

Gallery 1

October 15 –
January 14
2007

RELATED EVENTS

EXHIBITION TOUR

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 6 PM

Anthony Elms and Huey Copeland discuss the artworks and their relation to Sun Ra's ideas and aesthetic.

CONCERT

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 9 PM

Music for Tomorrow's World:

A Dedication to Sun Ra

The Hideout

1354 West Wabansia Avenue, Chicago

Starring: The Thurston Moore, Rollo Radford, Jim Baker and Avreeyal Ra Quartet, with Intergalactic Myth-Science DJ sets and an opening performance by My Barbarian.

Based in Los Angeles, My Barbarian is a performance group founded and directed by Alex Segade, Jade Gordon and Malik Gaines that also includes musicians Scott Martin and Andy Ouchi. My Barbarian's rock-operatic oeuvre synthesizes music, art and theater through site-responsive spectacles, videos and recordings.

For tickets (\$20), call 866.468.3401 or visit www.ticketweb.com

My job is to change five billion people to something else. Totally impossible. ... Everyone else can do possible things, why should I waste my time with that? Everything that's possible's been done by man; I have to deal with the impossible. And when I deal with the impossible and am successful, it makes me feel good because I know that I'm not bullshittin'.

—Sun Ra, quoted in
Extended Play (1994)

Hyde Park **ART**CENTER

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 www.hydeparkart.org

The Hyde Park Art Center is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative exhibitions, primarily work by Chicago-area artists, and educational programs in the visual arts for children and adults of diverse backgrounds. The Center is funded in part by the Alphawood Foundation; The Chicago Community Trust, a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council; the Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly; The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; The Lucius and Eva Eastman Foundation; The Field Foundation of Illinois; Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The Leo S. Guthman Fund; The Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Joyce Foundation; The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; Kraft Foods; The MacArthur Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The National Endowment for the Arts; The Orbit Fund; The Playboy Foundation; Polk Bros. Foundation; The Clinton Family Fund; The Sara Lee Foundation; South East Chicago Commission; The Terra Foundation for American Art; and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; and the generosity of its members and friends.

Interstellar Low Ways

Matt Bakkom, Pedro Bell, Destroy All Monsters, Karl Erickson, Matthew Hanner, Robby Herbst, Alex Hubbard, Derek Jackson, Karl Heinz Jeron, Tim Kerr, Stephen Laphisophon, 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, Josh Smith, travis, Fatimah Tuggar, Christopher Wool

Curated by Anthony Elms and Huey Copeland



Rob A. Pruitt
Sun Ra Moon and Stars
2006
Digital print
11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of Clementine Gallery

Sun Ra is not a person, it's a business name. And on the certificate, it's a business certificate which was gotten in New York City; they didn't notice that I didn't have down there what my business was. They stamped it, notarized it, and they filed it. So therefore, it's a business name, and my business is changin' the planet.

—Sun Ra, quoted in John Corbett's *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (1994)

Well before he left us in 1993, it was evident that while Sun Ra might go to outer space, he would never go out of business: in ways both seen and unseen he keeps on changin' the planet. Ra was a marginalized figure for most of his creative life, receiving only brief stints of recognition. His music, the cornerstone of his practice, was barely distributed until the early 1990s witnessed a rash of CD re-releases. Yet for decades Ra and his myth—not to mention his Myth-Science Arkestra—have inspired and attracted visual artists across the globe. *Interstellar Low Ways* explores Ra's evolving legacy in the visual field.

Mysticism and expressionism, prophecy and placelessness, hermeneutics and racial politics, collectivity and counter-discourse, do-it-yourself myths and build-your-own futures

Mysticism and expressionism, prophecy and placelessness, hermeneutics and racial politics, collectivity and counter-discourse, do-it-yourself myths and build-your-own futures: these are just a few of the territories that Ra obsessively charted, at times with dizzying fervor and often with cosmic prescience. His various modes of address—broadsheet, lecture, music, theater, proclamation, visual art, poetry—not only hold out a map to current artistic production, but also continue to inspire a range of practitioners equally invested in traversing the impossible, whether in UFOs or in search of alternative consciousness.

Navigating these channels is far from an easy task and this exhibition is anything but a comprehensive survey. Instead, *Interstellar Low Ways* highlights how contemporary practitioners take up, flirt with, and refract Sun Ra's ethos, whether in neon sculptures, motorized dance machines, or paintings that play on formlessness. Much like their creators, the works on view manifest varying degrees of engagement with their source, in some cases profound enlightenment, in others benign bemusement. Three of the practitioners have direct links to Ra: painter Joe Overstreet spent much time with the Arkestra when the group played regular gigs in the East Village during the early 1970s; Pedro Bell, known for his Funkadelic album art, interviewed the jazz icon and proposed record covers that

Dave Muller
W.W.S.R.D. (Cosmic)
2006
Acrylic on canvas
17³/₄ x 54 inches (unframed)
Courtesy of Blum & Poe,
Los Angeles



Ra would eventually decline; Charlemagne Palestine found in him an interlocutor and fellow traveler equally interested in the beyond.

Of course, the thread doesn't end there. Sun Ra's approach to being has provided a model for several generations interested in carving out sites of resistance, suspension, and possibility. And his trickster-like insistence on singularity, particularly in his interviews and statements, is a posture artists perennially attempt to adopt for their own ends. Smith, Hubbard, Plastic Crimewave, Travis, Jeron, Perret, Ligon, and My Barbarian are tuned in to Ra's methods and materials; for Muller, Pruitt, Destroy All Monsters, Kerr, Perkins, and Shubuck, he's a prophet worth picturing; Tuggar, Mutu, Cave, Jackson, Okudzeto, and Pendleton reflect on the current state of the Afrofuturist imaginary; still others—Wool, Hanner, Erickson, Herbst, Lapthisophon, and Bakkom—are unabashed fans who've dabbled in Ra's cosmology to compelling effect.

What such disparate gestures share is a determination to reimagine accepted histories as living myths that leave this world behind. In tipping their hats to Ra's spirit, the artists of *Interstellar Low Ways* establish concrete paths to a "beta world" tomorrow, today. Ra, no doubt, wouldn't have it any other way.

Anthony Elms and Huey Copeland
Curators of *Interstellar Low Ways*