



# *Lee Hunter: Cosmogogenesis*

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**John Michael  
Kohler Arts Center**



# Lee Hunter: Cosmogenesis



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A conversation between John Michael Kohler Arts Center Senior Curator Kaytie Johnson (KJ), and artist Lee Hunter (LH).

**KJ:** You began working on *Cosmogenesis* in 2014. Can you talk about the genesis of the project? How has it evolved since then?

**LH:** When I started *Cosmogenesis*, I knew I wanted to work on a project about the future that used a science/speculative fiction or worlding framework to explore possible futures. I also wanted to use the project as a framework for an accompanying novel. Worlding can quickly get out of control, there are so many possibilities and things to learn. As the project took shape, I asked myself questions like: What will cities be like? What will humans be like? What will nonhumans be like? What technologies will be common? What will the climate be like, etc?

Aesthetically, I wanted to create a world from the landscape of our world—which can be quite otherworldly—this is something I look for in my photographs. I wanted the work to focus on landscape, but then I started thinking about materials and the things humans leave behind. I spent time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art looking at global material culture and noticed many of the objects in its collection are made from materials I was using, such as stone, glass, bone, ceramic, wood, and metals. I continued researching ancient artifacts from northern and western Europe, the places my ancestors are from prior to settling in North America. Through conversations with two friends, I realized the project should take the form of an archive or collection of objects focused on the narrative I was developing.

**KJ:** What is singular about the project's presentation at the Arts Center?

**LH:** *Cosmogenesis* is an archive of objects—each year I add to the collection. I think of exhibitions as iterations, or a repetition of a process; each iteration is recorded and added to the archive. I like to respond to architecture when installing art and this exhibition has several components that are specific to the Arts Center: the wall color, a large photographic mural, textiles, and an arched doorway. In the spring of 2019, I was an artist-in-residence at Palazzo Monti, Brescia, Italy—many of the works in this exhibition were created during that residency, or were influenced by it.

**KJ:** *Cosmogenesis* is a world-building project told through the perspective of an archivist making her way through the material culture of travel cults in the near future. Can you talk a bit about the narrative thread and how the objects in the show visualize it?

**LH:** The narrative component is based on the following premise. In 2245, archivist Tima Noda begins working in the special collections at the Library of Congress in Pittsburgh. The objects in the collection are artifacts from Transdimensional Travel Groups (TTGs), 2040–2145 CE. The TTGs traveled parallel dimensions for metaphysical and/or economic reasons. Some believed that travel was transcendent, while others were looking for rare materials to trade at the gray markets. Many of the TTGs represented in the collection are rooted in Western occult practices and rely heavily on coded language, images, and objects to share information with other groups. Because they were secretive about their practices, they usually transmitted information orally and left behind few written records.



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The titles of the objects give the viewer hints about their use. Numbered codes in the titles are associated with different parallel dimensions, where E00032 is this dimension. Many of the photographs are reproductions from training manuals in the collection, and there are references to well-known portals, temples, and markets. Some of the objects are keys to unlock portals, while others are from different temple locations. Others have unknown uses.

**KJ:** I know you created them using a range of materials and processes. Did you work in new ways for this iteration of the project?

**LH:** Definitely! I started working in a much more expansive material language. For this project, I have been carving alabaster, hand-building ceramics, casting pewter, making mirrors, working with textiles, and really trying to push my material language. For the tapestries, I used some of my photographs as the source material for digital prints that are backed with half-square patchwork quilts made from digitally printed cotton and quilting cotton. The other exciting thing I learned to do was hand-pouring mirrors in the old-fashioned way, which involved science and a gentle touch.



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**KJ:** The project takes place in the future—how does it speak to our present moment?

**LH:** Worlding is an excellent way to think about the present through possible futures, and to remember the past. Time is fluid. I am concerned about the future of the planet, something I believe others are thinking about as well. From people to nonhumans to ecosystems, there are many troubling issues happening now. I wanted to think about changing some of the major systems Western cultures consider to be normal and required. I think many of those systems are exploitive and are fueling the present crises facing the planet. Worlding is a way to talk about possibility, the possibility of making different, better decisions, and I think that is important for future generations.

*Lee Hunter: Cosmogenesis* is part of the Arts Center's Ways of Being theme. The featured artists recontextualize our past, reorient our present, and project new, viable futures. Collectively, they ask, what if?

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**Cover**  
Lee Hunter, *The Devil's Playground at Dawn; Near the portal in E00085; Popular Mining Parallel; E00032*, 2020; custom printed fabric and thread; 96 x 114 in. Courtesy of the artist.

1 Lee Hunter, *Midwest Portal; Activate with Nook; Central Illinois; E00032*, 2021; digital C-print; 40 x 35 in. Courtesy of the artist.

2 Lee Hunter, *Dragon Key; Thought to Open Portal Near Santa Fe; Found in Cas O'Brien's personal items; E00032*, 2021; Utah alabaster; 9 x 8 x 3 3/4 in. Courtesy of the artist.

3 Lee Hunter, *Personal Item; Fossilized Mudpot; Origin Unknown*, 2021; stone; 5 x 7 x 1 in. Courtesy of the artist.

4 Lee Hunter, *Personal Items; Collection of materials found in the Temple Collection; E00032*, 2021; ceramic, stone, fossil, pewter, scoria, mica, and starfish; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.