



MEDIA CONTACT

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CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts presents: *Drum Listens to Heart*, Opening September 1

Three-part exhibition with accompanying performance series brings together contemporary artists and performers from around the world



Milford Graves: A Mind-Body Deal, September 25, 2020—January 24, 2021, installation view at the Institute for Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. Photo by Constance Mensch.

San Francisco, CA—June 14, 2022—All bodies are drums, each one playing at the speed of its own heart. All drums are bodies, each one made of a skin that vibrates differently. To some, the drum is the peaceful heartbeat of Mother Earth; to others, it's an urgent call to war. Rhythm contains a duality, at once demanding order and presenting an opportunity to break free from it. This September, the Wattis Institute at California College of the Arts will explore the nuance and nature of the percussive with *Drum Listens to Heart*, an iterative exhibition that weaves together myriad forms of percussion—physical and socio-political, literal and metaphorical—and juxtaposes instances of physical impact and vibration with forms of control, emancipation, and community-building.

The exhibition brings together an international roster of artists presenting works in a variety of media to explore rhythm, pulse, music, cultural history, healing,

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power, freedom, and control. Curated by Anthony Huberman, Director and Chief Curator of the Wattis Institute, the show will be presented in three chapters, on view September 1–October 15, 2022; November 9–December 17, 2022; and January 17–March 4, 2023 respectively. Punctuated by performances curated by Diego Villalobos on-site and at The Lab in San Francisco’s Mission District, the exhibition will also include an original catalogue, an artist-directed film documenting the show, and a pop-up record store. The exhibition will also travel, in different forms, including a day-long event at the Rivers Institute in New Orleans.

Drum Listens to Heart is centered around an action foundational to human existence: to strike an object against another. The simple act of beating, and creating rhythm, has not only been a tool for fabrication and mark-making, but also for oppression and control, and as a means to break free, to express independence, and to establish language in the face of oppression. Without needing words or images, the percussive can threaten forms of authority and voice a powerful demand for freedom. In a moment when historical narratives are being renegotiated to bring forth voices that have been subjected to colonial erasure and systemic racism, it provides a form of expression, communication, celebration, and protest that marginalized voices have long used to be heard and seen.

The exhibition presents work by Francis Alÿs, Luke Anguhadluq, Marcos Ávila Forero, Raven Chacon, Trisha Donnelly, Em’kal Eyongakpa, Theaster Gates, Milford Graves, David Hammons, Consuelo Tupper Hernández, Susan Howe & David Grubbs, NIC Kay, Barry Le Va, Rose Lowder, Lee Lozano, Guadalupe Maravilla, Harold Mendez, Rie Nakajima, The Otolith Group, Lucy Raven, Davina Semo, Michael E. Smith, Haegue Yang, and David Zink Yi to explore the many symbolic, historical, and social manifestations of the percussive.

“When thinking about art, we are so often looking to categorize or define what artists do,” said **Anthony Huberman**, Director and Chief Curator of the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. “I wanted to see how a vocabulary borrowed from music might activate new layers of meaning for visual artworks. By charting a new set of coordinates for encountering work, how can we create a new experience for visitors to engage? Our aim at the Wattis is to bring together forward-looking art in surprising ways, to dig into an artist’s practice, and to unearth unexpected themes and ideas. Percussion is such a rich point of departure as it relates to a wide range of aesthetic, expressive, and political forms. This show turns the idea of a traditional thematic show on its head because it doesn’t try to “illustrate” or “explain” what percussion is, but establishes a rhythm between specific works that invites viewers to recognize percussive forms in new and surprising places.”

The first chapter of the exhibition opens with a series of works that ground visitors in the more corporeal aspects of percussion. Entering the exhibition visitors will encounter a series of hand-made kinetic sculptures by the late **Milford Graves** that are somewhere between a homemade EKG machine and a sacred altar. To understand the drum, Graves studied the vibrations of the heart and connected people to these devices, which run custom software invented by the artist. Here the drum quite literally listens to the heart (a phrase etched onto the front of a drum and the inspiration for the exhibition's name), creating space for a more metaphorical and spiritual look at the percussive nature of being as the exhibition unfolds. From a sculpture by **Harold Mendez** of an abstracted body stripped bare to just its heart, to a video installation by **Marcos Ávila Forero** that presents a community in the Colombian Amazon communicating via an ancestral form of water drumming, the exhibition will turn an eye to the human body's own ability to beat. Visitors will also be able to experience an immersive installation by Cameroonian artist **Em'kal Eyongakpa** who will transform an entire room into a cave-like space, where water, flowing through tubes, triggers beat generators, and where speakers underneath a wooden floor make objects vibrate. Eyongakpa explores ideas around portals, crossings, ancient self-preservation and healing practices, and water, in relation to resistance movements from the oil and natural gas-rich region of the Gulf of Guinea and beyond.

Each room in the exhibition's second chapter (opening November 9), will present a single video work by **Francis Alÿs**, **Theaster Gates**, **the Otolith Group**, and **Lucy Raven**, and will offer a dramatically different reflection on the percussive. Alÿs meditates on the military's culture of obedience, order, and control through a performative work in which individual guards marching through the streets of London encounter one another and snap together into formation. As the video progresses, more than sixty individuals coalesce into a single, rigid square moving in lock step through the streets. Gates captures the ruins of a soon-to-be-demolished church, abandoned but punctuated by the sound of two men flipping heavy doors throughout the space, against the sound of a viola being played. Percussion is variously presented as a force of control, as well as a space for emancipation and catharsis.

The third chapter of the exhibition (opening January 17) offers visitors a sweeping look at the percussive with different forms of physical impact, dance, healing, and language. Highlights of this chapter include a site-specific installation and rarely seen video by **David Hammons**; a new video installation by artist, performer, and choreographer **NIC Kay** inspired by table drumming that is part of their **#Blackpeopledancingontheinternet** project; and so-called "disease throwers" by **Guadalupe Maravilla**, elaborate sculptures that draw on indigenous healing traditions, which the artist uses to perform sound baths. Visitors will also be invited to wear one of Korean artist **Haegue Yang's** "Sonicwears"—

necklaces, bracelets, and scarves made of nickel-plated bells. Walking around the exhibition wearing the sculptural works, visitors' bodies will become percussive instruments, creating a soundtrack of polyrhythms as they move separately or in unison.

The exhibition will also feature a series of performances curated by **Diego Villalobos** that explore historical and political possibilities for the percussive. Drawing on ancestral music and language, ritual ceremonies, and the long history of percussion and the Avant-Garde, the performances explore two predominant themes: music as a tool for political activism and social change and music as an experimental art form. Artists **Raven Chacon**, **Moor Mother (Camae Ayewa)**, **Tcheser Holmes**, **Valentina Magaletti**, **Music Research Strategies (Marshall Trammell)**, and **Nkisi (Melika Ngombe Kolongo)** will present performances inspired by the political capabilities inherent in the percussive. Like a talking drum, these artists give voice to marginalized communities, amplify suppressed histories, and call for social change. Meanwhile, the work of **NOMON (Shayna & Nava Dunkelman)**, **Karen Stackpole**, **Ikue Mori**, and **William Winant** engage and complicate the legacies of Avant-Garde music, experimenting with the sonic possibilities of their instruments.

Drum Listens to Heart will be accompanied by a catalogue, co-published and designed by Inventory Press, that includes essays by Anthony Huberman and Diego Villalobos, as well as eight short essays by writers responding to individual terms related to the percussive, including **Geeta Dayal** on drumming, **Hannah Black** on rhythm, **Anthony Elms** and **Hamza Walker** on ensemble, and **JJJJerome Ellis** on stutter, to name a few. For those who cannot attend the exhibition in person, the Wattis has commissioned the artist **Alison O'Daniel** to create a film that documents the exhibition, which will premiere on March 4, 2023, featuring work from all three chapters of the show.

This exhibition is made possible thanks to generous support from Teiger Foundation, Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, VIA Art Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, Westridge Foundation, Etant donnés*, Mondriaan Fund, Michael Asher Foundation, Emily Hall Tremain Foundation (EHTF); and from Kaitlyn and Mike Krieger, Diana Nelson and John Atwater, Katie and Matt Paige, Lauren and Jamie Ford, and Robin Wright. The Wattis program is supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Grants for the Arts; Leadership Circle members Katie and Matt Paige, Abby Turin and Jon Gans, Lauren and Jamie Ford, Westridge Foundation, Mary and Harold Zlot; and Curator's Forum members.

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About CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts

Founded in 1998 at California College of the Arts in San Francisco and located a few blocks from its campus, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts is a nonprofit exhibition venue and research institute dedicated to contemporary art and ideas. As an exhibition space, it commissions and shows new work by emerging and established artists from around the world. Recent solo exhibitions include: Hervé Guibert: *This and More* (which travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome and to KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin); Josh Faught: *Look Across the Water Into the Darkness, Look for the Fog*; Maia Cruz Palileo: *Long Kwento* (which traveled to the Kimball Art Center in Park City); Jeffrey Gibson: *Nothing Is Eternal*; Lydia Ourahmane: *صرخة شمسية Solar Cry*; Cinthia Marcelle: *A morta*; Vincent Fecteau; Abbas Akhavan: *cast for a folly*; Akosua Adoma Owusu: *Welcome to the Jungle* (which traveled to the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans). The last group exhibition, *Mechanisms*, traveled to Secession in Vienna in an expanded form entitled *Other Mechanisms*.

As a research institute, the Wattis dedicates an entire year to reflect on the work of a single artist, which informs a regular series of public programs and publications involving the field's most prominent artists and thinkers. The 2021–2022 season is dedicated to the artist Lorraine O'Grady; past seasons featured Joan Jonas, Andrea Fraser, David Hammons, Seth Price, Dodie Bellamy, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cecilia Vicuña.

The Wattis also hosts an annual Capp Street Artist-in-Residence, one of the earliest and longest-running artist-in-residence programs in the country, founded in 1983 by Ann Hatch as Capp Street Project, and incorporated into the Wattis Institute in 1998. Each year, an artist comes to live and work in San Francisco for a semester, teaches a graduate seminar at CCA, and develops a new body of work or research. Recent participants include Helen Mirra (2021–2022), Raven Chacon (2020–2021), Hồng-An Trương (2019–2020), Abbas Akhavan (2018–2019), contemporary (2017–2018), Melanie Gilligan (2016–2017), Carissa Rodriguez (2015–2016), and Nairy Baghramian (2014–2015). For more information, visit wattis.org.

About California College of the Arts

Founded in 1907, California College of the Arts (CCA) educates students to shape culture and society through the practice and critical study of art, architecture, design, and writing. Benefitting from its San Francisco Bay Area location, the college prepares students for lifelong creative work by cultivating

innovation, community engagement, and social and environmental responsibility.

CCA offers a rich curriculum of 22 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs in art, design, architecture, and writing taught by a faculty of expert practitioners. Attracting promising students from across the nation and around the world, CCA is among the 25 [most diverse colleges in the U.S.](#) Last year, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked CCA as one of the [top 10 graduate schools for fine arts in the country.](#)

Graduates are highly sought after by companies such as Pixar/Disney, Apple, Intel, Facebook, Gensler, Google, IDEO, Autodesk, Mattel, and Nike, and many have launched their own successful businesses. Alumni and faculty are often recognized with the highest honors in their fields, including Academy Awards, AIGA Medals, Fulbright Scholarships, Guggenheim Fellowships, MacArthur Fellowships, National Medal of Arts, and the Rome Prize, among others.

CCA is creating a [new, expanded college campus](#) at its current site in San Francisco, spearheaded by the architectural firm Studio Gang. The new campus design will be a model of sustainable construction and practice; will unite the college's programs in art, crafts, design, architecture, and writing in one location to create new adjacencies and interactions; and will provide [more student housing](#) than ever before. For more information, visit cca.edu.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts presents

Mirra Helen: Leaves 1992 2022
January 11 - July 10, 2022

Hervé Guibert: This and More
June 9 - July 30, 2022

Location: 360 Kansas Street (between 16th and 17th streets), San Francisco
Gallery hours: Wednesday–Saturday, noon–6 pm; closed Sunday to Tuesday
Admission: Free.

Information: wattis.org or 415-355-9670
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