

Sandow Birk

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February gallery shows ponder architectural possibilities

By Michael Upchurch
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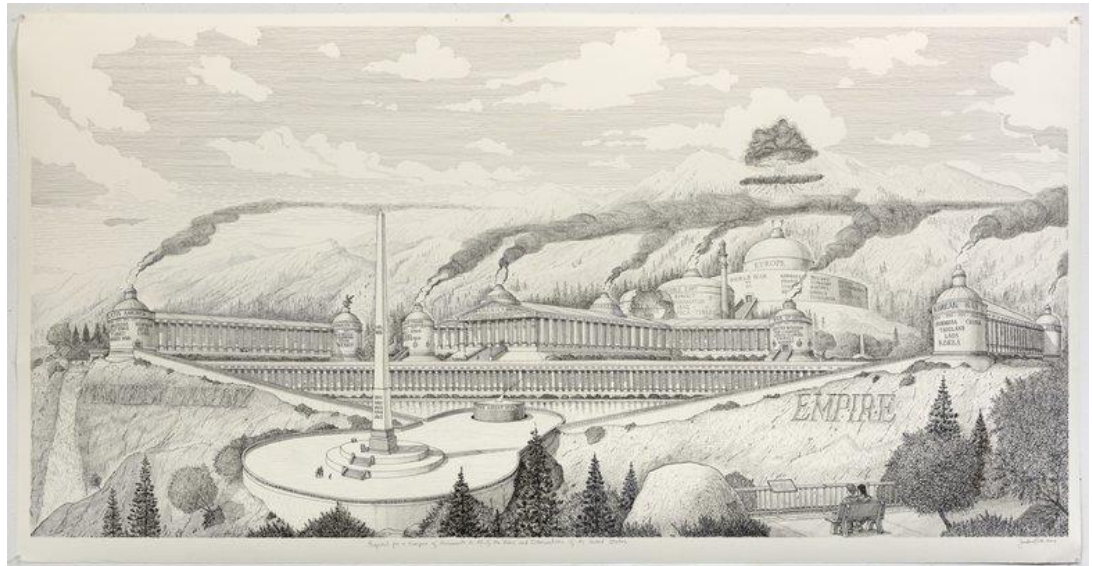
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Sandow Birk, "Proposal for a Campus of Monuments to All of the Wars and Interventions of the United States" (2016), ink on paper (Courtesy of Prographica/KDR)

"Sandow Birk: American Procession"

Calling Los Angeles artist Sandow Birk's new body of work "political satire" is a bit like calling a volcanic eruption a "burp." His pieces are as searing in content as they are accomplished in technique.

The title piece in "American Procession" is a 40-foot-wide wood-block-print triptych by Birk and his wife, artist Elyse Pignolet, inspired by "The Procession of Princes," a 19th-century mural in Dresden, Germany. In this version, the procession consists of iconic leftists and right-wingers converging on a U.S.A. verging on ruin. It's heavy-handed (Birk and Pignolet clearly lean left), but has hefty impact.

Two astonishingly intricate large-scale ink drawings from Birk's "Imaginary Monuments" series are even more impressive. "Proposal for a Monument to the Outer Space Treaty" pays skeptical homage to a 1967 international pledge not to bring nationalistic rivalries to space exploration (Birk places a small homeless encampment at the base of the monument and incorporates a model of the Starship Enterprise as one of its flourishes). "Proposal for a Campus of Monuments to All of the Wars and Interventions of the United States" takes stock of every armed conflict our country has engaged in. The list is endless enough to be dispiriting. And its arrangement in a parklike setting topped with an atomic mushroom cloud is scathing in the extreme.

The timeliest work is "The Horrible & Terrible Deeds & Words of the Very Renowned Trumpagrue," a series of lithographs portraying our Tweeter-in-Chief in various apocalyptic scenarios (including the White House going up flames). It's inspired by 19th-century artist Gustave Doré's illustrations of 16th-century satirist Rabelais' "Gargantua and Pantagrue." Its grotesqueries are as on the mark as you'd expect them to be.