Exhibition Overview

Drum Listens to Heart: Part I is the first part of a three-part exhibition. The series brings together an international roster of artists presenting works in a variety of media to explore rhythm, pulse, music, cultural history, healing, power, freedom, and control.

About Drum Listens to Heart

This exhibition, along with the accompanying performances and programming, weaves together various forms of percussion—physical and socio-political, literal and metaphorical. Together, the works juxtapose instances of physical impact and vibration with forms of command, emancipation, and community-building.

Drum Listens to Heart is centered around an action foundational to human existence: to strike an object against another. The simple act of beating is not only a tool for fabrication and mark-making, but also for oppression and control—to strike or to beat down. In opposition, the beat has also been used as a means to break free, to express independence, and to establish language in the face of oppression. Without needing words or images, the percussive can threaten forms of authority and voice a powerful demand for freedom.

For Reference

Source: merriam-webster.com/dictionary/

“Percussion”: per·cus·sion | \pər-ˈkə-shən
1: the act of percussing: such as
   a: the striking of a percussion cap so as to set off the charge in a firearm
   b: the beating or striking of a musical instrument
   c: the act or technique of tapping the surface of a body part to learn the condition ‘of the parts beneath by the resultant sound
2: the striking of sound on the ear
3: percussion instruments that form a section of a band or orchestra

“Polyrhythmic”: poly·rhythm | \ˈpä-lē-ˌrith-mə \n1: the simultaneous combination of contrasting rhythms in music
→ About the Artists

Part I Artists:

Luke Anguhadluq, (b. 1895, Tariunnuaq [Chantrey Inlet], Canada; d. 1982, Qamani’tuaq [Baker Lake], Canada)

The work of artist and printmaker Luke Anguhadluq represents scenes of hunting, social gathering, and drum dancing in Qamani’tuaq, Nunavut (also known as Baker Lake, Canada). Moving away from linear narrative, his work shows scenes as if they are seen from all sides at once, and conveys the social and spiritual significance of drumming in his community.

Marcos Ávila Forero (b. 1983, Paris, France)

Atrato, 2014
Single-channel HD video, color, sound, 13 minutes 52 seconds

Atrato shows a group of Afro-Colombians standing together in a river in Northwestern Colombia, learning tambor de agua, or water drumming. Working together with anthropologists, the artist reintroduced the group to this traditional practice of communication through rhythmic language. The practice had once served as a coded form of communication brought to the Americas by enslaved ancestors, but had been forgotten or erased in the years since European domination.
Raven Chacon (b. 1977, Fort Defiance)

*American Ledger No. 1*, 2022
Performance score on flag, dimensions variable.

*American Ledger No. 1* visually mimics the layout of the American flag. The score it presents is based on the story of the founding of the United States, including moments of contact, violence, building, erasure, destruction, and rebirth. Two versions of the piece are presented on an army blanket and a flag: material symbols of state hostility. Chacon’s score suggests that stories, like music, do not have to be told in the same way forever. Within notation there is room to reconsider, reinterpret, and revolutionize.

Em’kal Eyongakpa
(b. 1981, Manyu, Cameroons)

*batu kɛnɔŋ XII-rh/ babhi-berat XII-r* [babhi-manyɛp/ babhi-bawɛt, (mbaŋ)], 2022
10-channel sound installation: poly-rhythmic beat generators, electronic interfaces, ammunition boxes embedded with pulsation devices, wood chips, mycelium based sound baffles, dimensions variable.

Em’kal Eyongakpa’s multimedia environment draws on his background in botany and applied mycology. Eyongakpa uses sounds and fuses organic matter, like soil and fungi, with human debris, including yarn and oil barrels. The artist creates paths for the visitor through the installation, emphasizing listening, smell, and sixth sense over vision.
Milford Graves (b. 1941, Queens, NY; d. 2021, Queens, NY)

Pathways of Infinite Possibilities: Yara, 2017
Wood, metal brackets, copper wire, plastic medical figures, artifacts, medical heart specimen, wooden model hand, religious figurine, water element, printed labels, lights, stones, glue, amplifier, speaker, metal brackets, casters, 88 ½ x 38 ¼ x 33 ½ in.

The name of this exhibition comes from an element in one of Milford Graves’ included works. The late percussionist tried to understand the drum by studying the heart. To do so, he would hook people up to a homemade EKG machine, process the recording through a self-produced algorithm, and chart the data in a complex system of measurements. In his later years, he made sculptures that brought together this sense of the scientific with his interest in spirituality, ritual, and a deep knowledge of percussive traditions. All bodies are drums, he would say, each one playing at the speed of its own heart, and all drums are bodies, each one made of a skin that vibrates differently.

Susan Howe (b.1937, Boston) & David Grubbs (b.1967, Louisville)

Concordance page 82, 2022 (detail of collage)
Represented in the exhibition by letterpress prints, 6 x ½ x 8 ¾ in. each.

Susan Howe finds rhythm in found language and inserts a break within the beat of language. Pages from her poetry collection Concordance consist of collages made with found words. She collects this language from sources including Shakespeare, Emerson, Dickinson, nature field guides and legal documents. When read aloud, language starts, stops, sputters, and erupts again, in percussive rhythms. Single pages of poetry are turned into one-minute recordings she made with the musician David Grubbs. These are played every fifteen minutes throughout the duration of all three chapters of the exhibition.
Barry Le Va (1941-2021, Long Beach)

Sculptures by Barry Le Va, made between 1968 and 1971, consist of a stack of glass sheets and the simple instruction to deliver a blow to each pane with a sledgehammer, causing them to shatter into a polyrhythmic composition.

Rose Lowder (b.1941, Peru)

For Les Tournesols Rose Lowder filmed a field of sunflowers and then physically cut the 16mm film strip, rearranging and reordering individual frames. This intervention transforms the flowers’ natural swaying movement into a jittery, palpitating rhythm, resulting in a vibrating pastoral landscape as though the flowers are raving, lost in a trance, in their sunny field.
Lee Lozano (1930-1999, Newark)

The large “triple hammer” painting by Lee Lozano is a polyrhythmic strike, with many moments of impact occurring at once. In this series of paintings, Lozano made grandiose representations of tools society sees as ordinary: hammers, wrenches, and screws, all depicted in huge, sweeping strokes.

![Lee Lozano, Untitled, 1963, Oil on canvas, 65 x 80 in.](image)

Harold Mendez (b.1977, Chicago)

*but I sound better since you cut my throat*, 2016
Reclaimed galvanized steel, wood, chain link fence

Harold Mendez titled this piece after a poem by cultural theorist, poet, and scholar Fred Moten. Mendez found this fencepost near his former studio in Houston. The post reads like the spine of a body stripped down to its barest support, with a fragment of a tree attached to it like a heart once beating, now rendered still.

![Harold Mendez, but I sound better since you cut my throat, 2016, Reclaimed galvanized steel, wood, chain link fence](image)
**Davina Semo** (b.1981, Washington DC)

*Erode*, 2021

Cast aluminum, patinated solid bronze clapper, hemp shibari rope, leather cord, powder-coated galvanized steel chain, powder coated stainless steel hardware, 20 x 9 ½ in., overall dimensions variable.

Ringing bells can announce anything from the mundane to the monumental. While bells are usually kept out of reach to maintain a sense of reliability and purpose, the artist places these at arm’s length, inviting visitors to ring them at any time, for any reason. Semo gives visitors the agency to determine what, why, how, and when a call is to be issued. The interactive sculptures break “gallery etiquette” in favor of interactivity and collective experience.

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**Michael E. Smith** (b. 1977, Detroit)

*Untitled*, 2018

Sweatshirt, laser

This sculpture involves a black sweater hanging gingerly on the wall as a red laser beam bounces up and down between its crew neck and torso. The metronome-like laser beam seems to provide an artificial heartbeat to the sweater.
→ Recommended Questions for Discussion

Before your visit…

1. What does percussion mean to you? What comes to mind when you first hear this word?
2. What are forms of percussion that you interact with everyday?
3. Can you think of any examples of percussion that are:
   - Physical
   - Social
   - Political
   - Literal
   - Metaphorical?

During your visit…

1. How do you experience the artworks included in the exhibition as expressing the percussive?
2. Which works challenge your conception of percussion?
3. How do the different works of art, mediums, and artists in the show respond, correlate, harmonize, or repercuss with one another?

After your visit…

5. How has your perception of percussion changed?
6. Which of the artworks motivated you to think about the percussive as a social or political concept?
7. After considering the artworks included in the exhibition, can you think of an example of anything in another artwork or in everyday life that is a metaphorical example of the percussive?
→ Related Programming

Live music performances (curated by Diego Villalobos):

October 29, 3pm: Raven Chacon (meet at Wattis)
October 29, 4:30pm: Karen Stackpole and Gino Robair (Wattis)
November 26, 10pm: Nkisi (at The Lab)
December 17, 8pm: Moor Mother Ensemble (at The Lab)
January 21, 8pm: Ikue Mori, William Winant, Valentina Magaletti, and NOMON (at The Lab)
February 25, 8pm: Raven Chacon and Music Research Strategies (at The Lab)

Lectures, screenings, and other events:

September 28, 6pm: Bang on a Can: a lecture by exhibition curator Anthony Huberman
November 11, 6pm: an audio-visual presentation by April and Lance Ledbetter, the creators of Dust to Digital and its popular social media channel featuring musical practices from around the world.
December 8, 6pm: Pots and Pans: a lecture about protest and the politics of percussion by the drummer and scholar Daniel Akira Stadnicki.
Date TBD: The Rhythms of Injyana: an online lecture about the work of Rwandan philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana by the artist Christian Nyampeta.

→ Upcoming Parts of the Exhibition

_Drum Listens to Heart Part II: November 9–December 17, 2022_

Opening Wednesday, November 9

Part II artists: Francis Alÿs, Raven Chacon, Theaster Gates, Susan Howe & David Grubbs, The Otolith Group, Lucy Raven
Drum Listens to Heart Part III: January 17–March 4, 2023
Opening Tuesday, January 17

Part III artists: Raven Chacon, Trisha Donnelly, David Hammons, Consuelo Tupper Hernández, Susan Howe & David Grubbs, NIC Kay, Guadalupe Maravilla, Rie Nakajima, Haegue Yang, David Zink Yi

→ A Syllabus for Drum Listens to Heart

Listening to Percussion


The Percussive as a Drum


**The Percussion as a Spirit**


**Percussion is Political**


Moten, Fred. *In the Break*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. ***


**Ensembling**


Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2021)


