

Curator's Note + Artwork Description

CURATOR'S NOTE

FLORA FILE by Rick Silva

This exhibition borrows its name from William Gibson's first published short story, "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" (1977). As the story notes, when a hologram is cut into pieces, even the smallest section still contains the whole of the image. In a similar way, plant cuttings and an edition of digital works can both hold these mirroring elements of origin and multiplicity.

The artists featured in the exhibition were asked to imagine and create their own sci-fi plants, and to interpret this prompt however they like—whether it be by rendering an alien pollen, some photosynthetic architecture, or a flower whose weirdness is only revealed by its description. I invited these particular artists to this exhibition because their work already pointed towards these speculative notions of nature and time. They were also invited because of their experimental use, and creative misuse, of 3D modeling and animation. A 3D program's workspace is by default an infinite space, since as you navigate the viewport you are surrounded by a void on all sides—beyond which a sublime vastness awaits. In this way, the artists who choose to work in these programs are negotiating the infinite potentials of space and time whenever they start a new project.

Like botanists from a parallel future or an unknown world, these artists cultivate their fictions into existence. They sub-scatter seed pods, prune polygon cuttings, give their models plenty of volumetric lighting, and soak with fluid simulations. The 3D objects in this exhibition have secret pathways and telepathic tendrils. They bloom on neon skins and disperse nano mold spores through LCD screens. Like an Ikebana of poisonous flowers in zero gravity, they hover in the expanse as a collection of fragmented flora files.

ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

"Mutant Bagua" is a 3D sculptural reinterpretation of the Taoist Bagua (八卦) as a machine-spirit interface. In the center lies the Chinese mythical pearl of knowledge engraved with the Five Elements, adorned with the Taoist talisman for "Opening of the Heart." Enshrining the pearl are the eight trigrams of the Bagua, each representing a principle of reality translated into computational binary code: yin vs yang, 0 or 1. This sculptural digitization of ancestral code reinvents the form as a hybrid mutant sci-fi abstraction suggestive of queer robotics, drones, and imagined extraterrestrial technology.

By uploading ancient Taoist script into virtual form, "Mutant Bagua" serves as an ancestral portal to digital spirits that haunt the interface between Taoist structural code and digital data. As professor Alvin Eng Hui Lim states in his book *Digital Spirits in Religion & Media*, "Trigrams produce networks, simply by operating as nodes where gods pass their visions and energies to human subjects with the right access codes... Gods are only accessible when human agents enact the trigrams and numbers and use them as codes and passwords to tap into the divine sphere." Through numbers, the god in the machine speaks.

"Mutant Bagua" presents an opportunity to reimagine the Taoist binary—thinking of yin and yang not as fixed gendered arrival points, but as vectors in motion: data storage in flux that when combined can reveal an infinite spectrum of possibilities. Or, as Laozi riffed over 2000 years ago:

"Tao produced the One.
The One produced the Two.
The Two produced the Three.
And the Three produced the Ten Thousand things."
—Laozi, Tao Te Ching