

REMEMBERING TOMORROW

by Jerome Tarshis



The original Tomorrowland opened at Disneyland in 1955. In later years the idea of dedicating an area of each Disney amusement park to architectural visions of the future caught on, and each of the five Disney parks has one. But the architectural environment of the present day continues to change; as a Disney spokesman once said, the problem is to keep Tomorrowland from becoming Yesterdayland. The Anaheim Tomorrowland is now in its third version, and the other four are also carefully watched so that they can be brought up to date.

This series of paintings by Patricia Araujo is not a realistic depiction of any one Tomorrowland at any single point in time. It is, collectively, an artist's fantasy, like a theme and variations in music, about the imaginative act involved in designing a representation of the future, seeing it built, seeing it get older. It unobtrusively reminds us that looking forward and looking back are closely connected.

Araujo worked with a similar theme in her earlier series *SOMA Seen*, which depicts buildings in the San Francisco neighborhood called SOMA, for South of Market, and Mid-Market, just to the north. One of the recurrent images of *SOMA Seen* is the Beaux-Arts dome that originally stood atop The Emporium, a department store that opened in 1896.

At that time it was one of the largest shops in the world. Its architect, Albert Pissis, famous for introducing the Beaux-Arts style to San Francisco, was much disparaged during his lifetime. Beaux-Arts architecture referred to Greek and Latin antiquity, and above all to the Italian Renaissance, and it seemed to exclude the architectural modernism that was struggling for acceptance.

But The Emporium looked forward as well as backward: a huge department store selling mid-priced merchandise was a relative novelty in the 1890s. If its visual style aspired to be classical, the actual function of the building prefigured the market for mass-produced consumer goods that characterized the twentieth century and still dominates our own time. Culturally conservative as San Francisco has been, not least in architecture, it has also been a city of the future.

The circular building seen in so many of the paintings in *Tomorrowland Today* could conceivably have been found in one of the five Disney amusement parks. In several of the paintings its roof includes a ribbed element that suggests the Space Mountain in Florida's Magic Kingdom. The building could exist in today's post-Beaux-Arts San Francisco. There is in fact a circular building with a not-dissimilar roof design at the intersection of Sansome and Market Streets, which houses an electronic stock-trading business. It looks as if it might be a flying saucer that set down in San Francisco and found itself repurposed.

Araujo's thematic building, which she knows only from photographs, houses a circus in Dnepr, a middle-sized city in Ukraine. The roller-coaster she depicts in *Tomorrowland Today* is in the United States. The reality here is not that of any particular city or country; it is the parallel reality of architectural drawings.

There is a long tradition of visionary architecture—designs for structures meant to look thought-provoking or amusing, but not intended to be actually built. Even when the design is for a real building to be paid for by a real client, there is always the chance of a divergence between the architect's intention, the client's wishes, and uncontrollable future events.

Architects' drawings contain a larger element of fantasy than the architects themselves might prefer. It is not only intentionally visionary architecture that can have an air of fantasy; the realization of a building's design is often very different from what the architect had in mind. Patricia Araujo has a personal connection with the Tomorrowland in Florida. She was born in Miami and, as she mentions in her introduction to this book, her father, the architect Eduardo Araujo, worked for Disney Imagineering. Her father's profession plays a central part in her own mature work as an artist. She studied architecture before she studied painting, and her art is deeply concerned with the interaction of past and future in our constructed landscape.

The San Francisco buildings she depicts in the series *SOMA Seen* were actually built, but the plans and the buildings themselves became part of the historic past as soon as the work was completed. Both the dome and the facade of The Emporium still exist, although The Emporium as a department store closed in 1996. Today its architectural vestiges have been incorporated into a Westfield shopping center. Another outstanding Beaux-Arts building, once the main office of the Hibernia Bank, a major local institution, has stood abandoned since the year 2000.

The Utopian view of the future that characterizes world's fairs, carried over into the design of Disney's Tomorrowlands, is itself part of the past; most of us no longer see the human future as a limitless triumph of planning and technology. *Tomorrowland Today* celebrates that hopeful past, and its individual paintings have great charm. But there is a half-hidden elegiac element under the deliberately beautiful surfaces. Painting these vestiges of a real or imagined Tomorrowland is both celebratory and sad; Araujo's architectural fantasies mourn for the future as it once was.