

# Lehman College Art Gallery

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## Castles in the Sky: Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art

October 13, 2018 – January 26, 2019

Reception: October 24 5 to 8 pm



Peter Hamlin. *Living Matrix Palace*, 2018.

Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art

### ***The buildings in our mind's eye are limitless.***

Within our dreams, we unlock doors to unknown passages and climb unending stairs into the darkness of rooms, strange and never seen before. Not tied to the reality of bricks and mortar or ground and gravity, we imagine any structure —the American “dream home” on a coveted suburban cul-de-sac beyond our reach, or the wild acid-trip floating balloon palace of a magical unicorn.

***Artists have long embraced the dramatic visual possibilities of “castles of the mind,” which allow them unfettered creative possibilities.***

Jarring the laws of actual architecture, the imagined palace functions as a very real foundation, buttress, and pillar for *Castles in the Sky*. From Claes Oldenburg’s proposal to replace the Washington Monument with a gigantic scissors to Laurie Simmons’ photograph of candy castles atop a cake weathering a blizzard of confectionary “snow,” the works here delight and intrigue.

***Many antecedents for this exhibition range widely, and its 30 artists gather inspiration from famous sources.***

Lothar Osterberg draws from the etchings of 18th-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the creator of images of dark and cavernous space he fills with interlocking architectural elements that seem to continue forever — the nightmarish side of the architectural dream. In a lighter key, Will Cotton’s candy castle represents a fantastical continuum of the art of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American landscape painter Thomas Cole whose influential *Youth* (1842), pictures a man rushing towards the mirage of a castle in the sky, the locus of all his youthful dreams. Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Salvador Dalí famously created a style of Surrealism that incorporated discordant buildings that seemed drawn from dreams. In *Gala’s Castle* (1974), an elephant on attenuated legs tiptoes across a castle crenellation, its ponderous bulk made as light as a spider. Today Adrien Broom adopts a similar Surrealism in her improbable scene of a proper Victorian woman whose drawing room, open to the sky, is filled with a zebra.

***The artists in *Castles in the Sky* develop bizarre, impractical, enchanting and inspiring unbuilt (and likely unbuildable) designs.***

In the 1960s, Diane Arbus who photographed *Sleeping Beauty Castle* at the very center of Disneyland, created a haunted, threatening palace amidst the sunshine of Southern California. Her photograph underscores the sinister quality that lurks under the surface of the archetypal Disney building, ironically dubbed the “architecture of reassurance” — a place to feel safe and secure. For each work in this exhibition that is filled with enticing charm like the chandeliers that John Bowman populates with cottages, there is another that is unnerving. Robert Hite’s tall, crooked houses look as if they were found in deep woods and conjure the tale of Rapunzel trapped in a tower by a witch.

***The exhibition plays tribute to the ceaseless meanderings of the human imagination and the creative fantasy that hovers in the recesses of every artist’s mind.***

Artists in *Castles in the Sky*: Gustavo Acosta, Diane Arbus, Clint Baclawski, John Bowman, Hannah Brenner-Leonard, Michele Brody, Adrien Broom, Dean Byington, James Casebere, Laurent Chéhère, Thomas Cole, Beatrice Coron, Will Cotton, William Richard Crutchfield, Linda L. Cunningham, Salvador Dalí, Thomas Doyle, Peter Hamlin, Cameron Hayes, Robert Hite, Julie Langsam, Armando Marino, Jonathan Monaghan, Juan Garcia-Nunez, Claes Oldenburg, Lothar Osterberg, Kevin M. Paulsen, Laurie Simmons Rachel Sydlowski, Eric Wesley and Danwen Xing.

*Castles in the Sky: Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art* is organized by Lehman College Art Gallery and curated by Bartholomew F. Bland, Executive Director.

## Exhibition Program Supporters

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