

Video Walkthrough | Danielle Dean: *Out of this World*

Danielle Dean gives a virtual tour of her exhibition, *Out of this World*. Introducing her new film, *Hemel*, Danielle speaks to the relationship between industry and community in the English town where she was raised.

Watch the walkthrough on Mercer Union's website:

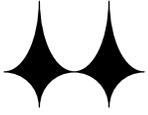
<https://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/dean-out-of-this-world>

Danielle Dean: The reason that I like to make work that crosses documentary and fiction is to do something that's more than what one can predict or what can be planned.

The show is called *Out of this World* and it's a premiere of a film called *Hemel*, which is a portrait of the town Hemel Hempstead. *Hemel* is a very personal work to me because I actually grew up in Hemel Hempstead. And so the work explores my relationship to the town as well as this proximity to industry, to what we call the industrial state. It was a small town, and then it kind of expanded in 1946 as part of a kind of New Town act to allow for people to move out of London and to live in better conditions after the Second World War. At one point also England, and in particular people in Hemel were really making a lot of money, like bricklayers and builders they had this surge of income that occurred. And I think that kind of tapered off, people were struggling financially. And a lot of the time there is this situation, like, who's to blame for that, right? And I think that in England, a lot of people from elsewhere get blamed for that, as if, you know, people coming into this town are taking everyone's jobs or taking over. This piece is not just about Hemel, it's something that's happening in many different towns even in America. Like, maybe the equivalent is shopping malls closing down, right?

In the installation you will be sitting in a community center that is all devoid of colour and a kind of black and white atmosphere. To have this sense of walking into something and having to decide where you're gonna sit. Are you gonna sit with someone else watching it, or you're gonna go and take your own table? Like, there's a consideration of your body in space in relation to the film and the idea of community.

I encountered *Quatermass II* actually quite a long time ago. It's like a B movie, sci-fi film that was shot in Hemel Hempstead, and I watched it, and you could literally see where I grew up. So I was intrigued first of all, because of it being almost like an archival document of this town, like before I was born. But then it turns out the actual sci-fi narrative in itself was incredible interesting because it was essentially about these meteorites that came from outer space which happened to actually be more than just meteorites. They contain alien entities that give off this gas that essentially possesses the people in the town, in particular the workers of the



town. So everyone seems to be employed by this unknown factory, The Corporation, that is cultivating this black goo that is turning into an alien.

To me, it made clear that there was this conversation about race and labour that was going on in this piece because with a lot of sci-fi, they're often reflecting the hysteria and fear of the time. And so it seemed like this idea of this infiltration from elsewhere, like the infiltration of work from elsewhere. And so I wanted to unpack that because I think that for me it was really significant to how I felt growing up in England and how those things about race and labour coincide with each other.

For me, I was thinking about this slippage between these raw materials like coal also and oil and things that happen to be black, in reality, but then also the abstraction of race – the idea of black or to be black as a fiction that is not in reality a real thing, but is in its binary what kind of causes a lot of racism in the sense that you're different, like because you're the extreme opposite to me being white.

If you're living in a town, you're a part of a community, and sometimes that comes with, you know, feelings of exclusion, like who belongs and who doesn't. I think that caring for people, which was the point of the town, was about caring for people and making sure they had good living conditions. That's a good thing, right? It's just that – for whom? That's now the question that we have to keep asking is not just about taking care of who we think we're like, based on some sort of nationalistic idea but also a kind of planetary notion that we're all connected.