The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites

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The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites

by Jessica Bremehr

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Abstract

I often find myself dancing in a sort of delusion; a place where I set aside logic to let intuition guide my thinking and making. In these modes of thinking, I daydream about different ways of being and existing and visualize these daydreams through my art practice. While I take you on a journey through my daydreams and my musings on an alternate existence, a tour guide will lead the way through a narrative of an otherworldly realm called *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites*, reflective of a tourist experience to a faraway destination. *The Garden* provides an uncanny experience with imaginary life forms in an attempt to expand a sense of wonder and promote ideas of interconnectedness within the world around us.
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Before the Beginning

[ an introduction ]
In a time where life becomes more and more like fiction, it is hard to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Through painting, sculpture, and installation work, I create mythological narratives composed of characters at various stages of transformation reflecting an interest in science fiction and fantasy. Through my recent project, I built a world of imaginary life forms that exist in an alternate realm called *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites*.

The work of an artist is, at times, solitary and isolating, as if you are an alien alone on a foreign planet, tinkering away at a language through creative devices that allow you to communicate with the external world. Visitors show up to art with their own baggage of past experiences and perspectives without any prerequisites from the artist. The visitor becomes a hitchhiker, who by definition travels by securing a free ride from passing vehicles. As an artist and an alien, I temporarily transport the hitchhiker to an alternate vision. I build my own world and with that my own rules and ways of thinking. In these worlds, I also become the hitchhiker in a parallel world of other artists.

Through the following text, I present a delusion where you, the reader, are the hitchhiker on a journey toward an alternate realm guided by a god-like buffoon. As I travel through the research and inspiration behind my work, the prose of the tour guide will break the journey into four stops, reflective of a tourist experience to a faraway destination. The tour guide will introduce you to the area while I take you on a stroll along my daydreams, my contemplations on an alternate existence, and the cultural residue within my aesthetic choices. The tour will culminate in *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites* where curious life forms converge with familiar objects to cultivate an otherworldly realm, in turn, expanding a sense of wonder while promoting ideas of interconnectedness within the world around us.
1st Stop:

Welcome to Deee-Lite Tours

[ the importance of daydreaming ]
On behalf of Deee-Lite Tours, I welcome you on a journey toward The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites. As your guide, I will help you along this tour providing you information, so you can exist in this delusion. Trust me, everything is deee-lite-ful. Feel free to listen to the other voices, whether it be in this text or in your head.

As we turn the corner, we will be exploring paintings of unreal places and surreal spaces while taking a closer look at how we arrived on this tour. As a safety precaution, be aware of your surroundings as gestures and colors may be blinding. A human-like being will provide some context before we exit Earth, so keep your eyes tuned.

We will be arriving at The Garden in a few minutes. For your own sanity, I ask that you set logic aside in order to access the weirder parts of your brain. To indicate that you want to get on or off the tour, raise both your hands and cover your eyes and repeat until someone asks you, what’s wrong? And most importantly, enjoy the views.

While we are waiting for the tour to progress, I would like to ask you a question to get things started. If you were capable of being anything but human, what might you be?
Throughout my work, I daydream different ways of existing through cognitive realms. If I were anything but human, I would be a plant. And if I were a plant, I’d be a Billy Button. Scientists would call me Caspedia Globosa, but you would call me a Billy Button; a curious and bright yellow flower; tough and strong, standing tall on a dainty, green stem; blooming once a year to continue my family lineage. I am native to Australia, and there I would live, soaking up the sun’s rays while enjoying the dry heat. My flowers would look like a tennis ball, but the size of a ping pong. You would find me very interesting, so interesting that you might kidnap me and whisk me away from my home. I would travel across seas to your swanky apartment in an up-and-coming neighborhood in the United States. I would be placed in a manufactured vase from HomeGoods, on a raw wood table to dry in the stale air of your apartment. At first, I would be upset until I realize, I am the star of the room. Your visitors would ogle at me, oohing and ahhing as I stand-out among the other flora. Day after day, the sun would rise and set through a tiny window on the 15th floor. One day, everything will go dark, as I lay at the bottom of a trash bag under the chicken scraps from last night’s dinner.
When I was a child, daydreams took the form of imaginary friends including Sarah, George, and Tabatha, three of my closest friends. We walked through the woods together, built imaginary castles and treehouses while mixing potions of mud and water on boulders into bubbly porridge. I shared imaginary tea with the stuffed animals while disclosing my daily meanderings as a seven-year-old. I imagined myself capable of walking upside down and taking merry-go-rounds on the ceiling fan; anything was possible.

As I entered adulthood, daydreams turned into a way to contemplate the world around me. Eventually, these daydreams were revealed in my art practice, continually embodying the spirit of the *carnivalesque* and the *upside down*, a literary trope employed by Mikhail Bakhtin.\(^1\) Within the upside down, traditional rules and order are set aside, the world is inverted in order to upend social norms through the celebration of the possibility of affirmative change.\(^2\) In my understanding of Bakhtin’s ideas, social hierarchies are reversed, and madness and imperfection are celebrated. According to Bakhtin, a *carnivalesque* world celebrates freedom, equality, and abundance. This idea embodies the *upside down* I dreamed as a child and the transgressive nature of my work.

![Figure 1. Cartsen Höller, *Upside-Down Mushroom Room*, 2000.](image)
Art that engages with a variety of sensory play has the same ability to upend routine ways of looking and seeing the world by stimulating human perception. I am inspired by the sensorial environments of Cartsen Höller’s work. In his installation the *Upside Down Mushroom Room* (2000) (Fig.1), a room of hallucinatory mushrooms are flipped, secured on the ceiling, disorienting the visitor. I am inspired by these influential environments created by Höller, which intend to disorient human perception and by doing so, stimulate precognitive moments of pure sensation. Through his body of work, symbols of childhood are rearranged, testing our perceptions and guiding us toward self-exploration.

In a recent daydream, I had flowers for eyeballs; two fluorescent blooms sprouting through the eye sockets. What if you could embody the sun, the chair you are sitting in, and the animal byproduct of a hotdog? I find daydreams are a source of solace in a time of uncertainty, escaping to the clouds for a moment to return to solid ground with some semblance of clarity. As Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev states in her essay *Transcendence and Immanence in Some Art of Today*, the boundary between reality and dreams is permeable. My daydreams often reflect the trope of the *upside down*, which flows through my fingers and out to my work. The *upside down* involves the act of thinking beyond one’s body and looking underneath, inside, and outside of our reality.
Through the past year of lockdowns and quarantine, suffused within the uncertainty of political, social, and environmental unrest, I found myself embarking on daily solo quests through the city upon foot. In this solitude, I examined the relationship of humans and plants, and began studying phenomena and traditions revolving around the natural world. I began to rethink our relationship to the world around us, and how systems of thought alienate humans from our environment, which led me to contemplate whether plants can have emotions. Through these observations, it became evident that the human phenomena of metacognition plague our species with *superiority complex* that has alienated us from our environment and excluded other species, such as plants, from a potential shared sensorial and emotional realm. Can the leaves of trees feel the touch of my fingers when I walk by? Is the exchange of energy between species another form of communication in the world?

I started to rethink plants as sentient beings upon reading *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins. The book is humorous at times, peppered with outlandish experiments using polygraphs to test whether plants have feelings by placing them in hot cups of coffee. When supposing plants have emotions and feelings, there is a tendency to equate these experiences of feeling with the human experience of feeling; drawing an incomplete and simplified conclusion; plants are just like us. Our understanding and perceptions of plants is quite skewed. It is crucial to push the understanding and perception of plants beyond anthropomorphizing. When we place ourselves at the top of the biological hierarchy, we fail to conceive anything non-human as having the capacity for emotion or consciousness.

I was left questioning, what we from a human standpoint have glazed over when trying to understand other species. The disconnect between plants and humans is apparent in language, especially the verbal and the written. As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, science is responsible for
this disconnect as the Western world has been obsessed with the objectivity of science for over 500 years. Although perspectives are starting to change as we learn how forests and plant life communicate with each other, there are no words for describing the sensorial experience of plant life outside of a human perspective. The visual language allows you to return to a pre-cognitive state and engages a different part of your brain allowing one to explore different perspectives.

Through the visual language within my work, I attempt to bridge the gap between human beings and non-human beings that perhaps brings us closer to understanding other aspects of the world.

In response to this exploration, I created a series of paintings titled *Invasive* (2020) (Fig. 2,3,4) to imagine a tight knit bond to our natural surroundings. Humans are rather invasive, growing rapidly without any end in sight. In these paintings, the human finger and plant intertwine as separate beings, but knot together in a tight embrace, ultimately becoming a woven mass. The paintings are set in the colors of twilight during a Midwest sunset where anything seems possible. What if I was merely a finger, long with several joints rather than just two and capable of growing out of the ground like my plant partner?
Figure 2. Jessica Bremehr, *Invasive I*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 20 x 24 inches, 2020.
Figure 3. Jessica Bremehr, *Invasive II*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches, 2020.
Figure 4. Jessica Bremehr, *Invasive III*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 12 x 16 inches, 2020.
In Kimmerer’s collection of essays titled *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she contrasts Indigenous traditions with her research in Western biology and addresses the separation between humans and nonhumans. Kimmerer dissolves the barriers between the two and emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and interconnectedness between plants and people through the language of animacy. She writes,

The taking of another life to support your own is far more significant when you recognize the beings who are harvested as persons, nonhuman persons vested with awareness, intelligence, spirit—and who have families waiting for them at home. Killing a *who* demands something different than killing an *it*. When you regard those non-human persons as kinfolk, another set of harvesting regulations extends beyond bag limits and legal seasons. Through an indigenous worldview evident through language, the living world is appreciated as if it were a person, as if it were a part of the family. In the English language, the words for personhood, he, she, they, are reserved for human beings, but omit plants, animals, landscapes, and objects. These ways of categorizing reinforce dominance and societal hierarchies. With the reality of the industrialized world, the postindustrial society has no reverence for the natural world. If these hierarchies were demolished, perhaps humans would have more reverence and respect for their fellow roommates on Earth.

Through my recent sculptural work, I hint at a new possibility of interconnectedness between humans and nonhumans. I develop an alternate realm full of otherworldly species in *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites*. I break down the barrier of object vs. being in hopes to promote a sense of animacy toward the inanimate. Before reaching this point of contemplation in the natural world, I had to attempt to transcend the corporeal through painting, ultimately going through a sense of *ego death*. So first, I would like to explain how I reached this place of contemplation through a couple stops in my visual stew.
2nd Stop:

A place that only exists in my head

[ the narratives within my work ]
At this point you may be wondering where we are currently located on this tour. Well, the only thing I am certified to tell you is our approximate location is far away from Earth, but far away in a dream sort of way. At Deee-Lite Tours we do not provide special discounts for anything, because nothing is being sold here and there is no currency to speak of. Money is a social construct from Earth that blew away in the journey to get here. Advertisements are simply a tool for entertainment in this new reality. Extended stays are welcome with the exchange of gratitude for what you already have.

Up ahead, you will see imagery made up of paint molecules on bits of canvas and wood. Most of the imagery involves a transformation of something like you into something not quite like you. Human-like beings can be seen swimming in hypnotic patterns, becoming shadows, or melting out of focus. You can walk into their shoes and discover a psychic terrain or take a moonlit walk along the waters of your thoughts. Either way, let’s dive in.
Figure 5. Jessica Bremehr, *In Our Shadows*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019.
In my earlier work, I often painted myself as a nude comic character reflective of my experience as a young female dealing with depression and anxiety. During this period of my life, I was plagued by reoccurring adverse thoughts and emotions, unable to express or articulate them. I utilized painting to symbolize the psychic terrain left hidden in the void of my interior. In the painting, *In Our Shadows*, (2019) (Fig. 5), the figure sits within a domestic scene while the interiors of the body creep out of the skin interconnecting with the shadows. The painting is a metaphor for the pain hiding in the *shadow-self*, a term laid out by Carl Gustav Jung, which contains all the parts of our psyche that we conceal. The shadow is everything we deny within ourselves including those which bring us guilt and shame and would rather pass into oblivion.

As my work developed, I began to build worlds within my paintings. The female character moved from the domestic sphere toward a place of contemplation and dreamlike setting, existing in her own thought patterns. I utilized hypnotic patterns to reflect a mind in a trance state. In *Facing Another Realm* (2019) (Fig. 6), the female figure is in a state of transformation where her head is camouflaged by undulating patterns. In this psychological state, the body stays stagnant while the mind travels to alternate realms.

My aesthetic choices of vivid colors and wavy forms stem from an interest in psychedelia. Psychedelic drugs have the ability to refocus your thoughts and bring the subconscious to the surface similar to dreaming. I equate the experience of viewing undulating patterns to the feeling of being on psychedelics while mirroring the feeling of reoccurring thought patterns and emotions.

I gravitate to artists who live within this headspace including the work of Yayoi Kusama. I am interested in how the repetition of dots within Kusama’s work can create a sea of hypnotic
Figure 6. Jessica Bremehr, Warped, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019
patterns while simultaneously creating an organic shape. Through the use of intense vivid color and full to ceiling of intense patterns, Kusama creates an ecstatic state through the immersive experience.

I share Kusama’s obsession with repetition as a means to deep contemplation. Kusama once said, “A polka-dot has the form of the sun, which is a symbol of the energy of the whole world and our living life, and also the form of the moon, which is calm…. Polka dots are a way to infinity.”10 Within my work, I create paintings full of patterns and use color as language to convey an altered state of consciousness. The female, headless, frozen in a moment melts into a psychic state. The act of repeating patterns creates a stimulating effect or a meditative state for the body to exist, which translates to the act of viewing the painting, getting lost within a world of dots, globular shapes, and rolling repetition.
I once met Pipilotti Rist in a hole in the floor.¹¹ I was waiting at the entrance at MoMA PS1 in New York and a glimmer of vibrant light caught my eye on the ground below my feet. I found a screaming woman in a fiery flame within a tiny video display below my feet. Visitors were walking past, failing to give a second to the person stuck in the bath of lava.

After this choice encounter, I developed a fascination in the work of Pipilotti Rist and her playful approach to expansive questions of our bodies within the universe. Juliana Engberg writes about Pipilotti Rist’s work,

"I am a molecule; you are a molecule!" chants the disembodied voice that floats around the dark room. And yes, in the generous, lush, expansive, and fecund universe created by Pipilotti Rist, we are all but small, organic specks in a massive, corporeal cosmos—ever-connected, always reproducing, endlessly social and intriguing as we move through space and time, colliding with other molecular debris.¹² Her work draws a certain congruity between the macro and the micro. On a molecular level humans, plants, and animals are simply interacting through various means of bumping up against other molecules; one in the same. The atoms of humans and all of its byproducts feverishly reproducing with no end in sight.

As Lucretius said, all matter is made of atoms and molecules, which gather together for a time to create a sensible thing.¹³ But when that thing reaches death, then those atoms return to
their origins and transform into another form. This transformation is the natural ebb and flow of nature and humans are a multitude of these indestructible atoms and molecules, reconfigured in different ways. Lucretius states, “nothing exists but amalgams of matter and space.” Thus, what remains is a constant state of transformation.

My project, *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lite* reflects the notions laid by the notions of atomism. The inhabitants within *The Garden* are an *exquisite corpse* of Earth, a transformation of not the best atoms, not the worst molecules, just atoms and molecules. The amalgamation of parts questions what will come of all the atoms and molecules leftover when humans build mansions on Mars.

On a microscopic state, the atoms and molecules of the world are in a constant state of change and transformation. Conversely, on a macro level human are in a constant state of emotional change on a psychological level. Clarissa Pinkola Estés emphasizes the importance of recognizing psychological transformations to bring out our wild and natural creature. Estés draws from a curiosity in the wild woman archetype from a collection of intercultural myths in *Women Who Run with Wolves*. In these writings, Estés weaves various folklores of Central and South America. The characters within the stories live amongst wolves, embody swans, or obtain magical powers from ghostly bones of ancestors allegorically reconnecting with their repressed instinctual nature. Estés writes,

> Asking the proper question is the central action of transformation- in fairy tales, in analysis, and in individuation. The key question causes germination of consciousness. The properly shaped question always emanates from an essential curiosity about what stands behind. Questions are the keys that cause the secret doors of the psyche to swing open.  

I use my own work to test the doors of the psyche, which swing rapidly back and forth. Figures take on different shapes and gestures alluding to a transformation into something other than human much like a vision in mythology.
I create illusions mixing representational images with imaginary forms to invoke a body in a surreal space. In the domestic space presented in *I think I’ll just stay home tonight*, (2019) (Fig. 7), a pink figure is in mid-transformation consumed by biomorphic shapes. The biomorphic shapes consist of patterns reminiscent of textiles, plants, and the cosmos. Without these patterns, the biomorphic shapes would otherwise be lifeless. The globular shapes serve as a metaphor for discarded thoughts called brain garbage; the never-ending inner dialogue that reproduces itself tirelessly, creating an infinite landfill of thoughts. The brain garbage explodes into pieces of pleasure and pain, spreading like a parasite, and oozing out into the exterior world. Gradually, the brain garbage migrated from a 2-dimensional painting to a 3-dimensional sculpture called *Hoover* (2020) (Fig. 8), the first inhabitant of *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites*.

At this point, my work transitioned from a space less involved in the interiors of a psychological state toward an external otherworldly space. My painting named *Portal* (2020) (Fig. 9) marks this transition. The imagery of reverberating, vivid green appendages reflect the natural world. The appendages part in the center creating a small opening where a green pea looks the visitor in the eye. The *Portal* marks an escape into another realm and another place of being.
Figure 7. Jessica Bremehr, *I think I’ll just stay home tonight*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 16 x 16 inches, 2019.
Figure 8. Jessica Bremehr, *Hoover*, papier-mâché, pumice stone, acrylic, flashe paint, rubber tongues, expandable foam, rubber plants, 18 x 16 x 64 inches, 2020
3rd Stop:

Last view from Earth

[ my aesthetic choices ]
Let me say a few words about the history of Deee-Lite Tours. Now you may be asking, what does this have to do with art, as you know it? Please be patient. These things must not be rushed.

Deee-Lite Tours can be traced back to the beginning of painting. On Earth, cave dwellers scribbled on rocks 30,000 years ago to map out their existence in the universe. Well on second thought, I must not cloud your thoughts with too many historical meanderings in order to keep your brain in the present moment.

In a few minutes, we will encounter extraterrestrial beings, but not in a classic Hollywood science fiction sort of way with the slimy green bodies or the shiny silver hoses, but do not fret, there will be plenty of hoses. For their safety, please do not feed any of the beings.

But first, let’s take a look out the window to see the last hairy bit of information before we leave Earth. Absorb the final views and mentally photograph everything you may see, but do abandon them at the next stop.
After stumbling upon the Chicago Imagists during a visit to Chicago, I quickly gravitated to the loud graphic quality and in-your-face compositions of Jim Nutt’s work. In that moment, I found my long-lost art cousin. The work had a strange ability to scream at you in a silent room, echoing tactics from advertisements and graphics from pinball machines. In my own work, I use a palette of loud, saturated colors and gestural qualities stemming from a similar web of influence from cultural milieu, yet with a personal underpinning.

I am simply an earthling, just like you, using my eyeballs as a vacuum sucking up any inspiration that floats by and spitting it out through my hands. On an average day, I meditate on the gestures of plant-life within my apartment. As a result, I absorb so much from the potted creatures in the way they wiggle their way from dirt toward maturity and shifting daily with the direction of the sun. Even the simple walks through the city provide an entry point to a new idea. I look to the old trees in my neighborhood that bulge out of the concrete breaking their roots loose from the sidewalk.
Jessica Bremehr, *Warped*, acrylic, gouache on wood panel, 9 x 12 inches, 2019
When I am not walking around sucking up inspiration from the outside, I am looking at my dusty collection of thrifted books from yesteryear, which may be unimpressive to most, but for me they serve as a portal to another era. In a way, I am scraping through the excess from pop culture to create new forms of being. I am particularly tantalized by the images throughout my collection of 1960s *Time Life Science* books including those focused on microbiology, cellular biology and matter. The illustrations through these dusty books inform the patterns throughout my work with the addition of strong contrasting colors.

Color is a form of language. The clash of bubblegum pink and fire red have the ability to vibrate the senses and cause for alarm, excitement, pleasure, and exhaustion. The same strategies have extended throughout my sculptural work. I paint the sculptures in a similar contrast of muted tones like olive green and beige dance with the acid colors of cherry red to create patterns reminiscent of cartoons.

Growing up in the age of Nickelodeon, cartoons were my first exposure to storytelling. Cartoons were a way to learn about the important stuff in life while set in a fantasyland. I can see some semblance in my current work to the characters of *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* and *Looney Tunes*. I am intrigued by the way character actions are amplified through stretching and bulging. These formal choices can be translated into my paintings and sculptural work as seen in *The Watering Hole* (2021). Serpentine forms twist around bulbous shapes calling to mind rubber-hose cartoons.
of the past, yet the hose takes on its own identity detached from a human body existing in another world.

As I continued to build the otherworldly environment of *The Garden*, I looked to artists involved in world building; an imaginary space governed by their own imagination. Luigi Seranfini’s created an encyclopedia called *Codex Seraphinianus* (1981) (Fig. 10) written in an imaginary language full of imaginary creatures and inventions. Plants meld with machines, creatures, and furniture in a surreal world. While a couple copulates, their bodies metamorphosizes into a crocodile. The encyclopedia is indecipherable to anyone but the artist himself, existing as a visual guide to an alien world. I also looked to Rene Laloux’s animated film *Fantastic Planet* (1973) (Fig. 11) featuring blue giants who rule over their human plaything on another planet filled with imaginary life forms.

![Figure 10. Luigi Saranfini, Codex Seraphinianus, 1981.](image1)

![Figure 11. René Laloux, Fantastic Planet, animated film, 1973.](image2)
In addition, I looked to Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490 – 1500) as a source of storytelling, formal choices, and the chaotic nature for my own garden. In Bosch’s painting, human bodies and natural wonders conjoin together to create hybrid creatures. Many of the figures appear to be in a transitional state, dancing among architectural curiosities. Similar to my predecessors, I am interested in melding the natural world with the residue of pop culture and imaginary life forms in *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites* (2021).
Final Stop:

The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites
At this moment we have arrived at our destination. I would first like to take a minute to un-familiarize you with Earth, as you know it, and introduce you to the area. You might find that your surroundings remind you of Earth, a wig here and a flower there, but Earth, fortunately, is far, far, far away from here.

Here in The Garden, you will be introduced to a stew of odds and ends congealed together into new life forms. You may see things you might remember but altered in a way that makes you question their origins. Not to worry. You must not be concerned with these sorts of details. I assure you; you are not alone. There are others here, but life here is not what you remember from Earth. Here, organisms live in a symbiosis mutually benefitting from their fellow hitchhikers. You may remember Earth was far too greedy and ravenous. Here, we are all merely atoms and you are just a walking amalgamation of those same atoms. Your fellow hitchhikers made do with what they could find before leaving earth; paper, flour, limestone, synthetic materials stewed at room temperature utilizing mass produced items from culture to get by. Please do not swim here. But what does it matter what they or I are made of? Here, you’ll like them either way. You may be thinking, are these lifeless objects or simply 3-dimensional representations of forms? No, my dear visitor, you are just moving at full speed like you remember doing on earth, and here your fellow visitors are moving in slow motion. Have you forgotten so quickly?

A human-like voice will tunnel into your ear as we explore The Garden, so please keep your voices below a
swarm of locusts. Any human chatter could throw off the stasis of The Garden.

Please step back and enjoy the views as we enter The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites. I ask that you remain in your heads until we have come to a complete stop. It is customary here to squat before standing. Heather will be meeting us at the entrance to help you with your globular brain baggage. Please double check to make sure your baggage has been removed and recycled in the receptacles provided. On behalf of Deee-Lite Tours, have a wonderful visit.
Upon entering The Garden, one comes face-to-face with extraterrestrial life forms. The inhabitants of The Garden are an exquisite corpse of Earth made up of parts assembled to result in a new existence. In the process of creating this body of work, I took on a god-like role and built a world governed by my intuition in an attempt to create life outside of myself.

The Garden is in the shape of a geodesic dome, which ties the space to exploration, astronomy, and the celestial sphere. The original design popularized by Futurist architect Buckminster Fuller in 1948 modeled the geometric patterns to nature, marveling at structures of crystals, flowers, and seeds. The organic lines and shapes within my sculptural work suggest plants, insects, animals, coinciding with the natural origins of the geodesic dome.

The visitor walks through the entrance of the dome, following the path between the organisms like Dorothy and Toto along the yellow brick road, finding curiosities along the way. The environment is illuminated by a pink, orange glow; sustaining for many moons, and providing the right exposure to light for the inhabitants.

Within The Garden, the inhabitants are primarily made up of chewed paper mixed with a stew of rudimentary materials including paper, cardboard, and adhesive along with ground sheetrock. Walking through The Garden, one might see these beings as simply sculptures of inanimate materials, but my exploration and research on the language of animacy has brought me to realize these objects as more than rock and glue. The materials make the beings feel frozen in time, but they are ever evolving molecules and atoms shifting through time. They contain memory from a past life of gypsum and lime deposits with the force of human creativity, the collision of reality and fantasy. Rocks are millions upon trillions and trillions of years old, a lifespan far beyond that of the average human. Are we so superior, when in reality we are the newcomers to Earth?
Moving through *The Garden* the visitor encounters *Ingrown Hair* (Fig. 10); a being made from a long golden wig stands in a round cascading like a fountain. The hairy being speaks in a high-pitched sound out of range to human visitors. An olive-green sprout with neon yellow, spiked buds protrudes from the center part. Once upon a time, the life form grew back into the golden wig causing inflammation until the sprout poked itself through the scalp of the hair fountain. An ingrown hair is often a condition that results from hair removal. If we remove a vain part of ourselves, might a new life form be revealed?

On the edge of *The Garden*, *Hoover* (Fig. 12) hovers over the ground. I created *Hoover* as a meeting place for many species; each species twisting and turning around each other. I wanted to create a narrative within one sculpture. Species appear to be producing offspring, others are wrapped in an embrace expressing affection, and others hang docile. I painted most of the skin of the beings with imagery of microscopic cells; metaphorically correlating the painted patterns to another layer of life on the skin.

In the presence of Hoover, you can find the existence of seven different species who consist of cells from the microcosms of Earth, interstellar clouds, Medusa Merger Galaxy, and a solar flare. The seven species live in a symbiosis, mutually benefitting off one another. A cone flower that pokes out of solidified smoke houses amoeba from a public swimming pool. In this realm anything is possible. Galaxies of great scale can be held in your hand while micro-organisms can make up other species.
Figure 12. Jessica Bremehr, *Hoover* (Installation view), 2020.
In the past year, I became intrigued by the biological illustrations of Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel while working alongside Charles Darwin, made an attempt to research every crevice of the Earth, discovering species across the world. Haeckel illustrated species on a macro and micro level creating detailed renders of cellular structures. On a micro level, a distant world exists in our fingertips and under our toes, yet we are unable to see this world with the naked eye. Within this microscopic world, I see amoeba as microscopic shapeshifters and ambiguously erotic in the way they maneuver.

In the center of *The Garden* resides *The Watering Hole* (2021). Many species twist around one another communicating through body language. The patterns as seen in (Fig. 13) are reflective of Haeckel’s biological illustrations of crustacean cells (Fig. 14). Another place in *The Garden* where life lives among life mutually benefitting from one another.
Figure 15. Jessica Bremehr, Sunny, cardboard, papier-mâché, acrylic, flashe paint, fake plant, rubber tongue, 6 x 4 x 16 inches, 2020.
Figure 17. Jessica Bremehr, Betty (installation view), papier-mâché, pumice stone, acrylic, flashe paint, rubber tongues, 16 x 48 inches, 2020.
Sunny (2020) (Fig. 15) hangs from the atmosphere of The Garden over the inhabitants. Tubular parts meld together in a unified form and a rubber plant and tongue hang loose from the crevices. The tongues throughout The Garden exist to help detect and transmit outside invaders to all of the inhabitants. The organism is covered in fluorescent orange amoeba set against a neon yellow background; a product of a nuclear collision between molecules of a banana and antifreeze. As one walks through The Garden, a combination of two species forms one figure called Noni (2021) (Fig. 16). The collision of two species forced out another tongue for an extra alarm system for The Garden.

Around the corner we meet Betty, (2020) (Fig. 17) a being with an elongated neck and triangular body stores a collection of rubber tongues. Betty’s neck bulges in the center like a goose swallowing a rock. Their neck extends into a serpentine formation that wraps around and twists at a point. The bulb drops from their body creating a regeneration, visually reminiscent of the tuberous root of a Dahlia plant.
Perfect timing hitchhikers. I was hoping Betty would drop their clone before we had to return to our regular thinking. Betty’s bulb is about to split into fragments; each fragment developing into a mature clone genetically and morphologically identical to their parent. A stew of extracted paper, glue, adhesive, and paint from Earth living under sensual light produces a clone waiting to drop into their own being, which is metaphorically reflective of ancient forms of life carrying on. Betty is wrapped in a pattern of fluorescent orange amoeba with black centers. The tiny black voids within the amoeba invoke the feeling of infinity, a life within a life. A notion that life always seems to find a way. The clone will imprint on the first organism they see, so as to not disturb the environment, we best be on our way.

Throughout the atmosphere of The Garden, a programmed voice named Heather fills the air. Heather is an AI stuck in the algorithmic style of meditation, which has risen to popularity in the mindfulness movement. Heather is the inner monologue of The Garden. The meditation is a reflection of our earthly desires including the unending obsession with branded clothing, the lure of chain restaurants, and applauses from social media.

Breath in and out.

In tuning out, under the guise of mindfulness, we are tuning out the awareness of the world around us and centering on awareness of the self. But tuning out is not enough, Heather reveals even she desires a new way of life toward an otherworldly existence away from the human-centric world of Earth.
Breath in and out.

The mindfulness movement only touches on a snippet of the sacred prayer. One is encouraged to accept what we cannot change, to let go of the noise and let the bombardment of a crumbling Earth be another swipe on Instagram. What is lost in the remaining prayer is the encouragement to change the conditions that lead to stress and imagine a new way of life sprouting from the promise of change. As the Buddha says, “He who is mentally concentrated, sees things according to reality.” Yet, the reality that mirrors corporatized mindfulness seems to be clouding the true reality.

Although meditation practices help to tune out the mental reverb from stress and potentially lessen anxiety and other mental inhibitors, Ronald Purser writes in his book *McMindfulness* (2019),

Mindfulness is nothing more than basic concentration training. Although derived from Buddhism, it’s been stripped of the teachings on ethics that accompanied it, as well as the liberating aim of dissolving attachment to a false sense of self while enacting compassion for all other beings. What remains is a tool of self-discipline, disguised as self-help.

In the past few years, the word mindfulness has exploded into a tag-phrase used everywhere to encourage an awareness on the present moment and to acknowledge one’s feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Meanwhile the surface of mindfulness has been absorbed everywhere from yoga studios to KFC, which capitalizes on the ideas of meditation to sell pot pies.

*Heather* reflects these notions, but in contrast her mantra is a mixture of meditation and daydreaming; a chain of thoughts and images of Earth combined with a quest for another existence. In the end, the simulated voice of *Heather* starts to question their own existence, resulting in an existential crisis. Are we accelerating to the wrong place? It seems the human world is growing and evolving while simultaneously moving backwards.
Toward the end of the visit to *The Garden, Heather* decomposes into the ambient sounds of the environment and the visitor is encouraged to let go of oneself and soak into the sensorial landscape. The visitor is urged to contemplate their connection with the inhabitants and, in the end, the world outside of *The Garden of Extraterrestrial Deee-Lites.*
CLOSING REMARKS

[ a conclusion ]
Artist Erika Blumenfeld emphasizes the importance of wonder engagement in connecting ourselves with the world around us. She suggests, “perhaps a daily practice of wonder engagement could be a path to empathetic response and decision making in the face of our time’s great social and environmental uncertainty.”

We are indeed in a time of uncertainty. The world around us feels unconnected and out of touch with anything but ourselves. If we can think outside of ourselves for a moment, we can better connect with the world around us for a more compassionate existence. Christov-Bakargiev notes in her essay Transcendance and Immanence in Some of Art Today,

artists are indulging and exploring strong responses to disembodiment and ecstatic or visionary experience. Yet, they are also confirming the importance of being aware of the mechanisms that allow for these experiences, questioning the desire for detachment. While they go along with our desire to transcend and escape reality, they also counter that impulse by grounding our experience of their artworks in the physical world, thus celebrating the here and now.

Gardens are historically a place for reflection, wonder, and reconnection with nature. In providing a place to witness a gathering of the beings unlike you or me in The Garden, I hope to provide a place for contemplation for our own bodies in space, provide an expanded sense of interconnectedness and reverence for the microscopic and commonplace natural wonders of the world.

At this time, we have reached the end of our tour. As we return to Earth, I ask that you take with you all that you have absorbed through your pores along with the chemical reactions in your brains but be sure to remain in your heads until we step back into Earth’s reality. Once the human-like voice fails to fill your brain with any more information, hitchhikers may prepare to disembark from
this journey. Please double check to make sure your brain has been safely restored to its human-like positions, and everything you have witnessed can be stowed away for further reflection. On behalf of Deee-Lite Tour have a wonderful life on Earth. May it be filled with compassion for more than your earthly desires onto an otherworldly existence. I hope to meet you in another realm.

Endnotes


5 a term coined by Alfred Adler in the early 1900s.


7 Robin Wall Kimmerer is a botanist, writer, and an enrolled member of The Citizen of Potawatomi Nation.

8 Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 183.

9 a complete transformation of the psyche as recognized in Buddhist traditions. A person improves his or her past life and makes radical change. In Jungian Psychology, this term is synonymous with a psychic death.


Bibliography


