

Art in America

Exhibition Reviews

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JENNIFER AND KEVIN McCOY

Postmasters

For their recent show at Postmasters, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy presented eight miniature landscapes, each displayed on a small wall-hung shelf and made of materials such as tar, sand, dirt and plastic toys (all works 2012). The dioramas depict anonymous non-places, identified by titles such as *Along the Roadside*, *Behind the Hillside*, *Next to the Parking Lot*. The exhibition title, “Twenty One Twelve,” dates the scenes 100 years in the future.

In most of the models, a photograph functions as a partial backdrop. Several of the pictures portray sites in Abu Dhabi, where the couple lived for a year while Kevin helped NYU launch an art program at its campus there. A 2011 exhibition at Postmasters served as a dispatch from the UAE capital. By contrast, this exhibition took a wider view, suggesting a narrative about the consequences of rapid development not only in Abu Dhabi but globally.

Small LCD screens embedded in the models often feature manipulated footage of the photographic backdrops or related scenes. For example, in *Along the Roadside*, a panoramic photo of a cement factory is placed behind what looks like a barren, polluted mound. Toward the front of the diorama, a screen appearing like an electronic billboard shows an image of the factory and a recurring explosion of light, alluding to the plant’s ruin and the subsequent devastation of the surrounding environment.

In the case of *Behind the Hillside*—which looks like a dump, heaped with toy detritus—the LCD seems to be just another discarded item, underscoring the waste produced by consumption. Delicate miniature cranes and pieces from an Erector Set are combined with a photo of a gated home in *Near the New Villas*. The frequent appearance of these little toys lends the models a sinister whimsy, representing construction and destruction as child’s play.

In the back room, two more dioramas were installed on tables. Two small video cameras were trained on each and captured the scenes as well as visitors’ hands or faces. A computer algorithm transformed the footage into kaleidoscopic patterns, which were projected onto nearby walls. What sounded like a theme song for a sci-fi thriller played on a loop. One of these table pieces, *Priest of the Temple*, includes a photo of Gordon Moore, the cofounder of Intel and namesake of Moore’s Law. In a 1965 paper, Moore stated that the number of transistors on a silicon computer chip would double every two years. But, in 2005, he updated



Jennifer and Kevin McCoy: *Between the Resorts*, 2012, paper, balsa wood, plastic, LCD screen and mixed mediums, 11 by 16 by 20 inches; at Postmasters.

this prediction, saying that such exponential growth would not last forever: “The nature of exponentials is that you push them out and eventually disaster happens,” he said. He claimed that, after approaching microscopic sizes, chips would have to be made larger at a higher cost.

Moore’s image loomed as a reminder of a technological barrier, and the works in the exhibition foretell other obstacles. A century in the future, the world may resemble the one we know, but the planet’s ability to absorb the burdens that humans place on it may well have surpassed its limit. Unlike computer chips, Earth cannot be redesigned and made bigger. The McCoys’ small models illustrated the magnitude of that reality.

—Zoe Larkins