

Shadows of Dark Ecology

By: DeAnna Boyer

Have you ever walked outside after an evening storm when the eerie light from the setting sun begins to reflect its luminous colors off the canvas of the black clouds, seeping into the mist pulling from the wet earth? It feels as if you are standing amongst the final cutscene of a dystopian film. The most recent exhibit, *Protopia*, at the Burren College of Art galleries featuring artists Lindsay LeBlanc, Catherine McDonald, and Amelia Rafle, “seeks out alternative visions within a fear-driven world; an imaginative and entangled existence” placing you inside a shadowy world.

As you walk through the fantastical and darkly whimsical space, you are presented with gray, rock-like sculptures seemingly growing out of the floor, ghosts of dead birds casting shadows on the walls, and mysterious plants depicted through glass sculpture growing through a Victorian couch and wallpaper. The works of these artists each speak to the dark side of ecological studies and present an individualized perspective of the past, present, and future of our current world as we linger in the protopic space between utopia and dystopia.

The collaboration of the artists is most evident through the theme rather than the full exhibition and curation of the show. The show depended quite heavily upon a play on shadows, casting ghostly images on the walls of the room. Because this was such a vital component to the cohesiveness of the show, I think each work would have been more successful if the room was darkened even further, or if stronger point lights were used to cast these shadows - perhaps even trapping the shadows of audience members, locking them into the protopic world the artists sought to create.

One of the most valuable aspects of these artist’s work is their ability to develop a new world within a gallery setting. Experimenting more with texture on the floor, sounds of the birds hitting the window panes, or mist surrounding the rocky pools of liquid might have helped pull the space together and immerse the audience further into a world of dark ecology.

It is exciting to be presented with work that challenges our entanglement with nature and portrays humankind’s confused perception of our present place within the world. The work is innovative and ambitious and speaks to the powerful voice and potential that young artists have within a world lingering between dark ecological fantasy and stark reality.