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# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE November 2004

MEDIA PREVIEW Friday, February 11, 2005 10am-noon

# Visual Music February 13 through May 22, 2005 MOCA Grand Avenue



Wassily Kandinsky
Fugue, 1914
Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 in.
Beyeler Foundation, Basel
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Jennifer Steinkamp
SWELL, 1995
Computer generated projection and installation with soundtrack by
Bryan Brown
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Purchased with funds provided by the Ruth and Jake Bloom Young

LOS ANGELES — *Visual Music* surveys the charged and profoundly generative relationship between art and music over the last 100 years. This major exhibition, co-organized by The Museum of Contemporary Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, opens to the public at MOCA Grand Avenue (250 South Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles) on February 13, 2005 and remains on view through May 22, 2005. Featuring masterpieces of modern and contemporary art, *Visual Music* offers for the first time in the United States a chronological exhibition of the relationship between abstraction, color, and music forms as varied as classical, jazz, rock, and electronic.

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Rather than following a traditional progression of movements and styles, this exhibition presents successive explorations of the idea of synaesthesia. Artists from all over the world are inspired by the concept of synaesthesia, the experience of one sense evoking another, in this case exploring the union of the aural and visual senses. *Visual Music* explores this concept's remarkable cross-pollination across time and medium and reveals how the multimedia installations produced today realize ambitions expressed by paintings made almost 100 years ago. Over 80 works, including important examples never before seen in the U.S., by over 40 internationally recognized artists of abstract painting, experimental cinema, and contemporary installation are featured. This exhibition is coorganized by MOCA Director Jeremy Strick; MOCA Assistant Director, Board Affairs Ari Wiseman; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC Director of Art and Programs and Chief Curator Kerry Brougher; and Hirshhorn Curator Emerita Judith K. Zilczer.

### **Paintings and Photographs**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout Europe, artists' desires to emulate musical qualities propelled crucial developments in abstract painting. Russian-born painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), an accomplished musician, used color to associate tone with timbre, hue with pitch, and saturation with the volume of sound, as seen in his groundbreaking painting *Fugue* (1914). Artists such as Lithuanian composer and artist Mikalojus Čiurlionis (1875–1911), Swiss-born Paul Klee (1879–1940), and Czechborn František Kupka (1871–1957) further explored ways to evoke sound and emulate musical composition in painting. In the 1920s Klee developed a systematic approach linking musical counterpoint to color gradation and harmonic structure to color composition.

In America, modernists such as Arthur Dove (1880–1946), Marsden Hartley (1877–1943), and Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), embraced musical analogy in their search for a new visual language of abstraction. Dove's growing enthusiasm for American popular music and his practice of listening to music in the studio coalesced in a series of "jazz paintings" in 1926 and 1927. Two Americans working in Paris were among the most outspoken advocates of musical analogy in painting. Known as synchromists, Morgan Russell (1886–1953) and Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890–1973) developed an elaborate and sophisticated theory of painting based on dynamic spatial rhythm and color harmony.

Artists featured in this section are: Daniel Vladimir Baranoff-Rossiné, Mikalojus Čiurlionis, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, František Kupka, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Mikhail Matiushin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Morgan Russell, Alfred Stieglitz, Léopold Survage, Helen Torr, and Henry Valensi.

## Films, Videos, Color Organs, Light Projections

Fueled by the belief that projected light might constitute an independent art, artists in Europe and America designed instruments seeking to link the color spectrum to the musical scale. American artist Charles Dockum (1904–77), Russian artist Daniel Vladimir Baranoff-Rossiné (1888–1944), Czech artist Zdeněk Pešánek (1896–1965), and Danish-born Thomas Wilfred (1889–1968) created "color organs." These instruments were controlled by a piano-style keyboard linked to a projector that bathed a screen in ever-changing colored light. Pictures developed over time like musical compositions. Few of these color organs have survived; however, rarely seen film footage of these distinctive projections is included in the exhibition. The most successful extant light instruments were created by Thomas Wilfred and the exhibition features a major piece, *Opus 152: Study in Depth* (1952), which has recently been restored to working order by the Hirshhorn.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, film enabled painters, who had been confined to merely suggesting motion and rhythm in static images, to create flowing movements and rhythmic schemes that unfolded over time, thereby drawing visual art closer to musical composition. German artist Oskar Fischinger's (1900–1967) films begin with relatively simple geometric forms that expand and contract, ultimately reaching a frenzied climax in which the elements explode in a pyrotechnical display of color and flicker. Fischinger moved from Germany to Los Angeles and was involved with movie studios including Disney where he worked on the film *Fantasia*.

German artist Viking Eggeling's (1880–1925) abstract shapes conjure associations with stringed musical instruments, musical staff lines, and machine parts. In 1918, he settled in Berlin and began his association with German painter Hans Richter (1888–1976). Together they created a series of elaborate scroll paintings through which they tried to ascertain the principles of rhythm in painting. Eggeling carried this concept into film and spent three years (1921–1924) animating thousands of abstract drawings based on his scrolls. The resulting seven-minute short film *Diagonal Symphony* was a landmark of avant-garde cinema that influenced many filmmakers.

As the technologies of color film and soundtrack developed, filmmakers brought color, form, and sound together to create extended compositions that bore occasional resemblance to the work of abstract painters. New Zealand–born Len Lye (1901–1980) was a major figure in experimental filmmaking as well as a leading sculptor, painter, and writer. Lye's *Colour Box* (1935) features music, saturated color, and organic forms that bounce across the surface of the artist's hand-painted and scratched celluloid, a technique he pioneered and called "direct film." The Grammy-award winning American filmmaker and musicologist Harry Smith (1923–1991), best-known for his seminal

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compilation recording *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), created films that distill pure color and form, such as *Film No. 3* (1949).

In the early 1940s, Los Angeles filmmakers and brothers John (1917–1995) and James Whitney (1921–1982) collaborated on a project known as *Film Exercises*, in which the image generates the sound. Utilizing innovative animation techniques, James Whitney created *Yantra* (1950–1955), meaning "implement" or "machine" in Sanskrit. Such films embodied a growing interest among artists in Eastern philosophies and theories of the cosmos and prefigure the 1960s interest in live light shows, which brought visual art and music together in immersive environments. These works are presented in the exhibition through rarely seen documentary footage of performances by artists such as Elias Romero, Mark Boyle and Joan Hills, the group Single Wing Turquoise Bird, and Joshua White.

Artists featured in this section are: **Stephen Beck**, Jordan Belson, Mark Boyle and Joan Hills, Larry Cuba, Charles Dockum, Oskar Fischinger, Viking Eggeling, Hy Hirsh, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, Len Lye, Zdeněk Pešánek, Elias Romero, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Dan Sandin, Single Wing Turquoise Bird, Harry Smith, Alfred Stieglitz, James Whitney, John Whitney, John Whitney, Jr., Thomas Wilfred, and Joshua White.

#### Installations

Recent explorations employing digital media and installation represent a fulfillment of the tradition while suggesting new directions for visual music. Using multiple video projections and amplified sound, Jennifer Steinkamp (b. 1958) constructed a space where the viewer is immersed in an environment of lights, color, form, and movement synchronized to a sound composition by Bryan Brown. In her work *SWELL* (1995), three projectors present digital animations of glowing colored starburst forms, creating the impression of an infinite space in which light spirals out towards the viewer and spins back into the void.

London-based artist Nike Savvas' (b. 1964) *Anthem (The Carny)* (2003) is a silent installation of disco and theatrical lights that takes the music of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds as its source. Evoking light shows and discotheques, Savvas uses colored lights moving at different speeds to not only represent sound but to replace it entirely. New York artist Leo Villareal's *Lightscape* (2002)—a large, ten-by-seven foot wall-mounted screen utilizing LED colored lights—incorporates new computer and lighting techniques to build upon the effects of color organs of previous generations. Los Angeles artists Cindy Bernard and Joseph Hammer's installation is based on their performance *projections+sound* (1999–2001/2005). Monochromatic color fields morph while a soundtrack is created from a reel-to-reel tape

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player to simultaneously record and play sampled music. In his installation *Corridor* (2003), New York artist Jim Hodges (b. 1957) presents a long hallway with two murals of colored stripes that correspond to an audible soundtrack of musical notes and lyrics from popular songs sung by individual voices.

Featured artists in this section are: Cindy Bernard and Joseph Hammer, Jim Hodges, Nike Savvas, Jennifer Steinkamp and Bryan Brown, and Leo Villareal.

### **Publication**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated 272-page hardcover book co-published by MOCA, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and Thames & Hudson. *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900* features essays by exhibition curators Brougher, Strick, Wiseman, Zilczer, and musicologist Olivia Mattis. The book also includes a bibliography, chronology, and illustrated exhibition checklist and is available in the MOCA Store for \$50.

### **Exhibition Tour**

Following MOCA's presentation in Los Angeles, the exhibition will travel to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC (June 23 to September 11, 2005).

### **Public Programs**

### **Art Talks**

Art Talks are informal discussions on current exhibitions led by arts professionals. The talks take place in the exhibition galleries unless otherwise noted. Attendance is free with museum admission and no reservations are required. The Art Talks series is made possible in part by The Times Mirror Foundation Endowment.

**Kerry Brougher**, exhibition co-curator and director of art and programs and chief curator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

**Judith K. Zilczer**, exhibition co-curator and curator emerita, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Sunday, February 13, 3pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

Cosey Fanni Tutti, artist and musician

Thursday, February 24, 6:30pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

Jim Hodges, artist

Sunday, February 27, 3pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

**Vilayanur S. Ramachandran,** director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and professor, psychology department and neurosciences program, University of California, San Diego Thursday, March 10, 6:30pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

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**David James**, professor of cinema and comparative Literature, University of Southern California

Thursday, March 31, 6:30pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

**Jeremy Strick**, exhibition co-curator and MOCA director Thursday, April 28, 6:30pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

**Ari Wiseman,** exhibition co-curator Sunday, May 15, 3pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

### **Music Series**

#### **Visual Music: SEE HEAR NOW!**

Co-presented by MOCA and the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, REDCAT, *Visual Music: SEE HEAR NOW!* is an experimental music series investigating the synaesthetic resonance between contemporary music and visual art. All performances take place at REDCAT, located at 631 West 2nd Street, corner of 2nd and Hope Streets in the Walt Disney Concert Hall complex, Downtown L.A. \$18 general admission; \$14 MOCA members, students, CalArts staff/faculty, and Alumni Affinity Card holders. To purchase tickets and for more information, visit redcat.org.

### Carter Tutti Chessmachine

Friday, February 25, 8:30pm, REDCAT

Members of the legendary group Throbbing Gristle, major forerunners of techno and electronica, artists, musicians, and subcultural collaborators, Cosey Fanni Tutti and Chris Carter (Carter Tutti) make a rare United States appearance. A collaboration between American Richard Charter and Russian Ivan Pavlov (aka CoH), Chessmachine explores the aesthetic atmosphere of a Cold War chess game, with live sonic exchanges by Chartier and Pavlov, color-coded staging, uniforms, lighting, and video projections.

# Skoltz\_Kolgen present Flüux:/Terminal Tom Recchion

### William Basinski & James Elaine

Saturday, February 26, 8:30pm, REDCAT

Skoltz\_Kolgen, the Montreal-based plurimedia duo of Dominique [T] Skoltz and Herman W. Kolgen, uses digital platforms to explore the immediate relationship between sonic systems and visual material. An alumnus of legendary 1970s collective the Los Angeles Free Music Society, Tom Recchion takes prerecorded tape loops, keyboards, and effects and turns exotica into music you'd expect to hear in the tiki bar on a 22nd century space station. Live video mixing by New York filmmaker Jonathon Rosen accompanies Recchion's performance. In an artistic symbiosis reminiscent of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, musician and auteur William Basinski and filmmaker James Elaine have created subtle films and music together for over 20 years, with the seamlessly integrated quality of their work beautifully illustrating the thesis of *Visual Music*.

# Raster-Noton Artists: Carsten Nicolai (aka Alva Noto), Olaf Bender (aka Byetone), Frank Bretschneider, Signal

Saturday, March 4, 8:30pm, REDCAT

Founded in 1996, Raster-Noton is a major experimental and minimal label cooperative based in Germany. Three of its headline artists—Frank Bretschneider, Olaf Bender and Carsten Nicolai—perform both solo and together as Signal for this one-of-a-kind performance. Co-

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founder and principle administrator of Raster-Noton, Olaf Bender (alias Byetone) is an inordinately talented "sound architect" with a fascination for minimalism and the impact of technology on creativity. Composer Frank Bretschneider's recent projects include *Aerial Riverseries*, in which he aligned a complimentary musical excursion with aerial photographs of a river in Iceland by internationally reputed artist Olafur Eliasson. Berlin-based Carsten Nicolai is known in the contemporary art world for his installations and by electronic scene aficionados for his individual productions designed under the pseudonym of Noto or Alva Noto.

#### **Bell Solaris**

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, April 7-9, 8:30pm, REDCAT

Bell Solaris, Twelve Metamorphoses in Piano Theater, began as a concert-length composition for solo piano by American experimental music pioneer David Rosenboom, who built the music upon an underlying narrative about evolution expressed through transfigured myths. Now, renowned theater and opera director Travis Preston has conceived an enveloping theatrical experience of the same piece. With an intricate choreography, a large ensemble of performers interacts with the on-stage musical performance while wearing multiple video cameras and moving projectors to capture and display performance images.

# **Synaesthesia**

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, April 14-16, 8:30pm, REDCAT

This film and music weekend brings together the CalArts School of Film/Video and School of Music to present milestone collaborations between composers and filmmakers from different eras and genres accompanied by live performances of their original soundtracks.

#### **Performance**

## **Color Organ Performance with Randy Sprout**

Sunday, March 13, 3pm, MOCA Grand Avenue, Ahmanson Auditorium Free with paid museum admission

Randy Sprout has carefully restored Stanton Macdonald-Wright's *Synchrome Kneidoscope* (1960–1969), a one-of-a-kind color light machine which has not been performed in 30 years. Utilizing multiple film reels and a range of colored lights, the *Synchrome Kneidoscope* creates unique light and color projections.

### Class

# **Visual Music Course**

Saturday, March 19, 10am-1pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

This one-day course explores the influence of music as well as film, video, and computer technology on the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century art production. Emphasizing U.S. and European art, the class focuses on issues surrounding modernism, the emergence of media art, and contemporary art. Instructed by Gloria Sutton, Ph.D. candidate, Art History, UCLA. Course number 855.25. \$95 general (registration #Q9845B); \$85 MOCA members (registration #R0051B). INFO 310/825-9971 or go to uclaextension.org.

#### **Teen Event**

### Synergy Teen Night

Saturday, February 26, 7–10pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

Admission is free; required release form signed by parent if under 18.

The MOCA Apprentices and Teens of Contemporary Art (TOCA) invite creative teens to a special event at MOCA after dark. Bringing together teen artists from all across Los Angeles

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County to create artistic culture and community, Synergy features *Visual Music*, live performances, a student art exhibition, and refreshments. INFO 213/633-5310

### **Family Workshops**

### First Sundays are For Families

On the first Sunday of every month, MOCA hosts hands-on workshops inspired by current exhibitions. For families with children ages 5 and up. Free and no reservations are required. For more information, call 213/621-1712. For Families/Para Familias is sponsored by Bank of America.

### Sunday, March 6, 1-3:30pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

Sound artist Kelly Martin leads art and musically inspired activities.

### Sunday, May 8, 1-4pm, MOCA Grand Avenue

Celebrate visual music on Big Family Day through exploration, experimentation, and entertainment. Student-led tours and performances complete a full afternoon of fun.

# **Funding**

Visual Music is organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Generous funding is provided by Altria Group, Inc. Additional support provided by the Smithsonian Scholarly Studies Program; the NASA Art Program; and the David W. Bermant Foundation: Color, Light, Motion, Inc. The presentation at MOCA is made possible through the generous support of The Sydney Irmas Exhibition Endowment; Lillian and Jon Lovelace; Audrey M. Irmas; Geraldine and Harold Alden; Dahlia and Arthur Bilger; Blake Byrne; Cynthia A. Miscikowski and Douglas R. Ring; Kathi and Gary Cypres; The MOCA Projects Council; Vivian and Hans Buehler; Mandy and Cliff J. Einstein; Betye Monell Burton; and Pamela H. and George A. Smith. Major promotional support is provided by KJAZZ 88.1FM. At MOCA, education programming for the exhibition is supported in part by The Winnick Family Foundation. The presentation at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is made possible in part by the Hirshhorn's Board of Trustees and Barbara and Aaron Levine. The Millennium Biltmore is MOCA's Official Hotel. KCRW is the Official Media Sponsor of MOCA.

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MOCA Grand Avenue and MOCA The Geffen Contemporary are open 11am to 6pm on Saturday and Sunday; 11am to 5pm on Monday and Friday; and 11am to 8pm on Thursday; and closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. General admission is \$8 for adults, \$5 for students with I.D. and seniors (65+), and free for MOCA Members and children under 12. Wells Fargo Free Thursdays provide free general admission every Thursday.

MOCA Pacific Design Center is open 11am to 6pm on Saturday and Sunday; 11am to 5pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday; 11am to 8pm on Thursday; and closed on Monday. Admission to MOCA PDC only is free.

For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213/626-6222 or access MOCA online at moca.org.

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