Andy Graydon’s *City Lights Orchestra* began with a small moment of deception. The city of Cambridge had offered him a collection of used street lamps. Upon visiting the recycling station to pick them, he approached the semi-clear globes, expecting to feel the cool weight of dense blown glass that matched their vintage design. Instead they were made of lightweight, highly durable plastic. Graydon felt both duped and bemused by this manufactured *tromp l’oeil* (“trick of the eye”).

For his PLATFORM commission, Graydon has transformed these used lamps into a collection of playable sculptural instruments. Installed in a dynamic S-shaped formation within deCordova’s Sculpture Park and set into metal armatures, the forms take inspiration from a worldly range of instruments, including Japanese Taiko drums and the Balinese gamelan, which is comprised of bells, drums, and gongs that create a signature style of music when played collectively (*Inside Cover*). Graydon’s biography informs these references. Growing up in Hawaii, he was aware of musical traditions of the Pacific Rim, particularly instruments that bring together community members for shared performance.

For the passive observer, *City Light Orchestra* is a multi-part sculpture that one can wander around and through, exploring the open framework and translucent globes, strung together with vibrant, red airline cable (*Cover*). Active participants may play the piece, batting on the lamps with sticks and rubber-headed dowels. While on view, the installation is also host to public performances, including experimental percussionists and sound artists. The various possibilities for engaging with *City Lights Orchestra* reveal the work’s true form as a sculpture-in-the-making, an ongoing composition performed in both structure and sound.

Those who play the sculpture may experience another kind of ruse. Visitors likely expect the instruments to produce a satisfying percussive timber, yet they will quickly realize that the cracks and thuds of the plastic globes are hardly musical in the traditional, orchestral sense. In this way, Graydon’s work relates to the development of avant-garde sound art and experimental music that has evolved since the early twentieth century. In 1913 the Italian painter and experimental composer Luigi Russolo wrote a manifesto called *The Art of Noises* in which he claimed that since the Industrial Revolution, the
human ear had become more receptive to the crude noise of urban, industrial life. Arguing that harmonious musical sounds were limited and outdated, he called for a new sonic panorama based on noise of all kinds and urged his readers to “cross a great modern capital with our ears more alert than our eyes.” Around this time he also created Intonarumori (“noise makers” in Italian), an elaborate band of experimental musical instruments that produced brash, industrial noises (Fig. 1). These wooden boxes housed intricate moving parts and metal horns attached to their exterior to amplify the explosions, buzzes, and hisses. Since that time a lineage of artists and musicians, from John Cage to Alvin Lucier, have forwarded non-standard approaches to sound and instruments, employing chance, randomization, and acoustic displacements in their conception of experimental sonic art forms.

What happens when such campaigns to embrace noise (not music) are translated to a bucolic sculpture park? The natural world is also loud and irregular when you stop to listen. While some visitors will play Graydon’s instrument, others might also hear the rustle of leaves caught in the wind, the low hum of a car’s engine driving through the park, or the buzz of a plane flying overhead. As Graydon’s installation enriches an appreciation of outdoor sounds, it also performs an act of displacement by bringing the hardware of artificial city lighting into a pastoral setting. While street lamps are easily ignored, here they are brought down to eye-level and made tactile and personal. Experiencing the artwork through touch and sound shifts the priority often afforded to sight as the primary
sense for apprehending the world. Unlike sight (which involves a separation between a viewer and the object that they are beholding), one is more often immersed or enveloped by sound, which literally moves the listener through vibrations. Similarly, we can come to know an object differently and perhaps more intimately through touch than through vision alone. While sight generally only extends across the surface of an object, other physical interactions can illuminate their inner structures (for example, knocking on a wooden box can reveal its hollowness). In *City Lights Orchestra*, sight, hearing, and touch are equally engaged. By their very design, the metal framework and semi-transparent lamps of *City Lights Orchestra* suggest its permeable status, as visitors wander through and around the work to perceive its arrangement inside and out (Fig. 2).

*City Lights Orchestra* continues ideas from Graydon’s past works that have involved sound, light, and sculpture. In 2007-8, he created *Free Verse* by arranging freestanding fluorescent tubes in clusters on the floor and in the corner of a gallery space. The bulbs were not plugged in; a projector cast flickering light onto their surfaces, reversing the expected source of illumination (Fig. 3). In contrast to the rectilinear fluorescent light sculptures of Dan Flavin, these bundles of bulbs splayed slightly outward like a bouquet of long-stemmed flowers. *Free Verse* coincided with another project called *Untitled (weathering steel)*, 2008 in which Graydon
made field recordings at Storm King Art Center in upstate New York near outdoor sculptures by Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Serra, and others. He then installed these ambient scores at the New Museum, New York, transferring the sonic experience of a sculpture park to an indoor gallery. Large-scale minimalist steel sculptures such as those by Serra are among the most physically imposing artworks of the twentieth century. By dissolving their form into sound, Graydon translated their obdurate monumentality into immersive immateriality. City Lights Orchestra similarly turns sturdy fixtures into contingent remnants.

The playful experience of City Lights Orchestra and its porous sound and light convey Graydon’s interest in the multisensory, embodied perception of sculpture. In their original urban setting, street lights are beacons, providing safety and direction. Since antiquity, street illumination has signaled a society’s order and communal care for (or surveillance of) its public. During the uprisings of the French Revolution in 1848 revolutionaries smashed street lamps in order to move through the city undetected. Others have similarly considered street lamps, whether oil or electric, as tools for social control or means to expose illicit nighttime actions. Here in deCordova’s Sculpture Park the lamps may carry these associations, but also illuminate other qualities of shared experience and sensory exploration. No longer a ubiquitous yet overlooked object that shines light, these musical lamps are playfully peculiar, inverting our expectations of sight, sound, and touch.

- Sarah Montross, Curator
CAPTIONS

Cover: Andy Graydon, City Lights Orchestra, 2018, used street lamps, steel, airline cable, Courtesy of the artist, Photograph by Clements Photography and Design, Boston.


Fig. 1: Luigi Russolo e Ugo Piatti con gli intonarumori, [anni ‘60 del XX secolo], Courtesy of Rovereto, Mart, Archivio del ‘900, fondo Russolo.

Fig. 2: Andy Graydon, City Lights Orchestra (detail), 2018, used street lamps, steel, airline cable, Courtesy of the artist, Photograph by Clements Photography and Design, Boston.

Fig. 3: Andy Graydon, Free Verse, 2008, Dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist.

Inside back cover: Andy Graydon, City Lights Orchestra, 2018, used street lamps, steel, airline cable, Courtesy of the artist, Photograph by Clements Photography and Design, Boston.
BIOGRAPHY

Andy Graydon was born in Maui, Hawaii in 1971. He earned an MFA in Radio, Television, and Film from Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, and a BA in Comparative History of Ideas from University of Washington, Seattle. Notable commissions and solo museum exhibitions include Fig.1 (these things we know) at the Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii (2015) and The Findings, The Frye Museum of Art, Seattle (2014). He has exhibited in group exhibition at venues including Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; and The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Graydon has received numerous awards and fellowships including a MacDowell Colony Residency (2017) and a Rhizome Commission for his project Untitled (plate tectonics). He lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

PLATFORM

PLATFORM is a series of one-person commissioned projects by early- and mid-career artists from New England, national, and international art communities that engage with deCordova’s unique landscape. The PLATFORM series lets artists expand their practice and visitors experience new approaches to contemporary sculpture.

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RELATED EVENTS

THUD Performance with City Lights Orchestra
Saturday, September 29, 12-2 pm

Experience Andy Graydon’s PLATFORM project activated by The Harvard Undergraduate Drummers (THUD), an experimental group that performs with nontraditional instruments, including brooms, dinnerware, and instruments they have built themselves.