

VISUAL ARTS

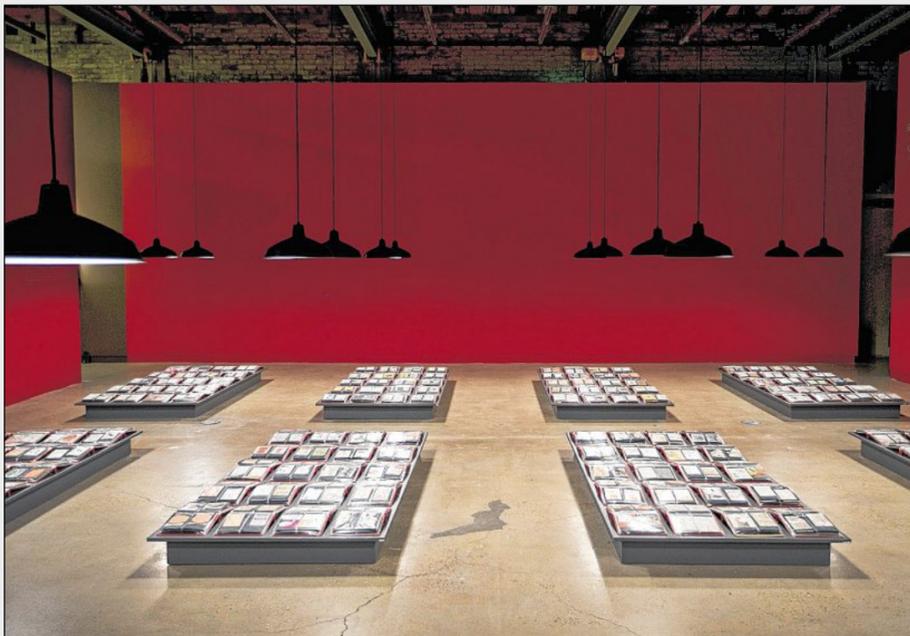


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Mark Mothersbaugh — co-founder and lead singer of Devo — will exhibit his artwork, including "My Little Pony," at the Contemporary Austin.

Since the 1970s, Mothersbaugh has created postcard-size artworks daily.

The rugs originate from the postcard drawings.

The "Booji Boy" rubber mask (left), plastic wig (center) and plastic flower pot hat that were staples of Devo's look. JAY JANNER PHOTOS / AMERICAN-STATESMAN



MULTIMEDIA MULTITALENTED MOTHERSBAUGH

Devo frontman brings entertaining art to Austin.

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin
jvanryzin@statesman.com

The first time Mark Mothersbaugh came to Austin was in 1978.

He was the frontman for Devo, the influential new-wave band formed with fellow art students at Ohio's Kent State University.

It was the year Devo signed a major contract to Warner Bros. Records, ushered in by none other than David Bowie.

Wearing their signature bright yellow hazmat suits and with their jerky, robotic movements, the band played at Austin's legendary Armadillo World Headquarters.

"Somebody pointed a gun at us when we were on stage," Mothersbaugh said recently with a good-natured shrug.

"It was a different time," he said, resuming with the finishing touches on "Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia," the definitive retrospective exhibit of his sprawling visual art practice now on view at the Contemporary Austin's Jones Center gallery.

A certain generation knows

Exhibit continued on D6

ALSO INSIDE

» Info about 'Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia', D6

MUSIC

Composer's work is inspired by mythology of Enchanted Rock

By Luke Quinton
Special to the American-Statesman

Austin rock musician and alt-classical composer Justin Sherburn was, you might say, enchanted by Enchanted Rock very early on. There's just one thing — despite living in Austin since 1998, the Fort Worth native hadn't actually seen it in person.

"I didn't go out there till this

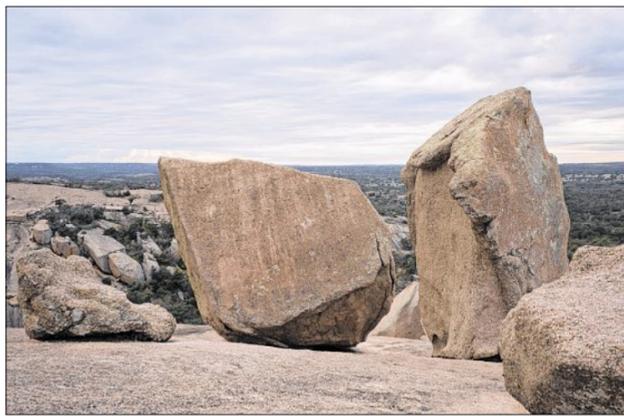
year!" he said. Sherburn's imagination had a lot of time to envision the monolith near Fredericksburg.

"I'd think about it. I kind of just constructed pictures of it in my mind," Sherburn said. What did the pictures resemble? "In my mind it was the Rocky Mountains," he laughed. "So when I went

Sherburn continued on D8

IF YOU GO

What: Justin Sherburn and the Montopolis Chamber Ensemble: "Monolith: Music for Enchanted Rock"
When: 7 p.m. Sunday
Where: North Door, 502 Brushy St.
Tickets: \$15
Information: montopolismusic.com



Leon Alesi's photos, including "Enchanted Rock," will be projected on a screen as a part of the performance. CONTRIBUTED

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Exhibit

continued from D1

Mothersbaugh, 65, from his Devo days of the 1970s and 1980s. The band, with its counter-culture, darkly humorous message of de-evolution (i.e. the breakdown of civilization), catapulted to pop culture heights thanks to chart-busting hits like “Whip It.”

A younger demographic recognizes Mothersbaugh for the myriad soundtracks he’s composed, including for the “Rugrats” TV series, “The Lego Movie,” “Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs” and Wes Anderson’s “The Royal Tenenbaums.”

But few know of the prolific visual output of the creative polymath — his tinkering with dated technologies, his manipulated vintage photographs and his daily habit of drawing postcard-size images that now number more than 30,000.

Most formative were his years as an art student at Kent State during the Vietnam War. Mothersbaugh was a sophomore when, in 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed four Kent State student protesters. It was an event that had a profound impact not just on Mothersbaugh’s nihilistic yet irreverent outlook on American culture but also on Devo’s own philosophy of “de-evolution,” the idea that the world was falling apart and that human-made developments benefited no one.

Now, perfectly — and deliberately — timed to land in Austin during South by Southwest, “Myopia” emerges as an enormously entertaining exhibit that fills in Mothersbaugh’s creative back story.

Just inside the Jones Center’s Congress Avenue-level picture window is “Mutatum” — a two-ended Toyota Scion parked on a patch of AstroTurf, one of Mothersbaugh’s 3-D realizations from his “Beauti-



Mark Mothersbaugh’s “Mutatum” is a sculpture made of a fused, double-ended Scion parked on a patch of fake grass on the first floor of the Contemporary’s Jones Center. Next to “Mutatum” are some of Mothersbaugh’s ‘Roli Poli’ figures.

JAY JANNER PHOTOS / AMERICAN-STATESMAN



The exhibit, perfectly timed to land in Austin for SXSW, includes some of his prints.

ful Mutants” series. A cluster of “Roli Polis” — creepy-funny cartoonish character sculptures with large hands and a single tuft of hair — gather nearby.

From upstairs comes the cacophonous, circus-like sounds of Mothersbaugh’s “Orchestrions” — music machines made from outdated vintage church organ pipes and antique bird whistles. And there are more “Roli Polis” and “Beautiful Mutants” along with Mothersbaugh’s prints, paintings, rugs and vid-

eo animations, all representative of his mashup of high and low culture.

Mothersbaugh’s under-the-radar profile as a visual artist prompted Adam Lerner, director of Denver’s Museum of Contemporary Art, to organize “Myopia.”

“He’s someone who deserves to be known by the art world,” Lerner said. “His music is only part of his creative output, and even then Devo is misunderstood by many.”

After its 2014 premiere, the show has toured to

Minneapolis and Cincinnati and, after its stop in Austin, will continue to New York and California. An accompanying catalog with scholarly essays solidifies Mothersbaugh’s arrival on the museum scene.

Lerner frames Mothersbaugh’s visual art as part of a trajectory that begins with an underground comic book aesthetic of the 1960s, spans multiple avant-garde experiments of the 1970s and finally dovetails with today’s street-art vibe and indie graphic art movement.

“They didn’t understand what we were about,” said Mothersbaugh of the music industry executives who brushed aside Devo’s experimental origins.

“We thought we were an art movement. We didn’t want to be presented as just a rock band. But that’s what happened, and we ended up going along with it for a while.”

And they did, after all, become rock stars.

The exhibit’s title refers to Mothersbaugh’s severe vision defect, myopia that wasn’t properly diagnosed until he was 7.

“I never saw birds flying or the tops of trees or clouds,” he said. “I never even saw the sun properly. After I got glasses I just immediately started drawing pictures.”

And Mothersbaugh hasn’t stopped.

Indeed, the heart and soul of this sometimes frolicsome body of work are the dozens of identical red archival notebooks filled with thousands of postcard-size images. Displayed auspiciously on low platforms under hanging pendant lights in a gallery painted a deep

IF YOU GO

What: ‘Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia’
When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through April 17
Where: Contemporary Austin, Jones Center, 700 Congress Ave.
Tickets: \$3-\$5 (free on Tuesdays)
Information: 512-453-5312, thecontemporaryaustin.org
 For a video of Mark Mothersbaugh, see austin360.com/arts.

red, Mothersbaugh’s many postcards are offered as a road map of an incessantly engaged imagination.

The habit of making hand-held drawings was born of convenience, too. It was inexpensive way to create small works that were easy to share and trade as part of the mail art movement of the 1970s.

Also, it was an efficient means of making art when Mothersbaugh was on the road with Devo.

Moreover, with his vision impairments, holding a small piece of paper tucked closely by proves the least distracting drawing method for Mothersbaugh.

“Even with glasses, I still see everything like it’s reflected in a doorknob,” Mothersbaugh said, standing amid the display of postcards at the Jones Center. “It’s much easier if I just do this.”

From his pocket he pulled out a piece of cardboard and an ink brush pen. And with a few deft strokes, he drew a hand gesturing to reach.

“I made all these privately,” said Mothersbaugh of his postcards.

“They’re like a diary,” he said. “For years, I never intended them to be shared with anyone. I hope people aren’t disappointed.”

Contact Jeanne Claire van Ryzin at 512-445-3699.

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