

SHOW & TELL: SPRITES AND GODS PLAY IN 'STRANGE ATTRACTOR' AT BALLROOM MARFA

Curated by Gyphon Rue, this exhibition in the desert ventures deep into the uncanny.

By Tim Adams – August 27, 2017

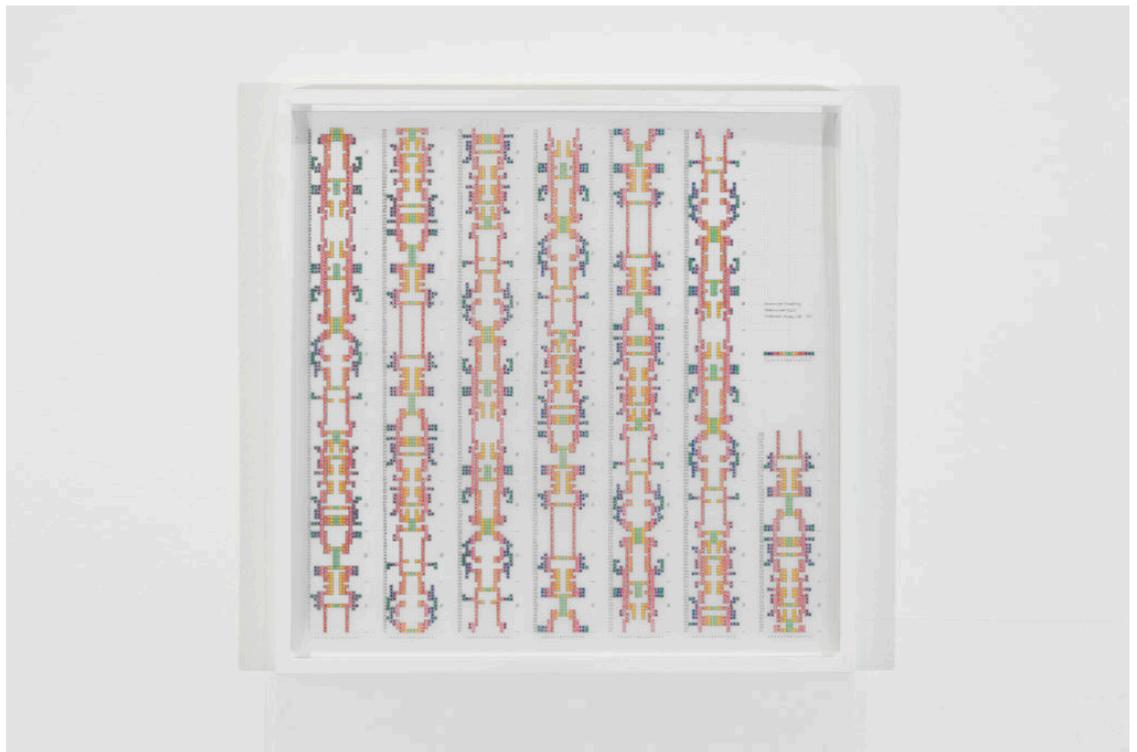


Phillipa Horan
Foreign Exchange
2015-17
Strange Attractor at
Ballroom Marfa
Photo by Alex Marks.

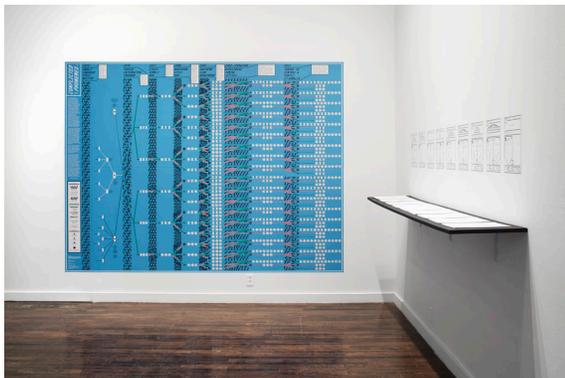
One of the roles of art is to make the imperceptible lucid, the uncanny understandable. In a mind-expanding exhibition at Ballroom Marfa called “Strange Attractor,” the curator Gryphon Rue has assembled a batch of these kinds of spooky artworks, approaching them as an alchemist might call upon talismans—holding them up to the light. One piece in the show, a statue of the Greek ferry god Charon (whose job is to transport the departed across the river Styx), was built by the artist Phillipa Horan out of mycelium, a freaky fungal network capable of extending across miles of land. Photographs by Thomas Ashcraft, meanwhile, capture beautiful electrical patterns in the night sky called “sprites,” a variety of luminous discharges in the mesosphere that were only discovered in 1989. Coming into the show, expect to learn odd new things you hadn’t yet imagined: the unknown unknowns.

Rue, a musician when he isn’t curating shows, is an expert in avant-garde sound art. He’s written a text on “Calder and Sound,” listening for sonic qualities in the sculptures of his great-grandfather, Alexander Calder. It’s not surprising then that artworks in his group exhibition relate to one another more by their beguiling tone than by their visual appearance. Other key pieces are by the filmmaker Beatrice Gibson, the sound artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan (whose fascinating piece examines the way authorities use linguistic analysis to determine the true origin of asylum seekers), data-visualizer Channa Horwitz, the band Lucky Dragons, and Calder, whose never-before-exhibited “noise-mobile” Clangors (1942) hangs in the entrance of the show.

Below, see works from Rue’s transporting desert phantasmagoria.



Thomas Ashcraft
Dancing Sprites Over Southeast
Colorado
August 04, 2013
Channa Horwitz
Sonakinatography I
Composition XXII
1991
Photos by Alex Marks



Douglas Ross, *abstraxi*, 2014
Alexander Calder, *Clangors*, 1942
Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Conflicted Phonemes*, 2012
Phillipa Horan, *Foreign Exchange*, 2015–2017
The entrance to *Strange Attractor* at Ballroom Marfa
Haroon Mirza, *Cosmos*, 2016
Photos by Alex Marks