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## Art exhibition celebrates Egypt-obsessed mystic

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Belgian artist profiles American mystic and jazz pioneer Sun Ra with collection of album covers, video and sound installations

By Marwa Morgan

To open his exhibit at Medrar Contemporary Art Gallery, Belgian artist Tom Bogaert wrote the name of jazz pioneer, poet, mystic and philosopher 'Sun Ra' in 27 tanning lamps.

Sun Ra, who would have been 100 years old this year, was born in the United States as Herman Poole Blount. After a visionary experience which led him to believe he came from the planet Saturn, he changed his name to Le Sony'r Ra. Fascinated with ancient Egypt, the musician incorporated the Egyptian God of the Sun 'Ra' in his name.

The exhibition, '1971, Sun Ra in Egypt', is a part of an ongoing research project about Ra's life and work. It includes a series of lectures, videos, art objects, installations, and related publications, many of which address Sun Ra's 1971 visit to Egypt. The works "playfully insert Sun Ra's life and legacy into the conceptual, pop, and minimalist *zeitgeist* of the New York art world of 1960s and 1970s," according to Bogaert's website.

In the show, Bogaert displays original video and audio installations alongside objects related to Sun Ra's work, including album covers, posters and publications. In one sound installation, called 'Sputnik Power,' Bogaert examines Sun Ra's belief in



(<http://i1.wp.com/www.dailynewsegypt.com/beta/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/8-1-Sun-Ra-photo.jpg>)

In the sound installation 'Sputnik Power,' artist Tom Bogaert examines American musician Sun Ra's belief in "Pyramid Power," or the "alleged supernatural or paranormal properties of the Egyptian pyramids and objects of similar shape"

“Pyramid Power”. For Sun Ra, this was the “alleged supernatural or paranormal properties of the Egyptian pyramids and objects of similar shape”.

In the piece, Bogart highlights Ra’s fascination with the moon and a poem he wrote just before Apollo’s first journey. It reflects the jazz musician’s oft repeated story where he “claimed to have been abducted by aliens who transported him to Saturn.”

In addition to the exhibition, Bogaert is working on a video about Sun Ra’s visit to Egypt, when he and his band, *The Sun Ra Arkestra*, performed by the Giza pyramids. In the video, ‘Sun Ra was here’, the artist follows a fictitious tour with a local guide and interviews several members of the band and their families.

The video addresses the lack of documentation about Ra’s experience in Egypt, in an attempt to draw clues that could make up for “Sun Ra’s outward attitude toward his legacy and toward documenting his own life,” Bogart’s website explains.

Sun Ra, himself, didn’t see much value in sharing his story.

“They ain’t supposed to know it,” Sun Ra said, according to Bogart’s website. “If they ain’t going to live forever, they don’t need to know it.”

However, Bogaert wrote, Ra complained that his work had been “overlooked in other ways.”

View ‘1971, Sun Ra in Egypt’ at Medrar Contemporary Art Gallery, Garden City, from 10am to 5pm until June 13.

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