

Party is the most overtly critical work of the terrarium series in its damnation of societal corruption and overconsumption. Conversely, it is also exemplary of the cooperative ethos that characterizes both the process and the content of Moore's oeuvre. To create this carefully choreographed chaotic mess, Moore banked on the complicity of a talented and unruly group of individuals who, as an ensemble, delivered in spades. The *Alice in Wonderland* allusions are most overt in this tableau, ruled by the Mad Hatter and a host of tyrannical queens.

Aside from its play on words, *Itinerarium* refers to Roman cartography, lists of milestones outlining place-names and the travel times between them. At first reading, this series suggests a guided meandering through evolution from primitive life to the modern city. However Moore's cosmos defies notions of progress. Each work presents the viewer with a loop, a day in the woods, a city street or the death and life of a party, all playing out concurrently, cyclically and ceaselessly. Every terrarium also contains its own multitude of parallel, occasionally colliding narratives, all within a fixed view that is paradoxically omnipotent and partial. Anthropomorphic creatures populate these worlds, simultaneously underlining and collapsing distinctions between country and city, nature and culture, viewer and viewed, self and other. These animated renderings become windows, revealing flat, cross-sections in space and time, yet they drip in detail and often encompass a dizzying depth of layers. Allison Moore's unflinching, static gaze favours exuberant and decorative posing, reminiscent of glitter-trash performers championed by Andy Warhol, Jack Smith and John Waters. *Itinerarium* seduces the viewer with whimsy and nostalgia only to reveal a world of dark and pressing questions concerning memory, myth and human perception.

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ITINERARIUM

A Collection of Video Terrariums

Allison Moore

September 13 – October 18, 2014

Allison Through the Looking Glass

Based on the format of a zoo, the exhibition *Itinerarium* features displays from the mind's eye of a young artist engaged in a flagrant disregard for the impossible. As a grouping of specially commissioned works alongside recent panoramic tableaux, *Itinerarium* is an ambitious series of "video terrariums", including a suburban street, a cityscape, a country garden, a temperate rain forest, an underground burrow and some very human brine shrimp also known as *Sea Monkeys*.

Raised in the ostensibly temperate and staid climate of Victoria, British Columbia, Allison Moore thrives in the wild and woolly environs of Montreal where she surrounds herself with an eclectic crew of conspirators and accomplices. Moore's practice encompasses drawing, painting, photo-collage, performance, video, cinema, music and installation. Her multidisciplinary approach has brought her into contact with an outrageously diverse cohort. Often engaged in collaborative ventures and shared authorship over projects, Moore co-founded Egotrip productions with Arthur Desmarteaux in 2006,

and she directed the short film, *Smile Stealers* (2012), a collaboration over several years with interdisciplinary artist and costumer, Jasa Baka. Though the works in this exhibition reflect an open and collaborative ethos carried over from a consensus-based creative practice, they are the result of a visionary, hands-on and highly focused methodology. These terrariums evoke whimsy and visual pleasure, yet they also demand concentration and reflection both of the maker and the viewer.

Moore traces her longstanding interest in panoramic scenes to the scale models of *Miniature World*, a curious fixture within Victoria's perennial tourist circuit. In practice her terrariums stem from her drawings, inspired by Bosch and Bruegel, where she began her experiments rendering a world of activity within a single, extended frame. Densely populated with fabulous creatures, her drawings often stretch and collapse perspective and scale, confounding hierarchies and providing a picture that slices a cross-section of the universe, sometimes resembling a gigantic Petri dish, simultaneously embracing and critiquing the proliferation of imagery and other excesses of the Internet age.

Moore herself regards these previous panoramic works on paper as precursors to her video terrariums. Indeed the majority of these electronic works involve drawn elements, a proliferation of colour, the collaging together of unlikely neighbours and an elastic approach to scale and perspective, all characteristic of the drawings and collages. The use of live action characters, only possible through the use of video, adds a dimension of significance and destabilizes the gaze of the spectator. By naming the works terrariums and framing them as though these fantasies were slices of life presented behind a piece of glass, Moore foregrounds the act of looking, then populates her zoo with creatures of a distinctly human nature.

The earliest work of the collection is the interactive piece *Sea Monkeys*, a single-screen "aquarium" whose namesake is derived from the mass marketing of Artemia NYOS, a specially bred species of brine shrimp. As a novelty pet advertised directly to children and sold primarily through mail order, Sea Monkeys were reputed to be a disappointing purchase: the crustaceans themselves bore little resemblance to the fanciful, very human-looking creatures featured in the illustrations advertising them and they tended to die and rot rather quickly under the care of their unenthusiastic captors.

Through the magic of green-screen video and of the Pure-Data programming platform, Moore redresses this wrongdoing by providing miniature humans that swim through an electronic tank and who avoid collision due to the use of Boids, an algorithm developed to simulate the activity of a school of fish.

Subsequently, Moore turned her attention from sea to land and to the larger-scale work *Urban Terrarium* that serves as a key component within this series. *Urban Terrarium* acts as a homage to urban chaos and to the harmony that ensues within great cities despite congestion, overcrowding and other ills; and as such it is perhaps the most utopian site within Moore's imaginings. Homes, shop-fronts, signs and anthropomorphic flora are all lovingly stacked into extraordinary feats of engineering, forming a metropolis that combines images drawn from the artist's travels through cities in Brazil along with some familiar Montreal locations. As a companion piece, *Suburban Terrarium* presents a whimsical yet pernicious view of life on the city's peripheries. In this case the artist deploys readymade tools designed to generate cookie-cutter images of utopian communities. In doing so, she also invokes a place of stifling perfection that renders its inhabitants somewhat bereft. The human activity that animates *Urban Terrarium* becomes blight on the otherwise tidy landscape of the suburbs.

Beneath a house in the suburbs lies *The Burrow*, a world of pure fantasy inspired by Franz Kafka's dreamlike story of the same name and carved out by gnomes, mole-like creatures and insects borrowed from the Brothers Grimm and Lewis Carroll. Here, Moore shifts her axis 90 degrees, slicing deep below the ground into a place of incessant scratching and digging, of constant labour, of decay and of renewal. Her composition suggests that we are glimpsing but a small sample of a vast network of tunnels that might be found anywhere and everywhere. This most terrestrial of terrariums stands alone in the exhibition space, bridging the urban and suburban environments in a nexus of collective imagining.

Behind a curtain grows a forest. Within that forest exists a population to rival any city. With *The Enchanted Woods*, Moore envelops her audience with floor-to-ceiling projections on three sides, effectively collapsing the divide between viewer and viewed. Woodland creatures look toward and beyond the spectator to each other as they appear on opposing walls. Sounds abound and rebound. Magic prevails. People and human-like creatures are everywhere. While embracing myth and historical literature, *The Enchanted Woods* also engages in a gentle critique of the cultural separation of urban and rural imaginaries.

The most recent production in this collection steps away entirely from live action and animated collage techniques characteristic of the previous works. *The Garden Party* was shot in a single take and involves no compositing or special effects. It would be a terrarium in the nude if it weren't for Jasa Baka's elaborate set of Louis XIV-inspired costumes made from old prom dresses and other thrift store finds. *The Garden*