

Nic Hamilton: Dreaming in the Virtual Space

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This year, we're returning to Sugar Mountain Festival in Melbourne for a very special live broadcast. Joining the bill will be Beats In Space lynchpin Tim Sweeney, Tom Trago, Florian Kupfer, Jnett and Laila Sakini with the prestigious video artist and Aussie native Nic Hamilton doing us the honour of creating visuals for Boiler Room's stage at the festival. Here, we dive in a little further to see what Hamilton and his work are really about, and what he's got in store for Sugar Mountain, as his first creative venture into physical space. Instrumental to the visual identities of Actress, Lukid and Night Slugs are Nic Hamilton's hyper-glossy and immersive futurist worlds fuse CG, film, music and spatial design with unparalleled execution. Leaving a large digital footprint via his warped music videos, the quiet achiever finally steps out into the physical space with a comprehensive set design for BR's stage at Sugar Mountain Festival. Hamilton will show a 10-hour reel which deconstructs his existing videos, editing room offcuts and other experiments into a vibrant, buzzing compilation of moving pattern and colour. Screening them on multiple 2.4m x 1.2m LED totems, the coarse pixelated visions are neutralised by adjacent walls of live foliage. A recurring theme in his work, Hamilton explains that the soft vertical gardens offset the harder, brighter architectural and spatial geometry of the footage. It's a shared ideal that people could work online remotely from a living jungle; cool, calm and disconnected from office and constructed environments. The feeling that technology should be able to link into and support our existing natural ecosystems, and not vice versa. Hamilton's clip for Bok Bok and Sweyn Jupiter's "Papaya Lipgloss" touches on a similar concept where oozing plant sap powers the track's Yamaha DX7, and greenhouses are the energy source for a seemingly infinite server room. He continues to fantasise of a treechange and living on a bush block in remote Tasmania, pending faster Internet availability. Surprisingly neither sci-fi film nor literature have played a role in forming his utopian ideas. He's seen neither Blade Runner nor 2001, instead citing modern sculpture art, TV and the Internet as influences while video game trailers and gameplay clips also provide important visual cues. "Recently I've been watching a lot of fighting games for the backgrounds. The 8-bit cityscapes of Street Fighter 2 and Streets of Rage, and watching how they've developed through to Marvel vs. Capcom and Tekken. From the urban landscape of decayed transmission towers featured in the Actress' "Grey Over Blue" video, to the sweeping survey of Lukid's vacant rave lite warehouse, Hamilton's progressive 3D and animation skills are reluctantly indebted to his day job in architectural film. I can't make a living off just music videos at the moment, so I rely on my dark corporate secret a fair bit. Property development is depressing, and that's the area I work in. It's quite a conservative sphere. With longterm aspirations to design his cold virtual environments full time, he'll hopefully be rolling out industrial spaces and grow rooms with satisfying repetition soon. Left to right: Stills from Actress' "Grey Over Blue" and Lukid's "Nine" Noting his impressive international résumé which stemmed from a 3D animation for Dean Blunt and Inga Copeland in 2012, you could easily mistake the Melbourne artist as English or American. Most of Australia's famous videographers developed a folio of local product prior to making a name for themselves abroad, yet Hamilton seemingly went straight to the top. He explains, "I hung out with a lot of these people when I was based in London and those real-life meetings filtered back into the Internet as I moved away." E-mailing a fan-made video to Actress was the catalyst of their ongoing transcontinental collaborations, before Night Slugs bossman Bok Bok messaged him directly on Twitter, prompting the techno-Atlantis record cover and trailer for L-Vis 1990's "Ballads". Artist projects have ranged from entirely collaborative to not at all. "Often I'll have an idea that I've been working on where this goes with that. Other times with Alex Sushon [Bok Bok], for instance there are a lot of phone calls and e-mails. He's almost like an art director for me. Irrespective of the artist's involvement, his focused creative process will dissect how each track was made, right down to

every sample and drum machine model. Hamilton attests that he genuinely clicks with everyone he works with, without being falsely diplomatic. "That said, Bok Bok has a really interesting view of the world and how technology, connectivity, popular culture and the built environment fit together, which resonates with me." "Ultimately technology should be able to link into and support our existing natural ecosystems, and not vice versa." Hamilton's non-narrative optical overloads seem to come at a perfect time, as the advent of televised music video dissipates and online viewers become accustomed to YouTube's music that's merely accompanied by stills. "Things have splintered so far from traditional music videos," he says in agreement. "The static image is plenty enough for me. Not all music needs a visual. Sometimes it can water it down. Music videos are often getting caught up in purely being promotional content. It's definitely splintering sideways with online art sites like Sedition selling videos for iPads, and Instagram accounts uploading 10-second snippets." Of these new platforms, he seems less than enthused by the growing interest which galleries have in his art form. "I'm suspicious of white space galleries and that whole art scene. I hate pretentious video art. Where's the craft in it? Some people just put a spinning sphere in there. I prefer the slightly commercial and more mainstream platforms." Enclosing Tim Sweeney, Tom Trago, Jnett, Florian Kupfer and Laila Sakini in his bio-tech wonderland, the ambitious set design is a rare opportunity for Hamilton to dream in the physical space, while feeding back into the inescapable Internet platform and taking Boiler Room's choppy, urban backdrop visuals to dizzying new heights. You can catch Nic Hamilton's visual delights at Sugar Mountain Festival alongside Tim Sweeney, Tom Trago, Jnett, Florian Kupfer and Laila Sakini on the 23rd January. Head here to tune into our broadcast, and if you're lucky enough to be in Melbourne for the festival itself, RSVP here.