

CHICAGO

“The Freedom Principle”

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO (MCA CHICAGO)

220 East Chicago Avenue

July 11–November 22, 2015



“What art does black life produce?” This is the question posed by curators Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete for the exhibition “The Freedom Principle.” Key figures from the black avant-garde of Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and AfriCOBRA are shown alongside contemporary artists, such as Stan Douglas, Catherine Sullivan, and Rashid Johnson, in a welcome dose of inspired poetry, music, politics, and psychedelia. This adroitly organized show

examines the social fabric woven in the aftermath of the civil rights movement that generated a synthesis of life and art.

DIY aesthetics resound in *Rio Negro II*, 2007–15, a mystical, kinetic installation of rain sticks, bamboo, and earth by AACM musicians Douglas R. Ewart, George Lewis, and Douglas Repetto. Nari Ward’s gothic script of dangling shoelaces in *We the People*, 2011, pokes through drywall like braided locks of hair or regal tassels worn by an army about to burst forth. Across the hall, Jamal Cyrus’s untitled, 2010 ode to the Black Panthers, is a black leather-bound bass drum surrounded by microphones gathered close, ready to receive its thunder.

Furthering the legacy of influence, Lili Reynaud-Dewar’s *La Grande Oreille (From Eye to Ear to Ass to Memory and Back)*, 2015, is an installation inspired by her father’s jazz-record shop in France that carried AACM artists’ music. Its booth of mirrored walls embedded with large speakers plays a soundtrack by a Chicago local band, Tiger Hatchery. The incredible dimensionality and ingenuity of the Black Arts Movement makes this an exhibition that will reverberate in the mind, just as the ink bubbles and vibrates inside the Tam Tam stools installed here.

— Arielle Bier