

Kevin Cooley



The Many Ways of Vinyl: Kevin Cooley and Phillip Andrew Lewis
By Sara Estes / April 8, 2014

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Kevin Cooley and Phillip Andrew Lewis, video still of "Harmony of the Spheres" performance at Zeitgeist Gallery, Nashville, 2014.

For the latest exhibition at Nashville's Zeitgeist Gallery, multimedia artists Kevin Cooley and Phillip Andrew Lewis have achieved a rare feat. They've produced a diverse exhibition with a single material: vinyl.

When I first heard about the exhibition, I assumed an all-vinyl show would be gimmicky or nostalgic. You know, the way exhibitions of art made out of old books can be. I was wrong.

When you walk into the gallery, the space feels charged with an ominous quietude. Three undulating black vinyl sculptures, titled *Dark Matter 01*, *02*, and *03*, greet the viewer. Perched on white pedestals and each dignified with its own spotlight, the organic formations teem with potential energy, as if at any moment they could worm their way down from their towers and onto the floor. Overhead, *Dark Star*, a large tentacled form suspended from the ceiling, reaches out in all directions.



Kevin Cooley and Phillip Andrew Lewis, *Dark Star*, 2014; black record vinyl, 6 by 6 by 6 feet.

Borrowing the title from an ancient Greek concept linking music and celestial movement, *Harmony of the Spheres* uses vinyl as a tool to explore themes of creation and destruction, black hole theories, points of singularity, and flat-earth philosophies.

Digital scans of vinyl records hang on the main wall. Here, the vinyl records—seen broken, eclipsing one other, or fading into a black abyss—are abstracted to the point that they read more as omniscient oculi than as music devices. Standing in front of the images, which feel simultaneously cellular and planetary, the mind oscillates between perceiving the looping grooves of LPs and the celestial patterns of the cosmos.

Cooley and Lewis push their material to new limits in each piece, from a starry sky made using vinyl pellets on a light box to a dense nugget of torched vinyl to a two-toned wavy tower of layered vinyl.

The exhibition also includes two video works: one is the documentation of a record-breaking performance (literally) and the other, *Point of Singularity*, is a meditative video featuring thousands of vinyl pellets being sucked into black-hole-like central point.

The vinyl for this project came directly from United Record Pressing, the largest vinyl record pressing plant in the country, which happens to be located near the gallery. The artists made many of the works inside the factory walls. “We were able to not only have records pressed, but also conduct our own long ‘shifts’ at the factory.” Inside, they built sculptures straight from vinyl remnants as they came off the presses and generated the photographs, videos, and sound for other pieces.

Cooley and Lewis, who met and began working together a year ago as residents at the Bemis Center in Omaha, Nebraska, are a powerful team. While accomplished artists individually, their combined vision and aesthetic senses have the ability to chart a lot more territory. “Problem solving, critical engagement, and making connections happens much faster with two brains,” they say. “In general, it has changed the way we approach our own work, and has been a very productive way to make art.”



Kevin Cooley and Phillip Andrew Lewis, silver gelatin prints on dibond, 2014, 16 by 20 inches each.

If their first collaborative piece, which won the 3-D Award at ArtPrize 2013, is any indication of the future trajectory of their artistic partnership, then Cooley and Lewis are just getting started.

“Harmony of the Spheres” is on view at Zeitgeist Gallery in Nashville through April 26.

Sara Estes is the gallery coordinator at Fisk University and curator of the art space Threesquared. She lives, writes, and works in Nashville.