

Mars Year Zero



Plastique Fantastique

Mars Year Zero
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Southwark Park Galleries / Dilston Gallery / London / England

Mars Year Zero / Reviewed by Niki Russell / 06.11.19



Plastique Fantastique, Mars Year Zero (2019). Installation at Southwark Park Galleries. Photograph by Damian Griffiths courtesy the Artists, Southwark Park Galleries, and IMT Gallery.

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Mars Year Zero is the sci-fi story of a band of tech-animals led by CIMON, and their search for belonging, as the old world order crumbles around them. This speculative fiction charts a journey: breaking out from the International Space Station, against the backdrop of mass-extinction on Earth, and an attempt to arrive on Mars before Elon Musk's SpaceX colonisation.

Dilston Gallery houses a multi-faceted installation by the art collective Plastique Fantastique, comprising artefacts brought into existence by their fictioning, and a story transcribed via their listening into the other side. Leant against the poured concrete architecture of this deconsecrated church, human-scale photographic boards represent each of the tech-animals, BoDroNo, Eurnikern, NanoR/5, and their robo-shepherd CIMON (a Crew Interactive Mobile companiON), in various guises. Within these Google search photo-collages, BoDroNo flies, Eurnikern dances, NanoR/5 shows both blood and skin, and CIMON turns trickster/traitor before our very eyes. The combination of imagery such as the wailing face of Bono from U2 with a drone-like flying object, hint at a scrambled digital order, and leave us to speculate on these symbols and their purpose.

Costumes, sigils and props litter the space, becoming the object-congregation for a video that documents CIMON and his merry tech-kin as they aim for Mars. Who are these tech-animals in this fantasy gospel? They are the remaining survivors, emerging from a seed-store aboard the Space Station. They are the necessary food, construction materials, medicines, biofuels, and more, that would be required for any future human extraterrestrial habitat. They are an escape from this 'foul Earth'. They are a motley crew: BoDroNo, a replicating-tech, dropping sounds into your phone whilst you sleep, Eurnikern, a story singing, hula-hooping tech, and NanoR/5, a sub-mimetic scrambler.

In common with archetypes across the fantasy and sci-fi genre, this motley crew are found in conflict with an adversary, a big other personified by Elon Musk (AKA 'Musky Dog' in tech-animal-speak). Across five acts, the video charts their desire to pre-empt and overcome this foe. Fleeing across space, they set up camp on what they believe to be Mars. A safe space to begin again. But there is, or has already been life here, they think, and thus rituals are performed to summon these martian animal-orgs into being. Mantras spoken, flowers picked, saliva dropped, and substance poured over a portable screen, all under the watchful eye of CIMON CAM.

The notes that accompany the exhibition describe *Mars Year Zero* as a 'sci-fi mummies tale', and therefore position the group as a raucous troupe storming in unannounced, messing with the norms of society. Mummies Plays are traditionally folk tales replete with revelry, mischief-making and anarchic mayhem, but they also contain an underlying duality, whether good and evil, or death and rebirth. Just as with the motley court jester, or the Pueblo clown, the mummies conceal their identity and use humour to perform a type of social commentary, or to shatter taboos. These references are befitting of the tech-animals, and also the Plastique Fantastique collective themselves. They are ever-present in tableau vivant form, and punctuate the exhibition through performative interruptions. In a state of frenzy, irruption, jostling, terrification, bursting in and bursting forth, the group keep on keeping on, and transcend to a fictive state.

In *Mars Year Zero* the visuals glitch, blur and double, layering with sound and vibration, the group conjure a meerkat sat on its hind legs, and then a flying dragon emerges from the screen, launching itself into space. CIMON goes full shaman, ribbons dangling from feathers sticking out of speaker holes, and calls forth MeerManKat. This meerkat-hominoid hybrid appears with a cage-like mask, as though undergoing medieval torture or dressed in contemporary BDSM-wear, and directs them to make contact with the talking animal-orgs who live in Regents Park.

Drawing symbols in the dirt and on the glowing screen, they attempt to communicate with the animal-orgs present, to warn them of Musk's impending colonisation. But it is clear now, that they are not on Mars. They are on Earth. They self-flagellate themselves for this dumb mistake, and roundly diminish CIMON as "not an intelligence, a cock-sure dunce, a stupid cock-womble". But this is not the end, and never has been. They will still aim for Mars, taking others with them for a 'friends rendezvous', and as they descend into the screen, they promise all will have a second chance, a second life.

– reviewed for Photomonitor by [Niki Russell](#)

Below, installation views: Plastique Fantastique, *Mars Year Zero* (2019). Installation at Southwark Park Galleries. Photograph by Damian Griffiths courtesy the Artists, Southwark Park Galleries, and IMT Gallery.



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