

The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now

Glenn Ligon

(b. 1960, New York; lives in New York)

Give us a Poem, 2007

Black PVC and white neon

The Studio Museum in Harlem, gift of the artist

Exhibition copy

Glenn Ligon's *Give us a Poem* presents a simple, two-word quotation from world-champion boxer and antiwar activist Muhammad Ali. Ali spoke these words in 1975 at Harvard University when asked by a student to "give us a poem." Ali's response, "Me. We," suggested that his personal destiny was inextricably linked to a broader community. By contrast, Ligon's citation of the poem, in which the words "me" and "we" flicker, proposes a less certain relationship between the individual and the collective.

In his larger body of work, Ligon often borrows words and images from a variety of sources: writers Gertrude Stein and Zora Neale Hurston, comedian Richard Pryor, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and even nineteenth-century "Wanted" posters for runaway slaves—to name just a few. Appropriating these sources, he asks us to reconsider the texts in new contexts.

Art Ensemble of Chicago

Banner and various instruments

Courtesy of Roscoe Mitchell

The Art Ensemble of Chicago is one of the best-known acts to emerge from the AACM. The group's performances were notable, not only for its avant-garde music, but also for its signature use of colorful costumes, face paint, and a dizzying array of custom-made instruments, including so-called "little instruments"—which can be viewed on the stage set here and in the photographs nearby.

The Art Ensemble of Chicago's core members included multi-instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell, saxophonist Joseph Jarman, percussionist Famoudou Don Moye, trumpeter Lester Bowie, and bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut. The group grew out of the early Roscoe Mitchell Quartet. Mitchell, one of the AACM's founding members, continues to be one of the AACM's most visible and active representatives.

Roberto Masotti

(b. 1947, lives in Milan)

The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Bergamo Jazz Festival, Italy, 1974/printed 2015

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Lauren Deutsch

(b. 1956, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Art Ensemble of Chicago, 1990/printed 2015

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Catherine Sullivan (b. 1968, Los Angeles; lives in Chicago)

George Lewis (b. 1952, Chicago; lives in New York)

Charles Gaines (b. 1944, Charleston, SC; lives in Los Angeles)

Sean Griffin (b. 1968, Los Angeles; lives in Los Angeles)

Afterword via Fantasia, 2015

Single-channel video (color, sound) and mixed-media installation

Courtesy of the artists

Afterword via Fantasia takes as its starting point the postscript to George E. Lewis's history of the AACM, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*. Lewis rearranged quotations from interviews he conducted with AACM participants to place their words into conversation with each other. Artist Catherine Sullivan partnered with Lewis, composer and director Sean Griffin, and artist Charles Gaines to produce *Afterword*, part of a larger project that includes an opera premiering at the MCA in 2015.

This installation includes scenes from Lewis's opera featuring an ensemble of actors, dancers, opera singers, and AACM musicians, shot on the sets of four Chicago theater productions that featured African American casts. Scored with music by Lewis and Griffin, the resulting vignettes are projected in an environment whose walls are adorned with Gaines's stage designs for the opera, which are rendered in ghostly white chalk.

The opera, *Afterword: an Opera*, premieres at MCA Stage October 16–17, 2015.

Stan Douglas

(b. 1960, Vancouver; lives in Vancouver)

Hors-champs, 1992

Two-channel video installation with stereo sound

13 minutes, 20 seconds, looped

Courtesy of the artist; David Zwirner New York/London; and Victoria Miro, London

In French, “hors champ” loosely translates to “off camera.” Stan Douglas’s *Hors-champs* features video of AACM members Douglas R. Ewart (saxophone) and George Lewis (trombone) performing Albert Ayler’s “Spirits Rejoice” on the sound stage of a Parisian TV studio. Douglas’s installation presents different footage of the same performance on each side of a screen.

The title of the installation—and its two-sided screen, which can’t be viewed in its entirety at once—might prompt a viewer to consider what it means to be on or off camera. Douglas created the work in 1992, when Los Angeles erupted in violence in the wake of the Rodney King beating and the acquittal of the police officer who assaulted him. The musicians in *Hors-champs* play a song that Ayler recorded in 1965, another turbulent year that also saw riots in Los Angeles.

Douglas R. Ewart (b. 1946, Kingston, Jamaica; lives in Minneapolis)

George Lewis (b. 1952, Chicago; lives in New York)

Douglas Repetto (b. 1970, Philadelphia; lives in New York)

Rio Negro II, 2007/2015

Robotic-acoustic installation (rain sticks, chimes, bamboo, earth, wood, rocks, robotics, sculptures, and sound files)

Courtesy of the artists

Douglas R. Ewart and George Lewis are both longtime members of the AACM. In 1992, the two joined together to produce *Rio Negro*. That first version was commissioned in Chicago by Experimental Sound Studio, a longstanding non-profit organization. It was presented at the now-defunct Randolph Street Gallery. In 2007, Ewart and Lewis collaborated with sound artist Douglas Repetto on an enhanced version of the sound environment, which appears here.

Rio Negro II consists of rain sticks and chimes, among other elements. They are all orchestrated by robotic mechanisms. The rain sticks, a key component of the installation, suggest the instruments of indigenous Americans, such as the inhabitants of the Rio Negro basin in Brazil. The audio-kinetic installation also resembles a Zen garden with its clusters of bamboo. Overall, the work seems to cut across time, mixing a hint of the ancient with the technology of today.

AfriCOBRA

AfriCOBRA, or the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, was founded on the South Side of Chicago in 1968 by the visual artists Jeff Donaldson, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Gerald Williams. The group grew out of an earlier collective called OBAC (pronounced “oh-bah-see”), the Organization for Black American Culture, which brought activists, artists, and writers together to support the African American struggle for freedom, equality, and justice in the United States. OBAC organized the important *Wall of Respect* mural on the South Side (see the vitrine in this gallery). AfriCOBRA shared OBAC’s belief that art could foster social change, and its artists brought a great political urgency to their work, which they positioned within a larger Pan-African context.

AfriCOBRA’s strong social and political dimensions went hand in hand with a dedication to developing a new visual language. Many AfriCOBRA paintings and prints feature heroic figures and mosaic-like patterns in bright colors that seem to emanate light and movement. The collective was also committed to making art widely accessible. Printmaking was a particularly important medium, since it allowed them to mass-produce affordable works on paper.

There were many parallels and direct collaborations between AfriCOBRA and the AACM. Both collectives responded to the Afrocentric cultural aspirations of the time and to experimental approaches that melded art and life in new ways. AACM rehearsals and concerts occasionally took place in the studios of AfriCOBRA artists, and AACM musicians also appear in paintings by these artists. At one point, the two even organizations shared an address. Much like its musical counterpart, AfriCOBRA continues to influence and inspire artists.

Jeff Donaldson

(b. 1932, Pine Bluff, AR; d. 2004, Chicago)

JamPact/JelliTite (for Jamila), 1988

Mixed media on canvas

Collection of Jameela K. Donaldson

Jeff Donaldson's *JamPact/JelliTite (For Jamila)* uses his signature mosaic-like style of colorful patterning to depict a vibrant concert. Fragmented faces and instruments appear: James Brown, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Charles Clark are three musicians recognizable in the scene. The title of the artwork refers to the densely covered pictorial surface and demonstrates one of the visual strategies used by AfriCOBRA, a collective of visual artists Donaldson cofounded. In addition to his work with AfriCOBRA, Donaldson occasionally collaborated with members of the AACM.

In 1967, Donaldson was the lead artist on the influential *Wall of Respect* mural. The mural, painted on a building on Chicago's South Side, featured musicians and other black cultural heroes. Donaldson's study of Miles Davis for the music section of the mural is displayed in one of the vitrines in this gallery. In addition to his work as an artist, Donaldson was a scholar trained in art history.

Wadsworth Jarrell

(b. 1929, Albany, GA; lives in Cleveland)

Revolutionary, 1972

Screen print on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Wadsworth Jarrell's *Revolutionary* is a dynamic portrait of radical political activist Angela Davis speaking into a microphone. Through a radiant burst of bright colors, Jarrell conveys the vitality and power of his subject. Words seem to emanate from the speaking figure, and her political calls to action generate a vivid, mosaic-like pattern. Reflecting AfriCOBRA's interest in art forms that could be easily reproduced, this work exists as both a singular painting and a widely distributed screen print (seen here).

Nelson Stevens

(b. 1938, New York; lives in Baltimore)

Uhuru, 1971

Screen print on paper

Collection of David Lusenhop, Cleveland

Towards Identity, 1970

Oil on canvas

Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Dr. James and Jetta Jones, 1999.940

Nelson Stevens's screen print *Uhuru* adopts the Swahili word for independence or freedom and depicts a heroic black figure facing a bright future. The work is inspired partly by the independence gained by African countries in the late 1960s. A member of AfriCOBRA, Stevens uses the collective's signature kaleidoscopic colors and kinetic patterning. *Towards Identity* depicts a female figure in the same confident pose and with a similar style. It attests to the collective's interest in gender relations as part of broader struggles for equality by African Americans.

Gerald Williams

(b. 1941, Chicago; lives in Sumter, SC)

Nation Time, 1969

Acrylic on canvas

Johnson Publishing Company

Nation Time, by AfriCOBRA member Gerald Williams, is an example of the artist's talent for combining the language of black radicalism with the group's signature use of vivid "Coolade colors." The title comes from one of the slogans of the Black Power movement: "It's Nation Time!" This phrase opened activist Amiri Baraka's poem with the same title, published in 1970. In the years that followed, a number of jazz musicians also used the slogan for album names, and in 1972 Baraka himself released a sound recording with the phrase as its title. The call for nationhood, and the related language of empowerment, returns in the fictional record covers created by Jamal Cyrus in 2005, also on view in the exhibition.

The AACM

This exhibition coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an influential group whose members have revolutionized jazz and improvised music, often bringing a sense of play and inventiveness to their work. The AACM was founded on the South Side of Chicago in May 1965 by four young musicians: Richard Abrams, Jodie Christian, Phil Cohran, and Steve McCall. To create their own support network and to break from the jazz tradition of performing popular standards, they started their own musicians' collective. Adventurous young composers such as Anthony Braxton, Douglas R. Ewart, George Lewis, Roscoe Mitchell, and Henry Threadgill soon joined the AACM, attracted to its spirit of experimentation.

AACM members not only made music but also collaborated with dancers, theater artists, poets, and visual artists. Even when focused on music alone, they broke new ground by pairing a rigorous approach to composition with new ideas about "free" improvisation emerging from avant-garde jazz in the 1960s. Education was also important to the AACM. The organization's headquarters not only served as a concert venue and base for a musicians' union but also as a free school. Through this emphasis on teaching, the AACM nurtured future generations of musicians. Still dedicated to the collective promotion of creative music, the AACM continues to thrive to this day.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(b. 1938, Chicago; lives in Forest Park, IL)

***Unite (AfriCOBRA)*, 1971**

Color screen print on ivory wove paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Judy and Patrick Diamond, 2005.588

***Relate to Your Heritage*, c. 1971**

Screen print on cream wove paper

Collection of David Lusenhop, Cleveland, Ohio

Barbara Jones-Hogu's *Unite (AfriCOBRA)* presents a powerful image of black collectivity. Rather than well-known heroes, the screen print features anonymous figures that mirror its intended audience. One figure looks out at the viewer directly, so that the call to "Unite!" is an invitation to the viewer.

Jones-Hogu, a founding member of AfriCOBRA, became the group's foremost printmaker, approaching printmaking as an affordable art that could reach a wider audience. Her other screen prints, such as *Relate to Your Heritage*, point to a goal of AfriCOBRA artists to unite diasporic Africans by drawing on a common past to look to the future.

Wadsworth Jarrell

(b. 1929, Albany, NY; lives in Cleveland)

***AACM*, 1994**

Acrylic on tempered Masonite

Courtesy of the artist

Wadsworth Jarrell, a founding member of the AfriCOBRA collective and husband of Jae Jarrell, was a longtime chronicler of Chicago's musical life. The panoramic painting *AACM* is an example of Jarrell's later style, in which he combines figures and abstraction using vivid colors. The painting depicts a number of the organization's core members: reedists Roscoe Mitchell and Henry Threadgill, percussionist Steve McCall, bass player Fred Hopkins, and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams.

Wadsworth Jarrell

(b. 1929, Albany, NY; lives in Cleveland)

Painter Wadsworth Jarrell's group photo of AACM members, taken in the artist's backyard, c. 1968/printed 2015

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of George Lewis

Exhibition copy

Mahal Richard Abrams

(b. 1930, Chicago; lives in New York)

Levels and Degrees of Light, 1968

Acrylic on canvas

Blues Forever, 1982

Acrylic on cardboard

View From Within, 1985

Collage and acrylic on canvas

Roots of Blue, 1986

Acrylic on canvas

Blu Blu Blu, 1991

Acrylic on cardboard

Kei's Dance, 2010

Acrylic on cardboard

All works courtesy of the artist

The examples presented here span nearly forty years of pianist and composer Mahal Richard Abrams's painting activity. Since the late 1960s, Abrams has used his paintings on select album covers, starting with his first solo release *Levels and Degrees of Light*. The titles and subject matter of his paintings often refer to music and dance. *View From Within* even includes actual musical scores.

Born in Chicago, Abrams is one of the AACM's founding members. Not only is he a musician who paints, he is also featured in a number of paintings, among them Jeff Donaldson's *JamPact/JelliTite (for Jamila)*, which is included in this exhibition.

Roscoe Mitchell

(b. 1940 in Chicago; lives in Oakland, CA, and Madison, WI)

The Third Decade, 1970

Acrylic on canvas, fabric, wood, and fringe

Courtesy of the artist

Panoply, 1967

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Kay Michener

Roscoe Mitchell, one of the founders of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and an early member of the AACM, is also a long-practicing visual artist. One of his paintings, titled *The Third Decade* (1970), graces the cover of the 1984 Art Ensemble album of the same name.

The individual interests of Art Ensemble members such as Mitchell and Joseph Jarman (also a painter) fed into the group's collective interest in the visual arts—also important to the AACM as a whole.

Lauren Deutsch

(b. 1956, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Roscoe Mitchell (Matrix), 2014

Archival pigment print

Great Black Music Ensemble, 2006

Archival pigment print

All works courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copies

A native Chicagoan and director of Chicago's Jazz Institute since 1996, Lauren Deutsch has been a devoted chronicler of the city's jazz scene for many years. Her black-and-white photographs in the vitrines in this gallery portray many musicians important to the city's musical heritage.

Her vibrant portrait of saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell conjures his angular sounds, while the panoramic photograph depicting the Great Black Music Ensemble evokes the spirit of collectivity and the group's large size and sound. Deutsch's experiments with digital color photography, such as these, include shimmering patterns of light that may bring to mind the dizzying look of AfriCOBRA artworks.

Jose Williams

(b. 1934, Chicago; lives in Mechanicsville, VA)

Ghetto, c. 1969

Oil on canvas

South Side Community Art Center, Chicago

Born in Chicago, Jose Williams is equally fluent in the languages of jazz and painting. A performing clarinetist, he gradually shifted his attention toward the world of art and began working as a visual artist, curator, and organizer.

Ghetto consists of a grid of tightly packed, blackened architectural forms surrounding a small newspaper photograph of a young boy sitting on a city stoop. The photograph interrupts the abstracted composition, introducing a counterpoint to the painted expanse of the city.

Ayé Aton

(b. Robert Underwood, 1940, Versailles, KY; lives in Baton Rouge, LA)

Untitled, 1964

Acrylic on paper

Private collection

Photographer unknown

Untitled (Ayé Aton wall mural, artist's mother's house), c. 1973

Untitled (Ayé Aton wall mural, Barak's house), 1972

Untitled (Ayé Aton wall mural, Barak's house), 1972

Untitled (Ayé Aton wall mural), 1972

Untitled (Ayé Aton wall mural), 1972

The Eye of Ra, 1972

Untitled, c. 1973

Color photographs

All works from a private collection

In the 1960s and 1970s, Ayé Aton painted a series of murals in people's homes in Chicago's predominantly black neighborhoods. Aton is both an artist and a musician, and many of these murals were inspired or directly informed by his phone conversations with his mentor, the experimental Afrofuturist composer and bandleader Sun Ra (Aton was sometimes the drummer for Ra's band, known as his "Arkestra").

Sun Ra's influence is apparent in the recurring motifs of Aton's murals, which include Egyptian imagery and space travel. Here, one of Aton's cosmic paintings is shown alongside photographs of the larger psychedelic murals. Most of the original murals no longer exist.

Jae Jarrell

(b. 1935, Cleveland; lives in Cleveland)

Brothers Surrounding Sis, 1970

Suede suit and acrylic paint

Gent's Great Coat, 1973

Suede, appliqued and woven in leather

All works courtesy of the artist

Trained as an artist, founding AfriCOBRA member Jae Jarrell ran a fashion boutique in Chicago in the 1960s. She grew interested in clothing and fabric as surfaces on which to celebrate black life. Her dress *Brothers Surrounding Sis* uses a garment as the ground for a visual representation of supportive black male-female relationships. The elaborate detailing of *Gent's Great Coat* points to AfriCOBRA's interest in decorative patterning.

Artworks that are intended to be worn, Jarrell's garments and fabric sculptures can be seen as precursors to Sanford Biggers's *Ghetto Bird Tunic* and Nick Cave's Sound Suits, also on view in *The Freedom Principle*.

Emilio Cruz

(b. 1938, New York; d. 2004, New York)

Untitled, c. 1970

Fiberglass and automobile putty, on a wood frame

Courtesy of the Emilio Cruz Estate

Resembling the shell of a creature, *Untitled* exemplifies Emilio Cruz's interest in combining nonrepresentational and natural forms. Cruz uses a canvas shaped more like a circle than the conventional flat rectangle to create a painting with sculptural properties. He presents the work low to the floor, a display strategy that influenced artists, including Terry Adkins, whose work is presented in another gallery.

In the 1970s, Cruz taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was included in the MCA's *Abstract Art in Chicago* exhibition in 1976. He was an accomplished drummer and performed with many AACM musicians, including Douglas R. Ewart and Anthony Braxton, whose works are featured in the exhibition, and Henry Threadgill, who composed music for Cruz's *Homeostasis* performances (see posters and photographs in the nearby vitrine).

Designer unknown

AfriCOBRA, Ten in Search of a Nation, Studio Museum in Harlem, 1970

Poster

Collection of David Lusenhop, Cleveland

Vitrine 1

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians

In 1965, Muhal Richard Abrams, Phil Cohran, Jodie Christian, and Steve McCall founded the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in response to the difficult conditions black experimental musicians face in Chicago. Membership quickly increased from the original group of four. Musicians who had honed their skills while performing in the military or who had studied in the strong band programs under the renowned Major N. Clark Smith at Wendell Phillips High School or Captain Walter Dyett at DuSable High School were enthusiastic about the possibilities the collective offered. The AACM emphasized composing original music, rather than playing popular jazz standards. Improvisation—devising music in the moment even when following the directions in a notated score—remained important. Teaching was also central to the organization, and shortly after its founding the AACM set up a school.

Photographs document classes, recording sessions, and performances by AACM members. Fliers and posters demonstrate how, from early on and throughout its existence, the organization's experimentation extended beyond music to text and visual forms as well.

1:

Concert of Modern Music, Richard Abrams Experimental Band poster, 1965
Courtesy of Muhal Richard Abrams

2:

Robert Abbott Sengstacke

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Muhal Richard Abrams and the Experimental Band, c. 1965/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

3:

Eric Dolphy Tribute Concert program, c. 1965

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

4:

Flyer for AACM Presents Focus concert at All Souls First Universalist, Chicago, 1970s

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

5–6:

Leonard E. Jones

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Germany)

M'chaka Uba, cello—AACM youth class, Muhal Richard Abrams in background, Abraham Lincoln Center Chicago 1968, 1968/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Muhal Richard Abrams, Thurman Barker (back to camera) and Sherry Scott's son, at Joseph Jarman's As If It Were The Seasons recording session, 1968, 1968/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

7:

Poster for AACM: Nosredna Yelhsal, c. 1970

Courtesy of Muhal Richard Abrams

8:

Poster for AACM 10th Anniversary Concert featuring Muhal Richard Abrams and the Fred Anderson Sextets, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, 1975

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

9:

AACM Concert Flyer, c. 1970

Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black Collection

Exhibition copy

10:

Poster for AACM: Kaleidoscope, c. 1970

Courtesy of Muhal Richard Abrams

11–16:

Business cards and concert announcements for various AACM musicians, 1960s–70s

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

Experimental Music History

The AACM has been the subject of important works of scholarship and criticism, among them George E. Lewis's *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and Experimental Music* and John Litweiler's *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958*. Lewis studied composition with Muhal Richard Abrams before becoming the

youngest person to join the AACM. His book offers the most extensive history of the group. Litweiler is a Chicago based jazz critic. His book, which explores the rise of free and experimental jazz, was among the earliest to give serious attention to the AACM within jazz criticism.

1:

A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music by
George E. Lewis
University of Chicago Press, 2007

2:

The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958 by John Litweiler
De Capo Press, 1984

Vitrine 2

Great Black Music

As a collective of musicians, the AACM was not a band itself, but from its inception its members have played together in various configurations. Distinct ensembles, each invested in experimental composition and improvisation, emerged organically from the organization and continue to do so to this day. These bands include the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Air, and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble, among many others. On display here is a small sample of the material created to promote and support the wide range of artistic activity that the AACM fostered. A rich photographic documentation of jazz and experimental music in Chicago exists as well. Showcased here are images taken by Lauren Deutsch, director of the Chicago Jazz Institute; former AACM member Leonard E. Jones; and Robert Abbott Sengstacke, a distinguished photojournalist who captured major black cultural events for the *Chicago Defender*.

1:

Lester Lashley and Friends poster, c. 1972
Courtesy of Muhal Richard Abrams

2:

Robert Abbott Sengstacke

(b. 1943, Chicago, lives in Chicago)

Phil Cohran at the Afro-Arts Theater, 1968/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

3:

Robert Abbott Sengstacke

(b. 1943, Chicago, lives in Chicago)

63rd Street Beach Concert, 1967/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

4:

Flyer for Kim On Wong and the Joseph Jarman Co., benefit concert, Sullivan House at the Francis W. Parker School, Chicago, 1968

Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black Collection

Exhibition copy

5:

Joseph Jarman at Alumni Hall, DePaul University, Chicago, c. 1970s

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

6:

Flyer for New Music Concerts at N.A.M.E. Gallery Chicago, featuring Henry Threadgill and Amina, 1974

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

7:

Muhal Richard Abrams

Roots of Blue, RPR Records, 1986

LP Record

8:

Flyer for Air Trio, N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, c. 1973

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research

9–15:

Lauren Deutsch

(b. 1956, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Breath, 1983/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Joseph Jarman, 2002/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Maia, 1990/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Wadada Leo Smith, 1990/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Rita Warford and Ann Ward, 1990/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Malachi Favors Maghostut, 1990/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Douglas R. Ewart and Fred Anderson at the Velvet Lounge, 1992/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

16:

Leonard Jones

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Germany)

Henry Threadgill—Amsterdam, Holland in the studio of Q. Jan Telting, July 1971,
1971/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

17:

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(b. 1938, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Leonard Jones and Wadada Leo Smith, Steinebach am Wörthsee, Germany,
1973, 1973/printed 2015

Collection of Leonard Jones

Exhibition copy

Vitrine 3

Art Ensemble of Chicago

Multi-instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell, saxophonist Joseph Jarman, percussionist Famoudou Don Moye, trumpeter Lester Bowie, and bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut formed the core musicians of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. In 1969, the group relocated to Paris and quickly made waves in the European jazz scene with its idiosyncratic compositions and inventive stage performances.

The Art Ensemble of Chicago became one of the most internationally known experimental jazz groups. Its members recorded more albums in their first months in Paris than they had since their inception in Chicago. The materials on view, along with the stage set in this gallery, show the group's performances and suggest the publicity the Art Ensemble received both in Europe and the United States.

1–3:

Leonard E. Jones

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Germany)

Art Ensemble of Chicago—Paris, France, July 1970, 1970/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Roscoe Mitchell, AEC concert University of Chicago, 1968, 1968/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Art Ensemble of Chicago—Paris, France, July 1970/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

4:

Art Ensemble of Chicago astrology flyer, c. 1972

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

5:

Art Ensemble of Chicago concert flyer, 1970s

Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black Collection

Exhibition copy

6:

The Art Ensemble Farewell Concert flyer, The Blue Gargoyle, Chicago, May 1969

Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

7:
Poster for Art Ensemble of Chicago Free Jazz, Maison de la Culture de Rennes,
Rennes, France, c. 1969–70
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

8:
Art Ensemble of Chicago
Message To Our Folks, BYG Actuel, 1969 [2001 Reissue]
LP Record

9:
Flyer for Black Panthers benefit concert, featuring the Archie Shepp, Chicago Art
Ensemble, and Frank Wright, 1970
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

10–15:
Angela Lee and Joseph Banks
Roscoe Mitchell, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA, 1971
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

Angela Lee and Joseph Banks
Lester Bowie, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA, 1971
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

Angela Lee and Joseph Banks
Art Ensemble of Chicago, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA,
1971
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

Angela Lee and Joseph Banks
Joseph Jarman, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA, 1971

Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

Angela Lee and Joseph Banks

Don Moye, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA, 1971
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

Angela Lee and Joseph Banks

Malachi Favors, Art Ensemble of Chicago Performance, Lenox, MA, 1971
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum Research Center, Larayne Black
Collection
Exhibition copy

16:

Art Ensemble of Chicago

Nice Guys, ECM, 1979
LP record

Vitrine 4

The AACM and Experimental Theater

Art forms that combined music, poetry, dance, and theater flourished in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, AACM cofounder Muhal Richard Abrams created a play *Platu-In the City of Non-Spiritual*, as advertised on this poster. Similarly, artist and musician Emilio Cruz created large-scale performances such as *Homeostasis* in collaboration with AACM members. This tradition continues in the contemporary moment, including musical arrangements inspired by literature, multimedia creations, and an opera about the AACM itself, which will premiere at the MCA in the fall of 2015.

1:

Muhal Presents, *Platu* poster, 1971
Courtesy of Muhal Richard Abrams

2:

Poster for *Homeostasis*, The Blue Gargoyle, Chicago, c. 1980
Courtesy of Patricia Cruz
Exhibition copy

3:

Poster for *Homeostasis*, MoMing Dance Theater, Chicago, 1980
Courtesy of Patricia Cruz
Exhibition copy

4–6:

Marc Enguerand

(b. 1950; lives in Paris)

Henry Threadgill and Douglas Ewart, Homeostasis performance, 1981/printed 2015

Courtesy of Patricia Cruz
Exhibition copy

Marc Enguerand

(b. 1950, lives in Paris)

Photo of Emilio Cruz playing the Drums, 1981/printed 2015

Courtesy of Patricia Cruz
Exhibition copy

Marc Enguerand

(b. 1950, lives in Paris)

Homeostasis performance, Festival Mondial du Theatre, 1981

Courtesy of Patricia Cruz
Exhibition copy

The Wall of Respect

In 1967, artists in the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC, pronounced “oh-bah-see”) created the *Wall of Respect*, a twenty-by-sixty-foot mural designed to celebrate black culture in its many forms. The mural, no longer extant, was located on Chicago’s South Side and became a site for poetry and musical performances. Jeff Donaldson (pictured here at work on the wall), Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Wadsworth Jarrell (all included in the exhibition), as well as many other artists, worked to complete the mural, whose overall design was by Sylvia Abernathy, who also created AACM album covers for Delmark Records.

1–2:

Robert Abbott Sengstacke

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Wall of Respect 1967/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

Robert Abbott Sengstacke

(b. 1943, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

Jeff Donaldson working on the Wall of Respect, 1967/printed 2015

Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition copy

3:

Jeff Donaldson

(b. 1932, Pine Bluff, AR; d. 2004 in Chicago)

Study for *Wall of Respect*, c. 1967

Oil on paper

Lusenhop Fine Art, Cleveland

Vitrine 5

The MCA and Experiments in Art and Culture

Like the AACM, the MCA's founding took place within the political and cultural ferment of the 1960s. Experimentation was central to the mission of each organization. Since the 1970s, AACM members have used the MCA as a venue for concerts and festivals. A number of AACM-related musicians and bands, such as the Fred Anderson Quartet and the Nicole Mitchell Ensemble, have released live recordings of their respective concerts at the MCA.

1:

AACM brochure, c. 1990

MCA Archive

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

2:

AACM Festival, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, participant sign-in sheet/roster, 1995

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

3:

Anthony Braxton, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, program notes, 1973

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

4:

Anthony Braxton, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago/Jazz Institute flyer, 1979

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

5:

Muhal Richard Abrams Sextet, AACM promotional brochure, 1979

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

6:

Fred Anderson Quartet

Dark Day, Message Records, 1979

Compact Disc

7:

AACM 30th Anniversary Festival Brochure, with handwritten note from Douglas R. Ewart to former MCA curator Dominic Molon on reverse, 1995

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

8:

Brochure for *Further Explorations: A Celebration of the AACM*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1979
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Library and Archives

9:

Poster for "*The Museum of Contemporary Art in conjunction with the Jazz Institute of Chicago Salutes the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians AACM in a Festival*", 1979
Featuring *Save Mon* score (1977) by Douglas R. Ewart
Courtesy of Douglas R. Ewart
Exhibition copy

10:

Nicole Mitchell's Black Earth Ensemble
Intergalactic Beings, FPE Records, 2014
LP record

Art and Soul

Shortly after its founding, the MCA partnered with the Conservative Vice Lords, then a socially conscious activist offshoot of a street gang on Chicago's West Side, to create Art and Soul, a storefront space in which art classes and exhibitions took place. Jan van der Marck, the MCA's first director, worked with brothers Jackie and Danny Hetherington, two West Side artists who were not affiliated with the Conservative Vice Lords, to shape this unusual collaboration on an experimental outreach project.

1–3:

Ann Zelle

Art & Soul exterior with rainbow mural by Sachio Yamashita, 1969
Courtesy of the artist
Exhibition copy

Ann Zelle

MCA Director Jan van der Marck and Art & Soul director Jackie Hetherington with prize winning kinetic sculpture *Black Madonna and Child* by Reggie Madison, 1968
Courtesy of the artist
Exhibition copy

Ann Zelle

Jeff Donaldson, Ben Bay, and Jackie Hetherington at the Art & Soul opening, 1968
Courtesy of the artist
Exhibition copy

Lili Reynaud-Dewar

(b. 1975, La Rochelle, France; lives in Grenoble, France)

"La Grande Oreille" (from eye to ear to ass to memory and back), 2015

Mirrors, six speakers, sound system, wood structure, modified Tam-Tam stools with integrated ink fountains, and wooden bench

Courtesy of the artist

Lili Reynaud-Dewar's sound installation is an homage to her father's record store, which specialized in experimental music. The work doubles as a jukebox within the galleries: emanating from the sculpture's built-in speakers are music tracks selected by the artist.

While the piece mimics a listening station in a record store, it is intentionally inaccessible and offers a walled-in space for contemplation, perhaps like a meditative garden. The artist transformed colorful stools into fountains, filled with gurgling ink, and offers a bench for visitors to sit on while they look and listen.

Matthew Metzger

(b. 1978, Chicago; lives in Chicago)

I Can't Concentrate With You In The Room, 2014–ongoing

Installation consisting of the following elements:

That Which Can't Be Played (Versions 1–9)

Nine paintings, each acrylic and oil on MRMD Panel

Dedications and Reverberations

Digital audio recording

2 minutes, 16 seconds

Courtesy of the artist and Arratia Beer, Berlin

The installation *I Can't Concentrate With You In The Room*, by native Chicagoan Matthew Metzger, includes nine photorealist paintings that are each the same dimensions as a twelve-inch vinyl record cover. To create each composition, Metzger used an improvisational method determined by chance: he tethered two bookends to the wall, let them drop, then painted them however they landed.

These works sprang out of Metzger's deep interest in one of Anthony Braxton's saxophone records, *For Alto*, and in the composer's writings. The background color of Metzger's paintings are the same as one book from Braxton's philosophical *Tri-Axiom Writings*. Accompanying Metzger's paintings is a sound piece that he has edited to eliminate most of the music from one of Braxton's performances, primarily leaving the gasps of breath that occur between notes.

Lisa Alvarado

(b. 1982, San Antonio, TX; lives in Chicago)

Representing, 2011

Acrylic, flash, and ink on banner (canvas, fabric, wood, and fringe)

Traditional Object, 2013

Acrylic, gouache, and ink on banner (canvas, charmeuse, wood, aluminum, and fringe)

Both works courtesy of the artist

The repetition of simple geometric motifs gives the works of Lisa Alvarado a lively rhythmic quality. Suspended in the air, they may also bring to mind Chinese scroll paintings. Additionally, Alvarado's paintings feature psychedelic patterning and bright colors that recall those used by the AfriCOBRA artists in the 1970s, as seen in works displayed elsewhere in the exhibition.

Alvarado plays harmonium in Natural Information Society, a band led by composer and multi-instrumentalist Joshua Abrams, and the group sometimes uses her paintings as backdrops for performances.

Jamal Cyrus

(b. 1973, Houston, TX; lives in Houston)

Untitled, 2010

Drum, leather, microphones, mic stands, cables, and speaker

Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston

In Jamal Cyrus's *Untitled*, microphones cluster closely around a drum, as if they were a crowd gathering to listen. The drum itself is silent, but a hum fills the air—the ambient sound from a speaker system—creating a feeling of anticipation.

As with much of Cyrus's work, political references are embedded in his choice of materials. In this case the drum is wrapped in leather, much like a person wearing a black leather jacket. For Cyrus, this recalls the look of the Black Panther Party—the radical black nationalist organization founded in 1966.

William Pope.L

(b. 1955, Newark, NJ; lives in Chicago)

Another Kind of Love: John Cage's Silence, By Hand, 2013—ongoing

Yellow legal paper and dyed wood lattice

Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Another Kind of Love: John Cage's Silence, By Hand is an ongoing project in which Chicago-based artist William Pope.L has meticulously hand-copied many dozens of the nearly three hundred pages that make up composer John Cage's 1961 collection of essays and lectures, *Silence*. Four loose pages from the larger set are installed in other locations in the exhibition, waiting to be discovered.

By reinventing Cage's cult classic as a handwritten score, a form that invites performance, Pope.L puts renewed pressure on the uneasy relationship between the frequently opposing traditions of jazz and other forms of experimental contemporary music. Cage, who collaborated with AACM member Joseph Jarman for a 1965 concert, advocated for chance as a compositional strategy. His ideas generated debate and conversation among AACM members, critics, and music lovers about the nature of improvisation.

A live twenty-four-hour reading of the work occurs November 21 and 22, 2015.

David Hammons

(b. 1943, Springfield, IL; lives in New York)

U.N.I.A. Flag, 1990

Cotton

Marilyn and Larry Fields Collection

David Hammons's *U.N.I.A. Flag* features the familiar pattern of the American flag, but it is not red, white, and blue. The colors Hammons substitutes instead echo the flag Marcus Garvey designed for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), the early twentieth-century black nationalist organization that Garvey led. The original U.N.I.A. flag used broad bands of red, black, and green and was intended to unite all people of African origin under one banner. Hammons's new version conflates the color and look of the two flags, perhaps implying that a black nation lurks within the United States or, conversely, the impossibility of the same.

Hammons's explorations of the black experience in America have influenced a generation of artists, including many represented in this exhibition. He often combines found materials in his work to foreground cultural assumptions, such as the association of particular materials with certain ethnic groups. His artworks often nod slyly to art history as well: his *U.N.I.A. Flag*, for instance, calls to mind Jasper Johns's iconic American flag paintings from the 1950s.

Scores

For certain composers in this exhibition, scores—the written forms of musical compositions—are vehicles for both visual and musical experimentation. The composers featured here have developed idiosyncratic methods of graphic notation, generating scores that look like drawings, mathematical formulas, or collages, rather than traditional sheet music. Their scores offer instructions, but they leave ample room for interpretation and improvisation. Performers don't simply read the scores; they must decide how to interpret the compositions' visual cues.

Members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) have used scores in particularly innovative ways. Beginning with its inception in 1965, the AACM emphasized the composition of original music, placing it on par with improvisational performance. The scores of AACM members arose out of their own context, but they parallel other developments in the 1960s. Avant-garde artist groups such as Fluxus referred to their performance instructions as scores. Composers such as John Cage (who inspired William Pope.L's installation in this gallery) also invented new ways to notate music.

Anthony Braxton

(b. 1945, Chicago; lives in New York)

Falling River Music (363h), 2004–present

Falling River Music (364f), 2004–present

Falling River Music (366a), 2004–present

Falling River Music (367c), 2004–present

Falling River Music (368d), 2004–present

Graphic scores

All works courtesy of Anthony Braxton and the Tri-Centric Foundation

Exhibition copies

An early member of the AACM, Anthony Braxton continues to blur the boundaries between the auditory and the visual. His graphic scores range in style from austere arrangements of math-like symbols and formulas to expressive sweeps of colorful paint. The scores include compositions that have been performed by such AACM stalwarts as Douglas R. Ewart and Roscoe Mitchell.

Born in Chicago and now based in New York, Braxton is a multi-instrumentalist and a prolific composer. His broad-ranging interests in mathematics, science, and technology are reflected in his pioneering experiments in musical notation, which continue to inspire artists such as Matthew Metzger, whose works are also presented in this gallery.

Anthony Braxton

(b. 1945, Chicago; lives in New York)

Teaching notes, 1991–92

Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center

Composition No. 76, 1977

Graphic scores (16-page booklet and 26 loose leaf pages)

For Alto, Delmark, 1969

Double LP record

Matana Roberts

(b. 1975, Chicago; lives in New York)

always say your name, 2014

Collage, charcoal, and paint on cardboard

Courtesy of the artist

Saxophonist and composer Matana Roberts creates collage-like scores that are meant to be interpreted musically. A Chicago native who was involved with the AACM early in her career, Roberts now lives in New York, where she has developed a distinctive research-based practice as a composer and visual artist.

Roberts's multifaceted projects are often based on travel to sites of personal and historical significance in the United States; her experiences then shape new compositions and visual scores that include historical photographs or photographs Roberts captured while on the road. Her work hints at the diversity of today's improvised music while also reminding us of jazz's roots in everyday life.

Wadada Leo Smith

(b. 1941, Leland, MS; lives in Los Angeles)

Multi America, 2000

Mixed media on paper

Courtesy of the artist

AACM member Wadada Leo Smith was an early adopter of unconventional musical notation. In this regard, Smith's *Multi America* looks less like a traditional score and more like a drawing. It develops from its own kind of logic, and each performer is meant to interpret the score as he or she wishes in order to create a unique performance each time the piece is played.

Smith was concerned with the political and spiritual aspirations of the civil rights struggle and ensuing black self-determination movements, which were defining influences on the forward-looking jazz of the 1960s and early 1970s. With its title, this score from 2000 suggests his continued interest in issues of nationhood and multiplicity.

Wadada Leo Smith

(b. 1941, Leland, MS; lives in Los Angeles)

Light Upon Light, Tzadik Records, 1990

Compact disc

The Great Lakes Suite, TUM Records, 2014

Compact disc

Nick Cave

(b. 1959, Fulton, MO; lives in Chicago)

Speak Louder, 2011

Mixed media, including black mother-of-pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, metal armature, and mannequins

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Speak Louder is a prime example of Nick Cave's Sound Suits, which are either worn in performance as elaborate costumes or exhibited on their own as sculptures. Cave, who is a professor of fashion design at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, combines art and performance in ways that echo the vivid example of the city's experimental musicians in the 1960s and 1970s.

The installation consists of seven figures covered in silvery buttons and joined to each other to form a single organism. Capable of making noise, Cave's horn-like suits remain static and mute when on display, as if waiting for the invitation to interpret the musical scores around them. The work's title, *Speak Louder*, adds further meaning: it instructs, or perhaps demands, with great political urgency.

Visual and Performing Arts

The 1960s were the beginning of a fertile period for interactions between the visual and performing arts on the South Side of Chicago. For many participants, music and dance programs in schools and churches had been an entry point for their creative careers. Emerging from this context, visual artists went on to play in bands, while musicians made paintings and sculptures. Combinations of visual art and music also turned up in theater, film, and other creative forms.

An exchange between the visual and performing arts shapes many of the works in this exhibition. Visual artists use video as a medium to reinterpret musical performances or recordings. Musical composers create sound notations that look like paintings. A number of sculptures generate sound and incorporate musical instruments. Other artworks meditate on silence. Whether completed by one person or through collaboration, all the artworks exude a spirit of experimentation, encompass collective investigation, or incorporate improvisation—three principles that were essential in the 1960s and continue to inform the work of interdisciplinary artists drawn to this legacy.

Jennie C. Jones

(b. 1968, Cincinnati; lives in New York)

Quiet Gray with Red Reverberation #2, 2014

Acoustic absorber panel and acrylic paint on canvas

Collection of Gary and Denise Gardner

Vertical into Decrescendo (dark), 2014

Acoustic absorber panel and acrylic paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

In paintings such as *Quiet Gray with Red Reverberation #2* and *Vertical into Decrescendo (dark)*, Jennie C. Jones translates musical elements into physical form while also updating the geometric, hard-edged painting of the 1960s. *Quiet Gray with Red Reverberation #2* suggests a reverberation of sound, seen as the reflected glow of red paint on the wall. *Vertical into Decrescendo (dark)* indicates a decrease in volume, as represented by a dark downward slope.

These works are part of an ongoing series in which Jones incorporates acoustic absorbers into her paintings. She uses materials designed to muffle sound more commonly found in recording studios and concert halls than in artworks. While Jones's explorations of music are silent, she encourages people to notice how the quality of the sound you hear changes as you approach the works.

Terry Adkins

(b. 1953, Washington DC; d. 2014, New York)

Native Son (Circus), 2006–15

Cymbals with magnets/electronics

Courtesy of The Estate of Terry Adkins, Salon 94, New York

Native Son (Circus) is an element from one of artist Terry Adkins's "recitals," research-based tributes to historic African American figures. This piece, which Adkins conceptualized before he died, is part of a recital for the great improvisational saxophonist Charlie Parker. Each cymbal in the group is magnetized so that if one moves, the entire cluster vibrates as if it were a living organism.

The relationship between visual art and music deeply informed Adkins's work. Adkins has noted that Emilio Cruz, who collaborated with the AACM, was a formative influence. Cruz's sculpture *Untitled*, also on view in the exhibition, partially inspired *Native Son (Circus)*. In turn, Adkins mentored younger artists, such as Sanford Biggers, whose *Ghetto Bird Tunic* (also on view) Adkins once wore in a performance that Biggers staged.

Sanford Biggers

(b. 1970, Los Angeles; lives in New York)

Ghetto Bird Tunic, 2006

Bubble jacket and bird feathers

Courtesy of David Castillo Gallery, Miami

The *Ghetto Bird Tunic* is at once a sculpture and a costume made of layered feathers. It takes its cue from masquerade and carnival traditions. A wearer's identity is hidden yet powerfully transformed by the elaborate plumage. Terry Adkins, whose work is also included in this exhibition, wore Biggers's creation in a performance in 2009.

Biggers draws from a wide range of cultural sources, including Zen Buddhism, African American history, hip-hop, and jazz in order to expand the borders of fine art. A musician as well as an artist, he currently performs with Moon Medicin, an improvisatory sound-and-video collective.

Black Cultural Nationalism

The late 1960s and the 1970s transformed the political landscape of the United States, not least of all for African Americans. During this time, those who grew impatient with the civil rights movement turned toward Black Power, which ushered in a more radical rhetoric concerning race relations in America and the world. In this context of radicalization, many artists were dedicated to the idea that the arts are crucial to struggles for liberation. Galvanized by the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, poet and playwright Amiri Baraka and others launched the Black Arts Movement in New York. Artists and writers produced politically charged works that explored the African American experience. In Chicago, artists such as those in the AfriCOBRA collective explicitly linked art to the prospect of social change. They created portraits of activists like Angela Davis and represented scenes of black unity and protest. These artists filled paintings and prints with vivid color and dynamic patterns, creating new visual strategies for a new cultural era.

Today, the merging of political consciousness and art has taken on different forms, but artists continue to respond inventively to changing times. Some of them adopt a critical distance as they look back at earlier moments of radical action. They offer elegant tributes to—or loving parodies of—the music, manifestos, and graphic designs that shaped the era of Black Power. Other artists reimagine familiar symbols like the American flag to raise questions about inclusion and nationhood. These more recent works are not resounding rallying cries like the prints of AfriCOBRA; instead they are more ambivalent reflections on contemporary society and its predicaments. Nevertheless, they still imply a belief in the political possibilities of experimental art and the value of improvised responses to the culture at large.

Jamal Cyrus

(b. 1973, Houston; lives in Houston)

DMFD—6 Minutes Till Nation Time !!!, *Pride Catalog* #2217, 2005

The Dowling Street Martyr Brigade—Towards a Walk in the Sun, *Pride Catalog* #2235, 2005

Running with Polaris—Self-Titled Album (extended play 45), *Pride Catalog* #1030, 2005

Sharhonda & The Black Stone Queens—Me, My Shining Prince, and The Deep Black Sea (extended play 45), *Pride Catalog* #1042, 2005

Uhuru Splatter—The Visions of the African Mystics, *Pride Catalog* #2309, 2005

South Detroit Children's Choir—we are the black seeds of a brighter tomorrow, *Pride Catalog* #1051, 2005

Shaniqua Hameed—Shaniqua Hameed Sings the ABCs of Revolution, *Pride Catalog* #1052, 2005

Collage on paper

All works courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston

Jamal Cyrus's collages are imaginary album covers released by a fictional 1970s record label that he invented: Pride Records. Riffing on the graphic design and radical language of forty years ago, these works emphasize the mix of music making and black politics that marked the time period.

Cyrus mines the history of black radicalism as a source for his art, but he does not simply return to the past—he reinvents it. He uses or references found material to express an exaggerated, but plausible, vision of the past that is relevant to the present.

Jamal Cyrus

(b. 1973, Houston, TX; lives in Houston)

Cultr-Ops, 2008

Graphite powder on paper

Mentuhotep, 2008/2015

Graphite powder on paper

Both works courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston

Jamal Cyrus's large-scale graphite drawings are based on the files the FBI maintained on black radicals through its controversial surveillance program, COINTELPRO. Cyrus started with redacted documents concerning figures such as Malcolm X and removed all the text, leaving behind only the marks the FBI used to conceal information.

Cyrus also incorporates other cultural references. *Cultr-Ops*, for instance, recalls unconventional musical notation styles created by AACM members Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton, whose scores are in the exhibition. In addition to working as a solo artist, Cyrus is also a member of the Houston-based artist collective Otabenga Jones and Associates.

Nari Ward

(b. 1963, St. Andrews, Jamaica; lives in New York)

We The People, 2011

Shoelaces

In collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

Exhibition copy

Nari Ward's *We The People* renders the famous opening words of the US Constitution in dripping shoelaces embedded directly into the wall. Ward enlarged the iconic script lettering of the original text to give it a monumental or heroic presence. Viewed up close, however, it becomes a mass of dripping color. Only from afar do the shoelaces read as coherent text.

Ward perhaps suggests that inclusive democracy in the United States—the full making of “a people”—must be judged from multiple perspectives. By spelling out “We The People” in shoelaces, Ward also links the elevated language and ideals of the Constitution to materials from everyday life.

Renée Green

(b. 1959, Cleveland; lives in Boston)

Space Poem #3 (Media Bicho), 2012

Polyester nylon and thread; 34 double-sided banners

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Renée Green's *Space Poem #3 (Media Bicho)* presents a set of colorful banners, each featuring a brief phrase. She borrowed the words primarily from political tracts, literary texts, or music lyrics. One line, "A power stronger than itself," is the slogan of the AACM.

The installation creates a poem in space that evokes utopian social ideas and political possibilities. Suspended high in the air, the banners may bring to mind a series of flags or a parade. The arrangement allows multiple meanings to emerge from the phrases as viewers see them from varying angles and in different orders.

Rashid Johnson

(b. 1977, Chicago; lives in New York)

Roscoe's Target, 2014

Burned red oak flooring, black soap, wax, spray enamel, vinyl, plant, shea butter, and books

Courtesy of the artist

Rashid Johnson's *Roscoe's Target* is, in part, a tribute to AACM member Roscoe Mitchell. Strategically positioned in the work's center is a copy of the album *Sound*, recorded by the Roscoe Mitchell Sextet in 1966 and released by Chicago's legendary Delmark Records. The album's design and placement within the sculpture make it appear like a target within the work.

Born in 1977, Johnson cites the heyday of Afrocentric culture in the 1960s and 1970s as a formative influence on his art when he was growing up in the Chicago area. His artworks often incorporate records, books, and other references from that time period into objects that are hybrids of painting and sculpture.

Charles Gaines

(b. 1944, Charleston, SC; lives in Los Angeles)

***Manifestos 2*, 2013**

Four-channel video (color, sound; 64 minutes) and four graphite drawings on Rising Barrier paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Jill and Peter Kraus, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and The Friends of Education of The Museum of Modern Art, 2013.

Music composed by Charles Gaines and arranged by Sean Griffin and Opera Povera

Music and politics intermingle in Charles Gaines's *Manifestos 2*, an installation that consists of four large hand-drawn scores, a four-screen video, and a corresponding soundtrack. In this work, the artist transformed four major political manifestos into music, using a rules-based system to change the texts into a sonic composition: he converted every letter into a musical note to generate a new piece of music that was then performed by a chamber orchestra.

The scores derive from four of the most influential manifestos in the history of the civil rights struggle: Malcolm X's last public speech, in 1965; a manifesto on behalf of indigenous populations, written in 1999 by Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred; the outline for a new sociopolitical ideology, written by Raúl Alcaraz and Daniel Carrillo in 2010—based on the experiences of undocumented people in the United States; and a seminal pamphlet declaring the rights of women, written by French activist Olympe De Gouges in 1791.

Cauleen Smith

(b. 1967, Riverside, CA; lives in Chicago)

Little Instruments, 2015

Multi-channel video (color, sound), stereo speakers, wood tables, CCTV camera, kusamono, and found objects

Courtesy of the artist

Cauleen Smith's installation *Little Instruments* uses a closed circuit TV camera to generate a live video feed of an array of small objects, all of which she presents in front of a green screen backdrop. This rudimentary mechanism—set up in plain sight—yields a cinematic projection that creates a psychedelic landscape that can also serve as an imagined space for contemplation.

Smith's installation is partially inspired by the musicians of the AACM and their practice of making their own "little instruments"—or homemade sound-making devices. She also looked to early video art, especially the improvisation and live recordings that characterized the audio-visual work of artists such as Nam June Paik.

Anri Sala

(b. 1974, Tirana, Albania; lives in Berlin)

Long Sorrow, 2005

HD video (color, sound) transferred from Super 16 mm film

12 minutes, 57 seconds

Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Johnen + Schottle, Berlin, Cologne, Munich; Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London; and Galerie Chantel Crousel, Paris.

The musical performance at the center of Anri Sala's *Long Sorrow* features Chicago-born free jazz horn player Jemeel Moondoc, whom the artist filmed playing an improvised sax solo while suspended in mid-air outside the top-floor window of an apartment building on the outskirts of Berlin.

The title of Sala's video recalls the nickname given to this particular building by its residents: "The Long Sorrow." This apartment block became an icon of postwar urban planning that, for many residents and critics, did not live up to its aspirations. As such, both the original composition and Sala's video seem to convey a sense of lost utopianism and social idealism.

The Otolith Group

(founded in London by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar, 2002)

People to be Resembling, 2012

HD video (color, sound)

21 minutes, 42 seconds

Courtesy of the Otolith Group, Project88, Mumbai, and LUX, London

Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar are the members of the Otolith Group. They describe *People to be Resembling* as “a five-sided portrait” of the post-free jazz trio Codona. Reimagining the band’s recording process for their self-titled 1978 debut album, the film essay takes an experimental form, combining moving and still images, and integrating both archival footage and newly recorded material. It also is an homage to Jean-Luc Godard’s 1968 film *Sympathy for the Devil (One Plus One)*, which intertwines a Rolling Stones recording session with footage of social activists such as the Black Panthers.

Featuring original music by Charles Hayward and excerpts from a novel by Gertrude Stein, the video weaves together music, literature, film, photography, and dance. An homage to the art of listening and the interplay of different creative forms, *People to be Resembling* also hints at a larger political context. In the artists’ own words, the film becomes “a meditation upon the relations between visual anthropology, anticolonial choreography, nuclear annihilation, and *Weltmusik* (world music).”