

The Alternative Guide to the Universe

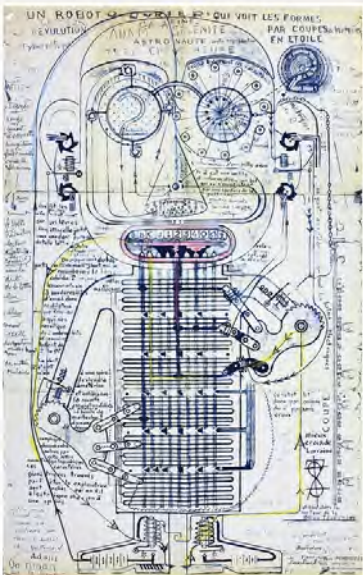


Rammellzee, Color Letter Racer Set, c.1988. And White Letter Racer Set, c.1991. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 © Estate of Carmela Zagari Rammellzee. Photo: Linda Nylin

The Hayward Gallery in London has recently opened a fairly eccentric exhibition filled with the works of outlandish inventors, maverick engineers, self-taught architects, and other people whose imagination won't stop at the laws of physics nor at the rules set by society.

Contributors to the exhibition explore fictional identities and design imaginary cities; they build healing machines and record the unseen energy flows of our bodies. They speculate on mysteries of time and space; create devices for time travel and communication with other dimensions; and fashion new letter forms designed to liberate the alphabet from the strictures of Western civilization.

The Alternative Guide to the Universe is never dull nor predictable. And it is as much about artworks, models and speculation as it is about the stories and personalities of the individuals behind them..



Jean Perdrizet, Untitled, Un robot ouvrier qui voit les formes par coupes de vecteurs en étoile (Worker robot who sees shapes in star-like vectoral planes), 1970

Take Jean Perdrizet for example. He was a civil engineer who lost his job because of mental health troubles. Around 1955 he became an "inventor", stretching the limits of physics, drawing and prototyping machines to communicate with ghosts or aliens. He also invented a language, the "sideral esperanto" that enabled all humans to understand each other but also to communicate with extra-terrestrials. His machines are lost, only the intricate drawing, plans and mathematical formulas remain.



Lee Godie, Lee and Cameo on a chair...., early to mid 1970s © the artist. Courtesy Richard and Ellen Sandor Family Collection



Lee Godie, Untitled Photograph (Photo booth Self-Portrait)

Lee Godie is the one who fascinated me the most. Godie was living on the streets of Chicago in the late 1960s. She called herself a French Impressionist and was selling her drawings and paintings on the steps of the Art Institute. So far, so almost normal. What makes Godie a star of the Hayward show are the theatrical self-portraits she was taking inside a photo-booth at the bus station. She'd bring along accessories, bits of fabric and other props to build different personae. She would then add bright colour to her lips or paint her eye brows in a Scouse fashion. Godie was thus doing theatrical self-portraits long before Cindy Sherman did. And long before celebs started invading twitter with 'selfies.'



Lee Godie, Untitled



Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, Untitled, 1940s



Lee Godie, Four Photos (Photo booth Portraits)



Eugene von Bruenchenhein, from *Untitled*, 1940s. Photograph: Hayward Gallery/© 2013 Lewis B Greenblatt



Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, *Untitled (Bonnet)*, 1940s © 2013 Lewis B. Greenblatt, all rights reserved. Courtesy Lewis and Jean Greenblatt



Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, *Untitled (Green Background)*, 1940s © 2013 Lewis B. Greenblatt, all rights reserved. Courtesy Lewis and Jean Greenblatt

He is romantic in me is charmed by a self-taught photographer who sees his wife as his muse and takes thousands of photos of her dressed as a pin-up, wearing little more than cascades of pearls or donning Christmas tree decorations on her head, referably against a rococo backdrop. From the early 1940s to the mid-1950s, Eugene Von Bruenchenhein documented the Marie's beauty but even when she is sked, the portraits have more tenderness than kinkiness.



Bodys Isek Kingelez, *Mundial Isek Sport*, 1989. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 © the artist. Photo: Linda Nyilind



Installation view of works by BODYS ISEK KINGELEZ at 'Alternative Guide to the Universe' exhibition, Hayward Gallery 2013 © the artist. Photo: Linda Nyilind

Bodys Isek Kingelez uses cardboard, candy wrappers and other materials found in the streets of Kinshasa to make what he calls Extrêmes maquettes (Extreme Models) of extravagant buildings and utopian cities. They look neither purely African, nor European, even when they bear the name of a European city. I wouldn't say that they are futuristic either. In truth, these buildings can't be assigned to any architectural movement. They are in a league of their own.



Richard Greaves, *The House with Windows*, 2005 © the artist. Courtesy Mario del Curto



Richard Greaves, *The House with Windows*, 2005 © the artist. Courtesy Mario del Curto

Richard Greaves sculpts houses as much as he builds them. Like many of the artists in the exhibition, Greaves is self-taught. He never learnt to be an architect. Yet, his constructions successfully defy the laws of gravity. The cabins and shelters he erects in the middle of the forest in Canada are made from abandoned barns which he



Rammellzee, *Color Letter Racer Set*, c.1988. And *White Letter Racer Set*, c.1995. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 © E. of Carmela Zagari Rammellzee. Photo: Linda Nyilind

Rammellzee's graffiti and art work are based on his theory of Gothic Futurism. He imagined a world in which letters of the alphabet would arm and liberate them from the slavery and corruption of language. Made from found objects and customised skateboards, his Letter Racers are flying armoured vehicles poised for linguistic and galactic warfare. His style is stunning. Why had I never heard of him before?



Yulu Wu, *Remote Controlled Cart with Clothing (Yao Kong Chuan Yi Xiao La Che)*, 2013. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 ©

light cigarettes, or take him to market. The Hayward is showing the small robot that climbs a wall and a child robot that chases people (as Ralph Rugoff, Director of the Gallery and Curator of the show, pertinently noted, it's not a coincidence if a man from the country of the one child policy decided to build himself a little boy.)

I'm going to stop here because unfinished, unpolished, unpublished posts are piling up and i need to move on but in an ideal life, i'll find the time to write about Karl Hans Janke, the man who discovered the 'radiation-free German Atom'; Philip Blackmarr and his theory of 'quantum geometry'; or Emery Blagdon who built a 'Healing Machine' from wire, copper, aluminium foil, Christmas tree lights, ribbons, beads, leaves, butterfly wings, magnets and 'earth elements': i cannot vouch for the scientific soundness of their theories but i'm glad an art gallery has given them a chance to expose them to the public.



Morton Bartlett, *Untitled*, c.1950s. © Morton Bartlett and Marion Harris. Courtesy The Museum of Everything



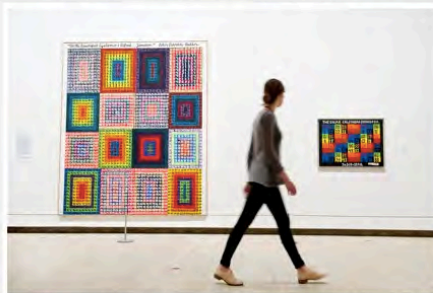
Morton Bartlett, *Untitled*, c. 1950. Photograph: Hayward Gallery/© The Bartlett Project, LLC



Paul Laffoley, *Thanaton III*, 1989. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 © the artist. Photo: Linda Nylind

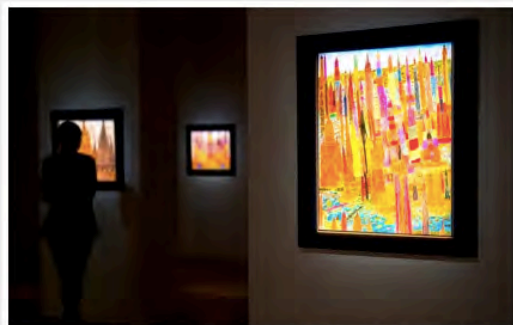


Paul Laffoley, *The World Self*, 1967. Installation view 'Alternative Guide to the Universe', Hayward Gallery 2013 © the artist. Photo: Linda Nylind

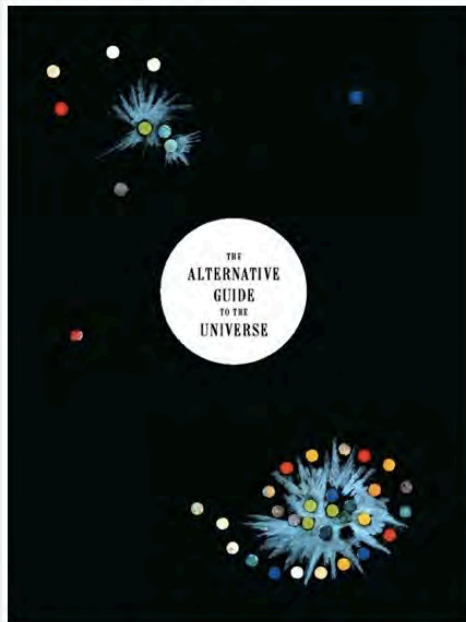


Installation view of works by ALFRED JENSEN at 'Alternative Guide to the Universe' exhibition, Hayward Gallery 2013 © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2013. Photo: Linda Nylind

If you can't make it to London, i guess that the next best thing is to get your hands on the [catalogue](#) *The Alternative Guide to the Universe: Mavericks, Outsiders, Visionaries*. It's on amazon [.co.uk](#) and [.com](#) .



Installation view of works by MARCEL STORR at 'Alternative Guide to the Universe' exhibition, Hayward Gallery 2013. © Liliane and Bertrand Kempf. Photo: Linda Nylind



Alternative Guide to the Universe is at the [Hayward Gallery](#) in London until 26