



Cade Tompkins Projects

HYPERALLERGIC

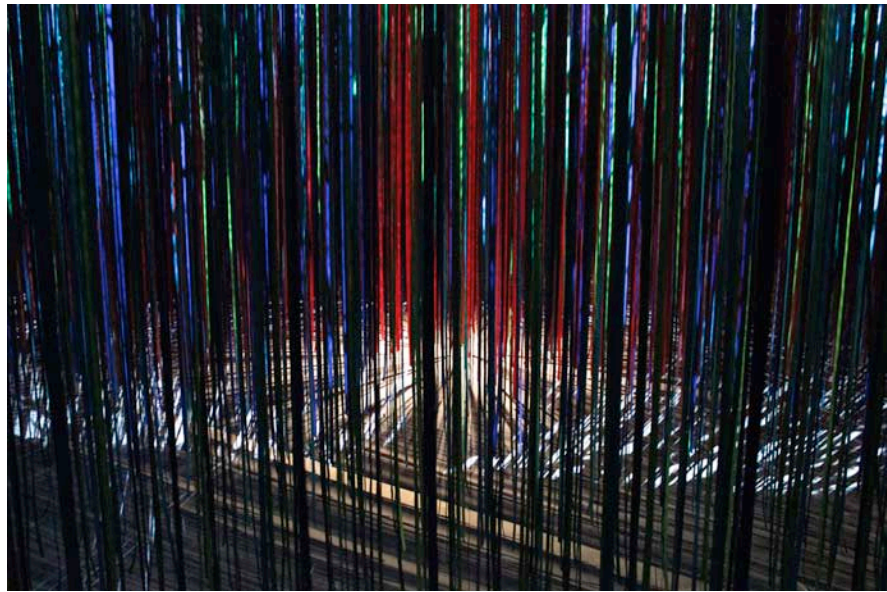
A Stroll Through a Forest of Ribbons That Simulates Synesthesia

Anne Patterson's installation *Pathless Woods* at the Ringling Museum of Art suggests a walk through the woods, despite having none of the literal characteristics of the outdoors.

by Sarah Rose Sharp

March 30, 2017

SARASOTA, Fla. — Most people have heard of synesthesia, a cognitive condition that causes the synesthete to conflate one sense for another, for example to taste colors, or perceive certain letters to light up or have personalities. But it occurred to me, as I stepped into the exhibition space for *Pathless Woods*, an



Pathless Woods by Anne Patterson at the Ringling Museum of Art, installation view (all images by the author for Hyperallergic)

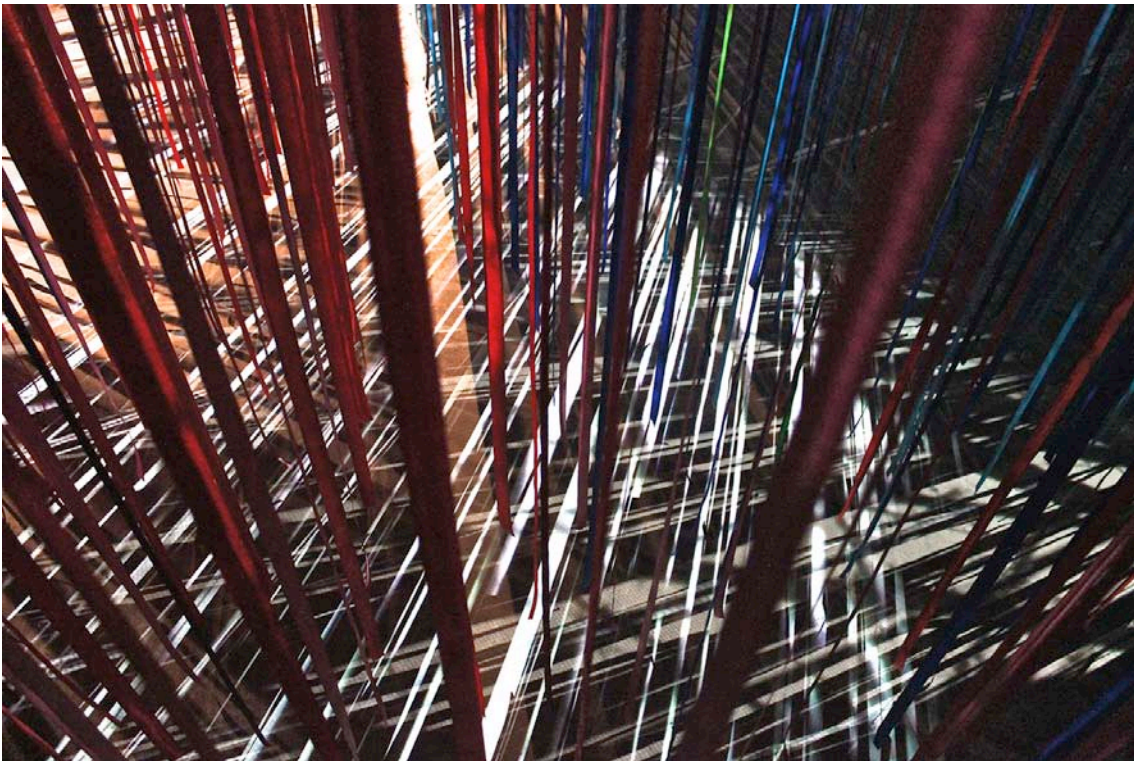
installation work by synesthetic artist Anne Patterson at the Ringling Museum of Art, that I had always held an abstracted view of what a synesthetic experience might feel like, and never formalized those thoughts in any concrete manner.

198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888



Cade Tompkins Projects

The good news is that Patterson has done the job for us, and quite a nice one of it at that, with an installation specifically built for the space at the Ringling. *Pathless Woods* is simple in its component parts: light, sound, and about 24 miles of ribbon in various colors. The ribbons are hung from the ceiling in a dense grid with fields of hot reds and pinks meshing and contrasting with areas of green, blue, and purple. Video projections by Adam Larsen throw branches, falling rain, and rushing water against the ephemeral and changing scrim of ribbons, while the air is permeated by scents concocted by artist Beau Rhee. The whole scene is soundtracked with composer Michael Gandolfi's lively orchestral work "The Garden of Cosmic Speculation."



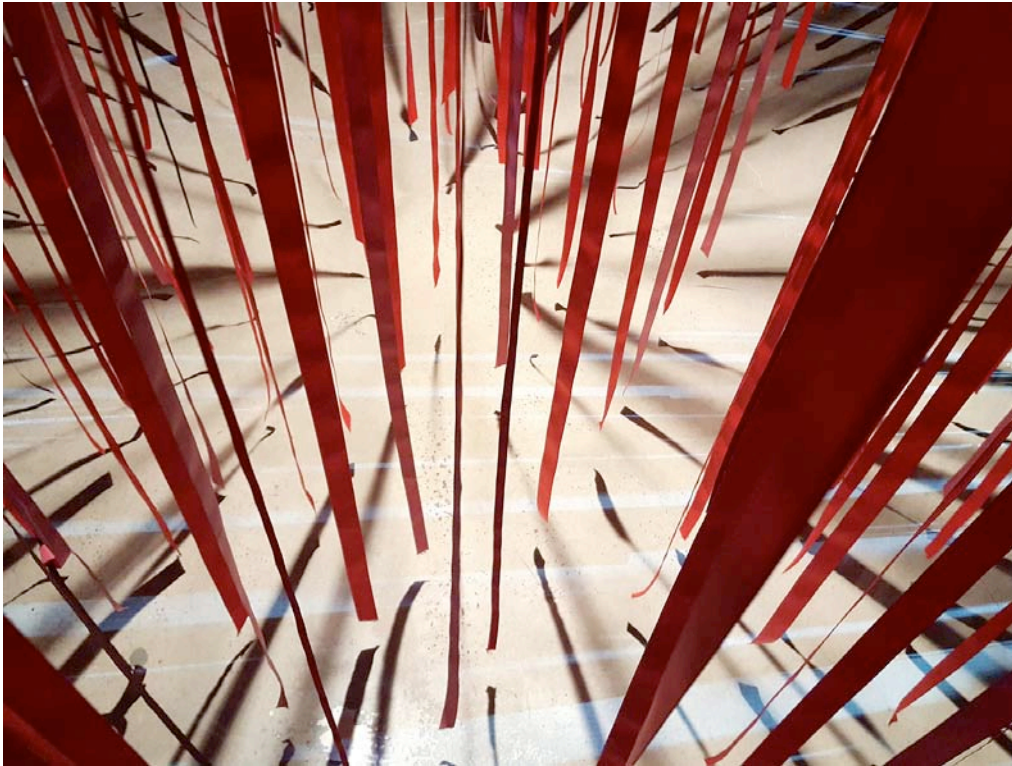
With frequent mood changes, sometimes quiet, and sometimes punctuated by bright horns, it helps invoke in the visitor a version of Patterson's synesthetic gifts, which happen largely in response to musical stimuli.

"When I hear music I see color and shape," she said in an email interview with Hyperallergic. "I use this gift a lot with my work. In the case of [*Pathless Woods*] I listened to the music, and specific sections triggered for me the colors I used in the piece. I also responded to the music by letting it guide me in picking the projected images that are inside the ribbons." Patterson also experiences synesthesia in connection with numbers, seeing them as personified, with genders, personalities, and even clothing. "Very weird, I know," she said.

198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888



Cade Tompkins Projects



The resulting feast for the senses is completed with touch, as viewers are invited to enter the space and wander through the field of ribbons by any path they see fit. The room is darkened, with the brightest point being a kind of circular clearing in the midst of the piece, surrounded by red ribbons. The color-coding and density of the ribbons correlate to emotional states.

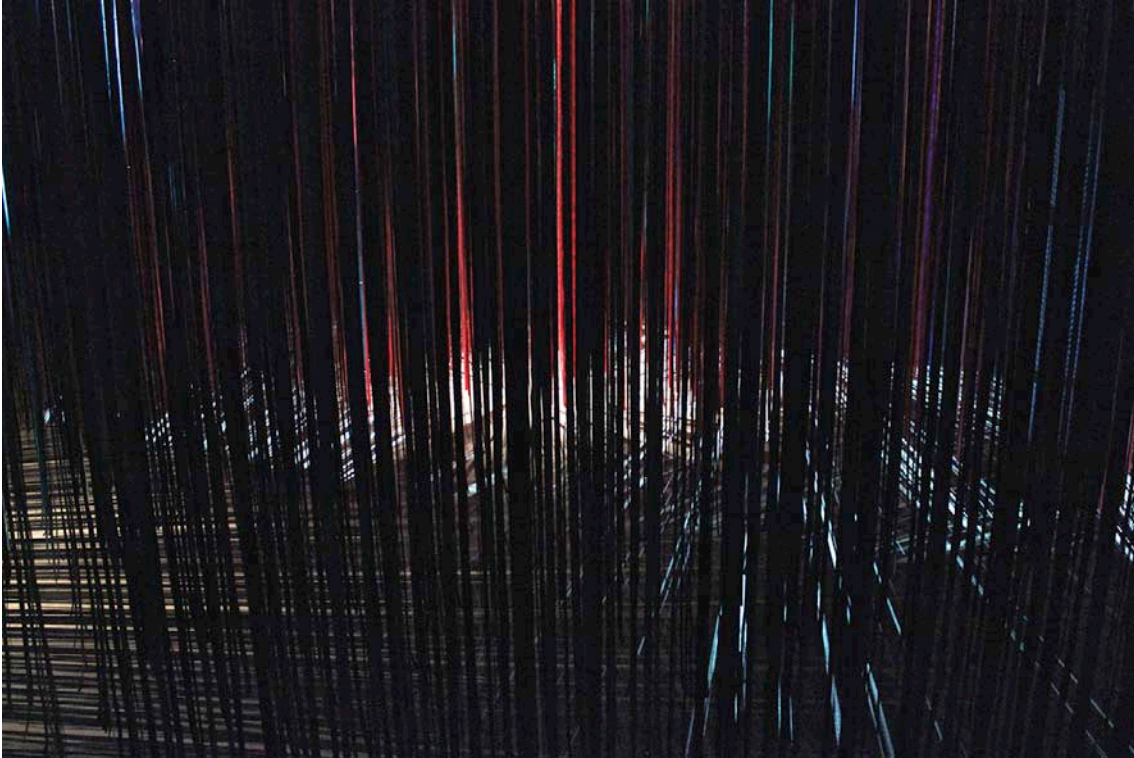
“The dark greens and purples on the left of the piece align with the emotionally darker parts of the music,” said Patterson. “The reds are the heart of the piece — that is also why the thickest ribbons are in the red section. The blues and bright greens on the right feel very joyous and energy-filled to me. It is as if we go through the dark places and into the heart to come out into the light.”

The work’s title is perhaps in reference to a poem by Lord George Gordon Byron, “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” the opening line of which reads: “There is a pleasure in the pathless woods.” There is, indeed, much pleasure to be taken in Patterson’s installation, and with the musical accompaniment on a roughly 20-minute loop, no need to hurry the journey. The combination of sensory experiences manages to very closely suggest a walk through the woods, despite having none of the literal characteristics of the outdoors. Ribbons act as gentle proxies for vegetation, brushing against you at close range and standing static from afar; the projections

198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888



Cade Tompkins Projects



simulate weather and shifting sunlight through the leaves; and the music gives a strong impression of the majesty of nature in sonic form. The general darkness of the environment manifests an effect akin to driving through dense fog — you can only see things as you come directly upon them, including other visitors to the piece, which occasions mysterious encounters in this forest of ribbons.

Pathless Woods is the product of community efforts, with 740 hours of labor by a group of volunteers under Patterson’s supervision (one imagine the Ringling assiduously harnessed the power of its surrounding retirement-age community). The artist remained hands-on throughout the process, affording volunteers as well as viewers the opportunity to make tactile connection with the work.

“It was like a swing circle or a cooking group,” said Patterson. “We were all using our hands at the same time in the same way to create a beautiful piece of art. I do love the fact that the viewer gets to feel the ribbons brushing up on their arms and shoulders in a way that is similar to the feeling those of us had in our hands as we cut, rolled, and tied the ribbons.” In fact, the final effect is akin to a theater piece, only complete as visitors enter and engage with the space.

198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888



Cade Tompkins Projects



With *Pathless Woods*, Patterson has done a lot with humble materials, creating a walk to remember. “Mediation is a large part of my life and I wanted *Pathless Woods* to feel like a meditative experience,” said Patterson. “I believe we can meditate with our eyes closed or widely open — any experience that takes us out of ourselves and our own repetitive thoughts and inner dialogues is for me meditative. I wanted to overload the viewer’s senses in a beautiful way to take them on a journey.”

There is a very strong sense of walking through a forest, which makes the piece quite successful, when you consider its constituent parts — ribbon, light, and sound — have very little to do with an actual forest. While every artist, to some degree, is trying to leverage their singular perception to create an accessible experience, it would be difficult to remain unmoved while surrounded by the forest that grew from the seeds of Patterson’s synesthetic gifts.

198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888