

## Artist Jimmy Baker plays around with Armageddon

It's inevitable. Then again, possibly not. Opposites abound in these post-apocalyptic scenarios.

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Special to The Times

June 7, 2007

The environment, the war on terrorism, red-blue state feuding — it's hard to tell which road may lead to Armageddon first. Just to be safe, Ohio-based multimedia artist Jimmy Baker has crafted relics from several imaginary disasters for his one-man exhibit "Rapture," on display at Roberts & Tilton Gallery this month.

Using iPods, landscape photography, classical portraiture and cellphone video footage to convey a distinctively sedate chaos, Baker speculates like a secular left-wing Tim LaHaye about the outcomes of a handful of post-apocalyptic scenarios from the viewpoint of those Left Behind to make sense of it all. And as Baker himself warns, "There's no one specific answer. The larger kind of overarching narrative is that all of these interconnected events can't be necessarily separated."

In a manner befitting a former heavy-metal drummer, Baker displays a fascination with the hopelessness evoked in his work while also evincing his love-hate relationship for technology and how it simultaneously can depict and distort reality: Three iPods play audio montages representing the past (Bob Dylan's "Masters of War"), the present (a Sunni call to prayer) and the future (a dark ambient drone), while two Google Earth photos of the North and South poles are named "The Ends of the World." Baker also throws a political statement into the mix: "Open Invitation (From the Coalition Provisional Authority)" presents two doors from a black GMC Suburban — a standard vehicle provided for Baghdad's Green Zone residents by Halliburton — riddled with bullet holes, leaving the viewer to contemplate the zone's suggested destruction. Closely linked to it in a black-walled antechamber separated from the main exhibit room is "Night Brings," in which a sketchy video loop of Saddam Hussein's execution repeats on a cellphone like a ghostly, Zapruder-esque transmission to the future.

Baker also places polar opposites next to each other with his "The Future Is Clean/The Future Is Dirty" portrait series. Here, four virtually identical women sit in front of bleached backgrounds, while the men are placed in darkened spaces and complemented by etchings of Latin phrases to heighten their menace.

Baker insists the future exists between these purposefully exaggerated possibilities. "They're both extremes and they're both completely unrealistic, and in giving the viewer these two extremes, hopefully they'll find themselves somewhere in the middle."

Given this, "It's Inevitable," the caption engraved on the iPod depicting the future, can only be seen as ironic; after all, the actual future is left up to the audience to determine. "I feel like I'm purposefully being sort of the devil's advocate in the work," Baker says, "sort of challenging you: Is this stuff already written? Or is there a way to analyze how we act and live?"