

## The World

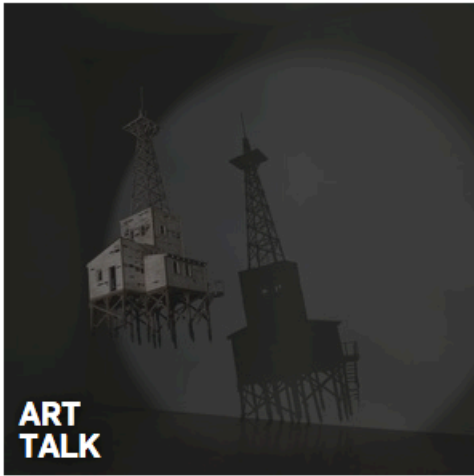
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## Michael McMillen at LA Louver

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp talks about the sculptor and his history in LA.

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FEB 04, 2016



PLAY



## FROM THIS EPISODE

Michael McMillen's work has long resided at the cusp of assemblage and installation art, making or incorporating exceptionally detailed elements to suggest a mysterious narrative. This particular show, **Outpost**, is a mini-survey dating from 1980 to the present so you can see that the stories that he tells have to do with his own evolution as an artist and, at times, the history of Southern California where he has lived and worked.

McMillen uses aspects of vernacular architecture, old signage, and defunct technology to suggest time past yet it is not necessarily a sunny or nostalgic view. Sinister forces are suggested through the incorporation of military and surveillance technology.



Michael C. McMillen, "The Pequod II," 1987

Wood & metal kinetic assemblage; 96 x 77 x 206 in. (243.8 x 195.6 x 523.2 cm)

© Michael C. McMillen, courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California

*The Pequod II* (1987) refers to the whaling ship in *Moby Dick* but without any Nantucket charm. The giant model suspended from the ceiling is not made of wood but of rusted metal cast-offs included canisters from an old Electrolux vacuum cleaner. A built-in motor generates a constant flow of air that flutters the aged sails, lending the appearance if not the fact of motion.



Michael C. McMillen, "Dr. Crump's Mobile Field Lab [aka Inductive Geo-Imaging Field Laboratory]," 2004-2014

Mixed media installation with four films, featuring "Politbureau," "Science Institute Presents,"

"Wastelandia" and "The End;" 153 x 106 x 176 in. (388.6 x 269.2 x 447 cm)

© Michael C. McMillen, courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California

A highlight in the show is one of McMillen's more ingenious pieces, *Dr. Crump's Mobile Field Lab (aka Inductive Geo-Imaging Field Laboratory)* (2004-2014). As a posted pseudo-official document claims, this is the subterranean laboratory, lost for 70 years, that was recently excavated by Dr. Crump and is now open for viewing with the aid of his assistant, one MC McMillen.



*Michael C. McMillen, "Transmitter," 2014*

*Painted wood, metal construction, motor, electronic beacon; 60.5 x 17 x 22 in. (153.7 x 43.2 x 55.9 cm)*

*© Michael C. McMillen, courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California*

You walk up a ramp and into a little trailer where an empty chair stands before a desk strewn with all the evidence of a scientist at work, perhaps an eccentric, even mad character. Flasks of bubbling water, electric transmission equipment, lengths of tubing and wires are arranged next to a monitor playing a series of old films, mostly in black and white, made by the artist. It is like stepping into a time machine that takes you back to the years between the two world wars, when Santa Monica was a small town where people surfed and cavorted on an under-populated beach. (At least, in McMillen's films.) This piece was originally installed at Cal Tech where aspiring scientists of all sorts could take stock of the pre-digital fantasy and meditate on the limits of knowledge and the futility of assumptions. And on security. When there, you could also see footage from surveillance cameras that McMillen had transmitted back to the trailer.



*Michael C. McMillen, "Finger Tension Tower 1," 1980*  
*Wood, metal, desert detritus; 29 1/4 x 11 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (74.3 x 29.2 x 31.8 cm)*  
© Michael C. McMillen, courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California

McMillen, a Santa Monica native, has been actively engaged in this work since the early 1970's, in the wake of Ed Kienholz and George Herms but during the developmental years of his friend, the late Chris Burden. Those two artists shared an unusual affinity for popular science, history and performance. To support himself as an artist, McMillen has worked as a prop designer and model maker for the film industry, (including *Bladerunner*), which accounts for his painstaking attention to realistic appearances though each object is clearly the artist's own bizarre invention. It is that narrow gap between the actual and the improbable that activates our imagination upon encountering his work.



*Michael C McMillen, "Della Sala (Interior with stairs)," 1985*  
*Mixed media; 16 x 12 x 15 in. (40.6 x 30.5 x 38.1 cm)*  
© Michael C. McMillen, courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California

Walking into LA Louver, next to the front desk, is an easy to miss early piece called *Della Sala* (1985). It is simply a peephole. Peering into it, you see a softly-lit interior view of a room and staircase. What does it mean? Where does it lead? Those are questions McMillen's work often seems to ask. The show continues at [LA Louver](#) through February 13.

