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Corcoran presents Ellen Harvey: The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON, DC.- This summer, the Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design will present Ellen Harvey: The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C. For her new, site-specific project, Harvey envisions the city 10,000 years in the future, as seen by visitors from another planet. The exhibition is the latest in the NOW at the Corcoran series, the Gallery's contemporary art program dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging and mid-career artists.

The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C. is a glimpse into the world of the distant future. Human civilization having long since come to an end, the earth is populated now only by ruins, ripe for archeological interpretation by visitors from another planet. Most immediately striking to these extraterrestrial observers are the remains of classical and neo-classical buildings that seem to have taken root in every corner of the globe. Attempting to make sense of what they find, Harvey's aliens immediately mine the potential of one of the greatest examples of neo-classical cities—Washington, D.C.—as a tourist destination.

The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C. is the result. A tour of America's capital city through alien eyes, the exhibition's centerpiece is a self-guided map of Washington's landmarks. Available for pick-up at the Corcoran's "alien visitor center" (located in the Corcoran's Atrium) as well as other locations throughout the city, The Alien's Guide contains reconstructions and interpretations of such sites as the White House, the World War II Memorial, and the U.S. Capitol.

As Harvey explains: "Neoclassical architecture is far and away the most successful and widely adopted architectural style. For over 2,000 years, civilization after civilization has succumbed to its infectious charms. Why would extraterrestrials be immune?"

The rest of the exhibition documents the aliens' efforts to make sense of the remains of the civilization around them. One of the Corcoran's galleries will be devoted to educating alien children about the classical style around the globe, following its roots as a symbol of democracy in ancient Greece to its subsequent use in the service of empire builders, fascists, Stalinists, museums, banks, and post offices. Seduced by the architecture's power themselves, the aliens have erected a spaceship in the neo-classical style, on view in the Corcoran's Rotunda.

"Ellen's project explores what the world looks like and how it got that way," says Sarah Newman, curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran. Classicism was the original "viral" aesthetic—worming its way throughout history and taking on the attributes of the cultures that appropriated it. The Alien's Guide is both playful and serious: a look into our cultural infatuations and to how meaning is created.

Ellen Harvey's art explores the pull of desire, the shocks of reality, and the histories embedded in ways of seeing. In work that ranges from painting and drawing to installation and public interventions, Harvey probes the gap between the imagined and actual—art's promise of transcendence versus its reality.

The Alien's Guide to the Ruins of Washington, D.C. is an investigation into the abiding influence of classicism, the dissemination of style, and the language of power. Humorous, unexpected, and eye-opening, it sheds light on a world at once familiar and strange.



Ellen Harvey, *Alien Souvenir Stand*, 2013, mixed media, 10x17x5feet, installed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art