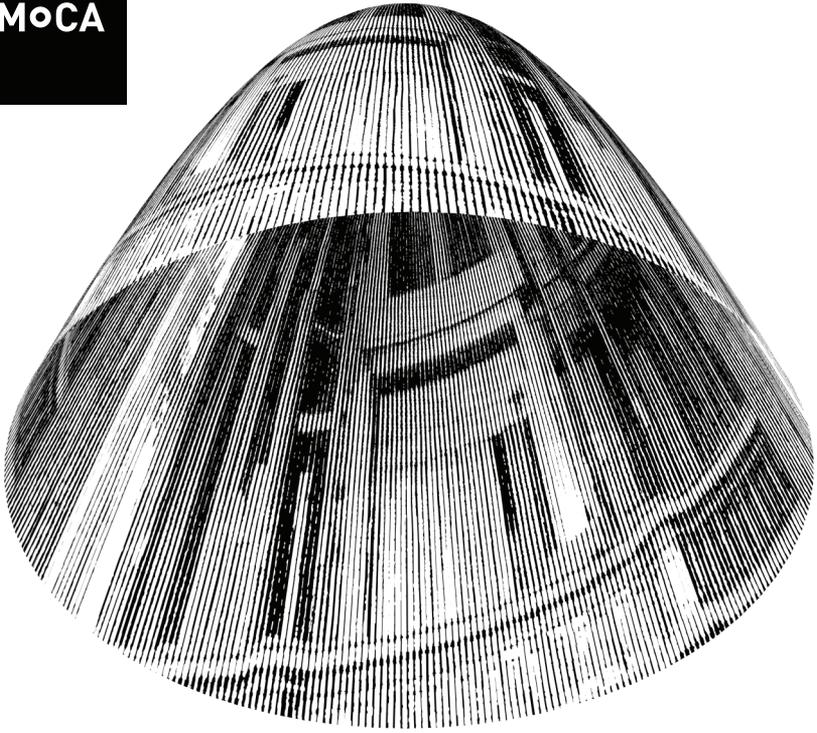


BMoCA



Summer 2021 Present Box

Web Model Dot Space

Aaron Jones
Waaheed
With critical writing by
Wesley Taylor

July 15 – August 1, 2021

Web Model Dot Space

Aaron Jones, Waajeed with critical writing by Wesley Taylor

Dome study

Laser jet plots, plywood, monofilament, globe pendant light, and audio tracks.

2021

Web Model Dot Space is a suspended, bell-like dome that graphically represents the interior of an existing Detroit church as a floating, immersive, performative venue. Viewers become active participants as they enter the overhanging structure that illuminates aspects of fixed, historical architecture.

Jones re-constructed the church's interior using laser imaging, detection, and ranging, known as LiDAR or 3D laser scanning. The scans are printed using a large-scale toner plotter on bond paper and begin as flat, dymaxion-style maps reminiscent of American architect, designer, and futurist Buckminster Fuller. Jones shipped the flat prints to Boulder and transformed the scans on-site into a three-dimensional space by simply pleating, folding, and adjoining sections.

Jones' low-tech, straightforward installation counters the church's representation of permanence and tradition, with an impermanent paper exterior. The weight of the structure alone is a bold contrast to the physicality and presence of our everyday built environment.

Inside the dome, musical tracks composed by Waajeed entitled "Worship Tones" play on a loop. The music is derived from legacies and experiences within the Black Church, inspiring religious themes. The blending of musical scores within represented, existing architectures stokes a deeper and more critical engagement of both elements.

Web Model Dot Space becomes an entry point, or portal, to critical dialogue around how existing spaces can facilitate visionary use. Our everyday built environment is filled with static, ancient architectures and institutions that symbolize a kind of permanence. Jones' forward-thinking architectures reimagine these familiar spaces in unfamiliar, sensory ways. The viewer steps inside this shift in place, an experience that prompts consideration of how inclusive these sites have historically been in terms of diversity of people, methodologies, and thinking.

Cover image: Aaron Jones, *Web Model Dot Space*, dome study, digital, 2020.
Courtesy of the artist.

Referendum at Play Web Model Dot Space

Prologue

Throughout this writing I am referencing a letter of recommendation I wrote of Jones for his Rome Prize proposal. Every year the Rome Prize invites scholars and practitioners of Italy to research and explore a specific line of inquiry. In reviewing Jones' Rome Prize proposal, I immediately noted both its brevity and density. He covered a ton of ground in very few sentences, to the point in which I had to reread it several times to understand exactly what he was proposing. There was a moment when I was one second away from calling Jones to see if he was willing to accept my help to rewrite the entire thing, but there was no time (and that was unnecessary). Ultimately, I decided to approach writing the letter as a translator, taking Jones' thinking and creating something that would generate the energy for the project that I thought was missing in the proposal's dry tone and matter of factness.

Since the ensuing project was a collaborative work between Jones and Waajeed (and because the impetus of the letter of recommendation was solely focused on Jones' work), I interviewed them both over Zoom to follow up on the threads I was unraveling in my writing and to gain more of Waajeed's perspective. Like my relationship with Jones, I'm equally invested in Waajeed's practice. He is someone I've had the privilege of observing and working closely with over the past decade. (As an accompaniment to this writing, we are publishing the Zoomcast wherein we scratch the surface of the pertinent topics in the project, including *Worship Tones*, *field churches*, scanning/sampling, ghosts in the machine, scale, et al..)

Back to the proposal and the letter of recommendation, which are the genesis for this essay. There was one passage from Jones' proposal that lingered with me, that gave me pause and generated the thought experiment that I'm working through with this writing.

Waajeed is looking for architectural infrastructures which allow for deeper engagement with his music, as a **referendum** on the typical platforms for electronic music such as clubs, bars, etc. This music entitled "Worship Tones" is derived from legacies and experiences within the black church and therefore draws upon and inspires certain liturgical themes within the project.

Initially, I was uneasy with the use of the word *referendum* in this passage. It seemed too strong, too presumptuous. Referendum denotes a public reckoning, but the manner in which Jones uses the word as justification for producing speculative architecture—

projects which blur the borders between performance and the built environment—collapses a whole lot of nuance and complexity that needs to be drawn out in the material. Particularly, the use of the word draws out a supposed polemic, and in this, I think it is important that these positions are explicitly stated: who/what it is positioned against, and who/what is positioning. Where does the public have agency in all of this? Or, is this passage a one-man referendum speaking on the behalf of the DJ? In the Rome Prize proposal he explicitly implicates the shortcomings of traditional music performance venues as the impetus for imagining new types of music venues. Conversely, Waajeed brings up the club as a missed opportunity for spirituality and healing. Although this was not the first instance in which Jones has used this word, it was the first time that it stood out to me as being significant. I became fixated on this idea of referendum as practice, wondering who is being implicated and what are the consequences.

Jones is a master of creating space inside of space. Not only does he recontextualize existing structures, but he also recontextualizes other forms of media. There is fluidity to the spaces he generates that stems from how he structures his collaborations or, more precisely, his *mash-ups* (as he likes to characterize them taking cues from club music and street fashion). For instance, his mash-up with Waajeed (DJ X Architect) takes a very counterintuitive approach to design methodology that rejects traditional hierarchies of media. Instead of asking a musician to make compositions that are inspired by existing structures or landscapes (as in, *this thing already exists, make a song to go with it*), Waajeed is “scoring” his compositions *with* the built structures. Through this process, the structures function as both vessels and transmitters. For this collaboration, Jones actually requested pre-existing sketches of tracks that Waajeed had lying around, so that the structures he built were molded by the sound. In this scenario the songs inspire the form of the built environment just as much as the structures mold the compositions. Past iterations of this collaboration have generated intimate architectural scales that have been anticipatory of the current challenges facing musicians and DJs during a global pandemic.

What is interesting is that Waajeed calls these songs *Worship Tones*—stripped down rhythmic progressions that follow a house music tempo and incorporate field recordings, 808 bass kicks, claps, snaps, and the human voice. Waajeed has mastered the science of music. In our interview he makes several salient points: *DJ as shaman. Club as new place of worship.* The basis for *Worship Tones*. Clubs as an opportunity to receive The Word. One thesis that I derived from our talk was that DJs are spiritual leaders, and therefore new building types are necessary to act as their temples. For the sake of transparency, I should state that I hold Waajeed with the utmost respect; he has been one of my favorite DJs and music producers since the early aughts. We’ve

also worked together in the same collective Complex Movements for ten years. It was only recently that he revealed to me some of his secrets to music production and DJing. My appreciation of his work grew after knowing his methods and seeing them at play, especially on the dance floor. Recently, for the purposes of "field research," I went to see him and his partner Lady Monix play at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning at a club called the Marble Bar in Detroit. As they held a congregation of weary party goers, some of whom had been at the venue for 10+ hours, the day and time was not lost on anyone. Together they closed out a 12-hour party where they gathered the remaining 150-200 weary party goers for a 2-and-a-half-hour "sunrise service." I observed the pacing, sequencing, and frequencies they selected and blended to preach as sermon that uplifted an entire dancing congregation.

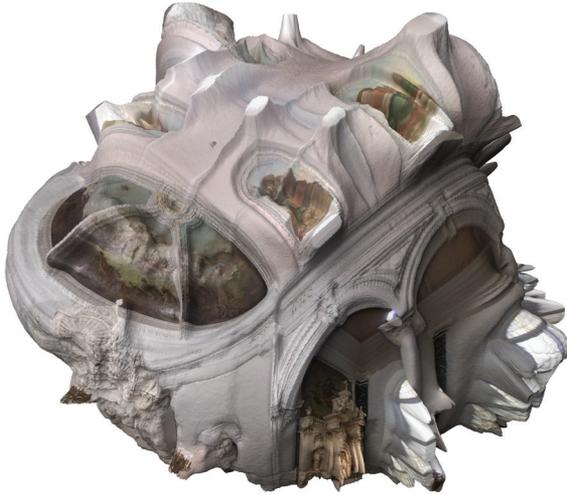
In re-reading the proposal I discovered hidden referendums that were not as explicitly stated but I felt were equally important. One such referendum is the promise/myth of permanence in traditional liturgical spaces. In the letter I make connections between Detroit and Rome and the throughline Jones creates with his work between the two geographies. In the conversation we go deeper into what this type of work means for a city like Detroit where we all base our practice and the context for our work. Detroit, where the myth of permanence fades with its countless decaying cathedrals, is the counterargument to the same myth that Rome gave birth to. This contradiction leads to the interesting material choice of paper. In the conversation Jones mentions churches as being "heavy" buildings because of construction methods as well as connotation and history. It is difficult to mistake a church, and because of that it is difficult to generate new uses and context for them. Paper can be seen simultaneously as both harsh critique and elegant metaphor, and the fact that it floats in that stasis makes for great poetry.

It's been insightful to see his "referendum strategy" at play over the years because of the possibilities it opens up with the themes he focuses on. In the case of this project the word referendum doesn't imply finality, or judgment, it is actually an examination of the missed opportunities of dominant institutions, architecture types, systems, genres, and frameworks in regards to how non-inclusive they have been historically in terms of diversity of people, methodologies, and thinking. In the referendum he creates new scenarios in order to inject the missed opportunities back into the programming of the institutions he wishes to critique to make them more suitable for the future. Jones has leaned on the mash-up as his preferred method to make his point and generate compelling juxtapositions. One such is his interest in the illusion of "quadratura," the baroque paintings in the domes of cathedrals. Usually they were commissioned to make the churchgoer feel like they were in the presence of heaven by mapping a forced perspective of celestial beings on the ceiling. Jones copies this

move by projecting an entire church inside of a paper dome. This stripping down of opulence onto flat commonplace materials is matched by the minimalist compositions of Waajeed's *Worship Tones*.

Jones has a keen ability to observe sites through listening and synthesize that listening into models of buildings and speculative pavilions. Waajeed, a self-proclaimed ambassador for the city of Detroit, has mastered his practice of listening to craft these soundscapes. Both have the innate ability to make connections between geographies through shamanism, model making, and experience design. The propositions that work makes are actually big claims and major critiques by both architect and DJ on the most major established institutions. When you hear them talk or witness them DJ, there is a deep sincerity in both. Even though they tread on similar territory, their understated conviction is in contrast to the fervor you may hear from Kanye West and his Sunday Service church. When Waajeed says that DJs are shamans, he means it. When Jones says new architectural typologies are necessary, he is serious. It is important to understand the context of Detroit's music scene where there are established traditions of ordaining music producers as deities, and DJs who have served as pastor/deacon/praise leader/choir director for 30+ years that this work is a nextention of those established traditions. I can now understand the tone of Jones's proposal as cover to not stir up dogma or for not wanting to sound dogmatic himself as they go through the paces of scaling up the work. What both Jones and Waajeed are offering is a place of aboutness that is neither the church nor the club, but a stratosphere all of its own. The referendum they are proposing is more of an opportunity for a reset/refresh and less of an indictment.

- Critical writing by Wesley Taylor



Above: Aaron Jones, *Web Model Dot Space*, dome study, digital, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

Artist Biographies

Aaron Jones is a registered architect working in Detroit, MI.

Jones runs an experimental architecture studio concerned primarily with the research and development of media structures. This work often results in pop-up theaters, performance art installations, and entertainment portals that are produced in collaboration with leading creative professionals and organizations around the world. The studio looks at the opportunities between content and infrastructure, especially as they reveal and expand audience types. Currently, Jones is an assistant professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological University's College of Architecture and Design.

Waaheed is a Detroit-born music producer, DJ, visual artist, and photographer.

Waaheed is the founder of DIRT TECH RECK, an independent record label that he established in 2012. Additionally, Waaheed is the director of The Underground Music Academy, a Detroit-based hub that aims to build the future leaders of independent music.

Wesley Taylor is a printmaker, graphic designer, musician, animator, educator, mentor, and curator.

Taylor roots his practice in performance and social justice. His individual practice is inextricably linked to his collective practices, consisting of a constellation of collectives he has helped form for over 20 years. This includes Complex Movements, Talking Dolls Detroit, Design Justice Network, and Big Models. Taylor is currently an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Department of Graphic Design and the Art Foundation Program.

Present Box is a series of temporary exhibitions that invite artists to transform BMOCA's lobby and front entrance into innovative installations, performances, and events that last less than a month. Presented two times per year, the site-specific projects are intended to encourage artists to create work outside their comfort zone and to foster interactive participation. The exhibitions encourage experimentation and urge artists to test ideas and explore different approaches. Present Box exhibitions are always free and open to the public.

About BMOCA + AIA CO

BMOCA's four-year partnership with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Colorado seeks to foster, promote, and inspire dialogue about what innovative design can accomplish for innovative cities. It is our goal to explore the powerful intersection between art, architecture, and our community.

Present Box Events

Virtual Studio Tour:

Aaron Jones

July 15, 12-12:30pm

Opening Reception

July 15, 5 – 8pm

Free public reception

Creator Conversation with

Aaron Jones and Wesley Taylor

July 15, 6:30-7:30pm

Free

Join Exhibiting Artist and Architect Aaron Jones and his collaborator Wesley Taylor during the Opening Reception for a conversation surrounding the exhibition *Web Model Dot Space*.

*Thank you to our generous sponsors of BMOCA + AIA CO and this Present Box exhibition: **The Markowitz Family***



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