

AQC0229

Nanopublication — Symbolic Transliteration of Bass and Contradiction

by Arnaud Quercy · Charles Mingus · 2021



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Symbolic Transliteration of Bass and Contradiction

The vertical grooves carved into the sculpture's surface symbolize the double bass strings, while the angular cuts and negative spaces capture Mingus [3]'s contradictions — the structural composer who taught by ear, the violent tyrant known as "The Angry Man of Jazz" who wrote vulnerable, deeply expressive music, the genius who bullied his musicians into greatness.

CONTEXT

The vertical grooves carved into the sculpture's surface directly reference the strings of the double bass — Mingus's primary instrument and the vehicle through which he revolutionized jazz bass playing. He lifted the bass from its traditional timekeeper role into the front line, playing with ferocious technical brilliance and deep expressive power. The grooves run the length of the form, just as the bass strings span the instrument's body, creating linear pathways for sound — or in this case, for the eye and hand to follow.

But Mingus was never reducible to technical mastery alone. He was a mass of contradictions: a structural composer who refused to write fixed scores, preferring to teach his musicians parts by ear and let compositions develop through live "workshopping." A violent tyrant who bullied sidemen into submission, yet wrote music of extraordinary tenderness and vulnerability. A genius who created some of jazz's most sophisticated extended compositions while maintaining the raw, earthy power of gospel and blues.

The angular cuts and negative spaces in the sculpture embody these contradictions. The form is architectural yet chaotic, solid yet punctured, vertical yet destabilized by voids. It doesn't resolve into a single reading. Like Mingus's music — which has been described as containing "shouting, laughing, singing, dancing, heated arguments, romantic corners, and fights breaking out" — the sculpture holds multiple emotional states simultaneously. Strength and fragility. Structure and rupture. Standing tall while barely holding together.

This is transliteration as symbolic encoding: not a literal representation of a bass or a man, but a three-dimensional embodiment of presence, contradiction, and uncompromising force.

REFERENCES

- [1] Arnaud Quercy (2021). Charles Mingus — Catalog raisonné. <https://arnaudquercy.art/en/catalogue-raisonne/AQC0229.html>
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