

PARIS 2440/3020: EXCAVATING DANIEL ARSHAM'S FICTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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THE PRESENT IS PREGNANT WITH THE FUTURE,
THE FUTURE MIGHT BE READ IN THE PAST,
THE DISTANT IS EXPRESSED IN THE NEAR.
—GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ¹

In 1771, the French writer, dramatist, and social commentator Louis-Sébastien Mercier published *L'An 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (1771), an instant bestseller today regarded as one of the earliest science fiction novels. Mercier's tome traces the journey of a Parisian man of letters after he accidentally wakes up nearly three-quarters of a millennium in the future. Just as George Orwell's 1984 was a commentary on 1948, Mercier's novel vaulted eighteenth-century readers into the ostensible year 2440 in order to defamiliarize "their" Paris enough to call into question *Ancien Régime* policies and institutions. Mercier's collapse of a linear understanding of time is foreshadowed on the title page of the novel (Fig. 1), which partially excerpts a well-known line by the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: "The present is pregnant with the future (*Le Temps present est gros de l'Avenir*)."

Leibniz's quote, featured as the epigraph of my article, encapsulates his concept of relational time, a framework formulated in opposition to Newton's theory of absolute space and time. Instead of presupposing time and space to be two independent and external entities, Leibniz proposed that the two are inextricably and symbiotically linked. Mercier's truncation simplifies this complex Enlightenment debate to a concise reference point through which the passage of time can be considered as a series of dilating concentric circles, facilitating literary and visual production predicated on durational jumps.² While *L'An 2440* has often been miscategorized as a utopian novel, Mercier's innovation in the genre lies in the fact that it does not unfold in a faraway fantastical *topos* (unlike, say, Thomas More's imagined island of Utopia in the distant South Seas). Instead, *uchronia* triumphs over utopia: in Mercier the *topos* is temporal

1 Acknowledgements: I'm deeply grateful to Jola Idowu, Ardalan SadeghiKivi, Antonio Pacheco, and Meriam Soltan for guiding this edition of *Thresholds* to fruition during these challenging times for scholarship. I thank Perrotin and the Daniel Arsham studio for their assistance with obtaining image permissions. This article profited from insightful feedback from Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Meredith Martin, Jeffrey Fraiman, and the two peer reviewers. Finally, I'm profoundly indebted to Tim Schneider for the intellectual exchanges during the gestation of this article and for his ever-fastidious edits, even at the eleventh hour. "Le présent est gros de l'avenir: le futur se pourrait lire dans le passé; l'éloigné est exprimé dans le prochain." Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Principes de la Nature & de la Grace, fondez en Raison," in Isaac Newton, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Samuel Clarke, and Pierre des Maizeaux, *Recueil de diverses pièces, sur la philosophie, la religion naturelle, l'histoire, les mathématiques* (Amsterdam: Chez François Changuion, 1740 [1714]), 419.

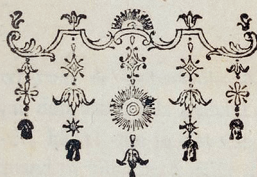
2 Leibniz's conception of the world as a fold was particularly instrumental to Gilles Deleuze's conception of the object. See Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Editions de la Minuit, 1988). For a discussion of Leibniz and the Enlightenment, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

L' A N
D E U X M I L L E
Q U A T R E C E N T Q U A R A N T E.

Rêve s'il en fût jamais.

Le Tems présent est gros de l'Avenir...

LEIBNITZ.



A L O N D R E S,

M D C C L X X I.

3 The term “uchronia” was first published by the French philosopher Charles Bernard Renouvier in his novel *Uchronie: L'utopia dans l'histoire* (1876), which traced an alternate history of Western civilization where Christianity never became the dominant religion. Galerie Perrotin, which represents Arsham, also uses the term “uchronic aesthetics” in its official bio for Arsham. For further discussion of uchronia in relation to utopia, see the conference proceeding *De l'utopie à l'uchronie: formes, significations, fonctions; actes du colloque d'Erlangen, 16–18 Octobre 1986*, ed. Hinrich Hudde, (Tübingen: Narr, 1988).

4 Arsham's interest in archaeological time was first sparked by a 2010 visit to an archaeological site on Easter Island, where he saw archaeologists unearthing tools left behind by a previous team of excavators next to a Moai statue. See Daniel Arsham and Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Parallel Realities: Daniel Arsham in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist,” in Daniel Arsham, Virgil Abloh, Steven Matijcio, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Arsham* (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2018), 124. In addition to objects, Arsham released a film series in 2013 entitled “Future Relic” that narrated a story of a woman searching for her father in a post-apocalyptic world after he disappears while excavating a site on the Moon.

rather than spatial, with future rather than foreign society serving as a foil to the present.

This aesthetic of uchronia is the signature strategy of Daniel Arsham (born 1980), a contemporary American artist best known for his *Future Relics*: artificially eroded copies of vernacular and cult objects ranging from sporting goods, electronics (Fig. 2), and musical instruments, to iconic artworks such as Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (2019).³ In these works Arsham takes the standard science fiction technique of exploring the present by projecting it into the future and distills this practice into a shorthand consisting of artificial erosions bursting with quartz and crystals. This reverse-engineering of archaeology fuses two temporalities: one of decay and destruction via the erosions, and the other of indefatigable growth and construction via the geological properties of the crystals.⁴

FIG. 1 Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814), *L'An deux mille quatre cent quarante. Rêve s'il en fût jamais* (London: 1771), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Inv. no. 8-LI3-38. Image © BnF.



FIG. 2 Daniel Arsham, *Ash Eroded Walkman*, 2014. Volcanic ash, volcanic glass, hydrostone, metal. 16.5x7.518cm, Unique #30315. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist.

Like Mercier’s imagined Paris in the year 2440, Arsham’s objects exist in the future version of our present—the *after* which makes tangible the presence of a *before*. This overlapping of the past and the present, looking forward by looking backward, thus makes Arsham’s sculptures an ideal prism to address this themed issue’s call for reflections on aesthetic consequences of moments of anticipation and retrospection.

Arsham’s adoption of what he terms “Fictional Archaeology” is overall endemic of the “archaeological turn” in contemporary art, which responds to the cult of acceleration and atemporality resulting from technological progress and globalized communications.⁵ It is additionally, and not coincidentally, evocative of Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), in which Jameson located the political saliency of utopia in its formal flaw, that

5 The phrase, “Fictional Archaeology,” was also the exhibition title for a solo show at Perrotin Hong Kong, (September 11–October 10, 2015). According to Peio Aguirre, the “archaeological turn” in contemporary art responds to the skepticism toward historical time that invited new hauntologies (to take Derrida’s term). See Peio Aguirre, “Semiotic Ghosts: Science Fiction and Historicism,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 28 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 124–34.

is, its “rhetorical and political strength ... forces us precisely to concentrate on the break itself.”⁶ For Jameson, all utopian artists are united in their embrace of the formal and temporal rupture, in what he sees as their desire to model alternative and imaginary worlds, an inherent baseline in Arsham’s visual and intermedial projects. Yet, perhaps owing to the promiscuity of his creative collaborations, Arsham’s “Fictional Archaeology” and his oeuvre as a whole has largely escaped serious and sustained critical attention in art historical circles compared to other artists, such as Mark Dion and Julian Charrière, who operate along the lines of a similar archaeological fieldwork model.⁷ In fact, his participation in cultural production is truly Warhol-esque. His various projects have included co-founding (with Alex Mustonen) in 2007 the highly sought-after and conceptually mischievous multidisciplinary design firm Snarkitecture, creating stage designs for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 2006 to 2011, collaborating with luxury jewelry and fashion houses, and a tenure as the first creative director of an NBA team (the Cleveland Cavaliers).⁸

My essay focuses on a series of sculptures Arsham has been producing since 2019, resulting from his unprecedented access to the storied Atelier de moulage de la Réunion des musées nationaux (RMN) in Saint-Denis. Founded in 1794, the Atelier preserves an encyclopedic collection of casts and original moldsand, and still makes certified copies for museums.⁹ Arsham is the first contemporary artist permitted to use the molds for his own practice, and he has since applied his trademark strategy to these original copies. His extraordinary collaboration with the RMN Atelier invites parallels between his contemporary relics and the temporal paradoxes involved in the restoration and conservation of classical statues. It is therefore a productive lens to unearth the historic roots of fictional archaeology.

Paris 3020 (Fig. 3; Perrotin Paris, January 11–March 13, 2020) was the first in a series of exhibitions featuring his gypsum cement (hydrostone, a type of particularly durable plaster) copies cast from RMN molds using the traditional mold process, followed by *Moonraker* (Musée Guimet, October 21, 2020–June 7, 2021) and *Time Dilation* (Perrotin New York, January 16–February 20, 2021), with future exhibitions planned. The title *Paris 3020* (the second date featured in the title of this article) was an invitation to imagine his altered classical statues as being rediscovered a millennium later, a strategy that excavates the belabored archaeological histories of the original sculptures.¹⁰ The gallery and the artist further compounded their art historical and archaeological credentials by inviting Ludovic Laugier, the curator of Greek sculpture at the Louvre Museum, to contribute a catalogue essay to *Paris 3020* and to host a conversation with Arsham.¹¹

6 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 232.

7 Arsham’s prolific success in the market has not come through traditional institutional and academic channels. Most of the literature on him (barring catalogues published by Perrotin) has appeared in art-, design-, and fashion-industry trade publications. Arsham has located his fascination with ruins and fragments in his early witnessing of the destruction of his house by Hurricane Andrew in 1992, an experience he refers to as “architectural dismemberment.” Steven Matijcio, “The Medium of the Medium,” in *Fictional Archaeology* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2015), 6.

8 Some of the brands Arsham has collaborated with include Tiffany & Co, Dior, Adidas, the Pokémon Company, and Supreme.

9 Founded in the Louvre in 1794, the molding workshop and its plaster cast collection have been in the purview of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux since 1895. For a fuller history of the historic atelier, see Florence Rionnet, *L’atelier de moulage du Musée du Louvre (1794–1928) Notes et documents des musées de France*, no. 28 (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996).

10 This idea of looking ahead a millennium was already active in Arsham’s exhibition *3018* (September 8–October 21, 2018, Perrotin New York).

11 Ludovic Laugier, “Paris, 3020,” and Daniel Arsham and Ludovic Laugier, “Conversation between Daniel Arsham and Ludovic Laugier (January 2020)” in Daniel Arsham and Ludovic Laugier, *Paris, 3020* (Paris: Perrotin, 2020), 25–27, 41–47.

Arsham's selection of RMN molds refracts the long legacies of certain sculptures. The illustrious list of Arsham's re-casted sculptures includes Michelangelo's *Moses* (c. 1513–15), Antoine Coysevox's *Hamadryade* (1710), *Venus de Milo* (2nd century BCE), *Lady of Auxerre* (7th century BCE), and *Venus of Arles* (1st century BCE), (Figs. 4,5), all remade with his characteristic erosions and insertions. His remade original copies were displayed on elevated plinths of varying heights with underlit bases that spotlighted the very system of museum display. The act of recasting and copying is in itself a longstanding homage to the history of Greek sculpture—an argument prominently featured in the exhibition *Serial Classic* at Fondazione Prada (May 9–August 24, 2015).

Artists throughout the ages have used the polished bodies of classical sculptures as prime sites for visual interventions. Examples range from seventeenth-century anatomical prints that dissected the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Farnese Hercules* to revisions of *Venus de Milo* by Dalí and Arman. Moreover, archaeology as a strategy of spatial and temporal rupture was notably adopted in the exhibition *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art* (March 6–May 18, 2008) at the Barbican, an exhibition staged under the conceit of a show curated by-and-for Martians from the future. The installation displayed works from an illustrious roster of artists including Joseph Beuys, Christo, Thomas Hirschhorn, Damien Hirst, Louise Lawler, Sigmar Polke, Cai Guo-Qiang, and Andy Warhol, with the “Martian” curators and anthropologists reconstructing their own interpretation of what contemporary art, art movements, and visual culture might have meant to twenty-first century humans, all as a kind of fictional future archaeological display parallel to Arsham's own approach. In fact, Arsham first debuted his *Future Relics* by transforming Locust Projects in Miami into a kind of archaeological site, by cutting a twenty-two-foot diameter hole on the floor of the gallery and filling it with thousands of cast objects—making visible the detritus of present-day technological upgrades.

The works in *Paris 3220* invite the most overt parallels to Damien Hirst's *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (Punta della Dogana and Palazzo Grassi, Venice, April 9–December 3, 2017), which featured statues ostensibly rescued from an ancient underwater shipwreck. While critically maligned, the historical resonance of Hirst's *Treasures* was co-opted by the Galleria Borghese where they installed his works vis-à-vis Old Master paintings and sculptures (June 8–November 7, 2021). It should be noted that Hirst's exhibition follows a tradition of contemporary art exhibitions focusing on establishing a dialogue between the past and the present,



FIG. 3 Daniel Arsham, *View of the exhibition "Paris, 3020"* at Perrotin Paris, 2020. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist. Photographer: Claire Dorn.



FIG. 4 Daniel Arsham, *Quartz Eroded Venus of Arles*, 2019, Quartz, selenite, hydrostone, 208 × 102 × 74 cm. Unique #50746. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist. Photographer: Claire Dorn.

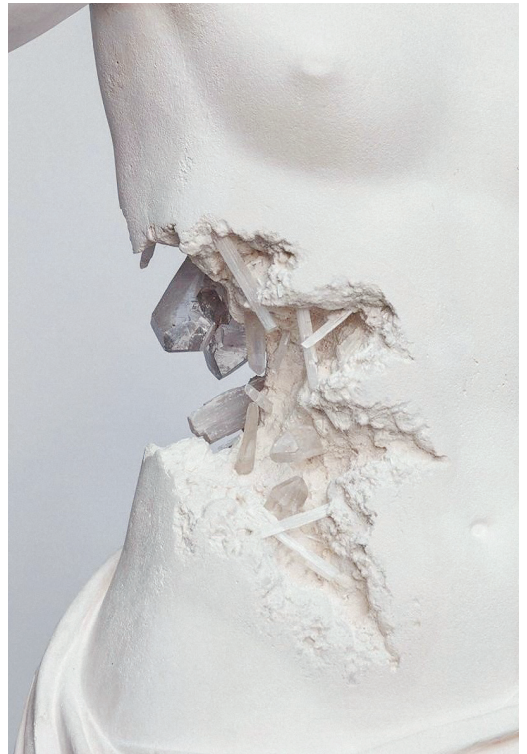


FIG. 5 Daniel Arsham, *Quartz Eroded Venus of Arles* [Detail], 2019, Quartz, selenite, hydrostone, 208 × 102 × 74 cm. Unique #50746. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist. Photographer: Claire Dorn.

such as Hiroshi Sugimoto's *History of History* (2003–09), a show curated by the artist himself that juxtaposed his photographs with fossils and antiques from his own collection, or the 2011 Venice Biennale curated by Bice Curiger, in which paintings by Tintoretto punctuated rows of contemporary art in the central pavilion in the Giardini. Such exhibitions materialize the artistic and curatorial preoccupation with the temporal strata of art, a preoccupation instigated by Aby Warburg's counter-chronological approach to images, and notably revitalized by a watershed of what Didi-Huberman identified as polychronic, heterochronic, and anachronic approaches to history and visual culture.¹² Arsham too installed some of his RMN copies at Musée Guimet next to "original" artworks for his exhibition *Moonraker*. However, the palimpsestic quality of his sculptures (being cast from original molds that carry the scars of conservation and history) inserts an additional layer within this pervasive temporal preoccupation. Thus, they are not fictional sculptures—i.e. works painted and molded to convey age. Rather, Arsham's geologically dense sculptures illuminate the fiction surrounding the exhibition, reception, and canonization of historic sculpture.

While enduring visual and literary fame propelled continuous early modern artistic engagements with sculptures such as the *Laocoön*, *Apollo Belvedere*, and *Venus de Milo*, Arsham intentionally selected specific works for their complex archaeological, art historical, and conservation histories. A particularly palimpsestic example is the *Venus of Arles* (Figs. 4, 5) reproduced in gypsum cement, rose quartz, and quartz. Considered a copy after Praxiteles's *Aphrodite of Thespiæ*, the *Venus* was discovered in pieces in 1651 at the Roman Theatre in Arles. The statue was gifted to Louis XIV in 1681, and, before being installed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, it was "restored" by the royal sculptor François Girardon. Girardon determined the angle of the goddess' head, added folds in the drape, and invented arms holding attributes of Venus: an apple and a mirror. In the late 1980s, the Louvre re-posed the head to restore it to a position more faithful to Praxiteles's time but kept Girardon's arms and attributes. Laugier explained that the Louvre's decision was motivated by "the weight of history," and this belabored conservation history has repeatedly fascinated Arsham.¹³ His preparatory drawing for *Eroded Venus of Arles* illustrates temporal contradictions within his relics. Signed and dated to the year 3019 in an aggressive form of mythmaking, one of the preparatory drawings features a speech bubble that reads, "Venus of Arles, End of 1st century BC, Lost, Discovered 1651, Lost, Discovered 3019 Reformed Pink Quartz + Selenite."¹⁴ The sediments of conservation and

12 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2000), 22.

13 Arsham and Laugier, "Conversation between Daniel Arsham and Ludovic Laugier (January 2020)," 46; Daniel Arsham (@danielarsham). "The Venus of Arles found at @museelouvre may be a copy of the Aphrodite of Thespiæ by Praxiteles, ordered by the courtesan Phryne." *Instagram*, February 9, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8WudFNgXiy/>. Daniel Arsham (@danielarsham). "The original Venus of Arles has a curious and varied history." *Instagram*, March 14, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMaOeYcgJUP>. For more on the restoration of *Venus of Arles* and on antique restorations see Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, "The Aphrodite of Arles," *American Journal of Archaeology* 80, no. 2 (1976): 147–54; Étienne Michon, "La Vénus d'Arles et sa restauration par Girardon," in *Fondation Eugène Piot, Monuments et Mémoires Publiés par l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1913): 13–45; Alain Pasquier, "Antiques restaurées," in *D'après l'antique*, ed. Pierre Cuzin, Jean-René Gaborit, and Alain Pasquier (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000) 53–59; Howard Seymour, *Antiquity Restored: Essays on the Afterlife of the Antique* (Vienna: IRSA, 1990); and Nancy H. Ramage, "Restorer and Collector: Notes on Eighteenth-Century Recreations of Roman Statues," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 1 (2002): 61–77.

14 Arsham and Laugier, *Paris, 3020* (Paris: Perrotin, 2020), 7.

restoration that press upon these hydrostone copies thicken the flow of time as they erode into the future and decay into formation.¹⁵ They operate in what Laugier referred to as a “mise-en-abyme”: as copies from original matrices, they carry traces of creation and revision that are subsequently restored, ruined, and reformed once more.¹⁶

The crystals and the quartz in Arsham’s RMN-copies and *Future Relics* can be read as references to marble as a metamorphic stone. They simultaneously create a state of continuous evolution and disintegration. The mineral properties of crystals are in the process of growth, but they are also agents of destruction, as classical marble sculptures frequently suffer from salt corrosion, in which soluble salts grow crystals between marble grains and thus damage the material from the inside. Together, these properties invite a type of apocalyptic geological prognostication: since the materials are older than the statues, the sculptures will eventually crumble while the crystals grow over time. Artists such as Pierre Huyghe, Marina Abramovic, and Thomas Hirschhorn have used quartz and crystals as symbols of regeneration or of material obliteration. To a certain extent they are all heirs to J.G. Ballard’s *Crystal World* (1966), a sci-fi novel that traced the metamorphosis of a jungle in Cameroon into a crystalline labyrinth, with the materials indirectly provoking a psychological transformation amongst its denizens.¹⁷ Within Arsham’s relics, the crystals in eroded technological avatars such as the Sony Walkman and the Polaroid camera restore both a mythic aura and contemporaneity to objects already considered obsolete.

15 This phrase is adapted from Arsham’s quote, “Which direction in time are they moving. Forward but eroding? Backwards but forming?” Daniel Arsham (@danielarsham). “Which direction in time are they moving.” *Instagram*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/COaKlioAWuu>.

16 Laugier’s quote is as follows: “For this exhibition, Arsham’s focus has changed, and the mise-en-abyme goes deeper: the objects he has chosen to reproduce are antique works ... sculptures that have already been ravaged by time, then restored, statues long considered master pieces: timeless Venuses, imperious emperors, a prophet, and more.” Laugier, “Paris, 3020,” in Arsham and Laugier, *Paris, 3020* (Paris: Perrotin, 2020), 25.

17 For a comprehensive survey on this topic, see the following exhibition catalogue: Lauren Haynes and Joachim Pissarro, eds., *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2019).

The Eroded Delorean (Fig. 6) is perhaps the best emblem of the relational temporality that pervades Arsham’s archaeological engagements. In addition to Arsham, artists such as Duncan Campbell and Sean Lynch have been drawn to the Delorean as an artistic subject, as the vehicle has long been revered as an ideologically charged cultural symbol for the future via the *Back to the Future* film franchise (1985–1990) and its intended and ultimately failed role as the future of the automotive industry. Arsham’s Delorean is cast indexically from a 1981 Delorean that Arsham’s team meticulously disassembled, and the artificially battered copy was reassembled using the original chassis. Pockmarked with quartz and pyrite, it is a survivor of an apocalyptic past, but materializes the failure of a projected future. In fact, the three decades from 1985 to 2015—an interval central to the plot of *Back to the Future II* (1989)—have undoubtedly hosted an exponential acceleration of technological progress compared to, say, three decades in Mercier’s lifetime. At the same time, these decades have also witnessed the disappointing



FIG. 6 Daniel Arsham, *Eroded DeLorean*, 2018, Stainless steel, glass reinforced plastic, quartz crystal, pyrite, paint, 114 × 421.6 × 185.7 cm, Unique #37636. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist.



FIG. 7 Daniel Arsham, *The Dying Gaul Revisited*, 2015. Selenite, hydrostone, 90 × 170 × 80 cm, Unique #34279. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist.

reality that arrived instead of the earlier-imagined future. In this, the *Future Relics* embody Jameson's argument in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism," in so far as representation of civilizational rupture is more endemic to our present than imagining a new operating system for global sociopolitics.¹⁸ By using materials such as pyrite and quartz to impose geological time on even these technological icons, Arsham removes them from what Paul Virilio has referred to as the modern fetishization of acceleration and instead subjects them to the inevitability of archaeological time—technological dystopia reimagined as a matter of temporal conflict rather than new forms or spaces.¹⁹

18 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 199. Jameson's text was written before the financial crisis of 2007, and Franco "Bifo" Berardi has followed up that "The rise of the myth of the future is rooted in modern capitalism, in the experience of expansion of the economy and knowledge. The idea that the future will be better than the present is not a natural idea, but the imaginary effect of the peculiarity of the bourgeois production model." Franco Berardi, Gary Genosko, and Nicholas Thoburn, *After the Future* (Edinburgh: AK, 2011), 18.

19 See Paul Virilio, *The Great Accelerator* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

20 Seymour Howard, "Restoration and the Antique Model," in *Symposium on the History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, eds. Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany, and Marion True (Garsington: Windsor, 2004), 25–44.

21 For more on the *Dying Gaul* and its restoration see Mattei Marina, *Il Galata Capitolino: Uno Splendido dono di Attalo* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1987).

22 In earlier works, Arsham has encased parts of his own body in plaster to cast his sculptures.

23 William Pink (1809–57) and Agostino Carlini RA (ca. 1718–1790), *Smugglerius*, ca. 1834. Plaster cast, Royal Academy of Arts, inv. no. 03/1436. For more on écorchés and classical sculpture, see Philippe Comar, *Figures du corps: Une leçon d'anatomie à l'École des beaux-arts* (Paris: Beaux-arts de Paris, 2008).

The same preoccupation with thickening the cult of acceleration appears in *The Dying Gaul Revisited* (Fig. 7; 2015), the first figure Arsham made using his erosion technique, predating his access to the RMN Atelier. He cast this life-size statue with a mixture of volcanic ash, gypsum cement, and selenite to create a fragmented and crystallized figure dressed in contemporary clothing (complete with Nikes) posed as the *Dying Gaul*, understood to be a second-century A.D. Roman copy of a Hellenistic work dating from the end of the third- or beginning of second-century B.C.²⁰ The limbs of this statue are inextricable from the interpretive problems of archaeological discovery. More specifically, the *Dying Gaul* was found in pieces around 1620 and shortly thereafter reconstructed by the Lombardian sculptor Ippolito Buzzi, who added expansive new sections to the left leg and the right arm—sections notably fractured in Arsham's iteration.²¹

Placement and iconographic choices made by early modern conservators such as Buzzi have consequently altered the interpretation and reception of classical statuary. Arsham revives this concern by highlighting the original fractures, updating the iconographic program, and giving the statue a corporeal character. His omission of a dais and the intentional use of volcanic ash palpably evoke calcified bodies found at Pompeii, a connection made even more uncanny by the crystals that jut out like the jagged edges of snapped bones.²² Such anatomical evocations are particularly potent in the history of this sculpture: the pedagogical program of the Royal Academy in London relied on a plaster cast of an écorché nicknamed *Smugglerius*, which was directly cast from an executed prisoner posthumously posed as the *Dying Gaul*.²³ By extension, the crystallization in the other RMN copies is equally reminiscent of exposed bones and viscera, foregrounding the problem of how classical statuary becomes canonized by memorializing his own version of the *Dying Gaul* for the imagined future audience.



FIG. 8 Daniel Arsham, *Cave of the Sublime, Iceland*, 2020, Unframed: 213.5 × 305.4 cm. Acrylic on canvas. Unique #55240. © Courtesy Galerie Perrotin and the Artist. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli.

As an artistic strategy in the visual arts, fictional archaeology as is grounded in the tradition of the capricci, originally a subgenre of landscape painting of architectural fantasies that prized picturesque compositions over topographical accuracy. For the exhibition *Time Dilation* (2021), Arsham included paintings that were visually and conceptually inspired by early modern capricci as well as German Romanticism. *The Cave of the Sublime, Iceland* (2020; Fig. 8), which he identified as a future vision of the year 12,000, features a blue chiaroscuro maw of a cave populated with his own sculptures, all displaying the telltale chiseled erosions replete with crystals.²⁴ The darkened foreground is akin to a cartouche; the naturally occurring stalactites and stalagmites frame his painted sculptures and obfuscate the age of the crystalline erosions. The base of the *Venus of Arles* appears to be fused with the cave, seemingly surrendering to the ecosystem of growth and decay in the cavern. Of the ten paintings exhibited in *Time Dilation*, four of them feature the *Venus of Arles*, further complicating the levels of decay and temporal transformation. The exhibition title compounds his temporal manipulations, as “time dilation” is the scientific term for the phenomenon, described by Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, in which time ticks at different rates for a stationary observer and one in relative motion.

24 The work alludes to his earlier paintings of architecture displaced into imaginary caverns as well as *Dig* (March 2–April 23, 2011), a performance and installation in collaboration with Snarkitecture where he filled the façade of Storefront for Architecture with EPS architectural foam and then personally carved it away from the inside, thus creating an artificial grotto.



25 Piranesi's imaginative "restorations" were produced while collaborating with the Scottish dealer Gavin Hamilton on the restoration and sale of antiquities. For further discussion see Eric Miller, "The Piranesi Vase," in *The Art of the Conservator*, ed. Andrew Oddy (London: British Museum Press, 1992): 122–36. Moreover, this recourse to Piranesi may appear abrupt, but Arsham's thesis advisor at Cooper Union was Anthony Vidler, an architectural historian that has written extensively on eighteenth-century architectural history.

26 Examples of artists include Jean-Laurent Legeay and Jean-Charles Delafosse. See Nina L. Dublin, "Les Piranesiens Français and l'Archéofiction," in *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth-century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), 27–43.

27 Alois Riegl, *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982). Riegl wrote the essay a year after he was appointed editor of the journal of the Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Artistic and Historical Monuments in Austria.

28 Michael Gubser, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-De-Siècle Vienna* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 142–44.

29 Kim Carpenter, "Playing with Perception: A Conversation with Daniel Arsham," *Sculpture* (December 1, 2014).

30 Hubert Robert's painting *Imagined View of the Discovery of Laocoön* (1773, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 62.31) engages in a fictional archaeology of his own, relocating the 1506 discovery in the ruins of Domus Aurea to a basilica, with the sculpture depicted with Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli's restoration instead of in fragments.

An obvious precursor to Arsham's strategy is Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the original poster child of archaeofiction and the most prolific producer of architectural capricci. Piranesi's restoration-inventions of vases and candelabra were maximalist exercises that unfolded dialogically and symbiotically with his capricci and grotteschi.²⁵ An example is his frontispiece for *Vedute di Roma* (Fig. 9, 1746–48), which features real and imagined monuments amongst architectural detritus and overgrowth—both a moment of discovery and abandonment. Throughout the eighteenth century, artists, architects, and artisans co-opted Piranesi's graphic strategy to confer archaeological authority on drawings and prints of their ornamental inventions.²⁶ Similarly, Arsham's new body of paintings materializes the invented moment of proleptic discovery by offering them as monuments that have survived the ravages of time. One document valuable to framing his approach is Alois Riegl's "Modern Cult of Monuments" (1903), an essay published over a century ago that still remains foundational to principles of modern-day conservation.²⁷ In the essay, Riegl offers an intersecting typology of values concerning the relationship between monuments and their observers: the historical, the artistic, and the temporal. He historicizes historical awareness by offering time both as a historical concept and as a phenomenon independently embedded in artifacts.²⁸ Riegl's complex temporal matrix presupposes that an artifact contains a fundamental form of historicity outside of overtly visible historical, geographical, and formal clues. For Riegl, a monument's value resides in a viewer's experience of the artifact's temporal dilation. In this, the arrhythmic chronological content of Arsham's sculptures (the original statue, the mold, the material, its presentation in contemporary and historic settings) thus engages with the very historicization of time within modern reception and, by extension, exhibitions.

In fact, Arsham has described that his works "float in time" and that "they could be now, they could be a thousand years in the future—or a thousand years in the past," here indulging in a narrative of timelessness that on the surface enhances the conceptual underpinnings and intellectual value of his work.²⁹ This preoccupation is far from exclusive to Arsham. In particular, it is comparable to Hubert Robert's *Imaginary View of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre in Ruins* (1796; Fig. 10), which was a pendant to his *Project for the Grande Gallery of the Louvre* (1796; Salon of 1796).³⁰ The former offered a ruinous view of the Louvre at some undefined point in the future in which all paintings displayed in the Grande Galerie have decomposed, and only a few icons of sculptures survive: the *Apollo Belvedere*, Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, and Alessandro Rondoni's *Bust of Raphael*. Robert's painting of the Louvre in ruins directly



FIG. 10 Hubert Robert (1733–1808), *Imaginary view of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre in Ruins*, 1796, Oil on Canvas, 114 × 146 cm. Inv. no. 1975-11. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Jean-Gilles Berizzi.

responds to Mercier's *L'An 2440* as a contemporary construction and vandalization of monuments, as well as the period's preoccupation with the future at the very moment when France's national past was being rewritten for a collective utopian dream.³¹

Mercier's Paris of 1771 and 2440, Arsham's Paris of 2020 and 3020: why dwell on these durational repetitions? The strategy of durational oscillation—that is, simultaneously manifesting the future and the past—serves a valuable functional aim for any artist or would-be mythmaker. It tries to give form to the present by correcting the inherent inadequacy of what George Kubler called “the biological model” in the history of art: a perceived linear life cycle (birth, maturity, or decline) of a work, an artistic style, or a culture.³² Mercier's *L'An 2440* both fictionally immortalized eighteenth-century Paris and made it worthy of extended contemporary social study by observing its innovations and flaws from the eyes of an imagined temporal outsider. Arsham's *Paris 3020* embraces a similar paradox. On the one hand, the series portrays his twenty-first century works depicted within as survivors of time. On the other, it provokes reconsideration of how the value of sculpture, and by extension, the long history of artistic pedagogy approaching classical statuary as ideal prototypes, have been embroiled in a type of mythmaking founded on the perceived objectivity and timelessness of archaeology.

This idea of archaeological and temporal repetition has become increasingly prevalent in exhibition practices in the last decade. Examples include Ca' Corner della Regina's re-installation of Harald Szeeman's seminal exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969/2013), the restaging of *The Armory Show* (1913/2013), the Tate Modern's recreation of Kazimir Malevich's *The Last Exhibition of Futurist Painting 0.10 (Zero-Ten)* (1915/2014), and Hauser and Wirth's re-presentation of MoMA's *The Photographic Object* (1970/2014). Digging into the conception of archaeological time provides a productive framework to critically question the assumed neutrality of such revivals. Such reiterations are not agnostic (let alone benevolent) acts of programming meant to provide contemporary audiences with opportunities to experience iconic exhibitions otherwise only accessible through historic literature. They are archaeology as self-mythology. Each reiteration stands as a preferentially sculpted fictional relic of an actual discourse, site, and audience that harbored many more complications and caveats. Invariably each excavation conceals institutional agendas by pointing toward an engineered vision of future culture that instrumentalizes canons of the past. The Leibniz quote that features as the epigraph of this article should thus be weighed against Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's oft-cited asser-

31 Nina Dubin has analyzed this work as “a product of intense temporal pressure: it was executed in the interstices between France's annihilation of its national past ... and its preparation to lay claim to another's.” Nina Dubin, *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth-century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 158. Mercier's future vision was preceded by Charles-Nicolas Cochin's fictitious account of Paris excavated by archaeologists in year 2355, which inspired Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin to draw *Vue prophétique de l'église Sainte-Geneviève pour l'an 3000* (1776, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. RF 52288). See Cochin, “Mercure du mois de Juin de l'année 2355,” *Mercure de France* (July 1755): 159–77.

32 George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 9.

tion, “We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.”³³ Taking an archaeological approach to durational hauntings provides a way to question the very shape, materiality, and labor force creating this so-called “rear-view mirror.”

In 1985, Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput curated the landmark exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at Centre Pompidou. Often cited as a prescient and decisive exhibition, the show reformulated how the subject’s relationship to objects would be irrevocably transformed and become “immaterial” as result of technological consequences of globalization. Nearly fifty years later, Arsham is among a growing number of artists modeling the material in our rapidly accelerating world. His project with RMN recasts the cycle of progression and regression and crystallizes the ways in which the present is historicized. To understand his work in this critical framework is to better understand the stakes of the active mythmaking shaping twenty-first century agendas—not only in art history but also in a wider culture increasingly intent on casting the future in the mold of a past that never was.

33 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 75.