

SOUND WAVES

Copeland's striated collage paintings have been likened to "strata" of the earth¹ or the contour line drawings of a topographic map.² Even the artist's materials—the earthen color palette and the fibrous texture of Hosho, a paper made from mulberry—seem to emphasize natural elements. The artist himself, however, would prefer the viewer to appreciate the work as a non-objective composition, without reference to other visual themes. In fact, Copeland has felt limited by representational work in the sense that the subject directs the form of the composition, to some extent, lessening the opportunity for spontaneity in the artistic process. Copeland remarks:

"The one thing I want back from art is a sustained creative moment. It is different from how I have worked figuratively in the past—the figures sort of dictate what you do. I wasn't energized by that."³

Rather than identifying visual sources for his work, Copeland admits there is a direct relationship to music in the courses of his layered collage paintings. Growing up in West Africa, the artist recalls the sensational experience of witnessing parades of musicians and dancers bursting through town in the midst of seemingly ordinary moments. Copeland describes the musical displays he watched and heard as "entirely intuitive" and without

¹ Eric Sutphin, "Boundary Hunters: Four Sides to Every Story," Exhibition Catalogue ("Boundary Hunters"), 2012, 2, <https://issuu.com/rachaelw25/docs/bhcatalog>.

² Rachel Golden, analysis of Copeland's work submitted for press, August 2018.

³ Donnie Copeland, phone interview with the author, August 11, 2018.

rehearsal, often comprised of purely vocal and percussive elements.⁴ There was no knowing when the music would begin, or when it would end.

With the same impulse to create, Copeland begins and ends each line of his compositions in a way that implies continuity beyond the physical space. The work is complete, but not finite, with a visual rhythm that persists beyond the edges of the substrate. Perhaps this is why the viewer is compelled to associate Copeland's work with living and breathing forms: it is not that the organic matter or aesthetic form create a sense of life, but rather contribute to the palpable rhythm stirred in both the artist and the viewer.

Copeland's lyrical sense of line, and spritely approach to pattern might not immediately register with the claps, chants, and djembe drums of West Africa, but the same pulsing, throbbing, urge expresses itself in painted waves of sound.

⁴ Donnie Copeland, phone interview with the author, August 11, 2018.