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Danial Nord
Cloud Nine
Torrance Art Museum
September 22 – November 10, 2018

By Jody Zellen



During the last year, San Pedro based artist Danial Nord might have been seen on his hands and knees in parks and on beaches casting his sculptures. He often used public spaces for building sand molds from which he created clear polycarbonate body parts— heads, limbs and torsos. These fragments were later meticulously assembled and combined with custom electronics to create uncanny figures with a glowing aura. Nord incorporates both high technologies and no technology (like found objects) to create spot on artworks that span personal and universal themes ranging from racism and deportation, to cell phone dependence, toxic pollution and the effects of global warming.

Though dark, the gallery in which Nord's installation Cloud Nine is exhibited is alive with celestial light and electronic noises. Six figures (each representing a different aspect of contemporary society) float in the space, suspended from the ceiling by cords that deliver current. Illuminated from within, these hunched over characters — a Businessman, Gunman, Mother, Alien, Illegal and Angel— are isolated and focused on their cellphones. Nord's figures are assemblages of disparate found and fabricated objects with limbs that are a combination of translucent plastic and driftwood or other elongated materials that suggest arms, legs and feet. Their torsos contain the appropriate anatomy (penis or breasts) in addition to seemingly random

objects that allude to the character's role within the installation. Each body is lit by pulsating electronic signals that ebb and flow. The illumination, as well as the sound that emanates from four hidden speakers is derived from appropriated video footage Nord has edited together and programmed for the purpose of cycling through the figure — a new kind of life blood. The overall impression is that these cell-phone addicted characters are bright-eyed zombies beholden to pulsating signals that dictate all aspects of their lives.

Nord's characters are composites based on observation, news commentary and his vivid imagination. The Businessman is so identified because he sports a wire mesh tie. Within the Illegal's body is barbed wire and an empty crushed water bottle. One eye faces forward, the other has been removed and covered by a black patch. The displaced eye sits on the back of the figure's head allowing for vision in both directions. Nord also creates a Gunman who stands tall alongside his son: Both of them are carrying weapons. The father holds his gun in one hand and a phone in the other. Within this ménage, a mother is pregnant with her second child. Child number one rests on the gallery floor tethered to the mother's stomach by a cord. The other child grows within her belly. The children's bodies glow from the light of additional cellphones within them, as if to say the omnipresent devices will become part of our offspring's internal anatomy. In the installation, the Angel is a winged being that floats away from the other figures. It holds two phones, one in each hand and is a representation of dualities and conflict rather than hope or affirmation.

Cloud Nine is a term often associated with the perfect state of happiness. It is also a cumulonimbus cloud. 'The cloud' has come to be known as the place where digital and electronic data can be stored— a virtual, non physical space. Nord's Cloud Nine is a warning about the future. His installation presents a dystopian environment where people are consumed by their pulsating cellphones — a device that once promised connection but in reality has created isolation and detachment. Cloud Nine is a hauntingly beautiful and seductive installation with undulating sonic and visual elements that not only speaks to challenges of integrating technology into both art and life, but to the importance of human interactions.

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