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**THE ALIEN-NATIONS AND SOVEREIGN STATES OF OCTAVIA E BUTLER
FROM ARTIST chlee - A FEELING BOTH FAMILIAR YET BRAND NEW**

By P. Andrews- Keenan

I've had the privilege of experiencing **Candace (chlee) Hunter's** work in many settings – **The South Side Community Art Center**, the **DuSable Black History Museum**, **Stella Jones Gallery** in NOLA and **Blackbird Gallery** in Detroit. Yet while there is a familiarity to her work, it comes across as totally new and different each time. Such is the case with here exhibit in the **Kanter Family Foundation Gallery** at the **Hyde Park Art Center**. The exhibit opened yesterday and continues until March 3, 2024.

Here the artist once again masters multiple medium – installations, collage, paintings, audio. The things that are consistent and familiar are the use of magazines, vintage maps, cloth, various re-used materials. This newest landscape also includes foliage and of all things a unicorn.

Specifically, **The Alien-Nations and Sovereign States of Octavia E Butler** takes us to an apocalyptic moment in time, that eerily enough in true Octavia Butler fashion – mirrors today's. The exhibition notes say it best.

“In 1993, Butler envisioned the impending world at odds and headed for destruction. Violence in community streets, food scarcity, environmental devastation.”

The novels the artist pulls from, **Parable of the Sower** and **Lilith's Brood: A Tribology**, chronicle the end of society as we know it. And can't we all just see it? Between the years 2025 – 2027 (eerie again).

Upon entering the gallery there is a framed piece on canvas portraying a lush garden brimming with all manners of greenery and flowers – lilies, lavender, roses, peonies bluebells and fruits. A floral bough of autumn leaves is affixed to the wall above it, appearing almost as it were a magic wand bestowing a blessing on the painting. Upon closer inspection you see the faces and body parts – legs and hands – among the dense foliage. Their faces bring us no comfort, rather their eyes haunt us, perhaps deterring us from joining them in this floral paradise.

A recurring theme throughout the exhibit is that change is the only constant in the universe. Found on one wall is the quote *“Change is the unavoidable, irresistible, (this is the spelling as it appears) ongoing reality of the universe.”* Change is the only constant has always been a prevailing mantra for me too, so it resonates.



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The full sized reclaimed doors are rendered in natural wood and bright shades of oxblood, white and blue. The doors carry full sized paintings of a diverse group of people on one side and messages on the other. Most impactful is the message board under the header "**FIND ME**". Reminiscent of the boards that spring up at the sight of disasters. In a world devastated and likely devoid of technology how will we find each other without these desperate pleas scribble on any leftover scrap of paper we can find. On one door the message is "God Prevails". A final message we should all heed.

One pastel hued is done in watery color of greens and yellows and blues, again with flowers. In the midst of them, triumphant, is a silver unicorn with flowing braided tresses above the words, "*the future is breath*".

The beautiful curvaceous bodies of the Brown Limbed Girls show up here in brown, black, bronze, and black. Some are raffia clad, others wear crinkly cellophane dresses, all have hieroglyphs of some sort. But, alongside them are funhouse mirrors that give you a long limbed, yet distorted view of your own image. Both the random and repetitive pieces of brandywine colored felt the artist used, form lovely patterns framing the women, again with flowering foliage weaved in. It just added something.

The way chlee has brought us back to honor this remarkably prescient author includes a reading library to accompany the exhibit. And you're only to use them while in the space. Believe me I need to snag a few books and begin my OEB journey.

Kudos to Ciera Alyce McKissick and Allison Peters Quinn who curated the exhibit.

We love that Candace is savoring her successes when most folks are looking at retiring. As a women of a certain age myself, nurturing a startup, I can appreciate the love of your craft needed to embrace every opportunity sent your way. BRAVO chlee!

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