

The Eden Institute: Artifacts from an Imagined Future

Welcome to *The Eden Institute*, where paradise is the future that was.

Donna Haraway wrote in her *Cyborg Manifesto* that “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (149). Taking cue from this statement, *The Eden Institute* investigates a speculative future-past at the permeable boundaries between nature and technology, belief and science, myth and tool. The artworks on display in *The Eden Institute* reclaim an imaginative realm once reserved for parable and fable. In the modern industrial age these speculative fictions interrogate and tame scientific audacity, and serve to negotiate each new technology’s integration into the fabric of society. Mythical impulses of chimeras and medicine pouches become alarmingly real in the face of advanced science. “Each new hybrid that arrives on the technological scene – test tube babies, Prozac, human genome sequencing – pushes us further into a no mans land between nature and culture, an ambiguous zone where science, language, religion and mythology overlap and interpenetrate” (Davis16). Is science the new belief system? Through it can we find redemption? Does it hold the promise of paradise? Fulfillment of the spiritual self? Edens lost?

The exhibition’s central piece *1984 and Beyond*, Gerard Byrne explore a future that failed to arrive. The film is based on of *Playboy* magazine’s 1963 “Future of Life” panel discussions where twelve well-known science-fiction writers to speak not as popular writers but as experts on 'the future'. The panelists discuss societal organization, population control, sexual habits, longevity, mass utopia, genetic modification, space travel and, the possibility of alien life. Filmed with a Dutch cast in the modernist Sonsbeek sculpture pavilion in the Kroller Muller museum, Byrne has created an intriguing work that meditates on the complexities of futures past, popular fantasy, and historical continuity.

The remaining works interrogate the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of a future that has arrived. Staged as an archeological item, Olivier Goulet’s *The Relic of a Bionic Man*

examines the dissolving boundary between man and machine. A human skeleton is cleverly modified with the insertion of synthetic and electronic prosthetics. This meshing of organic and inorganic material alludes to medical and biotechnological research for surrogate organs still in progress. In a similar vein Farah Yusuf's *You Are Not Who You Claim* presents a world where genetic therapy has been co-opted by the beauty industry, and bio-engineering has moved beyond medical treatment and infiltrated the domestic environment. Syringes, medical paraphernalia, and test tubes labelled: "Body Recombinant Cell Fusion Accelerant," "Retro Viral Ancient Gene Sequences," and "Chaos-Biology Random Gene Pack" point to a sinister habit underlying this innocuous scene - beauty as potential, body as prosthesis; mutation suggested but not explicit. Also featured within *The Eden Institute*, Liam Wylie's *Untitled (Apparatus #1)* presents a fabled ultramodern medical process. Although static in its current manifestation, the piece's construction alludes to procedure; its operation has no obvious output yet it is strangely sexual in form. This interplay of the functionally-familiar and the sexually-foreign suggests an overarching scientific narrative that engages synthetic notions of science and belief in relation to the body. All these works transgress the sacred boundaries of the body and notions of selfhood, moving the confrontation into the field of the observer.

The Eden Institute exists in a temporally ambiguous space where the artifacts of our collective dreaming have been collected and presented as reality. The authenticity of this proposed future/past is tenuous as the artifacts on display start to dematerialize into a field of questions about truth and the nature of scientific knowledge. By presenting imagined technologies that lie on the fringe of our cultural literacy, *The Eden Institute* occupies a shadowy zone where artworks slip from factual to metaphorical with disarming fluency. *The Eden Institute* is an ambiguous area where science and belief overlap and interpenetrate.



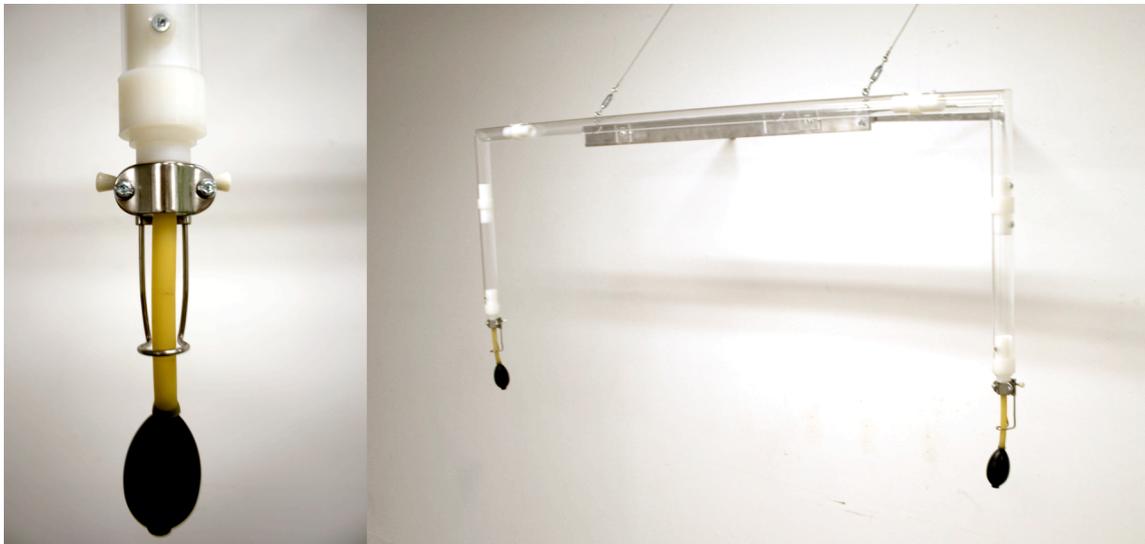
Gerard Byrne
1984 and Beyond (2005-2007)
Three channel video installation, (60 min. approx), 20 b/w photographs - 18 x 15 x 1.5''



Olivier Goulet
The Relic of Bionic Man (2001)
Human, animal and synthetic bones, electronic components - 80 x 55 x 20''



Farah Yusuf
 You Are Not Who You Claim (2009)
 Medicine cabinet, glass and plastic containers, gelatin - 29 x 17 x 6"



Liam Wylie
 Untitled (apparatus #1) (2009)
 UHMW rod, acrylic tube, aluminium, aircraft cable, found medical equipment - 64 x 24 x 18"

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