BOMB MAGAZINE

Sam Prekop & Zak Prekop

Sam Prekop & Zak Prekop · 2015



A few months before its release, Sam and I listened to The Republic, his new solo album outside of his work with The Sea and Cake, as we drove in his car from Chicago to Sheboygan, Wisconsin to see our dad‘s exhibition of photographs at the Kohler Arts Center. He insisted that we listen to the music loud. We listened, chatted, and joked as we drove past tan, November farmland.

The Republic is a collection of flickering fields, shifting textures, and tone patterns that sound like a telephone dialed in a dream. It was made on an analog synthesizer that Sam has been assembling and customizing over the past few years. The first half, or side A, if you’re listening to the record, was composed as a soundtrack to a video work, also called The Republic, by the artist David Hartt. The album is the latest instance of my older brother’s influence over my own aesthetic education, which began with Christmas and birthday gifts of records and art books that continue to form the foundation of my interests.

Sam Prekop So, what have you been up to?

Zak Prekop I’ve been at my studio working on the LA show. I’ll have some work at the art fair in Milan, so I’m simultaneously working on that. I think after today I’m going to finally hang everything up in my studio and do some kind of mock installation before the show.

SP You're pretty close to done with the LA show?

ZP Yeah, I'm working on one last painting for it now that's like a billion tiny dots. I've been needling away at this painting for a while.

SP A billion! That would take quite some time.

ZP Yeah. It's kind of like one of the small paintings I had in the Japan show. It was black and white with these tiny dots on it. It's kind of an enlargement of that painting. Not that it's the same forms. It's just similar in terms of the way I made the painting.

SP I do recall that. I like the idea of busy work in terms of making art, stuff you can do where it's almost like automatic handwriting. You worry about what it could be later. It's like knitting a good sweater, except that it's about putting the brush in paint over and over again.

ZP It's definitely part of a lot of the paintings. It's kind of like the way I work in shifts within each painting—when, at one point, I'm really looking at it and composing something, or I'm just looking at it and deciding what to do to it, what kinds of processes might be interesting. Then there's other stages of sitting there and going through this long process that takes a long time, and I'll do something else while I'm doing it, like listen to music. I don't like the paintings to be a record of that time in themselves. It's more about just what goes into the painting, or the shift between the two, more than one or the other.

SP What I like about painting is that you actually have to do something. It's not like you can think about it, and then it happens. There's physical work. It's sort of a gift in a weird way, you know? You have to make due with making the marks and using your hands. It's disconnected from thinking about it too much, in a good way.

ZP I feel like the more time I put into the paintings, the more alien they look to me at the end, because I can't get back that time spent in my mind that easily. I think about it in terms of getting them to the point where I see them the same way someone else sees them. It's not as much about me sitting there making them to kind of get pushed out of that realm of time. Because there are also these different kinds of records of speed in the painting, a fast mark is there but also these really labor intensive things— the record of time and how it's perceived by people looking is a big part of it.

SP It's a good way to expose the evidence of what you're doing on a very basic level. I was just thinking, you're almost done with the LA show, but how is that determined—when does it have to be done?

ZP I really work up until the last minute as much as possible, because I just never know what's going to happen. I do feel like a lot of the most interesting work happens as I'm rushing toward the deadline, maybe because all of the labor has finally added up to something beyond what I had in my head to do. Part of it is just that the accumulation of work really starts to add up. If I know I have enough work for a show, everything else I do feels a little more open or more risky. I'm not sure if that's really true or not.

SP So, do you have safety-net paintings? Do you expect all of them to be in the show or are there some that are still sort of on the fence?

ZP I try to make more work than will fit in the room. If I have two that are too much the same, there's no point in having both of them in there. I'll somewhat figure it out in my own studio, but more so, I'll send them and figure it out in the space, because it's pretty hard to do. Even if I know the dimensions—if it's a different room—I can't quite imagine it entirely.

SP Right. One of my favorite parts of painting for a show—of course, it has been a long time—is the actual installation of the pieces. It's the final idea. It seems more difficult than it should be, but it's ultimately the most rewarding part. I've never experienced a total failure in that regard—that would be difficult to deal with. Like you show up with your work and it's just not happening.

ZP I know, that's why I panic and make twice as much work as I need to. I'm getting better, though I used to spend like two days putting each painting in every possible location, in different combinations, and people from the gallery would peak out from the office. But, now I can do it more easily, in one day instead of three.

SP I also like having people around to tell me what they think just at the right time. Often I find, by that point in working on a show, I'm desperate for some sort of input outside of myself.

ZP That's the nice thing about doing group shows with friends or even people you don't know well but can talk to about it, so it's a fun interaction.

How was your trip to Japan? Did you end up going to that ceramic thing in the mountains?

Zak Prekop, Composition with Ending Field, 2015, oil on canvas, 58 x 42 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles.

SP I did do the ceramic thing in the mountains, and it was not what I expected. In my mind, I wanted it to be a very traditional Japanese ceramics studio, up in the mountains where I would have to walk across beautiful moss-covered stones arranged just so. When we got there it was much more like a punk-rock squat where they also happened to be into ceramics.

ZP Oh man, that would be kind of disappointing.

SP I was slightly disappointed, but then, of course, I just rolled with it. It was right outside of Kyoto in this crazy, big, shambling series of shacks, really big ones, with lots of junkyard stuff everywhere—very un-Japanese in some ways, really unorganized. But also the stuff just laying around could have only been in Japan. It was a great sort of dichotomy: a beautiful junkyard.

My actual experience of trying to make the ceramics basically ended with me just doing drawings in clay. I didn't have quite as much time as I thought I would have. They were kind of like, "You can try to make a pot, but we would rather you just carve into these slabs of clay."

ZP Did you and Archer [Prewitt] play a show there, too? A music performance?

chirpradio CHIRP FACTORY SESSION 003 - SHOWROOMS | SAM PREKOP CHIRP FACTORY SESSION 003 - SHOWROOMS | SAM PREKOP

Watch on

SP Yeah, that Japanese trip was for a Sea and Cake tour. It wasn't a synthesizer or a duo tour.

ZP Are you guys recording? Are you writing new Sea and Cake material now? Or planning anything?

SP Not now, I'm not sure exactly when, but perhaps in the summer after I'm done with all of this touring I have coming up. I'm pretty deep into working on my solo show and tour right now. I'm working out the synthesizer setup. Archer is actually playing with me on those shows as well.

ZP Have you two worked out more how that's going to go together, or what his part of it will be?

SP We haven't worked together on it yet, but we've done shows in the past with this setup. The shows are pretty much improvised. We come up with a strategy beforehand of what might happen and start from there. I hope these shows are different, but there are certain limitations with the modular synthesizer in a live context that I have to take into account. I can't really play discrete pieces on it, so it'll be a long synthesizer-based piece followed by more song and guitar-oriented pieces. I can't really change up the voices of the instrument.

ZP I didn't realize that was the reason the albums have more discrete tracks than the performances. It makes sense, but I hadn't thought about it.

SP It just doesn't work really. I think there's a way to do it, if I involved a laptop or something. But I've come to be really interested in taking advantage of the inherent limitations of playing the modular synthesizer live, in real time.

ZP Yeah, there's a difference caused by the machines.

Sam Prekop - Weather Vane (Official Music Video)

Thrill Jockey Records

03:57

SP I just deal with what I have. To me, it doesn't feel like anything's lacking. There's a really rich, complex sound that you can coax out of it, in terms of what sort of composition comes about from working this way. It's a repetitive, pattern-based music basically. I think having to play this instrument live and figure out what works has informed how I record and write with it.

ZP The performances I've seen of yours with the longer works have been really great. Your home studio is really cool, too. It's nice to imagine all that stuff set up in that little room. It's always overflowing with equipment.

SP It's really tiny and really messy, but I've figured out a way into it.

ZP Is The Republic released yet?

SP It came out in February. There was a video posted for one of the pieces that's a reedit of footage from the film David Hartt made.

ZP So, are you working on the synth stuff pretty much every day? Is that your routine these days, taking the kids to school and then working on the synth at home?

SP It has been lately, but I'm more working on the show aspect of it now, so it's weird. It's like I'm rehearsing to improvise, but I'm not exactly sure why, since it's hard to get much better at this point. I'm just refining aspects of my patch, because the instrument itself is so open ended. How you design the patch determines what it's going to do. I've been refining what I call the "performance patch." Last week, I did a short live performance on the local NPR station here. In preparation for that, I figured out quite a bit. That went really well, I think, so I'm feeling somewhat more confident about the shows coming up.

ZP I was thinking about how you work in discrete phases within a medium. For a few months you're doing synths, then the next year you're doing Sea and Cake stuff, and then the next year focusing on photos or something else.

SP When I'm into one particular medium I'm pretty much exclusive to it. The switch-off between photography, drawing, painting, or music, tends to be kind of gradual. I don't want to change, and there's this weird, reluctant pull toward the other that gets me going. So, the thought of writing pop music for the Sea and Cake is not terribly appealing right now. (laughter) Last fall I was heavily into photography, and now I don't even know where my cameras are.

ZP That's funny.

SP They're buried in patch chords at this point.

Support BOMB's mission to deliver the artist's voice.

DONATE JOIN/SUBSCRIBE

Zak Prekop is an artist based in New York City. He has held exhibitions at Thomas Duncan Gallery in Los Angeles; Hagiwara Projects, Tokyo, Japan; Galleria Augustina Ferreyra, San Juan, Puerto Rico; Art Statements, Basel, Switzerland; and Galeria Marta Cervera, Madrid, Spain.

Sam Prekop is a musician known for his work with Shrimp Boat and The Sea and Cake. He has released two albums under his own name: 2010's Old Punch Card and The Republic, for which he's currently on tour.

MORE Painting Electronic Music

EMAIL ADDRESS SUBMIT

By signing up, you agree to our User Agreement and Privacy Policy & Cookie Statement.