

*David Hartt: Stray Light* presents color photographs, sculpture, and a video installation by Chicago-based Canadian artist David Hartt (b. 1967). *Stray Light* reflects on the iconic downtown Chicago headquarters of the Johnson Publishing Company, famous for producing *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines and a leader in African American taste and culture. The 11-story building, built in 1971, was heralded as the first major downtown Chicago building designed by an African American architect since the 18th century.

Granted unprecedented access to film and photograph the John Moutoussamy–designed building, Hartt beautifully records the time-capsule nature of the space, which meticulously retains Arthur Elrod’s original 1971 interior design. The building was purpose-built as the headquarters of this important publishing company, and its interior, according to Lee Bay of WBEZ Chicago, “[embodies] an afrocentric modernism that was well-turned, avant garde and quite hip”—a pure expression of founder John Johnson’s vision of what a leading Black-owned business can be.

Hartt’s film and photographs are intimate portraits of the dreams and ideals of the Johnson family’s business, which continues to exert a force in American culture, as well as a kind of elegant forensic investigation into the power of cultural icons. The title of the project, *Stray Light*, is a term used to refer to unpredictable light within a controlled environment. It is also a fitting metaphor for Hartt as an outside observer of a company that has influenced so much of African American cultural history. His project became even more poignant with the unexpected news that the building was sold in late 2010 and the company was relocating to another site.

The soundtrack for the 12-minute *Stray Light* film is created by Chicago composer and flutist Nicole Mitchell. Mitchell is co-president of Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an organization that, like the Johnson Publishing Company building, was created in the 1970s and has become a leader in the cultural community.

*David Hartt: Stray Light* is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and curated by Michael Darling, The James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator. The exhibition is organized at CMOA by Dan Byers, The Richard Armstrong Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art.

*David Hartt: Stray Light* is the 72nd installment of Carnegie Museum of Art’s Forum series.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*