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## ARTS

# 21c Museum's must-see exhibition, 'SuperNatural,' explores human influence on nature

**Melinda Baker** Special to Nashville Tennessean / USA TODAY NETWORK — TENNESSEE

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You'll want to bear in mind the word "Anthropocene" as you walk through 21c Museum Hotel Nashville's latest exhibition, "The SuperNatural," on view through October 2019.

It's the term many scientists are using to define Earth's current geological epoch, one ushered in by human influence as opposed to natural forces. In short, because of global warming, pollution, mass extinction and technological activity, humans have dramatically and, in many cases, permanently, altered the nature of, well, nature.

So what does nature mean today and what's our relationship to it? These are the big questions that 21c Museum Director and Chief Curator Alice Gray Stites had in mind when selecting the more than 97 works on display in the exhibition. Occupying all three floors of the museum, the exhibition offers a sweeping mix of paintings, sculptures, photography, video and virtual reality by a multinational array of artists from 13 different countries. The result is a dizzying view of a new nature rife with contradictions — it is both organic and artificial, real and virtual, alien and familiar. The artists critique the present by projecting a precarious future — many of the works portray environmental disaster, mass destruction and the emergence of mutant creatures — while also looking back at history and 19th and 20th century aesthetic traditions.

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“The show narrates how the dreams and detritus of the industrial era generated the promise and peril of the digital age and explore the potential for adaptation to the visceral and virtual realities of the future,” Stites says. “While investigating observed, current realities, the works also reference the genre of landscape painting, exploring how it’s evolved and what new materials, methods and concepts contemporary artists are addressing when looking at what ‘nature’ means today,” Stites says.

Pieces by Chris Doyle, Pieter Hugo, Elena Dorfman, Lars Jans, Luis Gispert, Edward Burtynsky and Alice Pixley Young lament deteriorating environmental and economic conditions, those we’re living through and those yet to come. Doyle’s looping mixed media animation “Apocalypse Management (telling about being one being living),” depicts the moment when mass destruction has just happened. Figures are stunned and just beginning to dig themselves out of a ruined cityscape. Young’s “Will You Miss Me When I Burn,” a patterned wall drawing made from ashes paired with a hand mirror acts as a portal to scenes of wildfires and oil spills, critiquing the myopia that allows such environmental catastrophes to happen again and again. Both works reference the Hudson River school of American landscape painters and the 19th century aesthetic notion of the sublime, which echoes throughout “SuperNatural.”

“In the 21st century, the sublime is becoming the supernatural. Landscape, once the realm of the bucolic and pastoral, now appears alluring, fantastical, threatening and threatened, reflecting Earth’s entry into the Anthropocene,” Stites says.

Works by Anthony Goicolea, Laura Ball, Thomas Grünfeld, Sarah Garzoni, Kate Clark, Patricia Piccinini, Joshua Haycraft explore cloning, mutations and other forms of genetic engineering, reflecting our fears and fantasies about what the future may beget. Viewers are greeted by Patricia Piccinini’s piece, “The Listener,” which stands next to the front desk in 21c’s lobby. It is a hyperrealistic sculpture of a hideous, sweet-faced mutant creature curled atop a floor speaker with its hairy rump in the air. It looks like a cross between a human infant and a mole, and your brain doesn’t quite know how to compute what you’re seeing. Though it might repulse you, it might also compel you to cradle it in your arms. Piccinini’s work doesn’t question whether our future holds undesired outcomes; it asks whether or not we’ll be able to accept them.

“The aesthetics of the digital age fluctuate from dazzling to devastating, charting a cyclical progression beyond what either nature or technology alone may dictate,” Stites says. “We hope viewers are engaged and inspired to consider how we all see and interact with the environment, and with all those who share this beautiful, fragile planet,” says Stites.

## **If you go**

**What:** “The SuperNatural”

**When:** Through October 2019

**Where:** 221 Second Ave. N.

**Hours:** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Admission:** free

**Other:** For information on upcoming exhibition related events, please visit [www.21cmuseumhotels.com](http://www.21cmuseumhotels.com).

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