



were pulled into an immersive world of intense clarity, saturated color, and convincing illusion of depth.

The narrative follows Henry as he surveys a parched, polluted landscape and fantasizes about an alternative world. He builds a rocket ship and blasts off with his dog “just in time to escape planetary disaster.” In *Birth of a Red Planet #6—A Scary Arrival*, the rocket hurtles through a tunnel of storm clouds, constructed from cotton and chicken wire and backlit with rosy hues. Henry is safely delivered to a flowering utopia, where he meets a robot companion (the 1950s Japanese toy named Zoomer). The two figures stand as equals before a mysterious wooden chest.

For the exhibition soundtrack dubbed “Henry’s Mix Tape,” Bahouth drew from a variety of space-themed hits well beyond Elton John’s “Rocket Man.” What better comment on a dystopian society than Drive-By Truckers’s “Puttin’ People on the Moon”? The Southern rockers address mass unemployment, cancer, drug dealing, and the lack of affordable health insurance. In “Pluto,” the white rappers 2 Skinnee J’s compare the deportation of immigrants to Pluto’s ejection from planetary status.

**Above:** Peter Bahouth, *Birth of a Red Planet: #6—A Scary Arrival*, 2014.

**Medium-format stereoscopic images; mixed-media diorama constructed with Nikki Starz, 4 x 4 x 10 ft. Right and detail:** Nancy Cohen, *Hackensack Dreaming*, 2014–15. Glass, handmade paper, rubber, wire, and monofilament, approx. 20 x 30 x 11 ft.

A mix of child-like imagination and unremitting reality, 19th-century imaging techniques and high-energy music, *Birth of a Red Planet* ricocheted viewers between catastrophe and redemption. The final utopian scene suggests a happy ending, but we suspect that this, too, is an illusion.

—Sally Hansell

**JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY**  
**Nancy Cohen**  
**Visual Arts Gallery, New Jersey City University**

*Hackensack Dreaming*, Nancy Cohen’s powerful, affecting installation, attempted to salvage a bit of nature from the depredations of manmade interventions at Mill Creek Marsh near the Hackensack River. Cohen characterizes the site as among the ugliest in the state, a concrete jungle that leads nowhere. At the same time, life persists—specifically in the stumps of a former cedar forest, which provide an unlikely home for plants and birds. The confluence of these two environments—one man-

made and dominant and the other natural and determined to survive—is key to Cohen’s work. She uses all manner of materials—handmade paper, glass, and rubber—to characterize the tragic, but persevering voice of nature. As Christina Catanese points out in her catalogue essay, “Our world is giving rise to more and more of these novel ecologies.” Cohen’s version may help us to appreciate at least one of them in its disabled splendor.

The installation was divided into two parts, with a narrow walkway leading between them down the middle of the room. Cohen placed organic designs on her handmade paper, as if to call back the possibility of natural life. Facsimiles of the cedar stumps were set on the floor, reminding us that life can find a foothold even in a hostile environment like Mill Creek Marsh. The overall feeling of the installation was of a controlled anarchy generating the offbeat confusion of a marshland plain. The walls were lined with a series of drawings filled with plant imagery and executed on homemade paper, rubber, and resin. The combination of the plant images and the slightly unusual materials conjured the effects of manmade toxicities on tiny ecosystems. It is hard to find beauty in an asphalt backyard, but Cohen has done so, creating an oasis of proportion and muted color in a place almost no one would find attractive.



Cohen is reclaiming, even if only momentarily, the right of nature to assert itself despite the obstacles of human intervention. One does, in fact, see many “novel ecologies” in and around urban areas, and Cohen does an excellent job of using a metaphorical approach to a visually difficult reality, thereby making something beautiful out of something that is not. She shares this aesthetic with other artists of her generation, politicized as they are by ecological trauma. Some of the forms—drawings of glass and wire—offer spectacular visions of what art can be when taken from the ruins of nature. There is a vulnerability to Cohen’s work that moves it from the descriptive to a lyrical consideration of loss, though survival always remains a possibility. As a result, we see works like *Hackensack Dreaming* sadly, but bear up under their exquisite effects.

—Jonathan Goodman

## GARRISON, NEW YORK

### Susan Knight and Suzan Shutan Garrison Art Center

Suzan Shutan and Susan Knight met 20 years ago when Shutan was a fellow at the Bemis Foundation in Omaha, Nebraska. They admired each other’s work and discovered a mutual interest in patterns of weather, land, and scientific behavior related to the natural world. In 2011, they decided to join forces and develop an exhibition with the goal of providing viewers with artworks that inform, educate, and inspire interdisciplinary communication, community participation, and scientific and artistic literacy.

Their collaborative exhibition, “Watered Down: Issues That Run Two Ways,” included various suspended and freestanding sculptural components. At first glance, the work has a festive, light-hearted, pop quality. The sculptures, which are made of industrial and pedestrian materials such as plastic drinking straws, tar paper (used for roofing), pom-poms, and



Tyvek, filled the space with an airy touch, making use of walls, ceiling, and floor. Closer inspection, however, revealed that these seemingly fanciful works have an underlying message of grave intent. Knight and Shutan want viewers to gain insight into the environmental challenges raised by multiple water uses in the Hudson River Valley. They have researched in depth, interpreting scientific data from pie charts, graphs, and maps about the water quality in the Hudson River watershed, with a focus on New York State’s stewardship of the river.

In Knight’s large wall installation *Water Bank Boogie*, several hand-cut

disks of paper, sandwiched between layers of Tyvek painted with acrylic ink, seem to float on the wall like party balloons. Rendered in red, yellow, gray, and green, the rounds take the same colors used by hydro-geologists to color-code soil samples of clay, gravel, sand, and silt.

*Atoms in the Water*, also by Knight, uses reflective Tyvek on paper with applied Mylar dots hand-cut to the shape of the Hudson River Watershed. The surface of the sculpture is patterned with cutouts of the atomic signatures for iron, black nitrogen, aluminum, radon, manganese, fluorine, and other elements for which the Hudson is tested.

Shutan’s large geometric floor installation *Detrimental Sips* is made of plastic drinking straws. Their formal arrangement, which loosely refers to Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome, illustrates the interconnectivity and interdependency of earth and water. Taken from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the colored straws represent various problematic issues related to municipal discharge, urban storm runoff, agriculture, septic system discharges, and erosion.

A suspended corner installation, *River That Flows Two Ways*, also by Shutan, consists of a meandering, intricate wave of cut patterns in tar paper. The form reflects the tidal river system of the Hudson, as well as the communities alongside it. Made from petroleum and oil, the tar that infuses the paper alludes to recent oil spills in the Hudson River.

This strategy of enticing the viewer toward a deeper appreciation and understanding of environmental issues through playfulness and seductive color is not a new one, but it remains effective. Shutan and Knight manage to captivate and hold the viewer’s interest in the aesthetic aspects of their work via their decorative use of unconventional materials. Only then, does the work prompt an understanding of deeper meanings and interpretations, allowing the viewing experience to become provocative.

—Amy Lipton



Above: Susan Knight, *Water Bank Boogie*, 2015. Hand-cut paper, Tyvek, and acrylic ink, 8 x 21 x 4 ft. Left: Suzan Shutan, *River That Flows Two Ways*, 2015. Roofing paper, 8 x 3 x .25 ft.