

Gallery 4

October 1 –
January 14
2007

EXHIBITION RELATED EVENTS:

EXHIBITION TOUR WITH THE CURATORS

October 26, 6 pm

John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis will discuss the artwork and ephemera in the *Pathways to Unknown Worlds* exhibition.

TRAVELING THE SPACEWAYS SYMPOSIUM

November 11 – 12, 10 am – 5 pm

FREE! For more information, ask the front desk or visit www.hydeparkart.org/4833/symposium

TUESDAY FILM SCREENINGS

All screenings are free, begin at 6:00 p.m., and will be held in 4833 rph followed by a discussion.

OCTOBER 17

Space is the Place (1974) directed by John Coney
Discussion led by Blake Bradford, Director of Education at the Art Center

NOVEMBER 28

The Cry of Jazz (1959) by Edward O. Bland
Discussion led by Chuck Kleinhans, Associate Professor of Radio, Television and Film at Northwestern University

DECEMBER 5 (double feature)

Sun Ra: The Magic Sun (1966) by Phill Niblock and
Last Angel of History (1995/6) John Akomfrah
Discussion led by John Corbett, curator

LIVE MUSIC CONCERTS

Please note different host locations.

Sundays, 3:00-4:30pm

October 22, November 5, & December 17

Gallery 1, The Hyde Park Art Center

FOR THE LOVE OF MUSIC, a free acoustic creative concert series presented with AACM Chicago.

November 10

The Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia Avenue, 9:00 p.m.

Music for Tomorrow's World: A Dedication to Sun Ra
Starring Thurston Moore, Rollo Radford, Jim Baker and the Avreeyal Ra Quartet with Intergalactic Myth-Science DJ sets and an opening performance by My Barbarian.
Tickets are \$20 and can only be purchased through the Hideout. Call (866) 468-3401 or visit www.ticketweb.com to purchase tickets.

December 3

Chicago Cultural Center, Claudia Cassidy Theater
3:00 p.m.

Sun Ra in Chicago: Musical Recollections

An ensemble of original members of the Arkestra and other Ra associates, including Robert Barry, Art Hoyle, Ricky Murray, Hattie Randolph, and Lucious Randolph gather for an intimate exchange of anecdotes along with performances of favorite Sun Ra compositions.
Moderated by John Corbett. FREE!

The *Traveling the Spaceways* program of events is made possible by support from:

TERRA
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

Illinois Humanities Council
www.prhiic.org

Pathways to Unknown Worlds:

Sun Ra, El Saturn & Chicago's Afro-Futurist Underground, 1954-68

Curated by John Corbett, Anthony Elms and Terri Kapsalis



Sun Ra.

cover design, *Art Forms of Dimensions Tomorrow*, 1965

Hyde ParkARTCENTER

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.

If you were in Chicago in 1958, you might have happened into a jazz club on the South Side to find a band of musicians dressed in outer space costumes, chanting “rocket number nine, take off for the planet Venus,” and setting loose battery-driven robots. On another day, on a stroll through Washington Park, kitty-corner from the Baptist preacher and across from the Nation of Islam representative, you could have come upon a street-corner lecturer in a flowing faux-leopard cape and black beret, detailing the etymology of the word “negro” and the coded meanings of the Bible. In both cases, the same mastermind was responsible: Sun Ra.

Pianist, composer, bandleader, mystic and self-proclaimed extra-terrestrial Sun Ra was born Herman Poole “Sonny” Blount in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1914. It was during the 15 years that Ra lived in Chicago (1946-1961) that he adopted his new identity, legally changing his name to Le Sony’r Ra, assembling the first of his big-bands, the Arkestra, establishing key associations with musicians like John Gilmore, Pat Patrick, and Marshall Allen, sketching and then fleshing out his own elaborate self-mythology.

The Sun Ra presented in this exhibition is not yet the flamboyant, colorful, outsized trickster bandleader and showman he is remembered as today, but it was in Chicago that these aspects of his persona were germinated.

The Chicago period has been almost exclusively known through a group of important records that were made here in Chicago, LPs that were issued on Ra’s own El Saturn label, one of the first musician-owned record companies, co-owned by Ra’s business manager and fellow mystic Alton Abraham. But it was a pivotal era in Ra’s development for a variety of factors, not all of them musical. Ra was the central figure in a secret society, based on the South Side. Thmei Research, as it was known, was dedicated to mystical, occult, paranormal studies, which included highly original readings of the Bible, numerology, and deep research into non-mainstream histories (especially the lost history of black Egypt), and the group was also intensely trained on new technologies, scientific ideas, and experimental concepts, particularly concentrated on space and the future. The Sun Ra presented in this exhibition is not yet the flamboyant, colorful, outsized trickster bandleader and showman he is remembered as today, but it was in Chicago that these aspects of his persona were germinated.

Pathways to Unknown Worlds presents a selection of previously unknown broadsides and manuscripts, written by Ra and read or handed out as mimeographed sheets. Only one such document had been widely circulated, a sheet



Claude Dangerfield
album cover design,
never used, 1960

titled “Solaristic Precepts” that he gave saxophonist John Coltrane in 1956. Ra’s work was related to broader cultural trends, including a fascination with outer space leading up to the Sputnik and moon-landing. But Ra’s alignment of the notion of African-American alienation with a utopian vision of interplanetary transplantation qualifies him as a pioneer of Afro-Futurism. On view in the exhibition are various space-oriented graphics by a small cadre of South-Side designers, many of them made as possible record covers for the Arkestra’s LPs. El Saturn’s production helped define the independent American record company. Their records were made in tiny batches, with covers handprinted at Saturn’s headquarters using linoleum blocks or silkscreens. Among the materials in *Pathways* are the print blocks, as well as original artworks by Claude Dangerfield, LeRoy Butler, Aye, James Bryant, and Sun Ra himself.

The curators of *Pathways to Unknown Worlds* wish to thank the staff of the Hyde Park Art Center, particularly Allison Peters, Blake Bradford, Philip Nadasdy, and Chris Hammes; Hamza Walker, Rachel Weiss, Jim Dempsey, George Lewis, Scott Nielsen, Ken Vandermark, Kevin Whitehead, Lloyd Sachs, Lish Aiken, Lou Mallozzi, Experimental Sound Studio’s Creative Audio Archive, and Tim Shaw.

John Corbett, Anthony Elms, Terri Kapsalis
Curators