

‘Sooner or Later’ Artists Imagine the Future as a Place We Want to Be

By Sarah Hotchkiss
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Bonanza, Still from *Future 4ever Beta*, 2017. Courtesy of Southern Exposure.

It had me at hello. “If we do not imagine the future, someone else will do it for us,” reads the opening sentence of the press release for *Sooner or Later*, a group exhibition opening at Southern Exposure on Jan. 13. Yes, I said to myself. *Exactly*.

Curated by Oakland-based artist Torrey Cummings, *Sooner or Later* carries the impressive subtitle “A non-Euclidian vision of the future as a place to be,” borrowed from science fiction writer Ursula K. LeGuin’s 1982 paper “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be.” In it, LeGuin proposes utopia might be reachable not by moving forward, but “only roundabout or sideways.” It had me at hello. “If we do not imagine the future, someone else will do it for us,” reads the opening sentence of the press release for *Sooner or Later*, a group exhibition opening at Southern Exposure on Jan. 13. Yes, I said to myself. *Exactly*.

“We have got ourselves into a really bad mess and have got to get out,” LeGuin wrote 35 years ago, “and we have to be sure that it’s the other side we get out to; and when we do get out, we shall be changed.” (Read the whole paper, it’s great.)

The five artists and collaboratives in *Sooner or Later* — Sofía Córdova, Bonanza, Jader, Grace Rosario Perkins and Richard-Jonathan Nelson — speculate on futures not necessarily

decreed by the relentless drive of technological progress. In other words, not all possible futures are slick, sterile environments filled with whooshing, self-opening doors.

Part of creating a future utopia, LeGuin argues, lies in identifying what is already utopian about our present. The artists in *Sooner or Later* present their alternative narratives in luscious, saturated tones, making the future less impossible, much more attractive, and possibly within our collective grasp.



Sofía Córdova, Still from 'Echoes of a Tumbling Throne (Odas al fin de los tiempos) #8: COERPOH A COERPOH,' 2016. (Courtesy of Southern Exposure)

Córdova continues her pre- and post-apocalyptic epic *Echoes of a Tumbling Throne (Odas Al Fin De Los Tiempos)*, a video and installation series filled with glamorous, otherworldly characters enacting elaborate music and dance-based rituals. The collaborative trio Bonanza, well-known for embracing just about every medium available to them (including fashion design) shows a new video “marked by camp aesthetics,” while the artist Jader constructs complex, surreal portraits of genderless, species-less beings.



Grace Rosario Perkins, 'Three Sisters, King and Queen' (detail), 2016. (Photo by CA Greenlee / Courtesy of Southern Exposure)

Perkins contributes her energetically colorful work in painting, sculpture and installation, creating objects that “disassemble and reassemble” her own personal narrative. And Nelson, a current California College of the Arts MFA student, collages image and color on large-scale textile work, creating what he calls a portal.

Within *Sooner or Later*, the gathered disparate artworks embody perhaps the most crucial element of LeGuin’s view of utopia — that it cannot be a place of totalitarianism.

'Sooner or Later: Non-Euclidean visions of the future as a place to be' is on view at Southern Exposure in San Francisco Jan. 13–Feb. 25, 2017. For more information, visit soex.org.