



HANNAH EPSTEIN

## H A N N A H E P S T E I N

Born 1985, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Lives and works in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia

### Education

- 2017 MFA, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh
- 2011 Canadian Film Centre Media Lab
- 2009 Newfoundland Independent Film Co-Op  
BA in Folklore and Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland

### Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

- 2021 *Kill Your Captors*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
- 2020 Enter Art Fair (with Steve Turner), Copenhagen  
*Making Bets In A Burning House*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
- 2019 *Artists-on-Artists: Age of You*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto  
*Nittany Lion: Eco-Mascot*, HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University  
Art Brussels (with Steve Turner)  
Art Lima (with Steve Turner)  
*Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
- 2018 *Monster World*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
- 2017 *As The Fidget Spinner Turns*, Bunker Projects, Pittsburgh
- 2016 *The Steaks Have Never Been Greater*, The FRAME Gallery, Pittsburgh  
*Timecraft*, The FRAME Gallery, Pittsburgh
- 2015 *Service #4: Prey at Play*, Neu Kirche Contemporary Art Center, Pittsburgh  
*Killing it*, 808 Gallery, Pittsburgh
- 2014 *memememememe*, The Ellis Gallery, Pittsburgh
- 2012 *Backseat Animal*, CineCycle, Toronto

### Group Exhibitions

- 2020 *Our World*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles  
*New Domestic*s, Franconia Sculpture Park, Shafer, Minnesota  
Vector Festival, Toronto  
*Earth Day 2020*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles  
ALAC (with Steve Turner), Los Angeles
- 2019 *Know Your Meme: Stitching Viral Phenomena*, San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, California  
*Loops to Live By*, The Rooms, St. John's, Newfoundland  
*Thread*, Long Beach Museum of Art  
*Analog Pleasures*, LIKELIKE, Pittsburgh  
*Expanded Reality*, Refinery29 Art Park, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta, Toronto, Washington DC  
Enter Art Fair (with Steve Turner), Copenhagen  
*Ariadne Unraveling*, Asya Geisberg Gallery, New York  
*Power of Ten*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles  
*Rock Paper Scissors*, Living Arts Centre, Mississauga, Ontario
- 2018 *Games At Play Arcade*, UC Irvine  
Untitled, Miami Beach (with Steve Turner)  
*Inside Out*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles  
NEOFOLK, Killjoy Collective, Portland, Oregon  
Code Art Fair (with Steve Turner), Copenhagen  
*Through-Line: Drawing and Weaving by 19 Artists*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles  
*Reopen Closed Tabs*, White House Studio Project, Toronto  
*I'M NOT WITH HIM*, Future Tenant, Pittsburgh  
*B-SIDES*, Diametrale Film Festival, Innsbruck, Austria  
*BioPix*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles

- New Toronto Works, Pleasure Dome, Toronto
- 2017 *Speed Show: Playing Games*, University of Wisconsin, Madison  
*Lost/Found Biennial*, CornerProjects, Chicago  
*Nuit Blanche Art Party*, House of VR, Toronto  
*GAME ART VS ART GAME*, Christian Petersen Art Museum, Ames, Iowa  
*Canadian Craft Biennial: Nothing Is Newer Than Tradition*, Art Gallery of Burlington  
*Pop-Tarts and Pabst Fundraiser*, Bunker 2 Contemporary Art Container, Toronto  
*Roundtable Residency Reception*, The Dragon Academy, Toronto  
*Pleasure Dome*, CineCycle, Toronto  
*Vector Festival | Local Host*, Black Cat Gallery, Toronto  
*Cabinet*, David B. Smith Gallery, Denver  
*FAM*, Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University  
*Text Me*, Pierro Gallery, South Orange, New Jersey
- 2016 *It took a while.....*, Harry Wood Gallery, Tempe  
*Satin Finish*, Slayer Gallery, online  
*Bodacioussss*, The Museum of Contemporary Art Denver  
*The Cut and The Crumb*, The Frame Gallery, Pittsburgh  
*Art Game VS Game Art*, VGA Gallery, Chicago  
*Parkdale Film & Video Showcase: Close To Home*, Gallery 1313, Toronto  
*8-Hour Project: Failure*, Allegheny College Gallery, Meadville, Pennsylvania  
*Game Art VS Art Game*, VGA Gallery, Chicago  
*Different Games Arcade*, NYU Polytech, Brooklyn  
*What's a Steak*, 5122 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh
- 2015 *15 Performances in an Hour*, Neu Kirche Contemporary Art Center, Pittsburgh  
*MAKENight: Aquatic*, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh  
*Rules For An Other Self*, Boom Concepts, Pittsburgh  
*Home Economics*, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto  
*Pop Montreal*, Pop Quartiers, Montreal  
*Internet Yami-Ichi*, Knockdown Centre, Maspeth, New York  
*Papes*, The Rum Room Gallery, Pittsburgh  
*Fun Dip*, Mist Gallery, online  
*Prism Pipe presents Crystal Ball*, Pehrspace, Los Angeles  
*New Additions # 7 VAPORWAVE*, VIVO Media Arts Centre, Vancouver  
*Images Festival*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Jackman Hall, Toronto  
*Accelerate*, Niagara Artist Centre, St. Catherine's, Ontario  
*Sidewalkscreening.mov*, Whippersnapper Gallery, Toronto
- 2014 *Garfart 11/12*, Garfield Art Works, Pittsburgh  
*Wade In*, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland  
*The New Academy*, Williamsburg Art & Historical Centre, Brooklyn  
*VIA Festival*, Union Trust Building, Pittsburgh  
*Mean Time To Upgrade*, InterAccess Gallery, Toronto  
*Hard Twist*, Gladstone Hotel, Toronto  
*The Rainbow Volcano Explosion*, Graven Feather, Toronto  
*How Sweet It Is*, Swoon Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
*Sight and Sound Media Festival*, Eastern Bloc, Montreal  
*York Region Multi-Media Film Festival*, Lebovic Centre, Stouffville, Ontario  
*Feminist Art Conference*, Beaver Hall Gallery, Toronto
- 2013 *Long Winter Arcade*, The Great Hall, Toronto  
*STRUTT Wearable Art Show*, WS Tyler, St. Catherine's, Ontario  
*Queer Arcade*, Videofag, Toronto  
*BEND OVER! Images of Gender Exploitation*, Show Gallery, Toronto  
*AMC Arcade*, Allied Media Conference 2013, Detroit  
*NXNE Festival*, Art Fair, Toronto  
*Different Games Conference*, Different Arcade, NYU Polytech, Brooklyn

- Vector Festival: net.works, Propeller Gallery, Toronto
- 2012 HTMLles Festival, Studio XX, Montreal
- TIFF NEXUS Mini Arcade, TIFF, Metro Hall Rotunda, Toronto
- Punk Arcade*, Little Berlin Gallery, Philadelphia
- UCLA Game Arts Festival, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

### **Grants, Residencies and Awards**

- 2020 Textile Artist-in-Residence, Harbourfront Center, Toronto
- 2019 Textile Residency, Icelandic Textile Arts Center, Blonduos
- Work in Progress Residency, Textile Arts Center, New York
- 2018 Project Grant, Ontario Arts Council
- 2017 Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award, Textile Museum of Canada
- Individual Artist Grant, Toronto Arts Council
- Roundtable Residency, Dragon Academy, Toronto
- 2015 Project Grant, Frank Ratchye Studio for Creative Inquiry
- 2014 Remote Residency, Media Archaeology Lab, Boulder

### **Bibliography**

- 2020 Mary Lynn Buchanan, "Hannah Epstein at Steve Turner Gallery," *Mary Lynn Buchanan Blog*, April 27
- 2019 "Hannah Epstein on how her rug hooking art is influenced by comics, the internet and after-school television," *CBC Radio*, September 23
- "Hannah Epstein: Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space? / Steve Turner, Los Angeles," *VernisageTV*, February 20
- "Interview: Hannah Epstein," *Artland*, January 18
- Zellin, Jody. "Hannah Epstein: 'Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?'—Blending the Tactile and the Digital," *Art Now LA*, January 15
- 2018 "Textile Museum Profile: Hannah Epstein," *Now Toronto*, May 24
- Hampton, Chris. "Turning floors into folklore: Hannah Epstein is telling incredible stories...with debaucherous rugs," *CBC Arts*, April 20
- Mizota, Sharon. "Rugs that hook you," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4
- Mizota, Sharon. "The sweet hooked rug, gone bad: How artist Hannah Epstein gives a retro craft some bite," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20
- 2017 "Textile Museum of Canada announces the 2017 Melissa Levin Emerging Artist Award Winners," *Galleries West*, September 26
- 2016 Urquhart, Emily. "Modern Hookers," *The Globe & Mail*, January 27
- "Blanket Fort Chats: Game Making with Hannah Epstein," *FemHype*, January 8
- 2015 "YYZ Gameshow," (Interview), *Bell Local Toronto*, February 9
- 2014 "Meantime to Upgrade at InterAccess," *Daily Serving*, November 9
- 2013 "Have Surrealist Video Game Critique of Identity Politics Will Travel," *Now Toronto*, August 6
- "Queer Arcade," *Broken Pencil*, August 2
- Kotzer, Zack. "Hannah Epstein Wants to Get Sued," *Killscreen*, May 7
- 2012 Poplar, Raven. "The Difference That Women Make," *LevelSave*, February 9



## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

# STEVE TURNER



Hannah Epstein: *Kill Your Captors*  
January 9–February 6, 2021

Steve Turner is pleased to present *Kill Your Captors*, a solo exhibition by Hannah Epstein which features new hooked rugs, most of which she created after moving into an 1886 church in Mahone Bay, a small town one hour from Halifax. The hysteria of 2020 and the meme culture that ensued are depicted in some works while others depicting monsters look on. The meme works relate to Cancel Culture, Elon Musk and Grimes, Xi Jinping's China, sacred cows and hyperstimulation. Battles are brewing and monsters are watching.

Hannah Epstein earned a BA from Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009) and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon (2017). She has had solo exhibitions at HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University (2019); Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2019) and Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2018, 2019 & 2020) as well as group exhibitions at Long Beach Museum of Art (2019); San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles (2019) and The Rooms, St. Johns, Newfoundland (2019). This is Epstein's fourth solo exhibition at Steve Turner.



*Kill Your Captors*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



*Kill Your Captors*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



*Kill Your Captors*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



# STEVE TURNER



Enter Art Fair

Hannah Epstein: *See You in Hell*

August 27–30, 2020

Steve Turner is pleased to return to Enter Art Fair, Copenhagen with a solo booth by Halifax-based Hannah Epstein. Her exhibition, *See You in Hell*, features all new hooked rugs depicting her central characters of Superchill and Freakout Girl who find themselves in hell and heaven respectively. They are surrounded by monsters that stem from Epstein's study of folklore, pop culture and internet memes. While Superchill takes everything in stride, even in hell, Freakout Girl is melting down in heaven.

Epstein grew up in remote Nova Scotia and later went to college in even more remote Newfoundland where she studied folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009). After getting her MFA at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh (2017), she added conceptual rigor to her practice and became, as she calls herself, “a feminist folklorist of the internet age.” She has had three solo exhibitions with Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2018, 2019 & 2020).



Enter Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2020





Enter Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2020



Enter Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2020

# STEVE TURNER



Hannah Epstein: *Making Bets in a Burning House*  
February 15–March 28, 2020

Steve Turner is pleased to present *Making Bets In A Burning House*, a solo exhibition by Hannah Epstein consisting of room installations in two separate galleries, one with a selection of handmade hooked rugs and the other with algorithmically printed digital works. In the first room, the textiles are installed in a room that looks like a video game dungeon. The floor is covered with a carpet that depicts bubbling lava and the walls are finished to resemble white bricks. The wall works include a range of imagery—a ten foot tall dragon; an animal face surrounded by mandala-inspired fists; pornographic videos looping inside rugs; a woman carrying the weight of Atlas on her shoulders; and a tornado with a small hand hidden inside. The miles of looped yarn convey that Epstein labored hard to create these works, and within her labor there is an ominous danger that threatens the viewer and maker.

The second room has a green carpet which resembles a grass lawn and all the wall works are all AI generated, made from an algorithm that analyzed Epstein's works from the past eight years and predicted what she might create next. There also is a monitor playing surveilled content, filtered through an AI image recognition software, identifying people and objects from the first room. A single handmade work sits on the grass, a colorful soft worm, whose face goes from innocent to menacing when handled.

Hannah Epstein earned a BA from Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009) and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon (2017). Recent solo exhibitions include those at HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University (2019); Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto (2019) and Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2018 & 2019). Recent group exhibitions include those at Long Beach Museum of Art (2019); San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles (2019) and The Rooms, St. Johns, Newfoundland (2019). Epstein lives and works in Toronto.





*Making Bets in a Burning House*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



*Making Bets in a Burning House*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



*Making Bets in a Burning House*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020





*Making Bets in a Burning House*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020





*Making Bets in a Burning House*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



ALAC. Installation view, Los Angeles, 2020





ALAC. Installation view, Los Angeles, 2020



*Loops to Live By*. Installation view, The Rooms, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2019  
Photo courtesy of The Rooms, by Mike Mahoney

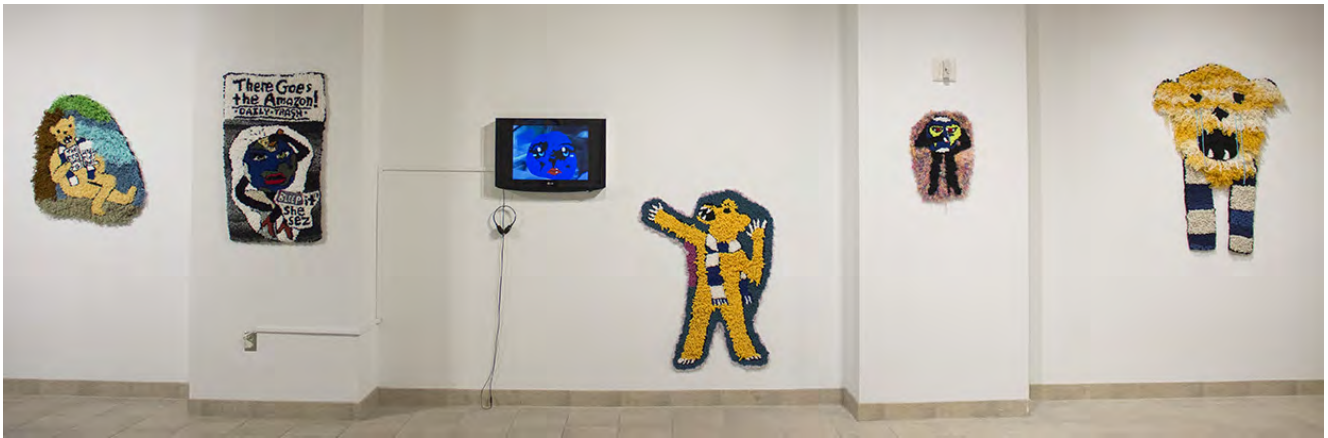




*Loops to Live By*. Installation view, The Rooms, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2019  
Photo courtesy of The Rooms, by Mike Mahoney



*Nittany Lion: Eco-Mascot*. Installation view, HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University, 2019  
Photo courtesy of Alvaro Jordan



*Nittany Lion: Eco-Mascot*. Installation view, HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University, 2019  
Photo courtesy of Alvaro Jordan





*Nittany Lion: Eco-Mascot*. Installation view, HUB Gallery, Pennsylvania State University, 2019  
Photo courtesy of Alvaro Jordan



Enter Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2019



*Ariadne Unraveling*. Installation view, Asya Geisberg Gallery, New York, 2019

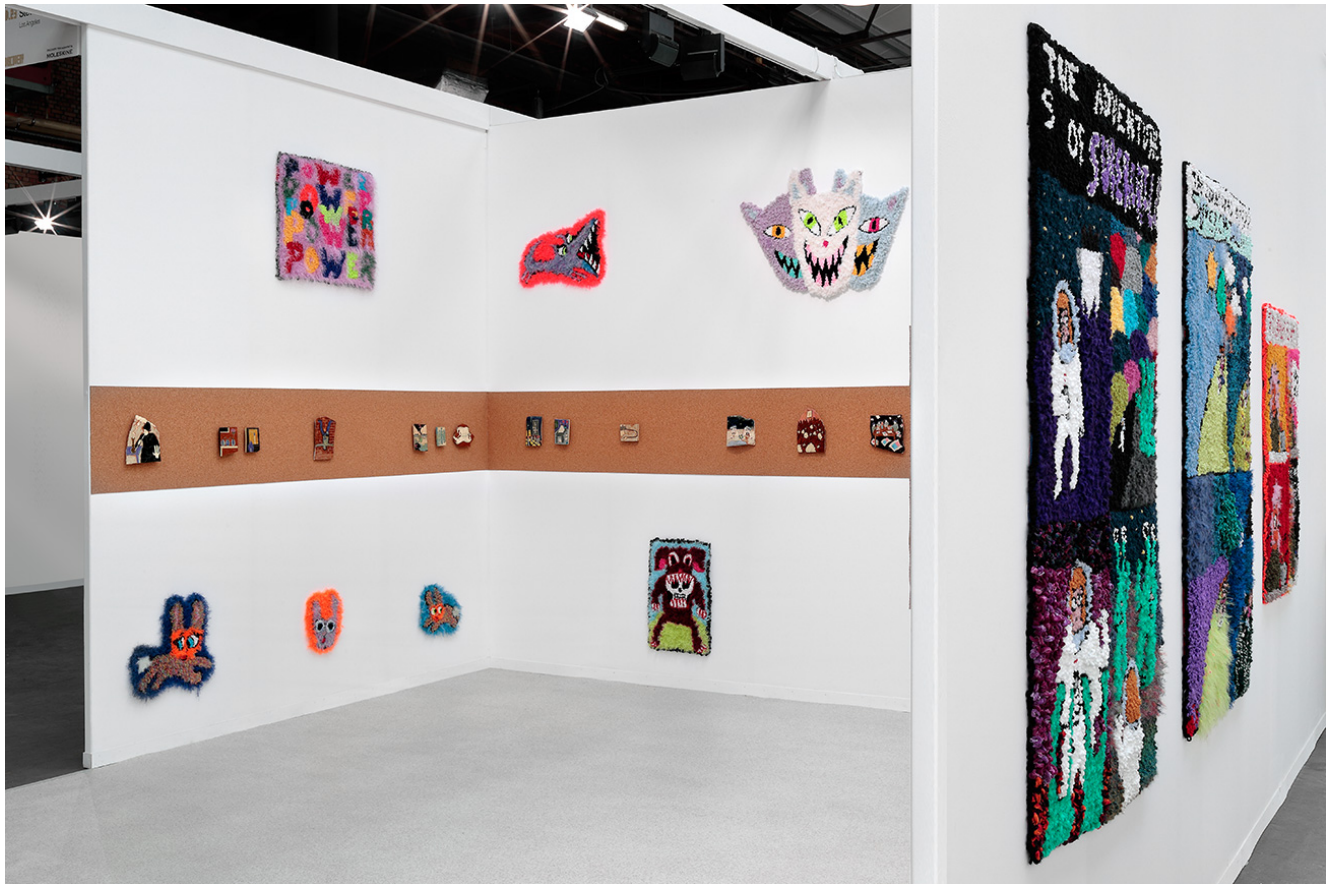




Art Brussels. Installation view, 2019



Art Brussels. Installation view, 2019



Art Brussels. Installation view, 2019



# STEVE TURNER



Art Lima, Booth B5  
Hannah Epstein  
April 4–7, 2019

At Art Lima 2019, Steve Turner will present a solo exhibition by Toronto and Los Angeles-based Hannah Epstein in Projects, the solo section curated by Dorothée Dupuis. Epstein will present hooked rugs that depict a variety of monsters and imagined characters that are derived from her study of folklore, pop culture and internet memes. Many of the newest works are influenced by her interpretation of traditional Peruvian folklore as filtered through Internet research.

Epstein grew up in remote Nova Scotia and later went to college in even more remote Newfoundland where she studied folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009). After getting her MFA at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh (2017), she added conceptual rigor to her practice and became, as she calls herself, “a feminist folklorist of the internet age.” She has had two solo exhibitions with Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2018 & 2019).





Art Lima. Installation view, 2019



Art Lima. Installation view, 2019



Art Lima. Installation view, 2019



# STEVE TURNER



Hannah Epstein: *Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?*

January 5–February 16, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday January 5, 6–8 PM

Steve Turner is pleased to present Hannah Epstein's second solo exhibition at the gallery, *Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?* in which she will introduce Superchill, the title character in her new comic strip. With hooked rugs, video animations and a video game that visitors may play, Epstein has created an immersive environment that represents contemporary anxiety and a possible antidote.

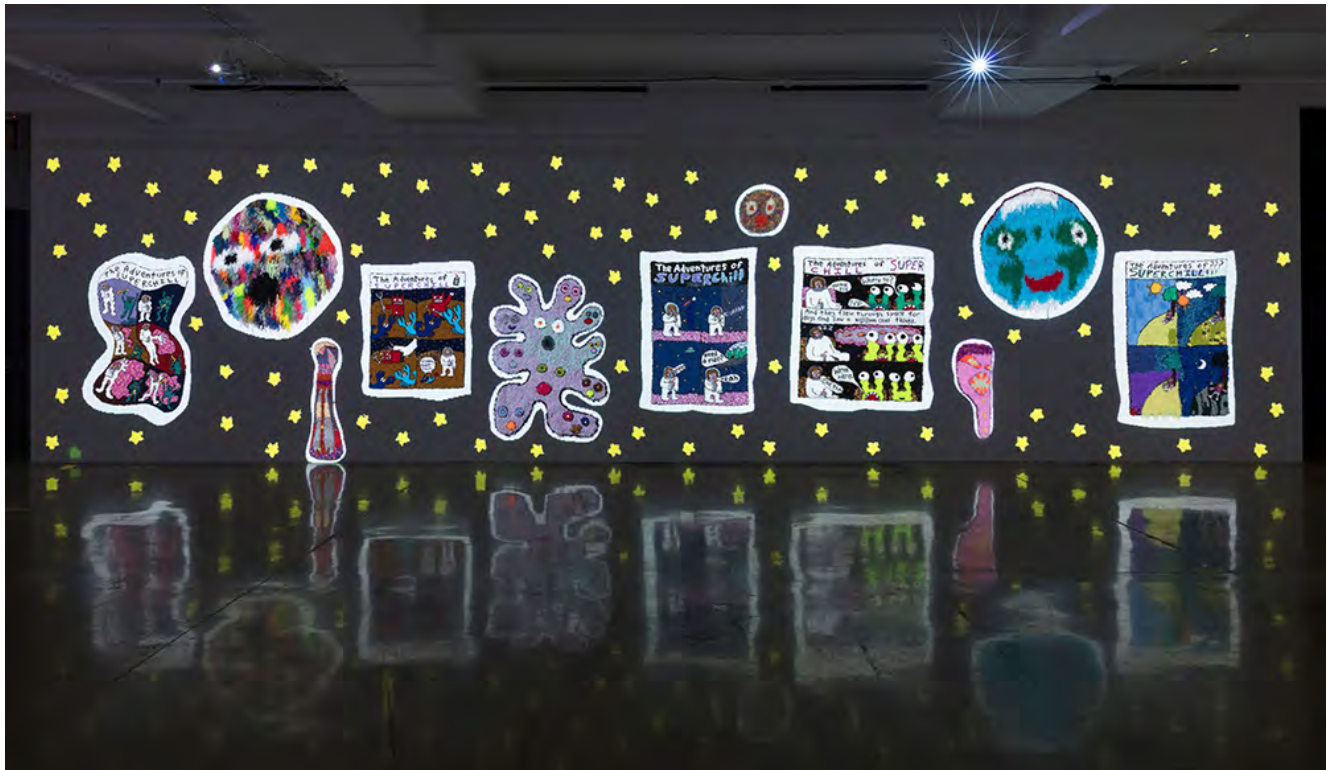
Epstein describes herself as “a feminist folklorist of the Internet Age” who in past works has created hooked rugs that depicted Internet memes and monsters. With Superchill, Epstein has created a new superhero, one who is not endowed with save the world powers like Superman or the like. Instead, Superchill's special power is her ability to stay calm while everyone else is freaking out.

Hannah Epstein earned a BA from Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009) and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon (2017). Her work has been included in exhibitions in Canada and the United States since 2011. She lives and works in Toronto and Los Angeles.





*Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?.* Installation view, Steve Turner, 2019



*Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?.* Installation view, Steve Turner, 2019



*Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?.* Installation view, Steve Turner, 2019



Untitled, Miami Beach. Installation View, Steve Turner, 2018





Untitled, Miami Beach. Installation View, Steve Turner, 2018



*Inside Out*. Installation view, Steve Turner, Los Angeles, 2018



*Inside Out*. Installation view, Steve Turner, Los Angeles, 2018



Code Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2018





Code Art Fair. Installation view, Copenhagen, 2018



*Through-Line: Drawing and Weaving by 19 Artists*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2018



*Through-Line: Drawing and Weaving by 19 Artists. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2018*



*BioPix*. Installation view, Steve Turner, Los Angeles, 2018



# STEVE TURNER



Hannah Epstein: *Monster World*

January 6–February 10, 2018

Opening reception: January 6, 6–8 PM

Steve Turner is pleased to present *Monster World*, a solo exhibition by Toronto-based Hannah Epstein that consists of a selection of brightly colored hooked rugs that depict a variety of monsters as imagined by the artist, whether derived from her study of folklore, her visual backlog of TV images, or from her interest in internet memes.

Epstein grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a cold, grey peninsula where she sought refuge indoors watching television. The sharp contrast between the saturated, colorful images on TV and the monotony of her surroundings had a big impact on the artist, and when later, she studied folklore at Memorial University in Newfoundland, she realized that TV had provided her with a visual vocabulary of cartoon and pop culture images that resonate with the folkloric tradition.

A few years later Epstein learned how to make hooked rugs which has enabled her to use a traditional craft medium to become a folklorist in the Internet age. Epstein's monsters, whether crazy cats, spooky hybrid animals, or a wild-eyed, shaved-headed Brittney Spears, remind us that monsters have long been lurking in the corners of our imagination.

Hannah Epstein earned a BA from Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009) and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon (2017). Her work has been included in exhibitions in Canada and the United States since 2011. This is her first exhibition at Steve Turner.



*Monster World*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2018



*Monster World*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2018





FAM. Installation view, Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 2017



FAM. Installation view, Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 2017

## SELECTED WORKS



Chewy, 2020  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
32 x 25 inches (81.3 x 63.5 cm)





*Freakout Girl: Freaking Into The Afterlife, 2020*  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
46 x 35 inches (116.8 x 88.9 cm)



*Hanski Ice Cream, 2020*  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
54 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 31 inches (138.4 x 78.7 cm)





*My "I'm With Cancelled" Shirt, 2020*  
Acrylic, cotton, burlap and shirt  
23 x 24 inches (58.4 x 61 cm)



*Neon God*, 2020  
Acrylic, cotton, burlap and spray paint  
30 x 19 inches (76.2 x 48.3 cm)





OMG I'M GONNA DIE, 2020  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
20 x 36 inches (50.8 x 91.4 cm)



*Self-Portrait, 2020*  
Wool, acrylic and burlap  
36 x 28 inches (91.4 x 71.1 cm)





*SpaceX/Mass Murder/fuct, 2020*  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
51 x 56 inches (129.5 x 142.2 cm)



*Superchill In Hell: The Fall, 2020*  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap  
45 x 46 inches (114.3 x 116.8 cm)





*Atlas Lugged*, 2019  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
50 x 31 inches (127 x 78.7 cm)



*Cry Me A Glacier*, 2019  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
38 x 39 inches (96.5 x 99.1 cm)





*Don't Deal With The Devil, 2019*  
Acrylic, polyester, cotton, wool and burlap  
41 x 42 inches (104.1 x 106.7 cm)



*Fists of Furry*, 2019

Wool, polyester, cotton, burlap and found llama head  
63 x 62 x 8 inches (160 x 157.5 x 20.3 cm)





*Freakout Girl VS The News Cycle*, 2019  
Acrylic, polyester, wool and burlap  
47 x 37 inches (119.4 x 94 cm)





*¡Las Llamas Locas!*, 2019  
Acrylic, polyester, wool and burlap  
54 x 40 inches (137.2 x 101.6 cm)



*Like a dragon unfurled its wings*, 2019  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
113 x 120 inches (287 x 304.8 cm)





*Nerd Smasher*, 2019  
Wool, polyester, cotton and burlap  
74 x 47 inches (188 x 119.4 cm)





*Soft Worm*, 2019

Wool, acrylic, burlap, polyfill and found toy parts  
7 x 6 x 56 inches (17.8 x 15.2 x 142.2 cm)



*The Fish Has Been Caught*, 2019  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
32 x 54 inches (81.3 x 137.2 cm)



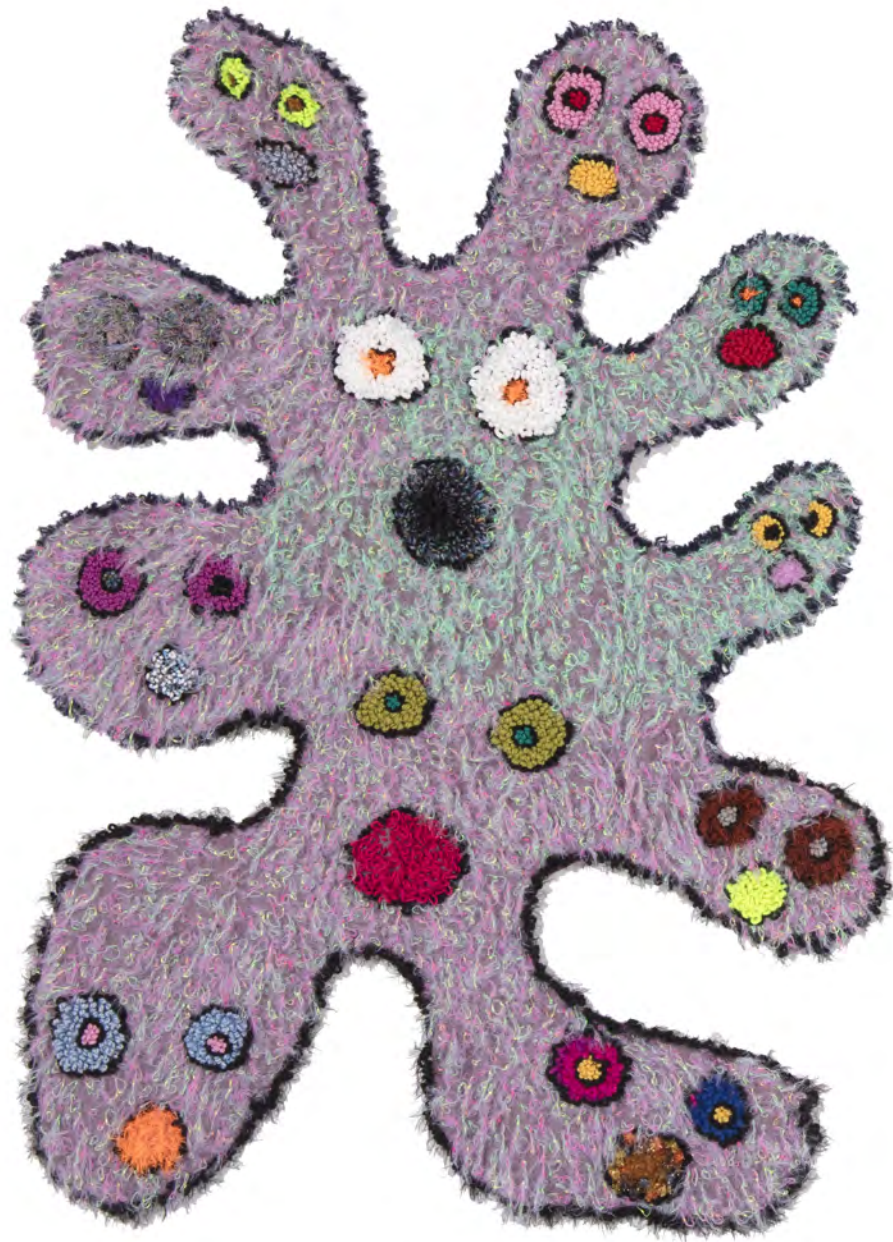


*The Last Clown in the Shtetl*, 2019  
Acrylic, polyester, wool and burlap  
47 x 41 inches (119.4 x 104.1 cm)





*Alien Flex*, 2018  
Acrylic and burlap  
81 x 53 inches (205.7 x 134.6 cm)



*Alien Microbe Enlarged X10,000*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
70 x 52 inches (177.8 x 132.1 cm)





*Babe in the Woods*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester, cotton and burlap  
29 x 35 inches (73.7 x 88.9 cm)





*Bhad Bhoy*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
76 x 41 inches (193 x 104.1 cm)



*Big Blue Bunny*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
97 x 95 inches (246.4 x 241.3 cm)





*Cruhnhc*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool and burlap  
76 x 51 inches (193 x 129.5 cm)





*Esmerelda*, 2018

Wool, acrylic, polyester, viscose and burlap

98 x 47 inches (248.9 x 119.4 cm)



*Freak Out Girl I*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
59 x 43 inches (149.9 x 109.2 cm)





*Freakout Girl "AH!", 2018*  
Wool, acrylic and burlap  
36 x 23 inches (91.4 x 58.4 cm)





*HEYYYYYYYYY*, 2018

Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
46 x 34 inches (116.8 x 86.4 cm)



*Milk Bone in the Sky*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
42 x 19 inches (106.7 x 48.3 cm)





*Mini Mouser I*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
34 x 25 inches (86.4 x 63.5 cm)





*Mini Mouser II*, 2018  
Acrylic, nylon, polyester and burlap  
37 x 24 inches (94 x 61 cm)



*Monstronaut*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
96 x 43 inches (243.8 x 109.2 cm)





*Planet Drug Cocktail*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
60 x 56 inches (152.4 x 142.2 cm)





*Planet Earth*, 2018  
Acrylic and burlap  
56 x 52 inches (142.2 x 132.1 cm)



*Rainbow Kitty*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
31 x 21 inches (78.7 x 53.3 cm)





*Running Through Hell With a Butterfly Net*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester, cotton and burlap  
46 x 68 inches (116.8 x 172.7 cm)





*Superchill (DYWAFTTOS?) Episode 1, 2018*  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
82 x 44 inches (208.3 x 111.8 cm)



*Superchill Buddha*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic and burlap  
32 x 27 inches (81.3 x 68.6 cm)





*Superchill Issue No. 1 Cover Page, 2018*  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
94 x 53 inches (238.8 x 134.6 cm)





*Superchill Meets an Interdimensional Elf*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
67 x 40 inches (170.2 x 101.6 cm)



*Technicolor Vagina Monster*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester, cotton, viscose and burlap  
77 x 38 inches (195.6 x 96.5 cm)





*The Burpus*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
31 x 29 inches (78.7 x 73.7 cm)





*The Drink Runs Dry*, 2018  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
64 x 42 inches (162.6 x 106.7 cm)



*The Long Trip Home*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
62 x 54 inches (157.5 x 137.2 cm)





*Tiki Totem*, 2018  
Acrylic, wool, polyester and burlap  
30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)





*Eats its Young, 2017*  
Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap  
38 x 64 inches (96.5 x 162.6 cm)



*Milo*, 2017  
Acrylic, polyester and burlap  
23 x 26 inches (58.4 x 66 cm)

SELECTED PRESS





**HANNAH EPSTEIN** (born 1985 Halifax), grew up in remote Nova Scotia before going to college in even more remote Newfoundland where she studied folklore. After getting her MFA at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, she added conceptual rigor to her practice and became, as she calls herself, “a feminist folklorist of the internet age.” Her hooked rugs of monsters, internet memes and historically-inspired creatures are both humorous and disconcerting.

## **Hannah Epstein in conversation with Steve Turner | August 2020**

### **Steve Turner:**

You have such a powerful source of energy, imagination and wit. How did this develop in Halifax, the place you once described as “a quiet rock in the Atlantic Ocean”? Can you share some details of your childhood that helped shape the artist you have become?

### **Hannah Epstein:**

A couple of months ago, a man in Nova Scotia, who’d bought an old cop car at auction, used it to go on a killing spree. Cosplaying as an officer, he pulled people over and shot them, killing 22. He also torched a few houses and is now rumoured (far down the grapevine) to have used hand grenades during his chaotic rampage. I tell this story to try and impart that Nova Scotia, this bizarre little Canadian peninsula that sticks out into the North Atlantic, may be known to the world as some enchanting little tourist vista where you can get amazing lobster rolls and see live music in people’s kitchens, but to the locals, it is something else entirely. Scratch the surface and the place reveals a deep wellspring of weirdness that manages to bubble up in strange ways. The recent shooting is a very extreme example, but I am serious in saying it does capture something of Nova Scotia’s essence, many unexpected twists of absurdity, some violent, some good.

I last left Nova Scotia ten years ago but visited often to be reappointed by the ocean and the culture. Being here now, having “moved back” to escape the pandemic, I am beginning to focus on uncovering language and imagery that I can use to define the specific eccentricities of the place and infuse them into my work.

To answer your question, I think NS has operated on multiple levels as a source of inspiration.

It is the place where my family is, so all the peculiarities of family dynamics are present. Growing up, my parents were separated, living in houses right around the corner from each other, sharing a backyard. They remained in some sort of unclear (to me) open relationship.

My father is a well-read Jewish intellectual with a socialist, which makes him an anomaly in WASPy Nova Scotia, where he somehow managed to keep winning elections as a lawyer-turned-enviro-activist-turned-politician candidate for the New Democratic Party.

My mother is an immigrant from Latvia who grew up in 1950s Canada, a place that didn’t appreciate being tall and thin with high cheekbones. She had a long and successful career as a librarian and spent most of it as

head librarian at the Nova Scotia College for Art & Design (NSCAD) and is a textile artist, designing complex knitting patterns.

As the product of these two proto-hipsters I never felt penned in by any sort of dogmatic ideology. I was free to make “my own mistakes”. By sixteen I was living alone and fucking every guy I could get my hands on.

Nova Scotia has a thick layer of repressed Victorian vibes, so with my early decisions to be all free love and recycled hippie tropes, I felt scrutinized by neighbours and friends alike. I managed to find social pockets of other sidelined-types which sustained and inspired me. Like the Dharma Brats, kids of the American Buddhists, 60's flower children, who followed their Shambhala leader, Chogyam Trungpa to the province and set up a range of businesses Nova Scotia had never heard of (including espresso-serving cafes and meditation centers). Like: the New Punks, boys who had legit good bands and drank Faxe and Golden Glow. Like: the less cool Goof Troop, wearing JNCO jeans, smoking weed out of glass blown pipes. Mostly wannabe goths since there was nowhere to buy goth clothes. Like: the kids from The Square, who were a mix of hood and hick. I orbited and traveled between these groups that formed a hotbed of culture in a place that always seemed to be straddling eras long gone.

I am back in Nova Scotia now and I am taking stock.



*Atlas Lugged*, 2019. Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap, 50 x 31 inches (127 x 78.7 cm)

**ST:**

I usually have to ask a series of questions to elicit so much interesting information, but with you, all I had to do was turn on the tape recorder. You make my job very easy. Now that we know your origin story, let's turn to your development as an artist. You are now well-known for your textile work. Was that something you learned in NS or was it something you learned when you went off to college to study folklore in Newfoundland?

**HE:**

I was fortunate to have always had art and artists present in my life. There was a kind of seamlessness to it. On weekends I would tag along when my dad visited one of his girlfriends, almost always artists. One made detailed landscape paintings of Nova Scotia wilderness and owned a parrot. One lived in a small wood house at the edge of a cliff and painted surreal interpretations of her small seaside village. One made scavenger hunts for my brother and I so we would be occupied outside. During the week I would see art students where my mother worked. They were like cartoonish background actors with their embarrassing fashion sense (skirts over pants wtf?! ) and pretentious airs (where did they think they were?) and a constant source of mystery. When I visited the NSCAD library I would walk by the Baldessari print that hung near the entrance, “I will not make any more boring art” it read, over and over, and I wondered seriously what “non-boring art” was. I got my answer when I visited the Tate Modern for the first time (15 years old, father-daughter trip) and saw an enormous sculpture of an electrical socket hanging from the ceiling, probably an Oldenburg, it was so surprising and so not boring. Seeing that socket and later in the gallery, a leg sticking out of a wall, a Robert Gober, gave me the confidence to pursue my own divergent path, of which studying folklore was one of many steps.

Studying Folklore is oxymoronish in that folklore is, at its core, anti-academic. But the study of informal narrative culture and traditions, a.k.a. Folklore, formed the basis of my formal understanding of the culture of the fringes. It was only after I graduated that I further internalized what I had learned and approached a local rug hooker to teach me the skill she practiced. I had come to a point where it was no longer enough to observe, study and admire what people made in their “folk” traditions. I wanted to participate and work to



*Esmerelda*, 2018. Wool, acrylic, polyester, burlap and viscose 98 x 47 inches (248.9 x 119.4 cm)

reshape and elevate the practice, finding a way to turn it into a stadium style performance.

**ST:**

This is before you went to Carnegie Mellon for your MFA, right? What images did you depict in your first hooked rugs? And, what other work were you making besides textiles? What motivated the various work you were making at the time?

**HE:**

I resisted any formal art education as long as I could, since I could see from early on that there was a predictable pattern to the “type” of person that chose to attend art school. Just as predictable, the work they would make. The predictability seemed jarringly in contrast with student aspirations to make work of note, since only work that radically diverged from the expectations and standards of its time made it into the library. Mostly students were trying to imitate what had been successful in the past with few aiming to be truly original. Anyway, I concluded that I had to champion aesthetics outside the official art history canon and develop my own hierarchies and that meant dodging art school until I had built that for myself.

After I finished my folklore studies and spent years traveling and working a variety of jobs, mostly around clubs and nightlife, and only after I had delved into the more obscure communities of experimental media and found a foothold in the world of indie games, did I think I was ready to attend art school.

The foundation I created for myself was “outsider art”, it was “folk art” and populist in that it valued “entertainment” as “artful” and incorporated personal narratives from friends, meanwhile it lived on platforms, like YouTube, which were all about a central hub for a variety of folk practices presented in video.

By the time I got to the MFA program at Carnegie Mellon, I was without any BFA grounding in artspeak and so averse to the formal instruction of art that I was resistant to accepting input from teachers and colleagues. Only recently, a few years post-MFA, do I feel like my work is starting to coalesce.

**ST:**

If you were so averse to input, what then did you get out of your MFA experience? And, if you feel that your work has only recently matured, to what do you attribute that?

**HE:**

Before my MFA I was completely free floating in my artistic development. I would come up against the established art world only in peripheral ways. I began to feel limited in my ability to be recognized as an artist without the right paperwork, so I applied to MFAs. Being accepted into the program at Carnegie Mellon was an introduction into a world I’d largely only observed and it was a chance to put theories I’d been developing, like, the importance of having a unique voice vs. formal instruction, on trial.

I started the three-year program with an “IDGAF about your ‘standards’” attitude to the work I produced and I think people responded to it, although with a lot of confusion. That initial burst reinforced my egomaniacal



idea that I was beyond instruction, that I was there to act as a Trojan horse, bringing folk aesthetics into the academy. But as my time at the school went on, I encountered a lot of rejection of my work, and it did shake my confidence and I started to make work that tried to appeal to what I thought were refined, highbrow, art school sensibilities. The best thing I got out of my MFA was having one of my professors, Paolo Pedercini, call me out for trying to suck up to what the other faculty wanted from me. Being called out like that was the kind of conversation I had been craving, one that spelled out for me that the intent present in objects when made is “readable” by an audience and I was being read. I finished the program making work that invoked that original IDGAF spirit but was, hopefully, more effective than earlier work.

Making work since then has been a process of learning how to pull the reins that control my energy and trying to channel very specific moods and characters, instead of channeling haphazardly from the ether, which I have done a lot of. A lot. It’s been a process of coming into one’s own power.



*Monster World*. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2018

**ST:**

I met you just as you were finishing your MFA at Carnegie Mellon in mid-2017 and I offered you a solo show right away. You opened *Monster World* in our third gallery room in January 2018 and it was quite a success. We sold nearly everything, to experienced collectors, to quite a few artists and you got a very nice [review in the Los Angeles Times](#). How did it feel to have a measure of success so soon after graduating and what did you learn from the entire experience?

**HE:**

That was major. It was like the magic eight ball had been shaken and all signs pointed to yes. It was very much one of those cliché, “it’s a combo of chance and hardwork” lines people say, but that’s what happened!

After the dozen studio visits I had in grad school that amounted to nothing, it was the one scheduled out of the blue by my professor, Angela Washko (empress of digital art), with Ann Hirsch (priestess of new media), that led me to a connection with “Steve Turner”. In my studio I kept a wall covered with the dozens of rug hooked pieces I’d made over the years and Hirsch was drawn to it and sent me in your direction. My partner at the time was working in LA, so the next time I was in town, we arranged to meet. Everything had to line up, by totally unimaginable happenstance, and it did. I’ve felt incredibly thankful ever since, and I’ve been fortunate to feel a sense of receptiveness from the gallery audience. It all feels like an affirmation of my earliest intuitive feelings, that I had to follow my own path and trust that it would end up where I wanted. Having a successful solo show right out of the gate did feel like instant success on one level, but it had been a long, laborious process as well.

**ST:**

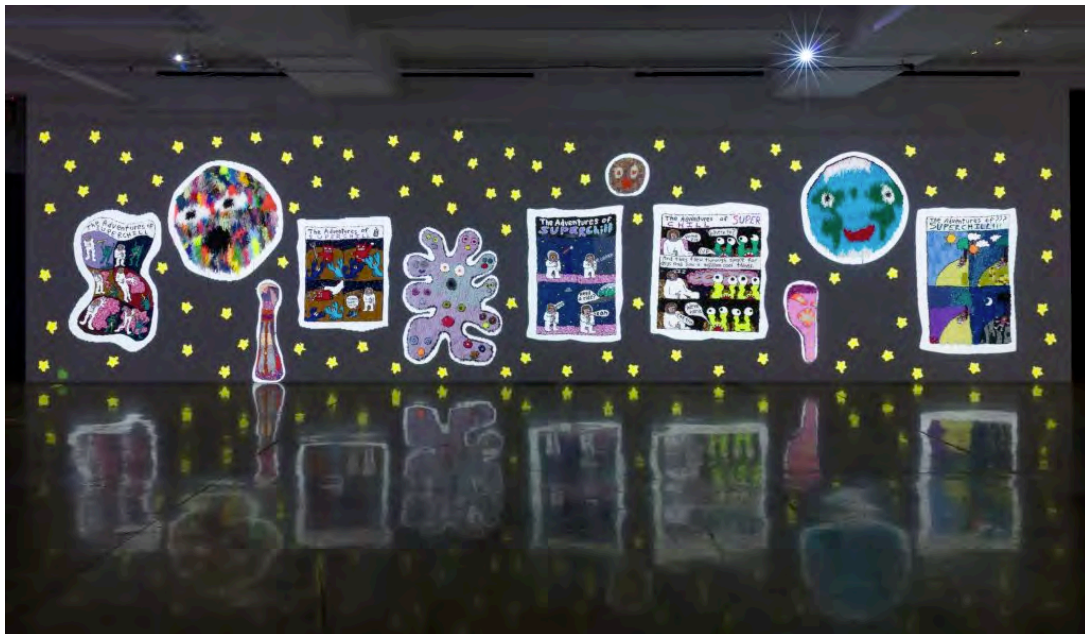
*Monster World* was a great way to introduce your hooked rugs to a broader audience. It was presented in one of our smaller galleries and there was a range of work, wild creatures and internet memes. Can you briefly describe the overall theme of the show and a few specific works?

**HE:**

There are a few works that really define that show for me. Of course *Mouser*, which was terrifying to step back from after making him, because he really felt alive and possessed by some demon. Also *Making Fun Of War* feels significant. The piece depicts an exaggerated version of a military ritual where soldiers carry around enormous swords, a real “culture of death” type of tradition, and it’s covered with these playful amorphous blobs who refuse to be afraid of the soldier and his death commander (comedy vs. war). There was also the

piece that depicted the iconic moment of Britney smashing the car with the umbrella right after shaving her head and *The Dream Of The Memelord's Wife*, where a hentai girl is being fucked by tentacles with the word "memes" tattooed on them. Finally, the three-panel comic of the man asking, "Am...am I...an animal?", which also exists as an animated gif. All together they amount to a survey of what my inner life feeds on, a mix of memory, digital iconography, celebrity and the tabloid media assault, cartoon pornography and a conscious effort to subvert and dismantle all systemic conflicts with funny-haha antics presented in the soft, harmless form of a domestic craft, gone rogue.

As an introduction, *Monster World* was the groundwork that established expectation. This was the material (physical and conceptual) that I would be tackling. It would be like watching a media sausage factory stuff cut-up media bytes into their casing, a messy, multi-pronged progress with occasional intervals of Jolt Cola, but soft.



*Do You Want a Free Trip to Outer Space?* Installation view, Steve Turner, 2019

**ST:**

Your second solo show, *Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?*, opened just one year later. You went from a small project in our third gallery to a large-scale immersive environment in the main gallery which included a hooked rug comic strip presented with video animations and a video game. You introduced some new characters, "Superchill" and "Freakout Girl." Can you describe the narrative of your comic strip and your motivation behind the show? And, might we expect to see more of Superchill and Freakout Girl?

**HE:**

I've been reading about tulpas, which are supernatural beings manifested through focus and meditation. Superchill, the embodiment of perfect chill, and Freakout Girl, the embodiment of chaotic freaking, are tulpas of a sort and they drove the creation of that show. Their clearly defined personas put them in the bracket of mythological figures (basically order & chaos) Together they represent the key balancing energies in a larger project: writing a new folkloric framework. It's a funny, futile and egomaniacal task to be possessed of any intent to create the characters of new mythologies in the hope that they eventually supplant everything we currently know. Not because the task itself is absurd but because that project is already taking place on the internet through memes and the authorship is appropriately collective. Despite that, I still think the art world is a place to foster myth creation, and that's what the Superchill and Freakout Girl comic is doing there.

The show opened in early 2018, two years into Donald, two years into the alt-right/antifa media war. The tensions were wicked, had been, and everyone was clique-ing up hard. You were/are either with the Jets or the Sharks. Long winded Atlantic think-pieces are The Jets and long winded rants from Alex Jones on InfoWars are The Sharks. The art world, mostly Jets, probably, was/is not immune and many of its highest regarded publications were making their anti-Trump, anti-populism opinions clear. Later that year, Boyd Rice's show was cancelled at Greenspoon Gallery in NYC after a threats taking issue with his neo-Nazi-like aesthetics were directed at the gallery. I just hate that kind of shit. The censorship over these issues that feel so sensitive we must keep them locked away and never learn how to sensibly address them and find \*gasp\* resolution, no, fuck that. So anyway, making work in some of the shittiest time in human history (as seen through my millennial lens), I was like, "I can be like all these predictable charlatans who seek to make their political puritanism their entire brand, or I can quest to find a creative path through the thicket of conflict." Superchill is my machete.

I'm not sure if Superchill is an enlightened Buddha or super depressed nihilist, but there is nothing on earth or in space that can shake her sense of utter chillness. Point in case, in the second solo show, we follow Superchill on her free trip to space offered by some unseen benefactor, probably Musk. The ensuing comics portray a laid-back adventure, as every creature she encounters is pretty much as chill as she is, which is its own idea; if you feel chill, so will the world around you (as above, so below, as within, so without).

When I started posting about Superchill on my Instagram I was instantly attacked by a fierce feminist voice in the comments section, calling me out for being another pusher of the "cool girl" narrative. I then went on a long internet recon mission to learn about the "cool girl". And like, theories about how the idea of a "chill" female is an act of erasure because it's a nerdy male fantasy aside, I was dismayed that the character I had created as a beacon to chillness was already causing a fembot to freakout. So Freakout Girl, the girl with the power to freak out about every single tiny thing, came to be. The idealogue feminist can have her totem and I can go back to working on Superchill.

The animated, immersive and interactive elements of the six-projector set up were the icing on the new mythos cake. I'm running a propaganda machine, too.

Will you see more? Definitely. These tulpas exist in reality, it would be rude to ignore them.

**ST:**

Your most recent solo exhibition, *Making Bets In A Burning House*, opened in February 2020. This time you had two galleries within which to work and each included a range of work within a room installation. What was the essence of each room and what was the dialogue between the two?



Making Bets in a Burning House. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020

**HE:**

In this show, one room is on fire, the floor has become lava and you are surrounded by messy, handmade memes, characters and symbols from personal narrative. There is almost no solid ground on which to stand as the walls feel like unscalable prison blocks – end times energy. The second room is trying to make a comfortable space out of a secretive surveillance system, the replacement of human artists with AI generated art – a world devoid of the human hand. Except for one mischievous *Soft Worm*, my snake in the post-scarcity garden. Overall the show is a type of breaking point.



The dialogue between the two rooms is one that is emblematic of the push and pull of two realities in this tumultuous time of transformation. Of course I didn't know there would be a virus vector as part of all this, but the new level of transition from the IRL human scale to the detached techno-dystopia of the post-scarcity world, where people no longer work and all our leisure is surveilled, was inevitable before the coronavirus hit.

One of the key pieces of the show for me is *Nerd Smasher*, in the first room, where a cartoon woman with no hair is playing a video game where smashing nerds isn't just the name of the game – it is the game. It captures the sort of disdain I have come to feel towards all the giants of the technological landscape and their utter fucked up selling out of the potential utopia that was online existence. They're all just dorks to me now, their mystique fallen away, and a return to them being sidelined as such is a relief, like how did we all get cucked by nerds? The promise of *Like A Dragon U-furled Its Wings*, the ten-foot dragon flying around the room, is that we will remember our innate unbridled human powers, like an updated dream of a working class revolution, where the kids in athleisure decide to wear Phrygian caps.

In the second room, where you can sit on a green carpet covered in pillows and watch people stream through the first room via live surveillance footage, I am most happy with the pieces generated by an AI neural net that predicted my future output. As much as I desire to slam everything that reeks of high tech gloss, there is an element of collaborating with an algorithm that has a unique texture and I will be casually considering the results for a while. Not to go unmentioned there is also the cum towel of *Jizzus Saves*, that depicts Jesus on the cross cumming on "society". The image was illustrated with a program that recreates rug hooked patterns I'd developed, trying to find ways to replicate my rug hooking texture.

Like the title suggests, we're all making bets in this burning house (global warming, pandemics, general apocalypse in all directions), despite the horror etc. because reality is shapeshifting in all directions, and anything is still possible. Which I'm excited about in a tired and exhausted type of way.

**ST:**

Unfortunately, the show was prematurely shut down by the onset of Covid-19. I wonder how the pandemic has affected you. Can you describe your most recent works, the ones you have after your exhibition closed?

**HE:**

The pandemic is fresh and so I'm just going to write from the thick of it.

I bought a car back in January and drove it from Nova Scotia to Los Angeles to do the install for the show and enroute the #coronavirus news started streaming out of Wuhan. It looked scary as hell, all the shaky leaked camera footage of bodies piled up in hospital hallways, people fainting in the streets, being carted away from airports in plastic bubbles, just a total nightmare. And I was like yes, universe, I know this virus is about to do such damage, but can it please hold off until like, after Yung Jake and I have a killer opening for our shows? Thanks. Then I bought a pair of elbow length black gloves to wear to the opening as some kind of virus prophylactic but the "numbers" were so "low" I was like, "fuck it" and just went out and partied that whole week (sans gloves). With ALAC, Felix, etc. it was a fab feeling to be in LA and it felt like I was getting my fun in before the whole thing really blew up. After the opening I drove back to Canada where I've been hiding out and going through a mix of raging out, freaking out, chilling out, blissing out and sometimes even forgetting about the plague and then remembering again. So, I was disappointed the show had to close early, but I'm happy that the old normal could attend the opening.

The works I've made since arriving back in Nova Scotia are currently in a big pile near my kitchen. It's a really inconvenient spot for them, but they just keep stacking up, each a document of a moment in this ongoing snoozefest of a foundational transformation of all levels of society.

The first, currently untitled, is a piece about Grimes' *Miss Anthropocene* album and Elon Musk's SpaceX and the two of them as mass murdering billionaire art-adjacent villainous forces. The second is a hit piece on the CCP and their coverup of the virus, followed by a Freakout Girl episode where her ghost is encountering her own corpse and smaller piece of Mickey Mouse with a giant boner wondering if he'll ever have sex again.

Those initial big bursts of angst aside I recently decided it was time to start working on *Superchill in Hell*, an idea I'd started to sketch out a year ago as a sequel to her trip to outer space. So, as promised, she's back and she's still super chill.

**ST:**

You have had a very busy two and a half years. What have you learned about being an artist?

**HE:**

I am now trying to focus on the very specific things that worked for me to get to this point. The largest takeaway I have at the moment is the immense importance of trusting one's own intuition, despite whatever "rational" minds might tell you. I have been spending a large part of this quarantine time trying to refine the relationship I have with that intuitive voice, make it stronger, and build my ability to trust it. I now have enough experience that I can look back and see where trusting it made my work stronger and where doubting it made the work fall apart. It's a constant dialogue I am having with myself.

**ST:**

Might we see some of these in your solo booth at Enter Art Fair, Copenhagen, August 27-30? Can you describe them? I hope you'll give equal time to Freakout Girl.



*Superchill In Hell: The Fall*, 2020. Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap, 45 x 46 inches (114.3 x 116.8 cm)

**HE:**

Yes, for sure. The saga of Superchill and Freakout Girl continues with each character's separate journey into the afterlife. Superchill goes to Hell while Freakout Girl finds herself in Heaven. Their stories are told episodically with a comic dedicated to moments in each character's adventure.

One irregularly shaped comic follows the movement of Superchill, like in an animation, as she skateboards along a residential street. Distracted by a bird she then falls down a dark tunnel into the underworld where she lands with a \*thud\*. In Superchill fashion she is unbothered and continues to slurp her drink into the entrance of Hell.

**HE:**

The next comic is a single panel of Superchill passing by the "Hope Check" counter where a demon asks her to check her hope. "Nah" she says, skating on, disobeying the only rule that Hell demands of its visitors: Abandon All Hope!

Superchill is subversively condemned. In a comic where demons attempt to torture her, she refuses to react, quoting a Buddhist philosophical statement that "All existence is suffering". The demons hear this and realize that the suffering they inflict on others is tantamount to their own suffering and begin to cry.

**HE:**

While Superchill chills in Hell, Freakout Girl confronts her own death, first as a ghost exiting her body, then in Heaven, where the realization of her new reality is so horrific that not even the promise of everlasting peace can quell her. She runs screaming from the panel, breaking out of her comic frame conventions.

A separate, single panel comic, shows Freakout Girl falling from the sky, headed straight for Hell.

Once in Hell, Freakout Girl, known for catchphrases like "AAAAAAHHH!" and "Not this again!", "Oh no!", and "Fuuuuck!!!", finds herself surrounded by creatures that mimic her wail of constant freaking. By the end of the comic she seems to have become bored with the echoes of her own horror and we see the first shades of a multi-layered Freakout Girl.



*Freakout Girl: Freaking Into The Afterlife, 2020.*  
Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap 46 x 35 inches  
(116.8 x 88.9 cm)



*Freakout Girl Goes To Heaven, 2020.* Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap, 37 1/2 x 44 inches (95.3 x 111.8 cm)

#### HE:

I was asked by a follower if Freakout Girl and Superchill ever meet. It's a question I had been unable to answer because I was still deciding if they were the same person or definitively different entities. The last few comics of the story investigate that.

Superchill and Freakout Girl encounter each other in Hell and the reader discovers a longstanding tension and resentment between them. Each is bothered by the other's personality, so different from her own. They share a thought bubble and think, "this bitch".

The final comic sets it up that we are in for a battle of the century, Superchill VS. Freakout Girl! They trash talk each other and then, instead of the expected climactic blow out between these two superheroes, we see that each is standing in their bathroom, looking in the mirror, and seeing a reflection of their opposite. Freakout Girl sees herself as Superchill and Superchill sees herself as Freakout Girl. This final frame still refuses to explain if they are one in the same or two individuals, regardless the characters themselves have been complicated for the reader as their inner life reveals a more complex struggle than their superficial presentation.

#### ST:

And how do the other works in the booth relate to Superchill and Freakout Girl?

#### HE:

My other works in the show are meant as accompaniment pieces to the Superchill & Freakout Girl narrative. They provide glimpses into other characters present in the worlds they move through, characters who may have their own comic panels- yet to be made, or up to the viewer to fill in. One is a direct quote from



John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "The mind is its own place and itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven", which directly feeds into the duality (multiplicity, really) of the self, which holds the potential for all things.

**ST:**

I always love your titles. Do you have a title for your solo Booth?

**HE:**

Of course I do. *See You In Hell*.

**ST:**

Fabulous. On that note, I wonder if you might reflect on all you have done in the last few years. What have you learned about being an artist?

**HE:**

I am now trying to focus on the very specific things that worked for me to get to this point. The largest takeaway I have at the moment is the immense importance of trusting one's own intuition, despite whatever "rational" minds might tell you. I have been spending a large part of this quarantine time trying to refine the relationship I have with that intuitive voice, make it stronger, and build my ability to trust it. I now have enough experience that I can look back and see where trusting it made my work stronger and where doubting it made the work fall apart. It's a constant dialogue I am having with myself.



OMG I'M GONNA DIE, 2020. Wool, acrylic, cotton and burlap, 20 x 36 inches (50.8 x 91.4 cm)

## Interview: Hannah Epstein

January 18, 2019

DO YOU WANT A FREE TRIP TO OUTER SPACE? by Hannah Epstein

January 5 – February 16, 2019 at Steve Turner



Hannah Epstein. Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?, Installation View, Steve Turner, 2019

**The most integrated presentation of her work to-date, Hannah Epstein's current solo exhibition DO YOU WANT A FREE TRIP TO OUTER SPACE? at Los Angeles-based Steve Turner, invites the viewer into a cartoonish, immersive outer space environment. Having been raised on a mixture of film, television, video games, and literature, the Nova Scotia-born artist draws on a wide net of mediums, through which she challenges and reshapes dominant narratives. DO YOU WANT A FREE TRIP TO OUTER SPACE? serves not only as a vehicle for travel into other worlds, but also as a space dedicated to confronting the ways in which the human soul suffers under our current cultural conditions. In her own words, "I want to 'let the sunshine in' and coax us toward a collective awakening".**

**Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space? is your second solo exhibition at Steve Turner. Can you give us some insights into your thoughts behind the exhibition?**

At its core, the show is an immersive, handmade, textile comic book that follows the story of Superchill and her chill adventure in outer space. On the walls hang planetary bodies,

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alien creatures and comic book panels- all illuminated by six projectors running projection-mapped, animated frames.

Since my first solo with Steve Turner, *Monster World*, exclusively showed textiles it was important to me that the new show offer a more comprehensive view of my practice and move me away from any limitations that might come with specific labels like, “textile artist”.

**The title *Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?* is playful and alluring, and yet, it also seems to indicate a sort of distancing from the world as we know it. Can you elaborate a bit on the exhibition title?**

The title is on one level a literal and sincere invitation to the viewer to come along for a make-believe trip to outer space and on another level it is referring to the various ways in which our cultural understanding of outer space is being carved up and redefined.

With capstone PR stunts like blasting a sports car piloted by an empty space suit, Elon Musk’s *SpaceX* and Richard Branson’s *Virgin Galactic* are companies endeavoring to pursue a capitalist agenda beyond planet Earth. With promises to create space tourism and the colonization of Mars, these companies aim to establish their brands in the yet unbranded vastness of space. Trump’s fantasy about creating a military presence outside our atmosphere with “Space Force” contains a promise that space will be yet another arena for human conflict.

When examining the emerging cultural narrative around outer space, it no longer seems to serve as a realm of poetic reflection and contemplation. It is becoming an extension of the worst parts of what humanity as we burn one planet and search to colonize and repeat the same pattern on others.

This show invites the viewer into a homemade outer space environment where a different narrative takes shape, one where the realm of space is free and accessible to anyone who wants to show up. Superchill, leading by example, represents an explorer who comes to chill.



Hannah Epstein. *Alien Flex*, 2018. Acrylic and burlap, 81 x 53 inches (205.7 x 134.6 cm)



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Hannah Epstein. Cloud Blaster, 2018. Video game in reclaimed arcade cabinet (includes controller, monitor and computer) 72 x 39 1/2 x 36 inches (182.9 x 100.3 x 91.4 cm)

**With hooked rugs, animations and a video game, you work at the intersection of the tactile, describing yourself as “a feminist folklorist of the Internet Age”. Can you talk about the blending of the historical and the contemporary in your work, the process-oriented textile craftsmanship and the technology-driven aesthetics?**

All categories are collapsing in on themselves. The usual categories of “painter”, “sculptor”, “video artist” are falling away into a broader understanding of the artist as they and their work exist across a myriad of platforms, both digital and physical.

This increased blending of mediums with which an artist works is an inevitable process when technology changes and evolves so quickly. It is impossible for an artist to act like a machine and simply replace all previous programming with the new software. They are more likely to integrate all previous programming. In my personal experience I have gone from using VHS to DVD to online streaming platforms but I’ve never considered any of these

media formats as “obsolete”. The rapid succession of technology meant that I had players stacked on top of each other, so I could play a favourite VHS before switching to Netflix.

Expanded to textile, I always admired the old hooked rugs of my home when growing up in Nova Scotia. By picking up the technique and recycling the tradition, I am discarding the false narrative that we must adopt new technology as it develops, rejecting all others that came before. I see value in every stage of technological development and consider “traditional craft” as vital in the present as any 3D modeled, laser cut, AI generated, VR experience.

# ARTLAND

**I note that your 2018 solo exhibition at Steve Turner included hooked rugs of monsters and internet memes presented on the gallery's white walls with conventional gallery lighting. In your current show, you are presenting hooked rugs again but without any lights. Instead, you chose to light the works with animations that are being projected onto the walls by six projectors. In short, what made you want to go dark and animate?**

I often experience coldness in the white cube gallery space, one where the space feels sterile and inhospitable. That is part of what makes it an elite and alluring space, one that can elevate work, as it did with my first show, but I wanted this show to exude a warmer, welcoming environment.

For the new show, I am casting aside any dialogue with the gallery as highbrow aesthetic arena and transforming it into a vehicle for travel into other worlds.

**Superchill is the title character in your new comic strip presented in Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space? I am interested to know more about this very relaxed female superhero. Is she a reaction to the sense of anxiety that seems heightened over the past few years? Are you suggesting that the male superheroes of great fame (Superman, Spiderman, etc.) have somehow failed society? And what is the relevance of Freakout Girl, the other human character in your show?**

In the hanski comic universe, Superchill and Freakout Girl personify the two biggest powers struggles. Superchill, with her superpower of remaining chill in any situation finds her counterpart in Freakout Girl, whose superpower is constantly being freaked out by everything. Where Marvel and DC might have “good” VS “evil”, the hanski-verse has chilling and freaking.

The politics of our world are often echoed in the world of superheroes and the same is occurring in the Superchill/Freakout Girl narrative. Marvel or DC will take a real war, like WWII and create alternative histories for its characters to inhabit, where the characters of my comic universe take a more reflective tone.

Superchill personifies an answer to a question I ask all the time- where are the leaders whose examples we strive to emulate? This is hardly articulated enough, but we humans are a mimicking species, which is why it is important for functional societies to have good role models. God is dead, which is fine, so I see it as an artistic duty to create guideposts in a chaotic darkness.

**“I think of textiles as comics with texture. So in the same way that comics can relate a story through image and text, textiles do the same.” In the above quote from an interview with NOW, you talk about constructing narratives. Can you talk about the element of storytelling in your work?**

I think of storytelling as constant activity we are all engaged in. You might say, “But Hannah,

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I'm not a good storyteller", meaning you don't feel confident reciting an anecdote in an entertaining manner, but that's not what I mean when I talk about storytelling. If everything around us is chaos, storytelling is a scaffold around which to build and recognize patterns. I can tell you a story like, "once there was a sun, it is night now, but there will be a sun again", and when morning comes you see that the sun has returned and this creates an understanding, however rudimentary, that this is what happens- the sun goes, but it comes back. That story is then told in a variety of ways, scientifically (the earth revolves around the sun), ritually (solstice celebrations) etc.

Getting back to the first part of your question, I am usually more interested in the type of story that is found outside of mainstream culture. Because comics and textiles have both existed outside the canon of art history they are the ideal place to inject new, counterculture narratives. It is in the unofficial margins where dominant narratives can be challenged and reshaped.



Hannah Epstein. Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?, Installation View, Steve Turner, 2019

**You grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a Canadian maritime provinces located on the North Atlantic Coast of North America and later studied in Newfoundland, an even more remote Canadian province. How has your upbringing shaped your ideas and artistic motivations?**



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Growing up in Nova Scotia, I felt like I was always on the outside looking in. American culture came through on a few select channels at certain times of the day and those glimpses showed me a brilliant, colorful world that seemed as absurd as it was hypnotizing. That kind of distance allows a person to retain a critical edge- one that's necessary when creating counter-culture narratives.

I was drawn to Newfoundland, because it seemed the furthest vantage point for looking in to the North American mentality. It is also the only place in Canada you can get a B.A. in Folklore. As an area of study, folklore exists as an anti-academic-academic discipline. Instead of looking towards the established orthodoxy of knowledge it demands you look to your own neighbors as repositories of knowledge that is valuable and worthy of serious consideration. I think there is something in cultivating the ability to look in from outside and look around from inside that is constantly at work in the way I perceive and interact with culture.

**You draw on a visual vocabulary of cartoon and pop culture images that resonate with the folkloric tradition, thus creating a dynamic interplay between the realm of our everyday life and the mythical. Can you talk about your sources of inspiration and how they feed into each other?**

The experience of the world that is shaped by mythic and archetypal narratives continues to define the human cultural experience. Whether the figures that reign supreme in your mind come from literature, some sacred text or Saturday morning cartoons, we constantly encounter characters with which we can identify, deify or condemn. For myself, having been raised on a mixture of film, television, video games and literature. I'm not sure I can separate how they all interact but I can list some and their associations; The Simpsons (family archetypes), David Suzuki (champion of the natural world), Orson Welles (the trickster), Xena Warrior Princess (overcoming a violent past and the path to redemption), Morvern Callar (the wild woman), Mickey & Mallory Knox (unbound love), Alan Watts (western prophet for eastern philosophy), Bikini Kill (rebel grrrl), Zelda: Ocarina of Time (adventure and courage), Mr. Show & Monty Python (comedy and absurdity), Big Brother (the technological villain), Jan Svankmajer's Faust (the folly of man). This list goes on forever.

**You have said that you are driven by an impulse to stir things up. More specifically, what or who would you like to confront?**

I would like to confront, quite plainly, the ways in which the human soul suffers under our current cultural conditions. Any gesture to "stir things up" is a signal that other realities are real possibilities. I want to "let the sunshine in" and coax us toward a manifestation of our positive potential as a species. Is that silly or is it desperately necessary? I want to confront the cynical voice within the reader that would say these desires are foolish or naive.

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**In your current show, Superchill goes to outer space. Should we conclude from the title of your comic strip (“The Adventures of Superchill”) that more episodes are forthcoming?**

Indeed I would love to see Superchill and Freakout Girl reappear in future comic works but I’m not going to force it. Contrary to the system of entertainment, which regularly spits out episodic film releases of their franchise properties, these characters will live and develop in their own time.



Hannah Epstein. Superchill Issue No. 1 Cover Page, 2018. Wool, acrylic, polyester and burlap, 94 x 53 inches (238.8 x 134.6 cm)

## Hannah Epstein: 'Do You Want A Free Trip To Outer Space?'

Blending the Tactile and the Digital

by Jody Zellen | January 15, 2019



For her second solo exhibition at Steve Turner, Halifax-born, Los Angeles and Toronto-based Hannah Epstein has transformed the darkened gallery into outer space. She fills this fantasy world with spot-lit, hooked rugs of varying sizes, depicting an invented comic book superhero called *Superchill*.

In her work, Epstein blends the tactile and the digital. She has a long history of creating animations, videos and online games, in addition to creating a cast of hooked rug characters. In her previous exhibition, *Monster World* (2018) her funky colorful creatures inhabited the walls eliciting awe and smiles. While her work has an outsider art appeal, it is created by a savvy insider. The term “*post internet*” is a catch-all phrase that refers to artists who do not necessarily make art on or about the internet, but create objects that are informed by internet culture. In many ways, Epstein is a quintessential “*post internet*” artist. Upon the walls in the gallery are more than twenty-five tactile objects, hooked-wool rugs with varying lengths of dangling yarn in a wide range of shapes and sizes. Each artwork is lit by a carefully constructed video projection that illuminates the silhouette of the shape, while simultaneously projecting twinkling yellow stars and other animated fragments that interact with specific aspects of the rugs. For example, when looking at Cruhnch (all works





**Superchill Buddha**

2018), a pink-toned monster filled with a pattern of different colored eyeballs and mouths with exaggerated teeth, pixelated orange and yellow flames suddenly erupt to surround the figure. A similar animation appears above the piece, Alien Flex.

The use of projected animation as a lighting source allows Epstein to create a dynamic rather than static environment in which the unexpected occurs. The narrative that drives the work centers on the adventures of *Superchill's* trip to outer space. During her trip, despite passing by a wide range of circular shaped planets (some drawn from popular culture like *Planet Accidental Ninja Turtle*) and interactions with alien monsters and other creatures, *Superchill* is

undisturbed. Epstein's imagining of this trip is to present an alternative to a superhero with powers, creating instead a superhero who stays calm, or super chill.

Any trip to outer space, free or not, would be anxiety-producing, as leaving earth and flying through the universe in a spaceship is risky. Yet, in Epstein's presentation, outer space is filled with smiling planets, friendly aliens and a star-filled sky. She even includes a free video game entitled *Cloud Blaster* in which viewers assume the role of a blond-haired astronaut who blasts evil-faced clouds with a golden genie lamp.

While *Superchill* could be anyone, she has an affinity with Epstein and might even be a self-portrait in much the same way Trenton Doyle Hancock's *TorpedoBoy* is his alter ego. Although she is depicted as buxom and muscular in *Superchill Issue No. 1 Cover Page*, in the other works, including *Superchill Buddha*, she is just a regular girl.

Epstein's creations have the aura and appeal of large-scale "Ugly" dolls or other stuffed toys that are popular with both children and adult audiences. In this enchanting installation, Epstein successfully combines the analog and the digital to create an evocative experience

that inspires viewers to think about what exists beyond, while simultaneously being grounded in the here and now.

Jody Zellen is a Santa Monica-based artist and writer. She has been writing art reviews for more than 25 years and currently contributes to Artillery, ArtScene, Afterimage and Art and Cake. For more information on her art and writings please visit [www.jodyzellen.com](http://www.jodyzellen.com)



**Cruhnh**



**Big Blue Alien**

## Turning floors into folklore: Hannah Epstein is telling incredible stories...with debaucherous rugs

Driven by the impulse to stir things up, Nova Scotia-born Epstein is — among other things — a troublemaker

Chris Hampton | April 20, 2018



Hannah Epstein at work.

Can a rug make mischief?

The very first rug that artist Hannah Epstein ever made hangs above a desk in her Toronto work room. It's a fuzzy patch, a bit smaller than a broadsheet, made from burlap and acrylic yarn. On it, there's an alligator throttling a triple-ex jug in its claw. It's wearing a top hat and cowboy boots and arranged into a sort of "ta-da" pose.

The character came to the 32-year-old Nova Scotia-born artist from a story told to her about a middle schooler in P.E.I. who'd had the magical creature branded on him with a homemade tattoo. The storyteller went as the sauced-up reptile dandy one Halloween, raising it to a sort of local legend. Epstein has memorialized it a rank further, retold and preserved now in the Maritime craft tradition of the hooked rug. The lizard lush has become something of a folktale.

Epstein calls herself a folklorist. Her art practice is interested in contemporary fables and myth-making, the idolatry that builds tradition as well as the iconoclasm that topples it.



(And, to that end, she's a proud troublemaker.) Growing up in the East Coast, she was surrounded by rug hookings — those folksy wall hangings made from looped yarn that picture, say, a bunny or some daisies or a cozy cottage. She's made it her Trojan horse, she says, using what some might consider "the lowly craft of grannies" to get inside the guarded walls of the art world.

Epstein's visual universe bleeds cartoon debauchery. She lists Bill the Cat among her early influences. "*The Simpsons* basically built my world, aesthetically," she says. Her lurid, ribald and jokey hookings subvert the tradition enough to freak out the craft fair crowd and slip past the gatekeepers into the sphere of galleries and cultural institutions. Her rugs appeared in the first-ever Canadian Craft Biennial this past Fall as well as the Textile Museum's 150 Years of Canadian Hooked Rugs travelling exhibition. She just deinstalled a major solo show at Steve Turner Contemporary in Los Angeles, where she also keeps a studio. The Trojan horse has worked; the outré and provincial can infiltrate the orthodox.

Her practice values what she calls "bottom-up storytelling." She celebrates the informal and the anecdotal — tales shared over a joint or a bar rail — rather than the authoritative and official. "In Newfoundland, for a long time, fishermen all had stories about giant squids, and it was considered laughable," she explains. "People would analyze it and say, 'What they're really talking about is a fear of the sea,' or something like that. Turns out, giant squids actually exist."

She's made a large body of work inspired by memes: the paranoid catchphrase "Jet fuel can't melt steel beams," for example, or the botched *Ecce Homo* restoration — all emblematic of present-day folk cultures, she says.

A self-described "Nova Scotian who never felt like she belonged there," Epstein's own outsider status spurs her art a bit like a challenge. She felt dismissed by the woman in Clayton Park whom she first enlisted to teach her rug hooking, for example. She feels like there's an archetypal crafter on the East Coast who just won't accept what she does. Her embrace of rug-making is in part a vengeance — she wants to take this thing they love and twist it just a little. It's evidenced maybe best in her second-ever effort, where she's hooked the image of her, legs agape, birthing herself into the world.

That instinct hasn't abated; rather, she indulges it. In another series — perhaps her best-known works — she sought to conjure demons. She'd trance out and channel monster forms before setting to her workstation to bring them forth in wool and polyester. She calls Mouser, an oversized shaggy cat head with yellowcake eyes and a mouth full of fangs, among the most powerful spirits that she'd summoned. For a time, he hung in her hall, monitoring the doorway like a sphinx. He is mischievousness embodied, she says. "That's my imperative, I guess." If there's anything that drives her to create, she explains, it's the impulse to stir things up.

## The sweet hooked rug, gone bad: How artist Hannah Epstein gives a retro craft some bite

By SHARON MIZOTA | JANUARY 20, 2018



Hannah Epstein's "Soft Teeth," left, "The Hybrid Kid" and "Mouser" are all from 2017.  
Don Lewis / Hannah Epstein and Steve Turner

Hannah Epstein's riotous exhibition at Steve Turner may bring back memories of hours spent with latch hook rug kits — those ready-to-assemble crafts that, strand by strand, formed a fuzzy image of a cheery rainbow, heart or "Sesame Street" character.

The Canadian artist's hooked rugs, however, are the bad sister-in-laws of those anodyne projects. "Monster World" assembles shaggy, snarling, off-kilter beasts that have more to do with alternative comics, cartoons and Internet culture than they do with sweetness and light. Strewn across a wall, they are the underbelly of cute, the id of the home crafter.

There are, of course, cats. "Mouser" is a cat's face, nearly 5 feet tall, hooked in a wild combination of yarns that manages to feel both colorful and dingy. The mouth is stretched into a gleeful, toothy grin, toeing the line between cheer and evil. Nearby, in "Bad Mascot," a smaller lion also bares its teeth: You can almost hear it hissing.

"The Hybrid Kid" depicts a humanoid creature with large, moth-like antennae and five eyes. Huddled in a protective posture, but grinning maniacally through its pain, one of its arms appears to be a snake, or perhaps it's just wearing a sock puppet. It's sweet; the monstrosity sneaks up on you. Also cute is the multi-colored, griffin-like animal in "Eats

# Los Angeles Times



Installation view of Hannah Epstein's "Monster World," with a hissing lion in the lower left corner.  
Don Lewis / Hannah Epstein and Steve Turner

Its Young" choking down a smaller version of itself. On its belly, as if in X-ray vision, we see a tiny, staring face. It's not exactly an image of maternal solicitude.

Other works forgo cuteness altogether. There are images of Britney Spears with shaved head, a cartoon girl getting punched in the face and an anime-style woman being encircled and penetrated by brightly colored tentacles, each inscribed with the word "memes." These are girls gone wrong, or girls done wrong.

Similarly, Epstein's rugs are nice projects gone awry. Her use of the hooked rug invokes hours of repetitious labor spent following a pattern. Such activities may be fun and relaxing, but they're also designed to keep girls' hands busy. They accustom girls to drudgery.

In creating her own patterns, Epstein has twisted the hooked rug into something not only novel but also appealing — even joyful. It feels honest, capturing the craziness, the violence, the screaming fury of our day. Anger is held in tension with cuteness, sweetness, fuzziness. These are the hooked rugs we might have made had we the nerve to burst out of our skins.