

HYPERALLERGIC

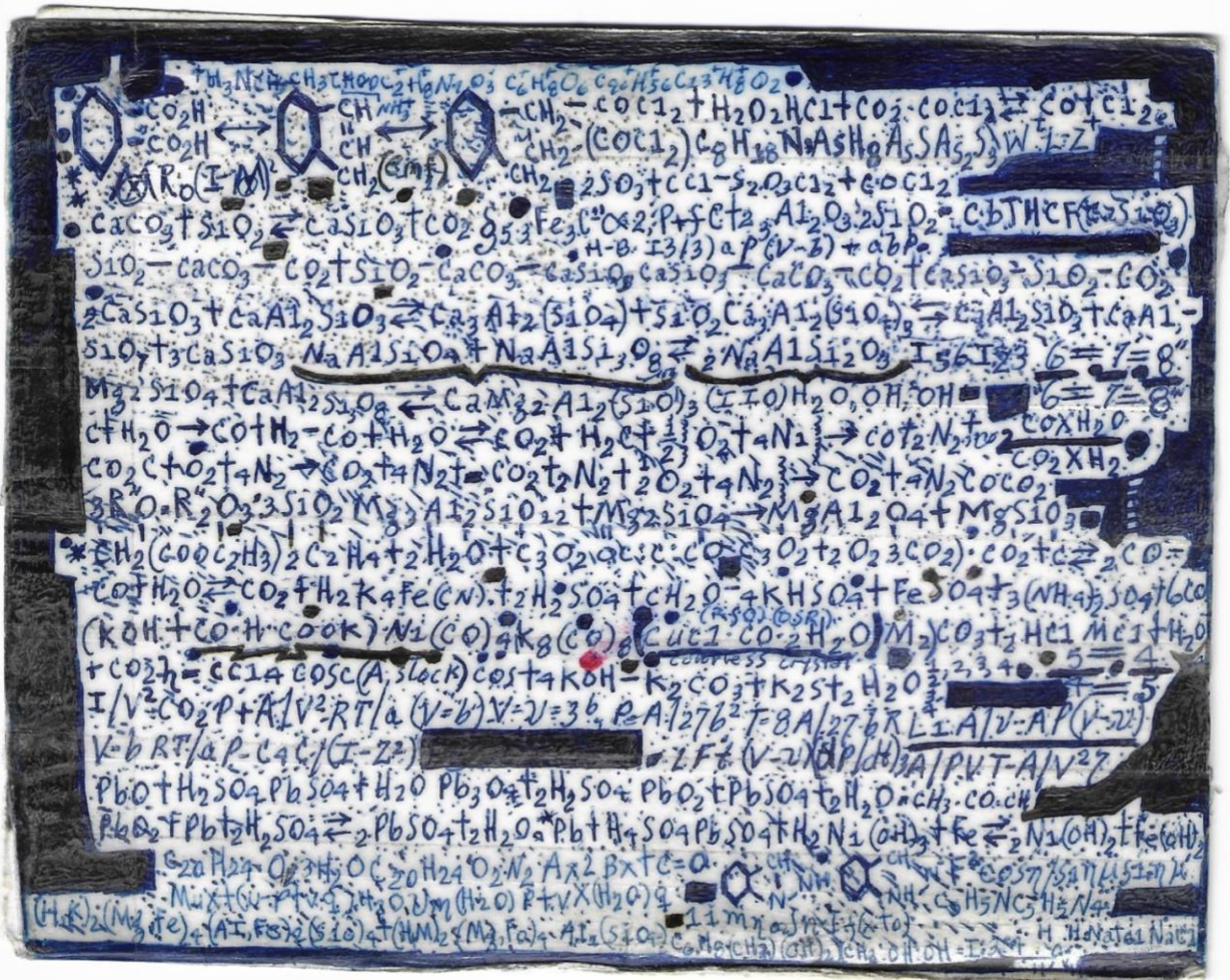
Art **Reviews**

The Musical Science of Melvin Way's Enigmatic Art

Way's drawings are not messages to be decoded but instead are renderings of our yearning to comprehend.



Albert Mobilio 19 hours ago

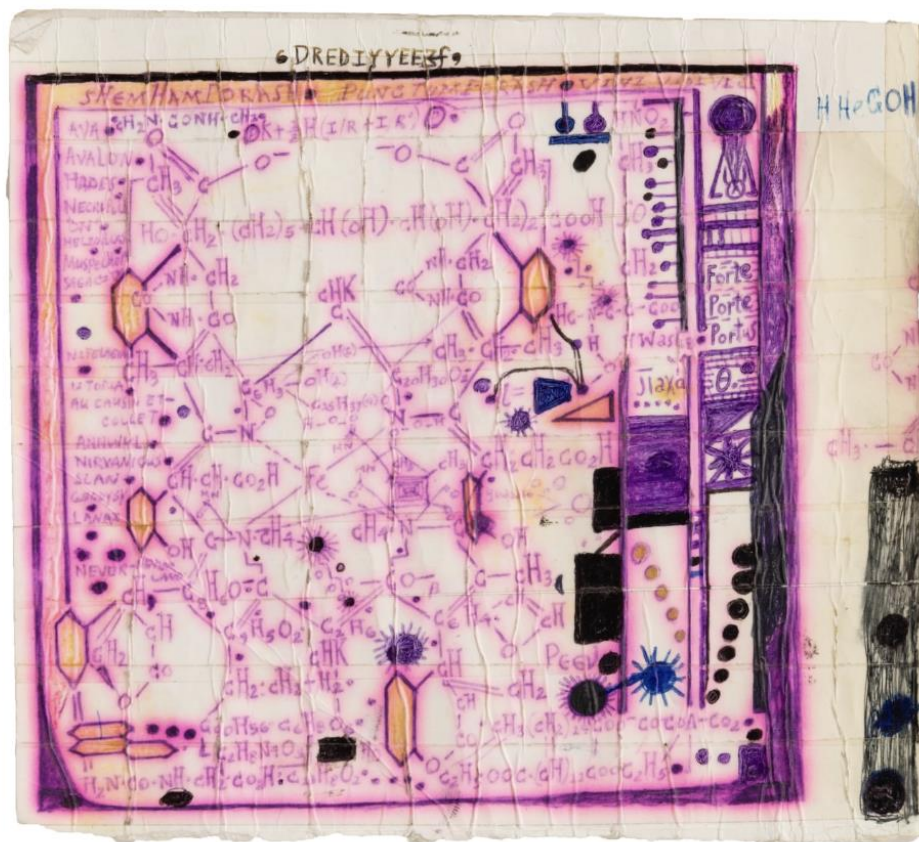


Melvin Way, "Ruler of the Universe" (c. 1996), ballpoint pen on paper, 5.5 x 7 inches (all images courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery)

Sometimes recognition comes too late: Melvin Way passed away this past February at the age of 70, just months before this solo exhibition. The artist's densely composed

drawings featuring mathematical and scientific notations have been exhibited in many group shows in recent years. However, the extensive *CO2 Blues* at Andrew Edlin Gallery offers the fullest view to date of his quixotic pursuit: to convey messages from an elusive realm of knowledge.

Born in South Carolina in 1954, Way came to New York in the early 1970s to study information technology. After being diagnosed with schizophrenia, he developed a drug problem, and eventually ended up unhoused. Despite his many difficulties, Way persisted in making art, and while involved in an art workshop in 1989 organized by a nonprofit, his work caught the attention of artist and curator Andrew Castrucci. His small drawings, made on scraps of paper, sometimes taped together, are exercises in intense focus. Using different colored ballpoint pens, Way inscribed dozens of diminutive lines of physics, chemistry, and mathematics formulae. Robert Walser's microscripts come immediately to mind, not to mention unnerving dreams one might have had in school the night before a chemistry exam.



Melvin Way, "Purple Haze" (c. 2008), pen on found paper, 7.5 x 8.25 inches

In a 2017 documentary directed by the French filmmaker Bruno Decharme, Way makes a series of outlandish claims — for example, that he traveled to Jupiter, Mars, and Pluto, and named those planets. But he also speaks about his artistic intentions. As he pens the letter “S” on paper, he elaborates on its import: “It means ... all things equal. It also means untouchable. My ‘S’ is also one-fifth a second in time. It’s also the solar system, the universe.” Indeed, the letter signifies everything and nothing; it is both sign and anti-sign. Its true meaning hidden by its multivalence. Way’s cryptic divinations conjure an intoxicating, even frightening beauty. His is the language of a most personal, ever-fleeting self.



Melvin Way, "Fauvi" (c. 1989), ballpoint pen and Scotch tape on paper, 10.75 x 8.5 inches