



DC SHINES!
July 7-31,
2025

Katzen Rotunda



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

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From the Curators

The ability of the artist to maintain an arts practice — and indeed, a reasonable living situation — has often been dependent on public funding. Until very recently, such funding has considered the ability of the artist or supporting organization or gallery to produce or oversee the production of a body of work that is available to the public. That distinction separates tax exempt organizations creating or supporting work for the public good, from private organizations supporting work for their own enjoyment or benefit; either of whose own opinions and morals determine which artists and artwork they will support. Rather than a new concept, this is age old, conceding that it was royalty, nobility, and ecclesiastical institutions that bought the work of, generously sponsored and supported artists from medieval times on until the present century, because they had the money to so support. In our present world, galleries, residencies, and fellowships, hold space and op

portunity for artists as well.

In a democracy, where public foundations are beholden to the wishes of its constituency, all people should be represented by art in public places available for public viewing. Thus, we are particularly grateful for not only the PEF Grant by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCAH) for funding DC Shines, but for their acceptance and support that the artists represented in this first exhibition under the auspices of Art Lantern, reflect the community DCCAH serves, the community members' history, ethnicities and culture.

Two of these artists are new to us, while we have long- followed the other two. Part of the role curators play is building a space for artworks and artists, to form a community. We look to Aziza's painted and printed language, made of glyphs appropriated from myths and stories of various African communities. We look to the Artist Oliver James'

prints of proud African American women writers, whose work has inspired this community and generations of other communities. We look at Steve Wanna's abstract sculptures, tall, light and reaching for the sky, for a vision of what we must all look up to and that importantly epitomize community by "requiring performers to add something of their own creativity beyond their basic interpretation and that keep", as he writes, "unfolding", in the presence and interpretation of the viewer. We see Jarrett Arnold's portraits and figurative paintings and dive through his process from drawings of their-

sides of people, the bones and nerves and muscular fibers, all the same across humankind, but different on the outside, as we consider what we are made of, not only what appears to others.

I am so proud of these artists and their ability to portray the important aspects of the people that make up their community. We welcome all of you to consider and learn from their work, but most of all, to enjoy it, at the Katzen Art Center's Rotunda at American University.

Elizabeth Ashe & Nancy Nesvet,
Co-Curators



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

Art Lantern Inc. received a FY2025 Projects, Events, and Festivals Grant, funded by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities to curate "DC Shines".

Claudia Aziza Gibson-Hunter

I am a mixed-media artist, arts organizer, and educator. As a narrative abstractionist, my work records and portrays stories using symbols, metaphor, color, texture, pattern, and forms. Originally from Philadelphia, I attended Temple University, graduating with a B.S. in art education. I continued my education to complete an MFA in printmaking at Howard University. Drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, and papermaking are combined while moving between 2D and 3D work. The production of my work is blended with teaching, organizing, and supporting fellow creatives. The stories in my work are interwoven with my lived experience, research, and imagination. Community is essential, for without my family, creative community, and the legacy of being a person of the African diaspora, the substance of my work would lose its spirit. Documentation of Black visual culture for future generations is paramount to me. It has prompted me to work with various ar-

chives, educational institutions, and artist groups to improve the recording of Black visual culture and the artists that produce it. My work can be found in many homeless shelters, hospitals, senior facilities, and schools in Washington, DC, supporting my belief that art is for all people and can transform what could be sterile environments into more compassionate spaces. Washington DC's permanent collection, the American Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia, the Boston Children's Hospital, Price Waterhouse Cooper, and the Library of Congress are spaces where my works on paper and paintings can be seen. As the co-founder of Black Artists of DC and an active member of several art collectives, including Women of an Undetermined Age, Dandelion Black Women Artists Collective, Where We At, and TRUTH, I support artists working together and sharing. I am particularly proud of my work with other female creatives, as our bonds and support systems

have been life-changing. It is my hope that my work will continue to be exhibited nationally and

internationally. I currently live in Washington, DC.



Untitled #1, acrylic and glaze on canvas

Process

I begin most of my work with a dioxane purple background. In this case, I have used relief printing to begin my image on the background with white gesso



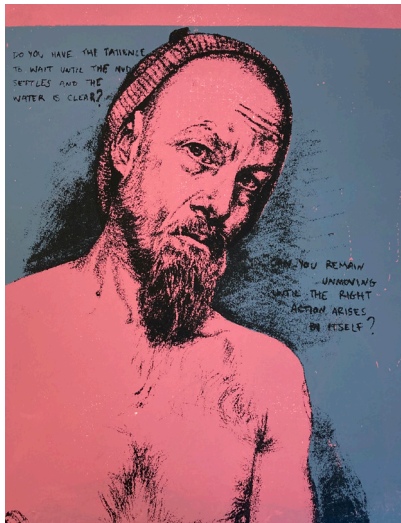
I begin to simplify and develop the composition of the work using thin glazes of acrylic paint to block in colors. Next is the process of glazing some forms back into the background while letting some of the original dioxane purple stay. I am also using colored pencils to color and make marks on the forms, covering the marks with matt medium glazes.

mixed with mat medium. I continue to print and use thin glazes of acrylic paint to block in colors.

Spray paint is used to add texture to the work. There is a continual build up of glazes as the composition takes shape and forms are added and subtracted. More layers of paint and colored pencil are added. Over 20 layers of thin glazes of paint are layered to develop the imagery



Jarrett Arnold



I turned 50 years old on July 22nd, 2024. I grew up in Georgia, and I have been serious about making art since my father died of ALS in 1990 when I was 16 years old. I walked the 2,200 miles of the Appalachian Trail in 1998 and completed two cross-continental bike tours in 2000 and 2001. I hold bachelor's and advanced degrees in studio art, biology, and education from The University of Georgia (BFA), The University of Oregon (BS) (MEd), and American University (MFA). I married the love of my life, Jaylene, in 2003, and I have two adult children, Bodhi and Shashi. I taught high school physics, chemistry, and biology for twelve years in Oregon and DC, and art at Magruder High School last year. I also taught classes on various topics at the University of Oregon and American University. I currently live in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and recently accepted a job as a Science and Math teacher at Oneness Family Montessori High School in Kensington, Maryland.

The daily notes, sketches, paintings, and poems I record in my sketchbooks form the center of my artistic practice. I use found, abandoned, and discarded objects and materials, and I work in all physical mediums. It is important to me that I transform discarded materials into art. I am cleaning up the world while I create, and the detritus of life finds its way into the work. I let chance initiate many of my images, and each drawing and painting I create is a portrait of the moments in time that lead to now, combined with the properties of the materials I use.

More often than not, I do not plan my pieces. I allow them to take shape while occasionally responding to them. I also spend time practicing observational drawing, painting, and sculpting from life, and I include realistic elements in my pieces. I started working this way in 1994 when I created two pieces on 36" x 48" canvases by repeatedly exposing the pieces

(Left to right) *Patience #3*, 11"x14," screenprint on paper, 2023, You must risk something that matters, 30"x30," mixed media on reclaimed canvas, 2024, *How to disappear completely*, 48"x60," mixed media and oil on reclaimed canvas, 2024, *We are stardust*, 48"x60," mixed media and oil on canvas, 2024, *Nothing she wants*, 46"x30," mixed media on reclaimed cardboard, 2024.

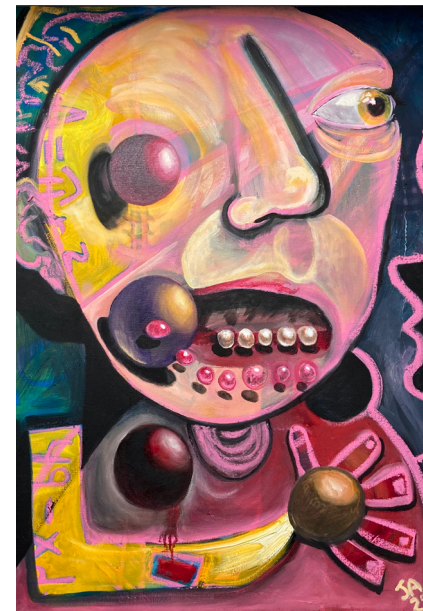
to chaotic events. I even threw them in the street and let vehicles run them over, I threw paint at them, and I waited for subsequent layers to dry until images emerged. The first of these was called "Satan's where the hats hang," and the second was called "Journey," which I finished in 1996. During this process, I discovered a lot about painting and image creation, but I also learned a lot about myself and how I felt about the world around me. This process was exciting and experimental, and allowed the world to enter the work.

Before I started working this way, my primary goal was to reproduce reality with fidelity while retaining the aspects of a painting. As I have continued to grow older and experienced intermittent success with realistic rendering, the appeal of realism for me has declined. Painting realistically involves

a formulaic process. After building my own formula to make a realistic drawing or painting in various media, I found that I could succeed at making a realistic image if I followed the formula. This isn't very interesting to me and takes me a while to do. During this process, I often become bored and sometimes have to force myself to finish works made this way. I make art because I enjoy making it, so when I work this way, I lose the motivation to create. Though I still make quick, realistic studies to keep my hand and eye sharp, I rarely find the consistent joy in working realistically to sustain the creation of larger, more involved work.

Though every piece in this show was created the way that I prefer to work, loosely, energetically and chaotically combining elements from the detritus around me and whim and fancy, I have only included images

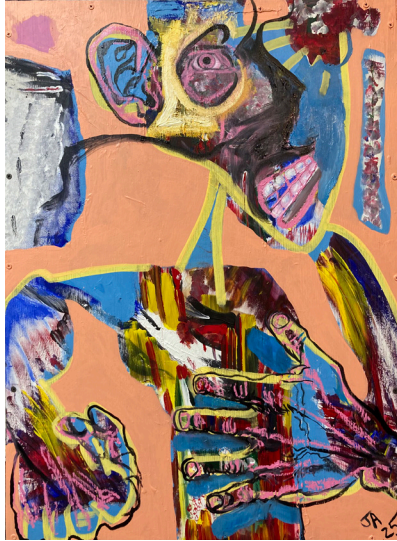
from the process involved in making "How to disappear completely again", a 48" x 60" reclaimed canvas which is one of the pieces in the show that took two and a half years to complete. I started it in November of 2021 and finished it in January of 2024. Because of the way that I work, the meaning behind each work is not entirely clear. I assign a title once finished but have no desire to interpret the meaning of the work for the viewer. The title is about what it has come to mean for me. Once a work is finished, I am more interested in what the work might mean to a viewer.



The integral of darkness, 24"x 30," mixed media and oil on reclaimed canvas, 2025



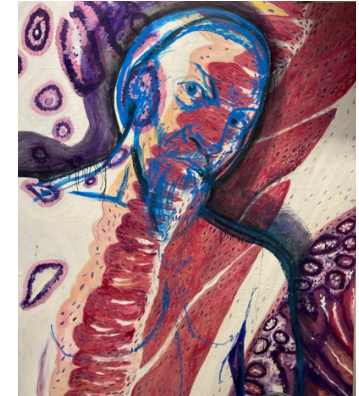
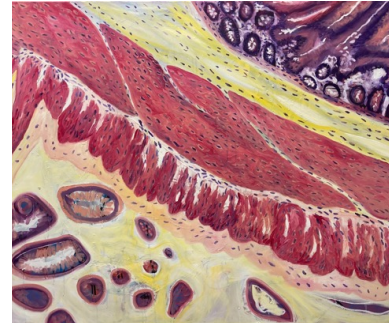
Small talk, 18"x24", mixed media on reclaimed cardboard, 2024



(Left to right) *Integration*, *the area under a curve*, collaboration with Nick Stares, 24"x33", mixed media on plywood panel, 2024, *Event 198*, *Horrible Feeling*, 28"x29", mixed media on reclaimed cardboard, 2024, *He's taking care of my dreams deferred*, 12"x16", oil on arches oil paper, 2022, *Death (from a print by Kather Kolwitz)*, 10"x15", mixed media on reclaimed cardboard, 2023

Process

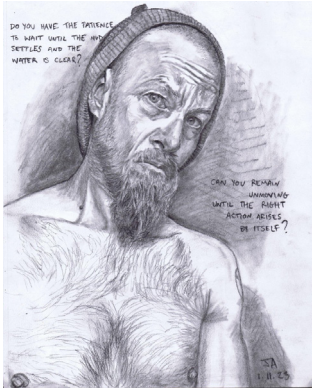
Figure 1: November 2021 - October 2022



The image at the top left was finished with spray paint and ferns in a park. I then decided it looked pretty biological and used an image of mammalian endometrial tissue in a micro-

scope to create the next two images. Then I turned the canvas to portrait orientation and began painting a self-portrait from a selfie I took in the bathroom over the top of that.

Figure 2: October 2022- November 2023



The top right image is a realistic charcoal drawing I made from the same selfie photo in my Sketchbook (Volume 65). I ran several series of screen prints based on this drawing. The next images show me refining the portrait image and then



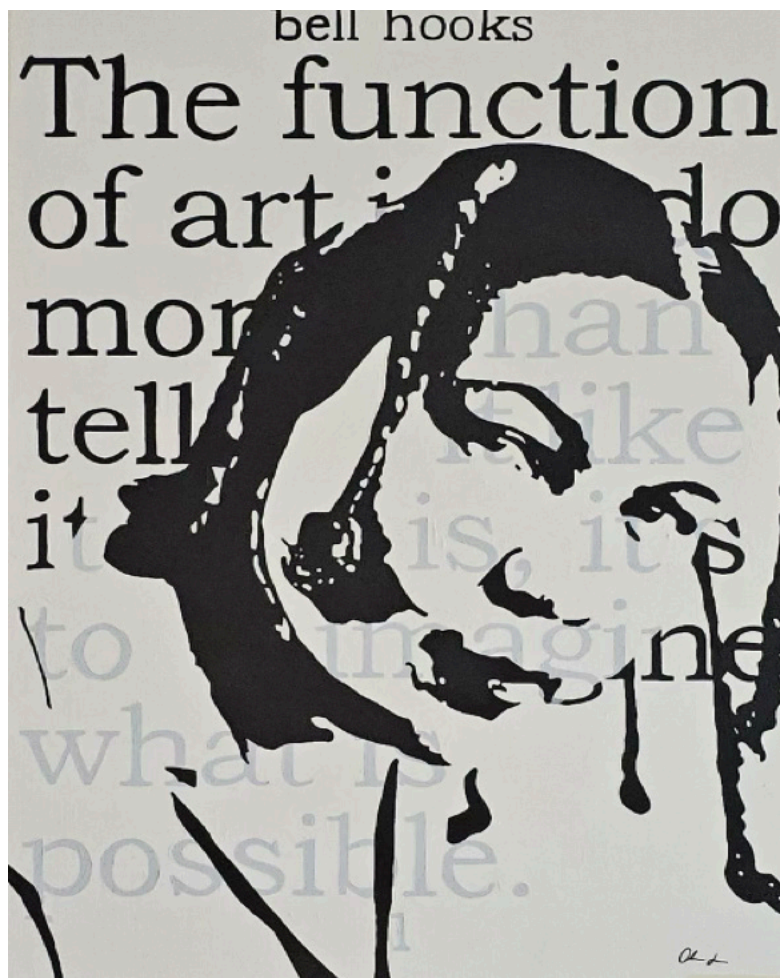
deciding to break it apart and obscure it again in the following months / year.

Figure 3: November 2023-January 2024



How to disappear completely (again), 48"x60," mixed media and oil on reclaimed canvas, 2024

Oliver “liv” James



bell hooks, 48" x 36," acrylic

I am a visual artist, muralist, and activist who has lived and worked in the DMV, Colorado, and Tampa Bay areas. Born in the DMV area, I spent my formative years moving from one place to the next, from D.C. to Denver and back a few times. I've always sought out other black women to learn from and found myself in constant communion with not only black women but also other men and women of color along the way.

I use my art to reflect not only my experience and my community's experience as a black woman, but also the experiences of other communities of color that I have and continue to engage with through my journey in life.

I have worked with organizations such as Greenpeace on Black social justice and climate change issues, NDN Collective on Black and Native Voting Rights, Students for a Free Tibet in their fight against CCP colonization, Future History Now, bringing the arts to underserved communities in the DMV area

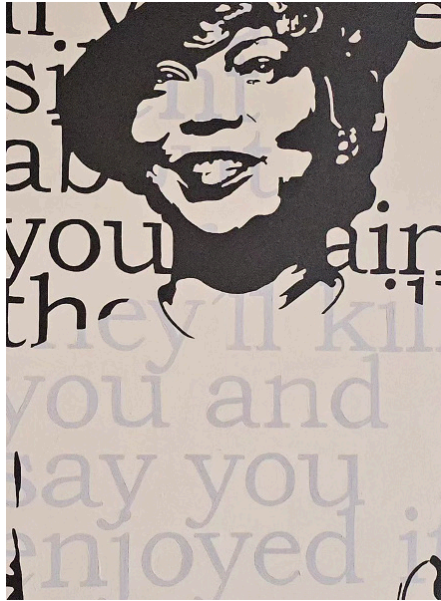
and Feeding Tampa Bay to aid in efforts to fight hunger.

It could be using one-layer stencil style portraits with pops of color to honor iconic civil rights activists, using three-layer grisaille or grey scale stencil style to represent the skin tones of children with culturally loud patterns in their clothing, or graphic design and messaging to create powerful action banners I am determined to use my art to reflect the change that I want to see in the world.

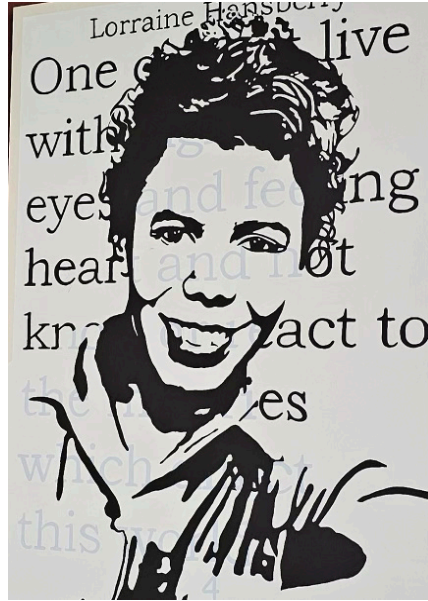
This series continues the original Oppression Fighters series, with Bell Hooks, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lorraine Hansberry joining the growing list of activists portrayed in one-layer stencil-style portraits. As books about BIPOC and LGBTQ communities and authors are being removed from schools, it's as important as ever to celebrate Black Female Authors. From Zora Neale Hurston, pioneer of African American ethnography, to Lorraine Hansberry, the first African-Ameri-

can female author to have a play performed on Broadway. Or Bell Hooks, a theorist and social critic who wrote on race, feminism, and class, to Toni Morrison, an author and editor bringing black litera-

ture into the mainstream. All four women were activists in their own right and greatly shaped African American culture and civil rights.



Zora Neale Hurston, 48" x 36," acrylic



Lorraine Hansberry, 48" x 36," acrylic



Toni Morrison, 48" x 36," acrylic

Steve Wanna

I am an interdisciplinary sound and visual artist using science, philosophy, and comparative mythology to imagine possibilities for new beginnings. Spanning multiple media, including music, sound design for dance collaborations, spatiotemporal installations and sculptures, photography, and works for mixed media, my art showcases the hidden, often ignored beauty I find in chaotic and seemingly random phenomena. Abstract, experimental, and multimedia, and always centered on the human experience, my work is inspired by science and nature, often incorporating elements of controlled randomness—uncertainty is built into the process. Born and raised in Lebanon, I immigrated to the US with my family as a teenager. I hold a doctorate in Music Composition from the University of Maryland. My work has been presented at venues and galleries at home and abroad. Recent exhibitions include a 2-person show at the Delaware Contemporary, titled *Inquiry: At The Intersection of Curiosity*, featuring an installation

of eight kinetic sound sculptures, and a solo show at Touchstone Gallery in Washington, DC. My multimedia, site-specific installation *A Vast Expanse* was selected for MoCA Arlington SOLOS 2023 and recently installed at the museum. *Ferns*, scrawned black, an outdoor sound installation was presented at the Kreeger Museum in Washington, DC in 2024. How can materials and processes create experiences that help us connect more deeply with the phenomenal world around us, and the cosmos beyond? This question drives my interdisciplinary practice: spatiotemporal installation, sculpture, sound, painting, photography, and time-based media offer grounds for exploration. Unfamiliar experiences and objects emerge and unfold to suggest more connected ways of seeing and being—a shift in our perception of time and space becomes possible. Much of my practice derives in some way from formal training in sound art.

Under the right conditions, I believe that beauty can emerge



"no. 1 (home is)," *Inner Spaces*, multi media sculpture

without the need for direct intervention. I use science, philosophy, and comparative mythology to imagine possibilities for new beginnings. My practice focuses on synthesizing multiple modes of thinking to create new forms of expression that foster unexpected experiences. I work collaboratively with concepts and materials to achieve this, allowing them to determine their own final forms.

Using an abstract and experimental approach, I create art experiences that become opportunities for perception, contemplation, and meaning-making. I avoid specifying meaning, instead creating opportunities for experience and perception to be imbued with meaning and narrative by the experiencer. My work is primarily informed by the principle of emergence and self-organization as defined in fields such as systems theory and Buddhism, incorporating experimental frameworks and elements of controlled randomness, with uncertainty built into the process and the final work.

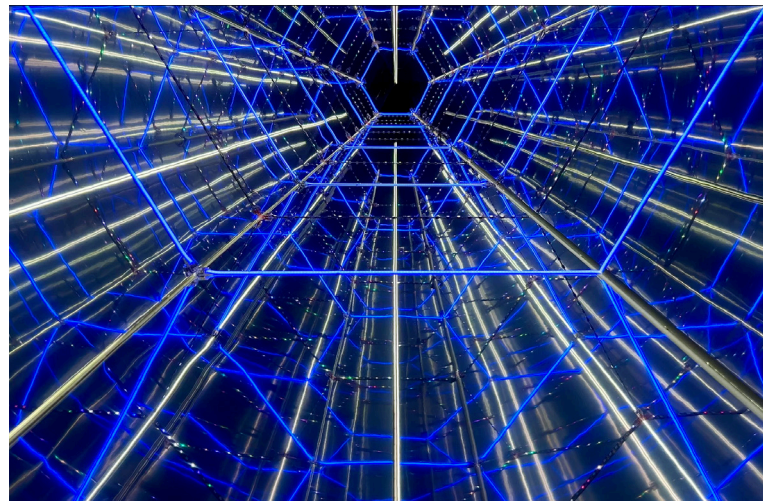
Process

My formal training is in music composition and sound art. Seeking to free myself from traditional formal constraints, my music evolved to include elements of indeterminacy within structured frameworks. I came to view performers, even audiences as co-creators: I set in motion certain processes within frameworks that require performers to add something of their own creativity beyond basic interpretation. Because many elements are undecided until the moment of performance, we all hear the completed work for the first time together. This interest in process-driven work whose outcome wasn't predetermined carried over into my visual art practice—I found myself creating works that were often unfolding rather than finished. Even with works that are fixed or complete, there is often a process underlying them that isn't entirely under my control, effectively rendering me co-creator with the various materials and conditions I happen to be working with. I gravitate towards



(Top) *Wéydos I*, multi media sculpture

(Bottom) *Wéydos I*, multi media sculpture, int. 1



spatiotemporal installations that unfold over a span of time, changing and reacting to various conditions and constraints, with an outcome that isn't fully determined beforehand and unrealized until the installation has run its course. All my work invites contemplation and encourages curiosity. It also tends to concern itself with questions while offering few or no answers.

Like most artists, my practice is an extension of my interests and how I view the world. For me, this worldview is deeply informed by unrelenting, child-like inquisitiveness into the nature of things, how they work or function, and why they're organized the way they are. I'm driven by a desire to know and understand by experimenting and tinkering. I'm as interested in questions as I am in their answers, but even when answers are elusive, the process of seeking them is informative and fulfilling. After all, humans make meaning through creative pursuits—like artistic and scientific undertakings. I view both as stemming from the same cre-

ative impulse to understand the world and imbue it with meaning. Curiosity is what drives most human endeavors, from the simplest and smallest to the most ambitious. My art practice is varied and multidisciplinary but always driven by inquisitiveness and curiosity, whether about materials, the human condition, current affairs, or seemingly esoteric, and potentially unanswerable questions. I'm always in pursuit of knowledge or understanding, which sometimes I get at by posing questions rather than offering answers.

The two works included in this exhibition share a few common traits, chief among them is a years-long interest in hidden spaces that conceal entire worlds, whether visual, sonic, or both. *Inner Spaces no.1* (home is) comes from an ongoing series of kinetic sound sculptures exploring hidden or ignored acoustic environments. Developed during a 2-month residency in Barcelona in 2021, the series went through several iterations before taking its current form,

which uses as a springboard the question of what it would sound like if we could hear inside spaces physically impossible for a human to access (e.g. the inside of a ceramic vessel.) This, naturally, raises other related questions having to do with the underlying desire to do so, and our often-troubled relationship with our environments, to name a few.



While this was something I've considered on and off for years, I had never explored it fully until the residency. Being in that city with its varied soundscapes, ranging from the Mediterranean beach, to traffic, to the noise of constant construction in certain

neighborhoods, the question of how we navigate and relate to our acoustic environments resurfaced on my many walks, listening and collecting recordings. I spent the two months of my residency playing with different ideas and with various forms, including sculptures that played field recordings I had been collecting, but wasn't fully satisfied. It wasn't until well after the residency, following more reflection and experimentation, that I arrived at the idea of creating spaces that were more intimate and, to a large extent, independent of and indifferent to our needs; spaces with their own sounds that were somehow wild and impenetrable. Like all my ideas, this one took shape only after I arrived at the right questions to ask about what it needed to come to life.

Arriving at the question of what it would sound like to be inside impossible spaces; I began creating sculptures using a range of materials to create forms that featured hollow interiors. Rather than adding sounds to them, I placed small microphones inside

them to “listen” to those interiors. I then made that acoustic image accessible via headphones—the microphones function as proxies for our ears inside those physically inaccessible spaces. This simple act of passively observing spaces we can’t access, or control becomes almost an act of communion with those spaces and offers a meditation on our broader relationship with spaces and environments. And because the sculptures effectively act as acoustic filters of the larger spaces holding them—taking external sounds and imbuing them with their own sonic signatures—the works raise questions about our relationship with our environments, and their fragility and vulnerability in the face of our desire to control or manipulate them.

Similarly, *Wéydos I* also deals with hidden interior spaces, in this case purely visual. Originally commissioned by Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art for their annual fundraiser gala in 2024, this interactive sculpture is inspired by some of the optical principles of kaleidoscopes.

Here, seemingly infinite reflections of symmetrical geometric patterns are created between reflective surfaces. The work continues a line of exploration into hidden spaces and surfaces that juxtapose dark, non-reflective exteriors with bright interiors that are either illuminated with lights or self-illuminated (e.g. fluorescent paint). Resulting from changing lights controlled by software of the artist’s design, the interior of the sculpture offers a rich, complex, and constantly changing world of colors and forms, contained inside a stark and unyielding black exterior. It can be easy to forget that the interior is essentially virtual and created from optical illusions that the brain is unable to resolve. Other works in this area include a few sculptures and a multimedia, site-specific installation titled *A Vast Expanse*. Featured in MoCA Arlington SOLOS 2023, the installation offered a visual and sonic imagining of an event horizon, the edge of a blackhole (another environment that would be impossible for humans to inhabit).

Thank You



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