

PROVENCE

Letter from the Editor

Saturday, October 21, 2023

Dear _____,

The voyage to Bolzano is rather peculiar, at least for me, leaving from Bern, passing through Milan and Verona, and sliding up into the *Alto Adige*. Vineyards accompany my train, whispering delights of the Schiava and Lagrein indigenous wine grapes. There are 300 days of sunshine a year in Bolzano, too. Is this reason enough for the local museum to mount an exhibition and call it “hope”?

Best,

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Review

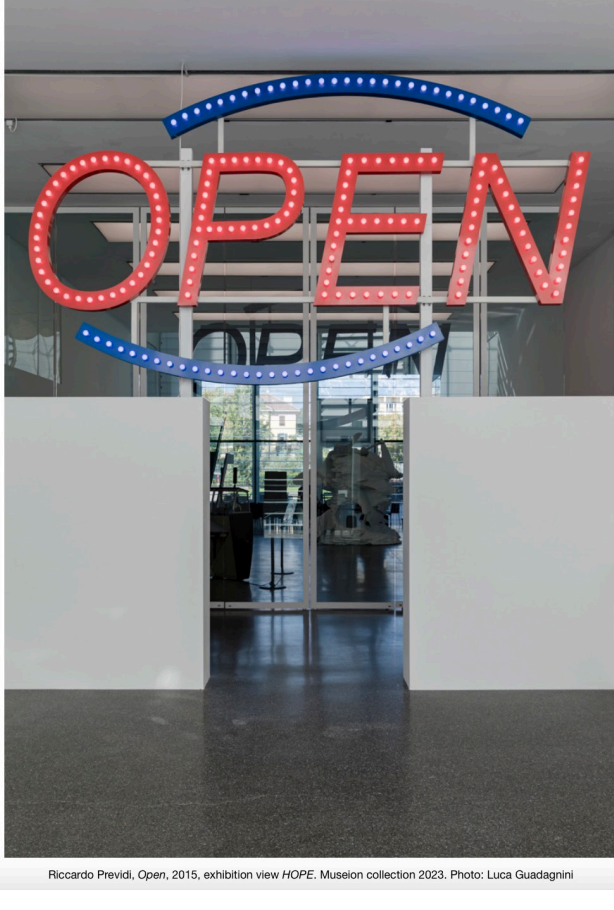
PROVENCE

HOPE at Museion

HOPE is the third and final chapter of *TECHNO HUMANITIES*, a three-year multidisciplinary research project which focuses on the figure of the contemporary human across different economical, technological, and ecological systems. Curated by Museion director Bart van der Heide together with Leonie Radine and realised in collaboration with American rhythm analyst, media theorist, and curator DeForrest Brown Jr., *HOPE* proposes an attentional focus on the reinvigoration of humanities abetted by science and fiction, outside of the teleological scope of progress. Brown is notably the author of *Assembling a Black Counter Culture* (2021), a materialist reading of economical, industrial, and structural developments, positioning techno as a tool for change (He also produces under the pseudonym Speaker Music, most recently releasing *Techxodus*, 2023).

With a name like “HOPE,” one would be forgiven for expecting some grandiose, biennale-like show. At Museion, however, “world building” denotes exploring the utopian promises of a technological humanity within the active site of the museum.

The show is further supported by a reader of newly commissioned texts, as well as extensive mediation and events programming including with several local cultural organizations. Museion cleverly applies its geographical ostracization toward addressing its own capacity to push for hope in political and social contexts. And perhaps as an effect of its capitalisation, the title *HOPE* functions as an acronym, something one could disarticulate in its given context, fulfilling a sense of agency against the torpor of defeat of more candid and confident exhibitions.



Riccardo Previdi, *Open*, 2015, exhibition view *HOPE*. Museion collection 2023. Photo: Luca Guadagnini

Finding part of Petrit Halilaj’s *When the sun goes away, we paint the sky* (2022) at the Museion’s entrance was a delightful surprise. It is still charged with the sentimentality I witnessed at Manifesta 14, its gleaming letters (and hotel stars) flickering atop the Grand Hotel Prishtina. If the hotel is itself a symbol of **a society navigating the turmoil of its recent political narrative**, and the Halilaj installation was a poetic reorganization of the language of advertising, seeing the two lone stars in Bolzano felt more melancholic, as if borrowing those signs of hope from their initial iteration came also with a sense of bitterness. But surely, hope doesn’t have to be equated with blind faith, and indeed, this closing chapter of *TECHNO HUMANITIES* doesn’t posit utopia and positive forward-looking as the lone route for hope, rather, it departs from Mark Fisher’s assertion of the “slow cancellation of the future”, (1) a compressed horizon of the contemporary haunted by the past and charged with lost futures. Going with the flow of the show, in the dearth of rejoicing narratives, there is a strong sense that reorganization is key to shaping more positive collective routes.

It is recommended that one starts up on the fourth floor and works their way down through the exhibition. The top level of the Museion, not usually used as an exhibition space, is treated here as an observatory, with two large windows at each side opening towards the city. At the centre of this viewing platform, Sophia Al-Maria’s *Tender Point Ruin* (2021) delivers personal narratives using the militaristic apparatus of the night vision camera. In the next room, Suzanne Treister’s paintings provide visuals for her futuristic poetry. On a backdrop of a constellation of concentric circles, a menacing tower with lava lamp-like gradient colours reads “Museum of the Inaudible Sound of Asteroids Becoming Data,” the same as its title.



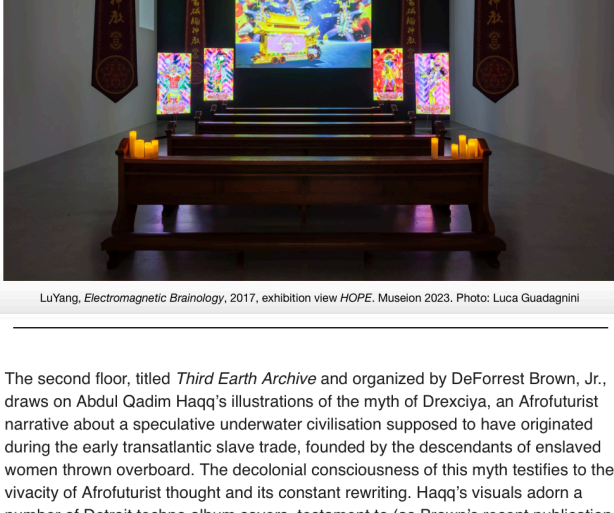
Ana Lupaş, *Coat for reaching the Heaven*, 1962/1964, exhibition view *HOPE*. Museion 2023. Photo: Luca Guadagnini

An intermediary room proposes an interesting case study, juxtaposing Black Quantum Futurism’s film, *Write No History*, the installation *Black Hole Viewfinder* (both 2021), and Sonia Leimer’s sculpture *Space Junk* (2020), making the room resonate with a form of silence, like a depressurized cabin before entering space odyssey. At the entrance of this floor’s final room, Marina Sula’s totemic metal structure (*You may never know what’s causing all the traffic*, 2023) conserves a sort of “elixir,” storing energy in its flesh as well as acting out its symbolic power, not unlike the vial of Saint Januarius’ blood, the liquification of which (as well as failure to liquefy) has become an omen in Naples. I’d seen Matthew Angelo Harrison’s sculptures in **Sharjah** already; replayed here in the middle of the room, they are guarded only by a translucent curtain, like a frail levitating swimming pool. Beatrice Marchi’s comical yet menacing sniper-like camera (*The Photographer Lens*, 2021) is pointed outwards, destabilizing the porous membrane of the institution in a voyeuristic gaze à la Brian de Palma’s *Body Double* (1984). The notion of skin as symbolic is continued beautifully with Nicola L.’s *Sun & Moon Giant Pénétrables* (1996/2012), two vinyl spacesuits which are hung up as if pieces of laundry left out to dry, or the aftermaths of the celestial bodies seasonal moult.



Nicola L., *Sun & Moon Giant Pénétrables*, 1996/2012, exhibition view *HOPE*. Museion 2023. Photo: Luca Guadagnini

If the top floor arranges itself as a group exhibition, inviting commonalities through proximate hangings, on the lower floors, artworks and artists are presented in specific spaces, granting fewer opportunities for a communality of works presented together and instead enhancing louder voices of bigger installations. The point of the third floor (described as an “arcade” as in place of entertainment machines as well as place of harmony and utopia) is to treat hope as a personified adventure, relocating its stakes in an individual narrative like the quest. Indeed, this floor is home to immersive, video-game like works such as Lawrence Lek’s *Nepenthe Zone* (2021-ongoing), a full dive into his personal “Sinofuturism” and its associated quests. The main character is led through digitised ruins of Beijing’s Old Summer Palace, sacked by colonial powers in 1860, followed by fictionalized versions of exhibition spaces in cities such as London and Seoul. In an updated and extended version of a presentation first shown at **Plymouth Rock**, Zurich, Ilaria Vinci’s *Iris IV - Our Last Best Hope* (2021) plays with world-building through the use of clues and findings, repurposed players’ logbooks, and a leporello which unfolds with its findings and whatever may constitute a knowledge that “unlocks.” Already weird by Zurich standards, here *Iris IV* is fresh, alive, and fun-fair like. In an enclosed space in the middle of the floor, LuYang’s impressive *Electromagnetic Brainology* (2017) staged a church-like space in which to screen his videos which advocate for the divine capabilities afforded to humans thanks to the latest technologies. With a hysterical visual language mixing intense advertisement with combat video games like Tekken, the spiritual contemplation felt more like a sugar rush.



LuYang, *Electromagnetic Brainology*, 2017, exhibition view *HOPE*. Museion 2023. Photo: Luca Guadagnini

The second floor, titled *Third Earth Archive* and organized by DeForrest Brown, Jr., draws on Abdul Qadim Haqq’s illustrations of the myth of Drexciya, an Afrofuturist narrative about a speculative underwater civilisation supposed to have originated during the early transatlantic slave trade, founded by the descendants of enslaved women thrown overboard. The decolonial consciousness of this myth testifies to the vivacity of Afrofuturist thought and its constant rewriting. Haqq’s visuals adorn a number of Detroit techno album covers, testament to (as Brown’s recent publication shows) the strong links between this kind of dance music and the science-fiction timeline that is Drexciya. At Museion, these visuals are presented alongside vinyls sourced from a private local collection (as Brown could not bring his own) transforming the room into a listening session where industrial beats match your pulse. Haqq’s wormholes become imaginative highroads for agency, echoing the first *TECHNO HUMANITIES* exhibition which focused specifically on the techno club as a space for broader social interactions.



AbuQadim Haqq, exhibition view *HOPE*. Museion 2023. Photo: Luca Guadagnini

1. Coming from Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Zero Books, 2014