

Ian Bourland, "Sunrise in Different Dimensions", *Frieze Magazine*, January – February 2016.



FEATURE - 16 DEC 2015

Sunrise in Different Dimensions

A fresh look at the music and art of the black radical tradition

BY IAN BOURLAND

Chicago is known as a musical Mecca. Geographically and culturally midway between New York and Los Angeles, and home to a long line of avant-garde notables from the New Bauhaus to Kanye West, the city has, for decades, been a hub for sonic experimentation. For some, this means the golden age of post-punk record label Touch and Go or the raw production of Steve Albini; for others, it's the sultry 'four to the floor' of 1980s-era house producer Frankie Knuckles or the flow of recent MCS, such as Lupe Fiasco. But Chicago is, first and foremost, a city at the heart of American industry, a beacon during the Great Migration that brought millions of black Americans from south to north and, with them, the traditions of delta blues, hot jazz and gospel, which came together in the music of Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy.

Chicago is also the windswept, late-industrial landscape where Herman Poole Blount – later Le Sony'r Ra, or Sun Ra – founded El Saturn Records in 1957 and a society called Thmei Research, which explored numerological esoterica and occultist histories of Egypt. Ra is known widely for the sci-fi-pharaonic look that would be echoed by the likes of Parliament, Funkadelic and Afrika Bambaataa some 20 years later. But his experiments with synthesizers were equally significant: novel in the hard-bop era, they presaged a fusion of speculative technologies and African antiquity that would animate an entire generation's formulation of afro-futurism.

Not many years later, in 1965, a collective called the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) was formed as an umbrella group under which emerging strands of free jazz fused with a globalized array of instruments and metres. The AACM, in turn, was allied with a growing constellation of public arts spaces and black avant-garde circles, such as St Louis's Black Artists Group and the New York-centred Black Arts Movement (BAM), which was influential in Harlem and beyond. The AACM sought to use music to complement positive images (and, later, afrocentrism) in black painting and sculpture by creating altogether new types of black subjectivity. Citing bam leader Amiri Baraka in a new book that accompanies the recent exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 'The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now', art historian Rebecca Zorach writes that 'pure forms' of diaspora culture such as music, dance and religion resisted objectification and were best suited to 'reconstructing or excavating black identity'.

'The Freedom Principle' is an overdue reconstruction of an historical moment that was vital and influential, fusing radical sonics with post-medium visions of artistic production.

The location for 'The Freedom Principle', organized by Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete, is unsurprising, given the Chicago museum's proximity to key figures and sites of this period, including Thmei Research and aacm, as well as The African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (known as Africobra), the Afro-Arts Theater, the Wonder Inn on South Cottage Grove Avenue, the Hyde Park Art Center, and the celebrated Jazz Record Mart in the River North neighbourhood. Yet the exhibition arrives at a crucial time: it's an overdue reconstruction of an historical moment in the 1960s and '70s that was both vital and influential, one that fused radical sonics with post-medium visions of artistic production. This scene not only offers something of a decoder ring for a great many contemporary practices, but has also allowed recent artists to put non-visual forms of experience front and centre in their work. And, while sound is integral to the history of modern art – remember dada's swells of noise, surrealism's fascination with American jazz and the swing and syncopation that suffused postwar American painting – the antiseptic and visual logic of the white cube and the art-as-commodity system it underscores, remain stubbornly intact.

One of great joys of 'The Freedom Principle' is that it takes us back to the apex of postwar modernism, when avant-garde music was venturing into uncharted territory and the black-radical tradition in the us was figuring itself through sonic experimentation and its visual analogues. Such experiments, of course, were largely obscured by the more familiar formalist narratives of the 1950s and '60s. Even as arguments against modernism's supposed transcendence of daily life were issued by a host of global players – Hélio Oiticica and the *tropicália* movement in Brazil, Guy Debord and the Situationist International in France, the Art Workers' Coalition and early land art in the us – many influential curators and critics doubled down, most notably Michael Fried in his 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood', a defence of medium specificity and the priority of immediacy and opticality.

'The Freedom Principle' featured a wide spectrum of materials – musical instruments, posters, paintings, multi-media installation, textiles – that collectively provide a vital counterpoint to the modernist and post-modernist debate that defined much of the late 20th century. Beckwith and Roelstraete's show made clear that the postwar failures of the democratic project in much of the west meant that there could be no 'outside of politics', no universal subject or viewership. The exhibition's main strength was the way in which it connected a history of Chicago to the liberating aspirations of music and social collectivity in that period.

Although the show was staged in a traditional white cube gallery, it managed to replicate several, multi-sensory projects. I had to be dragged away from Douglas R. Ewart, George Lewis and Douglas Repetto's *Rio Negro II* (2007/15). These three members of the AACM had prepared a room-sized assemblage of robotically controlled and interactive sculptural forms, including rain sticks and chimes. The ethereal soundscape was hypnotic and called to mind Phil Cohran's

Fans of another AACM alumnus, multi-instrumentalist Anthony Braxton, were given a chance to pore over his beguiling systems of alternate notation and his densely theorized *Tri-Axium Writings* (1985), which were displayed flat, inviting prolonged reading. In practice, Braxton is challenging music: from his solo saxophone compositions to his 'Ninetet' excursions, the intricate and sprawling sounds are better suited to deep immersion than background entertainment. As his contemporary Rahsaan Roland Kirk famously quipped of his own work with multi-melodic jams, this is music that's 'splittin' the mind in two parts'. The synergy of visual and sonic forms in the early 1970s is made clearer still in photographs of wall murals by Ayé Aton (born Robert Underwood in Versailles, Kentucky). He drummed for Ra's Arkestra, whose synthesis of occultism and sci-fi aesthetics found their way into Aton's large-scale, pop-psychedelic wall paintings in homes throughout Chicago's southside – an update of the visionary panoramas of black deco artists such as Aaron Douglas. Overall, 'The Freedom Principle' gave credence to both the serious formal interests and socio-political purpose applied to the avant-jazz tradition in Chicago.



ROSCOE MITCHELL, *THE THIRD DECADE*, 1970, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, FABRIC, WOOD AND FRINGE, 60 X 101 CM. COURTESY THE ARTIST

The show was less clear in explaining how the relative success of these earlier practitioners might help us to theorize the present more clearly. While many members of the AACM and Sun Ra's Arkestra are still active, Beckwith and Roelstraete gave over much of the installation to artists who they suggest were predecessors. On this level, there were some miscues – the usually outstanding Renée Green and Nari Ward both contributed text-based works that, in this context, seemed one-dimensional, diminishing the social ambitions that might elsewhere be unlocked through wall text.

Jeff Donaldson made paintings as both positive affirmations of blackness and as microcosmic depictions of utopian futures and dynamic black bodies.

In other sections, 'The Freedom Principle' found useful ways to recontextualize the work of other contemporary artists. For example, Nick Cave's *Soundsuits* (1999–ongoing) – always texturally inviting but often uncomfortably staid in the gallery, and almost like taxidermy – are reconnected here with the exuberant movement and sweaty Chicago-house dance floors that inspired them. Similarly, Rashid Johnson's semiotic play of black-cultural tropes seems less like cynical hipster pastiche than it otherwise might. His work Roscoe's *Target* (2014) evokes the afrocentric streetscapes of Chicago's Bronzeville and Hyde Park – not far from where Johnson went to art school – all the way down to Akan soap and a Roscoe Mitchell record that, resting at the centre of the composition, has the charge of a devotional reliquary.

The 1960s remain, for most, a romantic dream, a time when the radical left and grassroots collectives might force larger systems to make good on promises of inclusion and liberation – the completion of the project of modernity itself. Some 50 years on, however, many of the most intractable problems of the day seem to persist, and we hear their echoes in the Black Lives Matter and Occupy movements. But, unlike in the 1960s and '70s, the sort of art on offer in today's jazz clubs and galleries seems largely removed from radical activism, at best providing ancillary support in the form of documentary, archival research or sloganeering.

This shift in cultural context, from one of true grassroots activism to one of more explicit commodification, cannot be discounted. Accordingly, the most powerful recent work on display in 'The Freedom Principle' seems to draw on the utopianism and post-medium approaches of those earlier years, but updates them in ways that make the gallery itself a site of disorientation. For a theorist such as Robin Kelley, using objects creates a form of imaginative disorientation, an elaboration of surrealism within the black-radical tradition. Visionary spaces can be conjured through art, and it is no surprise that the surrealists' discovery of the 'marvellous' in black music extends well beyond jazz. But we also learn that, within the Chicago scene itself, Jeff Donaldson developed a subtle riff on the surreal: the 'superreal' or 'art that fills up, adds to and exceeds reality'.

One exemplar of this is Jennie C. Jones, who, for decades, has answered the question: what if modernist abstraction and minimalist seriality had continued to interweave with the sonic efflorescence of the 1960s? For the Chicago show, Jones contributed *Quiet Gray with Red Reverberation #2* (2014), a relief painting and assemblage comprising an acoustic absorber and acrylic on canvas. It calls to mind the hard edges of Kenneth Noland and Al Loving, or Donald Judd's cadmium red. Even more, it re-forges connections between postwar painting and jazz. In 2013, Jones's solo installation, *Higher Resonance*, at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C., took the austere architecture of the museum and converted it into a resonance chamber. Looped microsamples of music by Kirk, Alvin Singleton and others reflected off and were absorbed by the works and rebounded around the corners of the gallery. Jones's 'hybrid modernism' deflected the viewer away from mere visual absorption, cultivating breaks and grooves that reverberated through the otherwise hushed corridors.

'The Freedom Principle' also featured more conventional black-box screening rooms for works by both the Canadian artist Stan Douglas and Britain's Otolith Group. Both mine film archives to recuperate lost moments. In Douglas's *Hors-champs* (1992), members of the aacm perform Albert Ayler's free jazz album *Spirits Rejoice* (1965) on a Parisian TV soundstage. *For People To Be Resembling* (2012), The Otolith Group created a portrait of the 'post-free-jazz' trio Codono, pulling in a range of references to the political context of the 1970s. Douglas's 2014 installation at David Zwirner Gallery in New York, *Luanda-Kinshasa*, nodded to the postcolonial vectors of disco, funk and psychedelic music. The looped video shows the improvised performance of a fictional band from the 1970s, playing a loose, vibrant jam session at the famed Columbia 30th Street Studio in New York. This is anachronistic fantasia, to be sure, but to witness the film is to be transported: for a moment, the tumult and jouissance of an otherwise-distant era finds expression in the here and now.



ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO PERFORMANCE AT MCA CHICAGO, 1979, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN. COURTESY MCA CHICAGO

While radical collectivity reiterates itself as activism in the streets of Baltimore, Manhattan and Missouri, some of the work in 'The Freedom Principle' will be sold and re-objectified.



2



3

3
Stan Douglas
Luanda-Kinshasa, 2014,
video still

4
Rashid Johnson
Roscoe's Target, 2014,
burned red oak flooring, black
soap, wax, spray enamel,
vinyl, plant, shea butter, books,
270 x 335 x 25 cm

Courtesy
3 the artist and David Zwirner,
New York • 4 the artist
and David Kordansky Gallery,
Los Angeles

Previous page
Jeff Donaldson
JamPact/JelliTite (For
Jamilia-Kinshasa),
1988, mixed media
on canvas, 88 x 127 cm

1
Anthony Braxton
Falling River Music (363h),
2004-present,
graphic score, 27 x 43 cm

2
Lisa Alvarado
Representing, 2011,
acrylic, flash and ink on
banner (canvas,
fabric, wood and fringe),
2.5 x 2.3 m

Courtesy
Previous page collection
of Jameela K. Donaldson •
1 Anthony Braxton
and Tri-Centric Foundation,
New York • 2 the artist



4

In contrast, multi-media artist Sanford Biggers has long mined more ecclesiastical undercurrents in his work, exploring gospel and the connections between Buddhism and hip-hop, such as the shared transience of Tibetan sand painting and improvised break dancing explored in the *Mandala of the B-Bodhisattva II* (2000), a breakout piece with David Ellie from 2001. (The following year, Biggers was featured in the 'Freestyle' exhibition curated by Thelma Golden at The Studio Museum in Harlem and 'One Planet Under a Groove' at The Bronx Museum: shows that both prefigured 'The Freedom Principle' in their curatorial approach.) Biggers's *Ghetto Bird Tunic* (2006) was shown at the MCA – a mash-up of the hip-hop bubble jacket, Caribbean carnival and West-African masquerade. More stirring, in 2012 he drew together family history, Atlantic migration and afro-futuristic motifs for his massive installation *The Cartographer's Conundrum* (2012) at Mass MOCA's giant Building 5, where he infused the funkadelic with the history of gospel; the play of chromatic light and squalls of sound transformed the space into a site of communion on the scale of an earthwork.

The show at Building 5 also featured a panoramic reproduction of a 1970s-era painting in bold afrocentric figuration and colours by John Biggers, Sanford's cousin. The elder Biggers's painting was of a piece with works by Nelson Stevens and Jeff Donaldson in Chicago: Stevens's *Uhuru* (1971) and *Towards Identity* (1970), for instance, or Donaldson's *JamPact/JelliTite* (1988). Unlike Sanford Biggers, however, John Biggers, Stevens and Donaldson played to a primarily black audience, making paintings as both positive affirmations of blackness and microcosmic depictions of utopian futures and dynamic black bodies.

'The Freedom Principle' did not describe the performance or visualization of blackness per se but, instead, the reclamation of the supposedly autonomous space of the white cube in ways that bend and distort it away from the more static or passive encounters often fostered by exclusively visual practices. It reconnected viewers with the lineage of the black-radical tradition and its varied methods such as afro-futurism, improvisation and surrealism. Yet it's worth remembering that, while radical collectivity reiterates itself as activism in the streets of Baltimore, Manhattan and Missouri, some of the work in the show will be sold or, rather, in Baraka's terms, will be re-objectified.

Beckwith and Roelstraete's show has made it difficult to read mainstream 1960s modernism – with its assertions of the moral weight of formal problems – in quite the same way, knowing that artists such as these, working in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, were taking on big questions with a breathtaking blend of tradition and originality. Much of that work from the 1960s and '70s survives largely in record-store bins or art catalogues but, at its best, 'The Freedom Principle' highlighted the fact that there is now a cohort of younger artists who channel those same energies, creating new breaks and elisions, new zones of the surreal and superreal in which we, too, might radically reorient our senses.

IAN BOURLAND

Ian Bourland is an historian and critic of the global contemporary. He writes on issues of race, location, and power and is assistant professor of art history and theory at Maryland Institute College of Art, in Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

Allison Glenn, "Transmissions and Interruptions," in *Derrick Adams: ON*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Pioneer Works Press, 2016.

TRANSMISSIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS

Allison Glenn



Natural Information Society performing at Pritzker Pavilion, Chicago 2014 Photo: Colin Lyons, Image courtesy of Lisa Alvarado.

Derrick Adams' *LIVE* and *IN COLOR* series are laden with signifiers and double entendre that operate as a critique of representation. Through the use of pop-cultural referents, such as sitcoms, infomercials, and television psychics, a conversation emerges between the everyday experience of watching television and its loaded history of imagery, provoking a discourse around consumerism, race and class.

Within the two dimensional wall works, such as *Fabric Station Number 7* (2016), the frame operates as both a formal device for viewing and also as a backdrop for performance; they call to mind the work of Lisa Alvarado, whose paintings similarly perform the dual function of painting and performance backdrop for the experimental jazz group Natural Information Society. With tightly collaged, thick strips of fabric forming a

surface of shapes, Adams' textiles deconstruct the television screen itself. Adams' material choices—ranging from camouflage to Dutch-wax prints—carry loaded histories.

This abstraction of the image calls to mind Nam June Paik's *Magnet TV* (1965), a sculpture that consists of a CRT TV with an industrial sized magnet adhered to the top.¹ When placed on the top surface of the television, the magnet's field distorts the image, obfuscating the ability for information to be transferred in its entirety. Not unlike Paik's transformed televisions, the abstraction of the imagery in Adams' work is located within its performative transmission. When Paik first debuted his work, the viewer was encouraged to participate – moving the magnet to alter the distortion. During the opening reception for *ON*, nine performers activated Adams' televisions with their bodies, diligently working to highlight the absurdities of sales rhetoric. On the opening night, Adams disrupted the performance through the live mixing of audio from their microphones. Where Paik's insertion of a magnet interrupts the physical structure of the television and the mechanism of transmission, Adams' live mixing interrupted the social mechanism of broadcast. *Color Bar Constellation 4* from *Network Constellations*—a series of newer collage paintings—feels looser, as if Adams'

redistribution of the image has already occurred. A large swath of fabric cascades outside of the frame, its sparse placement interspersed with acrylic painted SMTPE color bars and vintage *TV Guide* covers.

The subject positioning within Adams' work is, as David Theo Goldberg mentions, about the “social formation of the subject...[which] involves, thinking [of] oneself in terms of—literally as—the image projected in prevailing concepts of the discursive order.”² The aforementioned paradox of representation is perpetuated by semiotics and institutions of power, or what Kobena Mercer describes as the “formal work of codes [which] essentializes each model into the homogenized embodiment of an ideal type.”³ This ideal type can take many forms, and in the case of Adams' interrogation of media and representation, it is the archaic archetypes that serve to further perpetuate one-dimensional views on race, class, and difference in America.

1 David Joselit, “Open Circuits,” in *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 7–12.

2 David Theo Goldberg, “Modernity, Race and Morality,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 24 (Spring 1993): accessed September 13, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354133>.

3 Mercer, Kobena, “Skin Head Sex Thing” in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 242.

Lori Waxman, " 'Freedom Principle' at MCA takes on black art, music", *Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 2015.

Chicago Tribune

'Freedom Principle' at MCA takes on black art, music



Work from Nari Ward, featured in *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now* at MCA Chicago. (MCA Chicago)



By Lori Waxman

"The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now" is a dazzlingly ambitious and optimistic group show up for just a couple more weeks at the MCA. It ought to knock the socks off everyone who sees it, especially those who like their media mixed. It has — despite the radicality of the innumerable instruments, costumes,

videos, opera, murals, sculptures, record albums, backdrops, scores and paintings included, by some 40 artists, musicians and collectives — a little something for everyone.

It's also very noisy.

From one gallery to another, robotized rain sticks raucously harmonize with free jazz-noise rock, a chamber orchestra, the occasional smash of cymbals and the barely audible hum of feedback. There's a lot of jamming going on, and it's to the credit of co-curators Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete that they've encouraged it by mostly eschewing the typical museum strategy of exhibiting sound-based works in isolation from one another.

Collectivity and improvisation are the norm here. They're also the history, one that the curators recount with a medley of passion and respect. "The Freedom Principle" marks the 50th anniversary of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), a group founded in response to the difficult conditions facing black experimental musicians in Chicago. It remains active today, though many of its civil-rights era compatriots are long gone, including the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA). The first half of the exhibition is devoted to telling the cultural and political stories of these and other grass-roots ensembles, through scintillating paintings by Nelson Stevens, Wadsworth Jarrell and Jeff Donaldson; mysterious Afro-cosmo-futurist murals by Sun Ra drummer Aye Aton; a black suede dress by Jae Jarrell wittily imprinted with the images of revolutionary "brothers"; and a stage set for the Art Ensemble of Chicago crammed full of bells, horns, cymbals, rattles, drums and a hundred other "little instruments" just begging to be played.

If some of this history and these objects sound familiar, they are. In the past two years, Chicago viewers have witnessed a long overdue series of related exhibitions, including a stellar trio at the South Side Community Arts Center, the Logan Center and the DuSable Museum. Most recently, Wadada Leo Smith, whose Calderesque musical notations appear in "The Freedom Principle," enjoyed a solo show at the Renaissance Society.

Follow that beat, drummer. It's a vital one, and it sounds different in each venue. At the MCA, an institutional obligation to the present tense equals an exhibition pulsing with intergenerational reverberations. Sounds aren't all that cross from one gallery to another; people and ideas move too. Roscoe Mitchell, founder of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and first-generation member of the AACM, features in the center of Rashid Johnson's 2014 wall sculpture, a quartet of splattered shelves artfully arranged with a houseplant, dishes of shea butter, a pair of books and a 1966 album by the Roscoe Mitchell Sextet.



Artifacts and instruments from Roscoe Mitchell, founder of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and an early member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, are part of "The Freedom Principle" exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art. (Zbigniew Bzdak / Chicago Tribune)

Sanford Biggers' "Ghetto Bird Tunic," a fabulously flamboyant garment made by covering a floor-length bubble jacket with bird feathers, was once performed in by the late Terry Adkins, whose giant cluster of magnetized cymbals — itself a tribute to the great improvisational saxophonist Charlie Parker — clangs nearby. Lisa Alvarado's pulsating pattern paintings, often hung as backdrops for the Natural Information Society, the music group for which she plays the harmonium and gong, echo the psychedelic rhythms and colors of AfriCOBRA. Stan Douglas' 1992 video installation "Hors-champs" simultaneously shows on each side of a large hanging screen different footage of the same musicians playing a classic free-jazz tune. I've never been a fan of Douglas' exploration of the space outside the frame (hors champ is French for "off camera"), but it's a terrific listening experience, not least because of the virtuosity of the protagonists: saxophonist Douglas R. Ewart and trombonist George Lewis, both AACM members, electrify.

They also planted an instrumental installation in the next gallery (with Douglas Repetto), a zany pseudo-Zen garden of jangly bamboo chimes and spinning rain sticks. And then there's Catherine Sullivan's "Afterword," an immersive environment and film based on Lewis' opera of the same name. Charles Gaines designed the set, and three rooms over his opus, "Manifestos 2," delivers four historical social justice speeches translated into chamber music. Malcolm X and the 18th-century French feminist Olympe De Gouges never sounded quite like this before. Oh, and Gaines sometimes plays in a quartet that once starred the late Adkins and still features Smith.

With so many artists involved in and around and across and back and forth between so many productions, a "where is the art, who is the artist" question arises. That's the wrong question, of course, betraying a limited understanding of raw creativity, technical ability, artistic influence, aesthetic and political solidarity, and economic and institutional realities.

Sometimes, too, it's about time. In the Albanian video artist Anri Sala's "Long Sorrow," the staggering brilliance of the two involved virtuosos can take as long as the length of the film for full revelation. Free jazz horn player Jemeel Moondoc thrills immediately and continuously with his piercing, guttural sounds. Sala bides his time. What at first looks to be a weirdly situated documentary about a talented musician eventually gives way to a surreal memorialization of socialist ideals. Moondoc hovers in midair outside the top floor of a concrete housing tower on the outskirts of East Berlin, a snake charmer for pipe dreams, afloat on a magic carpet languidly easing its way back down to earth.

Put that in your horn and blow it. Yeah.

Lori Waxman is a special contributor to the Tribune, and a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute.

"The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now" runs through Nov. 22 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Ave., 312-280-2660, www.mcachicago.org.

Elliot Reichert, "Imaginary Landscapes/Mana Contemporary", *New City Chicago*, March 20, 2015.



Review: Imaginary Landscapes/Mana Contemporary

RECOMMENDED

In this compact exhibition curated by Allison Glenn, landscape serves as a metaphorical ground for four artists' expansive manipulations of imaginary sites. Each of the works evince traces of fragmentation, collapse and compression, processes that appear here as gestures enacted on sites that are more the spaces of memory and history than they are physical terrains.



Lisa Alvarado. "Traditional Object 6"

On opposite walls, Caroline Kent's sculptural acrylic on wood paintings hang in low relief, the tactile painterly brushstrokes on their surfaces in direct tension with the sculptural gestalt of these beguiling objects. Although they appear to be carved subtractively, they are in fact built constructions and thus call up architecture as a sculptural endeavor, or vice versa. Robert Burnier's "Cirkaû," a blue and tan composition painted over an arrangement of thick panels, draws painting more fully into this conflation of space as it is inhabited by dimensional objects and space as it is rendered as an image on flat surface. Displayed on a white plinth, the sculptural presentation of Burnier's painting is at odds with the smooth, painterly gradients spread over the surface of the work, which is fragmented into eight square panels with thickness enough to return the work to the realm of sculpture. Conversely, Burnier's "Griza Intervalo" hangs from the wall with the low profile of a painting, its shadowed pockets and crinkles appearing as if they were painted on its surface, and yet the folded aluminum that creates these effects presents the undeniable volume of sculpture.

Hung off the wall and bedecked with black tasseled fringe, Lisa Alvarado's "Traditional Object 6" is a tapestry and also a painting that combines these media to interrogate expectations of the assumed dissociation of the abstraction of contemporary art from its corollaries in non-Western artistic traditions. Similarly, the stair-like constructions depicted in Assaf Evron's "Untitled (Athens and Oraibi)" are based on a Pueblo structure with resonance in modernist sculptural constructions. Landscape is a field that situates the indeterminate media and conflated cultures that unite this spare but potent gathering of objects and drive the exhibition's concise and compelling inquiry into abstraction's entanglements with space, place and history. (Elliot Reichert)

Peter Margasak, Dieter Roelstraete, Lisa Alvarado, "In Rotation", *Chicago Reader*, June 6, 2013.

CHICAGO READER

In Rotation: MCA Curator Dieter Roelstraete on Constellation

Plus: Painter Lisa Alvarado on Esteban 'Steve' Jordan's Echoplex accordion, the *Reader's* Peter Margasak on Afro-rockers Colomach, and more

Dieter is curious what's in the rotation of ...



Noh theater

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Lisa Alvarado, painter, member of the Natural Information Society

Noh theater For the past couple of years the Natural Information Society has included painting in many of our live performances. Searching for historical precedents, I came across [Noh](#), a 650-year-old form of Japanese musical theater. The sound of Noh is slow and haunting, with three drummers and a flutist. Giant pots buried beneath the stage floor increase resonance and ghostly vibration. All Noh performances take place in front of a painting of an old pine tree, called the *oi-matsu*, which symbolizes the demarcation of a sacred place. I'm also a fan of the similarly slow-motion Japanese court music called gagaku.

Tumba Francesa [Tumba Francesa](#) is an intricate simultaneous combination of song, drumming, dance, and weaving, which originated with Haitian slaves in 18th-century Cuba and fuses influences from West African music and French traditional dance. Dancers hold ribbons connected to the top of a tall pole, and as they circle and cross back and forth with their partners, their movements create a multicolored weaving that runs down the pole's length.

Esteban "Steve" Jordan [Esteban Jordan](#) (1939–2010) was a south Texas conjunto musician and connector of musical genres. He incorporated a myriad of styles into conjunto and shredded his accordion through an Echoplex. I was fortunate to hear him play live several times at Salut  back in my hometown of San Antonio, where he packed the dance floor every Friday night until his passing in August 2010.