that is, embodying Suvin’s aforementioned cognitive estrangement.

In this regard, our visits became ones in which citizens of alternative worlds found one another and cemented bonds through face-to-face meetings. We were surrounded by the artists’ slipstream artwork in their studios or galleries, which became *las puertas*. It was by traveling through these wormholes, found throughout the Americas, to islands of materiality, as opposed to “islands in the net,” to coin another phrase from Bruce Sterling’s 1988 novel with the same title, that we found an overall utopian experience of connectedness through material presence, rather than a dystopian one of disembodied connection through the telepresence of texts and screens. In other words, we were in true locations of the future, rather than just sensing, at an untouchable distance, the things to come.

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This book is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* at UCR ARTSblock, on view from September 16, 2017 through February 3, 2018. *Mundos Alternos* is curated by Robb Hernández, Assistant Professor, UCR Department of English; Tyler Stallings, Artistic Director, Barbara and Art Culver Center of the Arts; and Joanna Szupinska-Myers, CMP Curator of Exhibitions. Kathryn Poindexter, CMP Curatorial Assistant, is Project Coordinator. UCR ARTSblock is the California Museum of Photography (CMP), the Jack and Marilyn Sweeney Art Gallery, and the Barbara and Art Culver Center of the Arts at the University of California, Riverside.

Major support for this publication and exhibition is provided through grants from the Getty Foundation.

*Mundos Alternos* is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions from Santa Barbara to San Diego, and from Los Angeles to Palm Springs. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.

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#### **Color Management**

iocolor, Seattle

#### **Printer**

Artron Art Group, Shenzhen, China

Edition of 1500

#### **Produced by**

Lucia | Marquand, Seattle  
[www.luciamarquand.com](http://www.luciamarquand.com)

#### **Available through**

ARTBOOK | D.A.P.  
75 Broad Street, Suite 630  
New York, NY 10004  
[www.artbook.com](http://www.artbook.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017941846  
ISBN 978-0-9823046-8-6

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