

# Fantastic fandoms get the museum treatment a

By Larry Zamba

Contributing writer

Most art exhibitions show works from a movement or artist of the past, or perhaps a contemporary portrait of what's going on in the world of art today. In comparison, the Racine Art Museum's new exhibit is literally out of this world.

A *Whole Other World: Subculture Craft* is a show that orbits around fantastic fandoms in the realm of speculative fiction, like science fiction, superheroes and steampunk. The works included in *A Whole Other World*, by 26 artists (nine from Wisconsin and one international artist), re-envision pop-culture sci-fi icons or explore their own fantasy world.

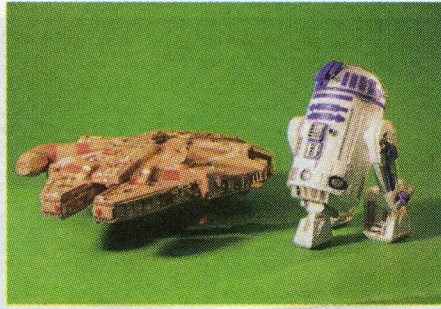
Lena Vigna, the curator of the exhibition — herself a fan of Batman, Wonder Woman and *Doctor Who* — says, "I'm holding up a lens to the human condition, trying to provide a framework of art that doesn't feel esoteric — rather more appealing to the general public."

## SCI-FI

Science fiction is an important artistic genre, because its ripple effect can predict future innovations in science and engineering. At its best, science fiction forces us to ask, "How do we create a positive future by retro-engineering a social or technological future that hasn't happened yet?"

Science fiction is always painted against a background of change, but the actions its protagonists take to change their world for the better can differ.

*Doctor Who* and *Star Wars* could fall on opposite ends of that. An action movie series at heart, *Star Wars* celebrates combat and strife as the way to vanquish evil.



*Doctor Who's* scripts believe in embracing the differences that make you unique, and emphasize intelligence over brute force to win the day.

A reimagining of familiar characters and artifacts from both franchises can be found at the museum. Jamie Kratz-Gullickson of Beaver Dam creates felted *Star Wars* characters from local sheep's wool. Thomas Richner presents a new 5-foot long cardboard replica of the Millennium Falcon alongside an almost-to-scale papier-mâché R2-D2. Whovians will probably delight in Kristy Daum's 6' x 8' stitched quilt, "The Tenth." (If you have to ask, you're obviously not a fan.)

## SUPERHEROES

Many have a love affair with superheroes — endowed with extraordinary powers, we may love them more than we love ourselves, for they are who we want to be.

They inhabit an emotional world and a destiny that only few can truly understand. Subtlety rarely enters the storyline. All that's needed are lots of primary colors, bold type, love, fear, hate and a few explosions.

Artist Mark Newport flies against clichéd superhero concepts. He constructs full-body superhero costumes, both for traditional heroes and his own creations: the Sweatermen and friends like Argyleman.

Vigna says the suits pose the question of "Where do we look for heroes?" and ventures her own guess at an answer. "We look at superheroes as strong, but these (costumes) are saggy. He calls them real heroes and compares them to real people



in his life. His Uberdad costume is an example that asks, "What does it mean to be a man? If I put this costume on would I feel like a hero?"

## STEAMPUNK

Originating as a role-playing fantasy, "steampunk" is defined as a stylistic genre inspired simultaneously by Victorian England, the Wild West and futuristic technology. Steampunk outfits overflow with overly mechanized devices and feature intricate design aesthetics. Tesla coils, multiple gears and pressure relief valves that may or may not have some important function are common artistic choices.

Steampunk embraces a broad lifestyle and creative vision, occasionally mixing the digital with the handmade. It is a fashion and lifestyle movement — sustainable, gritty, analog and salvaged, a fantasy often imagined by artists to exist in a post-apocalyptic or dystopian world.

But steampunk is different for each individual creator. Steampunk-influenced fashion designer Silversärk (aka Stephanie Schultz) says that, "To me, (steampunk) is about taking inspiration from every resource imaginable, and making a tangible, wearable piece of art to reflect the time period or event, or encapsulate the designer's thoughts and emotions, much like a painting."

Milwaukee fiber artist and Project Runway alum Timothy Westbrook also

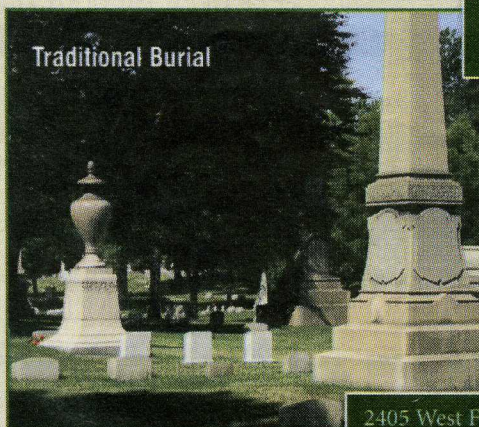


Thomas Richner's iconography, Marc-themed painting and "Steampunk Capel" works on display at

will have work featuring "steampunk" — re-creating technology in a more retro style that regressing technology to progress society. Westbrook's collection includes four garments made from repurposed materials, recently on display in Milwaukee. "When we could be in the past to create a more sustainable future," Westbrook says. "The expiration date of the items is into using cassette tape reel-to-reel audio-tapes. I'm rescuing these items to reincarnate them as art pieces."

## ON DISPLAY

*A Whole Other World: Subculture Craft* at the Racine Art Museum runs May 24 through Sept. 6. RAM admission is \$5, \$3 for students and seniors and free for children under 12 and members. Guests who visit in cosplay (dressed in character) will receive free admission throughout the exhibit's duration. Visit [ramart.org](http://ramart.org) for more information.



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