green fragments of leaves and stems, branches and brilliant red flowers scatter across a hazy, infinite space punctuated by floating rectangles and other geometric shapes delicately etched in silver. The ethereal scene recalls certain Surrealist paintings, especially those by Roberto Matta. However, the shattered vegetal forms and vaguely architectonic structures of Huelin’s compositions allude specifically to violent conflicts in nature, occupying a space far removed from the kind of psychosexual mindscapes characteristic of the Surrealist’s domain.

Among Huelin’s creepiest images is a 2007 series of prints featuring a centralized mound of green hairlike projections. Set against rather pretty monochrome pastel backgrounds, the furry clumps in Grassbug 5 and Biocenosis Triptych suggest an organism in the midst of a metamorphosis from the realm of plants to the animal kingdom. A similar morphological shift animates the sequence of images in the video, Wild Museum (2009). This mesmerizing 4½-minute loop, punctuated by a pulsating electronic music soundtrack with ambient sounds and echoing voices, leads the eye through a series of rooms in which outlandish plant forms burst from caskets and cages that evoke fanciful science-museum vitrines. Through an undulating course of actions, the feverishly mutating vegetation triumphs as it fills the screen. Among its thoughtful proposals, the video implicitly offers a simple warning about the fragility of the natural environment and potential consequences of human attempts to contain or control it.

—David Ebony

CLAIRE ELLEN COREY
STEPHAN STOYANOV

Claire Ellen Corey’s hybrid “paintings,” in fact ink-jet prints on canvas, digitally blend drawing, photography, collage and traditional painting so adeptly that it’s hard to distinguish one element from another. This show of six works (all 2009) was titled “Paths,” evoking travels and destinations. Suggestions of landscape were conjured from a variety of sources, including the artist’s own photos and imagery culled from the Internet, and combined with swathes of yellow, blue and red—resembling cartoonish motion signifiers—that blend into the smooth surfaces.

One of a number of contemporary artists using digital manipulation to varying degrees and effects—from Sara Greenberger Rafferty’s photographic portraits, printed and reworked both digitally and manually, to Matthew Ritchie’s multifaceted output that begins with drawings scanned into a computer—Corey has devised her own system with which to expand the definition of painting. She assembles a collage of images on her computer, prints it out and embellishes it with paint and colored pencil. That version is then scanned and reworked digitally; even visual patterns from computer glitches find their way into the mix. The result is a melding of hand- and machine-made marks.

In each piece, the overriding impression is of an environment, ranging from a craggy lunar surface to a serene Japanese garden. With the exception of Crowning, a smallondo 2 feet in diameter, and the 50-by-60-inch Isle of Fog, the paintings are roughly the same size (around 2 feet on a side) and share a similar compositional compactness. In the case of Isle of Fog, size does indeed matter. Here the more spacious arena allows the full variety of Corey’s elements to cavort freely across the canvas, providing greater depth and absorbing detail. If the smaller paintings are akin to tranquil gardens, Isle of Fog is more like outer space, wide open with possibility.

The works in this show continue along the intriguing trajectory that Corey has been pursuing for some time, one of increasingly computerized “gestural” abstraction. Despite the lively effects achieved by her incorporation of chance and disparate mediums, the works are inhibited by a lingering sense of control. A loosening of her self-imposed parameters might yield more electrifying results.

—Amanda Church

PITTSBURGH
“29 CHAINS TO THE MOON”
MILLER GALLERY AT CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

In 1938, Buckminster Fuller observed in his book Nine Chains to the Moon that there were enough humans on earth to form nine chains reaching to the moon; at our current population of 6.7 billion, we could forge an astounding 29. Fuller’s book proposed innovative solutions for improving quality of life through progressive design, despite growing populations and finite resources. The exhibition “29 Chains to the Moon” took Fuller’s utopian thesis as a jumping-off point, and aimed to instill in
today’s public the same sense of awe that futuristic proposals once stirred.

The show presented three projects by artists developing 21st-century ideas (some actually in the testing stage) to tackle big problems. It might be futile to exhibit world-saving proposals in a traditional art space, where they could seem to be nothing more than conceptual exercises, but the mix of novel ideas in this show suggested that people working in diverse disciplines might collectively yield solutions to some looming predicaments. The Miller Gallery’s location on Carnegie Mellon’s campus was an appropriate setting for an exhibition of works by individuals or collaboratives with varied backgrounds.

Stephanie Smith, a designer, is the founder of Ecoshock, a design lab where architects, designers, artists or “anyone with a passion for change” can work. In the gallery viewers could access her WeCommune, an online platform for resource sharing (now in beta testing), which was accompanied by a portable wooden kiosk designed to facilitate the real-life exchange of goods (books, videos, etc.) and ideas—a cross between a swap meet and town hall. This work grew from “Wanna Start a Commune?,” her novel project to create utopian communities within already existing social structures, such as suburbs.

Architect Mitchell Joachim, working with the design collaborative Terreform ONE, of which he is a co-founder, showed panels of digital prints with the schematics for Parastaltic City, a tall building made of a cluster of transportable pods; Stackable Cars, a storage and charging system for electric urban vehicles; and Homeway: The Great Suburban Exodus, which proposes retrofitting American dwellings with wheels in order to maintain the continuity of home in changing locations. Also on view was a digital schematic of the team’s Fab Tree Hab, a proposal to "grow" homes by training trees into habitable shapes using scaffolds.

The international, interdisciplinary members of the collective Open_Sailing presented a model and video illustrating how we might live on a crowded Earth through something called “Open_Architecture”: a floating village surrounded by ocean farming units, designed to adapt to various crisis conditions, from nuclear fallout to rising sea levels. Open_Sailing is building a prototype in London and Berlin, soon to be ready for testing. That some of these projects might be realized suggests that open exchange between artists and scientists, along with institutional support, may provide the creative solutions necessary to assure a livable future.

—Melissa Kuntz

MIA MIAMI

MARÍA MARTÍNEZ-CAÑAS

FREEDOM TOWER

In the photograph titled Doll, a figure in old-fashioned dress appears to float gracefully in a dark, shadowy space. But as soon as the viewer becomes aware of the structure of María Martínez-Cañas’s “Lies” series (2005)—scenes of violent death distorted to near illegibility—the fanciful-seeming image is seen to depict a woman lying dead on a carpet.

“Lies” is the earliest of the four black-and-white series shown in Martínez-Cañas’s recent exhibition “Tetralogy.” Although divergent in form, content and technique, each suite explores the nature of photographic truth, particularly digital photography’s capacity to both record and alter appearances. The artist’s career has been devoted largely to exploring her Cuban heritage; her current preoccupation with fact and falsehood was motivated by a family crisis. In 2003, her father, a prominent Latin American art dealer based in Miami, was accused of falsifying an authentication document. Although the charges were dropped, the local media delved doggedly into his father’s past. “Lies” reflects Martínez-Cañas’s initial trauma; the subsequent series show her moving toward acceptance and reconciliation.

“Adaptation” (2006) and “Tracing” (2007) make use of photographs taken by lawyer-critic-curator José Gómez-Sicre, a Cuban-born advocate of Latin American modernism and a close family friend. For “Adaptation,” Martínez-Cañas altered photographs Gómez-Sicre had taken of various museum and gallery painting installations, digitally replacing the framed artworks with blank panels. The series is both an homage and an act of defiance; the cultural figures’ images are embraced, but his points of focus eradicated.

In “Tracing,” Martínez-Cañas superimposed pieces of vellum on selected areas of photographs taken by Gómez-Sicre during his travels around the world; she then used a pencil to trace those sections of the images obscured from view.