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Politics the inspiration for summer exhibit at Bemis Center

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WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



Relax inside “CalmDome 3.1” by Carnal Torpor and the architectural firm Min/Day.

Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin took her jabs at a recent Tea Party Convention.

“How’s that hokey changey thing been going for ya?” she asked a cheering crowd.

Palin’s one-liner is the inspiration for “Hokey Changey Things,” the new summer exhibit at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

Hesse McGraw, the show’s curator, says Palin’s barb is typical of the shrill political dialogue you hear all the time on talk radio and cable news.

“But in a political landscape where gamesmanship trumps dialogue, art makes space for openness,” McGraw said. “Art makes an authentic attempt to understand what our world is and what it could be.”

Some of the artists in the Bemis show have political views that are both far-reaching and progressive.

Among those, Dana Fritz’s works are the most obvious. Fritz has created beautiful color photos of biospheres. “Banana Conveyor, Eden Project, 2009,” for instance, shows about as lush and verdant a world as you can imagine. It is nothing less than a green utopia.

“CalmDome 3.1,” by Carnal Torpor and the architectural firm Min/Day, is a different kind of utopia. The white dome is constructed of a series of appealing geometric shapes. People are invited to take off their shoes and enter the darkness of the dome, where they can relax to soothing sounds and vibrations. The aim is for you to get a sensation that is the opposite of how you feel when listening to politicians and talking heads.

Artist Gregory Green’s political message is less utopian, more irreverent.

His photos show himself — in the guise of his Eminence Ambassador Gregory Odell Green — laying claim on new territory for the “New Free State of Caroline.” The new state looks like a beach on North Carolina’s Outer Banks. Green is wearing swim trunks and holding a makeshift scepter. His entourage is a motley crew of party-hardy beach lovers.

Artist Aaron Storck thumbs his nose at utopia. He appears in his own art in the guise of a crazed wizard — imagine that Harry Potter has grown up and joined a separatist militia unit.

The focus of Storck’s exhibit is an installation called “Wizard House,” made of wood, concrete blocks, plants and trash — mostly in the form of empty plastic Mountain Dew bottles. The installation is basically a cross between a Japanese garden and a run-down trailer park.

An acrylic self-portrait — “Within the Range of His Ability,” featuring Storck in wizard costume — is hung next to the house. Storck also

printed a radical newspaper, “Aaron Storck’s Wizard Papers 2010,” as part of the exhibit. The paper, like of all Storck’s work, is both a parody and indictment of political extremism.

“Hokey Changey Things” also includes a “Microcinema,” which will show short films during the run of the exhibit. Matthew Cusick’s “Birds of Fire” — a cinematic Armageddon of exploding cars — is being shown through July 10. Other films will include Morgan Schwartz’s “Living on Earth on Mars on Earth” (July 13-Aug. 7) and Lucy Raven’s “China Town” (Aug. 1 to Sept. 11).

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