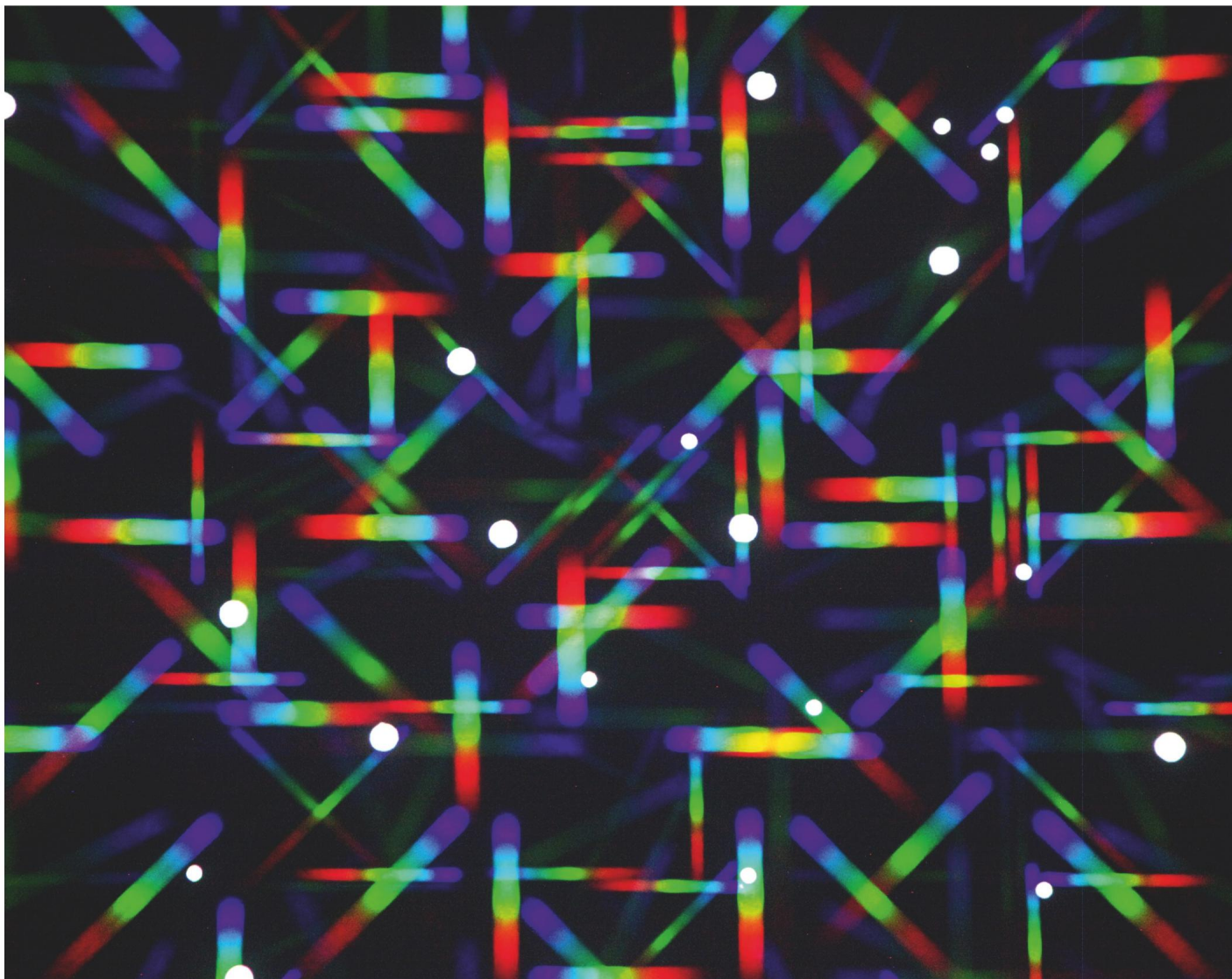


Wide Angle

EXPLORING THE BIGGER PICTURE



Beyond the rainbow: the multicoloured shapes and squiggles of American animator Jodie Mack's *Let Your Light Shine* (2013) offer a kind of visual music

ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

DEPTH WISH

In the hands of a new generation of artists, 3D is not a gimmick but a means of challenging our sense of reality

By Jordan Cronk

When James Cameron's *Avatar* was released, ten years ago this month, it reinvigorated interest in 3D cinema for audiences and filmmakers. But since then, 3D's reputation has declined; what once looked like the future of moviemaking now comes off to most as either a gimmick to lure audiences into cinemas (most films that have followed *Avatar* are actually 2D films post-converted to 3D) or a ploy to hike ticket prices. But at the same time, a crop of artists has adopted natively shot 3D as a tool to expand notions of cinematic space and transcend traditional storytelling. Invigorated by the technology's increased accessibility, and working largely outside commercial considerations, these filmmakers have made 3D's often ignored attributes the subject of their work.

Among the most prolific is Blake Williams, a Toronto-based artist who has spent the better part of the decade creating intricate, highly conceptual 3D films – among them the striking

2017 feature *PROTOTYPE* – which formally interrogate landscape, history and televisual forms through the volume of the stereoscopic frame. Noting the avant-garde's longstanding concern with “the depth and flatness of the screen”, Williams told me this new wave of 3D image-making is in part a response to its mainstream proliferation: “The re-emergence of 3D in Hollywood [has] made dealing with depth and spectacle a more present and complicated fact of working with moving images.”

While Williams now works solely in 3D, others of his generation employ the technology more sparingly. The Japanese artist Makino Takashi and the Austrian Rainer Kohlberger (see *S&S*, October 2019), for example, have each occasionally worked with dimensional effects – Makino with *2012* (2013) and the performance piece *Space Noise 3D* (2014), and Kohlberger with *more than everything* (2018). The sole 3D film by the American animator Jodie Mack, *Let Your Light Shine* (2013), may be the



most thrilling example of the medium's synaesthetic potential. A buoyant dance of rainbowed light and stroboscopic rhythm, the film envelops the spectator in a prismatic array of optically conjured shapes and squiggles – a kind of visual music made manifest.

Rather than the more typical anaglyph or polarized 3D technology, *Let Your Light Shine* uses diffraction grating glasses to create its effect. As Mack explained to me, using 16mm film allowed for the “purest white light”, which the diffraction filter splits into seven different colours while multiplying the image by five – an effect she says often “spawns audible ‘ooohs’ and ‘ahhhs’ in the audience”. For her, this approach stands in stark contrast to Hollywood’s use of 3D, which “wants merely to represent or enhance a constructed ‘reality’ or ‘diegesis’. I’m interested in something else: cultivating a cinematic language rooted in something other than a visual representation of what are essentially literary truths.”

The Austrian filmmaker Johann Lurf echoes these sentiments. He’s made a number of 3D films over the last ten years: “Some artists use 3D to question perception with sublime means,” he says. “Others try to break the fusion of two images into one by providing contradicting information to our eyes. I think every method used to fit the concept is appropriate.” The latter method is put to memorable use in what is perhaps the most critically lauded 3D film of recent years, Jean-Luc Godard’s *Goodbye to Language* (2014). In that film’s most radical moment, Godard splits and reunites the stereoscopic field in a single shot, producing an image that appears to move in two directions at once before fusing again. Like *Let Your Light Shine*, the film has elicited enraptured outbursts.

While for most filmmakers 3D is a recent concern, the American Ken Jacobs has been exploring the art for more than 40 years, beginning with his live performance project *The Nervous System* (1975), in which a pair of stop-motion projectors cast sequential frames in alternating patterns, producing, he says,

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“tremoring compound images and unexpected shallow depths that could be apprehended by even a single eye”. Since switching to digital video in 2000, Jacobs has been perfecting a new form of 3D he calls ‘Eternalism’, which builds on the *Nervous System* technique through rapid alternation of slightly offset images, creating an illusion of dimensional space without the need for glasses – a method picked up by other filmmakers such as his younger compatriot Scott Stark. These “3D limited-movement events”, as Jacobs calls them, are but one example of how artists continue to work creatively with stereoscopy – highlighting optical disjunctions in an effort to access a greater truth about how we perceive the world. “We live with many illusions determined by our particular sense-organs,” Jacobs says. “Recognised error can be fun.”

PROFILE: MED HONDO



Season of migration to the north: *Soleil O* (1970), Med Hondo’s inaugural masterpiece

The great African director, who died earlier this year, foresaw many of the debates and crises that shape the contemporary world

By Aboubakar Sanogo

Med Hondo was one of the most important filmmakers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, one of Africa’s immeasurable gifts to cinema. Indeed, though cinema is known to have a tendency toward addressing the consequences more than the causes of explored phenomena, for Hondo, examining causes was at the heart of the project of cinema.

According to his passport, he was born in Ain Beni Mathar in Morocco in 1936 (though many sources say he was born in Mauritania a year later). He attended both French and Muslim schools in his early years, before studying to become a hotel chef in the mid-1950s and moving to France in 1958. He entered artistic practice through the theatre in Marseilles and then in Paris. Acting in European classics, such as those by Molière, Shakespeare and Racine, he was confronted with the absence of meaningful roles for black actors, and joined with other African and Afro-diasporic actors to found the theatre groups Shango and Griots-Shango in order to adapt plays by the writers Aimé Césaire and Daniel Boukman from Martinique, the Haitian René Depestre, the Congolese Guy Menga, and others.

It was theatre that opened doors to the cinema for him; he acted in films by world-class directors such as John Huston, Robert Enrico, Costa-Gavras and Jean-Luc Godard. Hondo remained an actor throughout his life, in radio, television, film and the theatre. One of his most powerful impacts remains his work in dubbing: he was the French voice of numerous African-American actors, from Sidney Poitier to Eddie Murphy, Morgan

Freeman and Denzel Washington. Acting allowed him independence as a film artist, able to make films with little interference and to invent a cinematic style unlike any other.

Hondo’s cinema is invested in the emancipation of African and Afro-diasporic subjects whom he wishes to see reclaim their place in the world. Blocking their way, however, are the lingering effects of the transatlantic slave trade, of colonialism and neocolonialism, the global effects of capitalism, and the complicity of African elites who conspire in the maintenance of a certain status quo. In response to this, Hondo invokes history as an explanatory paradigm and an inspiring critique of the present, struggle as the inevitable means towards such an end, and critical solidarity as a prerequisite for ushering in a post-imperial, post-racist, and post-capitalist world.

With *Soleil O* (1970), his inaugural masterpiece, Med Hondo instantly secured for himself a place among the greats of African and world cinema, winning the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. The film follows the story of Jean, an African accountant (in fact a composite pan-African character) who arrives in France with great expectations of success and belonging (“We shared Gaul ancestors after all”) only to find impregnable walls of discrimination, structural racism, sexual objectification and, indeed of cultural ‘invisibilisation’, largely underwritten by neocolonial relationships between France and her former colonies.

Finding no respite in a place where life itself has been colonised, Jean seeks and finds refuge in a forest, where he is able to exhale, or rather to scream out his revulsion against this iniquitous system. There, inspired by such major luminaries of the global revolutionary movement as Patrice Lumumba, Che Guevara, Ahmed Ben Bella and Malcolm X, he realises that only taking part in revolutionary