

SFGATE

'Memories' of ska captured in Southern Exposure piece

By **Charles Desmarais** Published 10:46 am, Wednesday, March 29, 2017



Photo: Brian Tarnowski, Courtesy Southern Exposure



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Gary Simmons, "Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark," installation view at Prospect New Orleans (2014).

Beginning Friday, March 31, the nonprofit gallery Southern Exposure will show a sculpture meant to be listened to. The piece is "Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark." It was conceived by Los Angeles artist Gary Simmons, but he would likely be the first to say that it is incomplete until other artists make use of it. It is an assemblage of interlocking rectangular forms, made from found materials. At the same time, it is a stack of music speakers — a tribute to the

Jamaican producer and innovator Lee “Scratch” Perry, who worked with Bob Marley and other legends of reggae.

Perry’s famous recording studio was called the Black Ark, and it grew — and eventually went up in flames — in his backyard in Kingston. “Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark” was built in New Orleans, from scrap materials scavenged in the Treme neighborhood after Hurricane Katrina and vintage speaker parts. It was first presented in 2014, at the third iteration of the biennial exhibition Prospect New Orleans.

The ska and reggae “sound system” was a pile of large and loud speakers, but it was far more than that. A Jamaican sound system of the era in which Perry developed also included people: DJs, technical crew and performers who put on concerts and block parties.

So, any tribute to that era must certainly include music and musicians. Simmons encourages reconfiguration of the elements of the piece, and embraces music of a broad range of genres, and Southern Exposure plans to oblige.

A series of performances begins on Friday with the New Orleans-via-Oakland big band MJ’s Brass Boppers. It continues every Thursday and Saturday with a diverse program of Bay Area bands including Beast Nest, Chhoti Maa, the Creatrix and Xuxa Santamaria. The full schedule is at www.soex.org/blackark. A conversation between Gary Simmons and author Jeff Chang will take place at 6 p.m. April 22.

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Gary Simmons: “Recapturing Memories of the Black Ark”: Noon-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Friday, March 31-April 29. Exhibition is free; live musical performances 7 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays in April, \$10-\$20. Southern Exposure, 3030 20th St., S.F. (415) 863-2141. www.soex.org