

The Kitchen Presents Josiah McElheny: *Instrument Object*

Debuting in New York City, *Instrument Object* Explores the Histories and Sounds of Experimental Music

The Kitchen presents **Josiah McElheny: *Instrument Object*** (September 10–November 7). The exhibition reflects the artist's sustained engagement with the histories of experimental music over the past decade, an ongoing thread of his multifaceted work. Never before exhibited in New York City, *Instrument Object* brings together twenty multi-disciplinary works that draw on the legacies of pioneering artists with historical ties to The Kitchen, including **Pauline Oliveros, Lucia Dlugoszewski, Julius Eastman, and John Cage**, as well as other luminaries including **Milford Graves, David Grubbs, Big Mama Thornton, Joe McPhee, Wes Montgomery, and Sun Ra**. Each work is beautifully constructed out of a variety of materials, such as wood, glass, metal and electronic and mechanical elements.

Paying homage to this visionary group of musicians and composers, *Instrument Object* comprises sculpture, painting, installation, and drawing dating from 2014 to 2026. Sound and music are central to the exhibition: some works unpredictably activate to reproduce musical compositions, others hum with the movement of motorized gears, while others invite visitors to imagine music through its absence.

In the exhibition, works overlap in sound and subject, while celebrating The Kitchen's Archive, as seen in *Bench for Archival Listening* (2026), a minimalist, plywood furniture sculpture where visitors can listen to a lost recording of Julius Eastman's *Not Spiritual Beings*. *Bench for Archival Listening* demonstrates and celebrates how institutional archives can function not only retrospectively but also as sites of recovery, opening historical materials toward the future. Works such as *Ladder Harp* and *Primordial Lift* (both 2026) pay homage, respectively, to the instrument designs of Lucia Dlugoszewski and to musician Pauline Oliveros's radical ideas around vibration and "deep listening," a now global practice developed by Oliveros that "explores the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the conscious nature of listening."

Cosmic Blue Trumpet (2018), made in honor of jazz instrumentalist Joe McPhee, like many works in *Instrument Object*, emerges from McElheny's personal relationships and friendships with musicians. Three paintings from McElheny's series *From Red Black to Blue Black* (2023), are collaborations with musician, composer and writer David Grubbs. The paintings depict an "expanded" version of sunlight's color spectrum and are embedded with black vibrating glass gongs that transmit musical signals

composed by Grubbs, transforming the paintings into works of *chromesthesia*, the synesthesia of color and sound.

Key to the exhibition is *Heartline* (2023), a work that points toward percussionist and polymath Milford Graves, and features a blood-colored, artery-like cable that traverses The Kitchen's space through a series of glass tubes, transporting a synthesizer signal to a painted, handmade "floor tom" drum. The drum emits a never-repeating, heartbeat-like rhythm that celebrates Graves' research into the relationship between sound, vibration, melody and the human heart.

A robust program of public events featuring artists and thinkers working across music and related disciplines will accompany the exhibition. The schedule includes special performances including one by composer and instrumentalist **Zeena Parkins** of *After Fire Fragile Flight*, a new work inspired by Lucia Dlugoszewski's 1973 composition for chamber orchestra, during the exhibition opening on September 10 at 7 PM. The following day will feature a sunset duet between improviser **Wendy Eisenberg** and composer and guitarist **David Grubbs** on September 11 at 7 PM. On October 1 at 7pm, **Giorno Poetry Systems** and The Kitchen will co-host an experimental dialogue on the history of music within a larger cultural context. Entitled "**Limb Independence**," this evening will be introduced by McElheny and features **Raven Chacon**, **Jennie C. Jones**, **George Lewis**, and **Fred Moten**.

The Kitchen presents a series of community programs throughout the exhibition, including family art-making workshops on September 19, September 26, and October 3 (at 11am and 12:30pm), a program featuring artist and musician **Cecilia Lopez** co-presented with **Artists & Mothers** and registration for family workshops available on [The Kitchen's website](https://www.thekitchen.org); public walkthroughs with the artist; and a reading series held on Wednesday evenings throughout October.

The culminating event of *Instrument Object* is the two-day symposium "**Improvisation, Archive and Homage**," taking place November 7 and 8 at 2pm, featuring musicians and composers on November 7 and 8 with MacArthur Fellows **Claire Chase**, **Mary Halvorson**, **Ikue Mori**, **Tomeka Reid**, **Jason Moran**, and **Craig Taborn**, moderated by music historian and gallerist **John Corbett**. A closing reception for the exhibition, hosted by the MacArthur Foundation and honoring symposium participants, will be held on the evening of November 7. The symposium and closing reception are supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of *Defying Boundaries: MacArthur Fellows at 45*. For more information, visit [Defying Boundaries: MacArthur Fellows at 45](https://www.macarthurfoundation.org/defying-boundaries).

Instrument Object is organized by **Robyn Farrell**, Senior Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs with support from **Fernanda Escalera Zambrano**, Operations Manager, **Angelique Rosales-Salgado**, Assistant

Curator. Production by **David Riley**, Senior Manager, Production & Exhibitions Manager, and **Tassja Walker**, Production Supervisor.

The Kitchen thanks Gerry Eastman and Wise Music for their generous permission to feature Julius Eastman's work *Not Spiritual Beings* in this exhibition.

About Josiah McElheny

Josiah McElheny (b. 1966) has exhibited widely, including solo shows at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2024); the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, CA (2019); Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University, Houston, TX (2018); MAK Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, Austria (2016); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2013), Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2012), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, England (2011), Museo de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain (2009), Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2007), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2007), Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2002), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA (2001), The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA (1999) and the Seattle Art Museum, WA (1995). His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Tate Modern, London, UK; and Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH, among others. McElheny lives and works in New York, New York.

About The Kitchen

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, The Kitchen today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a kunsthalle model that brings together live performances, exhibition making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play, and innovative and experimental making, encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

Among the artists who have presented significant work at The Kitchen are Muhal Richard Abrams, Laurie Anderson, ANOHNI, Robert Ashley, Charles Atlas, Kevin Beasley, Beastie Boys, Gretchen Bender, Dara

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Birnbaum, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Leslie Hewitt, Darius Jones, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Devin Kenny, Barbara Kruger, Simone Leigh, Ralph Lemon, George Lewis, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sarah Michelson, Tere O'Connor, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nam June Paik, Charlemagne Palestine, Sondra Perry, Vernon Reid, Arthur Russell, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Spiegel, Talking Heads, Greg Tate, Cecil Taylor, Urban Bush Women, Danh Võ, Lawrence Weiner, Anicka Yi, and many more.

The Kitchen *Without Walls* is a programming initiative that explores site, cross-institutional collaboration, and the potentials of institutional porousness as its Chelsea building is under renovation and the organization operates from its satellite space at Westbeth Artists Housing.

Website: thekitchen.org

Instagram: @TheKitchen_NYC

The Kitchen's Funding Credits

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