

DE / CODING
THE
APOCALYPSE

MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

THE PANACEA MUSEUM, BEDFORD, UK
MARCH 8TH - JULY 1ST, 2018

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

Delcoding the Apocalypse is an exhibition by the visual artist Michael Takeo Magruder that explores contemporary creative visions inspired by and based upon the Book of Revelation. The exhibition consists of five new media installations that are constructed using a range of digital technologies and physical materials associated with traditional art forms. This blending of new and old updates and expands the concepts and contexts that have surrounded the Book throughout its history.

The word 'apocalypse' originally indicated an 'unveiling', and the Book itself not only documents the destruction of the current world, but also maps out the creation of a new, better one. By aligning contemporary art and theological study, the exhibition at the Panacea Museum investigates our enduring fascination with this ancient text and provides new ways for modern audiences to reflect upon the notion of apocalypse.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Michael Takeo Magruder (b.1974, US/UK, www.takeo.org) is a visual artist who works with new media including real-time data, digital archives, immersive environments, mobile devices and virtual worlds. His practice explores concepts ranging from media criticism and aesthetic journalism to digital formalism and computational aesthetics, deploying Information Age technologies and systems to examine our networked, media-rich world. In the last 20 years, Takeo's projects have been showcased in over 250 exhibitions in 35 countries, and his art has been widely supported by numerous funding bodies and public galleries within the UK, US and EU.



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CenSAMM

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Museum





THE HORSE AS TECHNOLOGY

BY: MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

IN DIALOGUE WITH: PROF. BEN QUASH

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are among the best-known characters from the Book of Revelation, even though they appear only briefly in the text. These riders – Conquest, War, Famine and Death – are seen as the harbingers of humanity's Last Judgment, and as such, have been the focus of much attention and speculation throughout the Book's reception history.

The Horse as Technology is a modular new media installation that proposes the 'horse' of Revelation is a symbol of technology – an extension of the human body and will – embodying transformation and maintaining the power to either create or destroy. The artwork consists of various artefacts that have been generated using modern digital production systems and processes related to 3D scanning, printing, and visualisation.

A digitised real horse skull provides the singular source material for the work, while the components of the installation represent various digital de/re-constructions of the biological form. These include a series of light panels containing the binary scan data of the skull and a set of four intricate 3D-printed 'mesh' sculptures that are digital simulacra of the original analogue object. Viewers are able to examine the outcomes of technological processes first-hand and reflect on the influence of these systems to both engender new forms of creation and bring about destructive (perhaps even apocalyptic) changes in ways that are quite similar to the potentialities of the horse in ancient times.

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PLAYING THE APOCALYPSE

BY: MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

IN DIALOGUE WITH: PROF. AARON ROSEN

Throughout its history, the Book of Revelation has greatly influenced Western notions concerning the final days of humanity's existence. The prophesies outlined within the text have inspired countless generations of artists who have sought to depict and explore these stories in ways that were informed by and relevant to their own times.

Playing the Apocalypse is a series of digital 'paintings' that reflects on how the Book of Revelation's apocalyptic visions and archetypes manifest in today's digital pop culture. The artwork is exclusively created from in-game footage (of the artist playing) taken from the immensely popular third-person shooter *Gears of War* (Epic Games, 2006-11). The game's setting – a once beautiful but now ashen world called Sera that is home to humanity's last survivors – is used to stage a set of scenic compositions that are reminiscent of the English Romantic painter John Martin's (UK, 1789-1854) apocalyptic landscapes, such as *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (1852) and *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851-53). The work considers the ways in which Revelation has shaped the aesthetics and narratives of such imaginary worlds and our quests to 'win' salvation for humankind that we strive to enact within them.

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OPENED THE FOURTH SEAL, I HEARD
COME AND SEE. AND I LOOKED, AND BEH
T SAT ON HIM WAS DEATH, AND HELL FO
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REVELATION AS MIRROR

BY: MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

IN DIALOGUE WITH: DR. NATASHA O'HEAR

The Book of Revelation has often been employed as a device to contextualise a present time or situation. Because of its visual nature, it has inspired endless artistic responses and functioned as a lens through which individuals and societies alike have viewed their own realities in order to gain a sense of understanding about the times in which they live.

Revelation as Mirror is a set of digital 'stained-glass windows' – one for each of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – that alludes precisely to this idea of the 'lens'. Each window is composed of two discrete parts. The first 'glass' and 'lead' layer is fabricated using the latest generation of direct-to-media digital print technology, and is composed from the Book's text itself, filtering and abstracting what lies behind it. The second, 'light' layer consists of an LED screen connected to a micro-computer system that renders fleeting, animated images drawn from live web searches based on keywords from the verses about the Horsemen. The combination draws the viewer's attention to the continuous reinterpretation, mediation and attribution of meaning of the biblical text through different ages, locations and systems of knowledge.

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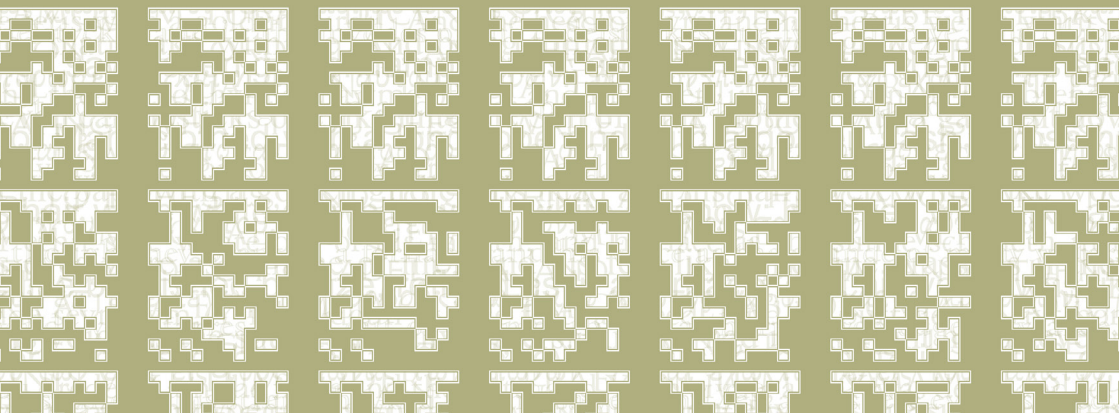


...and that the words of this book be a blessing and a testimony to all who hear them.

THE END OF THE WORLD IS NOT NEAR, BUT THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEAR.



THE END OF THE WORLD IS NOT NEAR, BUT THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEAR.



APOCALYPSE FOREVER

BY: MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

IN DIALOGUE WITH: DR. MICHELLE FLETCHER

Since its writing, the Book of Revelation has been the subject of untold controversy and debate. Humanity has forever been preoccupied with deciphering the 'true' meaning to its overarching narrative and hidden spiritual messages.

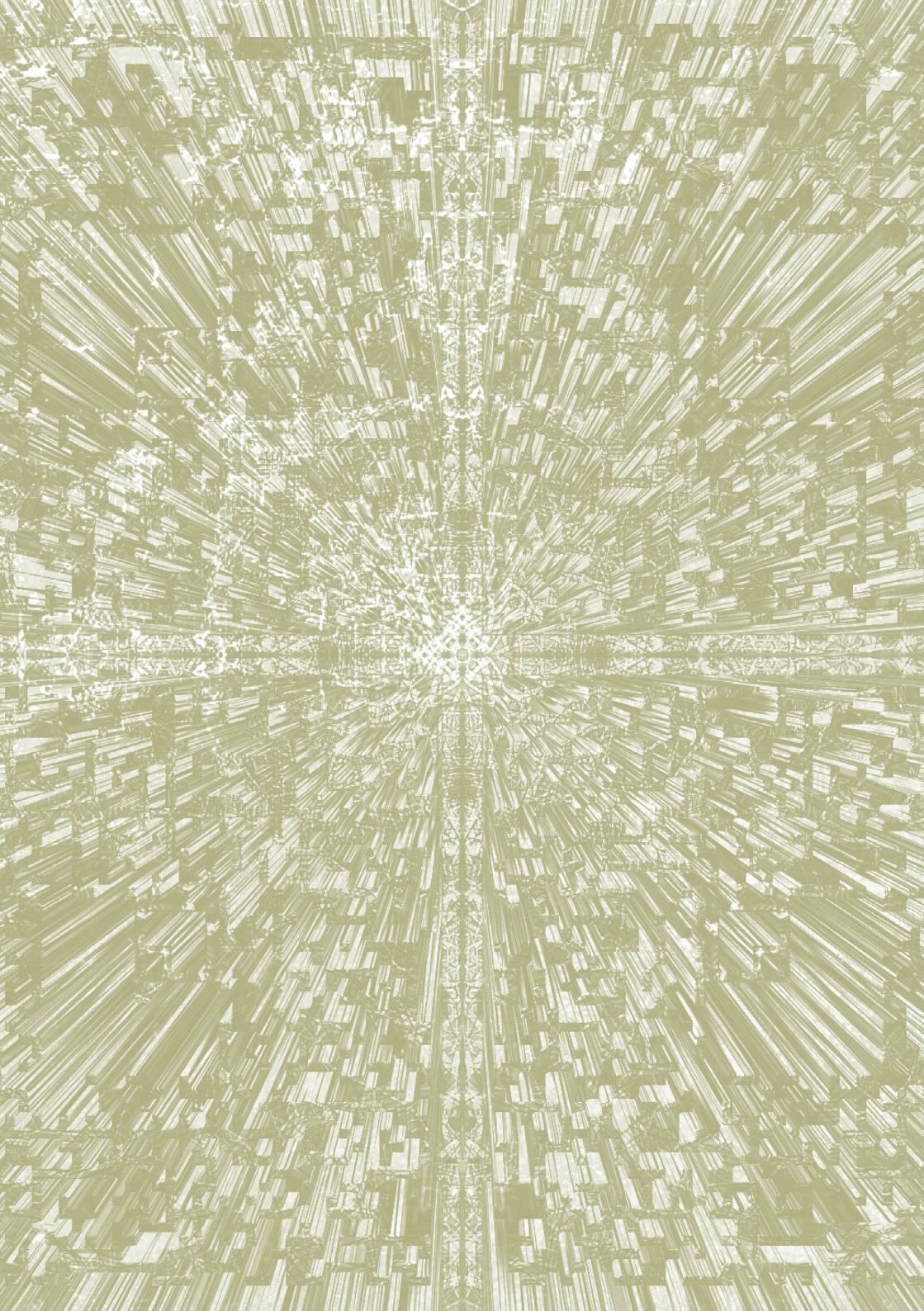
Apocalypse Forever is a modular new media installation that 'translates' the Book of Revelation into machine code/language. Unlike other traditional static transcriptions of the text, this version has the power to endlessly generate contemporary visual interpretations of the Book itself.

The artwork consists of three main elements. The first is a set of 22 small laser-engraved 'tablets' that draw comparisons with stone/clay-based systems of writing from ancient times. Each tablet contains the entire text of one chapter of Revelation that is encoded using the PDF417 barcode scheme, and a QR code that enacts an automated Google image search using the chapter's first verse. The installation's second component is a corresponding series of 22 large format digital wall prints. The prints use the same data as the tablets but incorporate an additional aesthetic 'woven' layer that is generated from the original Koine Greek version of Revelation and six historically significant translations (the Latin Vulgate, Wycliffe's, Tyndale's, the King James Version, John Nelson Darby's and the New Revised Standard Version). The final part of the work is a real-time wall projection that cycles through the 22 QR code web searches. This aspect of the installation shows a live visual 'reading' of the Book – each moment calling forth some new and unpredictable interpretation of the text.

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A NEW JERUSALEM

BY: MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

IN DIALOGUE WITH: PROF. EDWARD ADAMS

The narrative of the Book of Revelation is not just one of apocalyptic destruction; it is also a journey of salvation and unveiling. The Book's positive culmination is expressed in the creation of a heavenly city – referred to as New Jerusalem – that arises from the remains of the old world.

A New Jerusalem is an immersive virtual reality installation that seeks to embody the spirit of this prophesised city. The artwork manifests as a beautiful and illuminated metropolis that is based upon Revelation's architectural descriptions, and can be experienced through two distinct perspectives as witnessed and related by the Book's narrator, John the Seer.

Unlike other pictorial visualisations of this biblical prophecy that have been created throughout history, the underlying structure of the work is generated solely from the text of Revelation itself that has been translated into a data code form and rendered in four-dimensional virtual space (XYZ plus time). However, the imagined cityscape is also constructed using current Google Maps data of present day Jerusalem, thus offering the possibility that – in the words of theologian Professor Edward Adams – “the new creation is not a wholly unrecognisable place, even if the new Jerusalem is like no city the world has ever seen”. Within this context, the artwork asks viewers to contemplate why we should care about our present society and environment if promises of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21.1) await us.

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I was a child of the Cold War era living in my nation's capital surrounded by the incessant rhetoric and proxy wars of two ideologically opposed superpowers – all made real by the constant threat of nuclear annihilation. Even at that young age I was already fascinated with both technology and religion. Upon reading the Book of Revelation for the first time I wondered to myself if John the Seer wrote of things like locust hordes and falling stars because he could not understand, much less describe, swarms of apache helicopters and the sight of missiles raining from an evening sky.

Now, three decades later, I watch my daughter grow up in a very different world that is defined by data, networks and code. And in this age of such technological possibility and destructive potential, I can't help but wonder what end times she imagines in her own quiet moments of personal reflection. Her fears (or hopes) about the final days that she might witness are certainly not the same as those from my youth. My dreams never materialised, but hers might. So I look to her and try to understand, what is her Apocalypse.

MICHAEL TAKEO MAGRUDER

ARTIST'S REFLECTION

DE/CODING THE APOCALYPSE

2014 - 2018

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

De/coding the Apocalypse

an exhibition by: Michael Takeo Magruder

presented by: The Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic
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at: The Panacea Museum, Bedford, UK
March 8th - July 1st, 2018

in dialogue with: Simon Robinson (project director, CenSAMM)
Gemma Papineau (manager, Panacea Museum)

and: Prof. Ben Quash (lead academic)
Alfredo Cramerotti (curator)

Prof. Edward Adams (reader, *A New Jerusalem*)
Dr. Michelle Fletcher (reader, *Apocalypse Forever*)
Dr. Natasha O'Hear (reader, *Revelation as Mirror*)
Prof. Aaron Rosen (reader, *Playing the Apocalypse*)

Drew Baker (technologist, 3d visualisation)
Erik Fleming (technologist, server programming)
Ben Jastram (technologist, 3d printing)

Supported by:

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