

Sonic Restitutions: Afrosonic Aesthetics in Satch Hoyt's Artistic Practice

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Abstract

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This thesis focuses on the practice of contemporary visual artist Satch Hoyt, who employs what I am calling an “Afrosonic aesthetic”. Beginning with Hoyt’s expansive art making practice and theory of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier as an entry point, I argue that Black contemporary artists are attuned to the frequency of Black life, continually creating and accessing technologies that attend to a sonic past, present, and future. This thesis seeks to investigate the sonicity of Hoyt’s artworks that recall this frequency. By drawing upon a constellation of Black Study, blurring the borders of aesthetics, and engaging Hoyt’s Afro Sonic Mapping research project, this thesis shapes a living methodology that can identify, analyze, and archive artworks that contain this notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic to the art historical canon.

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Table of Contents

<u>List of Figures</u>	vi
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter One: Afro-Sonic Map: A Cartographic Remix</u>	14
<u>Chapter Two: Celestial Vessels, The Shape of the Afrosonic</u>	26
<u>Chapter Three: Unmuted: A Reparative Sonic</u>	34
<u>Conclusion</u>	44
<u>Figures</u>	45
<u>Bibliography</u>	68

List of Figures

Figure 1. Niklas Marc Heinecke, *Satch Hoyt: Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, MARKK, Hamburg, 2024. Image source: [MARKK website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 2. Torday Collection, *Group of musicians and young Bakuba chief*, (1905) photograph, Congo. Image source: Afro-Sonic Mapping Book, pg. 24.

Figure 3. Karl Edvard Laman, *Concert by the Bakongo. Hand wood drums, notched flute, horns*, (1929) photograph, Congo. Image source: Afro-Sonic Mapping Book, pg.26.

Figure 4. Satch Hoyt, *The Calling in of the Silent Codes*, (2019) acrylic, pigment on canvas, Sydney, Australia, White Bay Power Station, 24th Biennale of Sydney: *Ten Thousand Suns*. Image source: [Biennale of Sydney website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 5. Satch Hoyt, *Cross Rhythmic Delay*, (2017) acrylic, pigment on canvas, Sydney, Australia, White Bay Power Station, 24th Biennale of Sydney: *Ten Thousand Suns*. Image source: [Biennale of Sydney website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 6. Satch Hoyt, *Afro Sonic Mapping exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (The House of World Cultures)*, (2019) Digital Image, Berlin, Germany Image source: [Afro Sonic Mapping website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 7. Satch Hoyt, *On Galactic Paths of More Tomorrows*, (2017) acrylic on linen, (415 x 250 cm). Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 8. Satch Hoyt, *Bleed* (2017) acrylic, pigment on canvas, (415 x 250 cm). Image source: courtesy of the artist. Image source: [C& website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 8.1. Satch Hoyt, *Bleed* (2017) [detail] acrylic, pigment on canvas, (415 x 250 cm) Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: [C& website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 9. Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura)*, also known as *The Great Wave* (ca. 1830–32), Woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15/16 in. (25.7 x 37.9 cm), New York, Met Museum. Image source: [Met Museum website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 10. Satch Hoyt, *Afro Sonic Map #8* (2017), acrylic on linen, (210 x 150 cm), Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 11. Wadada Leo Smith, *Kosmic Music* (2008), Chicago, Illinois, The Renaissance Society. Image source: [The Renaissance Society website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 12. Renee Gladman, *Slowly We Have the Feeling: Scores* (2019-2022), Pastel and pigment on paper, dimensions variable, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, New York. Image source: [Marian Goodman Gallery website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 13. Satch Hoyt, *Front Cover Graphic Score Book*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 14. Satch Hoyt, *Floating Graphic Score*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 15. Satch Hoyt, *Floating Graphic Score*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 16. Satch Hoyt, *Inside Cover Graphic Score Book*, (2017) Pencil on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm. Image: Safia Siad. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 17. Satch Hoyt, *Celestial Vessel* (2010), RCA Victor Red Seal 45 rpm vinyl records, steel, magnets, oil paint, audio components & sound scape, (203 x 37 x 18 cm) Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 18. Satch Hoyt, *Celestial Vessel Install* 2010, Digital Image, Durham, North Carolina, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Image source: [Nasher Museum website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 19. Bamana, *Staff with Equestrian Figure* (late 19th–early 20th century), Iron, pigment, accumulated materials, (75.9 x 20.3 x 2.5cm) Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Museum. Image source: [Brooklyn Museum website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 20. Satch Hoyt, *Rulers-1* (2016), Wooden rulers, magnets, steel (200 x 190 cm) Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 21. Satch Hoyt, *Rulers-4* (2016), Wooden rulers, magnets, steel (200 x 190 cm) Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 22. Akan, *Kente Cloth*, Rayon, silk, 193.7 x 108 cm, Brooklyn Museum, NYC. Image source: [Brooklyn Museum website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 23. Satch Hoyt, *From Mau Mau to Brixton* (2009), Ebony wood, Zirconias, velvet lined wooden case (34 x 22 x 30 cm) Image source: [Satch Hoyt website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 24. Satch Hoyt, *Ice Pick* (2002), crystal glass, velvet lined case, metal key, soundscape, audio components, 400mmx260mmx300mm. Image source: [Biennale of Sydney website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 25. Satch Hoyt, *Hair Combing Circle* (2017), performance. Image source: [Archive Books website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 26. Akan, *Drum* (18th century), Camwood (Baphia nitida), deer skin, antelope skin, African cordia, fibre (clappertonia, ficifolia, and raphia), (24 x 41 x 28cm) British Museum, London, England. Image source: [British Museum website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 27. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting British Museum* (2023), Digital image courtesy of the artist. Image source: [Satch Hoyt Instagram](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 28. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting, British Museum* (2023), Digital image courtesy of the artist. Image source: [Satch Hoyt Instagram](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 29. Mati Diop, *Dahomey* (2024), Film still. Courtesy MUBI. Image source: [ARTnews website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 30. Mati Diop, *Dahomey* (2024), Film still. Courtesy MUBI. Image source: [ARTnews website](#). Accessed February 20, 2025.

Figure 31. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting Performance* (2017), Videostill from a performance as part of SAVVY Funk: documenta 14 radio program at silent green, Berlin, Germany. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

Introduction

No, you won't be naming no buildings after me
 To go down dilapidated ooh
 No, you won't be naming no buildings after me
 My name will be misstated, surely
 -Erykah Badu, A.D. 2000

they ask me to remember
 but they want me to remember
 their memories
 and i keep on remembering
 mine.
 -Lucille Clifton

Black contemporary artists across disciplines are living and working in what cultural theorist, poet, and scholar Fred Moten calls the break.¹ Moten's monograph *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* recalls the ongoing interruption, the strain, the perpetual moment that Blackness became "the extended movement of a specific upheaval".² The text opens with a cry, a singular cry, a cry that shatters any word that attempts to describe it, a cry that blooms into a chorus of cries. This cry contains the origins of a refusal that informs a Black radical tradition. This tradition is the root of contemporary sonic Black resistance and a global Black aesthetic. This cry is a symbol of Black life refusing to be extinguished by the horrors of slavery and every single struggle that evolved from that temporal, sonic, and spatial break. Moten asserts that resistance to enslavement created the performative essence of Blackness. With the "phonic materiality" created by a dispossessive force, Moten introduces a poetic theory that assembles Blackness with "the irreducible sound of necessarily

¹ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 1-24.

² Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 1-24.

visual performance at the scene of objection.”³ The break is the space where Black performance and subjectivity live.

This thesis focuses on the practice of contemporary visual artist and musician Satch Hoyt, who employs what I am calling an “Afrosonic aesthetic”. Broadly, an Afrosonic aesthetic is the artistic impulse to incorporate a Black sonic ethic into an artwork regardless of medium. I argue that Black contemporary artists are attuned to the frequency of Black life, continually creating and accessing technologies that attend to a sonic past, present, and future. I seek to investigate the sonicity of artworks that recall this frequency. By drawing from contemporary Black Studies, blurring the borders of aesthetics, and engaging Hoyt’s own Afro-Sonic Mapping practice and text, I will shape a living methodology that can identify, analyze, and archive artworks that contain this notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic to the art historical canon. As part of my scholarly practice, it is important for me to amplify the work of living contemporary Black artists, and Hoyt’s voice is included throughout my writing.

Hoyt, who was born in London of British and African-Jamaican ancestry, is a spiritualist and believer in ritual and retention.⁴ Music and sound has always featured prominently in his life and is completely entwined in his artistic practice. He began as a musician and singer before moving into the sphere of visual arts in 1999.⁵ His practice is centred in the cultural and political role of sonicity and engages the transnational African diaspora.⁶ Through a methodology of research and performance he

³ Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 1-24.

⁴ “Satch Hoyt”, Biennale of Sydney, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/participants/satch-hoyt/>.

⁵ “Sonic Experiences”, C&, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://contemporaryand.com/magazines/sonic-experiences/>.

⁶ Satch Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations* (Archive Books, 2022) 224.

un-mutes sonic archives, breathing new life into ancient sonic tradition (fig.1).⁷ He is based in Berlin, Germany, and his multidisciplinary practice includes sculpture, musical recording, performing, painting, and drawing. Most of his sculptural pieces and installations are accompanied by a soundscape.⁸ The underlying theme of his body of work is what he calls the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier; the notion that sound was the primary element that kept the African diaspora alive during the forced migration of the Middle Passage.⁹ Hoyt asserts that this “mnemonic network of sound” was carried with enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and continues to keep the transnational African diaspora intact.¹⁰ Imagining how these sounds were carried, held, and remembered during this forced migration is at the heart of Hoyt’s work as he maps this sonic journey across the African diaspora. Across his research and artistic practice Hoyt is building a living sonic archive that respects and honours Afrosonic histories through this Black sonic ethic.

A sonic ethic contains what Black feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art Tina M. Campt calls “the visual frequency of Black life”.¹¹ I endeavour to explore this notion of a visual frequency in-depth by defining a Black sonic ethic; the sonicity alive in Afro-descendant artists that awakens a specific frequency in a visual artwork. Campt’s idea of *still-moving-images* as a genre of Black visibility has inspired me to dig into how we might think about artwork across mediums that carry a sonic imprint.¹² Along with Campt, artist Arthur Jafa has noted that still and moving images

⁷ Hoyt has developed a practice that he calls “Un-Muting”, where he brings past resonating forms into the present. Namely instruments whose main function (among others) is to communicate with the ancestors.

⁸ “Sonic Experiences”, C&, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://contemporaryand.com/magazines/sonic-experiences/>.

⁹ “Sonic Experiences.”

¹⁰ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 27.

¹¹ Tina Campt, “The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor, and the Practice of Refusal,” *Social Text* 37, no. 3 (2019): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-758503>.

¹² Campt, “The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor, and the Practice of Refusal,” 27.

carry a sonic tonality, asking how we might interrogate a visual medium by analyzing the frequency and tone with a specificity that can only be imbued by Black artists.¹³ This sonic ethic is a responsibility held by artists across the Black diaspora to attend to the oral, the musical, and the vibrational affects passed down ancestrally through generations. I will return to this notion of a sonic ethic throughout this thesis as I attempt to define and thread the notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic throughout Hoyt's artistic practice.

The Afrosonic can be broadly defined as the innovations, sonic practices, and ways of creating subjectivities outside of capitalism with deep respect for Black creative tradition.¹⁴ Black sonic sensibilities are an embodied knowledge, a sacred somatic way of being and listening in the world. Scholar Tavia Nyong'o describes love of the wisdom in Black music as Afro-sonic-philosophy.¹⁵ What Nyong'o calls Afro-sonic-philosophy is the attempt to trace this wisdom through sonic transformations and reverberations across time and space.¹⁶ This wisdom, and the love surrounding it is what informs the artists that create work with an Afrosonic aesthetic.

Filmmaker and scholar Julian Henriques notes in his monograph *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* that thinking through sound is distinctly different from thinking through images or even music.¹⁷ Creating artistically through the ethic of an Afrosonic aesthetic allows for the embodied sonic "ways-of-knowing" that Henriques describes, to be

¹³ Arthur Jafa, "Black Visual Intonation," In *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 264–68.

¹⁴ Mark V. Campbell, *Afrosonic Life* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 13–42

¹⁵ Tavia Nyong'o, "Afro-Philo-Sonic Fictions: Black Sound Studies after the Millennium," *Small Axe* 18, no. 2 (2014): 173–79, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-2739938>.

¹⁶ Nyong'o, "Afro-Philo-Sonic Fictions: Black Sound Studies after the Millennium." 173–79.

¹⁷ Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*. (Continuum, 2011) xvii.

felt through an artwork. I argue that one can interact with an artwork as a sonic body when confronted with a piece that holds an Afrosonic aesthetic.

Aesthetics is “the discipline aimed at the study of beauty and art”.¹⁸ Modern aesthetics (as defined in Eurocentric texts) prioritize the earliest known academically published texts in the Western world as foundational thought.¹⁹ The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics for example, cites German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten as the person to coin the term aesthetics in 1735 as a twenty-one year old academic.²⁰ These anthologies do not include early African perspectives on beauty and art and leave out a significant portion of the world when discussing the ontology of aesthetic properties. Late art historian Robert Farris Thompson’s landmark text *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* attends to the art and philosophy connecting Black Atlantic worlds.²¹ With this text, Thompson traces how five early African civilizations- Yoruba, Kongo, Ejagham, Mande, and Cross River- have informed and are reflected in the aesthetic, social, and meta-physical traditions of Afrodiasporic people globally.²²

Black aesthetics as a concept has always existed in modernity, without explicitly being named and “has been racialized because anti-Black racism has had a deep history within modern Western aesthetics.”²³ To understand and think about Black aesthetics outside of and uncoupled from anti-Black racism is a truly radical perspective uncommon even today. The notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic

¹⁸ Alessandro Giovannelli, *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers* (Continuum, 2012), 1.

¹⁹ Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic*. (Meridian, 1957); Alessandro Giovannelli, *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers* (Continuum, 2012).

²⁰ Jerrold Levinson, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2003) 25-26.

²¹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Vintage Books, 1984) xiii-xvii.

²² Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, xiii-xvii.

²³ Michael Kelly and Monique Roelofs, eds. *Black Art and Aesthetics: Relationalities, Interiorities, Reckonings*. (Bloomsbury, 2024), 2-17.

attempts to wrestle Black aesthetics away from limited perspectives within the Western art historical canon into the abundant historical roots of African aesthetics. An Afrosonic aesthetic contains what Thompson refers to as a “flash of the spirit” - the visual and philosophic threads of creativity and imagination, living alongside sonic modalities that make up a Black Atlantic visual tradition.²⁴

Thompson’s writing around rhythmized textiles for instance, gives incredible insight into the deep and longstanding entanglement of the visual and sonic within the Black diaspora.²⁵ On the west coast of Africa, narrow-strip weaving has been in practice since medieval times and its influence can be found across the diaspora today. Thompson writes:

A particular style of the Mande and Mande-influenced narrow strip textile, enlivened by rich and vivid suspensions of the expected placement of the weft-blocks- thus characterised by designs virtually to be scanned metrically, in visual resonance with the famed off-beat phrasing of melodic accents in African and Afro-American music-introduces to the history of art and extraordinary idiom, unique to the black world.²⁶

In this short paragraph, Thompson attends to the sonic, quite literally woven into African textiles, giving them rhythm. This tangible example of how Black sonic and visual aesthetics have riffed off one another for centuries is a portal to my thinking around an Afrosonic aesthetic.

Hoyt’s practice is anchored by an overarching and ongoing research project entitled Afro-Sonic Mapping. Formerly a blog that archived his research findings, Afro-Sonic Mapping expanded into an exhibition at the HKW Berlin in 2019 and Hoyt along with the exhibitions’ curator Paz Guevara created a publication that is at once a research document, exhibition catalogue, collection of lyrics, blog posts and essays, and historical reading. Throughout the text, Hoyt interviews musicians,

²⁴ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, xiii-xvii.

²⁵ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 207.

²⁶ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 207.

producers, DJs, artists, and scholars across Angola, Brazil, and Portugal. Hoyt chose the Lusophone triangle of countries to embark on his first Afro-Sonic Mapping exploration, as the Portuguese were the first to sail into the Congo basin in 1483. Hoyt writes: “When we talk of resistance music in Angola we must reach back to 1483. That’s the year in which three Portuguese caravels sailed into Cabinda at the mouth of the Congo River and met the Pende people.”²⁷ This practice of moving through these specific regions within the diaspora is what Hoyt calls a “counter journey”- this deep work of recovery through the drawing out of sonic histories from the very descendants of those stolen from the shores of Africa.²⁸

Hoyt’s Afro-Sonic Mapping journey began with a research trip to the Berliner Phonogramm Archiv (Berlin Phonogram Archive), the first and oldest archive of its kind. The Phonogram Archive originally housed its earliest recordings from the 1900s at the Institute of Psychology at the Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University of Berlin) until 1923.²⁹ In 1934 the collection was moved into the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin.³⁰ The collection holds around 30,000 wax cylinders of music and sound recordings, with more than 16,000 original phonograms recorded between 1893 and 1943 in various regions of the world.³¹ It is here that Hoyt encountered the phonograph recordings from Angola and the Congo recorded circa 1906-1930, some of the earliest recordings from the continent of Africa.³² These recordings were captured by the likes of Swedish missionary and

²⁷ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 39.

²⁸ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 19-20.

²⁹ “Phonogram Archive,” Berlin Phonogram Archive, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de/sammlungen/phonogramm-archiv/>.

³⁰ “Phonogram Archive.”

³¹ “Phonogram Archive.”

³² Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

ethnographer Karl Laman and German ethnologists Hermann Baumann and Leo Frobenius, who created and collected audio recordings from the aforementioned regions (fig. 2 & 3).³³ These recordings were captured on the phonograph- a machine developed in 1877 by Thomas Edison to record and play sound. In his text *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, scholar Alexander Weheliye notes the profound shift in the way the Afrosonic moves with the introduction of this technology. With the invention of the phonograph towards the end of the nineteenth century, sounds became separated from the sources that (re)produced them, creating new oral and musical technologies that greatly impacted twentieth-century Black culture.³⁴ Weheliye argues that the complex entanglement between modern Black culture and sound technologies provides an atmosphere for creating and imagining a variety of cultural practices, resulting in what he names sonic Afro-modernity.³⁵

Weheliye's notion of sonic Afro-modernity speaks to the entanglement between sound technologies and Black aurality that marks the ways that distinct Black culture emerges.³⁶ This notion plays into the idea of an Afrosonic aesthetic when artists like Hoyt are contributing to Black visual culture by seeking to fill the gaps from what we cannot hear. As an artist, Hoyt was confronted with how early sound technologies aided in muting African musicians and has launched an entire cartographic investigation that is informed by sonic Afro-modernity through contemporary Afrodiasporic people. Due to technological limitations and Western sonic sensibilities of the time differing wildly from African sound practices, these recordings that Hoyt came across require a lot of

³³ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

³⁴ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2005) 19.

³⁵ Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, 19.

³⁶ Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, 19.

imagination. In listening to the archive, Hoyt noted that the wax cylinders that these recordings exist on only last two minutes each and do not capture the midrange and lower range (bass) frequencies.³⁷ When listening, one is only hearing the highs- making the recordings extremely difficult to listen to.³⁸ The instrument could only record what was directly in front of the horn, and many of these recordings are of entire orchestras, sometimes comprised of over thirty musicians, with many members of the village participating in ceremonies that often lasted several days. When one listens to the recordings however, you can only hear one voice in a sea of muffled background noise.³⁹ There are entire worlds that are missing with those frequencies. This is where Hoyt's practice of Afro-Sonic mapping lives.

In listening to these recordings, it prompted a series of questions for Hoyt around how they were created, and the conditions that these recordings were produced under. These 'ethnographers' were recording at the height of King Leopold's Belgian Congo massacre and a Portuguese colonial conquest. The performers in these recordings are not named in the archive. Hoyt asserts that these performances captured by ethnographers were mere sketches that hardly convey the depth of what was happening sonically and are minstrelsy in tone.⁴⁰ Hoyt's soundscapes and use of remix are the reparative work to counter this.

Here we can look to scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva's text *Unpayable Debt* as it highlights the profound economic and ethical value of coloniality through a Black feminist framework.⁴¹ Ferreira da Silva writes that the task of lifting this unpayable debt lives in the realm of the intuition and the

³⁷ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

³⁸ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

³⁹ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

⁴⁰ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 17.

⁴¹ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg Press, 2022) 81-111.

imagination; a metaphysical move is required to invite a quantum level kind of thinking that can see past the status quo of separability, determinacy, and sequentiality.⁴² Artists like Hoyt who work in the realm of the Afrosonic understand that there is an inherently different set of priorities that eschew notions of value when it comes to Black sound and Black sonic expression. Curator, DJ, and scholar Mark V. Campbell's monograph *Afrosonic Life* delves into Turntablism's decommodifying turn. Turntablists and DJs use their hands to interrupt the linearity of a record to tell a new story- using techniques that require a reimagining of our current ways of existing.⁴³ Campbell notes that Turntablists work outside of market time, challenging the dominance of the narrow colonial imagination by rendering the sonic illegible.⁴⁴ Hoyt's practice of un-muting African instruments from colonial collections defies the logics of colonial value and returns the value to the Afrodiasporic people and the instruments themselves as an act of restitution. Hoyt asks, "If the phonograph machine was the slave of the anthropological master, what was the role of the African performer and under what duress was the performance performed?"⁴⁵ These early recordings capture what Hoyt calls the first thumbprint of African music and are a part of a sonic tapestry that was being sewn at the moment of performance.⁴⁶

⁴² Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 81-111.

⁴³ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 43-66.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 43-66.

⁴⁵ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 17.

⁴⁶ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 23.

Hoyt attends to this archival erasure with a counter practice of what he dubs ‘a sonic restitution’.⁴⁷ This practice of sonic cartography is a vehicle for Hoyt to create avenues of repair directed towards a neglected archive.

Scholar Katherine McKittrick’s expansive, rigorous, and at times necessarily opaque text *Dear Science and Other Stories* offers rebellious methodologies and deep exploration through Black study.⁴⁸ McKittrick thinks through Black livingness as crucial method and attends to how Black citation, in its myriad of ways, creates “conversations about how we know what we know and how we share our livingness.”⁴⁹ Hoyt’s practice of un-muting enacts this rebellion, giving life to these silenced instruments and recalling sonic histories.

In a conversation with Afro-Sonic Mapping exhibition curator Paz Guevara, Hoyt shares that this project is about sonic restitution, countering erasure, and moving the encounter with sonic histories outside of static museum settings.⁵⁰ Hoyt explains:

The Afro-Sonic Mapping project is very much involved in the investigation of amalgamations. I argue that the enslaved Africans acted as portals and carried this mnemonic network of sound over to the Caribbean basin and to the Americas, and during those horrendous journeys new genres of music and languages were being formed. We cannot imagine what this incubatory infernal experience entailed, but when those ships landed, we already had the formation of musics that would evolve into all the sophisticated hybrids. For example, a very important amalgamation was created in Congo Square, New Orleans, where various African musics met French classical, First Nations’, and Irish music. This was the birth of Jazz, or Jass, as it was known at its stage of formulation. African sound in the sixteenth century met Catholicism, what I like to term the “Africanization of Christianity.” Nowadays, the Palenque community in Colombia speaks a strain of the Bantu language, a Niger-Congo language that no longer exists in the African continent. They are also playing a certain genre of music and rhythm patterns that are rarely found in African countries today. If we want to study African music, we

⁴⁷ Hoyt, interview.

⁴⁸ Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Duke University Press, 2020).

⁴⁹ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 29.

⁵⁰ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 22-34.

are forced to go to the transnational African diaspora. Particularly in the Americas and the Caribbean basin, the diaspora, unbeknownst to itself, has been and still is a living archive to certain Africanisms that, due to brutal colonial violence, have long been extinct in Africa. The lesser-known Afro-Lusophone sonic resistance is the chosen focus of my maiden voyage of Afro-Sonic Mapping, in which contemporary collaborators such as Khris and MC Sacerdote from Luanda, Suya Nascimento from Salvador de Bahia, and Rui Viera Nery in Lisbon were consulted and contributed to bringing the un-muted recordings and their aural histories into contemporary life. Afro-Sonic Mapping has managed to serve as a bridge to traverse and link us to the ongoing cartographies of our present days.⁵¹

Hoyt calls this iteration of Afro-Sonic Mapping the maiden voyage since it is only the beginning of a lifelong and worldwide research endeavour that illuminates his artistic practice. This research is one with his artistic practice. The conversations, recordings, and un-muting conducted while travelling inform his soundscape, sculpture, painting, and drawing practice. As Hoyt writes: “Unfortunately most colonial narratives available in archives are solely penned by the colonizers, not the colonized.”⁵² With Afro-Sonic Mapping, Hoyt is creating the infrastructure for sonic resistance and, on a spiritual level, the opportunity for great healing and repair through his gift of un-muting. Hoyt expands: “Afro-Sonic Mapping situates itself in a triangle of past, present, and future, offering a prismatic approach to the eradication of amnesia and fallacy often found in European and American historical ledgers. Afro-Sonic Mapping’s ongoing quest for epistemic sonic solutions attempts to contribute to the long crescendo of the transnational African Diaspora.”⁵³

Hoyt’s vast body of work across mediums attends to this theory of an Afrosonic aesthetic and to demonstrate this I will break this thesis down into three main sections. Section one titled Afro-Sonic Map: A Cartographic Remix attends to Hoyt’s paintings & unfixed visual scores that bring his research

⁵¹ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 27.

⁵² Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 209.

⁵³ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 218

to life in visual, spatial, and sonic ways. Section two titled Celestial Vessels, The Shape of the Afrosonic focuses on Hoyt's sculpture & aural activation practice. Section three titled Unmuted: A Reparative Sonic highlights Hoyt's unmuting series. Although I have separated this thesis into chapters discussing the use of different materials across various mediums, Hoyt's artworks defy linearity and genre. The ideas presented throughout Hoyt's work and this thesis will overlap many times, always returning to the sonicity of Black life and woven together by an Afrosonic aesthetic.

Chapter One: Afro-Sonic Map: A Cartographic Remix

In the summer of 2024, I had the opportunity to visit Hoyt's studio in Berlin. Taking in all of the artwork that occupies almost every inch of his atelier made clear the ways that music is transmuted into different materialities, explorations, and inquiries throughout his practice. Sculptures, rolls of canvas, instruments, recording equipment, and drawings live among stacks of scholarly texts and exhibition catalogues. There is a set of very crisp sounding speakers for listening to his soundscapes and compositions and a wall of windows that let in light. We began our conversation speaking about his paintings and drawings.

Hoyt's practice is anchored by his notion of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier. A mnemonic network of sound that stretches across ocean, time, and space. His artworks create the framework for sonic recollection. A space where African diaspora are invited to remember themselves again and again through sonic portals and aural repetition. What does freedom sound like?

Hoyt's methodology of Afro Sonic Mapping extends across and lives throughout his artistic practice. In this chapter I will give an overview of Hoyt's paintings, with a focus on the *Afro Sonic Map* (2017-Ongoing) series and an untitled series of un-fixed graphic scores painted in a vintage book of music.

Hoyt's paintings can be read and awakened in several ways- as cartographic depictions, unfixed graphic scores, and celestial constellations.⁵⁴ All of the paintings in the *Afro Sonic Map* series are a

⁵⁴ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 33.

variation of the same journey (fig. 4 & 5). With this work, Hoyt is re-writing, re-narrating the journey through the middle passage, across the Black Atlantic.⁵⁵

The ritualized politics of remembering- which art historian Cheryl Finley calls mnemonic aesthetics- is the underlying process that is key to the cultural practice of contemporary artists in the African diaspora.⁵⁶ Departing from Paul Gilroy's seminal text *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Finley introduces an art historical inquiry into the use of slave ship iconography.⁵⁷ Finley posits that Gilroy's notion of a Black Atlantic makes way for mnemonic strategies to influence cultural practices with waves of resurgence across the Atlantic.⁵⁸ This theory of mnemonic aesthetics works alongside the idea of Afrosonic aesthetics as it names the strategic memory work involved in producing works with "the aural and visual shape of sonic communication."⁵⁹ Finley names this artistic impulse the "symbolic possession of the past"; a practice of remembering as creative strategy.⁶⁰ Finley writes: "The practice of mnemonic aesthetics further reveals how artists have found it important to insist on their connection to the history of slavery, so that present generations can understand its contemporary ramifications for the processes of identity formation."⁶¹ This practice of remembering, re-creating, and re-framing the slave ship's journey is how contemporary Black artists keep hold of memories and stories that threaten to disappear.⁶² Like many Black contemporary artists, Hoyt is challenging the

⁵⁵ "Artists in Motion: Satch Hoyt", Biennale of Sydney YouTube, Accessed February 23, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Di4OZnKEIJg&list=PL33s&ab_channel=biennaleofsydney.

⁵⁶ Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 11.

⁵⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 10.

⁵⁹ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 11.

⁶⁰ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 10.

⁶¹ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 11.

⁶² Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 11.

memories and archival matter of the dominant colonial narrative. With these paintings Hoyt seeks to recall what happened sonically in the slave ship's hold during the brutal voyage that African people endured across the Atlantic.

The transatlantic slave trade violently transported upwards 10 million enslaved African people across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas from the 15th to the 19th century.⁶³ It was the second stage of the so-called triangular trade, in which arms, textiles, and wine were shipped from Europe to Africa, enslaved people from Africa to the Americas, and sugar and coffee from the Americas to Europe.⁶⁴ The imposed erasure, broken memory, and rupture that occurred through this brutal dislocation that accompanied the slave trade rearranged Black diasporic time and space.⁶⁵ Hoyt's paintings seek to transform this obscene journey into Black self-expression.⁶⁶

Hoyt's *Afro Sonic Map* painting series was at the forefront of the Afro-Sonic Mapping exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany, 2019 (fig.6). The series synthesizes Hoyt's research practice by re-writing and re-narrating the middle passage visually and sonically with respect to the black noise.⁶⁷ Between 2018 and 2019, he conducted eighteen interviews with artists, activists, musicians, curators, filmmakers, and scholars in Luanda, Salvador de Bahia, and Lisbon.⁶⁸ An 'interview station' was situated in the centre of the exhibition space on a table with headphones- representing a very important element of Hoyt's research project, shedding light on many intertwining

⁶³ James A. Rawley and Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 16.

⁶⁴ Rawley and Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History*.

⁶⁵ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 29; Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (University Press of Virginia), 61–65.

⁶⁶ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 1-17.

⁶⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.

⁶⁸ "Exhibition-HKW", Afro-Sonic Mapping, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://afrosonicmapping.com/exhibition-hkw/>.

subjects throughout the extensive Lusophone triangle narrative.⁶⁹ These interviews investigated colonial and post-colonial narratives, current cross-cultural topics, and the socio-political structures that have shaped the histories in the countries that Hoyt visited.⁷⁰ A selection of the paintings from the ongoing series were hung as a triptych, paintings stacked on top of each other in three panels with eight paintings in total. The paintings were hung in a way that resembles a Jamaican sound system- speakers stacked on top of each other in a distinct formation- rather than viewing the paintings individually, with this install they become part of a whole sound.

The exhibition dug deep into Hoyt's investigation of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier, weaving his samples of archival recordings and field recordings with Afrodiasporic community alongside his large-scale canvases. Throughout the exhibition the paintings were activated, interpreted, and read sonically by Hoyt himself and some of his musical collaborators from Luanda and Salvador de Bahia.⁷¹ Curator Paz Guevara writes:

What musical patterns have been preserved in the sounds of the African Diaspora, thus defying time and forced migration? What sonic affinities exist between Luanda, Lisbon and Salvador da Bahia, or between Dakar, Cali and Lima? How did postcolonial appropriations and transfer processes become inscribed in contemporary rhythms across the Atlantic and beyond?⁷²

The text that emerged from this exhibition was *Afro-Sonic Mapping* (2022). As the curatorial text on the HKW website notes; "*Afro-Sonic Mapping* transforms already-existing archives by uncovering forms of diasporic memory and tying their lineages to contemporary practices of

⁶⁹ "Exhibition-HKW."

⁷⁰ "Exhibition-HKW."

⁷¹ "Musing on the Project," Afro-Sonic Mapping Blog, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://afrosonicmapping.com/2019/11/>.

⁷² "Afro-Sonic Mapping," HKW, Accessed February 23, 2025, https://archiv.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2019/afro_sonic_mapping/afro_sonic_mapping_start.php.

musicians, artists and authors. The exhibition manifests the production of culture as a living activity and as method that resonates with wider processes of cultural liberation and restitution.”⁷³ In every iteration that they are presented, the paintings are large, brightly coloured, and striking.

On Galactic Paths of More Tomorrows, 2017 (fig.7) is a large acrylic painting on linen as part of the *Afro Sonic Map* series. With a rich golden peach background, we see black disc shaped objects along both sides and large speakers emanating purple sonic waves. On each side of the painting, growing out of the discs are two mountainous turquoise triangle shapes pointing towards each other. According to Hoyt, the triangle on the left is meant to represent Africa with a matching shape on the right meant to represent the Caribbean Basin.⁷⁴ In the middle is the crossing of the water, and as Hoyt insists, the crossing of sound.⁷⁵ This is represented by wisps of light blue waves stretching between each triangle. Across the middle of the painting are vertical white lines. In western musical notation, lines are drawn horizontal on sheet music, whereas Hoyt’s lines stretch accordion-like across his interpretation of the Atlantic Ocean. The top middle of the painting is occupied by what Hoyt calls a utopian planet- a large dark green semicircle dripping dark purple. The utopian planets that Hoyt incorporates into his paintings are aspirational; an ideal world filled with beauty.⁷⁶ Floating throughout the painting are his interpretation of octave notes, there are fourteen in total. Gesturing towards an Amiri Baraka poem, the bottom of the painting is lined with a railroad of bones.⁷⁷ Above the bones are swirls of turquoise, pink, and purple matter. This visual map of the transmigration between continents

⁷³ “Afro-Sonic Mapping.”

⁷⁴ Satch Hoyt, interview by author, Berlin, May 24, 2024.

⁷⁵ Hoyt, interview.

⁷⁶ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 33.

⁷⁷ Amiri Baraka and Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Wise, Why’s, Y’s: The Griot’s Song Djeli YA* (Third World Press, 1995).

has been read as an unfixed graphic score and performed by Hoyt along with other musicians. Hoyt's paintings speak to both spiritual and geographical travel.⁷⁸

In a painting from the same series painting titled *Bleed*, 2017 (fig. 8) the turquoise triangle on the left meant to represent Africa is significantly larger than the triangle on the right which represents the Caribbean Basin and the Americas.⁷⁹ At the base of the triangle is a bright orange foundation. Bright, magenta streaks are leaping from the triangles on both sides. In the centre of the painting there is a light blue square representing the water crossed on this sonic voyage. In this painting the utopian planet is less revealed and hovers as one third of a circle, black with a magenta border. There are eight floating octave balls and there are no lines present. Significant to this painting is the presence of an underpainting (fig. 8.1). Behind the soft violet background we see traces of waves referencing *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, 1831 (fig. 9) by Japanese artist Hokusai stretching out of the water and across the bottom of the painting.⁸⁰ Hoyt was inspired by the well-known Japanese woodblock print, as he found its themes congruous with that of *Afro Sonic Map*.⁸¹ With *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* depicting one of the first views of Japan from the outside world at the end of an era of isolation from the Western world, Hoyt is gesturing towards themes of European movement and the metaphorical waves caused by industrialization and colonization.⁸² There are paintings in the series that depart from featuring the large triangles as continents.

⁷⁸ Hoyt, *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 33.

⁷⁹ Hoyt, interview.

⁸⁰ Hoyt, interview.

⁸¹ Hoyt, interview.

⁸² Hoyt, interview.

Afro Sonic Map #8, 2017 (fig.10) has two long black rectangles acting as speaker boxes on the left and right side of the painting emanating yellow. Emerging from the rectangles are two sets of drum sticks that appear wave-like. The appearance of black drum sticks throughout this series represent the Black body.⁸³ Stretching across the painting are vertical white lines and there are eight octave circles floating within and outside the lines. Hovering at the top of this painting there are three utopian planets, two black semi circles and in the centre a larger gold and black semi-circle. Behind the circles is a purple mass. Emerging from the planets are two upside down solid turquoise triangles side by side. At the bottom of the painting is a mess of broken-down shapes, mingling turquoise and purple. Behind the soft cerulean background there is an underpainting referencing Hokusai's waves again.

Hoyt has said that he is interested in seducing the viewer with beautiful colours to bring them in, leaving it to them to decide which layers they want to confront or form a relationship with.⁸⁴ Hoyt's choiceful use of bright colours associated with joy, relaxation, spirit, and beauty do not evoke the horrors of slavery. Rather, these colours imply and recall a refusal to break spirit. Deeper than resilience, these colours align with what remembering a song in one's body might look like. These technicolour maps offer an insight to what hope in the hold looks and sounds like. Hoyt is drawing from a tradition of African aesthetics. Thompson has made clear the link between colour and sound that spans historical African society.⁸⁵ In his text *African Art in Motion; Icon and Act* he draws a

⁸³ Hoyt, interview.

⁸⁴ "Artists in Motion: Satch Hoyt"

⁸⁵ Robert Farris Thompson, National Gallery of Art (U.S.), and Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, *African Art in Motion; Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White* (University of California Press, 1974) 7-9.

parallel between the African tradition of singing notes in a steady outpouring of tone, and the strong use of colour in African textiles.⁸⁶ Thompson writes:

A.M. Jones has observed: ‘the African normally makes no noticeable physical stress on any note and sings all the notes in a steady outpouring of even tone.’ The same point applies to the strong use of color in African textiles. There are two ways of preserving the full sonority of colors in textile patterning: either through contrastive colors, hot and cool, of equal strength, or by maintaining equality of dynamics in the phrasing of light and dark colors. Either way, full sonority and attack in the handling of color means that every line is equally emphasized. For this reason, many or most of the textile traditions of Africa seem ‘loud’ by conventional Western standards, but this is precisely the point.⁸⁷

Hoyt’s paintings vibrate with an Afrosonic ethic that draws from an ancient African aesthetic.

In painting this sonic journey again and again, Hoyt enacts a practice of mnemonic aesthetics.⁸⁸ With this memory work, he employs what Finley calls aesthetic strategies of repetition and rhythm.⁸⁹ In offering these paintings as unfixed graphic scores, Hoyt plays with this memory work with a distinct Afrosonic aesthetic. Within each painting is the offer to recall, re-imagine, and contribute to the sonic journey across the Atlantic. Each time these cosmic constellations are activated, new memories are recorded into the Afrodiasporic consciousness. This archive of sonic recollection, though largely ephemeral, is a powerful tool in the act of cultural reclamation. Where does the sonic fit in when discussing the immaterial? As Campbell writes, “Afrosonic innovations, in their multisensory attentiveness, refuse to define humanness as solely a racialized labouring body.”⁹⁰ With his paintings, Hoyt is redefining humanness with his generous alternative forms of remembering through sonic

⁸⁶ Thompson, National Gallery of Art, and Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, *African Art in Motion; Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White*, 7-9.

⁸⁷ Thompson, National Gallery of Art, and Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, *African Art in Motion; Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White*, 7.

⁸⁸ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 1-17.

⁸⁹ Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*, 1-17.

⁹⁰ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 13-42.

mapping. The people inhumanely trapped in the slave ship's hold were not simply labouring bodies, they were whole beings filled with life, sound, memory, and history. When Hoyt's unfixed graphic scores are played by musicians, what does this do for collective memory making? Hoyt's work provides a visual map meant to represent a very black sonic journey underscoring a visual frequency of the black experience.⁹¹ With this work he is moving through Sylvia Wynter's "deciphering practice" with his sonic and cartographic reading that eschews a governing system of knowledge.⁹² The *Afro Sonic Map* series allows for breathing space and the ability to "honour other ways of feeling and knowing the world."⁹³

There is precedent for unfixed graphic scores created by Afrodiasporic artists. Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith is an American trumpeter and composer working in the field of creative music. Smith's *Ankhrasmation Language Scores, 1967-2015* (fig. 11) is a collection of over 45 works on paper. Included are the first of his early scores to use non-standard visual directions. Ankhrasmation is a unique sonic language that Smith has developed over fifty years. These unfixed graphic scores prioritize symbolic compositions of colour, lines, and shape over traditional musical notation. Smith has intended for these to be read and interpreted by musicians who have a deep understanding of improvisation. The scores create space for and allow musicians to bring unique expertise and strengths to each performance.⁹⁴ Visual artist and writer Renee Gladman's series of abstract scores; *Slowly We*

⁹¹ Camppt "The Visual Frequency of Black Life Love, Labor, and the Practice of Refusal," 25–46.

⁹² Sylvia Wynter. "Rethinking "Aesthetics": Notes towards a Deciphering Practice." *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, 1992; Katherine McKittrick. "Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea." *Antipode* 54, no. 1 (2022): 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12773>.

⁹³ McKittrick. "Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea," 3–18.

⁹⁴ "Wadada Leo Smith Ankhrasmation: The Language Scores, 1967-2015, The Renaissance Society, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://renaissancesociety.org/exhibitions/4/wadada-leo-smith-ankhrasmation-the-language-scores-1967-2015/>.

Have the Feeling: Scores, 2019–2022 (fig. 12), drawn with soft pastel and pigment on paper, play with space and time- inviting the viewer's sonic interpretation. Unlike Smith, Gladman is not a musician, and her scores offer musicians and non-musicians alike an encounter with the unknown. The common thread that all of these artists' scores share is a re-arrangement of sonic time and space, and an invitation to interpret them differently upon each encounter.

Interpreters of Hoyt's scores are invited to embrace these un-fixed elements and to create ephemeral improvisations, adding layers of meaning to the work. This invitation, with its rootedness in the presence of the interpreter, encompasses this notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic. In other words, these artists are attending to the frequency of Black life, allowing its ebbs and flows and a full spectrum of stories to be told from a sonic perspective.

Hoyt shared with me that his experience with Butch Morris' Conduction technique has deeply influenced his painting and un-fixed graphic score making.⁹⁵ A friend of Hoyt, late composer and musician Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris was a cornetist, composer, bandleader, and conductor. He was the creator of a technique for conducting group improvisations that he called Conduction.⁹⁶ Conduction is an intuitive method of leading an ensemble of improvisers that incorporates the standard moves of the conductor and fuses them with gestures and signs that instruct the musicians.⁹⁷ Hoyt creates his scores with the understanding that written signs and symbols are not obliged to function as rigid instruction.⁹⁸ Hoyt shared:

⁹⁵ Hoyt, interview.

⁹⁶ Butch Morris and David Henderson. "Butch Morris." *Bomb*, no. 55 (1996): 32–36.

⁹⁷ Morris and Henderson, "Butch Morris," 32–36.

⁹⁸ Hoyt, interview.

I believe that some absolute essential elements in working within an un-fixed ensemble format are: to be a conscious empathetic listener, to engage in constructive multiple layered conversations, to comprehend that more often than not, much is said in the silence of laying out rather than in the extrapolation of playing in. Creating in this universe of sonicity, permits an unbridled liberation within the construction of un-fixed real time composition.⁹⁹

Hoyt's painting practice includes collecting vintage player piano rolls of paper and music books from across Europe and repurposing them for his graphic scores. During our studio visit, he showed me an old German book of sheet music by Austrian composer Franz Schubert (fig. 13). Over each page of musical notation, Hoyt has created his own scores, some more opaque than others. When the book is opened, there are couplings of two pages that become one un-fixed graphic score and singular pages that become an individual score. For example, in one untitled work from the book, Hoyt paints over two pages of musical notation with royal blue creating three large black circles on each page (fig.14). The black circles are filled with a bright pink colour that allows for some of the musical notation to be seen more clearly. In another work, he lightly paints one page with the title 'Quartett IV' a blue grey that allows for the original notation to bleed through. Over top, he has painted green and pink squares of varying sizes that are outlined in red and interconnected by red lines (fig. 15).

This book is filled with dozens of individual drawings that have yet to be exhibited. On the inner page of the front cover that is covered in his notes, Hoyt writes, 'Unfixed graphic scores are open to interpretation' and 'Is this book an act of vandalism?' (fig. 16). This practice of writing over classical Western musical notation is a radical act of placemaking. In his research practice, Hoyt is attuned to the

⁹⁹ Hoyt, interview.

sonic and oral histories that go unarchived. With this work, Hoyt imagines a world where Afrosonic notation breathes through the pages of an unwritten history. Here, Hoyt recalls the Black Atlantic by visually imagining and recording a phonic journey.¹⁰⁰

Hoyt's painting practice spans material and format as he works on canvas and atop vintage book pages. Across materials, his paintings can be read, interpreted, and listened to as un-fixed graphic scores. As with all of Hoyt's works, with his drawings and paintings he is tracing the voyage of a life-sustaining Black sonic and is gesturing towards his notion of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier.

¹⁰⁰ Though Hoyt is thinking specifically about Black enslaved people as portals carrying various mnemonic networks of sound on this journey, I wonder what the sonic implications where/are for all oceanic life throughout the middle passage. Here, we can draw from Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *Undrowned* as reminder of marine mammals as witness(es).

Chapter Two: Celestial Vessels, The Shape of the Afrosonic

Living throughout Hoyt's studio are his sculptural works that are currently not being exhibited. While Hoyt lamented needing a larger space, I considered myself extremely fortunate to have a chance to see many of the works together during our visit. His sculptural works vary greatly in size, scope, and in types of materials used. These works range from small, sculpted hair picks to a life-sized canoe. The common theme that weaves its way through the work is always this notion of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier; this mnemonic network of sound is a primary element that has kept the transnational African Diaspora intact.¹⁰¹ This section explores several key pieces from Hoyt's vast breadth of sculptural works that employ a clear Afrosonic aesthetic that draws from the historical and works with a momentum that propels the work into the future.

Hoyt's *Celestial Vessel* (2010) (fig.17) is a large-scale sculptural piece composed of 250 collected red vinyl 45rpm records assembled into a 16-foot canoe structure meant to represent the sonic voyage from Africa to the Americas, underscoring music's importance within the African diaspora. Created in 2009 during an artist residency with the Nasher Museum at Duke University, the sculpture became part of the exhibition *The Record: Contemporary Art and Vinyl* in 2010 (fig. 18). Hoyt began intentionally collecting these red vinyls from the 1950's when he was in New York around 2006/2007.¹⁰² Vinyl as a material is deeply emeshed within Black Atlantic artistic tradition in what Campbell refers to as a B-side to Western modernity: the irreverence for linear time within the creative

¹⁰¹ "Biography", Satch Hoyt, accessed 2025, <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-biography-bibliography>.

¹⁰² "Satch Hoyt: Celestial Vessel", Nasher Museum YouTube, Accessed February 23, 2025, <https://youtu.be/aECSBN4dxCk?si=UoRGkg0c1TG-raOY>.

labour time of DJing and an investment in (re)producing oral and aural Afrodiasporic aesthetics.¹⁰³

Living and moving within this B-side is a relational experience.¹⁰⁴ From the invention of dub in Jamaica in the 1960s to hip-hop in New York in the 1970s, vinyl has been a material that Black artists have manipulated and innovated in ways that are illegible and impossible to be read by the dominant logic as anything but entertainment.¹⁰⁵ With these sonic innovations, Black artists have disrupted linear time, refusing to abide by unwritten rules of vinyl handling.¹⁰⁶ The vinyl record as the main material of this sculpture also resonates as a symbol of the massive effect that Black life and Black sound has had in the development of the music industry and popular culture writ large.

Here, Hoyt's notion of the mnemonic network of sound comes to play in a physical sense. The sounds and worlds that Africans carried in their bodies, carried in the ships hold, have been recorded and pressed onto the permanent object that is vinyl. Writer and scholar of Black Studies Christina Sharpe explores the afterlives of slavery and anti-blackness in transatlantic spaces with her text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.¹⁰⁷ Sharpe's notion of wake work states, "that to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding."¹⁰⁸ *Celestial Vessel* is an example of an artwork that is "in" the wake, occupying the grammar of remembrance and the return to the hold of the ship.¹⁰⁹ Hoyt's choice to create a life size boat like vessel makes clear his commitment to remaining in the wake and holding space for a deep listening.

¹⁰³ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 1-12.

¹⁰⁴ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 1-12.

¹⁰⁵ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 91-118.

¹⁰⁶ Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*, 13-42.

¹⁰⁷ Christina Elizabeth, Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.

Author and scholar Saidiya Hartman's writing is shaped by the study of Black life. Hartman's idea of critical fabulation, which is a practice of "playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view" imagines "what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."¹¹⁰ This work of de-centering the "authorized", mainstream, or colonial account honours the dead and leaves room for all of the stories that are unaccounted for.¹¹¹ Hartman's strategy speaks to the critical reparative gestures in Hoyt's work, as he seeks to breathe life into his works via the Afrosonic.¹¹²

The body of the canoe structure is a metal armature holds the collection of records. There is a longstanding history of ironworking and forging technologies across West Africa early as the sixth century B.C..¹¹³ Blacksmiths held skills to create objects such as amulets, weapons, lamps, masks, and figures (fig. 19) along with expertise in medicine, spirituality, and divination practices.¹¹⁴ Hoyt engaging with this material as the body of the sculptural piece gestures towards this expertise and a contemporary way of engaging with ancient African artistic practices. The soundscape that accompanies *Celestial Vessel* is an otherworldly mashup of Black sound across time and space with songs and sounds weaving in and out of each other.¹¹⁵ Buoyed with the warm crackling sound of vinyl, the mix represents that voyage that the enslaved were subjected to across the Atlantic in a non-linear dream-like melange of blues, jazz horns, r&b, peppered with shouts from James Brown, crooning from

¹¹⁰ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 1–14.

¹¹¹ Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 1–14.

¹¹² Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 1–14.

¹¹³ Emma George Ross, "The Age of Iron in West Africa". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002) 70-72.

¹¹⁴ Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith. *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals* (Prentice Hall, 1998).

¹¹⁵ "Accompanying Sound to Artworks", Satch Hoyt, accessed 2024, <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-sonics>.

Kelis and melodic piano riffs. With this soundscape Hoyt is essentially collapsing time demonstrating his theory of a non-linear and ever-present Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier that threads through all Black music and sound. Hoyt argues that the incubation for ebonics, hip-hop, bebop, and so many other genres of music were percolating in the slave hold under all of that duress.¹¹⁶

With *Celestial Vessel*, Hoyt pairs the sculptural with the sonic as they gesture to each other. Hoyt has activated the sculpture in various venues with live musical performances continuing its symbolic and physical sonic journey. As a form, this work represents the journey from Africa to the Americas once again drawing from Hoyt's notion of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier. The artists' choice in using vinyl as the main material underscores the record and music's importance throughout the African diaspora.¹¹⁷ In making these connections between material, the spiritual, and the sonic, Hoyt's sculpture embodies this notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic.

Hoyt's *Rulers* series (2016-20) is a series of large square hanging sculptural works made up of brightly coloured extendable rulers that broaches the topic of expansionist colonial ways of measurement.¹¹⁸ In 1884, at the request of Kaiser Otto von Bismarck, 14 European leaders were invited to attend a conference in Berlin, known as the Congo Conference or Scramble for Africa.¹¹⁹ European tensions at the time were centred around their imperialist desires ultimately leading to the creation of the Berlin Conference in hopes of sustaining a balance of power in Europe.¹²⁰ Upon

¹¹⁶ Hoyt, interview.

¹¹⁷ "Satch Hoyt: Celestial Vessel."

¹¹⁸ "Sonic Experiences."

¹¹⁹ "Sonic Experiences."

¹²⁰ Michael A. Rutz, *King Leopold's Congo and the "Scramble for Africa" a Short History with Documents. Passages* (Hackett Publishing, 2018) 8-9.

dividing the continent, they employed the metric system to create the borders (of which many exist today) that separated stolen colonial territories.¹²¹ Not one African ruler was invited and many of these invented borders are still in place today.¹²² *Rulers-1, 2016-20* (fig. 20) is a 200 x 190 cm square sculpture that is made to hang on a wall. Made with hundreds of wooden rulers, magnets & steel, it is striking in size. White rulers make up every other vertical row and are divided by colourful rows of rulers resembling West African weaving techniques. Blue, yellow, orange, red, green, pink, and turquoise rulers create colourful vertical stripes. When standing close to the piece, it is apparent that you are looking at rulers. When one is farther away, it appears like an intricate pattern. *Rulers-4, 2016-20* (fig. 21) is the exact shape and size as *Rulers-1* and varies only in colour scheme. This piece uses yellow rulers to make up the main vertical rows and are broken up by thin rows of white rulers along with yellow, green, pink, and blue coloured rulers. Hoyt collected these specific extendable folding rulers over a four-year period at various flea markets in Berlin.¹²³ The series draws explicitly from West African fabric designs, specifically Ewe and Kente woven fabrics from Ghana (fig. 22).

These designs are the descendants of the rhythmized textiles that Thompson writes about in his art historical text *Flash of the Spirit*.¹²⁴ Hoyt's embodied way-of-knowing generates an Afrosonic aesthetic with this series that so perfectly captures the rich layers of Afrodiasporic sonic histories.¹²⁵ The fact that these cloths are woven in an "off-beat phrasing" reflects Hoyt's deep and insightful choice

¹²¹ "Sonic Experiences."

¹²² "Sonic Experiences."

¹²³ Hoyt, interview.

¹²⁴ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 207-223.

¹²⁵ Henriques. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*, xvii.

to play with metrics and measures, defying the rigidity of colonial borders and cultural imposition.¹²⁶

The way that a rigid metric system was imposed on the entire continent of Africa, where temporal, aesthetic, and cultural sensibilities are so incredibly different than that of Europe. The bold, high-vibrational colours that make up Hoyt's *Rulers* series echo the intensity in colour of African textiles. As previously mentioned, Thompson's writing around the sonority of African textiles comes from a rich tradition of patterning that includes contrasting hot and cool colours of equal strength and light and dark colours of equal intensity.

On that note, Hoyt's *Rulers* series further weaves the sonic with reference to measures or musical bars. There are eight vivid lines in each panel, depicting an octave, as each panel is an un-fixed graphic score that can be played in an improvisational manner. Hoyt's intention with the work is to assemble an octet (eight musicians) to perform a live improv conduction with a complete series.¹²⁷ Here, Hoyt gestures to Morris' system of conduction again. Morris has stated that he uses the word improvisation so that people will know what he is talking about- but that he prefers to refer the musicians who participate in a conduction as "intuiters".¹²⁸ In the conservative world of classical composition and performance these ideas are still to this day extremely radical. To witness an ensemble participating in conduction is to experience harmony in supposed dissonance, it requires a great re-framing of how a group can assemble and be together. Morris has said: "Music isn't something on paper, it's something you make. It's something you make and hear. That's what a musician is... As far as I'm concerned, music is not something you think, it's something you imagine. And if you have to

¹²⁶ Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 209.

¹²⁷ Hoyt, interview.

¹²⁸ Morris and Henderson, "Butch Morris," 32–36.

write it, then you think it out.”¹²⁹ Morris’ call to move away from a Eurocentric way of composing, playing, and listening to music inspires Hoyt’s own music making and visual art practice.¹³⁰ Hoyt’s Rulers sculptures aren’t static or prescriptive. They invite participation, intuition, imagination, and play. They recall the sonicity and spirit of an African continent unbroken, undivided.

Hoyt’s works across mediums often feature the Afro pick/comb. *From Mau Mau To Brixton*, 2009 (fig. 23) and *The Ice Pick*, 2002 (fig. 24) are two sculptural works that incorporate the iconography of the comb. Both works are a part of Hoyt’s *Tangled Migrations* series which features paintings and sculptures adorning the Afro pick/comb. The series deals with the unravelling of Black narratives from the Black Atlantic, through the Middle Passage to contemporary entanglements in the transnational African Diaspora.¹³¹ These works attend to the multilayered history of the Afro pick.¹³² *From Mau Mau To Brixton* features a large black Afro pick sculpted from an ebony species of wood and adorned with five zirconias. It lays in a red velvet lined black case and next to it is a small black key carved in the same ebony wood. *The Ice Pick* in contrast is a large clear Afro pick crafted from glass and lays in a red velvet lined black case that is reminiscent of an instrument case. Hoyt states:

The comb is a very important signifier, and it is also a musical instrument. The Ice Pick is made of glass and talks about fragility and the lack of transparency. It’s important that when we talk about these works, we are referring to a centuries old process, the daily ritual of combing the hair in which history, stories, and rhythm are passed on, from parent to child. Hair culture is important in the communities of the transnational diaspora and is very symbolic in the various chapters of the Black narrative.¹³³

¹²⁹ Morris and Henderson, “Butch Morris,” 32–36.

¹³⁰ Hoyt, interview.

¹³¹ Hoyt, interview.

¹³² Hoyt, interview.

¹³³ Hoyt. *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 32.

Hoyt created a soundscape to accompany *The Ice Pick*. In a Brooklyn studio in 2002, he recorded the sound of a comb passing through the naturally curly hair of two Black women- Michaela Angela Davis and Natasha Nevada Diggs. He developed this work further into a performance, *Hair Combing Cycle, 2014-2017* (fig.25) which has been performed four times in various locales.¹³⁴ In highlighting the importance of hair in Black culture, Hoyt illuminates the sonicity involved in the act of hair styling- further traces of sonic embodied histories.

Hoyt's sculptural works vary greatly in types of materials used across projects yet are anchored together by their Afrosonic aesthetic and thematic interconnection. Hoyt's activation of sculptural works with the addition of an accompanying soundscape or a performative intervention add a reparative layer to his commentary. Hoyt's artworks disregard linear time and attend to the past, present, and future simultaneously.

¹³⁴ Hoyt. *Afro-Sonic Mapping: Tracing Aural Histories Via Sonic Transmigrations*, 33.

Chapter Three: Unmuted: A Reparative Sonic

Hoyt's reparative sonic practice of un-muting fully expresses his notion of an Eternal Migration of the Afro-Sonic Signifier. Hoyt's practice stretches across discipline and defies categorization. As a musician, Hoyt has composed songs for artists including the legendary Jamaican artist Grace Jones, he has sung and played on numerous recordings under the pseudonym Pharaoh Dreams and has been flautist-percussionist in *Burt Sugar The Arkestra Chamber* since 2001. Hoyt's knowledge of instruments is vast and his education and research in that realm is expansive as he travels the world meeting other practitioners. *Un-muting, a Sonic Restitution* (2023 onwards) began as a project in which Hoyt- a trained musician and visual artist, worked for three years to gain permission from the British Museum to play, and in his words 'un-mute', twenty-two African musical instruments from their collection. This historical event was recorded without an audience in a highly guarded area of the museum offices before the instruments were returned to silence in the museum's collection, back in boxes on shelves. The British Museum was born in 1753 and made up of donations from a man named Hans Sloane's massive collections of objects from around the world, most of which were stolen or 'taken' from their respective lands. Sloane was an Anglo-Irish physician who began amassing his collection while in Jamaica working as a doctor on a slave plantation.¹³⁵ After marrying Elizabeth Langley Rose, an heiress to sugar plantations across Jamaica, he gained substantial wealth from profits garnered by the labour of enslaved people and built a collection of 71,000 items that went on to

¹³⁵ James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Harvard University Press, 2017) 37-86.

provide the foundation of the British Museum, the British Library, and the Natural History Museum of London.¹³⁶

The British museum currently holds the *Akan Drum* (fig.26), which they publicly boast as not only one of their oldest African objects, but one of the earliest known surviving African American objects. It is made of Cordia and Baphia wood varieties, (both native to Africa), vegetable fibre, and deer skin.¹³⁷ Symbolically and physically, the drum is at the heart of African culture, tradition, spirituality, and life. In the cruel work to dehumanize Africans, sever community, and in an attempt to break their spirit, the drum and any kind of percussion had been outlawed in many instances in times of slavery and across history.¹³⁸ Despite this, African people carried their rhythms, beats, and percussive life-force with them. This is the essence of Hoyt's Eternal Migration of the Afro-Sonic Signifier. Africans were thrown into the hold with no tangible objects, but they carried a sonic ethic within their bodies. This sonic ethic, this embedded somatic, is what has kept the African Diaspora alive in the face of unimaginable brutality and dehumanization that continues to this day. These sounds and vibrations were carried across a Black Atlantic. The Akan Drum, like all 'trouble making percussive devices', was likely kept away from the enslaved before it was brought to Sloan from Virginia, USA to Britain likely between 1730-1745.¹³⁹ Now it sits in the British Museum, where it has been silenced for centuries. Sloane was known to record the music made by the enslaved while in Jamaica and had a notable fascination with collecting artefacts that belonged to enslaved people he encountered.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Delbourgo. *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum*.

¹³⁷ "Drum", British Museum, accessed 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am-SLMisc-1368.

¹³⁸ Christopher Johnson, *Musicians' Migratory Patterns: The African Drum as Symbol in Early America* (Routledge, 2020).

¹³⁹ King, J. C. H., *First Peoples, First Contacts: Native Peoples of North America* (British Museum Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum*, 37-86.

In 2020 after the brutal murder of civilian George Floyd by American police, there was a worldwide reckoning that included colonial statues being toppled, defaced, and removed from public sites by the public. That August, a bust of Hans Sloane which had been placed in a prominent position at the entrance to the museum was moved into a glass case with literature around his involvement in slavery how his collection was built on the backs of slave labour.¹⁴¹ The British Museum currently has a section on their website of ‘contested objects from the collection.’ These are objects that they state, “are subject to questions about, or requests for, return to other countries.”¹⁴² This makes clear that for museums, it is becoming impossible to ignore the public’s interest in topics like repatriation and return of objects.¹⁴³

For Hoyt, this practice of un-muting is an act of return, ancestral reunion, and deep recovery work. Sharpe, with her methodology of wake work, reminds us “that to be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery’s as yet unresolved unfolding.”¹⁴⁴ With the act of awakening a long dormant instrument, Hoyt situates his work in this unfolding. The culturally rich Congo region where many of these instruments were taken from has deeply influenced Black Atlantic aesthetic across linguistic, sonic, physical and metaphysical traditions.¹⁴⁵ From

¹⁴¹ David Olusoga, “It is not Hans Sloane who has been erased from history, but his slaves”, *Guardian*, August 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/30/it-is-not-hans-sloane-who-has-been-erased-from-history-but-his-slaves>.

¹⁴² “Contested objects from the collection”, British Museum, accessed 2024, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection>.

¹⁴³ Here in Canada where this thesis was written, we can look to contemporary examples of repatriation (or rematriation) such as the return of the Ni’isjoohl memorial pole to the Nisga’a Nation in British Columbia where it had been stolen by the Scottish in 1929.

¹⁴⁴ Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁵ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, xiii-xvii.

vernacular English to singing, Ki-Kongo words and concepts from ancient Congo have influenced Black language- notably, the lexicons of jazz and the blues.¹⁴⁶

In October 2023, once the British Museum had finally allowed him access to the long packed away objects, Hoyt recorded himself playing twenty-two instruments including a Yaka slit drum, a Sanza thumb piano, and a Pende whistle that he later used to create his own remixed soundscapes- fusing the sounds of the ancient instruments from the museum and his own personal collection with modern instruments and digital technology (fig. 27 & 28). The British Museum had many restrictive terms for Hoyt to engage with the instruments and he was forced to wear gloves and had to play the instruments in a subterranean windowless room in the basement with strong air conditioning.¹⁴⁷ He did not play the aforementioned Akan drum. When I asked him what it felt like to liberate the instruments sonically, Hoyt remarked that it was a deeply spiritual, moving process and that he could feel the spirits awakened after over a hundred years of silent incarceration.¹⁴⁸ Hoyt noted that these instruments are never exhibited and never played.¹⁴⁹ While the museum asserts that this is in fact ‘care’ for the object, Hoyt argues that objects that are meant to be played suffer when they are left to deteriorate. Here we can look to VèVè A. Clark’s notion of diaspora literacy- a kind of cultural, embodied literacy that demands knowledges created by lived experience.¹⁵⁰ Hoyt knows inherently how to care for these instruments. This literacy and deep knowing gestures towards the ways of being that

¹⁴⁶ Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 103-105.

¹⁴⁷ For modern museums to radically care for their collections beyond a stifled and limited colonial imagining, they must truly diversify their staff.

¹⁴⁸ Hoyt, interview.

¹⁴⁹ Hoyt, interview.

¹⁵⁰ VèVè A. Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness.” *Theatre Survey* 50, no. 1 (n.d.): 9–18.

we practice in order to resist limiting racial logics and colonial notions of museological care.¹⁵¹ The colonial way of creating and managing museum collections is undergoing a reckoning among contemporary institutions, where staff and public are having conversations around the return and use of objects among Indigenous communities. Filmmaker Mati Diop's documentary film *Dahomey*, 2024 traces the return of the so-called Dahomey treasures containing twenty-six of the many art works that French troops looted in the eighteen-nineties while subjugating the Kingdom of Dahomey (fig. 29).¹⁵² In 2018 after decades of pressure and activism, the historic decision was made to repatriate the art works to Benin more than a century later.¹⁵³ Diop's film follows the journey of these artifacts from the point of view of a near life-size sculpture of King Ghezo, voiced by Haitian writer Makenzy Orcel, who narrates throughout the repatriation process for the first half of the film. He is referred to by his inventory number, 26, gesturing towards his treatment in captivity (fig. 30).¹⁵⁴ The second part of the film welcomes the art works to Cotonou, the country's largest city, and the historic event is discussed passionately by students at University of Abomey-Calavi. Scholars have estimated that there are over 5000 stolen objects that still reside in France.¹⁵⁵ With her lyrical film, Diop gives a voice to the looted sculptures that have been taken from their geographical and spiritual African contexts. This work is in the same vein as Hoyt's un-muting, awakening silenced objects with the utmost respect.

¹⁵¹ Katherine McKittrick, "Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea," *Antipode* 54, no. 1 (2022): 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12773>.

¹⁵² Julian Lucas, "Mati Diop and the Cinema of Impossible Returns," *The New Yorker*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/11/04/mati-diop-profile-filmmaker-dahomey>.

¹⁵³ Lucas, "Mati Diop and the Cinema of Impossible Returns".

¹⁵⁴ Alex Greenberger, "Documentary Marks a Milestone Within the Repatriation Debate," *ARTnews*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/dahomey-mati-diop-looted-benin-artworks-france-review-1234721859/>.

¹⁵⁵ Alex Greenberger, "France Says It Will Return 26 Artifacts to Benin By 2021, in Major Move on Repatriation," *ARTnews*, December 16, 2019, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/france-returns-benin-artifacts-2021-1202672666/>.

During our studio visit, I had the great privilege of listening to one of Hoyt's soundscapes that was created with the recordings from the British Museum. It begins with a flurry of crashing percussion that leads into wind instruments and xylophone. As the track progresses it sounds fluid, bright, and filled with movement, pulsating with life and electric energy. Flutes soar bird-like over kalimbas that ride a wave of sparkling percussion and electric synths, fading into the old phonograph recordings of muted ancient voices that Hoyt has lovingly revived from 1910. Hoyt is collapsing time here at this site of refusal with a reordering of aesthetic space.¹⁵⁶ This new world that Hoyt creates is a site of possibility, lit up with Black aliveness.¹⁵⁷ No longer are these objects relegated as silent relics, they are being used for their purpose. Here, Hoyt is creating a living counter narrative of an archive that lays in quiet dormancy and gives power back to these stolen objects and recordings. He is living a B-side to Western modernity.¹⁵⁸ Listening to these soundscapes I feel a sense of ease, joy, lightness, and freedom. Much like Hoyt's paintings and unfixed graphic scores, they are a non-linear journey across time, space, and water. To listen to Hoyt's work across mediums allows for a different kind of seeing. As Moten waxes poetic, "Sound gives us back the visibility that ocularcentrism had repressed."¹⁵⁹ Hoyt's counter-journey of the middle passage; re-mixing mediums and technologies is steeped in sonic Afro-modernity.¹⁶⁰ His act of un-muting questions the idea of authorship; who gets to tell the stories of these instruments? Hoyt has since un-muted several archives, including the MARKK museum in Hamburg and the Bergen Kunsthall in Norway. Unlike the British Museum, these institutions have

¹⁵⁶ Moten. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 225.

¹⁵⁷ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*; Kevin Everod Quashie. *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being* (Duke University Press, 2021).

¹⁵⁸ Campbell. *Afrosonic Life*, 1-12.

¹⁵⁹ Moten. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 235.

¹⁶⁰ Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*.

been more open with the instruments from their collections being played on stage in community and without gloves- as they were meant to be played. On January 25, 2024, Hoyt performed a live un-muting at the Great Lecture Hall at the MARKK museum as part of the exhibition opening. In Nyong'o's accompanying essay to the MARKK exhibition catalogue for Hoyt's *Un-Muting Sonic Restitution*, 2024 exhibition, he asks pointedly if African objects that are held in Western museums should be returned to their points of origin, while describing Hoyt's practice and making connections between black music, futurity, and reparation.¹⁶¹ While the answer is a clear and resounding yes through what Nyong'o calls a diasporic consensus or the common sense of a Black Atlantic moral economy, it doesn't appear to be so obvious to the Western institutions that hold these objects.¹⁶² Overall it appears that the Western institution's priority is to think about the fragility of an object rather than a focus on preserving intangible heritage and considering the responsibility that Afrodiasporic people have to these objects.

Hoyt's practice clearly demonstrates that there are repressed sonic histories that are contained within these instruments that are not being used for their intended purpose.¹⁶³ Here again, we can look to Nyong'o's afro-sonic-philosophy; a "love of the wisdom in black music".¹⁶⁴ This love wrapped in wisdom audaciously places African music, rather than Greek dialogue as a point of philosophical origin.¹⁶⁵ This practice of sonic restitution is achieving much more than returning objects in concert

¹⁶¹ Satch Hoyt, Gabriel Schimmeroth, and Museum am Rothenbaum. *Satch Hoyt Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*. (Museum am Rothenbaum, 2024) 11-17.

¹⁶² Hoyt, Schimmeroth, and Museum am Rothenbaum. *Satch Hoyt Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, 11-17.

¹⁶³ Hoyt, Schimmeroth, and Museum am Rothenbaum. *Satch Hoyt Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, 11-17.

¹⁶⁴ Nyong'o, "Afro-Philo-Sonic Fictions: Black Sound Studies after the Millennium," 173-79.

¹⁶⁵ Hoyt, Schimmeroth, and Museum am Rothenbaum. *Satch Hoyt Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, 11-17.

with institutional-led timelines and repairing objects from colonial imagination- it is centering African wisdom in academic, artistic, and museological spheres. By channeling the ancestral, Hoyt is opening “portals to a metaverse of alternative black expressivity.”¹⁶⁶ By communing with the ancestral, Hoyt is moving through the opaque Black methodologies of curiosity, wonder, and sharing.¹⁶⁷ By allowing ancestors to speak through long-silenced instruments, Hoyt is undoing discipline with disobedient rebellion.¹⁶⁸

Hoyt’s un-muting performances are an amalgamation of the rhythms and melodies that were recorded during the process of un-muting in various storage facilities in ethnographic museums (fig. 31).¹⁶⁹ Hoyt plays live in accompaniment to these recordings in a process that he terms a Semi Acousmatic Performance.¹⁷⁰ Hoyt plays a wide variety of percussion (including a Roland HandSonic hand percussion pad), wind instruments, and lamellophones which are arranged on a long table. Many of the instruments that he uses originate from various parts of the African continent, predominantly the Congo region. He plays both acoustic and electronic silver concert flute, using various electronic processor pedals. He has an electric flute rig that consists of a preamp, a whammy pedal, a wah wah pedal, and various delay processors. Cymbals and bells are suspended from stands and at various intervals in a performance and Hoyt will recite self-written poetry.¹⁷¹ His performances include sounds from his archive of sonic meetings across the diaspora and live remix of those early muffled recordings

¹⁶⁶ Hoyt, Schimmeroth, and Museum am Rothenbaum. *Satch Hoyt Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, 11-17.

¹⁶⁷ McKittrick, “Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea,” 3–18.

¹⁶⁸ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 29.

¹⁶⁹ Hoyt, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Hoyt, interview.

¹⁷¹ Hoyt, interview.

from the Congo. These performances are the sonic result of the Afro-sonic mapping project. Hoyt's living cartographic subversion combines deep research with artistic practice. As he travels, meets, and plays with Afrodiasporic artists from around the world, he is also amassing a collection of recordings that contribute to a living Afrosonic archive. This translates to contemporary Black artists like Hoyt using the sonic, and performance to add to the immaterial archives of Black life, love, grief, loss, movement, and joy. The use of and reference to sound in Hoyt's work displays opaque embodied archival knowledges that are legible to those in tune with Afrosonic life.¹⁷² Hoyt's gesture of remix and replay acts as ancestral veneration, a powerful practice within Afrodiasporic spirituality.

Henriques' thinking through sound by identifying sonic bodies introduces a corporeal element in studying Hoyt's practice: "With embodiment, we can never forget ourselves or where we have been."¹⁷³

I asked Hoyt what it feels like to conduct an un-muting. He shared:

The feeling is often one of upliftment. These performances are acts of conscious sonic restitution, with each unique performance the audience experiences sounds from ancient discarded incarcerated instruments, from which the past is echoed into the present projecting into realms of the future. This is what I term The Eternal Migration of the Afro-Sonic Signifier.¹⁷⁴

I am deeply interested in the ways that Hoyt's un-mutings can unfold further and wonder what it would be like to hear his re-mixed soundscapes in public settings and in the very museums they were recorded- alongside the instruments, creating constellations of remembering and reverence.

¹⁷² Campbell, *Afrosonic Life*.

¹⁷³ Henriques. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*, xxv-xxxvi.

¹⁷⁴ Hoyt, interview.

Hoyt's sonic cartography of the Black Atlantic requires fellowship, presence, and witness while sounding together. It is a liberatory exercise.

This practice of un-muting raises questions in each host institution of restitution, repatriation, and reparation. It requires them to actively re-think how they approach reconciling uncomfortable truths that shape their collections and it requires patrons and audiences to establish a different kind of relationship to the archive.

It is Hoyt's wish that the incarcerated instruments he un-mutes are returned to Africa and his ongoing practice ensures that this is already happening on a metaphysical level.

Conclusion

This concise introduction to Hoyt's work has shown that he is working with a clear artistic impulse to incorporate a Black sonic ethic throughout his artistic practice. Across his painting, sculpture making, un-muting, and performance practice, Hoyt's work contains this idea of an Afrosonic aesthetic. By analyzing a selection of his works alongside the theory that comes out of contemporary Black Studies, I am able to begin my art historical practice of identifying artworks that contain this notion of an Afrosonic aesthetic to the art historical canon. I look forward to thinking alongside artists, curators, and scholars about what it might mean to index and archive these kinds of artworks through my evolving methodology of working with living artists as they create. The scope of Hoyt's practice is vast, and the overview of the works contained in this thesis are just a selection from his expansive oeuvre. Hoyt's generous theory of the Eternal Migration of the Afro Sonic Signifier allows for the symbolic and material remembrance and reclamation of the sounds, songs, and oral histories that were carried in the hold of slave ships.

Looking to the future, Hoyt has stated that he would like to continue his global Afro-Sonic Mapping research project with a voyage through North America.¹⁷⁵ This will undoubtedly yield massive and intangible results as he maps sonic histories through contemporary Afrodiasporic communities. Hoyt's counter journeying serves as deep archival project, communal healing through the Afrosonic, and radical act of sonic restitution. Hoyt's practice has offered a constellation of possibilities via an Afrosonic aesthetic.

¹⁷⁵ Hoyt, interview.

Figures



Figure 1. Niklas Marc Heinecke, *Satch Hoyt: Un-Muting. Sonic Restitutions*, MARKK, Hamburg, 2024. Image source: https://markkhamburg.de/files/media/2024/03/20240126_MARKK_SatchHoyt_237_LR-Credit-Niklas-Marc-Heinecke-1366x2048.jpg.



Figure 2. Torday Collection, *Group of musicians and young Bakuba chief.*, (1905) photograph, Congo.
Image source: Afro-Sonic Mapping Book, pg. 24



Figure 3. Karl Edvard Laman, *Concert by the Bakongo. Hand wood drums, notched flute, horns.*, (1929) photograph, Congo
Image source: Afro-Sonic Mapping Book, pg.26



Figure 4. Satch Hoyt, *The Calling in of the Silent Codes*, (2019) acrylic, pigment on canvas, Sydney, Australia, White Bay Power Station, 24th Biennale of Sydney: *Ten Thousand Suns*. Image source: <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-Calling-In-Of-The-Silent-Codes-960x659.jpg>.

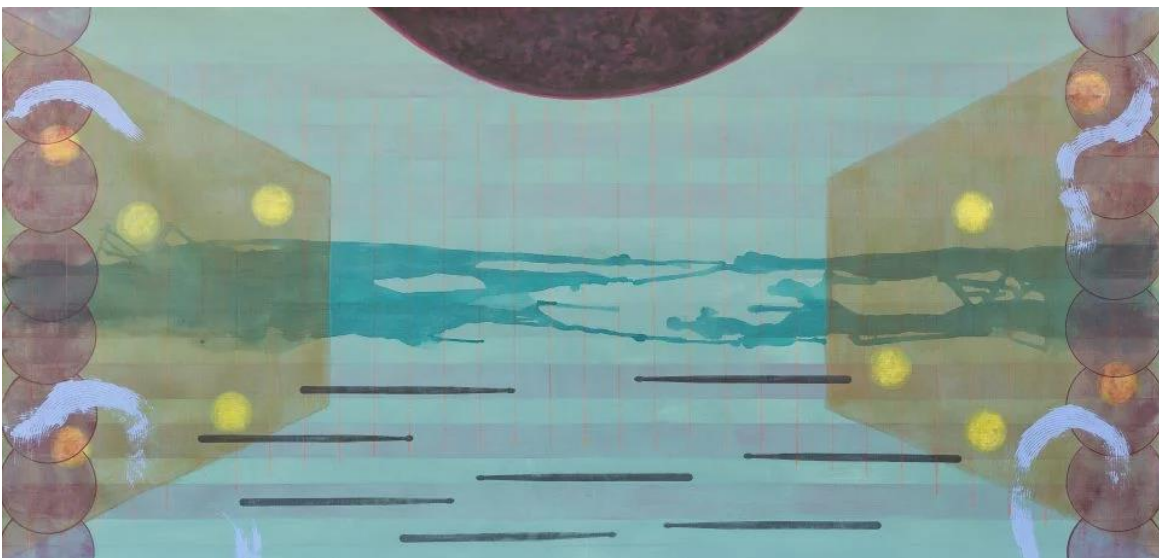


Figure 5. Satch Hoyt, *Cross Rhythmic Delay*, (2017) acrylic, pigment on canvas, Sydney, Australia, White Bay Power Station, 24th Biennale of Sydney: *Ten Thousand Suns*. Image source: <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Cross-Rhythmic-Delay-960x459.jpg>.

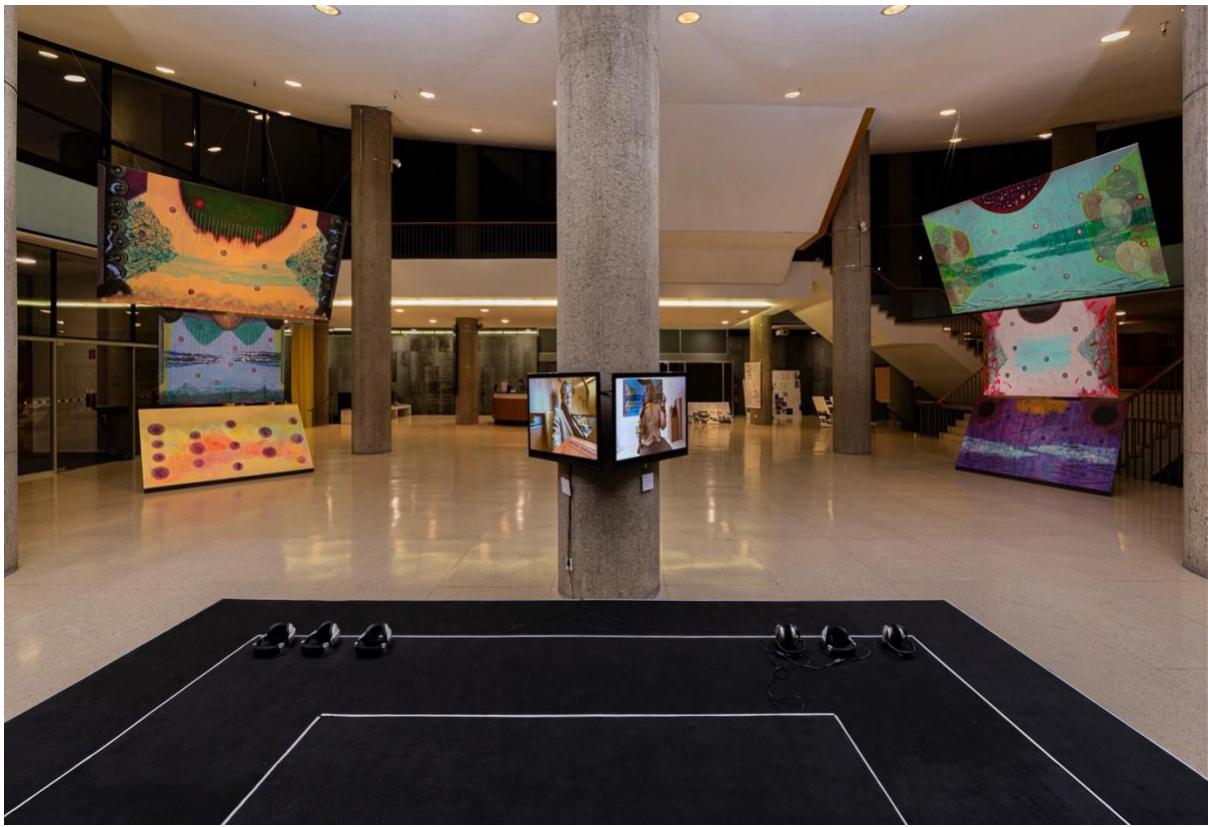


Figure 6. Satch Hoyt, *Afro Sonic Mapping* exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (*The House of World Cultures*, (2019) Digital Image, Berlin, Germany Image source: <https://afrosonicmapping.com/exhibition-hkw/#jp-carousel-708>.



Figure 7. Satch Hoyt, *On Galactic Paths of More Tomorrows*, (2017) acrylic on linen, (415 x 250 cm). Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-selected-paintings/#itemId=59c79f88914e6be086227ae2>.



Figure 8. Satch Hoyt, *Bleed* (2017) acrylic, pigment on canvas, (415 x 250 cm). Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://contemporaryand.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/satchhoyt.jpg>.



Figure 8.1. Satch Hoyt, *Bleed* (2017) [detail] acrylic, pigment on canvas, (415 x 250 cm)
Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://contemporaryand.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/satchhoyt.jpg>.



Figure 9. Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki nami ura*), also known as *The Great Wave* (ca. 1830–32), Woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15/16 in. (25.7 x 37.9 cm), New York, New York, Met Museum. Image source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/45434>.

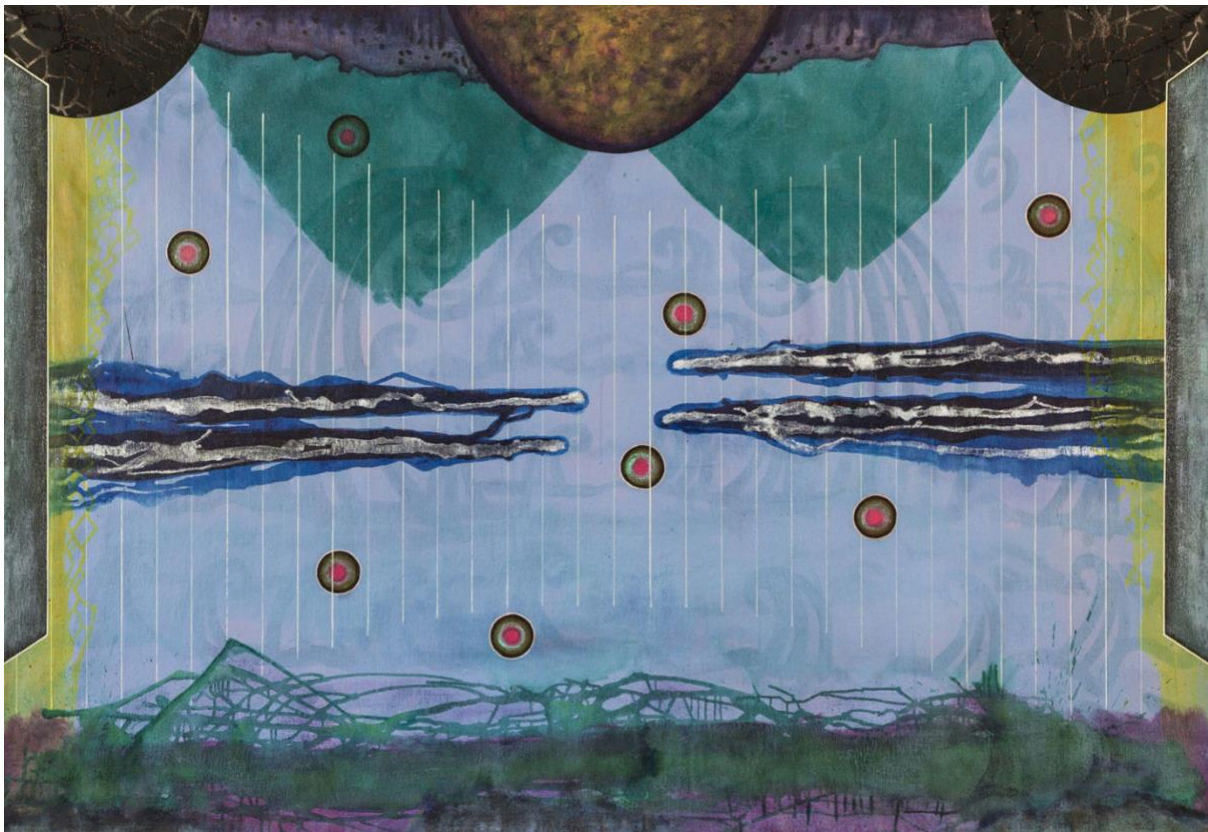


Figure 10. Satch Hoyt, *Afro Sonic Map #8* (2017), acrylic on linen, (210 x 150 cm), Image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-selected-paintings/#itemId=5908ddc58419c2dfbc941648>.

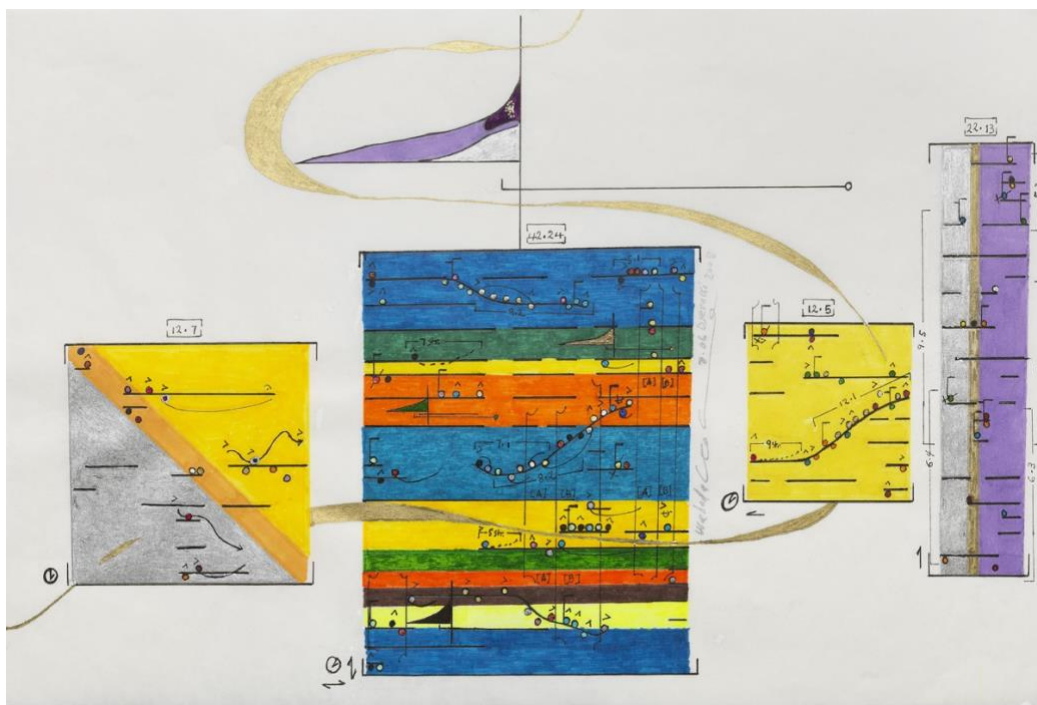


Figure 11. Wadada Leo Smith, *Kosmic Music* (2008), Chicago, Illinois, The Renaissance Society. Image source: <https://renaissancesociety.org/media/files/wls-cosmic-music-2008-web-min.jpg>.

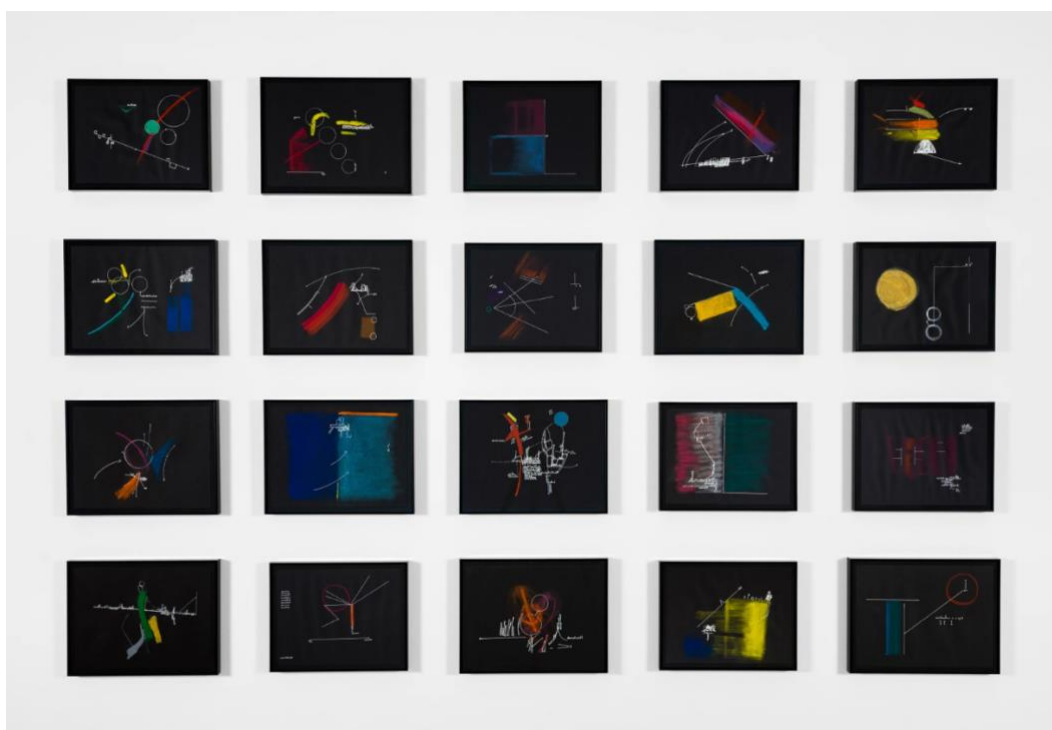


Figure 12. Renee Gladman, *Slowly We Have the Feeling: Scores* (2019-2022), Pastel and pigment on paper, dimensions variable, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, New York. Image source: https://www.mariangoodman.com/content/feature/2823/detail/artworks_full_bleed_slideshow59190/.



Figure 13. Satch Hoyt, *Front Cover Graphic Score Book*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm, courtesy of the artist. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan.

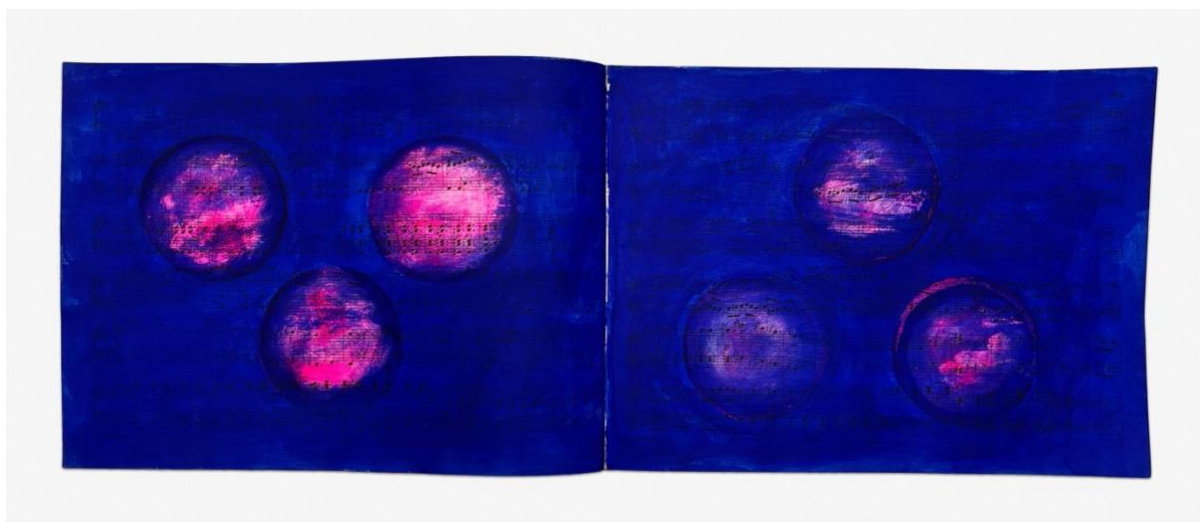


Figure 14. Satch Hoyt, *Floating Graphic Score*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm, courtesy of the artist. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan.

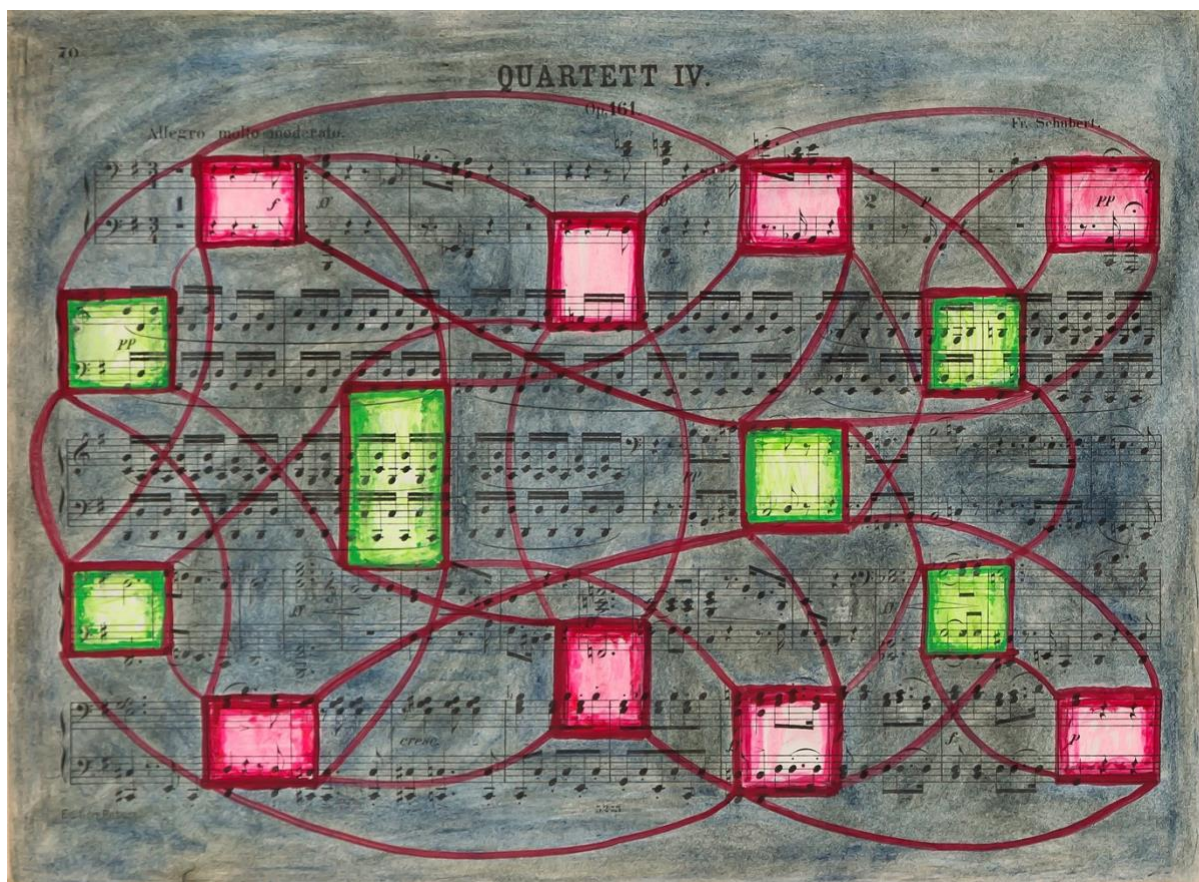


Figure 15. Satch Hoyt, *Floating Graphic Score*, (2017) Acrylic on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm, courtesy of the artist. Image: Trevor Lloyd Morgan.

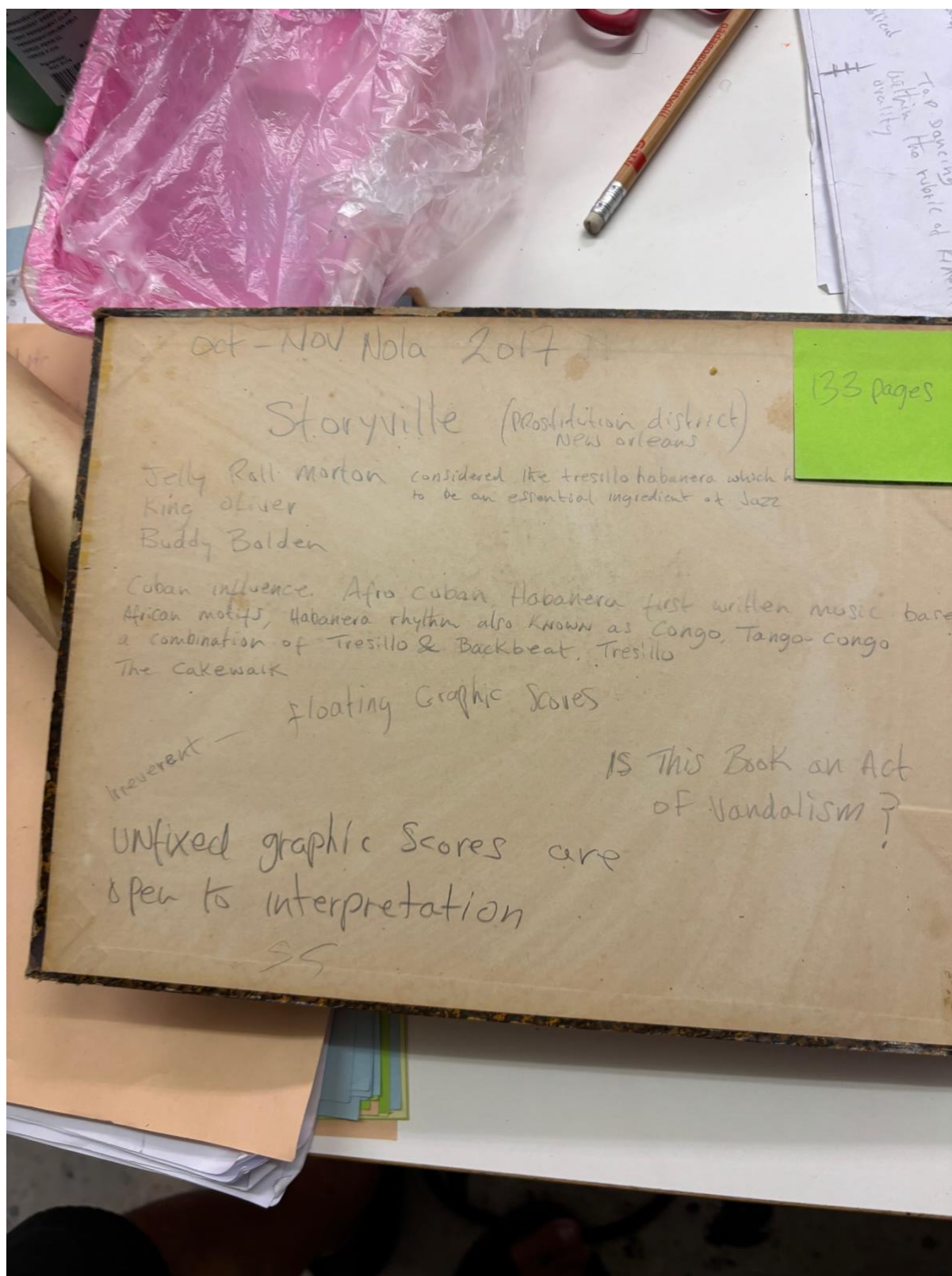


Figure 16. Satch Hoyt, *Inside Cover Graphic Score Book*, (2017) Pencil on paper (vintage Franz Schubert notation). 30x22cm, courtesy of the artist. Image: Safia Siad.



Figure 17. Satch Hoyt, *Celestial Vessel* (2010), RCA Victor Red Seal 45 rpm vinyl records, steel, magnets, oil paint, audio components & sound scape, (203 x 37 x 18 cm) Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-sculpture-installations/#itemId=5958e206e58c62244f4d6a68>.



Figure 18. Satch Hoyt, *Celestial Vessel Install* 2010, Digital Image, Durham, North Carolina, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Image source: <https://nasher.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/satch-day-one-one-768x1162.jpg>.



Figure 19. Bamana, *Staff with Equestrian Figure* (late 19th–early 20th century), Iron, pigment, accumulated materials, (75.9 x 20.3 x 2.5cm) Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Museum. Image source: https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size2/66.8_acetate_bw.jpg.

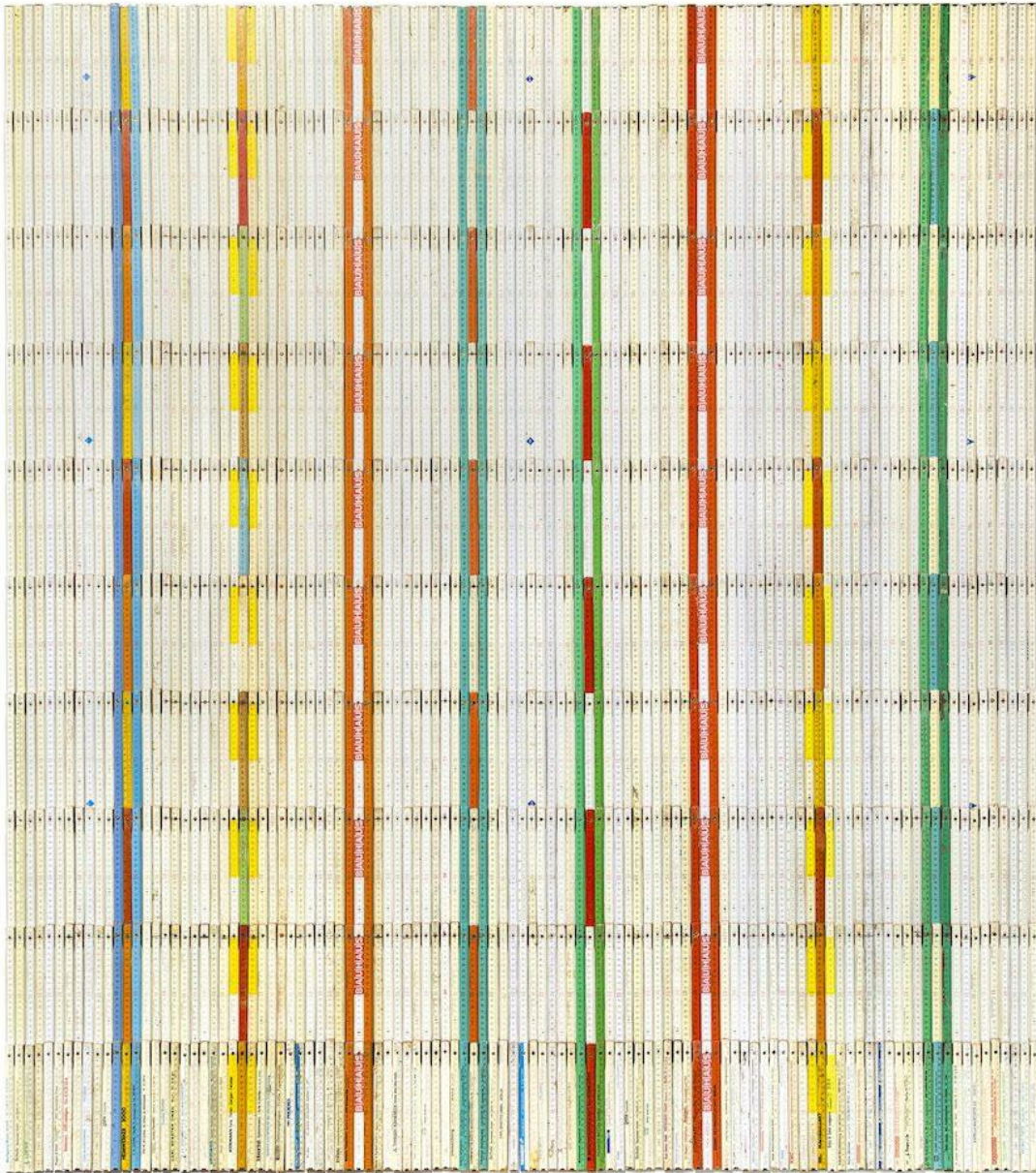


Figure 20. Satch Hoyt, *Rulers-1* (2016), Wooden rulers, magnets, steel (200 x 190 cm) Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-sculpture-installations/rulers-1>.

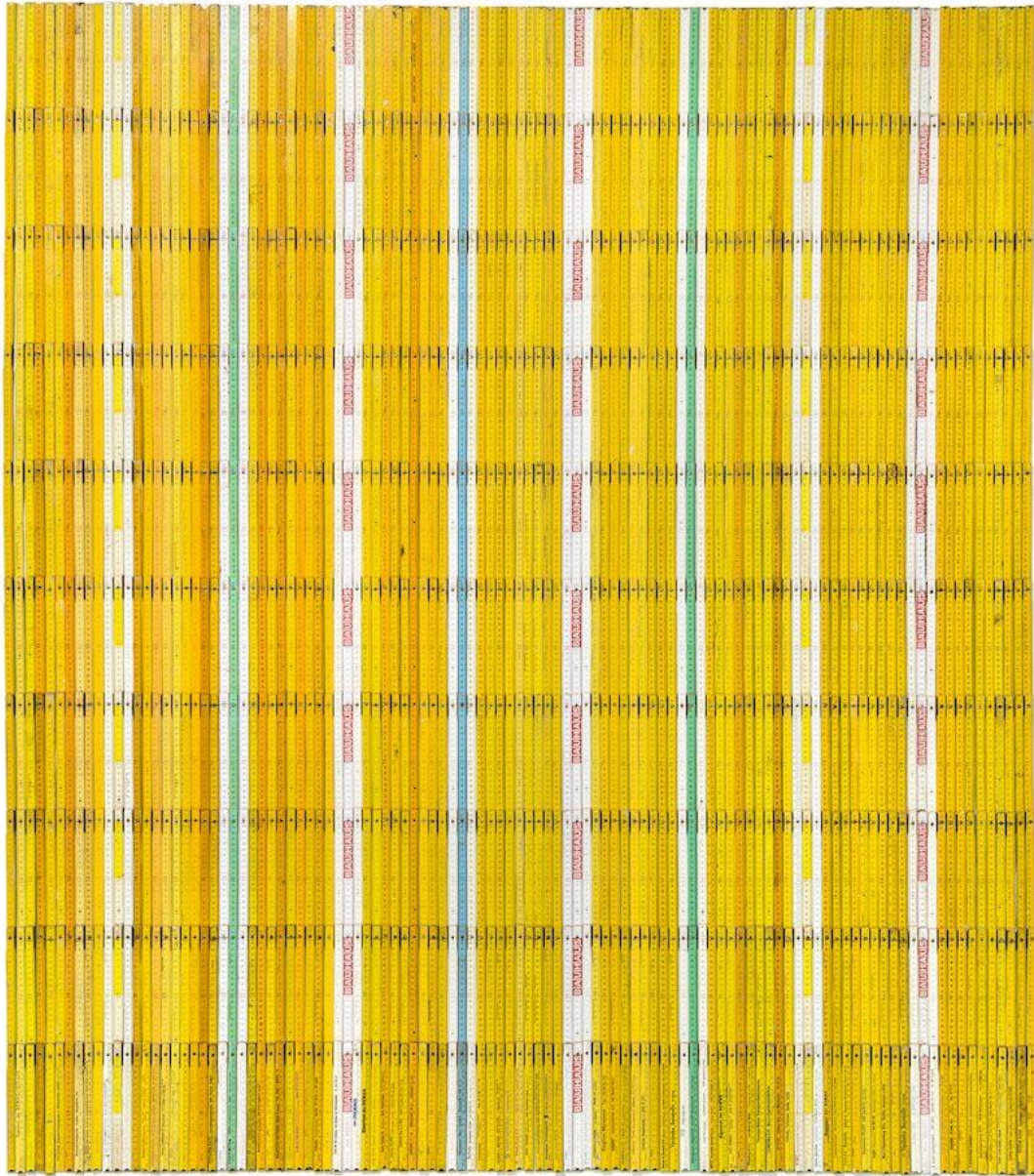


Figure 21. Satch Hoyt, *Rulers-4* (2016), Wooden rulers, magnets, steel (200 x 190 cm) Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-sculpture-installations/rulers-4>.



Figure 22. Akan, *Kente Cloth*, Rayon, silk, 193.7 x 108 cm, Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Museum.

Image source:

https://d1lfxha3ugu3d4.cloudfront.net/images/opencollection/objects/size2/CUR.79.237.2_detail4.jpg



Figure 23. Satch Hoyt, *From Mau Mau to Brixton* (2009), Ebony wood, Zirconias, velvet lined wooden case (34 x 22 x 30 cm) Image source: <https://www.satchhoyt.art/satch-hoyt-sculpture-installations/udqmyiepzayq4i8lc1ria4vp7k30iw>.



Figure 24. Satch Hoyt, *Ice Pick* (2002), crystal glass, velvet lined case, metal key, soundscape, audio components, 400mmx260mmx300mm. Image source: https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/WBPS-Lower-Boiler-House_Biennale-24-Install_Document-Photography-March-24-web-53-960x640.jpg.



Figure 25. Satch Hoyt, *Hair Combing Circle* (2017), performance. Image source: <https://www.archivebooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/hair-combing-circle1.jpg>.



Figure 26. Akan, *Drum* (18th century), Camwood (*Baphia nitida*), deer skin, antelope skin, African cordia, fibre (clappertonia, ficifolia, and raphia), (24 x 41 x 28cm) British Museum, London, England.

Image source:

https://media.britishmuseum.org/media/Repository/Documents/2014_10/9_15/94b9755b_0781_4dee_9899_a3bf00fd21bb/mid_00522556_001.jpg.

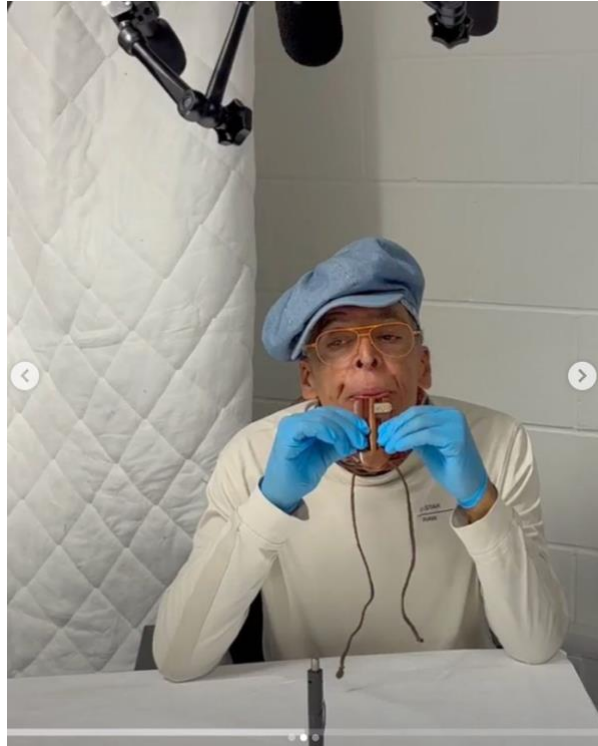


Figure 27. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting British Museum* (2023), Digital image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyinjsxMuW9/>.

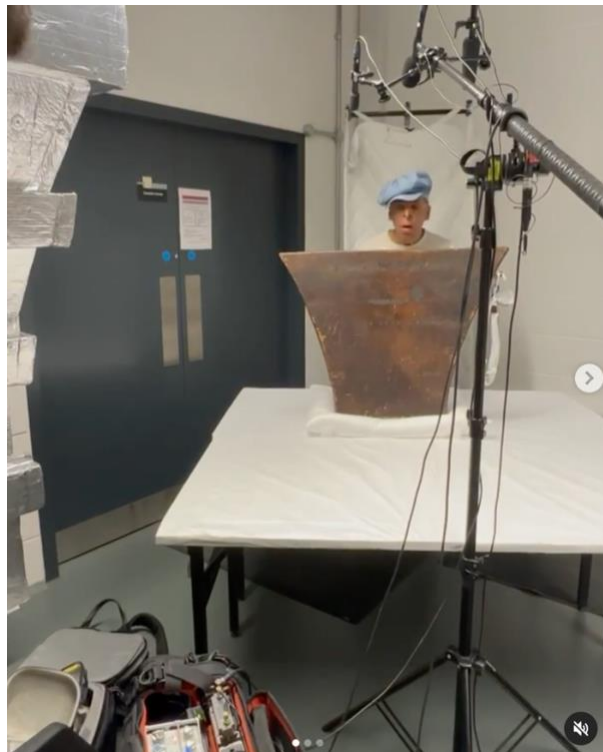


Figure 28. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting, British Museum* (2023), Digital image courtesy of the artist. Image source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyinjsxMuW9/>.



Figure 29. Mati Diop, *Dahomey* (2024), Film still. Courtesy MUBI. Image source: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/dahomey-mati-diop-looted-benin-artworks-france-review-1234721859/>.



Figure 30. Mati Diop, *Dahomey* (2024), Film still. Courtesy MUBI. Image source: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/dahomey-mati-diop-looted-benin-artworks-france-review-1234721859/>.



Figure 31. Satch Hoyt, *Un-Muting Performance* (2017), Videostill from a performance as part of SAVVY Funk: documenta 14 radio program at silent green, Berlin, Germany. Image source: Courtesy of the artist.

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