

frieze

JONAH FREEMAN & JUSTIN LOWE Marlborough, London, UK

Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe take dystopian readings of American history and spike them with mind-melting drugs. For their latest installation at Marlborough London, they've trenched through the gallery's vast two-floor exhibition space and built a labyrinth of 11 lurid bunkers, with the gallery staff atomized behind glass Tannoy booths.

Titled *Colony Sound* (2019), the installation represents the latest chapter in the artists' San San Universe, a speculative history melding narratives of the Summer of Love, US aerospace and Silicon Valley utopianism into an immersive architecture. In this installment, we're let loose to explore the whereabouts of 'The Smile', a communication system rumoured to have been made from a bacterial petri dish in California during the Cold War to brainwash the population. Now, as the show's press release tells us, this technology has been adopted by new tribes and subcultures in an effort to redeem society.

Tapping into the sense that the 21st century has come to seem like a stage set – pliable, flimsy, contrived – Freeman and Lowe mix different doses of retrofuturism. It's as if Alice has fallen through the looking glass and woken up on the Starship Enterprise.

The first room resembles some kind of head shop-meets-technology showroom; the duty free section of an intergalactic airport. In a glass cabinet, an array of narcotic e-liquids are presented like Apple products – 'High Entropy Breakfast', 'Buffalo Stadium (Telenovela Supermax)', 'Connecticut Nerdcore' – a blithe nod at the addiction that comes with our relationship to technology. The shopfront seems to play on the countercultural mantra of 1960s clinical psychologist, Timothy Leary – 'Turn on, tune in, drop out' – and assimilate it to a neoliberal sphere. Now, we are the products: walking data harvests, sold to, and slavishly hooked on, our gadgets.

Next up: a psychedelic squat-like room, which the artists dub a 'drop-out lounge'. There's an addled, new-age feel to the cultural junk on display: books with titles like *Fun with your Interneurons* and *Recipes of a Failed Ventriloquist* (the latter written by Joan Vollmer, William S. Burroughs's wife); diamond-patterned 1970s wallpaper and brown sofas; optically oblique paintings that resemble Rorschach tests; stalactite-like drips protruding from the ceiling. Wander deeper through these doors of misperception

and you encounter a dormitory, which appears to have been abandoned by a stoned teenager, opposite a legal highs emporium selling 'Toxic Strawberry Daze' and 'Herbal Potpourri'. In a society hungry for constant sensation and coerced by capitalist productivity, the logical end point is surely to sell 'high entropy enhancement' in a can.

Through a set of emergency-room swing doors, we cross into a medical theatre – all stainless-steel surfaces and strip lighting – which seems to have been re-purposed into a meth lab. Crystal formations tower from every surface. With each new room, there's a renewed sense of trespassing: the delight of stumbling recklessly upon something freshly hatched and surreal. As in a David Cronenberg movie, the rooms warp and mutate, both spatially and texturally. There's a dream-like logic to the 'colony': everything almost making sense, but never quite cohering.

We're bombarded with discomforting sensations. A copper-plated room is designed as a 'shield from electromagnetic waves'. Further along, knock-off cubist paintings adorn the walls – a wry nod to the gallery's usual illustrious roster, perhaps? Turning up the contrast dials, we stumble into a torched recording studio, eventually leading into a giant canopied prism filtering orange-pink light, both serene and strange.

Despite its heavyweight brew of political paranoia and technological invention, this show is ultimately an experiment in immersion: as much a head trip as an art exhibition; a thrilling, hyperbolic pastiche of reality, almost, but not quite, as we know it.

Daniel Culpan



Below
Jonah Freeman and
Justin Lowe, 2019,
installation view