



May 3, 2017 Written by [Tanya Gayer](#)

Sonic Futures at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art

Visitors might be deceived by the initial sounds they hear in *Sonic Futures* at the [San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art](#). A haunting hum resounds throughout the dark exhibition space, originating from a multichannel video installation with an audio mashup of Mariah Carey's "Fantasy" and Tom Tom Club's "Genius of Love." The work, titled *They Held Dances on the Graves of Those Who Died in the Terror* (2012–present), is by multimedia artist Sofía Córdova, and the televisions display a hazy world where nature has been destroyed and the surviving humans live in a decaying landscape. *They Held Dances* presents an overtly ominous commentary, and it nearly masks the catchy energy of the other six sound and performance artworks by INVASORIX, Jeepneys, Laura Hyunjhee Kim, Keith Lafuente, Merritt Wallace, and Jenifer Wofford. The works consider social and political conditions such as environmental destruction, ableism, racial inequality, gender discrimination, and White privilege, and the exhibition as a whole invites "singing and dancing," suggests curator Patricia Cariño[1], as an entry point to rethink social and cultural norms in the next year, decade, or millennium.



Laura Hyunjhee Kim. *LOVE NETWORKS LOVE*, 2017; video and variable objects; 02:32.
Photo: Qian Wang.

As the exhibition weaves its way through the space, a new installation is revealed at every turn; with the exception of Córdova's work, the music that accompanies each installation can be heard through headphones. The rocket-like installation *Your Body Your Ship* (2017) by the artist Jeepneys (Anna Luisa Petrisko) is painted with bright geometric shapes that reference precolonial tattoo designs associated with Pacific Islander nations. In the accompanying video, three performers wear bodysuits with the same geometrical patterns. The campy video meanders along time and narrative, displaying shots of performers who ride bikes and perform smiley, energetic group stretches to prepare for time travel, interspersed with circle dissolves, color overlays, and vintage footage of planets. The overall style suggests a liberated manner of thinking about time, space, and the body. By engaging with historical symbols, the performers consider their postcolonial identities in the present and commune with ancient energies and rituals for their unfathomable journey into the future.



Jeepneys. *Your Body Your Ship*, 2017; video and installation; 03:41; installation view.
Photo: Qian Wang.

The works by Keith Lafuente and the artist collective INVASORIX deconstruct gender binaries and privileged voices in art, music, and fashion. In Lafuente's black-and-white video, *Spring/Summer 17: Motherland* (2016), the artist films models who gambol about on the beach. The filming style and the clothing worn by the models reference conventional scenes from the American fashion industry, and also negotiate traditional gender-specific styles associated with Filipino clothing. No dialog is present—instead, a sorrowful Filipino song by Asin is used to comment on a bygone era of the Philippines. INVASORIX's video *Macho Intellectual* (2015) satirizes historically male-dominated artistic groups like Die Brücke and Bauhaus, which established "norms" for conceptual movements and cultural trends. Paired with rhythmic cumbia music, the video flashes vintage portraits of these

artist groups, which dissolve into images of INVASORIX in paper mustaches and drag, standing in poses similar to the old photographs. Both Lafuente and INVASORIX utilize tropes in visual culture to expose deeply rooted biases, dampening the reverence traditionally held for esteemed cultural benefactors. Yet, as heard in the lyrics of INVASORIX's second video, *Nadie Aquí Es Ilegal* (2014), there is "a vocabulary yet to be invented" to initiate a necessary dialog for the future, when identity and culture can originate from hybrid forms of acknowledgement and exchange. It is important to note that these installations utilize comedy and playful music to consider the future, yet they are dampened by the sound of Córdova's installation, which pervades the exhibition space and establishes a foreboding feeling.



INVASORIX. *Macho Intelectual*, 2015; music video; 03:06. Photo: Diana María González.

Laura Hyunjee Kim's video, *LOVE NETWORKS LOVE* (2017), considers the future from a technological standpoint. A performer digitally illustrates an image of a rose on her phone and types the phrase "a digital rose has no scent" while singing a sensual song that contains the same phrase. Kim considers the role that passion will play in the future as technology infiltrates connection and communication. The work leaves the audience with questions

rather than answers: Who authors romance and connection—the technologists or the people who use the products?



Jenifer Wofford. *No Scrubs*, 2017; installation of materials from performance. Photo: Qian Wang.

A desire to prepare for the future through actions in the present intensifies as one moves through the exhibition space. The exhibition ends with Jenifer Wofford's installation, *No Scrubs* (2017). In a corner, bright pink walls highlight protest signs and photographic documentation of a performance led by Wofford during the Women's March in Oakland. The bold text on the signs features lyrics from songs like TLC's "No Scrubs" and Yo-Yo's "You Can't Play with My Yo-Yo." For Wofford, marching seemed an incredibly formalized and retrograde call to action, so she asked people to hold these signs and engage with music to redefine methods of protest. The photographs depict strangers who held space and shared energy for a moment, and sure, there is nothing new here—dance and music have long-standing associations with forms of protest—but among the thousands of people who

marched in Oakland, it is notable that a nuanced form of collective passion occurred within Wofford's performance.



Sonic Futures; installation view, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art. Photo: Qian Wang.

Sonic Futures reckons with current issues and considers the work yet to be done—culturally, environmentally, and politically. It's a tall order, and any thoughtful reflection is accompanied by the inauspicious sounds of Sofía Córdova's installation nearby. Indeed, the future *does* seem dire. Yet with Wofford's work as the finale, viewers can take solace in the momentous actions that are presently bringing people together to hear each other.

Sonic Futures is on view at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art through June 11, 2017.

[1] From Patricia Cariño's curatorial statement.