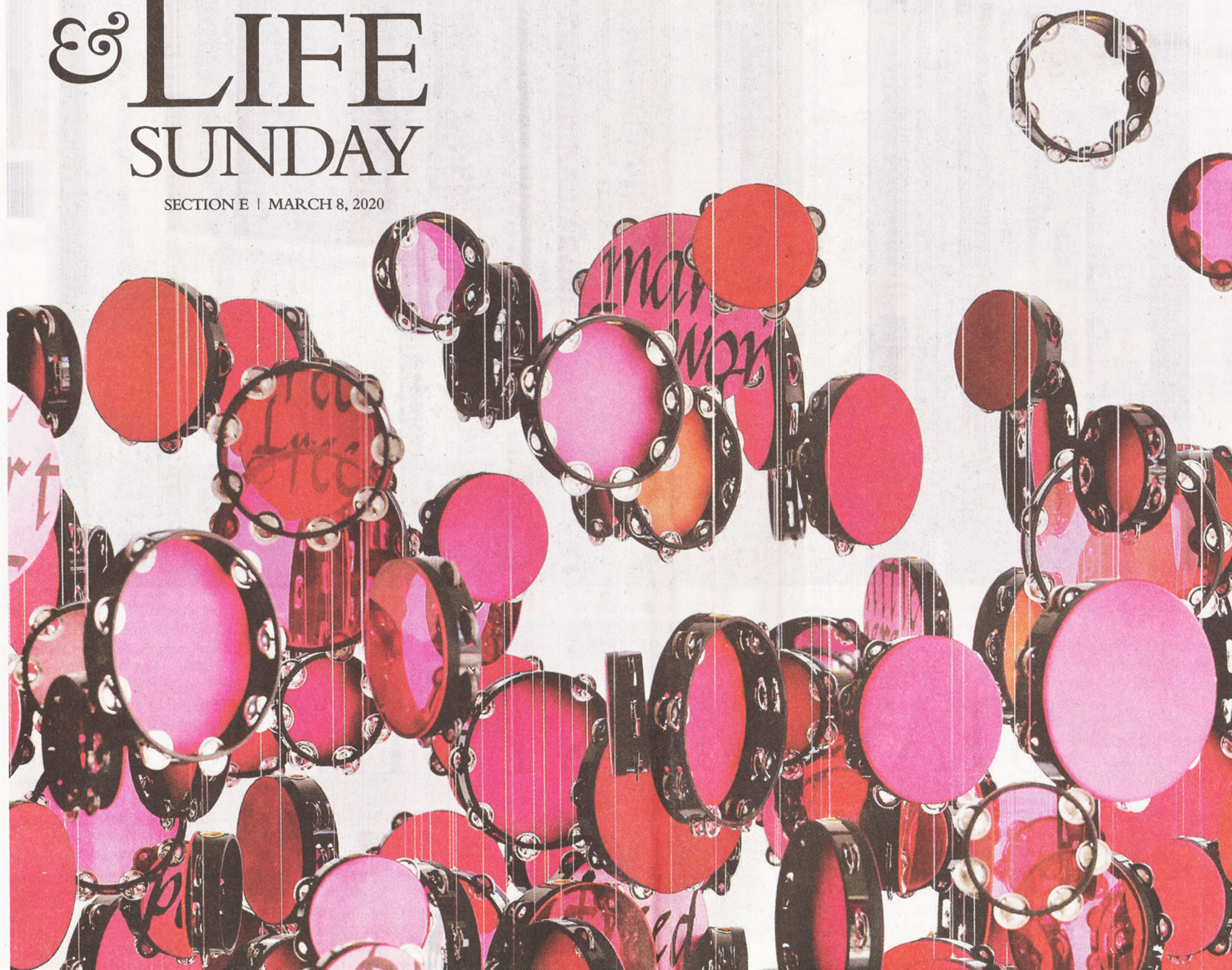


The Dallas Morning News

ARTS & LIFE SUNDAY

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OVERNIGHT SENSATIONS

At two new Dallas hotels, art is the draw. **By Mark Lamster, 8E**

Tom Fox/Staff Photographer

VISUAL ART

At the Dallas Contemporary, this rising artist is trying to seduce you.

By Darryl Ratcliff, 4E



BOOKS

Think coronavirus feels like something out of a sci-fi novel?

Here's how writers have imagined global outbreaks. **7E**



TRAVEL

Where to eat, play and stay now in Austin. **12E**

VISUAL ART

Sultry serenade

Step behind the curtain to share in Madagascar artist's explorations of mystery, seduction and sentimentality



DARRYL RATCLIFF

artslife@dallasnews.com

At first, the work is blurred, like looking at the sun with your eyes closed, the black curtain obscuring the white neon lights glowing against the museum wall. Then, after you peek through the slit of the curtain, the work emerges. The neon lights spell an evocative phrase that doubles as the exhibition title: "Serenade is not dead."

From the first moments of Joël Andrianomearisoa's "Serenade Is Not Dead," the artist is trying to seduce you. "I think serenade is a negotiation, of different temporalities, of geography, of lovers, a process of love," he says. This is the inaugural exhibition curated by the Dallas Contemporary's new senior curator, Laurie Ann Farrell.

Andrianomearisoa has many techniques, but let's start with the curtains.

These curtains, made from black fabrics the artist finds in markets in his native Madagascar, are omnipresent. Not only do they line the walls of the first gallery, they are also used in the second room of the show to obscure or hide nine of the installations that he has created, which he describes as chapters.

These curtains ripple with sensual and material vitality. They shimmer, they wink, they dress, they promise, they invite, they undress and they push away. If Andrianomearisoa had given us just the curtains, that would have been enough, yet his seduction continues when the viewer steps behind the curtains.

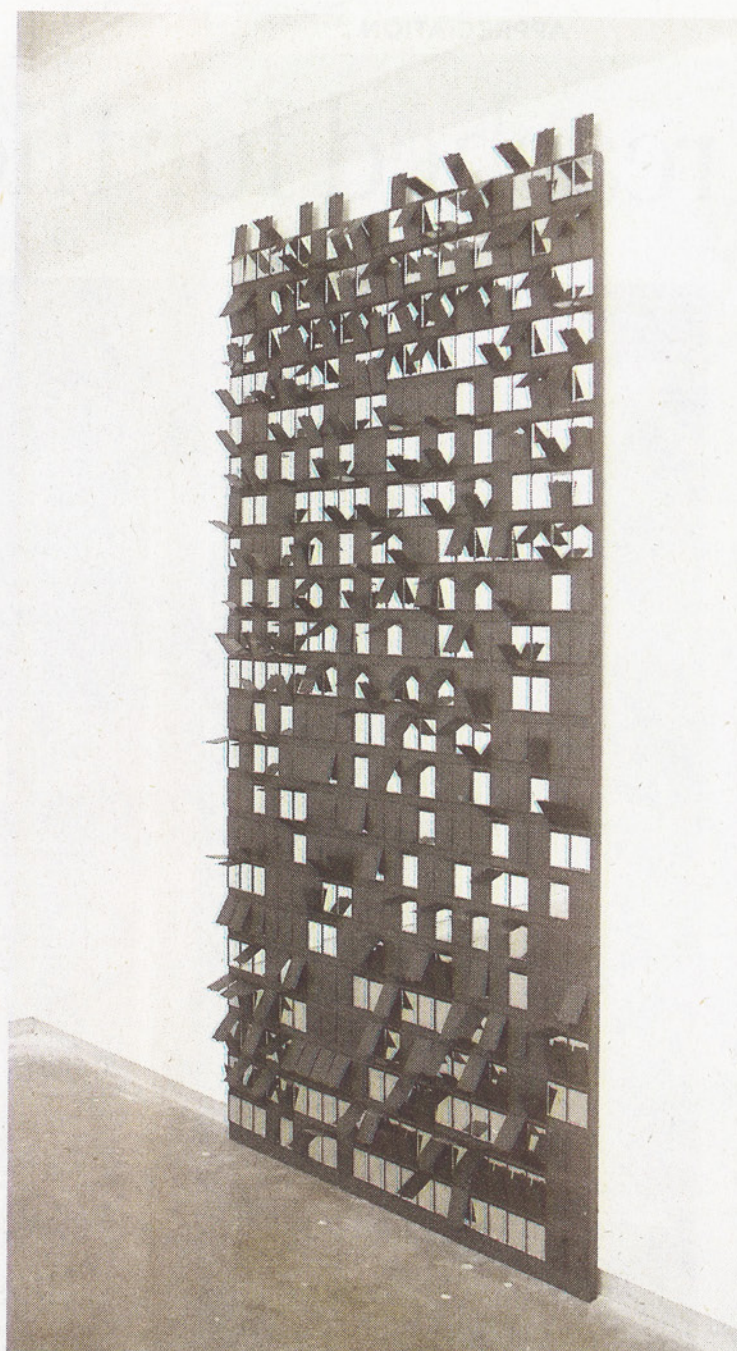
Visitors are greeted by a table of

black long-stemmed roses, an abstract painting on fabric and a clothing rack of black garments. It starts off as hangers with black string and later becomes couture dresses and jackets. Behind those vignettes are a large installation of black paper, a couple of shelves filled with found objects and a series of curtains stacked together.

Finally, on the last row, there is an installation of black compact mirrors that allow a partially obscured reflection, a poster of a shirtless young man with the French phrase *au hasard des jours* (random days) — which you are invited to take — and a rug (black, of course) made in Old World French style with the inclusion of black plastics and other forms of fibers. By the time you take the poster, you might need a cigarette.

Andrianomearisoa is creating an installation that attempts to return the ideas of mystery, humor, play, seduction and sentimentality to the viewer. In the hands of a lesser artist, it would be a cheap ploy. However, the joy of unwrapping his work is that every layer not only thrills but also adds more meaning to the story he is trying to tell.

Take, for example, one of the chapters in the form of a boutique store of items that he has harvested from around the globe. They're packaged and labeled with provocative language like the piece *Two for tea, a boy for you, a girl for you*, which features tea leaves that he found in Antananarivo, the capital



Photos by Nan Coulter/Special Contributor

Sentimental Negotiations is a gathering of black compact mirrors that allows a partially obscured reflection



Vestiges (detail) greets visitors to Andrianomearisoa's exhibition, "Serenade Is Not Dead," at Dallas Contemporary.

of Madagascar. Another piece, *Love Triangle*, contains a plastic triangle found in Paris. When I ask Andrianomearisoa about his thoughts on commerce, he responds, "Everything is for sale, but emotions are free."

It is interesting to think about what Andrianomearisoa is negotiating in "Serenade Is Not Dead." Fresh off being the first artist to represent Madagascar in the Venice Biennale, he has one of his vignettes depict a miniature version of his Venice installation. He is working through a higher profile in the art world. "Trying to be simple after Venice is very complicated," he says.

He is also negotiating the idea of Africa as a complex, emotional space and not just one of suffering. In fact, emotions can be viewed as materials and materiality in "Serenade Is Not Dead." The only body in the exhibition is on the poster that viewers are invited to take with them; Farrell says it has been taken over 600 times. It is perhaps the gesture he wants the viewer to take after experiencing a series of emotions — one last, long kiss goodbye.

Perhaps the message of the exhibition is, as Andrianomearisoa asserts, "We are all romantics."

Darryl Ratcliff is an artist, poet and cultural organizer based in Dallas. He is the co-founder of Ash Studios, *Creating Our Future* and *Michelada Think Tank*.

Details

"Serenade Is Not Dead" runs through March 15 at the Dallas Contemporary, 161 Glass St., Dallas. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; noon to 5 p.m. Sunday; closed Mondays. Free. dallascontemporary.org.