

A response to *Nathan Young: Night Music of the Southern Plains American Indian*

1. The origins of the art museum & the ethnographic museum are not dissimilar.

(Even here in Kansas City, a few thousand miles from the Louvre, the afterlife of colonial institutionalism is in play when Nathan strategically confronts us with forms belonging to one cultural paradigm within the exhibition format of another.)

2. Rich, complex aesthetic praxes are not the sole purview of Art with a capital 'A.'

(Art in the sense of autonomous art as it emerged in enlightenment Europe is a culturally & historically specific concept - no more neutral than any other form of whiteness. & as such, is likewise never neutral when applied as a category to aesthetic praxes with other histories. In that sense, a certain refusal to allow such practices to be subsumed under the moniker of 'Art' is a politically crucial gesture.)

3. Rich, complex aesthetic praxes are also not the sole purview of High Culture.

(Simply acknowledging pluralities of aesthetic praxes isn't enough. Any given practice must also be thought in relation to its specific cultural function & status - for instance, in relation to forms of social stratification & convention. In this sense, we might think of the 49 Songs along with other para- or infra-aesthetic traditions such as Sacred Harp.)

4. Non-traditional or non-'high cultural' aesthetic assemblies, 'masses,' are not inherently reactionary.

(Perhaps this only has to be said because of the current political climate in the United States in which the unruly 'energies,' the 'power,' of mass assemblies have been appropriated in public consciousness by neo-fascism. In this sense, the practice of the 49 Songs is a crucial & timely example of the anarchic pleasure of a group tethered to & oriented around aims that couldn't be further from populist nationalism.)

You're hit with all of this at once as soon as you step in the door - & only then does the real work of thinking these dynamics together in relation to the specific referents of Nathan's works begin. I'm also still doing that, & I can't say I see an end or solution in sight. That endlessness is an aspect of the works' strength - that the experience of listening to & thinking through it collectivizes us not (only) as identities, but as knots & nodes of problems. This is how I'm taking the displacements of displacements that the show seems built around: the documentation of a decontextualized, performed iteration of 49 Songs being what lands inside the gallery, the 'moon panels' abstracting a spatial feature of a sacred practice into a kind of diagrammatic compass on the gallery walls. Is this what at one point might have been called "negation of negation" - or is this just the only ethical way to occupy an institutional space conceptually bound to one's oppressor? And/or, is Nathan's occupation of the space also a strategic gesture toward re-assigning attention & value - not only to a 'Native presence' (the paintings themselves would be enough for that), but to a presence that insists on identity beyond 'the traditional' & on including its contemporary infra-praxes of assembly (insisting that we think both sacred & profane varieties of "Night Music of the Southern Plains American Indian" at once). Nathan's materials are displaced into Art to hijack the instituting & authorizing power of the gallery.

All of this might make your head spin. It should. Instead of trying to regain your balance, try staying with that spin - with the confusion & complexity of your implication in all of this. Maybe meeting *in* that, in a shared space of dizziness, also has a power. Maybe dizzy solidarity is the best we can hope for from art these days.

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