

Exhibition Review

Remote Central: Future Force

Geo Speculators



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Audible Gallery at the Experimental Sound Studio, Chicago,
May 2—June 15, 2014

When viewing *Remote Central*, the recent exhibition by the collaborative Future Force Geo Speculators (FFGS), one enters a time warp, a kind of future-past in which the artistic and political strategies of the historical left are recast in a Sci-Fi aesthetic to reimagine a more perfect present. Hardline feminism and cottage-industry craft, in particular textiles, are employed or rather deployed throughout the works on view, installed en masse to emulate a makeshift agora or meeting space that exists in a not-so-distant future.

Founded in 2013, FFGS is the cooperative practice of artists Carole Frances Lung, Ellen Rothenberg, and Christine Tarkowski that, according to the group's website (<https://futureforcegeospeculators.wordpress.com>), "instigate[s] a conceptual station of extrapolative prototypes and speculative souvenirs of the future commemorative." To that end, FFGS activates their

chosen sites with printed textiles, propositional models, public proposals, and tabloid publications that together meld revolutionary slogans, utopian fantasy, and gendered views on material production and labor (Figure 1).

For *Remote Central*, a collection of disparate objects read as both artifacts that wear the patina of use and as political tools ready for action. Hanging just above arm's reach on the gallery's right wall were five flags made from fabrics emblazoned with colorful patterns of simple, elemental shapes (hexagons, triangles, orbs), a Platonic geometry also reminiscent of Constructivist abstraction (Figure 2). These repeated forms, in particular a painterly splat that became the project's emblem, are found elsewhere, including in a large-scale wall piece entitled *The System* (2014). Here, the iconic splat is juxtaposed with sequences of right triangles, screen printed on paper and pinned to the wall, to form an allover grid,

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Figure 1
 Future Force Geo Speculators,
 installation view of *Remote Central*,
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where eye-popping colors and bits of Mylar create movement and dazzling optical effects (Figure 3). *The System* stands as a celebration of the ornamental and subversive potential of pattern, color, and decoration; it also functions as a manifesto of sorts, as suggested by a text printed in an accompanying broadside:

Transmission: The question isn't which ONE color combo but by which system to include them all. Several combinations to be printed and cut in a particular configuration. These smaller triangles are then pinned to the wall to create ENDLESS patterns and variations.

Translation: She understands the system

This “communiqué” is one of seven “transmissions” printed in the black-and-white leaflet that broadcast calls for the primacy of pattern and the power of revolutionary clothing, and announced “sightings of a first-generation feminist in Berlin.” These same proclamations are transmitted in a sound piece created by singer-musician Sally Timms, who also performed at the exhibition opening. Filled with various science-fiction tropes—the static of a radio transmitter, ethereal music, a robotic female voice—the untitled audio work infused the gallery with a space-age aura, suspending the works in time.

Some of the broadsides were unfolded then hung like banners on the left wall and also placed in



Figure 2

Future Force Geo Speculators, detail of *Flags* (2014), screen print and digital print on fabric. Reproduced with permission.



Figure 3

Future Force Geo Speculators, *The System* (2014), screen print on paper. Reproduced with permission.



Figure 4
 Future Force Geo Speculators,
 installation view of *Remote Central*,
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stacks for-the-taking on a wooden pushcart. A second pushcart displayed a bundle of handheld flags, a small sculpture cobbled from pipe cleaners, and four sets of gloves. Where the flags operate as symbols of protest, conquest, and commemoration, a series of aprons (one placed near the wall-mounted flags, four on the opposite wall), evoke—in addition to their domestic origins—protective gear, worker garments, or DIY space suits. Splattered with metallic paint and bearing the emblem “Sci-Fi Feminists” and the FFGS logo, the aprons function as uniforms of artistic unity and political communalism (Figure 4).

FFGS’s militant impulses can be traced to activist models of artistic collaboration, ranging from the Art Workers’ Coalition

to the Women’s Action Coalition, as well as to economic-labor movements and textile histories, such as the Occupy Movement and the Ladies International Garment Workers’ Union. Excavating such social art histories belongs to a practice I refer to as “productive remembering,” or what Russian curator Viktor Misiano and others term “progressive or radical nostalgia” to describe the positive effects of remembering in understanding the traumas of history and the challenges of the present. Critic and theorist Boris Groys points to those artists who reject today’s commodification of art by looking to past models of artistic production that operated outside the commercial system. He sees this not as nostalgic, in the traditional, conservative sense,

but as a “repoliticalization” of art, “revealing the artificial mechanism of the art market and presenting alternatives.”¹

In addition to these historical lineages, the show’s central themes—craft, labor, gender, alternative sites of production and economy—have also occupied the artists’ individual practices, each of whom brings her imprint to the collaboration. For instance, Rothenberg’s performances and installations often combine textiles, signage, and protest placards to address war, aspects of female and Jewish identity,

and the celebration of indigenous craft. In past works, Tarkowski has mixed print technologies taken from textiles and graphic design with sculptural forms based on utopian architecture to explore issues of imperialism and faith. Lung, who also goes by the alter ego Frau Fiber, is known for her activist performances devoted to domestic craft traditions, fair labor practices, and the garment industry.

Collectively, FFGS also embraces textiles practices, feminism, and activism, but with an ironical stance and personal cosmology that invoke

Afrofuturist musician Sun Ra, whose cosmic jazz mixed science fiction, fantasy, and Afrocentric themes as a form of Black celebration and emancipation. *Remote Central* similarly offers an alternative sightline—a future-perfect that nods to the progressive past, while envisioning an imminent world where social and creative equality reign.

Note

1. Boris Groys interviewed by Judy Ditner, 2011. In *Ostalgia*, exhibition catalog, p. 59. New York: New Museum.