

Future Nature

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Axolotl
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Keywords

nature, death, laboratory, specimen, foetus, comparative embryology

Statement

Future Nature continues my analytical engagement with the themes of retrieval and digital resurrection, bringing to light and into the light the specimens and objects previously hidden in dispersed archives and research databanks. The project takes as its base the unique animal embryos and foetuses housed in the Hubrecht Collection of Comparative Embryology, Utrecht, Netherlands, the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, Germany, and the Tornblad Institute in Lund, Sweden.

Future Nature stands as both requiem and genesis. The mode of display and artifice transform this collection of embryos, collapsing their past into a timeless, liminal, ambivalent space where they are constantly on the verge of becoming . . . yet frozen in time and death. This is the paradox throughout: a fantasy future of virtual Disney-world displays, of long-extinct creatures, or perhaps of those that never came into being, an imaginary zoo, a sublime simulacrum. Captured in a state of grace, the images invite us to view and enter a contemplative mode where colour and large scale render them both close-up yet distant, creating an allegorical world where death and immortality are present[ed] in living colour.

My photographic portraiture is deployed to imagine future menageries of the wild — or are they from the past? At times the highly colourful carnival of animals may evoke comforting and nightmarish fairy-tale images — the common opossum, the nosy mammal, or the spiny dogfish — with their anthropomorphic allure through details of gesture and expression. This gallery of animals, photographed in their glass jars, simultaneously references

science museum displays as well as subverting those same conventions through the use of intense light, scale, and staging. *Future Nature* reworks and undermines notions of scientific and clinical objectivity, eschewing ridged taxonomies and conventionally cold, monochromatic tones in favour of a vibrant colour palette and a sumptuous *mise-en-scene*.

In my past exhibitions and current project, *Vial Memory*, with the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, I have consistently sought to explore new perspectives on medical and scientific matters, attempting to create a personal atlas unfolding in time and association. *Still Life*, first shown at the Gallery of Photography, Dublin, presented images of neonatal human malformations from international medical collections. *R Block*, exhibited at Nikolai Fine Art, New York, explored the visual codes and conventions of medical pathology portraiture and imaging. *Stuffed Histories*, exhibited at Nikolai Fine Art and the Hudson River Museum, New York, re-presented a series of mural images of the animal dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History, New York.



Tarsier
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Future Nature is a further take on histories and narratives of science in the digital age, challenging our assumptions about how we aestheticize nature and map the animal body.

Author Biography

Karl Grimes lives and works in Dublin and New York. He studied photography and media at New York University and I.C.P., New York, graduating with an M.A. in Fine Art. His work has been exhibited and published in the United States and Europe and is represented in a number of international public and private collections internationally. He lectures on photography and new media at Dublin City University, Ireland. Recent art/science projects and collaborations include: Caregi Hospital, Florence; American Museum of Natural History; Hubrecht Laboratory, Netherlands; and Tornblad Institute, Sweden. He is currently a Fellow at the Mütter Museum and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, U.S.A. For more information, visit <http://www.karlgrimes.net/html/cv.html>.

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Nisar Keshvani, Editor-in-Chief

Established in 1993, Leonardo Electronic Almanac is, jointly produced by Leonardo, the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology (ISAST), and published by MIT Press, is an electronic journal dedicated to providing a forum for those who are interested in the realm where art, science and technology converge. For over a decade, LEA has thrived as an *international peer reviewed electronic journal* and web archive covering the interaction of the arts, sciences, and technology. LEA emphasizes rapid publication of recent work and critical discussion on topics of current excitement with a slant on shorter, less academic texts. Many contributors are younger scholars, artists, scientists, educators and developers of new technological resources in the media arts.

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Wild Nature and the Digital Life Gallery

Curated by **Dene Grigar and Sue Thomas**

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