

## Colibricoleur - Stephen Fuller

### Interdisciplinary Artist's Statement

My work as an artist is defined by a triumvirate of interwoven practices - **musical** and sonic composition, exploration and performance, **media** arts as a way of exploring individual & collective mythology and sense of place, and **making** - habitats, moments, and things. These practices are woven together through the creation of multisensorial works, as expressed in their ensemble as in their individual components. Whoa.

Colibricoleur is a composite nickname I received in a counteroffensive after I dubbed my innovative creator friend Yamobe "Bricolangelo". Colibri is the hummingbird, flitting between flowers, pollinating, battling, inspiring. A bricoleur is a "jack of all trades", an improviser who works with what they have and what they know to get (or try and get) things done. It seems to me the silicone age is also the golden age for people with this profile - thanks to the internet we have so many tools and resources to nourish exploratory practices, to develop skills starting from limited experience or exposure. And where I live on Turtle Island, there is so much material wealth that surplus material elements are almost always available to experiment and innovate with

Assuming my role as an interdisciplinary artist has meant living on the boundaries between established disciplines, trades, practices, social circles, industries. It's rooted in my personality of being curious and asking questions, of reflecting on both how things work, and why they exist. I hope that the resulting works will in turn be divergent, inspiring and catalyzing.

It seems to me that pressures of climate change, escalating conflicts, global forced migration, and the detrimental habit of extreme inefficiency of late-stage capitalism, all may have some antidote in working with what we have, through reduction, adjustment and sustainable innovation. I explore my work as a process, usually with specific results in mind at different stages, but equally as a tool for learning about how innovation happens, both materially and socially.

Thinking and learning about effective ways to adjust and adapt - given available resources, time, motivation, skills, tools etc. - feels like the best way to summarize my first decade as a "professional" artist-creator. I document and archive as many of the small and subtle steps of this process in order to be able to look back and see where specific decisions and changes emerged and were implemented. Most often it's through conversation and exchange with the amazing creator-collaborators that surround and nourish me.

In my experiences, ideas emerge in a fractalicious way. This is particularly true when working in "yes, and" style collaborations, where ideas are free to emerge, fragile and formless, to take shape, to mature and grow stronger, nourished by different contributors with diverse experiences. Healthy collaborative processes have given me so much clarity and strength, and hints at ways to keep growing my roots in this approach.

For most of my life I recall being someone with a lot of ideas, often zany and divergent. Tempering and taming that personality has had consequences in terms of my sense of place in society and my cerebro-corporal health. I am grateful to all those who have allowed me to simply be who I am, and to learn how to express my ideas and approaches in ways that are accessible to those around me, without diverting the intent or the personal meaning.

People often say now "you have so many projects", but for me it's all one project - my life, my growth, and a broader work for which I am assembling the puzzle, piece by piece. Each creation is a process, an étude (study), a result in itself, and also part of the learning and growth needed to make it possible to reach some of the more elaborate, interwoven, and hopefully impactful creations.

## Musique

From my first lesson to my most recent collaboration, music has always been as much about tones and rhythms and resonances as it has been about listening, dialogue, and learning from others. Like the most nourishing conversations, I am drawn by musical exchanges which are balanced without being too formal, carried by curiosity and caring rather than convention. At times I have a lot to say, at others it is my turn to listen - to the other, to the birds, and also to silence.

In silence I am sat beside the well, from which inspiration is drawn and drunk. In any given moment the water may taste bitter and hurt, or gleeful and full of dreams. It seems that the water flows into the well when the stony pores of the muse invite it. But that water is flavoured (and at times, tainted) by its keeper - my memories, my interpretation, my inhibitions, my ambitions.

Music at its core for me is a place of expressing lived feelings and experiences. Although I love, admire and aspire to 'good' technique (being 'in control' of voice and hands and feet), music for me is first a process to deliver the complex poetry of life, to try and out what is too complex or messy to stay inside. It is first a personal process, a form of necessary internal alignment, from which I seek to enter into dialogue with others.

I AM A OISEAU MIMICRUS. I REPEAT WHAT I HAVE ABSORBED IN MY WANDERING AROUND THIS WORLD. SOMETIMES IT'S FRENETIC AS A TRINIDADIAN CARNIVAL PARADE OR A SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS RAPID IN WINTER - SOMETIMES IT FLOATS LIKE LOVE AND CLOUDS DO.

I have allowed my 'musical journey' to be guided by attraction towards sound and emotional radiance. I think this is why I ended up studying the kora - my first exposures to this instrument were of total hypnosis. Not satisfied to only listen and appreciate, the curious, proud and stubborn goat in me had to go running towards this challenge, and of course bang my head against it. Generous keepers of this tradition, and others to follow, patiently helped me to assume this choice, to make steps to find my voice.

With their guidance I got early tastes of myself as a songwriter, explored as a budding composer, and even took my first steps as an instrument creator.

I wake up most days wondering where to orient my feet for the next few steps in the resulting practice which through repetition and incremental refinement has begun to take shape. Days when I am not sure what to *do* necessarily become days to listen. I listen to my friends. I listen to the gut wrenching and the heart uplifting news of the world. I listen to muse-icians - 'those who inspire' - to guide me. So I hope that the times when I get up the confidence and clarity to share glimpses of my work with others, I too in turn can uplift, clarify and nourish others. If only just a little bit.



Agua II, A vessel to drink from the Well

Photo: Martin Moreira, Mont Rolland 2024

## Media

My media arts practice stems from a lifelong passion for documenting precious and fleeting moments and subtly sculpting them into surreal, alternative and imaginative outcomes. In this sense the camera and media treatment processes are for me catalysts for change - of myself, of the social interactions I experience, of the places I move through.

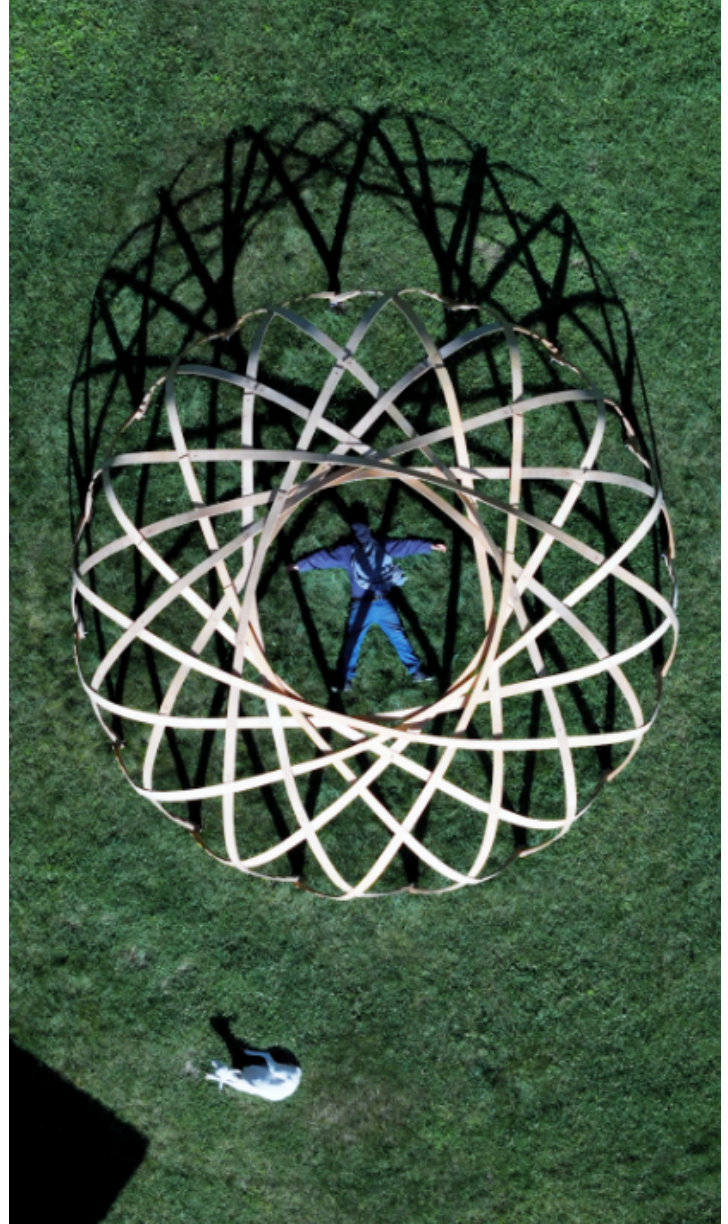
FOR ME THE LINE BETWEEN ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND RITUAL REFLECTION HAS ALL BUT DISSOLVED. THE CAMERA CREATES AN IMPETUS TO CATALYSE TRANSFORMATIONS AND TO TAKE STEPS JUST BEYOND WHAT SEEMS POSSIBLE IN A GIVEN MOMENT, TO MOVE MATTER, TO FUNNEL MAYHEM INTO MAGIC.

My work with aerial photography is enabled by drone technology and my certification as a pilot, but each time I take flight, it is as an avatar. In this way I am able to share perspective with the hummingbird, to hover in place and observe the world below, to explore the scale, textures and patterns of place. In flight, I redefine my relationships with the movement of water, of landscape and of people.

Timelapse photography, from the ground and from the air, allows me to reflect on the passage of time. I love to document processes of construction and deconstruction, and to apply subtle interpretations through choices of interval and shutter opening. The moment is passing, everything is changing - the camera allows me to bend time, just a little bit.

Light and shadow are the polarities which make up each image; I seek to constantly grow my understanding of these fundamentals. Working with natural light means accepting the generosity (or reservedness) of the sun on any given day, and so shifting my own interpretation to adapt to each type of light becomes an act of humility, of acceptance.

It is this patient dance of observation and adaptation that ultimately defines my relationship with the media arts process, and I hope that those who absorb my work will feel connected to the same forces which first drew in my senses, and then my lenses.



Self Portrait with Goat, Mont Rolland, 2024

Credit géométrie: Mazen Chamseddine, Guillaume Roberts-Cambron, Stephen Fuller

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## Make

I *need* to make things. Perhaps it's because I'm stubborn and want to know how to do things. Often it's out of economic necessity. And at another level, it's also because in the cycle of reflecting, planning, testing, executing, adjusting and repeating (sometimes, ad nauseum), I find an incomparable peace of mind.

I grew up on an old farm property, my playgrounds were haylofts and chicken coops. My father is a carpenter who specializes in restoring heritage buildings - so looking back it doesn't surprise me the degree to which I have come to value preserving and giving new value to the old, the tired, the past. Or that I don't mind getting dirty in order to realize a goal.

I studied environmental geography in university, but steps into a career of field research and data collection work felt incomplete, so for years after my studies my main sources of income were residential construction and arboriculture. Even when I had acknowledged that the road most aligned with my hyperactive imagination was in the arts, I continued to rely on my two hands and ability to transform habitation and landscape, to if not make ends meet, at least pull them a bit closer together from time to time.

I get a great deal of satisfaction in giving new life to tired and worn out places. Now when I do this type of work, it is with a consciousness that for me, it is a form of set dressing, of setting the stage for the kinds of social interactions and exchanges I hope to experience. I intervene with habitat to carve out places to collaborate, to innovate, to explore. To write and record music, to build instruments, to develop immersive visual works. To share meals with friends and strangers. To remember and to dream. To feel inspired to learn, experiment and grow a little each day.

When I started down the path of musical instrument making, I did so very much as if it was a carpentry project. But musical instruments don't have the same needs as walls or roofs - a rude awakening to the delicate balance between structural integrity and resonant capacity. To grow in this practice in the past

years I have leaned on a plethora of luthiers of a range of instruments - particularly the harp, the oud, the classical guitar - who share their work with me in person, though mostly through YouTube and other platforms. They generously explain their practices and thought processes that go into them and give me clues on how to steer my making process.

In deciding to innovate an instrument (well, a series of instruments in evolution), I unwittingly set myself a real challenge. But it was based on an interest to open up the capacity to play certain repertoire, and more broadly to make steps towards finding a particular sound I could hear in my head in the years of playing the kora and collaborating with a wide range of musicians.

More broadly though, learning what it takes to explore and to innovate based on specific goals fits with the process of learning the diverse pathways to solutions, to innovations, and to "discoveries" - more often than not, simply information or perspective we didn't have before. Via ideation, we orient matter, to combine that which exists into new forms which (hopefully) produce unique, interesting, inspiring results. Yazoo.



A drop of wood - Agua II hull taking shape, 2022

Photo: Stephen Fuller