

BLUE MOUNTAIN ARCTURUS





Type of output:
Exhibition
by
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Cover:
Blue Mountain Arcturus
Logo, 2018.
Photo credit: Allan Hughes

Left:
Blue Mountain Arcturus
Blue Mountain E-Meter, 2017.
Photo credit: Allan Hughes

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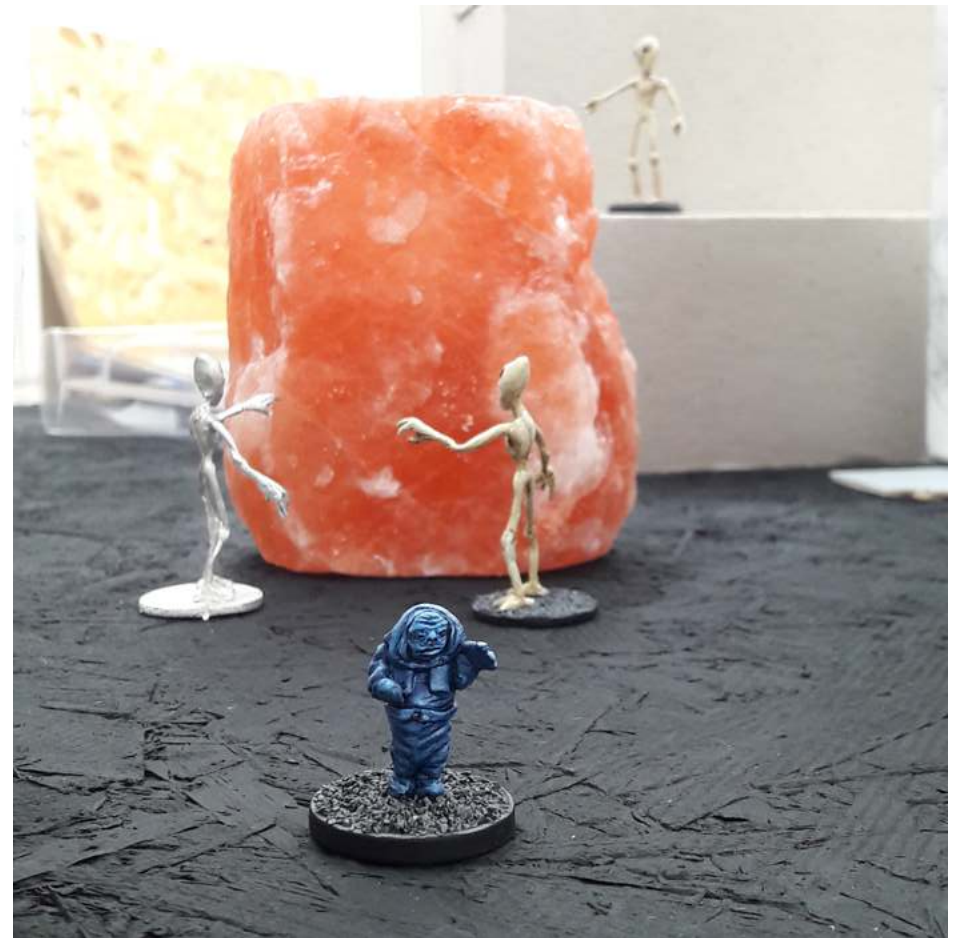
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SUMMARY

The *Blue Mountain Arcturus* project encompassed exhibitions with related performances and contextual material resulting from an innovative research methodology devised and led by Allan Hughes with collaboration from Mark Jackson. The investigation entailed the production of an experimental studio environment in which ideas were workshopped and concepts visualised, drawing upon the practices of visual art on the one hand and commercial gaming and its associated hobby activities on the other.

Blue Mountain Arcturus developed out of research into practices of appropriation and game-play, and into scholarly debates about the coincidences and resonance between fictional and real-world scenarios. The research was interdisciplinary and involved the creation of a hybrid methodology derived from art practice and art theory, role-play gaming, and underground fiction.

Right:
Blue Mountain Arcturus
Miniatures from the *Blue Mountain
Starter Set* installed in Kate Liston's
model for *Feel After the New See*, 2017.
Photo credit: courtesy of artists



Blue Mountain Arcturus exhibitions resulted from a cybernetic ecology of practice in which table-top gaming systems provided templates for exploring relations between characters and events in fictional worlds. The aim of such world-making activity was to speculatively imagine how worlds might be fashioned anew without recourse to the normalising control exerted by game rules and real world actualities, drawing upon contemporary theories of ‘fictioning’ in contemporary art (Burrows and O’Sullivan 2019; Gunkel, Hameed & O’Sullivan 2017) and literary imaginaries of “junkie” vision (Burroughs 1993) to forge alternative tableaux of historical possibility.

Blue Mountain Arcturus appropriated and used table-top gaming systems for their tactile and dynamic representations and as environments for the playing out of alternatives to embedded forms of capitalist realism (Fisher 2009). The roles adopted in the research were conducted via an artificial split between theory (Rohtmaa-Jackson) and practice (Hughes).

Since its establishment in 2017, *Blue Mountain Arcturus* project has realised seven exhibitions comprising video works, a sound work and numerous artefacts and image-based works.

Right:

Blue Mountain Arcturus, *The Citadel of Chaos*, 2019.
A scratch-built, 28mm-scale diorama of BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art set in a turbulent parallel present where the realisation of a public artwork by Tatham & O’Sullivan has resulted in a break- down of the fabric of reality.

Photo credit: courtesy of artists



RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Blue Mountain Arcturus set out to develop processes of art-making that drew from the development and realisation of table-top game systems. The research used a praxis of *fictioning* through role-play, model-making and chance operation to explore the ways in which art and artists can consider the limits of control.

The project aimed to extend the critical context of collaborative practice by asking what kinds of shared narratives might best enable the envisioning and realising of alternatives to embedded forms of capitalist realism (Fisher 2009). Enquiry was advanced by initiating forms of game play and material production that engaged with world-building and mythopoetic solutions to contemporary conditions of control.



Right: Blue Mountain Arcturus
The Citadel of Chaos, (detail) 2019.

Photo credit: courtesy of artists

CONTEXT

The project engaged with the theoretical proposition of *fictioning* which O’Sullivan describes in part, via his reading of the work of Burroughs, as a transformative “deployment of other times in the present” (Gunkel, Hameed & O’Sullivan, 2017). Such transformative activities extend from Burroughs’ cut-up technique to the introduction of incongruous characters and settings taken from sci-fi, fantasy and folklore into a *fictioning* of reality. This deployment is applied as a method of escaping an impasse of a linear time, causality and destiny maintained by social control.

For *Blue Mountain Arcturus*, the contexts of miniature wargaming and table-top role-playing games were adopted as scenes of similar world-making activities. Here protagonists could construct a world from past, present and/or future folkloric resources to achieve a desired alternative to present-day conditions of existence through studio practice.

Blue Mountain Arcturus provided a unique contribution to the field of art practice concerned with critical possibilities within forms of game-play (*States of Play: Roleplay Reality*, FACT Liverpool, 2018). While there is a wider theoretical field of study that prioritises studies of gaming within the social sciences (Giddings 2014, Zagal et al 2018), the unique contribution of *Blue Mountain Arcturus* resides within the exploration of embodied forms of gaming-activity and hobby practices as transferred to the contexts of contemporary art-making. The project is situated in a broader field of practitioners working in this area as curated in *Polymorph Other* (QHAC, Hexham, 2019), including artists Daniel Locke, David Blandy, Uma Breakdown, and Peter Wolfendale.

Right: Blue Mountain Arcturus
The Citadel of Chaos, (detail) 2019.
Photo credit: courtesy of artists



METHODS

Research methods are accretive, with characters, settings and points of reference recurring and regenerating in different forms. This approach is drawn from collaborative poly-narrative play that occurs in table-top role-playing games. A series of artworks was developed based on Whitley Strieber's narrative of an alien visitation by a Robot Being (Strieber 1995). Methodologies appropriated and explored in creating these included the production of replica props, miniaturised model-making for table-top scale representations and cosplay performance undertaken by the artists in live action role-play.



Clockwise from top left:

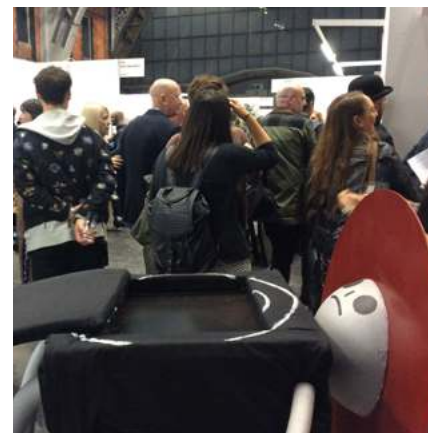
Robot Being Miniature from the Blue Mountain Starter Set, 2017.

Robot Being Costume for Plastique Fantastique performance, 2017.

Robot Being as it originally appears in *Communion*, 1989 Dir. Philippe Mora.

Robot Being, Manchester Contemporary, 2017.

Photo credits: courtesy of artists



Scale model-making of buildings, especially in relation to those used in representing historical sites for pedagogic purposes, and those used by curators in designing museum and gallery displays, feature as another methodology. The miniatures produced through the research employ a traditional epoxy modelling and white-metal spin-casting process; emulating the methodologies of games companies such as Citadel Miniatures Ltd. Using the cinematic feature adaptation of *Communion* (Mora 1989) as visual reference, a series of 28mm scale models of key characters were sculpted. These included representations of Strieber, the robot being, the 'mantis lady', the 'blue doctor' aliens and the alien 'greys'.



Clockwise from top left:

Blue Doctor, work in progress with two-part epoxy putty

Blue Doctor, finished sculpt ready for moulding

Spin casting process at Reiver Castings

Detail of vulcanised rubber mold for casting

Photo credits: courtesy of artists



These sculpts were then taken to Reiver Castings in Hexham, a local scale modelling manufacturer, where vulcanised moulds were produced and an edition of models were cast in white metal. A limited edition of 20 sets were packaged for sale at the Polymorph Other exhibitions and others were painted for inclusion in dioramas and use in game-play.

In the first iteration of the *Polymorph Other* exhibition, miniatures were installed in fellow artist Kate Liston's presentation of a model representation of The Bigg Market in Newcastle. In the second iteration the figures were installed in Hughes and Rohtmaa-Jackson's own diorama *The Citadel of Chaos*; a representation of BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead at an imagined apocalyptic moment in its would-be history.

This activation of different scenarios demonstrates how *Blue Mountain Arcturus* miniatures are not confined to any singular games system nor to inclusion in any one artwork. Instead they are elements which can be deployed to engender a playful reanimation of any number of gaming / artistic tableaux.

Right:
Blue Mountain Arcturus
Blue Mountain Starter Set, 2017.
28mm spun-cast white metal miniatures.
Photo credit: courtesy of artists



DISSEMINATION

The initial exhibitions, which were primarily realised as audio/visual installations, served to establish and develop key characters and identities in the myth-fiction of the practice. Subsequent works have been directed towards more specific gaming/hobby activities as practice.

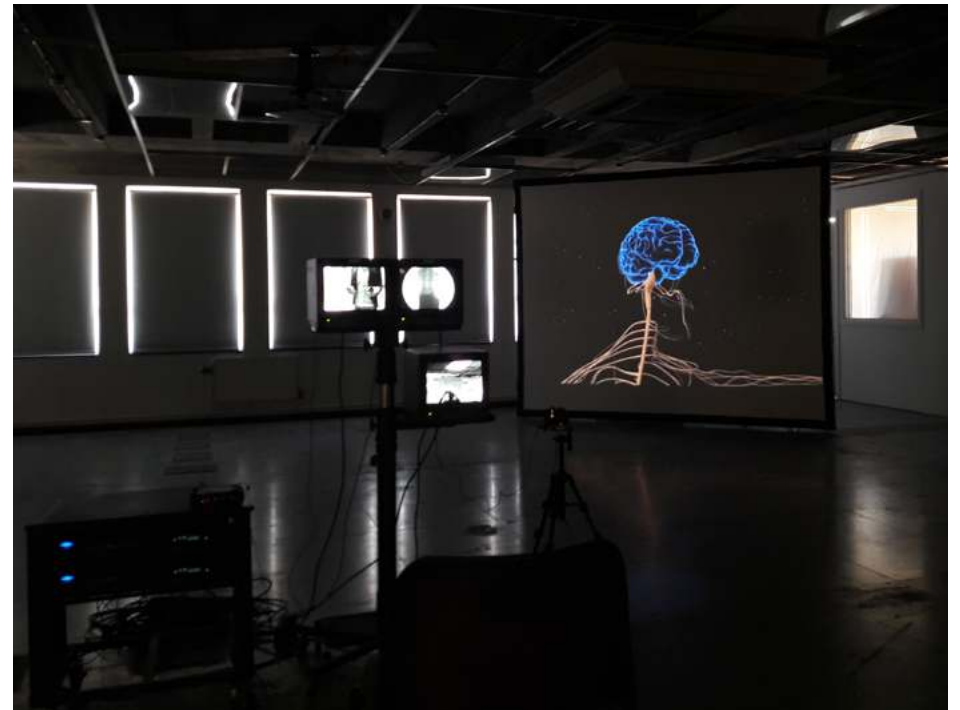
Blue Mountain Equals Arcturus was a two-day preview of video and material production exhibited in The Northern Charter, Newcastle upon Tyne (September 2017). Also presented at Manchester Contemporary through Gallery North (October 2017).

Bensham Grey was exhibited at the Shipley Gallery in Gateshead as a part of My Part Of Your Home, curated by Giles Bailey & CIRCA Projects (October 2017).

Through collaboration with the performance art collective Plastique Fantastique, *Blue Mountain* produced a full-size costume of the Robot Being and video footage for inclusion in their work for the Hayward Touring exhibition, *Shonky*. The exhibition has toured at The MAC, Belfast, Dundee Contemporary Arts & Bury Museum (2017-2018).

Right:
Blue Mountain Equals Arcturus
at The Northern Charter,
Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017.
Photo credit: courtesy of artists

Link to film:
<https://vimeo.com/251160287>



A second version of *Bensham Grey*, was included in the group show *Now Another Procedure Is To Run*, alongside work by Gail Pickering and Jawbone Jawbone in Catalyst Arts, Belfast (February 2018).

The *Blue Mountain Starter* set of 28mm metal miniatures was launched at an event in IMT Gallery, London (April 2018). This one-night only exhibition was curated and organised by Hughes & Rohtmaa-Jackson and featured work by other artists working in contexts of role-playing, live-action role-play and game fiction.

In August 2018 Hughes & Rohtmaa Jackson were selected to realise their proposal *Polyparanormal Rundown* for ArtHouses Whitley Bay. The project, a live seance that sought to make contact with aliens, ghosts and time-travellers in the house of a local resident of Whitley Bay was documented as a short film.



Right:
Polyparanormal Rundown
at ArtHouses Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, 2018.

Link to film: <https://vimeo.com/298880394>

Photo credit: courtesy of artists

In October 2019 Hughes and Rohtmaa-Jackson curated and realised an expanded iteration of the exhibition *Polymorph Other* for Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham. This version included newly commissioned artworks funded by Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grant scheme.

This exhibition drew together artists, philosophers, writers and industry professionals similarly engaged with ideas of game-play, fictioning and hobby production. The exhibition included contributions from national and international participants: Blue Mountain Arcturus, Uma Breakdown, TOTALLER, Felix Rose Kawitzky and Marianne Thesen Law, Daniel Locke, David Blandy, Motsonian, Reiver Castings, Peter Wolfendale & Tim Franklin.

Right: *Polymorph Other*
at Queen's Hall Arts Centre,
Hexham, 2019.
Photo credit: courtesy of artists



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APPENDICES

<http://bluemountainequalsarcturus.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://www.arcturusgames.com/>

https://www.instagram.com/arcturus_games/

<http://www.imagemusictext.com/exhibitions/polymorph-other>

<http://www.arthouses.net/AH2018.html>

Right: Poster for *Polymorph Other*, 2019.
Far right: Arcturus Games Instagram, 2018.

Back cover: screen grab from the 1989 film *Communion*
Image credit: courtesy of New Line Cinema/Allied Vision

