

Jonny Nash/Suzanne Kraft: Framed Spaces: Selected Works 2014-2017

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November 25, 2018



If you thought *Melody as Truth* was just an elaborate branding effort for the music of ambient artists Jonny Nash and Suzanne Kraft, *Framed Spaces: Selected Works 2014-2017* won't dissuade you. Though the Amsterdam label released very good albums by Tourist Kid and Palta this year, the vast majority of their music is by the two head honchos. Their first compilation is devoted to them and them alone, combining a smattering of tracks from each of their releases on the label, save some of their lower-stakes albums and the 2017 collaboration *Passive Aggressive*. Per Bandcamp, this is the "first chapter in an ongoing story"; maybe the second chapter will focus more on the new blood.

Nash, whose music occupies side one, seems the more wide-eyed of the two. His music is sentimental and militantly pretty, almost new-age, in thrall to its influences from the early Eno-dominated era of ambient music. *Eden* in particular suggests Laraaji's earliest tapes in its phased-out psychedelic soup and use of zither and gamelan bells. When there's a rhythm, it's usually the noncommittal drift of a hand drum. If not for their spit-shined and unapologetically digital production, most of his tracks could have been on *Ambient 5*.

Kraft, whose music occupies side two, is a little more forward-thinking. There's often a light drum machine pitter-patter beneath his soundscapes, suggesting an influence from club music or hip-hop, and in keeping with the Teutonic edge of his stage name (he was born Diego Herrera), he's more open to dissonance and glitchy effects.

I prefer Nash's music—it's a little dreamier, easier to get lost in—but Kraft's side hangs together a little better, drawing as it does from two albums rather than three. Still, you're better off listening to the original records. If you're familiar with the originals, this compilation won't serve much of a purpose; only four out of its 27 tracks are unreleased, and they slip easily into the record's 140-minute fabric. The chronological sequencing doesn't help, as there are only tiny pockets of each album's mood until they fade into the next.

Ambient compilations like this are tricky. In a genre where the goal is so often to get lost in the music, it can be irritating to switch sounds and visions every few tracks. At least on compilations where each artist gets one track we come to expect a bumpy ride, but *Framed Spaces*

seduces us long enough with each mood that we settle into a comfortable rhythm before being violently jerked somewhere else.

But the flaws of *Framed Spaces* highlight how good the individual albums are and what enchanting spells they cast during their runtime. The tracks here are culled from Nash's *Phantom Actors*, *Exit Strategies* and *Eden* and Kraft's *Talk from Home* and *What You Get for Being Young*. With the exception of *Exit Strategies*, whose Robin Guthrie pastiche is a tad too worshipful, these are all among the decade's best ambient records. They're the kind of albums we don't want to ever end. Here, they end too soon.