

BALLROOM  
MARFA

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**BALLROOM MARFA PRESENTS**

*Strange Attractor*

**March 10, 2017 – August 6, 2017**

**Curated by Gryphon Rue**

Opening Reception: Friday, March 10. 6-8:30pm

Featured artists: Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Thomas Ashcraft, Robert Buck, Alexander Calder, Beatrice Gibson, Phillipa Horan, Channa Horwitz, Lucky Dragons, Haroon Mirza, Douglas Ross.

**MARFA, TX** – Ballroom Marfa is proud to present *Strange Attractor*, a group exhibition organized by guest curator Gryphon Rue. *Strange Attractor* will be on view in Marfa from March 2017 – August 2017, with an opening reception from 6 – 8:30pm on Friday, March 10, 2017. The reception will feature a unique collaborative performance by artist and musician Lonnie Holley and psych duo Tonstartssbandht, with visuals by Benton C Bainbridge.

*Strange Attractor* explores the uncertainties and poetics of networks, environmental events, technology, and sound. The term “strange attractor” describes the inherent order embedded in chaos, perceivable in harmonious yet unpredictable patterns.

Essential to these subjects are intimate, vast, and interconnected abstractions we must reconcile with our lived experience—the problem of how to clearly perceive and interpret the world. *Strange Attractor* presents an array of multidisciplinary works tracing the disparity between individual perceptions and the intimate, vast, and interconnected abstractions of the contemporary moment. Sound and music pervade the exhibition, physically or latently, through production and allusion. Visitors are confronted with leitmotifs of capital, transmigration, and asylum. A lion’s share of debuting and commissioned works form the connective tissue of this expansive terrain.

As part of this process, *Strange Attractor* invites the collision of historical and contemporary artworks in diverse media. The exhibition features Alexander Calder’s previously unseen, noise-making, hanging mobile *Clangors* (1942), a sister work to *The Clangor* (1941), which Calder described as “three heavy plates that gave off quite a clangor.” Describing the importance that the principle disparity plays in a composition, Calder added, “Here was just another variation. You see, you have weight, form, size, color, motion and then you have

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noise.” *Clangors* is presented alongside Channa Horwitz’ numerological graphic scores *8th Level Discovered* (1982) and *Sonakinatography I Composition XXII* (1991), and contemporary pieces from artists working in a dazzling range of mediums.

*Strange Attractor* debuts *Agreements (5—10)* (2017), a commission from Lucky Dragons, the collaborative project of Sarah Rara and Luke Fischbeck. Custom designed tuning forks are installed in the Ballroom courtyard, and their tones are broadcast throughout the town of Marfa on overlapping radio frequencies in a continuously evolving sonic sculpture. The transmissions, overlapping geographically and all broadcasting on the same frequency (106.1 FM), compete with one another to reach the listener who chooses to tune in. This competing interference manifests as pockets of clarity, separated by boundaries of noise and silence. Listening while moving, one can hear these borders as they are crossed, and the shift between territories can be heard as dominance rotating from one signal to another. The tuning forks, one double-sided and the other four-sided, resonate with two and four narrowly-separated pitches, respectively. Each of these reference pitches corresponds directly to one of the six radio transmissions, serving as the basis for the musical universe contained in that signal. Cast as single objects that hold multiple reference pitches, the forks present the limits of sensing the whole of a group. Listening to each individual part in turn, you must hold the sound of one ringing note in your memory in order to compare it to another sound, just as your sense of each radio signal is interrupted as your position changes, and the relative power of all signals shift.

For her newly commissioned work *Foreign Exchange* (2015-17), artist Phillipa Horan worked with a commercial biotech laboratory in Upstate New York to produce what is possibly the first large-scale figurative sculpture grown from mycelium, the single cell root system of which a mushroom is the fruiting body. *Foreign Exchange* came into fruition (literally) from an interest in democratic networks and systems with an absent central point of power: The mycelium material is similar to certain threads of the Internet, and other organisms’ webbed biospheres, such as honeybee hives and ant colonies. *Foreign Exchange* is a “grown-to-be-shown” larger-than-life figurative sculpture of Charon, the ferryman of Greek mythology who transports the dead across the river Styx. This biotech sculpture has a usable lifespan of 30 years, after which it will biodegrade and may be regrown by the artist at her discretion. The mycelium body of Charon has literally been grown, and at certain points was alive and unpredictable, before it was dehydrated in heat chambers, killed, and essentially stabilized. In the installation, Charon’s transparent oar contains a live soldier harvester ant farm in NASA designed acrylic gel, serving as their habitat and sustenance for their 3-6 month lifecycle; an ant tunnel “drawing” that is creating a network as the ants eat and burrow through the gel over the course of the exhibition.

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In addition to these commissions, *Strange Attractor* includes existing works that further the exhibition's exploration of networks, environmental events, technology, and sound.

Beatrice Gibson's *F for Fibonacci* is a film that takes as its departure point American author William Gaddis' epic modernist novel *J R* (1975). An eerily prescient, biting social satire, *J R* tells the story of a precocious 11 year-old capitalist who, with the unwitting help of his school's resident composer, inadvertently creates the single greatest virtual empire the world has seen. Gibson worked closely with 11-year-old Clay Barnard Chodzko on a number of the film's production elements, commissioning him to design an office in Minecraft and develop an existing character of his, Mr. Money. Gibson and Chodzko's ramblings on the subject of his protagonist lead the viewer through *F For Fibonacci's* hallucinatory soup. Unfolding through the modular machine aesthetics of the video game Minecraft are text book geometries, graphic scores, images from physics experiments, and cartoon dreams, blended with images from wall street: stock market crashes, trading pits, algorithms and transparent glass. Gibson's practice is predicated on the idea of creating open-ended compositional structures, landscapes in which an asynchronous assembly of elements—actors, objects, and images—are placed together and left to dance. Mirroring *J R's* preoccupation with indeterminacy and abstraction, *F For Fibonacci* inverts the utopian and dystopian dimensions of abstraction: the avant-garde desires of composers John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and the educator John Paynter meet the entropic dimensions of dematerialized financial systems.

Known for his forensic audio investigations and advocacy work, Lawrence Abu Hamdan reflects upon the hybrid nature of accents in *Conflicted Phonemes* (2012) and the controversial use of language analysis to determine the origin of asylum seekers. Abu Hamdan's map-based work offers the asylum seeker an alternative and non-vocal mode of contestation.

Robert Buck's canvas "*At the end of the day...*" (*Holding area, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Nogales Placement Center, Nogales, AZ, June 18, 2014*) insinuates questions about the nature of beauty and globalization — of civilization and its current discontents — by evoking luxury goods, fashion and décor. The "*At the end of the day...*" series of paintings formally rely on the grid, its contemporary associations, such as Photoshop and GPS satellites, in order to disrupt it. The question was how to handle the death drive, the compulsion to repeat, as it operates today in hypermodernity. The paintings rekindle recent headline-news events, inexplicable, yet no longer uncommon, random acts of violence or maleficence. A single image of what happened, or its aftermath — in this case immigrant children detained at a border patrol station in Arizona — salvaged from scores of images available on the Internet, is cropped, inverted, multiplied, and digitally printed on canvas.

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Disrupting the digitally generated mosaic is a silkscreened image of an organically occurring pattern in nature, one with a subliminal link to the event. Bisecting the repeating pattern of sand-colored images in “*At the end of the day...*” (*Holding area, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Nogales Placement Center, Nogales, AZ, June 18, 2014*) is a large contrasting snakeskin print. Given this incessant backdrop, it’s not easy to know what’s “natural” and what’s not.

Making their debut in *Strange Attractor*, Haroon Mirza’s *Cosmos* (2016) and *Supernova* (2016) were made through a process of placing live peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) on blank PCBs (material usually used to make circuit boards) and running electrical current through them. The alkaloid rich juices of the plant oxidized on the copper, leaving an etched print. Peyote and other entheogens’ meditative, medical, and spiritual effects have in recent years been held responsible for the esoteric knowledge of ancient civilizations such as the Aztecs and Mayans. Graphically the prints resemble cosmological clusters not too dissimilar to the kind of visions these plants produce in humans, if consumed.

Thomas Ashcraft, a naturalist, artisan, extrapolator, and currency designer, shares *Coins to be Traded for Shining Cake* (2017), a new body of work from his art and science project Heliotown, including a working and writing kit and a selection of recent coins from his shop and bundle. As an extrapolator, Ashcraft practices anticipatory design science in the Buckminster Fuller sense. He foresees a developing new political state, the Biological Commonwealth, and ponders its possible economics. As a currency designer, Ashcraft wipes the old money symbols of kings, queens, thieves and generals and casts anew. He sculpts microbes, conjugating bacteria, jellyfish, pollen, eggs, phages, and something he calls the ubiquitous “schmoo.” Ashcraft also displays photographs of *Transient Luminous Events in the Mesosphere* (2012-17), “sprites” captured from his observatory in northern New Mexico. Sprites are large-scale electrical discharges occurring high above a thunderstorm cloud, giving rise to a varied range of intricate shapes, occurring roughly 30 to 60 miles above the Earth’s surface. Whereas science can explain some aspects of their physicality, it cannot fully explain their shapes: Sprites can be jellyfish-like, carrot-like, angel-winged, wish-boned, columniform, and some are five times bigger than Mount Everest.

Also making its public debut is Douglas Ross’ *abstraxi* (2014), a 47 x 6.5 foot, Jacquard-woven, cotton tapestry. Its colorful yarn coheres into a nearly photographic panorama of rubble and tire impressions raking across an unsettled landscape. Ross observes, “The many images transmitted to us by our Mars rovers show, among other things, tread patterns from the probe’s wheels winding across that planet’s sandy regolith. They show that we are the aliens... In *abstraxi* (2014), the structures intermingle to picture a place in the light of day—innumerable yarns as innumerable bits of terrestrial matter, and its reverse side some

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incidental gaseous state. In order to weave place and time in this way, the image has to be utterly specific, and yet the specific where of what's depicted through abstract isn't primary for me. It is any-place like this sort of place — a disrupted landscape. Initially, beginning with thinking and photographing the landscape, all of this is digital. (But weaving was digital before digital was digital.) Once it's woven, photographic realism can hardly catch up with the veridical presence of yarns becoming a new place and time. The sculpture as folding screen or folding screen as sculpture carries the consciousness that every exhibition space and exhibition scenario invokes the claiming and delineation of territory.”

With this unique constellation of works *Strange Attractor* builds on Ballroom Marfa's reputation for using art as a lens to examine ecology, history, science and technology. *Strange Attractor* creates an opportunity for audiences to apprehend meaning in an increasingly complex reality. Visitors to this remarkable exhibition will develop a sense of curiosity and agency, and cull meaning from systems and trends that lie at the limits of human comprehension.

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Gryphon Rue was born in New York City, where he lives and works as a songwriter, producer, and independent curator.

Selected projects: Curator, *Strange Attractor*, Ballroom Marfa (2017); Curator, *Calder Piece* (1966) by Earle Brown, Friends Seminary, New York City (2016); *Google Portrait* video series ft. Christine Sun Kim and Dean Wareham (2016/17); *Google Portrait* EP ft. Joakim, Tigersushi Records (2016); Principal performer for LYFE™ by Glass Ghost, co-presented by the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center and Performance Space 122, New York City (2015); Curator of music, *Eureka*, Pace Gallery, New York (2015); *Guilt Vacation*, vinyl LP under El Tryptophan distributed by Wharf Cat Records (2015); *Busy Day*, Christine Sun Kim & Thomas Benno, Droit de Cités (2014); Curator of music, *They might well have been remnants of the boat*, Calder Foundation, New York, for which he also presented his ensemble piece *Vertical Foliage Orchestra* (2013); Authoring “Calder and Sound” for the exhibition catalogue *Alexander Calder: Avant-Garde in Motion*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2013); Composing mobile soundtracks for the Calder Foundation's website (2012); Collaboration with Dean & Britta on the EP *Good mourning, Short companions* (2012); Curator of music, *They might well have been remnants of the boat*, Calder Foundation, New York, for which he also presented his ensemble piece *Playing The Beatles* (2011/12); Featured vocalist in Marina Rosenfeld's *Teenage Lontano* at the Whitney Biennial, New York (2008); “June Concert and Awareness Tour”, performing in Vietnamese cities and provinces with Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary, to raise awareness for victims of AGENT ORANGE, appearing on HTV9 (2008).

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For further information about the exhibition or to schedule interviews, please contact Ballroom Marfa at [press@ballroommarfa.org](mailto:press@ballroommarfa.org) or (432) 729-3600.

## **About Ballroom Marfa**

Founded in 2003 by Virginia Lebermann and Fairfax Dorn, Ballroom Marfa is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and a dynamic, contemporary cultural arts space housed in a converted dancehall that dates to 1927. Ballroom Marfa's mission is to serve international, national, regional, and local arts communities and support the work of both emerging and recognized artists working across all media: visual arts, film, music, and performance.

## **Location, Hours, Admission**

Ballroom Marfa is located at 108 E. San Antonio St. / Highway 90 West, and open Wednesday through Saturday, 10am-6pm, and Sunday, 10am-3pm. Admission is free, however, a \$5 donation is suggested to help fund Ballroom's programs.

*Strange Attractor* is made possible by the generous support of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Brown Foundation, Inc., Houston; Lipman Family Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; Texas Commission on the Arts; Ballroom Marfa Board of Trustees and Ballroom Marfa Members.

## **The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts**

