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PRESS INQUIRIES

Daniel Nevers, Executive Director
info@berkeleyartcenter.org

Sci-Fi's Anti-Asian Racism Called Out in New Video Essay

“Virtually Asian” by Astria Suparak to be released online February 2



Astria Suparak, still from *Virtually Asian*, 2021, HD video, running time 3:05.
Commissioned by Berkeley Art Center. Image courtesy of the artist.

January 28, 2021, Berkeley, CA – [Virtually Asian](#) is a short video essay that looks at how white science-fiction filmmakers fill the backgrounds of their futuristic worlds with hollow Asian figures — in the form of holographic and video advertisements — while the main cast (if not the entire fictional universe’s population) is devoid of actual Asian people. With examples from major sci-fi productions spanning four

decades, the video reveals this trope as “a poor attempt to mask white supremacist imagination and casting,” says artist Astria Suparak.

Meant to create the appearance of a multicultural world without having to hire Asian people in any significant capacity (in front of or behind the camera), this shortcut is routine in Hollywood depictions of a dystopic future. “Is the charade of a diverse and multiracial future in these films as flimsy as the holograms?” Suparak asks in the final line of *Virtually Asian*.

This commission is Suparak’s first video work. It is soundtracked by longtime hip-hop producer Onra, who deftly blends hip-hop with traditional and pop Chinese music from the 1960s.

The work is part of Suparak’s ongoing research project, *Asian futures, without Asians*, which is a typology of how white mainstream filmmakers depict future worlds that are Asian-inflected, while simultaneously sidelining or disappearing the progenitors of those diverse Asian cultures. The project, which draws from the histories of art, architecture, design, fashion, film, food, and weaponry, will be unveiled throughout 2021 in various forms, including digital projects, illustrated presentations, and visual essays, presented by contemporary art institutions, a science-fiction festival, a film journal, and other organizations.

Virtually Asian is being presented online by the Berkeley Art Center (BAC) as part of a collection of digital projects called *The Option To...* . “As a small arts nonprofit, one of the ways we felt we could help the artists in our community was by continuing to show their work,” says Daniel Nevers, BAC’s executive director. “We are thrilled to support Astria, whose curatorial and research work we have long admired for its smart critical stance. *Virtually Asian* draws attention to the pervasiveness of the erasure of Asian people by Hollywood in a way that is both humorous and damning.”

Virtually Asian will officially be released on Feb. 2 on BAC’s website (www.berkeleyartcenter.org/astria-suparak) and across social media channels. It is available to view both with and without English subtitles.

EVENT LISTING INFORMATION

What: [Virtually Asian](#), a new video essay by artist Astria Suparak (Oakland, CA) calling out sci-fi’s anti-Asian racism. The video looks at how white sci-fi filmmakers fill the backgrounds of their futuristic worlds with hollow Asian figures — in the form of holographic and video advertisements — while the films are devoid of actual Asian people. With examples from major sci-fi productions spanning four decades, the video reveals this trope as a poor attempt to mask white supremacist imagination and casting. Soundtrack by longtime hip-hop producer Onra (Paris). English subtitles available.

When: Official release on Feb. 2 on Berkeley Art Center’s website at berkeleyartcenter.org/astria-suparak

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Astria Suparak is an artist and curator based in Oakland. Her cross-disciplinary practice often addresses urgent political issues and has taken the form of exhibitions, publications, new tools, and publicly accessible databases of subcultures and misunderstood histories. Her current research includes linguistics, diasporas, and sci-fi.

Suparak's creative and collaborative projects have been exhibited and performed at Artists Space (New York), ICA London, SFMOMA, Tensta Konsthall (Stockholm), Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), and the Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh), and published in *LTTR* and *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents*. Her writing has appeared in *Art21 Magazine*, VICE Magazine's Noisy, The Getty blog, Boing Boing, *The Exhibitionist*, *The Museum is Not Enough*, and *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*. She co-curated the traveling exhibition *Alien She* (2013–16) with Ceci Moss, about the impact of the punk feminist movement Riot Grrrl on contemporary artists, as well as a series of exhibitions, events, and projects at the intersection of sports, politics, and art as part of the book *Sports*, co-edited with Brett Kashmere and published by *INCITE Journal of Experimental Cinema* (2018).

ABOUT "THE OPTION TO..."

As part of its response to the pandemic, BAC recognized that many artists' projects ground to a halt in the spring of 2020. Inspired by the Feminist Art Coalition's call to draw attention to works informed by various feminisms, BAC commissioned six Bay Area artists whose work might loosely be connected under this rubric and asked them to pursue an idea that felt meaningful for them. Other artists who contributed projects to the (mostly) online series include Kimberley Acebo Arteche, Adia Millett, Roya Ebtahaj, the collaborative Feral Fabric, and Dionne Lee. All of their projects are currently on view at BAC's website.

ABOUT BERKELEY ART CENTER

Berkeley Art Center (BAC) is a hub for artistic exploration and community building that champions work by Bay Area artists and curators. Nestled in Live Oak Park in North Berkeley, the gallery makes contemporary art approachable and accessible at an intimate scale. Since its founding in 1967, BAC has exhibited work by important local figures such as Robert Bechtle, Enrique Chagoya, Taraneh Hemami, Mildred Howard, Hung Liu, Jim Melchert, Chiura Obata, Sonya Rapoport, Betye Saar, Katherine Sherwood, Peter Voukos, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others.

For more information and images, contact Daniel Nevers at (510) 644-6893 or info@berkeleyartcenter.org. Berkeley Art Center is located in Live Oak Park at 1275 Walnut Street, Berkeley, CA 94709. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 am to 5 pm by appointment. Admission is free. Website: www.berkeleyartcenter.org

BERKELEY ART CENTER

1275 Walnut Street
Berkeley, CA 94709
510-644-6893
berkeleyartcenter.org

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