

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue, Chicago, IL 60615

Traveling the Spaceways: Sun Ra, the Astro Black and Other Solar Myths **A Symposium at the Hyde Park Art Center** **November 11 & 12, 2006**

The Hyde Park Art Center presents ***Traveling the Spaceways***, a landmark symposium devoted to the musical legend Sun Ra. Informative panel discussions, musical performances, and readings will investigate the impact Sun Ra and Afro-Futurism have had on American history and visual culture. Bringing together contemporary artists, major writers, and scholars who have focused on this prophetic jazz band leader, composer, pianist, and self-proclaimed extraterrestrial, this free event will enlighten and intrigue those interested in African American art and music of the postwar period.

The *Traveling the Spaceways: Sun Ra, the Astro Black and Other Solar Myths* symposium has been generously supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Illinois Humanities Council.

Saturday, November 11

- 10:00 a.m. Reading**
Cheryl Lynn Bruce performs from Sun Ra's broadsides.
- 10:30 a.m. Panel Discussion**
The Right Place and Right Time
Why did Sun Ra's nascent Afro-Futurism arise in Chicago in the 1950s? In order to understand the circumstances in which Ra's work emerged – namely South-Side Black Chicago of the mid-twentieth century – several cultural critics will discuss the period, the music, the ideas, and their cultural and social context, with special attention to Ra's place in jazz history. Invited speakers include: **Robert Campbell**, Professor of Developmental and Cognitive Psychology at Clemson University, author of the discography, *The Earthy Recordings of Sun Ra* (1994), and webmaster for the Red Saunders Research Foundation; **Graham Lock**, freelance writer, editor and author of several books, including *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington and Anthony Braxton*(1999); **Kevin Whitehead**, jazz critic for NPR and lecturer in American Studies at the University of Kansas.
- 12:15 p.m. Break**
- 12:30 p.m. Musical Performance**
Cellist **Fred Lonberg-Holm** performs music by Sun Ra with his trio.
- 1:00 p.m. Lunch**
- 2:30 p.m. Musical Performance**
A musical performance by **David Boykin's Expanse**, including "The Solar Suite," dedicated to Sun Ra.
- 3:15 p.m. Panel Discussion**
Heading Out
Sun Ra expressed a deep belief that music, art, writing, dance, and pageantry can change the way people think and act – that culture can literally remake the world. This group of contemporary cultural producers will discuss the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of Sun Ra's work, with attention to the ways that artists explore such notions as time and (outer) space through invention and composition. Speakers on the panel include: **Nick Cave**, artist and Assistant Professor of Fashion Design at the School of the Art Institute; **Terri Kapsalis**, writer, curator and Interim Chair of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute; **Adam Abraham**, son of Alton Abraham and author of *I Am My Body, NOT! and I Am Spirit!*, and

publisher of *Sun Ra: Collected Works Vol. 1 - Immeasurable Equation* (both Phaelos Books);
Hamza Walker, Director of Education, Renaissance Society.

4:45 p.m. **Reading**
Cheryl Lynn Bruce performs from Sun Ra's broadsides.

Sunday, November 12

10:00 a.m. **Reading**
Cheryl Lynn Bruce performs from Sun Ra's broadsides.

10:30 a.m. **Panel Discussion**
Aesthetics of Black Postwar Chicago: Sun Ra and "Outsider Design"
An air of unrelenting independence characterized El Saturn Records (Sun Ra's recording label) in the late 1950's; Ra and his business partner Alton Abraham maintained a sense of defiance, a quality of stark separatism and a harrowingly singular vision. Sun Ra made little distinction between the individual person and his art, fashion, and music – it all articulated an identity. This panel examines the visual manifestation of Sun Ra's philosophy and how graphics and design were essential in presenting a particular message encouraging self-determination. Panelists: **John Corbett**, writer, curator and independent music critic; **Calvin Forbes**, poet and writer and Chair of Writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; **Victor Margolin**, University of Illinois at Chicago, Professor of Art and Design History, author of *African-American Designers: The Chicago Experience Then and Now*; **Kerry James Marshall**, artist and Professor of Painting at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

12:15 p.m. **Break**

12:30 p.m. **Musical Performance**
Saxophonist **Ken Vandermark** and the Sun Ra Composer Quartet perform Ra compositions.

1:00 p.m. **Lunch**

2:30 p.m. **Musical Performance**
Flautist **Nicole Mitchell** performs with her ensemble.

3:15 p.m. **Panel Discussion**
The Sun Ra Diaspora: Art After Ra
Sun Ra's aesthetics and philosophy have had significant, but under-acknowledged, influence on American culture since the 1950s, and in some respects the art world has only recently caught up with a way of thinking that he developed at that time. Openness to new technologies and experimentation, a sense that personal identity is as much a construct as a given, and a playful attitude towards history and the pleasures of myth-making are all contemporary preoccupations that Ra pioneered half a century ago. Panelists: **Anthony Elms**, artist, editor of *WhiteWalls*, and Assistant Director of Gallery 400, University of Illinois, Chicago; **Malik Gaines**, co-editor of ARTUS, independent curator and Distinguished Critic in Residence at Otis College; **Glenn Ligon**, artist (NY).

4:45 p.m. **Reading**
Cheryl Lynn Bruce performs from Sun Ra's broadsides

5:00 p.m. **Coda: Tour with the Curators**
John Corbett, Anthony Elms, and Terri Kapsalis offer a guided tour of the exhibition, *Pathways to Unknown Worlds*

The symposium has been organized to correspond with a concurrent block of exhibitions at the Art Center until January 14, 2007 including:

Pathways to Unknown Worlds:

Sun Ra, El Saturn & Chicago's Afro-Futurist Underground, 1954-1968

A kaleidoscopic exhibition exploring the visionary musician and thinker, featuring original record designs and production materials, incendiary early manuscripts, paper ephemera, photos, sound recordings and films - poised to shed new light on the mystery of Mr. Ra.

Interstellar Low Ways

Matt Bakkom, Pedro Bell, Nick Cave, Destroy All Monsters, Karl Erickson, Matthew Hanner, Robby Herbst, Alex Hubbard, Derek Jackson, Karl Heinz Jeron, Tim Kerr, Stephen Lapthisophon, Glenn Ligon, Dave Muller, Wangechi Mutu, My Barbarian, Senam Okudzeto, Joe Overstreet, Charlemagne Palestine, Adam Pendleton, Reverend Seymour Perkins, Mai-Thu Perret, Plastic Crimewave, Rob A. Pruitt, Simone Shubuck, Joshua Smith, Travis and Christopher Wool

The artists offer distinct works that take up Sun Ra's characteristic forms, ranging from neon sculptures to paintings that flirt with formlessness. The works manifest varying degrees of engagement with their source, in some cases profound enlightenment, in others benign bemusement.

Academy Records: Le Conqueroo

A site specific installation by Chicago based Academy Records incorporates film, mixed media, and live and recorded drums exploring the effects of rhythm and its relation to the physical space. This is the third and final installment in the series of work that studies projection, magick, and forms of resistance.

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Symposium is made possible by support from:

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