

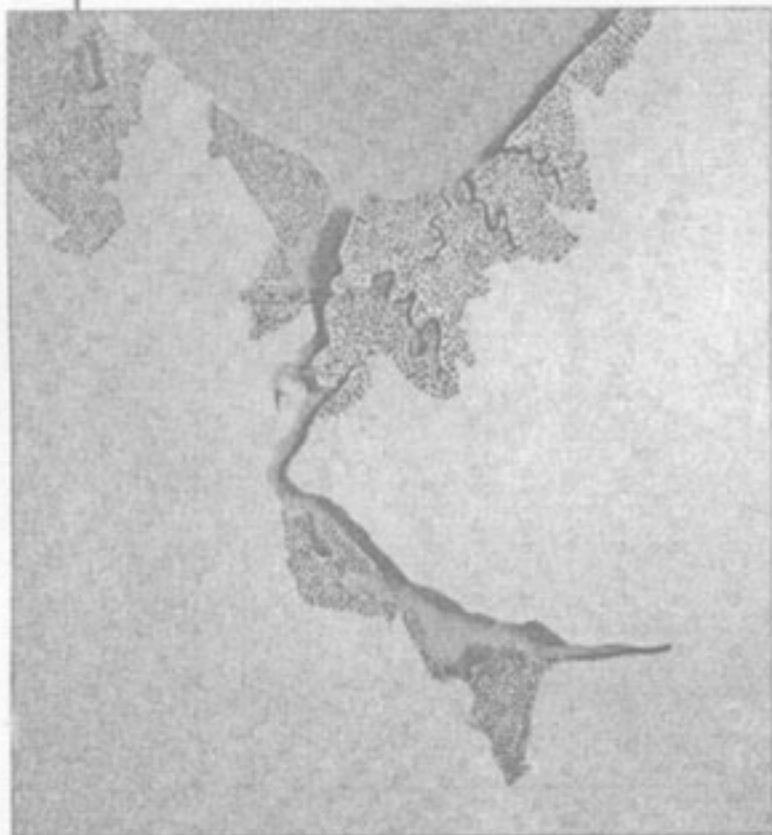
Four solo shows at Southern Exposure

There is a difference between having visions and being visionary, but those afflicted with the former often think themselves the latter. Frederick Loomis, one of four artists having solo shows at Southern Exposure, has seen things. Visited by visions throughout his life, he's undertaken to write and illustrate, under the penname Edward Mathew Taylor, the next holy text—part three of the apparent trilogy that begins with the Old and New Testaments. The title, of course, is *The Third Testament: The Genesis Story of the Coming Race of Human Computers*.

The show features drawings and texts both for the book, which is a work in progress, and not. Also included is a set of filing cabinets which viewers are invited to explore; this was presented at Loomis's 2004 MFA show at California College of the Arts as well. Inside, one finds a variety of files revolving around his book project: sketches, notes, clippings from unheard-of religious periodicals.

To comprehend Loomis's drawings, imagine William Blake in modern America; picture him as a divorcee and recovering alcoholic, with a blind zealot streak and career in technology sales under his belt, brought up on a steady diet of science fiction ranging from Isaac Asimov to the Terminator.

Loomis shares Blake's gift for image making, the small graphite works on view are beautiful and wild. Boggling and, frankly, a little unsettling to witness, they depict imagined events of the distant past and



future—the frontier outside of known history, which Loomis uses as a playground for his imagination. Loomis also shares in Blake's passionate invention, but it is perhaps that consuming intensity which will prevent him from attaining the heights to which Blake has risen, albeit posthumously.

It's difficult to say with certainty from this vantage, but it looks as though Loomis fervently believes in his story of a coming race of "human supercomputers," staunchly and literally. Strict fundamentalists aren't usually the types to question themselves. They are all too often overbearing and, at the same time, alienating, all plugged ears and open mouth. It is a challenge to develop any meaningful relationship with this particular blend of wild-eyed proselytizing, however awesome its scope may be.

Nonetheless, it's one of the greatest virtues of the nonprofit gallery to be able to provide a venue to such odd pieces of art: the work adjacent Loomis, Jessica Tully's *Liquidations: The Dance of Water & Power* happily follows suit. A large wall drawing of the San Francisco Bay watershed (or something) sets the stage for the accompanying video, which is a rare delicacy. In it, we see a group of wet-suited swimmers awkwardly dancing in various bodies of water throughout the Bay, including an underground spring, all to the beat of a boilerplate hip-hop loop. The video is graceless, lusterless and super-white bread, diametrically opposed to the average rap

video, which is usually fantastically stylish. Thus unadorned, there is a brilliant, guileless charm in watching these performers splash about—here serious, there smirking at themselves.

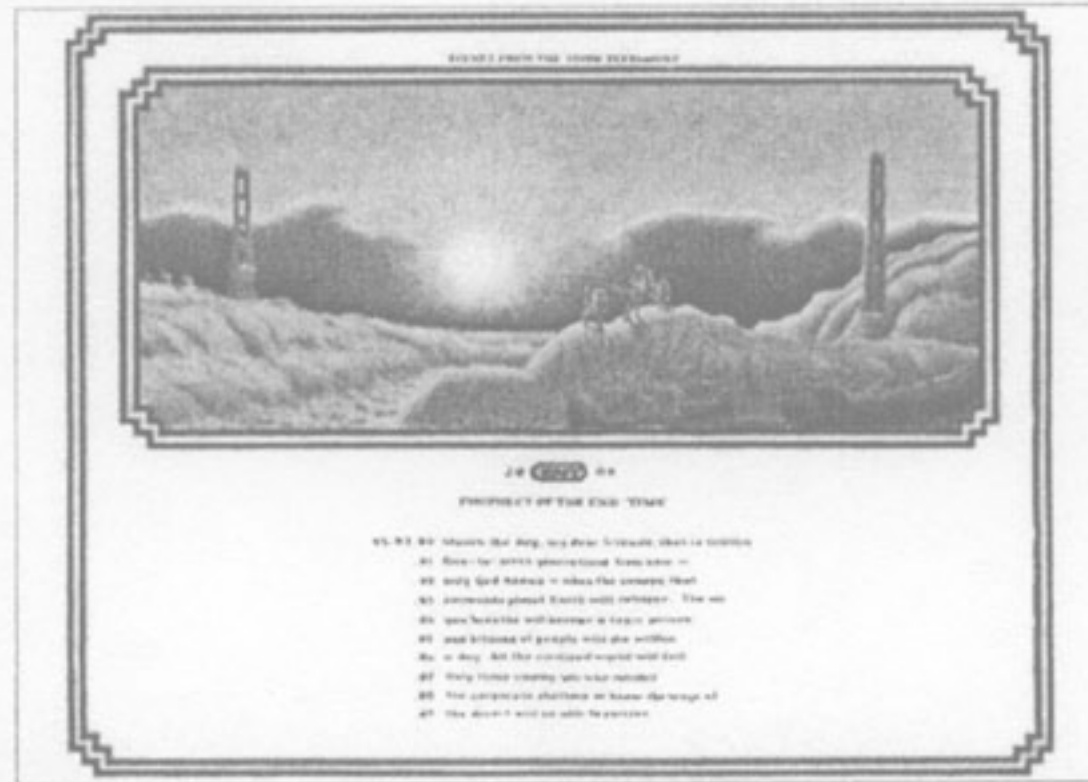
The artist is also a liberal political activist, so don't forget to consider the resonance of what she terms "claiming the water," though for me the piece works best as a decontextualized work of unusual humor, and as a smart experiment in the current value of performative art.

Of the four artists showing here, only Tully and Adriane Colburn display any thematic interplay. Colburn's exhibit, *Before the Rush*, also takes an environmental slant on water. She traces the historical cartographies of local water systems and reflects them against their contemporary counterparts, creating delicate cut-paper Rorschach blots, symmetrical but for the changes in the landscape made by human development. The work is pedantic in the classic sense, just one step removed from a *National Geographic* illustration.

In cases like *San Francisco Bay 1800/San Francisco Bay 2000*, we can ignore the children's museum spirit of the piece and absorb its aesthetic, which abstracts nature in a way beautiful for its utility, like camouflage. But in the ponderous and sloppily hung *Mission Creek, Bear vs. Bull, Oak vs. Eucalyptus*, we are trapped by simplistic reasoning and hackneyed talking-points. Numbed, it is difficult to concede much admiration even for the work's incredibly labor-intensive process.

In the upper gallery, a work of uncommon elegance feels transcendent. Los Angeles video artist Kerry Tribe's 16mm film, *Northern Lights*, captures the light effects of a device from her childhood known as the *Lumia Ori*, which she describes as "somewhere between a work of light art and an ambient trip toy." Tribe has paired it with a soundtrack played on the Lyricon, the sort of outmoded synthesizer coveted by vintage enthusiasts, and mixed a potent cocktail of seedy nostalgia with undertones of mystic enlightenment. Without straining, the film loop distills the dinky glory of a 1970s American childhood from a simple, unmediated image.

The pronounced impression of the piece is one of refinement, but in context of the artist's past work



Clockwise from left: Adriane Colburn, *Mission Creek, 1820*, 2005, paper, 12-1/2" x 14-1/2"; Frederick Loomis, *San Francisco Bay After the Great Catastrophe*, 2004, colored pencil on paper, 9" x 12"; Kerry Tribe, still of *Northern Lights*, 2004, 16 mm film; Jessica Tully, still of *Liquidations: The Dance of Water & Power*, 2005, at Southern Exposure, San Francisco.



it falls under the gallery's rubric of experimentalism; we find that Tribe herself falls under their other rubric: community values. Her videos, including straightforward interviews with community members, typically take a documentarian approach to the construction of memory. In this context, *Northern Lights* becomes an extension of what is essentially a clinical process. What is confirmed here, if anyone needed it, is that sensitivity to aesthetic concerns can trigger a response in the viewer emotionally, hormonally, inducing a more complete engagement with the work of art.

—Abraham Orden

Adriane Colburn: *Before the Rush*; Frederick Loomis: *The Visionary Drawings by Edward Mathew Taylor*; Kerry Tribe: *Northern Lights*; and Jessica Tully: *Liquidations—The Dance of Water & Power* closed April 9 at Southern Exposure, San Francisco.

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