Drum Listens to Heart: Part II
Curated by Anthony Huberman
Organized by Diego Villalobos
CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art
Part II: November 9 - December 17, 2022

→ Exhibition Overview

Drum Listens to Heart: Part II is the second part of a three-part exhibition, and this part presents several video-based works. The series brings together an international roster of artists exploring 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-ˌri-thəm
1: the simultaneous combination of contrasting rhythms in music
→ About the Artists

Part II Artists:

Francis Alÿs,
(b. 1959, Antwerp, Belgium)

*Guards* opens with a scene of a single British Guard pacing through the streets of London. This soldier is joined by a second, who magnetically “snaps into formation” with him. They attract more and more soldiers as they march through the city, eventually uniting sixty-four soldiers. Bit by bit, the *polyrhythms* of independent bodies are transformed into a single meter of a military march.

*Guards*, 2004
Installation composed of Guards, single channel video projection, 30 min, color, sound; and Shoeshine, annex video on monitor, 32:49 min (loop), color, sound.

Raven Chacon (b. 1977, Fort Defiance)

This piece visually mimics the layout of the American flag. It presents a *score*, or an arrangement or plan for making a piece of music or a performance. This score is based on the story of the founding of the United States, including moments of contact, violence, building, erasure, destruction, and rebirth. 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.
Theaster Gates (b. 1973, Chicago, USA)

This video is set in a debris-filled church. The St. Laurence Catholic Church once stood on the South Side of Chicago, where the artist Theaster Gates has centered his work as an urban planner. He also leads a musical ensemble called The Black Monks. Their voices fill the sanctuary in this video, accompanied by the sound of a mournful cello. During their performance, they flip heavy broken doors. These crash to the ground with resounding thuds, reanimating the abandoned church with raw percussive force.

The Otolith Group
(Founded 2002, London, UK)

This video opens with a male actor reading a speech. The address was originally delivered at Northwestern University by a composer and musician, Julius Eastman. The musical compositions he would perform that night have controversial titles—Crazy N*****, Evil N*****, and Gay Guerrilla. The speech addresses his reasons for giving these titles. After the actor finishes reading, four pianists begin playing Eastman’s works. They sit at shiny black baby grand pianos as though they are behind the control board of a spaceship. The four pianists are the “Gay Guerrillas” Eastman discussed in his speech: queer fighters from the future who give courage and fortitude as we face continued horrors including disease and police violence.
Lucy Raven (b. 1977, Tucson, USA)

Made with hundreds of still photographs, this stop motion animation records a musical performance. Avant-garde musician Earle Brown’s 1963 composition “Calder Piece,” is meant to be performed using one of sculptor Alexander Calder’s famous mobiles as an instrument. The hanging sculpture moves and rotates each time one of the percussionists strikes it. Brown conceived of the object not only as an instrument but also as a conductor, with its movements providing indications to the performers about what to play next. Raven’s animation amplifies the jerky, jostling score.

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

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 poetry and literature, 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.
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. Part II of this exhibition includes several video-based works. How do they relate to each other? How do the different works of art 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):

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:

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.

January 26, time tbd: Josiah Luis Alderete curates a night of poetry readings, exploring the poetics of percussion and how language can expand a beat.

February 16, time tbd: Anthropologist Pascale Boucicaut organizes a meditation on percussion and Caribbean spirituality.

→ Upcoming Parts of the Exhibition

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


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Percussion is Political


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

Moten, Fred. *Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. ***

Moten, Fred. *Stolen Life (consent not to be a single being)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. ***


