

IN WHAT
CENTURY WILL
THE EARTH'S
NORTH AND
SOUTH POLES
CHANGE
POLARITIES?
ON, OF, FOR, WITH
BEN PATTERSON

EXHIBITION

WITH Benjamin Patterson

ON SHOW 20.03.–27.03.2022 Daily 14:00–19:00 &
31.03.–17.04.2022 Thursday–Sunday 14:00–19:00

EXHIBITION ACTIVATIONS

20.03.2022

16:30 Christopher Williams
What's left of the Blurring of Music and Life?
Some Pattersonian Speculations
LECTURE

21.03.2022

16:30 Maulwerker
LECTURE

17:00 The String Archestra with George Lewis
CONVERSATION

SAVVY TOURS IN SAVVY TONGUES

24.03.2022	18:00	IN ARABIC	Tour with Nancy Naser Al-Deen
07.04.2022	17:00	IN ENGLISH	Tour with Kamila Metwaly
09.04.2022	15:00	IN ENGLISH	Tour with the production team
14.04.2022	17:00	IN HUNGARIAN	Tour with Lili Somogyi
15.04.2022	16:00	IN SPANISH	Tour with Manuela García Aldana
16.04.2022	17:00	IN ENGLISH	Tour with Lili Somogyi

This project is the sixth collaboration between SAVVY Contemporary and MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues, with works commissioned by Deutschlandfunk Kultur. In this edition, we are also grateful for our collaboration with Barbro Patterson, the Patterson Estate, and Elke Gruhn at Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden. The project is funded by MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues and Deutschlandfunk Kultur.

SAVVY CONTEMPORARY
THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS

 Berliner Festspiele
MaerzMusik

 Nassauischer
Kunstverein
Wiesbaden

 Deutschlandfunk Kultur

TEAM

ARTISTIC DIRECTION Dr. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung
CURATION Billy Fowo Kamila Metwaly
TEAM CURATION & PRODUCTION EXHIBITION Billy Fowo Nancy Naser Al-Deen
SCENOGRAPHY Nancy Naser Al-Deen
TEAM CURATION & PRODUCTION INVOCATIONS Lili Somogyi
Manuela Garcia Aldana Sonia Lescène
GENERAL MANAGEMENT Lema Sikod
PROJECT MANAGEMENT Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock Lia Milanesio
COMMUNICATIONS Anna Jäger
HANDOUT Aditi Kapur Nancy Naser Al-Deen
TECH Bert Günther
LIGHT Marcelo Schmittner Daza Nicolás San Martín Josef Maaß
ART HANDLING Rafał Łazar Antonio Pedro Mendes Abhishek Nilamber
Oussema Becha Jessie Omamogho Ola Zielińska Waylon D'Mello Yanis Papadakis Ryoji Kato Iga Świeściak
Kevin Gray
INTERNSHIP Hubert Gromny

C O N T E N T

05 INTRO

06 FLOORPLAN 1 / GROUND FLOOR

10 FLOORPLAN 2 / BASEMENT

12 CONCEPT BY BONAVENTURE SOH BEJENG NDIKUNG

INTRODUCTION

IF TIME BEGINS
AND ENDS WITH
ZERO,
WHAT IS
IN
BETWEEN?

From: Ben Patterson. 1986. "If Time Begins And Ends With Zero", *A Selection of Ben Patterson's Works*. Estate of Benjamin Patterson

Amidst the uncertainties, clamancies and nebulosity of our times, we must still find space to intro- and retrospect. Or is it to intro-audite and retro-audite? Indeed, we must find space and time to listen in and listen back. This project is a deliberation on and celebration of the seminal work of African-American artist Benjamin Patterson (1934–2016). It is an attempt to unsilence, re-enact and re-interpret the extensive body of work of one of the founding members of the Fluxus movement. It is a possibility to listen at ear level.

Six years after he transitioned to the greater beyond, it is time to take stock and time to commemorate Benjamin Patterson with a first comprehensive solo exhibition in Berlin. This exhibition will bring together original scores, texts, artworks, objects, videos, compositions and other archival material by Benjamin Patterson.

For the public INVOCATIONS programme, SAVVY Contemporary together with the Patterson Estate and MaerzMusik invites artists, curators, scholars and co-travellers to reflect and revive Patterson's work of five decades. While being based on a multi-disciplinary curatorial approach that stems from Patterson's worlds, this project wants to move beyond Fluxus, historically and artistically – a play on and with time, an archive in action.

This is a long term research by SAVVY Contemporary, which brings together works from five decades by Benjamin Patterson, including "When Elephants Fight, It Is the Frogs That Suffer (2016–17)", commissioned for documenta14 (Athens and Kassel, 2017).

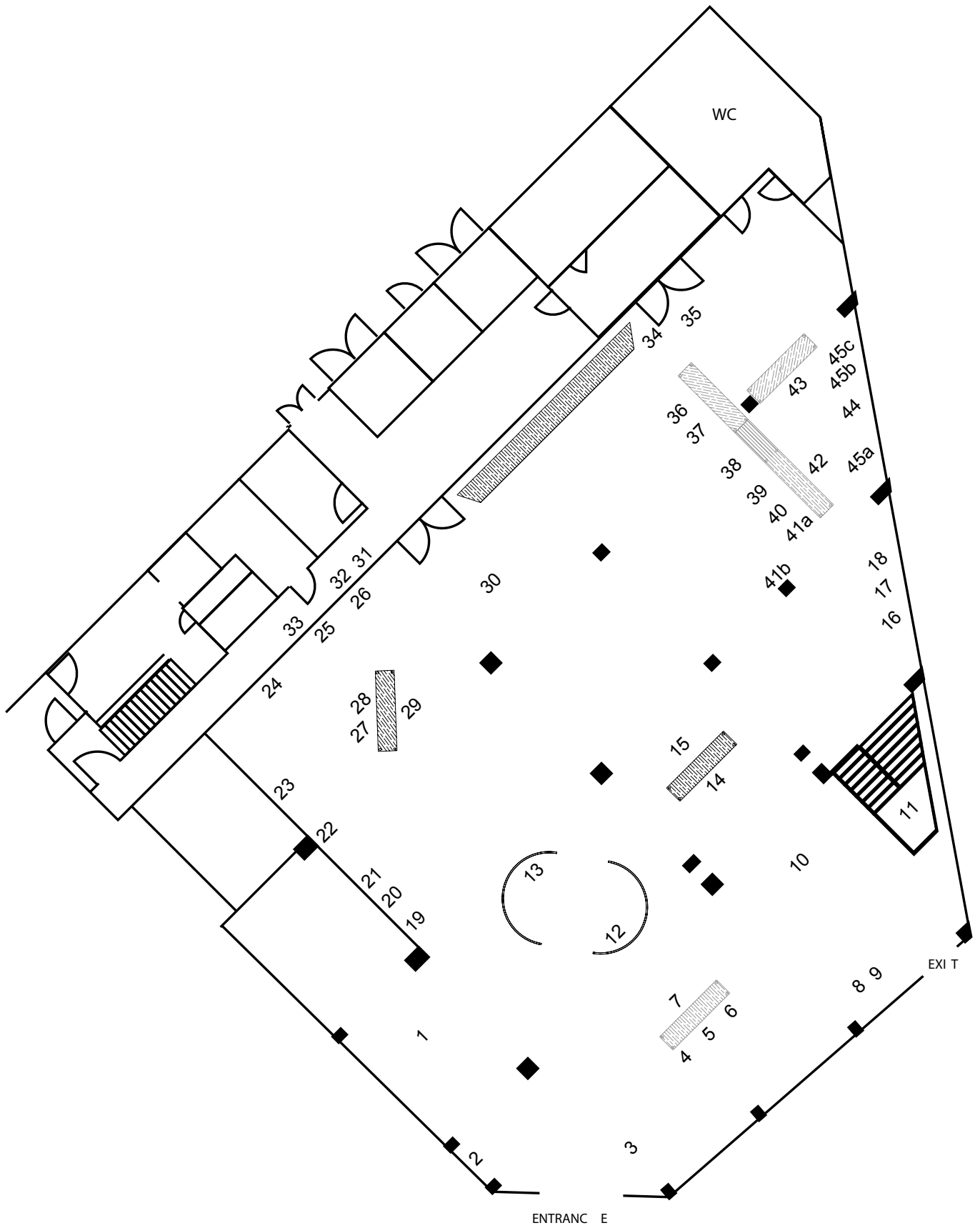
BENJAMIN PATTERSON

(1934 in Pittsburgh/USA – 2016 in Wiesbaden/Germany) was a musician, artist, and composer as well as a classical double bassist and early co-founder of the Fluxus movement: a trailblazer of performance and action art. With irony, humour, and a full understanding of his own method of notations, Benjamin Patterson crosses the borders between varied art forms and opens spaces of collective possibilities, questioning the canon while opening the limits of what we call music.

Patterson received his Bachelor of Music degree in 1956, and his first professional stint in classical music performance began under the auspices of the Halifax Symphony Orchestra in Canada. In 1958, the United States Army conscripted him into its only symphonic orchestra based in Stuttgart, Germany. During the early 1960s, he collaborated with comrades creatives. When news media cemented "Fluxus" within a broader public in and around September 1962, exhibitions and events quickly manifested. Alongside Dorothy Rudd Moore, Steve Chambers, and Carmen Moore, Patterson co-founded the Society of Black Composers in 1968.

Much of Patterson's artistic career was worldwide in scope, taking him to places such as Japan, Israel, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Namibia, Brazil, and Los Angeles. To mention some, in 2010, Patterson's first and major career retrospective opened at the Museum for Contemporary Arts Houston in Texas, which travelled to the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden. In 2012, Patterson assisted with devising and planning the 50th anniversary of Fluxus in Wiesbaden. Since 2012, Patterson accepted numerous invitations for re-performance of works, for participation in exhibitions and events. His last work before he passed on to the beyond was *When Elephants Fight, It Is the Frogs That Suffer* (2016–17) presented at documenta 14.

FLOOR PLAN



1. SELECTED SCORES OF BEN
PATTERSON

2. DOES SHE LOVE ME?, 2003

Mixed media, 78 x 110 cm

3. UNCLE BEN'S TINY ARTE
SHOPPE, 1994

Object, vending machine with toys, 50 x 25 x 25 cm

4. IF TIME BEGINS AND ENDS WITH
ZERO, 1986

Mixed material on canvas, 60 x 83 cm

5. FLUXUS STARTER-KIT, 2007

Mixed media, 40 x 30 x 10 cm

6. CELLO BLUE, CELLO RED, 2003

Bird houses, brooms, 121 x 16 x 13 cm

7. A SERIES OF ASSEMBLAGES
AND MIXED MEDIA

A . *My Prelude Before Soft Tools*, 2008

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 30 x 120 x 4 cm

B . *Symphony Plastique (french)*, 2008

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 30 x 120 x 4 cm

C . *Modern Largo Sorry, Sonata, Place, End*, 2008

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 30 x 120 x 4 cm

D . *After Mozart What Other Music Could be Needed?*,
2008

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 30 x 120 x 4 cm

8. DIASTERS AND CATASTROPHES,
PORTRAIT NO. 1/9, YEAR UNKNOWN

Assemblage, collage, variable measurements

9. PUZZLE POEM, 1962

Cardboard reprint, 26,3 x 40 cm

10. HUSBAND AND WIFE, 1989

Mixed material media: metal bed, leather cover with
painting, 165 x 180 x 200 cm

11. SONG LINES, 2003

Installation, prints on linen, sound recordings

12. HOW FROGS CHANGE THE
WORLD, 2012

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 80 x 80 x 10 cm

13. AFRICAN GIANT, 2007

Mixed material on canvas, 50 x 40 cm

These two works, 12 & 13, are accompanied by the
sound piece "*When Elephants Fight, It Is the Frogs That
Suffer*", a 2017 production by Nassauischer Kunstverein
Wiesbaden / documenta 14.

Stereo version recorded for Deutschlandfunk Kultur

Implementation: Bernd Schultheis

Field recordings: Frogs & Friends eV

Vocal performers: Sabine Bode, Stephanie Busse,
Valentina Dimitriadu-Karagiannis, Claudia Heidenreich,
Christiane Henke, Gerold Hens, Martin Hütten, Keno
Graumann, Elke Gruhn, Iannis Karanlik, Barbara Klinker,
Joachim Kreimer de Fries, Johanna von Kuczowski,
Alfred Neugebauer, Luzie Nierle, Fanny Chrysostom
Papadimitriou, Marina Papoulia, Dr. Barbro Patterson,
Elpiniki Reister, Theo Safaris Moschos, Pigi Mormouri,
Irmela Splett-Neumann, Ann Nöel Williams
Original soundtracks: Martin Luther King, Nelson
Mandela, Barack Obama, Benjamin Patterson

14. FOUR PERFORMANCE PRINTS

Cardboard Print, 47 x 88 cm each

15. BEN PATTERSON IN
ACTION: A SERIES OF FILMIC
DOCUMENTATIONS OF BEN
PATTERSON PERFORMANCES

Ben Patterson: "What is Fluxus? This is Fluxus"

Performance: 19.06.2001, Błonia, 13:22 mins

"Hello! Ben Patterson Welcomes you to his life in Real
Time", Performance Series at Kasseler Kunstverein
Kassel, Germany, 10.05-16.06.2002 "Bolero"
(1966), 19:04 mins

"Hello! Ben Patterson Welcomes you to his life in Real
Time" Performance Series at Kasseler Kunstverein
Kassel, Germany, 10.05-16.06.2002
"A clean slate" (2001), 07:01 mins

"Hello! Ben Patterson Welcomes you to his life in Real
Time" Performance Series at Kasseler Kunstverein
Kassel, Germany, 10.05-16.06.2002

"Do You Trust Me?" / Tour (13.05.2002),
16:19 mins

"Hello! Ben Patterson Welcomes you to his life in Real
Time", Performance Series at Kasseler Kunstverein.
Kassel, Germany, 10.05-16.06.2002 "Pond"
(1962), and "Swan Lake" (2001), 24:25 mins

“Hello! Ben Patterson Welcomes you to his life in Real Time”, Performance Series at Kasseler Kunstverein Kassel, Germany, 10.05-16.06.2002
Various, 26:06 minutes

“The Three Operas” (1994), 38:00 mins

“MARILYN MONROE & ME: 1952-1962; Memories & Regrets” & Epilogue Video Essay by Ben P. (2001), 29:36 mins

Conz and the Intermedia Avant-Garde (1997), Performances experts, 1:14 mins

Conz and the Intermedia Avant-Garde (1997), Performances experts, 00:51 mins

Selected Scenes from the Fluxus-Mass celebrated in Wiesbaden / Erbenheim (2002), 18:45 mins

Concert Fluxus Athenes (2007), 18:41 mins

Performance “World Weather” by Ben Patterson with Caterine Gualco, Chivari, Italy, (04.08.1999), 24:45 mins

“Fluxus Shopping Club” by Ben Patterson, at Fluxus Reunion Courthouse Theater, New York, (09.10.1984), 22:22 mins

Gallerie Schüppenhause (2005), 14:58 mins

16. UNTITLED, 1994
Mixed media material, 150 x 105 cm

17. TUBAS AND FROGS, 1994
Mixed material on canvas, 85 x 120 cm

18. HAUPTSACHE MUSIK, UNKNOWN DATE
Mixed material on canvas, 118 x 85 cm

19. SINK THE BISMARCK, 2005
Assemblage, 64 x 48 x 5 cm

20. I WILL NOT SIGN KYOTO, 2005
Assemblage, 64 x 49 cm

21. SCHRÖDER WARNT BUSH VOR KRIEG GEGEN IRAN, 2005
Assemblage, 64 x 48 cm

22. THE DREAM OF A CONCRETE EMPIRE, 2011
Assemblage, 80x70x13 cm

23. HOW MUCH LOVE DOES A PRESIDENT NEED?, 1996 / 2007
Photo Transfer, 60 x 83 cm

24. DO UNIFORMS MAKE PATRIOTS?, 1996
Photo Transfer, 83 x 60 cm

25. DIASTERS AND CATASTROPHES PORTRAITS NO. 3, 4 AND 7, 2010
Assemblage, collages, 39,5 x 60 x 8 cm

26. DIASTERS AND CATASTROPHES, PORTRAIT NO. 6, NEW YORK CITY!, 2010
Assemblage, collage, 39,5 x 60 x 8 cm

27. BREAD WARS, 2007
Collage, 62 x 47 cm

28. MILK WARS, 2007
Collage, 62 x 47 cm

29. BEN PATTERSON IN ACTION: A SERIES OF VIDEO PERFORMANCES BY BEN PATTERSON

“Rhein Gold”, video performance Ben Patterson (date, unknown); 04:07 mins

Ben Patterson “rheinpost”, gutenbergs pavilion, 03:25 mins

“Fluxus Hot and West”, Ben Patterson Performs SIX Fluxus Classics (2006), 72:00 mins

“Fluxus Parkour Warms” (2011), 15:47 mins

“Symphony_No.2” (date unknown), 03:00 mins

“The DVD Poems”, Video Performance (2009), 28:16 mins

“Tristan and Isolde” (date unknown), 14:22 mins

30. SMOKERS RIGHTS, 1988
Bottle dryer, cigarettes, 72 x 51 x 51 cm

31. WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, 2007
Collage on paper, DIN A4

32. HOW TO BE HAPPY, 1996
Four great lessons with easy to follow instructions, Print, 73 x 51 cm

33. DRIP MUSIC
Sound Installation, Ben Patterson performing a variation of George Brecht's classic “Drip Music”.

34. COCKTAILS “CHEZ BEN”, YEAR UNKNOWN
Print, 39 x 58 cm

35. LAST BEER, ANYONE?, 2003

Mixed media, 49 x 70 cm

36. BEETHOVEN SLEPT HERE,
2012

Assemblage, mixed media on canvas, 80 x 78 x 10 cm

37. HOW TO READ BEETHOVEN
SYMPHONY NO. 1 AND 2., 2007

Assemblage, mixed material, 53 x 83 x 4 cm

38. SOME PEOPLE SAY THESE
ARTISTS INFLUENCED MY WORK,
1999

Assemblage, mixed media, 69 x 50 cm

39. EFFIGY FOR DICK HUGGINS II,
2010

Assemblage, mixed media on wood, 52 x 52 cm

40. HOW TO MAKE SUSHI, 1996

Mixed material, 14 x 34 x 26 cm

41. OHRWURM I, 2014

Assemblages, mixed media on canvas, 40 x 30 cm

42. WITHOUT TITLE (R.R. &
M.L.K.), 1988

Silkscreen on fabric, 390 x 152 cm

43. WHICH PARTY IS BETTER?,
1996

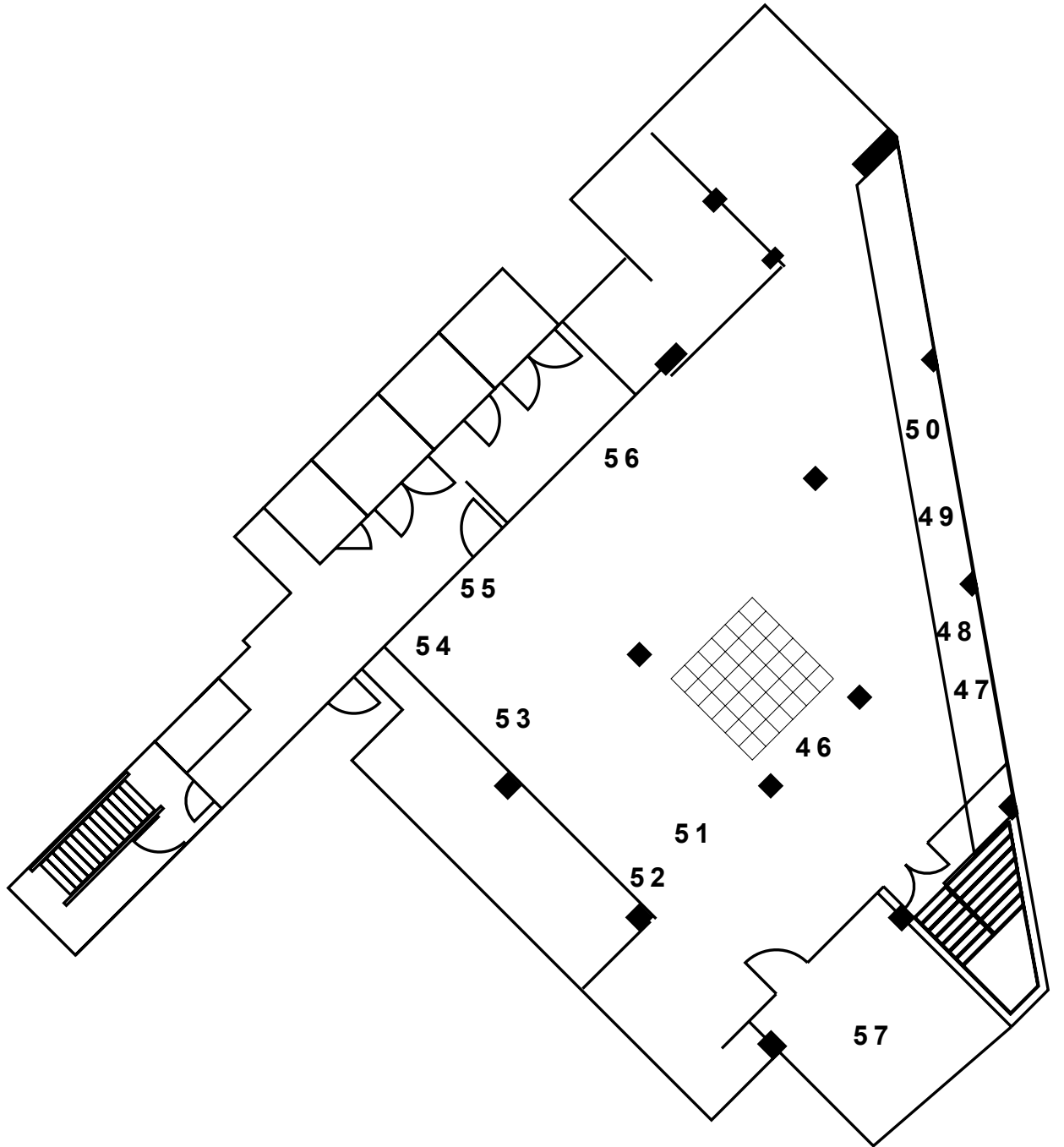
Mixed material on canvas, 71 x 50 cm

44. WHICH SOAP IS THE BEST
FOR WHITES?, 1996

Mixed media on canvas, 114 x 155 cm

45. WHAT LAW APPLY TO THIS
GEOMETRY, 1996

Photo transfer, paint on canvas, 59 x 85 cm



46. POND, 1962

A performative grid with frogs for 8 performers (please read instructions in the exhibition and perform POND).

47. OPERA, DATE UNKNOWN

Collage, 60 x 48 cm

48. DID FLUXUS CHANGE THE
WORLD?, 2012

Assemblage, Mixed Media on Canvas, 40 x 100 x 5 cm

49. EXPERT, 2011

Assemblage, concrete on painting, wood,
69 x 66,5 x 5 cm

50. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN KING -
THE PESSIMIST, 1989

Collage, drawing, 70 x 100 cm

51. SIT DOWN, 2010

Pantone Chair, bear with recordable voices,

39,5 x 39,75 x 23,5 inch

Please read the instructions in the exhibition and
perform "Sit Down"

52. TRUE/FALSE, 1996

Photo transfer, 70 x 50 cm

53. WHICH EVENT DID COCA COLA
SPONSOR?, 1998

Photo transfer and mixed media, 72 x 94 cm

54. PAPPAS GAME, 2005

Assemblage, mixed media

55. LA MUSE DE STRADIVARI,
2014

Assemblage, mixed material, 53 x 83 x 4 cm

56. I AM GLAD YOU ASKED
ME THIS QUESTION, A SERIES
OF CONVERSATIONS AND
DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL ON, OF,
FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON

Fluxus Wiesbaden (1962), 05:38 mins

Ben Fort Meyers (2014), 78:00 mins

Zelebrierung einer 40-jährigen Freundschaft
(1968-2008), The Titans of New Music, Ben Patterson
and Keith Rowe, Life Music Performance of TREATISE
by Cornelius Cardew (2008), 55:00 mins

IN WHAT CENTURY WILL
THE EARTH'S NORTH AND
SOUTH POLES CHANGE
POLARITIES?
ON, OF, FOR, WITH
BEN PATTERSON
(1934-2016)

CONCEPT BY BONAVENTURE SOH
BEJENGNDIKUNG

*This is not a small love
you hear this is a large
love, a passion for kissing learning
on its face.*

*This is a love that crowns the feet with hands
that nourishes, conceives, feels the water sails
mends the children,
folds them inside our history where they
toast more than the flesh
where they suck the bones of the alphabet
and spit out closed vowels.*

*This is a love colored with iron and lace.
This is a love initialed Black Genius.*

*This is not a small voice
you hear.*

— Sonia Sanchez: Excerpt from "This Is Not a
Small Voice"¹

THE QUESTIONS THE ANSWERS
HIDE

If James Baldwin's statement that "the artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides,"² in his now seminal essay about the role of the artist in society, ever had a perfect fit, then it

is with Ben Patterson. In the year 1962, when Baldwin made this proposal, Ben Patterson and his colleagues in Wiesbaden, Germany, were organising and performing at the "Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik" (Fluxus International Festival of Newest Music) — a series of events considered the birth of the Fluxus movement that would in its essence question what art and music are or could be. In that same year, 1962, the United States announced an embargo against Cuba and later the world would stand at the brink of a Nuclear war due to the Cuban Missile Crisis because of Soviet missile bases installed in Cuba — a situation similar to the current efforts by NATO to integrate Ukraine in its ranks and have Western military bases in Russia's front door. In that year too, James Meredith became the first black student to register at the University of Mississippi, an event that made news worldwide, exposing the racial tensions in the USA, as he was escorted by Federal Marshals to class. In 1962, the Vietnam war was at its apex such that U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield had to acknowledge publicly that the greatest empire of the time was not having a run as easy as they had thought. Which is to say that the world of the time, like today, was full of answers for which one wasn't/isn't really sure what the questions were/are. And some artists, like Ben Patterson, developed a practice from this dearth of questions.

Patterson had moved to Cologne in June 1960 with a bag of artistic, philosophical and sociopolitical questions. In his years of experimenting on forms and ideas, pushing the notions and practices of

1 Sonia Sanchez, "This Is Not a Small Voice", *Wounded in the House of a Friend*, Beacon Press, 1995.

2 James Baldwin, "The Creative Process", *Creative America*, Ridge Press, 1962.

performativity to its limits, stretching the concept of music not only in the way it was produced using differently prepared instrumentations, but also the way it was received collectively, as well as producing a plethora of scores, assemblages and other objects, Patterson was soon to notice that the sociopolitical questions were overweighing the other concerns. Maybe it wasn't a matter of overweighing but acknowledging the way the political, the economic and the social are intricately tied to questions of form and articulation. As Patterson was to later point out, he had developed a more and more vested interest in the politics of the 1960s, in the Civil Rights movement,³ and the general state of things in the world, unlike his mates of the Fluxus movement.

Despite the very impressive words that George Maciunas had found for the Fluxus Manifesto regarding the need to "purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional and commercialised culture, purge the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, — PURGE THE WORLD OF 'EUROPANISM'!", very few artists of the Fluxus movement were actually concerned with the racism in Europe and the USA, the police brutality, and white supremacist lynchings, when the Civil Rights movement was in full force and black people were fighting to reclaim their humanity.

Despite the very impressive words that George Maciunas had found for the Fluxus Manifesto regarding the need to "promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all people, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals," very few artists of the Fluxus movement were actually concerned with the massacres incurred in the Vietnam war or the Cuban Missile crisis.

Despite the very impressive words that George Maciunas had found for the Fluxus Manifesto regarding the need to "FUSE the cadres of cultural, social and political revolutionaries into a united front and action," very few artists of the Fluxus movement were actually concerned with the by then over decade long independence struggles and wars on the African continent.

It is these disparities between idea and intention, intention and action, posing and performing that might have caused Patterson to slowly retreat or at least decrease his involvement in Fluxus by moving to New York in 1963. In his conversation with George Lewis in 2013, he also cites the territorial nature of the movement that could excommunicate people for the sheer reason of collaborating with a deemed rival

movement. But this retreat allowed for Patterson to cultivate his quest for the questions that the answers hide.

An important part of the research and manifestation project *IN WHAT CENTURY WILL THE EARTH'S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES CHANGE POLARITIES? ON, OF, FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON* (1934–2016) is to study and present some of those critical, philosophical, sociopolitical questions that Patterson posed over his interrupted six decades of composing, making performances, sculpting and playing with art.

These days, we wake up to new and even more severe attacks by the Russian army on Ukraine. Putin has made it clear to the world that the nuclear option is not an abstraction nor an impossibility for him. Our minds, eyes see the mushroom shaped blast that brought Japan to its knees after the USA dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the 6th and 9th August 1945 killing more than a third of the population and causing damages still felt till date. Ben Patterson's work "If time begins and ends with zero, what is in between?" (1986) is reminiscence of this human savagery. The colourful fumes are almost beautiful. That turquoise blue of the water seems even inviting for a party in toxicity. Patterson invites us to reflect profoundly on what is between the zero at the beginning and the zero at the end without affording us the luxury of his opinion.

As we contemplate on the very tough questions of life, Patterson takes us to his bar. In the work "The Night Before, The Morning After", we are offered cocktails christened with names of some of the most important artists of the 1960s. But Patterson won't let us go without offering us one for the road. The assemblage piece "Last Beer, Anyone?" (2003) is insofar an important question as it reminds us of our promise of hospitality towards each other, but also references the most notorious breaking bread together ceremony, the communion before the betrayal, the ritual of the partitioning of the body as bread and drinking of blood as wine. As Patterson invites us to join the table, we take note that the twelve disciples are "Bierdeckel" of different kinds. To take a seat at this table is to expose oneself to even more critical questions. Another of the many questions in Patterson's repertoire is "Which party is better?" (1996). The canvas with image print collages might be a questioning of the two parties political system, the notions of order and chaos, or even more consequently, the question of the relevance of democracy. If one were to complete the puzzle that Patterson sets, the real question that appears on the canvas is "Which party choreographs freedom of assembly better?" Under which regime have we chosen to live? Which dictate have we pledged allegiance to? And no... it is not answers that we derive from Patterson's questions, but even more questions. In 2012, as the world celebrated 50 years of

³ Originally published in: Darby English and Charlotte Barat (ed.), *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019.

the Fluxus movement, and every museum that could afford it staged their own Fluxus retrospectives, and everyone who rubbed shoulders with any Fluxus artist also declared themselves a Fluxus artist and spoke in superlatives about the movement, Patterson seemed to retreat even further to take stock, to find an appropriate vantage, to polish the prism through which he needed to see the movement and most especially to clean the mirror in which the world saw Fluxus and the Fluxus artists saw themselves by asking the question that seemed like a call for a condition report: “Did Fluxus change the world?” (2012).

Other baffling questions that our quotidian answers hide, but that we encounter in this journey with Ben Patterson are: “Which soap is best for whites?” (1996), “What laws apply to this geometry?” (1996), “Which event did Coca Cola sponsor?” (1998), “Does she love me?” (2003), “Maybe you do have a good idea?” (1996), “How much love does a president need?” (1996/2007), and many more.

STRING YOUR SIGHS THRU THE RAINBOW OF OLD AGE

(after reading a New York Times article re:
a mummy kept preserved for about 3000 years)

*I'm gonna get me some mummy tape for
your love
preserve it for 3000 years or more
I'm gonna let the world see you
tapping a blue shell dance of love
I'm gonna ride your love bareback
on totem poles
bear your image on mountains
turning in ocean sleep
string your sighs thru the rainbow
of old age.
In the midst of desert people and times
I'm gonna fly your red/eagle/laughter
'cross the sky.*

Sonia Sanchez: excerpt from “A Love Poem
Written for Sterling Brown”⁴

There is something totemic in Ben Patterson’s relationship to two animals that he has made relations and allusions to several times in his career as an artist: the frog and the elephant. One can obviously read an environmental, climate, nature crisis in his deliberations through these animals, and that too won’t be wrong. It is safe to say that Patterson’s concerns for other beings – beyond humankind – existed before climate change, environmental disasters became the wave on which every Dick, Tom and Harry needs to ride. It is the almost spiritual significance and emblematic roles both frog

and elephant seem to assume in his oeuvre that is of interest for us.

When we invited Ben Patterson to participate in documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel for which he participated, alas, posthumously in 2017, he declared in no less dramatic words that our invitation was the greatest surprise in his artistic career. Armed with his wicked wittiness and razor sharp humour he replied that with this invitation, Fluxus had arrived in the “Big Time,” but expressed his concern that at 82 he might not be as fit to do 36 hours without sleep, as he did at the age of 75. But he concluded his reply by saying that “However, as we say in the U.S.A. ‘Old cowboys never die, they just fade away’.... So, let’s give it the ‘old college try’ and see what happens.”

We gave it the old college try and Ben Patterson did the site visits in Athen and Kassel and proposed to us a sonic graffiti, sixteen-channel sound installation titled “When Elephants Fight, It Is the Frogs That Suffer (2016–17).” This piece was realised posthumously in collaboration with Bernd Schultheis, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden and Elke Gruhn, and was presented at the Byzantine and Christian Museum (Gardens) in Athens, and as a twenty-four-channel sound installation at the Karlsau Park in Kassel.

The totems of frog and elephant were not only reminiscent of Aristophanes’s “The Frogs” (405 BCE) and earlier works by Patterson like “Pond” (1962), but also an incantation and (re-)incarnation of and by the artist. The symphony of croaking frogs that made up the sonic graffiti was composed of recorded frog croaks and a chorus of humans trained to imitate frog sounds. In these sounds, Patterson had concealed a plenitude of political messages that are a reflection of the power imbalances in the world. When two states fight against each other, it is the citizens — and actually the most vulnerable in society that suffer.

In the project IN WHAT CENTURY WILL THE EARTH’S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES CHANGE POLARITIES? ON, OF, FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON (1934 – 2016) two works — a collage and an assemblage — that call upon these totems are juxtaposed against each other: “African giant” (2007) and “How frogs change the world” (2012). In the former, in a gesture of referencing the elephant, Patterson might just be referencing himself through “my teeth”. He establishes a relation between the African giant, elephant/ Patterson, and the Austrian giant, Mozart. In the latter, he conceives a pond and conjures frogs that populate the pond. The space of interpretation is as wide as our imaginations can afford to run wild.

⁴ Sonia Sanchez, “A Love Poem Written for Sterling Brown”, *The Black Scholar*, Volume 8, 1977.

SOME PEOPLE SAY THESE ARTISTS INFLUENCED MY WORK

Ben Patterson was neither living on an island nor in a vacuum. In several works, he questioned his relation to artists that came before him and inserted himself or found himself in a web of artists that were co-travelers. There is a question of genealogy here, but also an equation of a rhizomatic network that connects horizontally, vertically, diagonally and otherwise. In the work "Some people say these artists influenced my work" (1999), he situates himself, not without his tongue in his cheek, between Johann Sebastian Bach and Charlie Chaplin. But this spectrum is hardly a mere provocation as between "Genie und Wahnsinn" is enough space for artistic expressions and humour, and a lot of space for disruption, which one can safely say is Ben Patterson's forté.

In the aforementioned piece "African giant" (2007), in which he sets the hard working Mozart next to the elephant content with its majesty, Mozart seems to appear pale. Patterson walks a very tight rope.

The proposals run on a very thin line between celebration and dismissal. Here too, it doesn't seem as if an answer is given, but even more questions provoked. In the piece "Opera" (year unknown) he writes that
*Operas can be big.
operas can be
small.
some people love
opera.
some people hate
opera.*

*However,
In the end, all
Operas sing about
One of four basic
Themes.
1. Revenge/ Rache
2. Love/ Lust
3. Envy/ Neid
4. Greed/ Gier.*

It is the "basic" as qualifier that maintains the walk on the tightrope. Other assemblages like "After Mozart what other music could be needed?" (2008) or "How to read Beethoven symphony no. 1 and 2" (2007) in which he employs plastics and metals also call for a deeper reading.

Patterson sought those relations too with his contemporaries even beyond the Fluxus movement. When Patterson came to Germany in 1960, he was armed with a letter of introduction written by the German ambassador to Canada who was a relative of Karlheinz Stockhausen and addressed to Stockhausen.

The story of Stockhausen snubbing Patterson is not of interest nor of relevance, but the fact that Patterson's seminal performance "Paper Piece" (1960) is said to be in part a response to Stockhausen's "Kontakte" (1958–60), for which Stockhausen demanded the musicians to rehearse for 200 hours to be able to play it. With "Paper Piece", Patterson not only makes a relation but offers a radical alternative to the Über-virtuosity and Über-grandeur by proposing paper as a musical instrument par excellence that could be played by all and for all.⁵

The project IN WHAT CENTURY WILL THE EARTH'S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES CHANGE POLARITIES? ON, OF, FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON (1934–2016) also brings together several other reflections on music by Patterson. Be it his cogitations on instrumentations, organs as instruments and daily tools and utensils as sound bodies like in "Tubas and Frogs" (1994), "La muse de Stradivari" (2014) which is a mutant between a lamp, a sculptor and a musical object, and the pieces that complicate, elastify our comprehensions on music, pay homage to colleagues of his time or those that came before or just disrupt like "Hauptsache Musik" (1994), "Song lines" (2003), "Effigy for Dick Higgins II" (2010), "Beethoven slept here" (2012) and "Ohrwurm" (2014).

CONFLICTS, DISASTERS AND CATASTROPHES

*In the past,
it would have moved me far more than it
does now.
And that's because I've learned some things
about people,
That they are — just people.
Simple man.*

*Bimpé Fageyinbo: "Just People"*⁶

The notion of political art, as much as poetic art, has been used and abused too often enough in the 20th and 21st century, such that we must be careful when we write about artists whose practices go beyond just the banal. But the political and the poetical walk hand in hand, sway seamlessly, slip through, into and out of each other in Ben Patterson's work, such that it would be a sacrilege to abstain from mentioning these two Ps. But it seems to me that behind it all is Patterson's deep interest in the human condition. As Bimpé Fageyinbo puts it — just people.

Be it in the constellations for "Milk wars" (2007) or "Bread wars" (2007) one can't fail to interpret a certain

⁵ Originally published in *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA*, ed. Darby English and Charlotte Barat (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019) Antonia Pocock, independent scholar

orchestration. The references to the National Military History Museum or Standard Security put the bread and milk rationing in close proximity with other power machinations and warfares. It is said that people will tolerate any regime until the price of bread rises. Milk too has been an essential part of human diets since forever. But it is with the broken finger and the broken foot that Patterson actually gives us something of a key to unlock or at least to glance behind the curtains of the work.

This cluster of works on conflicts, disasters and catastrophes includes works like “Sink the Bismarck” (2005) an assemblage of miniature fighter crafts and war ships. The title of the work alludes to the historical WWII events around the British attack of the German battleship, Bismarck. Bismarck and Tirpitz were considered to be the most powerful and largest battleships built by Germany when launched in 1939. Bismarck was to have a very short professional lifespan of eight months after which during the 1941 Rheinübung, Bismarck was attacked at the Battle of the Denmark Strait by the HMS Prince of Wales. This historical event was captured in Lewis Gilbert’s 1960 war epic “Sink the Bismarck!” based on C. S. Forester’s 1959 seminal book *The Last Nine Days of the Bismarck*. The sinking of the Bismarck is a reminder of the complexities and redundancy of warfare, the mind boggling investments made to create killing machines that can be sunk just after eight months while people are dying of starvation reveals another deep problem of humans and their priorities. As Bimpé Fageyinbo puts it — just people.

This cluster also includes works that thematize issues of climate crisis and global warming like “I will not sign Kyoto” (2005) on the Kyoto Protocol, which though adopted in 1997 only entered into force in 2005, the year Patterson made the work. Till date there are still some “great” nations that dispute the scientific evidence on the occurrence of global warming that is highly catalysed by human-made CO2 emissions and therefore the need for nation states to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Other works like “Schröder warnt Bush vor Krieg gegen Iran” (2005), “Bankruptcy sale” (2005), or “In spies we trust” (2011) speak for themselves and also speak for Patterson’s deep care for urgencies of his time, and allow for us to read his work as a testament of that time. Sometimes Patterson produced the works as the news unfolded. But unlike the news that seeks to tell world affairs in 15 minutes, Patterson digs underneath the occurrences, makes relations, condenses them, and uses the tools of poetry to express the undercurrents of world events.

6 Bimpé Fageyinbo, “Just People”, in: fayemi shakur (ed.), *A Womb of Violet: An Anthology*, Project for Empty Space, 2019.

In 2011, after almost a decade of hunting, the US Navy SEALs tracked down the Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and on 2nd May, at 1:00 a.m. PKT he was killed in an operation called Operation Geronimo. Ben Patterson made the assemblage “Operation Geronimo” (2011) in which one sees president Obama and his team in the situation room, a gun, the American emblem, the eagle, as well as handcuffs with images of bin Laden and the Bedonkohe Apache leader: Geronimo. As Raoul Peck points out in his four-part documentary “Exterminate all the Brutes,” it is no coincidence that the USA chose the name of an indigenous chief as the moniker for one of the greatest manhunts in the country’s history. It is this connection, this disrespect towards the indigenous peoples on whose land the USA was built that is at the crux of Patterson’s piece. The uproar of the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, the Navajo Nation and other indigenous nations after this scandal was only right.

In 2010, Patterson made a series of crushing tableaux that are portraits of several megacities in the world, including New York City, New Delhi, Mumbai, Mexico City, and São Paulo. More than portraits, these assemblages of train maps, photographs, objects, and texts are scans, x-rays of these cities. The rails serve as a kind of aesthetic skeleton of the cities, but the images and texts tell of the entanglements of class and other social disparities to spatial planning to religion to politics to economic questions. The series titled “Diasters and catastrophes no xx” (2010) is a scathing revelation of the underbelly of such cities. In “Diasters and catastrophes, portrait no. 6, New York City” (2010) a part of the text reads: “that the evils of megacity living are a direct product of population density, should be an obvious conclusion. The ‘rat in a cage’ syndrome is well known, but most people find it difficult to compare rat population with human populations. Never-the-less, the parallel is true and valid. The chart below measures the relationship of population density to crime and homelessness.”

<p>come tomorrow—</p> <p>Dark blue</p> <p>So nobody</p> <p>Have to ask</p> <p>How I been feelin</p> <p>Amina Baraka: In Color⁷</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>I’m gonna paint my face</p> <p>wont</p>
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In that space of reflections on Conflicts, Disasters and Catastrophes, one can’t possibly ignore the consequences of racial conflicts and class disasters around the world, but especially in his home country, USA. “Which soap is best for whites?” (1996), “Which party is better” (1996), or “What laws apply to this geometry?” (1996). “What laws apply to this geometry?”

(1996) is a tripartite, a geometry of photo-transfers and paint on canvas thematising hanging, lynching, as well as police brutality towards young black men. The history of the USA. Stretching through Patterson's works are deliberations on the racial divide in multiple forms and shapes.

IN SEARCH OF THE FLOW

In the conversation between George Lewis and Ben Patterson, Patterson talks of Fluxus not as a movement but as a way of being. The project *IN WHAT CENTURY WILL THE EARTH'S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES CHANGE POLARITIES? ON, OF, FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON* (1934–2016) is a possibility to forage in and through that way of being in the world. It is the possibility of inhabiting the world through the art works, the music, the testimonies, the questions, the provocations that Patterson left with us in his almost six decades of expressing himself through the arts.

This project is a possibility of pouring that ever flowing material of Fluxus into a container without containing it. It is a possibility of accommodating and being accommodated by Ben Patterson's philosophies, get infected by his curiosity and agencies, and especially accompany him in an almost peripatetic manner through philosophical poles like "Puzzle poem (great art)" (1962), "true/false" (1996), or "How to be happy" (1996).

IN WHAT CENTURY WILL THE EARTH'S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES CHANGE POLARITIES? ON, OF, FOR, WITH BEN PATTERSON (1934–2016) is an effort to think with, but also carry the torch further from an artist who titled one of his works "I am a poet but no one knows it" (2005) to another generation that hopefully will feel, see, listen to the world with such intensity as Ben Patterson did, irrespective of whether anyone knows it or not.

⁷ Amina Baraka, "In Color", in: fayemi shakur (ed.), *A Womb of Violet: An Anthology*, Project for Empty Space, 2019

MORE INFORMATION

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S A V V Y Contemporary – The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks – a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. S A V V Y Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

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