

Rhythm

Jennifer Angus & Alistair MacDonald

Jennifer Angus and Alistair MacDonald propose the tentatively titled work “Rhythm” for the Chazen Museum of Art. Angus is a Canadian citizen, currently living in Madison, Wisconsin where she is an Associate Professor of Textile Design at the University of Wisconsin. She is a visual artist whose recent works take the form of installations where real, exotic insects are pinned directly to a wall in repeating patterns which reference both textiles and wallpaper. MacDonald is a composer and Director of the Electroacoustic Music Studios at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. Transforming sounds and playing with ambiguities of recognizability and reference are hallmarks of his compositions. In addition, MacDonald is particularly concerned with the spatialization of sounds, spatial location and behavior. “Rhythm” will be a multi media work which utilizes pattern as both a visual and auditory device.

We believe in pattern’s narrative potential and its use as a tool of communication. Patterned fabric stitched into clothing can communicate sex, age, ethnic identity, region, marital status and position with a community. But pattern is not confined to a design upon cloth or a tissue paper guide used in dressmaking. What is a pattern? Basically it is anything in which repetition is inherent.

It is a well known fact that young children do best when there is a routine. Ever read the same story to a youngster twenty times or heard the same song over and over again? There is comfort in a routine or knowing what’s going to happen. Routine = pattern. Once children go to grade school, they are taught to recognize patterns by sight. The information that the eye sees is processed quickly by the brain to develop a consistent form of information or logic – call it a visual shorthand. “Pattern language” carries this concept even further, for it is a sophisticated form of thought which has been developed to solve recurring problems of design, be it in architecture or computer programming. Thus it is clear that pattern offers the possibility of a kind of narrative or progression of thought.

Upon the walls of an entire gallery space, we propose an installation of insects placed and pinned in a pattern which will gradually grow more dense and then fade out. The visual impression will be wave-like, that is, a growing and then receding of the pattern. This is to happen multiple times upon the length of the wall. As the viewer walks this length, a sound piece composed of insect-like sonorities will swell and then fade. Inspiration for the visual pattern comes from music itself. (Please see enclosed plan in cardboard tube – 1 inch : 1 foot). We will only use insects which in life make an audible sound such as cicadas, katydids, crickets and grasshoppers. The horizontal lines of the pattern are made up of clear wing cicadas. These lines reflect those of a musical score. The colourful circles of grasshoppers and katydids are intended to suggest the musical notes. Rest assured that none of the insects used are endangered. Conservationists and scientists are of the belief that if we encourage tribal peoples to continue collecting insects, thus

providing a livelihood, then they will have less reason to cut down the rain forest which the insects inhabit. It is ecologically sound. They are a renewable resource.

The sound component will indeed be partially created by using recordings of insects in the Malaysian jungle, but also transformed insect (and other) sounds which play with a continuum between the abstract and the recognizable. The work will also explore patterning in a number of ways:

- Spatial patterning - the work will be in 8 channels and sound patterns will be divided to articulate the installation space.
- Rhythmic patterning - the pulsing of the insects and their layered textures (at the root of the region's gamelan music) build from the short, sparse iterations into waves of polyrhythmic texture.
- Temporal patterning - on a larger scale mimicking the diurnal cycle of the insects sounding behaviour.

The patterns of sight and sound will combine to create the suggestion of a life cycle – birth, life and death. One will give pause to consider not only the natural world and environment, but also our own relationship to it, both positive and negative.