

Cohen, David. "Alain Kirili and Vision Festival: First visual artist honored with lifetime achievement award at legendary 'free jazz' fixture," *artcritical*, 4 June 2019.

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## Alain Kirili and Vision Festival: First visual artist honored with lifetime achievement award at legendary "free jazz" fixture

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by **David Cohen**

**This text is based on David Cohen's contribution to the festival's official program. For a full line-up of artists appearing in the festival, which runs from June 11 to 16, please visit the [Vision Festival website](#). Alain Kirili will appear in conversation with William Parker, June 13 at 9PM.**



Tom Buckner, William Parker & Maria Mitchell performing with works by Alain Kirili in his exhibition at Marlborough Gallery, New York,

1998. Photo: Ariane Lopez-Huici

There is something especially fitting in acknowledging Alain Kirili at the Vision Festival. (Drummer Andrew Cyrille is the musical awardee in the 24th annual event.) While there is too much talk of so-called "artist's artists", the world can always use a musician's artist. Understand that Kirili is 100% a sculptor. But his work is, at this stage, almost impossible to conceive divorced from music, so intimately connected is music with his modus operandi in the plastic arts. Music is no mere "violon d'Ingres" in Kirili's case. First thing to state: Kirili himself is not a musician, unless one counts the now silent rhythmic hammering of metal evident along the surfaces of his sculpted lines and forms as some kind of frozen music. But one can "make" music by invitation, and Kirili and his wife and fellow artist Ariane Lopez-Huici have turned their Tribeca loft into a legendary venue for new music over the last four decades. Predominantly devoted to free improvisation, the musical idiom of Visions Festival, Kirili's guests are not just performers but truly collaborators. Music is made in direct response to the visual art with which it is juxtaposed.

For years this was Kirili's own work, but true to the ever expanding field of his artistic generosity, more recently guest artists have been invited to install a work for the occasion. Fellow visual artists showcased in this way with newfound musical peers have included Laura Newman, Thomas Nozkowski, Jeanne Silverthorne and Christopher Wool. Whenever he has been given a museum exhibition – which is often, especially in Europe – Kirili has made sure

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that music and dance play a crucial role in programming. But the kinship to music runs more deeply than any of this could suggest. The lesson of free jazz for Kirili the sculptor (or, perhaps, not so much lesson as enduring point of commonality) is the example, ubiquitous amongst music-makers but in recent centuries an increasing rarity among painters and sculptors, of symbiosis. That collaborations and dialogues and interchanges are greater than the sum of the individual artists participating. Whether it is his interactions with traditional smiths and forgers in rural settings away from the usual artistic centers of New York or Paris, or his dialogues across time with historic figures like Auguste Rodin, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, David Smith and Julio Gonzalez, each of whom has been the shared focus of a museum exhibition, or indeed his collaborations with musicians and dancers, the outcomes are by their nature open-ended. The events and exhibitions are truly jam sessions, the sparks beyond predictability. Everything he makes is jazz.



Roscoe Mitchell performs with works by Alain Kirili at the artist's White Street studio, 2019. Photo: Ariane Lopez-Huici