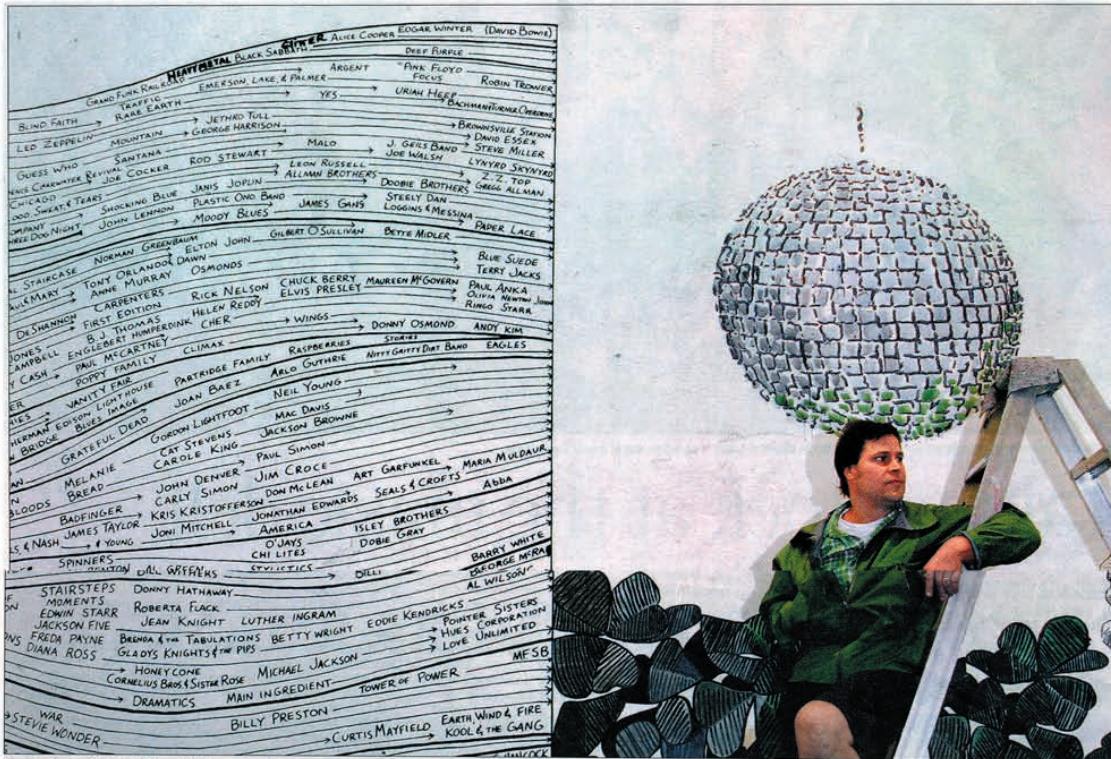


Roberts, Jo. As an Artist, Muller Rocks. The Age, December 22, 2004

As an artist, Muller rocks



San Francisco artist Dave Muller with his rock'n'roll lineage chart now showing at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

PICTURE: CARRYN TREMAN

Visual art and music collide in the work of Dave Muller, writes Jo Roberts.

MUSIC is Dave Muller's all-encompassing passion and has been since he was a young boy growing up in San Francisco. As he grew older, he became an avid record collector (he has about 3500 vinyl albums), and then began DJ-ing on college radio. Yet, after finishing his art studies, he chose to keep his loves of art and music separate. "Being so into rock'n'roll, I've actually avoided using it as subject matter for a long time," says Muller, who still DJs, often at his own openings, and for nine years has played bass and trumpet in the seminal anti-rock band Destroy All Monsters. "I just couldn't think of how to do that in a way I believed in," he says.

But Muller, 40, found a way, and its most recent incarnation is writ large on the walls of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Muller is one of 20 artists in ACCA's current exhibition, *A Molecular History of*

*Everything** ("well, not Everything"). Muller's work sits perfectly in the exhibition's theme, its main component a genealogy chart mapping the history of rock'n'roll from 1954 to 1975. Muller has installed it four times previously, in New York, London and Paris. The version at the Whitney Museum of American Art was about 15 metres long, but the ACCA version stretches about 30 metres along two ACCA walls, as Dion follows Chubby Checker, as the Beach Boys give way to the Surfaris, as folk rock spawns its own family tree.

"I'm not sure exactly what the title of this one is," says the softly spoken, yet bear-like Muller. "I'm thinking of the title being like *This, That and the Other*, with a heavy inference on 'other'."

Whatever its name, it is music genealogy shown as a geological section: the history of rock encased in rock, as it were.

But each version of the work is different. The most recent two have included Muller's more pointed opinions of modern music: a mirror image of the timeline, in Muller's comment on "retro" music. "It's my take on the end of rock'n'roll," he says.

Tellingly, the break in the work — at which the final years end and then invert into mirror image — features a disco ball. "It's the beginning of the end, I guess," says Muller drily.

"My idea of retro is really simple; basically it just goes back down to nothing until there's nothing left to recycle any more. A lot of rock'n'roll right now just seems like a zombie. It just seems like it's going through the motions. It's not vital in the same way it

▲ About the middle of 2013, we're gonna come to some realisation that it's all crap. ▼ DAVE MULLER

might have been at one point in time. And a lot of things are like that. A lot of things get assimilated into the culture and then they just get defanged, then you have to find something else that's not heavily assimilated yet.

"The space between what is being done in retro and what was the thing that's being 'retroed', the distance is getting shorter and shorter. At some point, you'll have a flatline. My estimation, in this incarnation, is that about the middle of

2013, we're gonna come to some realisation that it's all crap." Which is why, from that year on, the artwork's landscape becomes a desolate wasteland. "Although I'm sure there'll be something new to get excited about, but it may not be rock'n'roll," he says.

The lineage he uses is from a 1977 book by Massachusetts academic Steve Chapple and co-writer Reebee Garofalo: *Rock'n'roll is here to pay: the history of politics of the music industry*. Muller reproduces the basic chart — which concentrates on the years 1954 to 1975 — by projecting a blueprint of his version of the chart onto the wall, then works out what elements to retain or omit.

He approaches his art the same way he approaches his DJ-ing: put it all in, then decide what to keep. "When I'm DJ-ing I'll carry around five boxes of records, but I'm only gonna play in the course of an evening this many," he says, squeezing a small gap between his thumb and forefinger. "But having the five boxes, having all those elements, allows me to be more articulate. With that mind, I think it's the same thing here. I have way more images and things that I can

use as elements than I could ever physically use, that would even physically fit into this entire space. But what that allows me to do is to pick specific ones that I think make more sense."

When she first saw Muller's work, ACCA artistic director Juliana Engberg knew his "map of the cosmos of rock'n'roll" would be perfect for the concept of a show she had been nurturing.

"The whole show is about evolving certain things, in a kind of way, so I wanted to make a show that is part of what current art practice is interested in doing at the moment, and that's freeing things up a bit, and looking at systems of things," she says.

She knew that Melbourne, as Australia's music capital, would be the perfect city for Muller.

"We're a club city; we're a band city. We share a cultural interest between Los Angeles. I think Dave is the perfect kind of person to bring here. For the young artists and music aficionados, he's the dude, he's

Sundays until February 20.