

Rus Kitchin: Harbinger of Hallucination

Rus Kitchin is a cartographer of chaos, a librarian of lunacy, a harbinger of hallucination a translator of turmoil and a linguist of labyrinths. There are gods in here and demons. There are rituals and omens, prayers and mantras. Kitchin is travelling down a path perhaps not dissimilar to that of William S. Burroughs when he consumed peyote in the Mexican desert or that of William Gibson when he evoked the spirit of Candomblé in his ground-breaking novel *Neuromancer* or Matthew Barney when he evokes the belief system of Candomblé as an influence on his infamous *Cremaster Cycle*:

“For practitioners of Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion, the deity Ogun is the god of both iron and war. As the creator of iron, he makes the blade to cut away the primordial forest and create civilization. With this same knife, he has the ability, too, to take the life of another. In the way that Candomblé uses nature as a lens for understanding the world, Ogun is particularly attractive to me as a creation myth whose function is to describe a balance between creative and destructive energy.”ⁱ

With his montage-style approach Kitchin’s ‘knife’ is digital, plundering materials from around the globe to create a ‘world’ of epic proportions. Other sects, cults, mutated versions of the Aztecs, Cuba’s Santería, Brazil’s Candomblé, Haiti’s Vodun and syncretisms invaded Kitchin’s psyche via mystics from Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia, to say nothing of that newest and most virulent of religions: Consumerism, a notion wonderfully explored in Neil Gaiman’s 2001 epic novel *American Gods* – now an hallucinogenic television series – in which the Old Gods of Norse, Celtic and Egyptian heritage go to battle with the New Gods of media, technology and celebrity culture.

Kitchin himself describes his panoramas as: “A multi-narrative meandering conduit of interwoven historical references, human follies, concepts, conflicting human paradigms with the sentience of the natural world bearing witness to, and grounding where possible, these threads. Like cross sections of the cosmic bottleneck of time and consciousness quantum physicists now talk of, or as the indigenous Hopi refer to, we are in now living in ‘the quickening.’”

These are worlds where East meets West, where the ancient world and its beliefs collide with new technology, where the animistic and mechanistic form uneasy bedfellows. In *Worlds* (2017) ancient deities rendered as a giclée archival print mounted on di-bond and resin, become pixelated data. If Kitchin were a film-maker the results would hover somewhere between *Koyaanisqatsi – Life Out of Balance* (1982)ⁱⁱ and the Wachowski’s *The Matrix* (1999) with a dash of Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain* (1973).

Kitchin says that he began this series in 2005, inspired by his travels to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City two decades earlier where he first encountered Pre-Colombian bark cloth codices. Fascinated by this palimpsest of images and language he set about creating his own visual discussion and debate.

“An important aspect of my work over the last decade is the very deliberate and conscious effort to develop a visual ‘language’ that is the antithesis of the visual aesthetic that represents and propagates contemporary popular culture,” he says.

The result is a fecund realm, a personalised vocabulary of glyphs, Hindu and Mayan Gods jostle for space and life forms of all sorts intermingle with hints of relics from Cyberia. Skulls and the faces of indigenous tribesmen peer out from the cacophony and Kitchin’s fascination with anthropology and ethnography and his ongoing research and travels to obscure temples and shrines around the globe all meld in a stew of bright colours and movement. His visits to Aztec and Egyptian ruins feed into this electronic buzz while giant butterflies and humming birds narrowly evade collision with aircraft

There is something more than a little daunting when confronted with Kitchin’s magnificently exuberant oeuvre. The dazzling colours; the insanely detailed textures; the bizarre sculptural formations, the hallucinogenic visions. The crazed leaps from media to media, subject to subject. Horology, labyrinths, floristry, cosmology, mathematics, Psychopathology, Cryogenics, Combinatorics, Philology and Geometry can all be imprinted on Kitchin’s Worlds. There may be a hint of nostalgia for an aesthetic that thrived in the drug-fuelled late 1960s and early ’70s, the crazed colouration of Woodstock and a soundtrack propelled by lysergic acid and the theories of Timothy Leary. But equally there are hints of the primitivism of the New York graffiti movement and the works of such giants as Jean-Michel Basquiat. (unsurprisingly, Kitchin himself worked as a graffiti artist under the *nom de plume* AIM).

In a number of artists’ statements Kitchin has attempted to describe his inspirations and working methods. But in reality Rus Kitchin’s Worlds are inexplicable, as mysterious as our own ‘real’ world.

– *Dr. Ashley Crawford*

ⁱ Matthew Barney in Arthur C. Danto, ‘A Dialogue on Blood and Iron,’ p.62-69.

ⁱⁱ Ground-breaking experimental film directed by Godfrey Reggio with music by Philip Glass and cinematography by Ron Fricke.