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Graham Lock and David Murray (eds.), *The Hearing Eye: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Visual Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, \$24.95). Pp. xv + 366. ISBN 978 0 19 534051 8.

This splendid edited volume explores the complicated relationships that link African American visual art to the practices, patterns, and aesthetics of jazz and blues music. Deftly blending interviews with visual artists and musicians with astute critiques by scholars of music and art, *The Hearing Eye* helps us see how we have been impoverished by the conventions of disciplinary specialization in the academy that encourage us to separate the study of music from the study of visual art. The essays and interviews that Lock and Murray have collected and conducted show how visual artists have been influenced by blues and jazz; how painters, sculptors, quilters, and installation artists use improvisation and rhythm in their work; how silences in music resemble spaces on a canvas; how artists follow musicians in creating serial works that present variations on a common theme. At the same time, interviews with musicians reveal how they have also been influenced by visual artists, how painters and jazz artists alike try to capture the attention of audiences and viewers, how the colors of visual art suggest tone colors in music, how both artists and musicians struggle with the possibilities and perils of creating metaphors inside bounded forms.

Lock and Murray range widely for their objects of study. Many different kinds of crossroads in African American life have entailed dialogue between music and art. From Paul Oliver's explorations into the advertising art used to promote early blues recordings to Graham Lock's examination of Rose Piper's representations of blues and folk songs in her 1940s paintings, from Sara Wood's study of the influence of bebop on the abstract expressionist paintings of Norman Lewis to Richard King's sensitive critique of Bob Thompson's struggles to blend particular idioms with universal concerns, this volume consistently illuminates both the similarities and the differences that characterize music and art production among African Americans in the twentieth century.

Appropriately enough, artists who both painted and made music receive especially careful attention in this volume through studies of Romare Bearden by Robert O'Meally and Johannes Volz, and in a moving and affectionate tribute to Jean-Michel Basquiat by Robert Farris Thompson. In a related vein, interviews with musicians reveal Marty Ehrlich's perspective on his long and productive association with the painter Oliver Jackson and Jane Ira Bloom's understanding of how her playing has been inspired by the paintings of Jackson Pollock. Richard Ings's knowing study of the jazz photographs taken by Roy DeCarava not only focusses attention on a different visual medium, but also reveals how African American music and visual art alike emerged from a complex social world where different forms of dance, display, style, and speech served as sites of struggle and self-affirmation, as repositories of collective memory, and as ways of calling communities into being through performance. Devoting attention both to the internal aesthetic issues that artists face and to the external pressures on African American art and artists imposed by oftentimes hostile critics, curators, and patrons, *The Hearing Eye*

correctly locates artistic choices within a complex matrix of social and cultural institutions.

Robert O'Meally's perceptive analysis of Romare Bearden's artistic practices perfectly illustrates the links between jazz and painting. Bearden compares his composition on the easel to composing at the piano: one thing leads to another and paint falls into place just as the right keys on the piano seem to be in the exact place where one's fingers come down on the keyboard. The essay by Richard Ings examining Roy DeCarava's collection of jazz photographs, *the sound I saw: improvisation on a jazz theme*, adds a new dimension to the intertextuality of art and music. Ings notes that DeCarava mixed literature as well as music with photography, collaborating with Langston Hughes on *The Sweet Flypaper a Life*, a presentation of some 140 photographs held together by a continuous written text. This fusion of literature and photography prefigured DeCarava's jazz series that juxtaposes images of performing musicians with depictions of everyday life in Harlem. These musicians are working people, not triumphant geniuses; they do not leave their community behind when they create great art but rather transcend its indignities and alienations into constantly reworked and revised metaphors. DeCarava himself creates art that eschews easy accessibility, that makes demands on its viewers. His images of black people in dark spaces force viewers to look closely, to adjust their sight lines, to perceive images and shadows that are not visible at first glance. The written text of *the sound I saw: improvisation on a jazz theme* is poetic and resistant. It does not comment directly on the pictures in the hope that this strategy will compel readers to go through the collection again and again, discerning a new rhythm each time.

One especially important aspect of *The Hearing Eye* is its presentation of skillfully conducted interviews with artists. These include discussions with quilt-maker Michael Cummings; with painter and designer Sam Middleton; with painter, sculptor, and aspiring electric guitar player Wadsworth Jarrell; with painter and historical activist Joe Overstreet; and with painter and classically trained pianist Ellen Banks. These interviews are a treasure trove of insight and imagination about the links between music and art in African American life. Cummings describes his series of quilts on similar subjects as analogous to a composer's variations on a theme. Sam Middleton relates that he learned to take chances and to not fear mistakes from Thelonious Monk, that Duke Ellington taught him how to weave colors together within a disciplined form, that Louis Armstrong offered him an example of pride in workmanship and humor, that Coltrane's playing encouraged him to venture out into experimental work yet remain true to original principles. Middleton also insists that there is a rhythm to painting, that it has to be carried out according to a beat. Wadsworth Jarrell delineates his trajectory from a shipping clerk in a paint factory to an artist making sketches at performances by Ahmad Jamal and Eddie Harris, and then becoming an arts activist, muralist, and painter who derived inspiration from the bright greens and yellows of 1960s African American fashions, hues that he refers to as "coolade" colors. In the course of discussing his art, including the historically inspired Storyville series, Joe Overstreet affirms that musicians including Sun Ra have always been his most important sources of advice and criticism because they have great compassion and are not afraid to struggle. Ellen Banks offers a fascinating description of how her youthful desires to be a dancer and pianist

influenced her development as a painter who bases her art on music scores, giving each note in a score a particular color.

The Hearing Eye advances our understanding of both music and art. It addresses successfully relationships that many people have noticed, but few have attempted to codify and theorize. It is a greatly needed book, because the institutions that control art and music education, exhibition, and performance for the most part continue to relegate visual art and music to separate and seemingly incommensurable realms. Yet artists, audiences, and viewers all live in a world where the senses are not so easily separated and different media interact constantly. Especially in African American life and culture, where the emphasis has been more on the creative act than on the created object, visual display and music have a long and mutually constitutive history.

Readers engaged by the core concerns of *The Hearing Eye* may want to investigate relations between music and art that are not included in the book. Musicians Roscoe Mitchell, Lester Lashley, and Bobby Bradford have all created and exhibited significant works of art. In the 1960s, Max Roach, Charles Mingus, and Jo Jones planned to open a school of arts, music, and gymnastics in New York. Rhythm and blues artist Johnny Otis won a citywide art contest for his painting of Nat Turner in 1964, exhibited a series of sculptures based on the African understanding of a chair as a symbolic locus of power, and created a series of paintings titled Rhythm and Blues featuring renditions of the microphones, clothing, and neon signs Otis encountered in black night clubs during the 1940s and 1950s. Otis does not think of himself as an actual visual artist, but instead as a musician who is lucky enough to have other ways of representing and interpreting the things he has seen. But he does believe that there are important affinities between music and art, that the color wheel in painting is like the basic triad in music. In addition, Otis argues that both music and painting are made possible by the movement of waves, by light waves in painting and sound waves in music.

The analyses, interviews, and breathtakingly beautiful works of art that Lock and Murray present in *The Hearing Eye* also invite us to think about more general questions about art and difference. As Richard King's rumination about the art of Bob Thompson illustrates, art that has been created by African Americans has often been dismissed as particular and parochial folk art that is inferior to the putative universal art of the western European art tradition. The institutions that control the study of music operate in similar fashion, generally consigning popular and folk music to the fields of ethnomusicology and music sociology. In both cases, one dominant particular emanating from the conditions of European and North American life announces itself as universal, an announcement that is itself evidence of parochialism rather than proof of universality. Racism and the protection of entrenched privileges account for part of this pattern, but it stems as well from a failure to understand the dynamics of difference. If our choices are between a disembodied universalism and a parochial particularism, we will always be trapped in categories that fail to do justice to the complexities and contradictions of cultural production, reception, and distribution. The publication of *The Hearing Eye* offers us an opportunity to revisit this issue, to think about the ways in which the African American tradition makes it possible for us to think about questions of difference and sameness in new ways.

The creative potential of difference appears clearly in Thomas Brothers's brilliant book *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans*. In one memorable chapter, Brothers draws on the insights of Robert Farris Thompson to explain why musicians in the Crescent City characteristically wore one item of clothing that did not match the rest of their outfit. Brothers sees a form of resistance and creativity in this practice, noting how Thompson's research shows that a textile tradition started by the Mande people in Africa led diasporic Africans in Haiti and the southern states of the US to favor asymmetrical patterns. He observes that Senegambians created syncopation in their clothing through staggered patterns and colors that honored the folk adage that proclaimed "evil travels in straight lines." For New Orleans musicians and Senegambian clothing designers, interruptions, changes in direction, and unexpected patterns served as mental training exercises for the aleatory challenges of life. African American visual artists and musicians have long incorporated this disposition in their work separately; *The Hearing Eye* helps us understand how mixing music with art adds another dimension to this complex and creative practice.

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