

## In the galleries: A revelatory exhibition by D.C. artist Jonathan Monaghan

by Mark Jenkins



A video still of Jonathan Monaghan's 19-minute "Out of the Abyss." (Courtesy of bitforms Gallery, New York)

After viewing "A Trace Left by the Future," Jonathan Monaghan's show at VisArts, people may start calling the artist "St. Jon." The centerpiece of this show of video, prints and sculpture is "Out of the Abyss," a 19-minute digital-animation loop that is Monaghan's own Book of Revelation.

The D.C. artist, who made this work as a VisArts studio fellow, crafts cleanly rendered but conceptually intricate videos. Drawing on the iconography of advertising and marketing, the videos combine the pursuit of luxury goods with more traditionally heroic quests from movies and video games.

Monaghan's fantastical videos once were studded with actual corporate logos, but there are few of those in "Abyss," whose inhabitants include a robot knight on horseback, a spaceship with dragon's head and wings, and a mechanical cow with video cameras on its head and a yoga mat strapped to its back. The organic-technological hybrids travel through a scenario that depicts worlds within worlds, with continual shifts in scale, location and perspective.

Although Monaghan has included few brand names, he does appropriate several logos, ingeniously changing their text while retaining their design. A home-goods store's emblem is changed to read "Alpha & Omega," and the familiar curved arrow of an Internet-shopping behemoth underscores the word "Patmos." Fans of extravagant visions needn't be reminded that Patmos is the island where, according to tradition, a certain John wrote a book known as "Revelation." Monaghan has hitched his spaceship to one of the world's most influential prophecies.

The show also includes inkjet prints and 3-D-printed sculptures of mash-ups of animals, consumer products and historic architecture. Small, mollusk-like creatures made of nylon, with 18-karat gold details, sit next to massive renderings of sleek, candy-colored "Sentries," which suggest futuristic redesigns of the guardian statues that overlook the entrances to Japanese temples. The resemblance

is probably unintended, but it seems appropriate in a show that marks Monaghan's attempt to fly a shopping mall into the rapture.

Jonathan Monaghan: A Trace Left by the Future Through Aug. 11 at Gibbs Street Gallery, VisArts, 155 Gibbs St., Rockville.