

January 28, 2013

[Scott Hocking: THE END OF THE WORLD](#)

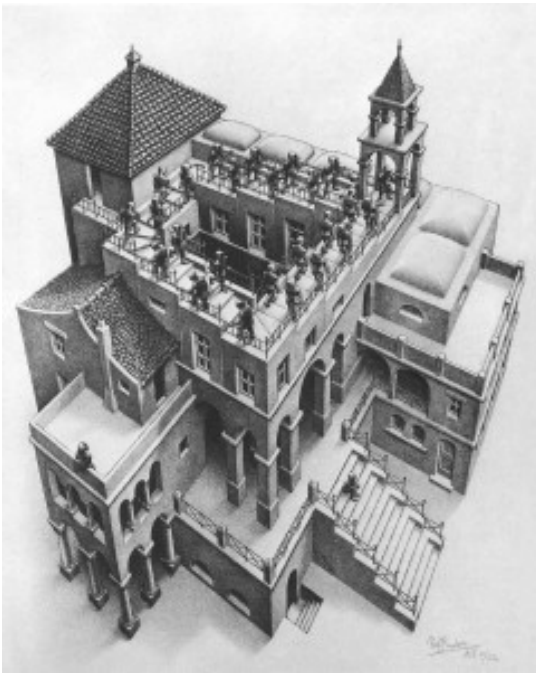
Category: [Art installation photography review](#) — [artifizz admin](#) @ 7:31 pm

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By Jim Welke

Through the end of January, installations and images by Detroit artist [Scott Hocking](#) inhabit the [SUSANNE HILBERRY GALLERY](#) in Ferndale. Get down there and see the “THE END OF THE WORLD” — you won’t witness another show like it.

Mr. Hocking’s work brings an eerie aura to the gallery. Most of the photographs that occupy the walls were shot in Detroit at night. Color emerges sparingly, as though you’ve stepped into a dark corridor and your eyes require time to adapt. Give your eyes pause to dilate and you’ll appreciate the astonishing depth in these deftly composed scenes. A sense of peering into a dream through a very clean window grips you.



MC Escher: Ascending and

Turn your head a few degrees, and the objects in the view appear to shift as though constructed in three dimensions. But these are photos, your brain insists. How can these images relentlessly play such tricks? Consider the use of perspective and [depth of field](#). Consider those converging lines that transport you toward the focal point. The effect suggests the work of [Escher](#), but not as overtly and not with the cloying effect of a visual parlor trick. The subtlety of composition unobtrusively engages without testing your patience.

And how does Mr. Hocking achieve such clarity at night? One wonders. In the pursuit of clarity and depth, [Ansel Adams](#) used eight-by-ten-inch glass negatives lugged into the wilderness on his back. The high physical and spiritual cost of each shot demanded careful composition and long waits for the perfect moment. Similarly, the clarity of Mr. Hocking’s work represents well-honed craft and timing, no doubt wrought through repetition and ruthless winnowing of sub-standard shots.

But clarity is a tool Mr. Hocking applies willfully, and sometimes he dispenses with it to let sections of a composition drop of out focus through wide apertures. By selectively focusing, the images are imbued with a temporal, fleeting quality like your eye captures in a landscape where objects grab your attention randomly. Blurring seems to envelop a whim, an impression at the instant the shutter opened and closed and froze time. Depth-of-field manipulation is a classic photographic technique that requires precise selection of lenses, lighting, shutter speed and lens opening. Few amateurs wit



Several shots are devoted to “The Egg,” a cairn-like installation Mr. Hocking created *in situ* in the crumbling Michigan Central train station in Detroit. The work, built from fragments of stone broken free of the building, implies an improbable spontaneous recombination of the products of decay. [Quantum mechanics](#) enlists probability to describe the potential for a given condition to occur, and thus a set of probabilities represent every possible condition. While not impossible, the probability of the spontaneous formation of an egg-shaped cairn in a neglected train station is very, very low. But, add the sheer force of human will to the equation and improbable things happen. “The Egg” reminds us that humans possess something raw natural forces do not: free will. We can halt inevitable entropy and reconstruct the world in the blink of an eye if we persistently, relentlessly direct our will.

One amusing print, “Obama 2012,” reinforces the documentary quality of photography. In thirty years this image will be imbued with powerful nostalgia that will either chide us for our failures, or honor our accomplishments. Our choice. But looking at this image, a visual memory burns into your retinas with the vivid colors of a gas station sign emblazoned in the depth of night with the title text — an audacious gift from a gas station operator and Mr. Hocking.



Scott Hocking: The End of the World, 2012

“The End of the World,” the installation from which the show gets its name, stands against a back wall of the gallery where it beckons visitors with a multi-colored pyramidal form. Approach the work and you see that it is comprised of books positioned vertically, face-out, one on top of the other. The titles are uniformly bleak, if not apocalyptic. Remember that thirteen level pyramid on the back of the dollar bill — the one with the all-seeing Eye of Providence on top? Depending how you order the rows, Mr. Hocking’s pyramid also possesses thirteen levels. But the message seems to be imbued with a bit more irony than earnestness, and reflects on the folly of certain realms of human study. What were those authors thinking? What sort of publisher puts such things in print? Ponder it for a while.



Scott Hocking: Mercury Retrograde, 2012

Another construction of Mr. Hocking's occupies one long side of the gallery: various sized glass-fronted wooden boxes stand stacked against the wall. Dead animals preserved by a curiously inspired taxidermist inhabit all of them. Frozen in poses they may or may not have held in life, the stuffed carcasses of birds, mice, squirrels, chipmunks, voles, raccoons, groundhogs (woodchucks), a deer (a two foot tall infant), etcetera stare out of their enclosures with glassy, dead-eyed indifference. These stilled animals were once transported to schools to show children the myriad of life surrounding them, no doubt in a time before the prevalence of video, or sensitivity to the impression a herd of murdered creatures might have on developing minds. Not that the impression would be damaging, but I think kids with their clear eyes would see the weird irony here. And with the animals stacked up in an art gallery, the weird streams out like photons from a star penetrating your entire being. There is no escape.

Across the room a big, fat, corroded Mercury sedan crouches with an equally dead-eyed stare, headlights blown out by rocks or bullets. Bullet holes perforate a door and window of the car. Was the Mercury a backdrop for a cold-hearted execution? Or was it just the target of rambunctious gunplay?

The animals and the car comprise Mr. Hocking's "Mercury Retrograde." Mercury retrograde is a term of art from astrology and refers to the apparent reverse motion of planets through the sky due to vagaries of their orbits as viewed from Earth. Retrograde motion of Mercury (according to Wikipedia) "*is commonly thought to signify difficulties in communication, such as post or emails going astray, verbal misunderstandings, and travel delays and frustrations.*" Clearly gone astray, the car sits in a pile of salt, which does not appear to be an accidental choice of material.



Scott Hocking: Mercury Retrograde, 2012

Notably, salt underlies Detroit in the form of vast [400 million year old subterranean deposits](#). Salt spills too from the base of one of the boxed animals, and ties the beasts to the human conceit of permanence imbued in that multi-ton Mercury of the past. The salt was here before us and will be here when we're gone. Possibly too, in the distant future a few of us will stare dead-eyed from glass-topped boxes — the exhibit is after all entitled "End of the World." There is irony here, but it lurks in the background of the eerie reality thoughtfully constructed by Mr. Hocking. Nothing lasts forever; think about those long gone oceans that formed the salt below us.

Get out and see this show before it is gone.