

Graphic Psychedelia

Now



Opposite page: Summer Fire, Neil Krug

This page from top: BRIDAL SHOWER, Petra Cortright 2013; Ladytron, GTS Remixed, Neil Krug; Pulp Art Book II, Neil Krug & Joni Harbeck

Robert Urquhart discovers psychedelic ideas and aesthetics now making a return to contemporary visual culture.

Psychedelia has been bubbling under since the mid 90's. Recently though things have sped up. Themes of consciousness, consumerism and technology have become interwoven with a sense of perception and reality in relation to digital technology. This isn't about today's creative community's love of commercial counter culture or lip service to the heady and hip days of yore and the cash cow of nostalgia. This is something deeper, something more 'far out'. It's the second coming for a new digital tribe.

Artist Petra Cortright is part of this new wave of artists for whom experimentation with digital data is as intoxicating as LSD. Talking to Cortright brings out the intensity of digital vision in a babbling stream of consciousness when she says, "I have so much fun playing with software and all these weird effects, they are super intuitive. I'll set up different effects and stuff and watching what's happening and then something really simple, like I'll do something with my hand and it is just really beautiful. I won't be able to do it again, if I start thinking about it; and the nicest time is when I have these very natural elegant moments." Cortright is

talking about the created glitching effects on her films, viewable on YouTube, but we may as well be in a field at 6am.

Further up the coast in San Francisco is Anita Fontaine, a digital artist and designer working mainly in advertising and fashion. Picking up on Fontaine's move from Amsterdam to San Francisco, how important is West Coast USA in contemporary psychedelia? "It's nice being surrounded by the intensity of nature in California, as well as the history of psychedelia in that part of the world. Sometimes the beauty is overwhelming, it reminds me of life growing up in Australia, the light and the wildness. In this kind of environment, I've always craved grittiness and darkness; I'm obsessed with visualising alternate worlds and futures in which nature has a different kind of glow and juxtaposition with technology," explains Fontaine.

If landscape can be a trigger for psychedelia, how about the liberation of space and digital time? "Psychedelia feels like something which is ever changing, something with no limitations, which is also how I feel about digital, that the explorations are endless, infinite," explains Fontaine. ▶



She adds: "I enjoy the parameters of not having any (parameters) I suppose. I also feel like you are free to combine absurd colours, strange patterns and unexpected concepts together and somehow it all makes sense as it lives in this category."

Sebastian Moody, an artist and curator based in Queensland, Australia, curated an exhibition that included Anita Fontaine (who is originally from the region) back in 2011. Entitled New Psychedelia, the exhibition, focused on the contemporary scene. Moody says this about the trend: "The current influence of psychedelia has developed in response to the growing impact of global capital and technology on daily life. The 'new psychedelic' aesthetic is a strategy for illustrating and transcending the politics of the everyday. Increasingly, the contemporary experience is facilitated by a sophisticated digital matrix. We might not be able to see this digital world but we know it's there and we feel its effects acutely."

Talking about Fontaine's work in particular, Moody suggests that looking at her work is "Like surfing the Internet on steroids and acid." He adds: "She wounds the flatness of her 2D work, passionately tearing into the matrix until the screen is soaked in pulpy cute pixels. And despite the inherent violence involved in smashing pixels in this way, she manages to retain a strong



romantic feeling, suggesting that maybe we are always longing for beauty in ruins."

Beauty in ruins may well be a valid description for much of Neil Krugs' work. Krug, a photographer and film maker based in Los Angeles, shares the wide eyed, Wild West mysticism of psychedelia but integrates it with a contemporary music scene, working for bands including Scissor Sisters, Ladytron, Boards of Canada, My Chemical Romance, The Horrors and Bat for Lashes. "I will always love all things psych, I think it's something I was born with, there's never been a time when bold colour and shifting patterns didn't interest me. I don't know how relevant the imagery is nowadays but the spirit of the genre seems to be alive and well," says Krug.

Tracy Conti McCarty, Krugs' stylist on work including Bat For Lashes as well as a number of fashion shoots, says of the genre: "It's very punk rock, it feels good, you put it out there, keep the vision going. I'm doing this for myself and doing it for sharing, I'm projecting from my heart." McCarty sells vintage and handmade psychedelic clothing through her Etsy store. This 'wearable art' leads the psychedelic clothing scene from her Blog, Prism of Threads. McCarty sees a link between psychedelia now and technology when she says, "Technology has given us so much, with Instagram and the Internet you are really able to create your own reality and your own art."

British based curator Barnie Page is a member of the Phone Arts group, a loose collective of like-minded individuals who are pushing the boundaries of freedom in their approach to digital culture. "Aesthetically we all have very different interests, but we're all trying to explore something new, especially in terms of technology. I think it's really that; what can we do creatively that everyone probably wouldn't expect us to," explains Page.

The commonality between Krug, Cortright, McCarty, Fontaine, Moody and Page is that they are all exploring the spirit of the unseeable. So, where next? Page was recently invited to write for WWLTD (WorldWideLimited) a new fashion shop and Blog about young, emerging Mexican culture. McCarty also speaks of a Mexican influence in contemporary psychedelia. Perhaps the next logical step is a further embrace of cross border pollination in true (digital) hippy style. ■

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This page:

Pulp Art Book II, Jackie 41, Neil Krug & Joni Harbeck

Opposite page, clockwise from centre:

SpringValle_ber_girls11, Petra Cortright 2012;

DRK PARA, Petra Cortright 2013;

Anita Fontaine;

Pulp Art Book II, Mystic White Flight, Neil Krug & Joni Harbeck

