

Really consider for a moment, what is a ritual and what is not a ritual? Determining what constitutes a ritual likely depends on how much you believe rituals require intentionality or a certain level of sacredness. Why might differentiation be important? So much of life repeats, from your beating heart to systemic injustices. We are surrounded by repetitions, and when we know how to observe them, they become rhythms; something to join along in, jump out of, resonate with and improvise over.

*Ritual and Rhythm* features an eclectic group of creators who are weaving together cultural information and artistic innovations. The total contributions from Kara Mshinda, Rashid Zakat, Malkia Okech, Sabrina Pantal, and Vitche-Boul Ra are both striking and familiar. The artists echo each other's

themes of Blackness, spirituality, and interestingly, the color red.

Kara Mshinda is a visual artist who incorporates her signature dot and line work into her collages and freehand drawings. In certain visual contexts, “rhythm” can describe when a design element appears over and over again and establishes unity. While visually harmonious, Mshinda’s handiwork is full of spontaneous decisions. To really perceive all of the details, you should relax your eyes and focus on seeing.

“Tears,” “Face” and “Eye See” are black and white ink drawings that depict amorphous forms that are made up of various mark making patterns. These amebic shapes are reminiscent of organic compositions; “Eye See” features a long appendage that is filled in by vertebrae-like

disks and there is another appendage that has coiling, intestinal white lines. As the name suggests, there is also abstracted eye imagery throughout.

Mshinda's drawing method began in childhood, when she would doodle during them long, long church services. Her habit of drawing while receiving spiritual information led to Mshinda's ability to create drawings as a way to process deep feelings. Her "Departed" series, featuring the drawings "Tears" and "No Words," was created shortly before her father's death. Each drawing is a pictorial depiction of Mshinda's relationship to her father and her culminating relationship with grief. "Tears" in particular features formations that replicate crying eyes.

A standout from Mshinda's featured work is "Meta One," a collage composed

out of two copies of a model's face, both of which are adorned in dense marks. Behind the figure is a spread of bright red paint.

"Meta One" is part of an investigation of mythology and how identities can replicate each other in and outside of stories.

Another piece in the show that focuses on embodiment and reflective identities is "Erzulie," a photo series from Sabrina Pantal.

Lwa Erzulie is a divine figure in Haitian culture who is a fierce protector and a force for harmony. Pantal is a queer first generation Haitian and chose to invoke Lwa Erzulie as part of a photo series connected to *Children of Sirius*, a curatorial project lead by Malachi Lily. In the photos, Pantal is draped by rich red fabrics and poses powerfully in a forested location. In one close-up image, Pantal stares directly at the

viewer, their eyes, face, and arms accentuated by decorative black dots.

*Children of Sirius* included a series of performances, where Pantal showcased her work as a musician and healer. “Sirius” is a photo document of their performance at Vox Populi. Pantal sits on the floor surrounded by an altar and a strong red light permeates the room. This performance, one of three shared in *Children of Sirius*, began with a processional, during which Pantal methodically set up their altar and established a locus where comfort and divine rage could flow freely from both herself and from the audience members.

As a musician, Pantal pays special attention to vibrations and how frequencies can restore our energy. For this exhibition, Pantal created a new work titled, “Rhythm &

Ritual.” In the video piece, Pantal moves about her rustic home in Costa Rica. Occasionally, they gaze mesmerizingly into the camera lens. Meditative music mixed with the ambient sounds of animal life is played throughout the piece. Text appears at the bottom of the screen. Pantal’s words are a declaration. The first line begins, “Existence is ritual and I am the altar.”

The clear sincerity of Pantal’s practice is contrasted against one of their contemporaries, Vitche-Boul Ra. Where Pantal tenderly shares methods of meditation to soothe spirits, Ra keeps clandestine intentions. It’s blackholiness. From his vast research, Ra only shares glimpses and tricks. Viewers must adopt a certain level of scrutiny in order to engage with its work beyond the two common

responses to art — disdain or entertainment.

One of Ra's pieces, "There's Levels to dis Shit" features written text collaged with two images of its bare torso and an inky illustration that resembles a game strategy drawing. The text seems to explain a scenario featuring Ra and many gardeners who sandwiched him "between their four, very close bodies." "I Has a Visitor and he Done Knocked" is a set of sculptures composed out of the snapped off heads of plastic spoons. For each sculpture, the spoon tops are arranged into dynamic rings on top of a black background. Due to the clear material, the spoons become cloudy when densely layered in the middle, and dissipate into darkness at the edges. These pieces are elusive but not as confrontational as some of Ra's other work.

When listening to “Diptych Promoraccô: Biology 1” and “Diptych Promoraccô: Biology 2” the viewer may find themselves witnessing an unknown rite. Once again, red is here.

“Drip Triptych” highlights Ra’s astonishing skill as a mover. In the video, he dances to a series of pitch-shifted remixes of rap songs. The audio is crunchy and the bleeding resolution turns each frame into a watercolor painting. Outside of consumer-based media, in which high resolution is conflated with professionalism and marketability, what does “good quality” media look like?

Digital technology is new and will continue to be relatively new for hundreds of years. The question of how to value virtual objects is extremely relevant, especially in anthropological communities.

There has been a centuries-long urgency to honor the physical objects created by various cultures. Museums paying thieves is not the answer. New movements in digital technologies however, might be.

At the intersection of archeology, digital crafting and AfroFuturism, Malkia Okech builds their practice. For *Ritual and Rhythm*, Okech shares a series of videos and images that document her process of creating 3D models of Luo objects. An example of what a digitized object can look like is seen in Okech's piece, "Luo Chief Head Wear." The head wear that Okech has created is simple, showing accurate proportions and suggesting materiality through basic shapes and textured surfaces. It sits behind a bright lavender background, further pushing away expectations of hyper-realism.

Most of the work shown by Okech shows the process that went into developing a 3D model of a Beaded Ligisa Cap. One video, “Digital Ligisa: Beading Documentation” is a screen recording of Okech working on Blender to place beads onto the headpiece. At the beginning of the recording, we see Okech start a Youtube video of the Congolese song, “Etat Major” by Extra Musica, an artist Okech’s father would play for them as a kid. Throughout the rest of the video, the bit-crushed melody from “Etat Major” faintly plays behind the Blender interface and Okech’s patient clicks.

In between our days of living, we watch videos on the internet. Not everything we see is new content. Media that was created in the pre-internet era is being uploaded all the time. Rashid Zakat’s recent series

“Revival” is an audio-visual mix that captures this particular nexus in time in which our personal archive of media is composed of videotapes, dvds, television broadcasts, and now online videos.

“Revival” has the vibe of an after-service, fellowship hall kiki. For the series, Zakat collects video clips and arranges them into compilations that can last between ten minutes to two hours.

“Revival” segments have been shared through Blackstar Film Festival and are currently being shown at the Fabric Workshop and Museum.

There are four clips from four different mixes being shown in *Ritual and Rhythm*. Their themes include, “Giant Steps” by John Coltrane, freedom (heavily featuring Nina Simone), and freestyling. One of the clips, identified as “000 FWM” takes the

widest thematic journey. The first minute is of Karen Clark Sheard performing “Balm In Gilead” and from there, Zakat includes video snippets of Anna Douglas, Andre Atunas, Steve Harvey, and a dance video credited as the “Christian version of the Cha-Cha Slide.”

Zakat balances humor, spirituality, research and entertainment in his videos. The resulting concoction feels familiar, because it is a reflection of how we process all the many influences of our lives. He harnesses the rhythm of it all and invites us to join in with laughter and meditation.