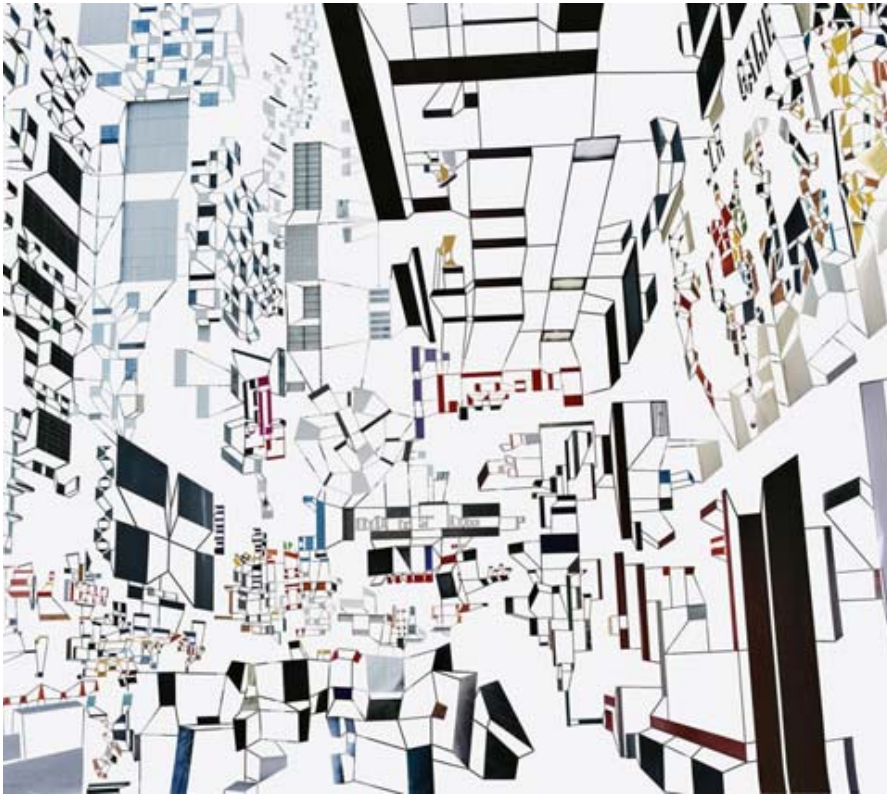




The Thousandth Word ART by the Vicious Circle



Welcome to the Geometric Imaginarium

By Christina Schmid.

If an exhibition inspires imaginary conversations with William Blake, William Gibson, and Terry Tempest Williams in the same breath, it seems safe to assume that there's something going on: something that just might live up to art's potential to intrigue, confound, and, ever so slightly, alter the way you perceive the work at hand – and, ambitiously, the world at large. Most importantly, though, the two artists that curator and Franklin Art Works director Tim Peterson has brought together here entice us to let our imaginations run loose: Richard Galpin invites us to get lost in the compelling geometry of Tetratopia's visionary cities, while Margaret Pezalla-Granlund's *Fallen over the Horizon*; or, *Crash at the Putney Velodrome* eclectically pits sci-fi allusions – complete with portals and wormholes, against the mundanely ordinary; think Dairy Queens, swimming pools, airstrips, and racetracks. Both artists investigate the possibilities of re-

imagining familiar architecture, and challenge us to immerse ourselves in this geometric imaginarium. The only entry requirement, Terry Tempest Williams might add, is a mind ready to go wild in the presence of artistic creation.

Richard Galpin's imaginary cities result from a process that renders the putatively two-dimensional photographs of cityscapes into quasi-sculptural pieces. Galpin carves and peels the photographs' colored surface layer with mathematical, surgical precision. What remains are geometric clusters of visual information on white paper that bears the marks of this concentrated stripping. (A video on view at the gallery and online documents Galpin's process.) His titles both number the cluster and reference an imaginary city: Cluster XXII (Rhizopolis) (2007), shown above, intrigues with its promise of rhizomatic subterranean growth in the emerging geometric pattern, while other clusters – evocatively titled Pteropolis, Sporopolis, or Cirrhopolis – reference feathers, wings, spores, seeds, or clouds.

This bridging of the natural and the architectural, this imagining of cities that organically grow out of naturally occurring patterns, may sound like science fiction. The visual reference points the video provides help set Galpin's geometric abstractions into a fascinating context: Galpin starts with Russian Kasimir Malevich's influential Suprematism, a style reliant on severe geometric abstraction, and Liubov Popova, another Russian painter and designer of the late 19th and early 20th century, before turning to a slew of German influences, such as biologist, philosopher, and artist Ernst Haeckel (the father of phylogeny), Hermann Finsterlin, visionary architect, painter, and poet, Wenzel Hablik, whose plans for crystalline architecture are as fantastic as they are obscure, and Kurt Schwitters, whose famous Merzbau sought to translate Dadaist ideas into the realm of sculptural architecture. Most of what these visionaries planned, driven by the urge to imagine a dazzling range of future possibilities, may very well have been considered science fiction in their day and age.

Historically speaking, what all of these influences share is their debt to modernity's narratives of progress. Yet while we know today that this unfettered belief in progress was tragically and irrevocably shattered by two world wars, in the work that Galpin references, this belief still seems innocently intact. All of these artists and architects and thinkers and poets and painters shared the belief that their architectural and artistic dreams could indeed serve as a means of altering the way we, as humans, are in and experience the world.

Lebbeus Woods, the only North American and contemporary architect Galpin includes and mentions by name in the video, articulates his view of architecture like this: "I am an architect, a constructor of worlds." This architect does not bother with mere buildings or with creating environments; this architect constructs worlds. Taken literally, this is the stuff of science fiction.

A few more words on Woods, who seems to be a prolific and provocative character: Architecture, to him, means being at war "with my time, with history, with all authority that resides in fixed and frightened forms." Here, architecture means resistance to what is and demands the creation of new, adventurous forms that do not abide by established authorities, whether political or aesthetic. (As an expatriate Austrian, I cannot help but

mention that on Woods' Web site, a short video shows the imperial architecture of Vienna's inner city being sneakily invaded by the lines of architectural drawings. Like alien intruders, these lines stealthily move and creep, assemble and dissemble fluidly, as if organically, brushing past Rachel Whitehead's formidable Holocaust Monument, a.k.a. Nameless Library (2000), on the Judenplatz. Architecture becomes a tool for remembering and breaking with the crimes of the past, critically interacting with the legacies of the past while envisioning a drastically different future.)

In Tetratopia, Galpin continues on this trajectory of visionary architecture, though undoubtedly with a less belligerent air than Woods. The clusters of this series result from a reduction of information, a selective erasure that resembles nothing so much as a visual tuning out of white noise. The original photographs of buildings disappear into white space. But the white background is not just negative space but intensely textured space that bears the marks of being peeled and cut and ripped. From this surface, the complex patterns, whose base elements often seem to rely on rectangular shapes (as in Tetratopia), emerge as if stepping out of the chatter of architectural and visual information overload. These patterns, despite their stability, seem ephemeral, poised to kaleidoscopically realign at a moment's notice. They emphatically bring to mind nodal points, sudden aggregates of high-interest data in a given field of information, a term coined by legendary cyberpunk author William Gibson. Galpin's work carves these nodal points out of the photographs and thus reveals the underlying clusters of relevant visual information.

Pezalla-Granlund's installations are equally interested in exploring underlying patterns: meteoric orbits, looping bicycle racetracks (a.k.a. velodromes), and spirals converge in *Fallen Over the Horizon*; or, *Crash at the Putney Velodrome*. Using plywood, foam core, wood, glue, and tape, as well as watercolor and collage on paper, Pezalla-Granlund creates installation pieces that sit on high wooden frames (Franklin Art Works provides two stepping stools for a top-down view). These skeletal stilts of sorts are necessary to accommodate all the extensions and protrusions that emerge from the models of velodromes, Dairy Queens, pools, and airstrips. The geometry of the curvilinear shapes – the artist refers to them as "portals" – are pitted against the sheer verticality and sprawling horizontality of other formal elements: ascending mountainous shapes and descending wormhole-like structures expand vertically, while the airstrips in *Cheyenne/Enneyehc* (2008) stretch horizontally, providing a compelling contrast in a carefully orchestrated collision of shapes.

In fact, this body of work, which also includes a number of two-dimensional pieces, engages with the idea of collisions in a number of ways: The meteor's crash into Earth and the collision at the Putney velodrome are, without doubt, the most obvious ones. But there are others. While the portals and wormholes once again evoke the fantasies of science fiction, of travel faster than the speed of light, of instantaneous transportation to different worlds, these space-age illusions collide vehemently with the formal qualities of the material on display: glue strings and blobs, patches of tape, and the visible jabs left by a knife on the foam core distract from the formal impact of the work, obstinately insisting on reminding and drawing attention to its very materiality, which appears so very much at odds with interstellar travel. But who knows – I may be guilty of underestimating plywood, glue, and tape.

Yet despite such material reminders, the pieces on display invite you to adopt a radically altered perspective, to look at the shapes of this estranged architecture and allow your mind to roam. "What if...?," the work seems to insinuate; what if this racetrack was a portal, this swimming pool much more than its surface reveals? What if we were to look at these structures not as fully determined by their intended, ordinary purposes but as liminal sites, where, as the artist puts it, "we move between before and after, or above and below, or rational and chaotic ... between the expected and the unexpected, between the prosaic and the poetic." What if we were to succeed at suspending all we know for a moment or two and adopt a truly alien perspective in order to see anew?

Perhaps, if all of this work is about the imagination and where it can take us in the blink of an eye, focusing on the material distractions misses the point entirely. Perhaps these pieces should really be considered as portals, as collision sites, between the actual and the possible, the concrete and the imagined. Perhaps it is our imagination that is supposed to pass through these portals – and here, finally, William Blake's impossible nostalgia for passing through the doors of perception enters into this far-ranging, imaginary conversation. A visionary artist and poet himself, Blake understood that art, at its best, transforms the quotidian, the ordinary, into something that, though usually useless in practical terms, holds a paradoxical and complicated value. This alchemical transformation lies at the core of all art and at the very heart of the current show at Franklin Art Works.