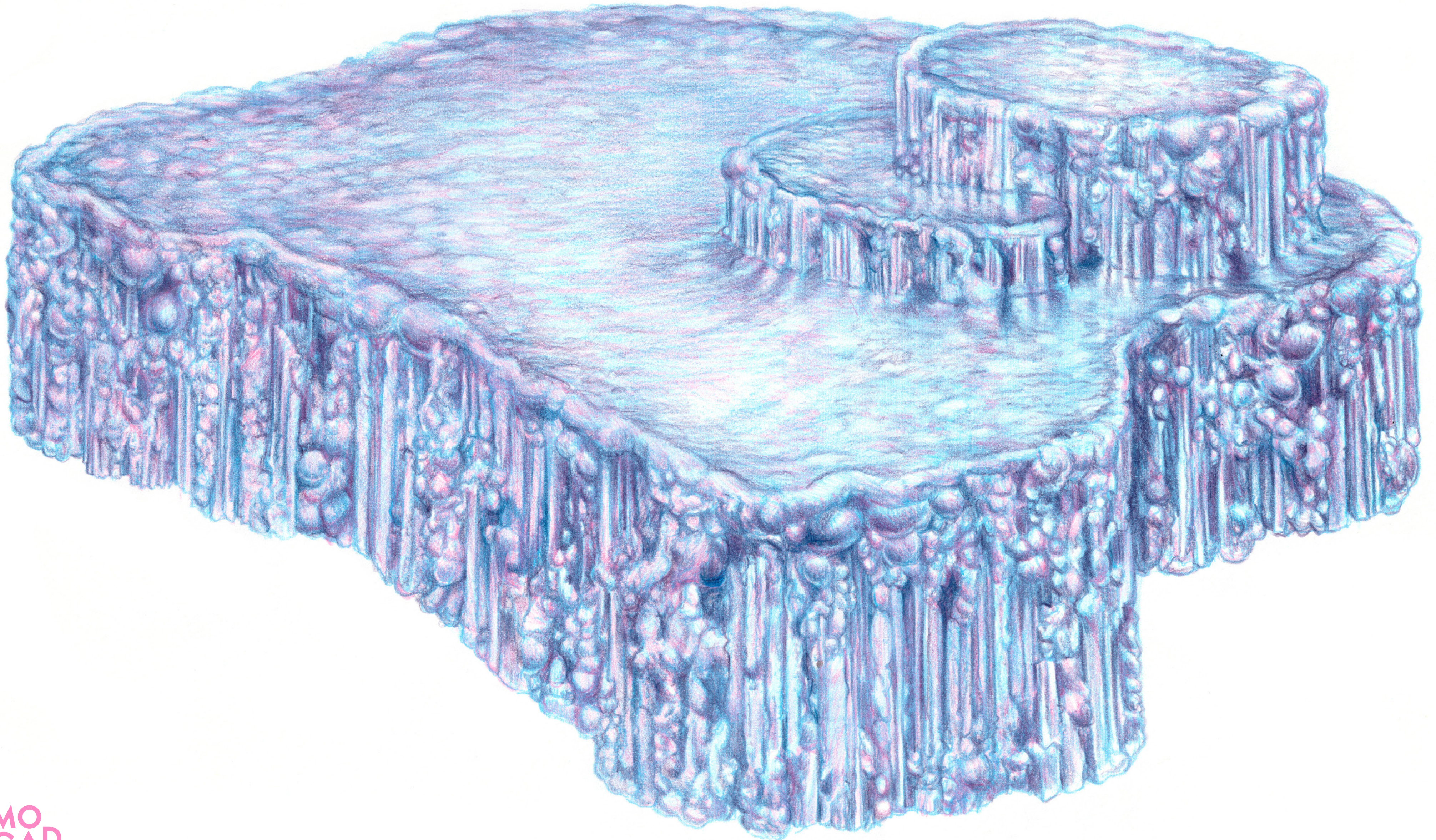


CHRIS SCHANCK A SURREALITY



CHRIS SCHANCK: A SURREALITY

11.22.24 – 02.23.25

"SOME DREAMS TELL US WHAT WE WISH TO BELIEVE. SOME DREAMS TELL US WHAT WE FEAR. SOME DREAMS REVEAL WHAT WE KNOW THOUGH WE MAY NOT KNOW WE KNEW IT. THE RAREST DREAM IS THE DREAM THAT TELLS US WHAT WE DID NOT KNOW."

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, 1971

A Surreality features the latest creations of Detroit-based artist and designer Chris Schanck, whose work reveals a collection of fantastic objects, sculptures, and furnishings that explore the expansive nature of science fiction, myth, and fantasy in crafting our reality. Located in MOCAD's Woodward Gallery, a former auto showroom, *A Surreality* mirrors the nostalgic allure of 19th-century display techniques through an aesthetic guise of mythical and otherworldly motifs. An avid consumer of science fiction, Schanck's distinctive design practice prioritizes imagination over functionality and celebrates the transformative power of extraordinary experiences and otherworldly narratives. Works are presented as imagined relics from the artist's dreamscapes or sur-reality—a term coined by André Breton, the French writer and co-founder of the Surrealist movement, and defined as a space where artists create fantastical visions through irrational or unnatural combinations and juxtapositions.

This exhibition is anchored in the genre of speculative science fiction, a cultural platform that serves as a lens to explore philosophical, ethical, and cultural issues often set in an alternative reality that challenges our understanding of the current world. As a creator of visual science fiction, Schanck combines materials from the home with pop culture references to make objects that are simultaneously familiar and strange, like something out of a dream. These objects act as passive storytellers, serving as an inanimate archive for the characteristics of those who share space with them. They aim to conjure *memories* of moments and feelings that transcend various realities.

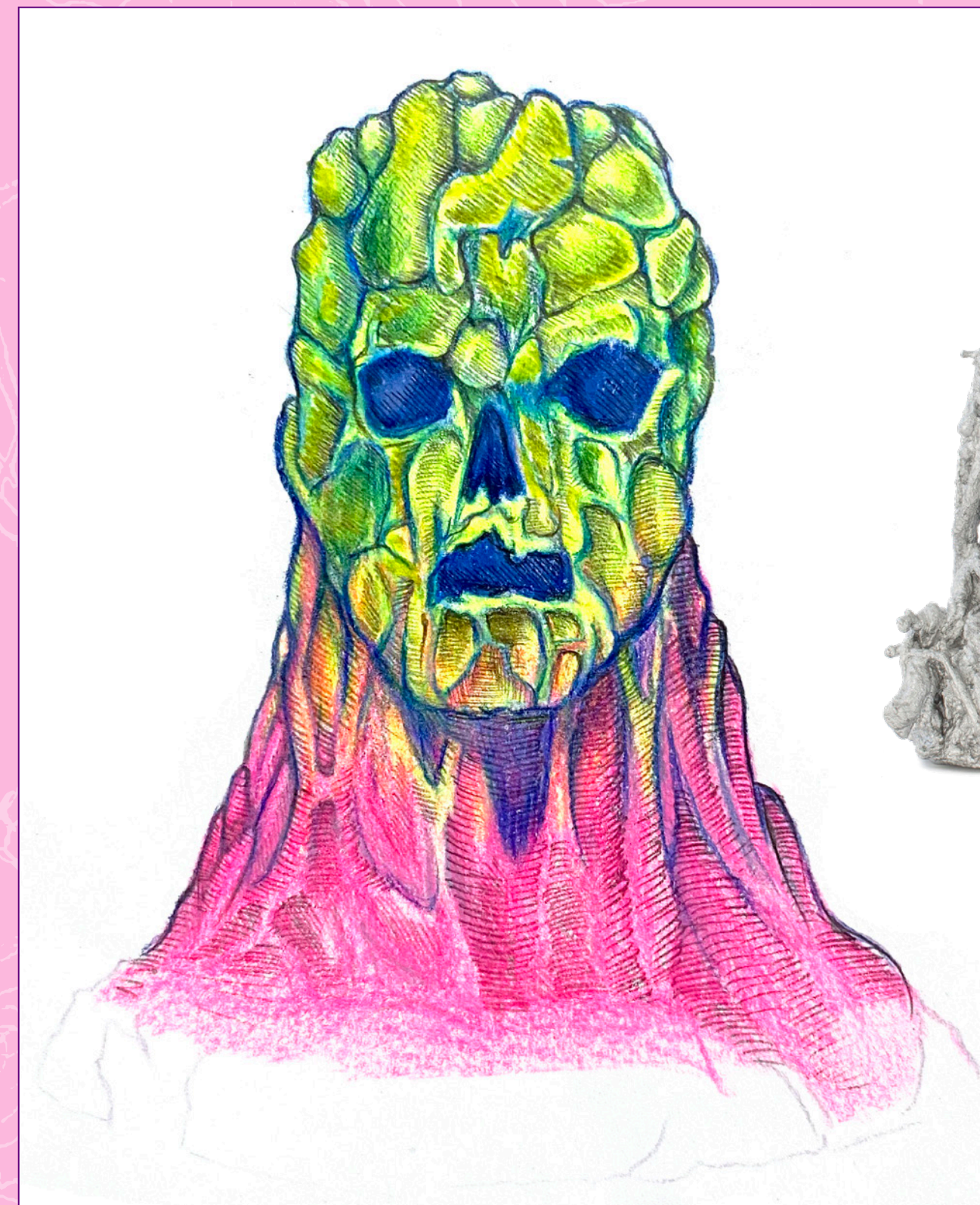
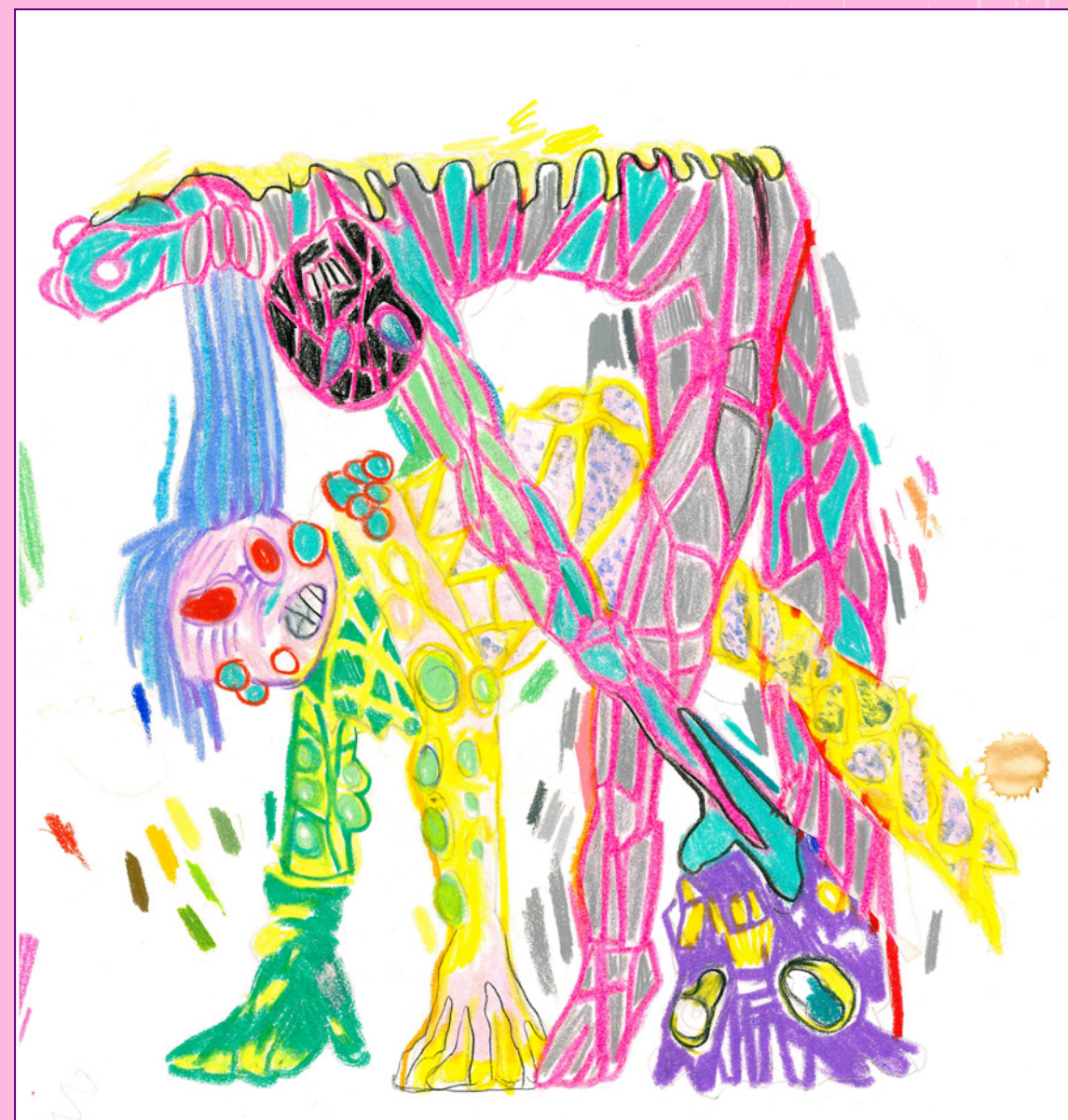
The selection of works presented in *A Surreality* illustrates Schanck's Alufoil technique, which uses aluminum foil to cover industrial and discarded materials and then seals them with resin. This



affordable material repurposes obsolete objects and changes their temporal context from past to future. In the spirit of semiotic design, as theorized by architect Robert Venturi, Schanck's work imbues his designs with multiple layers of meaning, transforming each object into a vessel for discourse. His work contributes to the lexicon of craft practices, where objects, sculptures, and installations create undefinable and amorphous experiences.

This presentation considers the city of Detroit as a site of dreams, recalling the iconic science fiction novel *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula K. Le Guin. Set in a dystopian future, Le Guin's text follows a man whose dreams can alter reality and explores themes of power, ethics, and the consequences of trying to define reality. In *A Surreality*, Schanck positions Detroit as his dreamscape home—a site of resilience where various communities fantasize together in various shapes, sizes, and colors. Some dreams come true; some are more complicated and harder to untangle and is a space where the logical and illogical exist simultaneously. Coffee tables, mirrors, tables, light fixtures, and ethereal chairs transport you to another dimension, sparkling and shimmering to underline the blurry nature of experience from science fiction to fantasy, creating a new reality.

Jova Lynne, Co-Director and Artistic Director, MOCAD



Cover image: Chris Schanck, concept sketch of *Terraced Table*, 2024. Colored pencil on paper.

left to right: Chris Schanck, *Invasion*, 2018. Resin, steel, glass, polystyrene, nylon fiber, aluminum foil. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Chris Schanck.

Concept sketch of *Invasion*, 2018. Colored pencil on paper.

Chris Schanck, *Nite Light: Xenorc*, 2019. Aluminum foil, found objects, glass, resin, steel. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Chris Schanck.

Concept sketch of *Nite Light: Xenorc*, 2019. Colored pencil on paper.

"MY WORK SITS ON A SPECTRUM. ON ONE END, IT'S PRACTICAL AND FUNCTIONAL, AND ON THE OTHER, IT'S FANTASTICAL AND SPECULATIVE. THINK OF A CHILD'S BED SHAPED LIKE A ROCKET SHIP OR A LOCOMOTIVE. THE BED CAN'T ACTUALLY FLY OR MOVE, BUT IT CAN INSPIRE DREAMS OF SPEED AND ADVENTURE. MY WORK IS LIKE THAT—IT'S A MIX OF FANTASY AND REALITY, PRACTICAL USE WRAPPED IN A DREAM-LIKE FORM."

Chris Schanck

Artist's biography

Designer Chris Schanck's work embraces the tension between dilapidation and opulence, asking us to find unconventional beauty in the imperfect. Schanck was born in Pittsburgh in 1975 and grew up in Dallas, Texas. He received a Bachelor's of Fine Art degree in sculpture from the School of Visual Arts and a Master's of Fine Arts degree in design from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Upon graduating in 2011, Schanck founded a studio in Detroit employing over a dozen artists, students, and craftspeople. Based in a former factory in Hamtramck, a city with a dense immigrant population, the local community plays a key role in Schanck's egalitarian studio practice.

Schanck's efforts deviate from the mass-produced, instead reviving mundane materials by transforming them into unique objects of uncommon luxury. Schanck is best known for his ongoing *Alufoil* series, in which industrial and discarded materials are sculpted, covered in aluminum foil, and then sealed with resin.

Chris Schanck: *A Surreality* is curated by MOCAD's Artistic Director and Co-Director Jova Lynne with the support of Associate Curator Abel González Fernández. The curators want to extend their gratitude to the artist Chris Schanck and his studio team, Friedman Benda and David Gill Gallery, Marsha Miro, Robert and Caroline Taubman, Alexander and Corrinne Taubman, and MOCAD's staff for their support. Especial thanks to Jonathan Rajewski, Exhibitions and Facilities Manager; Isabella Nimmo, Associate Curator; Arya Rana, Exhibitions + Facilities Coordinator; Sarah Addy and Judith Banham, designers who made significant contributions to the exhibition through their expertise.

Chris Schanck: *A Surreality* is made possible with generous support from the Mellon Foundation.



Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit
4454 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48201
mocadetroit.org 313.832.6622