

Knocking on Heaven's Door

'Almost Paradise' at LaMontagne Gallery, 'Out of the Blue' at Proof, and Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons at BU

By RANDI HOPKINS | November 13, 2007

It's difficult to embrace the idea of Utopia these days — contemporary cynicism and irony don't leave much room for addressing the healing of our planet or improving the human condition. Still, artists dare to hope — striving to envision a perfect world even as they critique some life's grimmer realities. In **"ALMOST PARADISE: DANIEL HEIDKAMP, JO JACKSON, ERIKA SOMOGYI, AND CRISTINA TORO,"** which opens at LaMontagne Gallery on November 17, four painters offer commentary, criticism, and observations on the world as they find it.

In the West Coast-based Jackson's new work, for example, skeleton keys, pocket watches, and playing cards rain down on a melting glacial mass. Puerto Rican-born, Upstate New York-based Toro is inspired by art from India, Africa, Peru, and China as he invents a personal world that recalls folk creation myths and epic fairy tales. Boston Museum School grad Heidkamp fills large-scale paintings with humans interacting in ways that range from the gory to the mundane, and often bathed in a kind of visionary light. And New Yorker Somogyi creates large watercolors that the *Village Voice* described as "breezily upbeat . . . like the Day-Glo, utopian posters that adorned many a wood-paneled '70s basement" but that reveal themselves, on closer inspection, to be "more like the hangover from a party that devolved into nastiness."

The role of authenticity in video and performance art — and of artifice impinging on the genuine — are up for debate in **"OUT OF THE BLUE: ELIZABETH AXTMAN, KEN FANDELL, LILLY MCELROY, MELANIE SCHIFF, AND KIRSTEN STOLTMANN,"** which opens at Proof on November 17. Presented by Proof directors Kara Braciale and Julia Hechtman, these five video artists blur the line between performance and reality — a borderland we have learned to love from our front-row seats on the strange evolution of "reality" entertainment programming in what used to be called mass media.

Actual, old-style reality, filtered through personal experience and cultural identity, informs the work of **MARIA MAGDALENA CAMPOS-PONS**, whose own identity and biography have provided subject matter for her art since the 1980s. The Cuban-born Campos-Pons, who lives and works in Boston, where she teaches at the Museum School and runs the innovative GASP gallery that she founded in Brookline, speaks at Boston University on November 26 as part of the School of Visual Arts' "Contemporary Perspectives Lecture Series."



Cristina Toro, *Communicating with Insects*

"Almost Paradise" at LaMontagne Gallery, 51 Melcher St, Boston | November 17–December 22 | 617.482.8400 | **"Out of the Blue"** at Proof, the Distillery, 516 East 2nd St, Unit 20, South Boston | November 17–December 29 | 508.963.9102 | **Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons** speaking at BU's College of Fine Arts Concert Hall, 855 Comm Ave, Boston | November 26 at 6 pm | 617.353.3350