

THE NASHER | SPRING 2022 | SOUND ISSUE

THE NASHER



TAVARES STRACHAN OLIVIA BLOCK MICHAEL ELMGREEN DAVID BRESKIN LUKE FOWLER
NINA BEIER CHRISTOPHER BLAY FRANCISCO MORENO MARIN SULLIVAN CHRISTINA KUBISCH

SOUND ISSUE



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Nasher Sculpture Center

FRONT COVER:
Olivia Block (b. 1970). *The Speed of Sound in Infinite Copper*, 2022.
Sound and video installation. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

INSIDE:
Nadine Robinson (b. 1968). *Coronation Theme: Organon*, 2008. Speakers,
sound system, mixed media. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, given by
John F. Wieland Jr. in memory of Marion Hill, 2008.175.

Dick Higgins (1938–1998). *The Thousand Symphonies*, 1968.
Sheet of printed musical composition paper shot with machine gun,
22 3/8 x 17 1/2 in. (56.8 x 44.5 cm). Photo: Fred Wilson.

BACK COVER:
Christina Kubisch engaging in an *Electrical Walk* in Oslo, Norway, May 2019.
Photo: Frank Paul. © Christina Kubisch.

ON SOUND

In the early years of the last century, artists involved in the invention of abstract or “nonobjective” painting imagined works that mirrored their understanding of music as a fully abstract art form; one that acts powerfully and immediately upon the senses, the intellect, and the emotions. But if music served as ideal and inspiration for early abstract painting, later in the 20th century it largely fell to sculptors to begin producing works that engaged with sound and experimental music.

That makes sense. Sound moves through space, which sculpture occupies and/or defines. Sound strikes us as insubstantial, yet it can be physically felt, while a traditional understanding of sculpture involves tangible physical presence. The physical substances out of which sculptures are made all carry distinct sonic properties.

It was in that last point—the sonic properties of metal—that artist and designer Harry Bertioia found inspiration for his sounding sculptures. Having dedicated the largest share of his career to working in metal, he realized he could create sculptures that would emit a wide and distinctive range of sound, and make possible a new form of music.

Bertioia's sounding sculptures, 23 of which are included in the Nasher's retrospective *Harry Bertioia: Sculpting Mid-Century Modern Life*, are but one component of a remarkably diverse practice that encompassed furniture and jewelry design, monotypes, domestically scaled sculptures, and a large body of impressive public commissions. Our retrospective is unique in that it is the only exhibition yet to feature all aspects of this oeuvre. But it is, in my opinion, Bertioia's sounding sculptures that may turn out to be his most distinctive and influential body of work. And it is these sculptures, in turn, that inspired two ancillary components of our show.

For *Sightings: Olivia Block*, media artist and composer Olivia Block created a new, interactive work for our Corner Gallery based on recordings she made from the sounding sculptures in our exhibition. Fragments of these recordings are activated by the movement and position of the audience. ‘SCULPTING SOUND: Twelve Musicians Encounter Bertioia’ offered a six-concert series, each concert dedicated to a particular instrument, in which 12 world-renowned musicians performed duets, with one artist animating Bertioia's sounding sculptures while the second accompanied on their primary instrument.

Finally, Bertioia's sounding sculptures served as inspiration for the central theme of this issue of *The Nasher*, sound and sculpture. That theme or, perhaps, thread is manifest in many of this issue's articles and sections. These pages may offer some inkling of the multifarious ways in which sculpture and sound intersect, the uses artists make of sound, and the subtle yet profound impacts sound can have on the experience of art. I hope you enjoy this issue, and look forward to seeing you at the Nasher.

Jeremy Strick
Director

P.S. You'll note at the back of this magazine a special pull-out section dedicated to the work of our 2022 Nasher Prize Laureate, Nairy Baghramian. Nairy is a truly extraordinary artist whose beautiful, evocative work provokes countless questions, including about the nature of sculpture itself. We are so excited to be celebrating her this April. When the Nasher Prize jury voted to award this year's prize to Nairy, they were unaware that we were planning a major show of her work for this fall. So visitors to the Nasher will have the opportunity to encounter Nairy's work twice: On view now is a small presentation at the very front of our museum, in the Public Gallery, and in October we'll open a large show in our upstairs gallery and on our exterior terraces. I know you'll enjoy getting to know Nairy and her work in the months to come.

CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTOPHER BLAY

Christopher Blay is the chief curator of the Houston Museum of African American Culture. The Liberian-born American artist, writer, and curator was the news editor at *Glasstire* magazine from 2019–2021 and served as curator for the Art Corridor Galleries at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth for the 10 years prior to *Glasstire*. As an artist, Blay uses photography, video, sculpture, and performance in exhibitions, and his work considers the Black experience in America.



OLIVIA BLOCK

Olivia Block is a renowned media artist and composer who, over the past 30 years, has forged an influential career in experimental music and sound installation. In addition to a discography of over 20 solo and collaborative recordings, Block has performed and exhibited around the world including installations and premieres in Europe, North America, and Asia at venues such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; and *La Biennale di Venezia 52nd International Festival of Contemporary Music*.

LUKE FOWLER

Luke Fowler is a Scottish artist, filmmaker, and musician who has developed a practice that is, at the same time, singular and collaborative, poetic and political, structural and documentary, archival and deeply human. With an emphasis on communities of people, outward thinkers, and the history of the left, his 16 mm films tell the stories of alternative movements in Britain, from psychiatry to photography to music to education. While some of his early films deal with music and musicians as subjects, in later works sound itself becomes a key concern.



BRANDON KENNEDY

Brandon Kennedy is an occasional artist, book scout/collector, freelance curator, and writer currently based in Dallas. For several years, Kennedy was the director of exhibitor relations at the Dallas Art Fair. He regularly covers North Texas artists for *Patron* magazine and occasionally contributes to *Fine Books & Collections* magazine.

BLAKE LINDSAY

Blake Lindsay is a motivational speaker, author of *Blind For a Purpose: Turning Life-Challenges Into Purpose In Life*, and communications director at Envision Dallas (formerly Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind). He speaks on blindness and the ways in which visual descriptions of art can help visually impaired people understand it in the same way that people with normal sight can.



FRANCISCO MORENO

Francisco Moreno is an artist that lives and works in Mexico City and Dallas. He received a BFA in painting from the University of Texas at Arlington and an MFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. In 2016, he received an Artist Microgrant from the Nasher to start the production of his *Chapel*, which was acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art. Moreno has had solo exhibitions at OFG.XXX, Erin Cluley Gallery, the Latino Cultural Center, and COAM in Madrid, Spain.



KEN SHIMAMOTO

Ken Shimamoto has written for publications including *Fort Worth Weekly* and the *Dallas Observer*. He played guitar in the proto-punk repertory band *Stoogeaphilia* and made banging and scraping noises in the experimental combo *Hentai Improvising Orchestra*. He blogs at *The Stash Dauber* and posts guitar videos on his YouTube channel. Ken lives in Fort Worth with his wife and their cat.



MARIN SULLIVAN

Marin Sullivan (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is a Chicago-based art historian, curator, educator, and consultant. She is the director of the *Harry Bertoia Catalogue Raisonné* and co-curator of *Harry Bertoia: Sculpting Mid-Century Modern Life*. Sullivan specializes in the histories of modern and contemporary sculpture, especially its interdisciplinary, intermedial dialogues with photography, design, and the built environment.



CAITLIN WOOLSEY

Caitlin Woolsey is an art historian and poet who specializes in the historical confluence of visual art, performance, and media. She is the assistant director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and lecturer in the Williams Graduate Program in the History of Art. She is at work on a book exploring the intersections of sound technology, experimental poetry, and expanded collage practices in the decades following World War II.





My friend Fred Holston often reminds me how, during a particularly dark emotional time, they would come to the Nasher garden each Sunday at noon to go and stand inside the Richard Serra sculpture *My Curves Are Not Mad* and listen to the bells of the Cathedral de Guadalupe toll out the hour from up the road. Closing their eyes, Fred would listen as the thick steel sides of the sculpture absorbed the bell tolls, trapping them and making them private. “It was my church, and it saved my life,” they say, without a hint of drama, only joy—“the chorus of my enlightenment.”

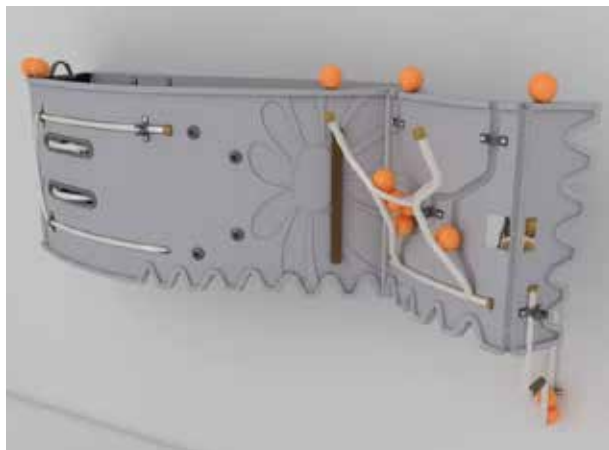
While our current exhibition *Harry Bertoia: Sculpting Mid-Century Modern Life* was being installed, I had the pleasure of watching co-curator Marin Sullivan activate Bertoia’s sounding sculptures, or tonals, installed in the gallery. The sound echoed off the stone walls of the space, growing and growing until the room felt full of it, compelling me to turn to our chief curator, Jed Morse, to say that I now understood the architecture of our Renzo Piano-designed museum in a whole new way. The classical temples Piano had in mind when he built the Nasher suddenly carried a layered meaning as the near-liturgical sound of these simple metal instruments, which wave like blades of grass when strummed, invisibly swelled within the limits of the building.

This issue of *The Nasher* is dedicated to how sound, by virtue of its contingent relationship to physical things—sculpture, buildings, the landscape, our bodies—can describe the ‘internal life of something,’ as artist Luke Fowler says it in his interview here, ‘Good Vibrations,’ with Nasher exhibition artist Olivia Block. More to the point, this issue is dedicated to the way we absorb vibrations such as these, and how the experience of sound changes one’s mind, changes one’s life.

Let’s have a listen.

Lucia Simek
Editor in Chief
lsimek@nashersculpturecenter.org

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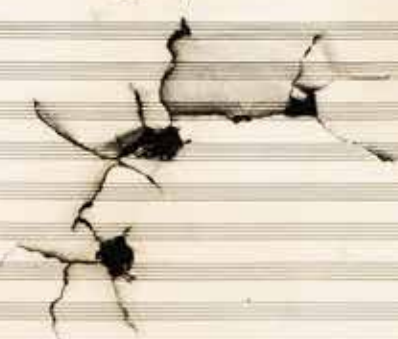
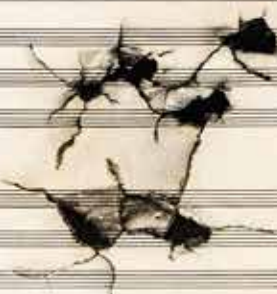
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Symphony No. 405 462

by Duk Hagins

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COLUMNS

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHT
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NEW KEYS

B.O.B.O. (Boat O.A.R. (Oceanic Auto-Reclaimer))

A dynamic new sculpture—part machine, part musical instrument—brings whimsy to the Nasher collection.

JED MORSE



Detroit-born, Dallas-based artist Jeff Gibbons's varied artistic pursuits and philosophical perspective, incorporating found objects, movement, and sound, coalesce in an amusing and engaging sculpture which has recently joined the Nasher Sculpture Center collection. The work considers an episode of great personal significance and even greater implications for humanity and, like many of Gibbons's sculptures, *B.O.B.O. (Boat O.A.R. (Oceanic Auto-Reclaimer))* is a functioning machine.

B.O.B.O. is composed of a variety of objects oriented abnormally: an air organ is propped on its side atop a chair tipped on its front. A taut string supports a tube extending upward from the side of the air organ and winds its way through the keys, depressing one, which draws an intermittent low note from the organ, suggesting the thrumming of engines and recalling movie scores meant to build drama and suspense. The air from the organ keeps a ball spinning at the top of the air tube. The ball has two faces drawn on it, one smiling, one frowning, cycling randomly through a range of suggested emotions, like the low-fi version of the myriad emoticons on a smartphone—happy, sad, and whatever feelings sideways or upside down smiling and frowning faces might suggest. The power cord on the floor traces a looping line from

outlet to organ, contrasting with the straight lines of the tightly pulled string supporting the air tube. A mushroom mounted to it seems to sprout from the back of the organ. The front of the organ sports a rendering of floating ice factories that Gibbons made to illustrate his idea for an invention to help counteract global warming and create more fresh drinking water. The idea expanded upon earlier sculptures he had made using refrigeration equipment that grew ice in beautiful forms and patterns. It also serves here as a remnant of a poignant episode in his life, as described by the artist:

This piano is a boat is a glacier is a life is a worry is a piano. Several years ago, I designed machines whose purpose is to create glaciers while simultaneously creating fresh water from salt water. I spoke about the project at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington D.C., and sought a patent, but I was too broke to afford one and too disconnected from anyone who could help. I just saw someone get a substantial award for creating the same thing several years after. So it goes.

The title for the work, *B.O.B.O. (Boat O.A.R. (Oceanic Auto-Reclaimer))*, is also the name Gibbons gave to his invention and underscores the affection he typically places on inanimate objects, activating and personifying them—

cast-off, downtrodden objects as stand-ins for human experiences. The sculpture, and the project to which it refers, also point to a faith in humanity that persistently alternates with antipathy, like the bobbing, spinning faces on the ball. The sculpture encapsulates the range of feeling around the intractable problem of climate change, recognizing that the grandiose solution proposed (and pursued by another), could save the world or simply be another well-meaning folly that ultimately does more harm than good.

The work by Gibbons is a significant addition to the Nasher collection, continuing the Nasher's acquisition of important works by Texas artists and its more recent support of artists in the region. The work expands the lineage of Dada, represented in the collection by the founding presence of Jean Arp, and adds to the Nasher's growing collection of found object constructions—one of the most significant advances in art of the last 100 years—running through the collection from Joan Miró to Elliott Hundley and including Texas artists Jim Love and David McManaway. It also resonates with works by Jonathan Borofsky that incorporate sound, motion, and a sense of whimsy.

Jeff Gibbons (b. 1982). *B.O.B.O. (Boat O.A.R. (Oceanic Auto-Reclaimer))*, 2020. Air organ, chair, ball, mushroom, foam, digital print, tacks, matchbook, string, 75 x 80 x 17 in. (190.5 x 203.2 x 43.2 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, acquired with generous support from Charles Dee Mitchell. Photo: Kevin Todora.

While at a museum, we are asked to keep our curious hands away from the artwork. I have managed to sidestep this to some degree by becoming a conservator at the Nasher, where I have the luxury of handling, cleaning, and even treating all types of materials. Even so, there are surfaces I only handle when wearing gloves. This understanding has come from training and experience; the most impactful lessons have come from seeing damage done by unnoticed fingerprints that with time have etched into delicate metal surfaces due to an interaction with the oils a gloveless hand can leave behind. The terms “delicate” and “metal” may seem contradictory, but in thinking about the sounding sculptures by Harry Bertoia, we can explore the challenges that make these words more synonymous.

The sounding sculptures are not only a conservation challenge due to their materiality, but also because of their purpose: to be touched so that the elements may strike against one another and resonate. As a caretaker of artwork, my preference is to limit touching any materials, especially uncoated metal. However, caretaking comes with acknowledging the inherent intent of an artwork. For these sculptures, the material is selected based on its ability to produce sound; the state of the surface is a distant second to this aspect. For this reason, many of these works exist with varying levels of dark patina, a result of decades of handling and thereby sound-making.

It was sound and media artist Olivia Block who reminded me of Bertoia’s knowledgeable selection of metal alloys that would resonate upon interaction. Alloys like bronze and brass are fairly commonplace in collections; however, his

experimentation with beryllium copper, Monel (a nickel and copper-rich alloy), and the trademarked Inconel (a nickel-chromium alloy), to name a few, makes for exciting potential conservation research.

If you imagine a metal artwork featured in a museum, you might think of the resilient copper-tin alloy bronze. Due to chemical patinas, and a wax coating if displayed outdoors, bronze artworks remain relatively stable in the right environment. Brass is a copper-zinc alloy often found in its raw state in modern art collections. The bright color of untreated brass has been favored by artists including Arp, Brancusi, and Judd, but unlike bronze, it is difficult to maintain because of its tendency to tarnish (i.e., oxidize, corrode, develop natural patina).

The tendency of an alloy to tarnish can correspond with the conductivity of the predominant metal. In its pure form, copper is highly conductive (think of electrical wiring in your home) and will react with pollutants in the atmosphere to develop a colorful patina. Unlike the patina chemically applied to a bronze, this natural patina is not as stable and will continue to change.

In addition to conducting electricity, some copper alloys successfully conduct sound. There is a reason the horn section of an orchestra is also referred to as the brass section. While copper loses some conductivity with the addition of other components, the zinc in brass offers strength necessary for forming instruments. A similar correlation can be found in Bertoia’s use of beryllium copper; the addition of beryllium allows for the production of stronger, corrosion-resistant copper alloy wire, without sacrificing its ability to conduct sound.

THE SCIENCE OF INTERACTION
The Nasher’s conservator considers the sound-conducting properties of metal alloys in Harry Bertoia’s sculptures.

NO TWO SURFACES THE SAME



Judd



Giacometti



Moore



Newman

Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1976. The aluminum surface of this Judd progression has been anodized, a surface treatment that both passivates and electrolytically colors the metal.

Alberto Giacometti, *Venice Woman IV (Femme de Venise IV)*, 1956; **Henry Moore**, *Working Model for Oval with Points*, 1968–69. In this instance, we can see two unique treatments of bronze. The Moore sculpture is a luminous golden brown, while the Giacometti is textural and varied.

Barnett Newman, *Here III*, 1965–66. While both of the metals featured in this Newman are composed of iron, they are two very different looking steels. One is a bright, brushed stainless, and the other is a weathering steel.

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Newman

Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1976. The aluminum surface of this Judd progression has been anodized, a surface treatment that both passivates and electrolytically colors the metal.

Alberto Giacometti, *Venice Woman IV (Femme de Venise IV)*, 1956; **Henry Moore**, *Working Model for Oval with Points*, 1968–69. In this instance, we can see two unique treatments of bronze. The Moore sculpture is a luminous golden brown, while the Giacometti is textural and varied.

Barnett Newman, *Here III*, 1965–66. While both of the metals featured in this Newman are composed of iron, they are two very different looking steels. One is a bright, brushed stainless, and the other is a weathering steel.



A SENSE OF PLACE

The narrator of the Nasher’s audio guide for the blind uses his sense of sound to tour the galleries and gardens.

BLAKE LINDSAY

With a snap of his fingers, Blake Lindsay can tell you the size of a room. Lindsay, who has been blind since birth, perceives his surroundings through sound and first came to the Nasher six years ago as part of a focus group to help the museum learn how visually impaired people could better explore and understand its sculptures and spaces. One of the initiatives established from that focus group was the writing and recording of verbal descriptions about the sculptures on view, which the Nasher Education team now writes, and Lindsay—who, as a radio announcer, has a velvet timbre in his voice—records the descriptions for the Nasher phone app. He reads the verbal descriptions using speech software, memorizing and recording them one line at a time, seamlessly connecting the sentences, and then sends them to blind colleagues and asks them if they can visualize the sculpture before considering the descriptions complete. The descriptions have become an important resource for the community at Envision Dallas (formerly Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind) and any Nasher guest that might benefit from a descriptive auditory guide.

Blake Lindsay joined Nasher Education staff on a crisp day last fall in anticipation of the upcoming Harry Bertoia exhibition to give insights on how sound can aid an art viewing experience.

-Lynda Wilbur, Manager of Access and Outreach Programs, Nasher Sculpture Center

I always liked echo, ever since I was a little boy. I always had my dad honk his horn in the tunnels that we would go through. So, I’ve always enjoyed coming in the Nasher and the reverb, the sense of tall ceilings, and wide-open area for the sculptures. I just feel like it’s a wide-open territory around me. It kind of gives you a feeling of freedom. It’s a good feeling. Sounds like you couldn’t run into anything.

I also love it when I can hear talking and interviews. Words really make things come alive to [the blind], and then a lot of time, sounds give us an image. But it’s just amazing, the imagination expansion I get from a sound, because I see with my ears, basically. I can stand in the middle of a room and snap my finger [snaps finger], and I can typically tell you the dimensions of the room, depending on where I’m standing. So, sound is really a lot to us. Words, sounds, bring forth color and imagination.

Sometimes, if there are little sound buffers, that can help me to get a little closure, even. Like, if there are a couple of couches in here or something to kind of buffer the sound a little bit, then that takes some of the reverb away and I’m able to become more accurate. It’s just amazing what we get out of sound and conversations. People’s descriptions of precisely how they see things make us be able to try to perceive it in the same way, so we really feel like we don’t miss out. People are always

feeling sorry for blind people at first, but after talking to me for 30 minutes, they no longer do because they realize there’s so much that we can still gain out of life.

“WORDS, SOUNDS, BRING FORTH COLOR AND IMAGINATION.”

[But] I would go to art museums, and I couldn’t stand it because they wouldn’t let us touch anything, and there were no audio descriptions. And then, SMU, about a decade ago, said “Blake, we want you to come over to the Meadows Museum and kind of see what we’re doing to make it as blind-friendly as we can. And you can give us suggestions along the way.” That really thrilled me that these students were wanting to do that. And the next thing I knew, I got to come to the Nasher six years ago, and you all were determined to give us a good experience. I remember giving some feedback. My main mention was that audio descriptions would be really helpful with all your sculptures, and you almost immediately made that happen. I literally, through your description, could visualize what everybody was seeing. You gave dimensions and what the motivation was for the artist. So, all of a sudden, I have a love for art that I honestly never had had as an adult. And now, [being the voice of the Nasher verbal descriptions for

the blind] has made me even more thoughtful about how bright these artists are. They have imaginations and they put it to life.

Out in the garden, I can hear a quiet highway noise and it’s not loud and consuming me at all. It’s a nice sound, actually. It sounds like you’re in the city, but it kind of sounds like you’re separated from the hustle and bustle. The traffic sound doesn’t sound monotonous, and it’s not big. You can hear it, but it’s not interfering with the nice mood that you’re in out here.

There’s a little sound change in this area by the fountains, but you still can hear traffic. The main thing is the texture change under my feet—wet wood. I always think it’s nice to be pressed by plants and feel like trees are giving you a little lovin’ as you’re walking by. You can partially hear the height because of the branches above you, depending on how full the branches are. You have to be walking underneath it and the branches have to be full enough to fill that sound gap.

When you go out [to the garden], you discover you can have beauty right here, where there’s hustle and bustle going on, but you’re pretty much hidden from it, even though you’re close to it. That’s what makes it unique. You’re in the heart of Dallas.

Photo: Steven Visneau.

Made from Concentration

Dallas-based artist Tom Orr recalls the summer he spent as Lynda Benglis's gallery assistant.

Lynda Benglis at the Nasher, opening May 21

TOM ORR AS TOLD TO DR. LEIGH ARNOLD



In 1970, Lynda Benglis visited Dallas from her adopted home of New York City for a show of new work at the Janie C. Lee Gallery—a contemporary art gallery that focused on bringing artists from the coasts to Dallas. During Benglis’s visit, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (then the Fort Worth Art Center Museum under the direction of Henry Hopkins) commissioned her to create the foam pour sculpture now in their collection. Benglis also used her time in Dallas–Fort Worth to make new work for a private collector and experiment with materials in Janie C. Lee’s backyard swimming pool. I spoke with artist Tom Orr about his recollections from that time, as a young artist working for a well-connected gallery, where he gained exposure to some of the great masters of American art, including the inimitable Lynda Benglis. His memories paint a picture of a serious and physical artist and a generous and kind person. What follows is a version of our conversation, condensed and edited for clarity and flow.

– Associate Curator Dr. Leigh Arnold

This was 52 years ago. An interesting time period. It was before I went to art school, and I had just finished two years as an art student at El Centro [Community College, now Dallas College, El Centro Campus] and was about to enroll at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). It was a good time for me in Dallas because I had a great job. I was working for Janie C. Lee, which was a gallery in Dallas that only showed New York and California artists, and a few local artists, but not many. I was the helper. My job was to assist the artists and do whatever they needed—if they needed to be driven somewhere, I could do that. If they needed to go get something from the hardware store, I’d take them to the hardware store. I was basically in the gallery based on anything they needed to be done—“get Tom to do it.”

To Janie’s credit, she was fairly strict, you know: “You’ve got to read this Barbara Rose book before you work with with me. ... You have have to be cautious around this work,” and she never implied that the art was very valuable, but it was. And she said, “Whatever you do, do not”—these aren’t the exact words—“do not bother the artists.” In other words, don’t try to be a buddy. So, she had me a little bit scared of these people. But the artists—except for one, I won’t reveal the name—treated me with respect and were very nice and friendly. But I got to meet a lot of important artists and help them to some

degree. It was good for me. I got to see those very early Larry Bells. Just tremendous. I had seen a lot of images in books, but I had never been around the actual artworks.

Then Lynda, of course. She was established already—she’d had several shows in New York, and I don’t know if she had anything in museums, but she was doing really well for herself at that time. She was not a superstar, but she was certainly up there with a lot of contemporary artists. So, I knew her works slightly from being around Janie and, of course, *Artforum* and other publications. I think she might even have been in *Life* magazine or something at some point. I forget now. But she was on the way up, and I had only seen some pictures of the poured pieces, the ones on the ground. Flat ones. I think Janie had shown me a picture of one of the corner pieces or wall pieces that was kind of stacked up against the wall, but the things that I first saw in person were these—I think they call them lozenge shapes. They were 2 x 4s with a rounded top and a bottom, and then they were dipped in wax.¹ They were just beautiful, just fantastic things. Pretty darn fragile, too. And I can remember looking and going “Oh my God! If it gets too hot they’re gonna melt.” When I talked to Lynda later, she said, “Well yeah, they can and they are fragile, but fragile on the surface.” But she investigated waxes and various materials and came up with something that was pretty darn durable for the wax.



When I was working with Lynda, it was the spring and the early part of the summer of 1970, and I had to leave in late June to go to a session at RISD. I think she was here for at least a couple of weeks, maybe a little bit longer because she had come to Dallas to make some pieces for a show at Janie's along with the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, in its old location.

Lynda wasn't really fond of having a crowd watch her. When I helped her in Fort Worth with that corner piece, she made it outside, and maybe some people from the museum were kind of watching in the background. I think I remember her saying, "I just don't want people hanging around. I'm not doing a performance; I am working on a piece."

**"I'M NOT DOING
A PERFORMANCE; I AM
WORKING ON A PIECE."**

-LYNDA BENGLIS

That was a cool thing about her: She was so intent when she worked. All I could do was watch. You can imagine how that process works with those corner pieces that you are adding to, and you can't really take much away from. You've got to be pretty precise and, of course, it is foam too, so you pour and it gets bigger. It was amazing to watch, I am telling you.

I was an art student and just beginning to work myself then, but what was very obvious was that Lynda was in control. She knew exactly what she was doing, even though there would be some happy accidents, she was in control, and she had total concentration. She was in very good shape and really strong. I was impressed at the concentration, and it was pretty much an all-day thing. I mean, she would break for lunch, and stop and rest every now and then, but she really gave it a lot in terms of total concentration, and that was impressive to me because, I didn't really know how to work [like that]. I work that way now, but at the time I thought "Man. ..." It was just great. She didn't make it look easy, but she made it look like something that wasn't like a magic trick. The sculpture is incredible, but it came from doing really hard work and really concentrating, like, there's no secret to this thing, but that's the method that she used to get work done. Exciting work. You gotta concentrate, you have to work hard and that's what she did. And it was a valuable lesson to witness.

When she was doing these pieces, my job was to remain quiet and just watch her and see if she needed anything because a lot of times, she would have to get another bucket of foam and quickly mix it. I had to be ready. I didn't mix any of it; she mixed it, but I would hand her things and when she was done and she finished the pour, I'd grab the bucket and take it out of the way.

I saved those buckets for a long time. I had 10 or so from the Fort Worth pour piece. When I went to RISD, I gave my old car back to my folks and left those buckets in the car. My mother said, "We need to save these buckets because she is gonna be famous one day." So, she kept them for years up in the attic, but they're long gone now.

Because my big '52 Dodge didn't have air conditioning and it was getting warm, Lynda and I had to drive over to Fort Worth to the museum early in the mornings. During the drive, Lynda was pretty quiet, but she would talk to me about things she knew and thought I might be interested in. She talked a lot about materials. She would ask me what I was doing and about going to art school. It was just a nice drive in the morning. She treated me like an adult and like a fellow artist even though I really wasn't yet.

**Lynda Benglis will be on view at
the Nasher Sculpture Center from May 21 to
September 18, 2022.**

Lynda Benglis (b. 1941). *For Carl Andre*, 1970. Pigmented polyurethane foam, 56 1/4 x 53 1/2 x 46 3/16 in. (142.88 x 135.89 x 117.32 cm). Archival images of Lynda Benglis commission. 2022 Lynda Benglis / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

¹ For Benglis's wax paintings, layers of a mixture of purified pigmented beeswax and damar resin were brushed onto lozenge-shaped Masonite panels of approximately 36 x 5 in.



Fruitful Time

Magali Reus at the Nasher, opening May 14

MAGALI REUS AND CATHERINE CRAFT

In her second major US show, Dutch-born, London-based artist Magali Reus presents an installation that examines the relationships between people and objects through the distortion of common images.

Reus reimagines commonly found objects such as “No Parking” signs or dehumidifiers to take on new lives. She describes this act of an object’s physical transformation as “destabilizing and emancipatory,” one that allows it to perform a different function than the one people normally associate it with. These objects and their new functions reflect

the disjointed character of contemporary life, where digital production and consumption make our interactions with objects a more isolated and alienated process.

From the Nasher Sculpture Center’s series of smaller-scale exhibitions, Reus will create new sculptures that similarly turn common objects on their heads. One of these will distort the color and typography of the Nasher’s specially designed green “EXIT” signs, while another will bring together concepts around the fruit basket—an esteemed and commonly used still life object by painters—and market stands where fruits might be sold and displayed.

Here, in a volley of poetic missives from Reus and Nasher Curator Catherine Craft, written just as the pandemic was locking everyone indoors in the spring of 2020, Reus’s work about quotidian objects takes on new meaning and weight.

Magali Reus will be on view at the Nasher Sculpture Center from May 14 to September 11, 2022.



1.



2.



3.

MAGALI REUS

A couple of weeks before my sculptures were destined to ship to Dallas for my exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center (the making of which had been absorbing most of my time and mind over the past 12 months), it became evident that due to the escalating global crisis, this would no longer be happening on the initially planned date of April 15, 2020.

CATHERINE CRAFT

I went to New York on March 9. It was to be my last trip for curatorial work before returning to Dallas for the installation and opening of *Magali Reus*. When the Nasher closed to the public on March 13 due to the growing pandemic, at first we thought that perhaps we would be able to open the exhibition later, at the end of May. We quickly realized we were wrong. I delayed my return to Dallas. I am still in New York, where my partner's houseplants press against every window, obscuring views of spring with their seasonless growth.

Ten days after Magali Reus's exhibition was to have opened, and after repeated exchanges between us regarding practical matters of finance, storage, and scheduling, I discovered that even in these circumscribed times of lockdown, Magali's creative life continues.

REUS

I am currently in Amsterdam, self-isolating in a small apartment. With the Rijksmuseum closed and only two minutes away, it sometimes feels as though the ghosts of the museum have drifted into my living space.

The domestic has become a new framework upon which my new routine hangs: Work is imagined through virtual means, the fruit bowl a new appendage or extension of nature's gracious bounty, the windows an interrogative portrait of people-at-home, my neighbors,

who perform in pantomime the same mirrored gestures as myself. Early morning coffee is a triumph and time continues its mysterious progressions through light and dark.

CRAFT

When an artist makes new work, all the photographs in the world cannot make it less of a mystery; you only become truly acquainted when the art is before you. These last months, I heard stories of the sculptures taking shape in Magali's studio, received photos of bits and pieces undergoing fabrication, examined digital renderings. There would be two series of work—no, four. My question, somewhat bewildered: "Are you still planning to do a fruit bowl [series of sculptures] to go with the awnings?" Her answer: These have now become part of the parasol bases! Of course they have.

There is delight there, in the unpredictable ways art upends us on its passage from idea to materiality. I imagine these works in Magali's studio, sheltered in place. In my mind's eye the studio is darkened, although I've only ever seen it in the brightness of illuminated day. For me, the works are not yet fully real, still. I can almost sense them, but if I put out my hand, there's nothing I can grasp.

REUS

I will share some of the works currently left behind in my London studio. Virtually re-imagined as simulacra versions of their real finished selves, these depictions are projected shells, pieces of proxy emotion and identity who take the roles of substance, weight, shadow, and color and perform them with new intent, with new desperation to convince that the world of touch is not erased, but simply paused until we can welcome it with greater responsibility. Our worlds are often held intact by the great electric grid of consumer product; here these

worlds combine and move together, equal comic protagonists in a rearranging of personal matter.

CRAFT

After so much time at home, nothing looks the same. Resourcefulness moves in. In Magali's transfigured works, the parasol base becomes a stand to accommodate cleaning products and coveted rolls of toilet paper; add a shirt and you have a companion, its buffaloe gaze sweeping our admittedly constricted horizon [*The Greenest Grass*]. Likewise, the green sculptures are based on the Nasher's exit signs, but there's no exit in sight. Instead, their surplus power makes a connection to the appliances that keep us company—the bounteous fridge, the purring blender [*Beetle (East)*], the respiratory rhythms of vacuum and oscillating fan. Emptied echoes of the earth beneath our feet, rich and loamy, raised up as doors, become bulletin boards for old photos, younger versions of ourselves, mingled with others, touching without thinking twice [*Clay (Mushrooms)*].

The fourth group has no such repurposed life that I can make out, only the fruit that falls, or is thrown, or rains upon wall-mounted structures bracketed in upon themselves, enfolded in a mimicry of sleep and the slow time of dreams [*Bonelight (Midsweet)*]. The fruit keeps coming down. I'm still in New York, and there are fewer sirens now. Spring will likely be summer by the time I see Dallas again.

LEFT: Magali Reus (b. 1970). *Bonelight (Midsweet)* (detail), 2020.
1 & 3. Magali Reus (b. 1970). *Beetle (East)* (detail), 2020.
2. Magali Reus (b. 1970). *Clay (Mushrooms)*, 2020.
Photos: courtesy of the artist.


DISPATCH FROM ARKANSAS

THE MOMENTARY *SUN & SEA*

The Nasher's social media manager heads to Bentonville, Arkansas, to encounter a much-lauded project from the 58th Venice Biennale.

KATIE BURTON





Just off a two-lane road surrounded on both sides by the ongoing construction of Walmart’s new headquarters, in the crisp air of early October in the Ozarks, a woman in a swimsuit with a towel draped across her waist walks her wet dog.

For a handful of days last fall, in what was once a cheese factory in Northwest Arkansas—an unsuspecting brick building, which, at its tallest point of five stories, stands stoically over the quiet town below—you could temporarily find 25 tons of sand, 13 vocalists in swimsuits, and the aforementioned dog (plus another). This unlikely landlocked scene was the avant-garde climate-crisis opera, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* taking place at the Momentary, the time-based arts satellite of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

The theatrical installation *Sun & Sea*, spearheaded by the all-women creative team comprised of filmmaker and director Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, writer Vaiva Grainytė, and composer Lina Lapelytė, was commissioned for the Lithuanian pavilion by curator Lucia Pietroiusti at the 2019 Venice Biennale, where it received critical acclaim, winning the Biennale’s coveted Golden Lion Award. Word of the work’s sensational reception—“as surreal as it is profound”—rolled back to the United States, where art and music fans alike lamented the lost opportunity to experience how the amalgamation of opera, performance art, and mundane everyday action could be thus described.

Then, amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the announcement came that *Sun & Sea* would make its American debut in the fall of 2021. Four stops—Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Bentonville, and Los Angeles—would play host to a faux beach and its accompanying performers, a practical mix of trained, touring opera singers and locally cast, volunteer beachgoers.

For those in Texas, like me, who still held a healthy skepticism of air travel in October of 2021, yet an itch to escape abundantly familiar surroundings, the drive to Bentonville, Arkansas, was perfectly doable. Especially when the promise of live performance—something increasingly rare these days—was the impetus for travel.

Inside, the stairwell of the Momentary led to viewing platforms, where I was hit with two things at once—dry heat and a siren chorus—both reverberating off concrete walls as I climbed. Upon reaching the balcony and peering through the mass of other people huddled around the banister, my sight caught up with my other senses. Nearly 15 feet below me, a section of the former factory space, about the size of a community pool, had been partitioned off from the rest of the first-floor gallery to emulate a

nondescript beach. My attention was drawn away from speakers and theater lights perched on eye-level scaffolding due to the amount of simultaneous activity happening upon the sand-filled stage below.

In one corner, two women bounced a shuttlecock between them; in another, children weaved in between beach chairs to play a game of tag. At the center of the faux beach, identical twins in identical outfits adjusted their towels, sweeping off infringing sand. Others, ranging from young to old, applied sunscreen, checked Instagram, played Go Fish, and poured water for their dogs to lap up.

For me, being around strangers again—watching how they interacted with each other, examining the books they were reading, crafting meaning behind their visible tattoos—brought a sense of absolute euphoria. Yet, audibly rising above this sense of normalcy created by the hum of everyday conversations was a warning tone as performers reflected on the effects of climate change on our planet. Thrust into the middle of these beachgoers’ vacation as a voyeur, I caught their private lamentations on litter, extreme currents, and the collapse of the Great Barrier Reef. One character notes their fatigue caused by extreme heat: “My eyelids are heavy / My head is dizzy / Light and empty body / There’s no water left in the bottle.”

Occasionally, the other vacationers’/singers’ harmonies joined, echoing remorse for a world on the brink of uninhabitability. Lying under the same unbearable sun, they repeat in unison: “MY EYELIDS ARE HEAVY / MY HEAD IS DIZZY / LIGHT AND EMPTY BODY / THERE’S NO WATER LEFT IN THE BOTTLE.”

These beautiful notes turned bitter as they began to take up space, tickling the part of my brain that I have been trying to ignore since March of 2020—the part that lets fear dominate. And as I left the platform, my back to the beachgoers below, their notes followed me down the stairs, reminding me as I stepped out of artificial day and back into the sunlight, that our existence on Earth is not promised; that while the tides will always come and go, there is a chance that there will not always be beachgoers on the beaches.

Sun & Sea (Marina). Photo: Ironside Photography, courtesy of the Momentary.

SCREEN TEST

How a sculpture by Harry Bertoia, commissioned for the Dallas Public Library in 1955, challenged convention.

MARIN SULLIVAN



On Friday, June 24, 1955, Harry Bertoia completed the installation of a large, textured multiplane sculpture, made from copper, brass, and nickel alloys that hung from the ceiling in the new Dallas Public Library building. The work was the result of a positive, thoughtful collaboration between the artist and architect George Dahl, but within two weeks the commissioned work was disassembled and removed from the building. Though today such a work may seem a rather benign abstract sculpture, the amputation of Bertoia's screen was the opening salvo of a public maelstrom that raged in Dallas over the entire summer of 1955.

The city of Dallas hired Dahl, a native Texan, to build a new downtown central library facility that was intended to serve as a major cultural and social step forward for a city not known for its progressivism. In addition to being modern in its architectural styling, the building was racially integrated, with front door access and full privileges for all of Dallas's citizens, including its then 15 percent of the population which was Black. With a budget of \$2.5 million and exceedingly high expectations, the new library became one of the most significant building projects for the city during the immediate postwar period.¹

Dahl included a major artwork in the original architectural design but did not hire Bertoia until relatively late in the process, paying him from a budget approved by the city. Bertoia submitted four designs, though arrived in Dallas with a sculpture that combined elements from all of them, which had taken him and two assistants 10 weeks to fabricate. The artist re-created the exact conditions of

the library in his Pennsylvania studio, which allowed him to create as he went along while keeping the specifics of the space in mind. This attention to site became a hallmark of Bertoia's large-scale commissions during the postwar period, as was its abstract form and lack of a title. Bertoia remarked, "It is very modern and contemporary of course. I have no name for it, for I do not think it should have any one name. A sculptor's art is his way of communicating." In what became a frequently quoted statement in the controversy that ensued, Bertoia concluded, "I have been asked many times what my work means. And really what it represents is very much up to the observer. It is a mirror of the man or woman who looks at it. Those who find significance and meaning in it are those prepared to give it significance or meaning. Those who find nothing have, evidently not prepared their lives and probably are very happy about it."²

"IT IS A MIRROR OF THE MAN OR WOMAN WHO LOOKS AT IT."

- HARRY BERTOIA

The people of Dallas were apparently not prepared to be reflected in such a modern, abstract sculpture, and the controversy erupted when then mayor R.L. Thornton, along with members of the City Council, previewed the sculpture shortly after its installation. Thornton declared the work a "bunch of junk" and in the following weeks the hanging screen became a citywide debate, with hundreds of articles, columns, and letters to the editor devoted to the subject.³ While many expressed dismay over the sum paid to Bertoia and the allocation of taxpayer funds, criticism also focused on the

aesthetic merits of the sculpture and Bertoia's "outsider" status as an Italian immigrant and artist based on the East Coast.

The removal of the piece, however, came about because of Dahl. Essentially dismayed and infuriated, he voluntarily offered to purchase the mural himself. Within weeks, a group of private donors bought back the screen from Dahl, who had been storing it at his home.

With the official obstacle of taxpayer obligation removed, the city had little choice but to accept the gift and reinstall the work, though it did come with a firm stipulation from Dahl: The City Council would have to agree by letter that the screen would be restored to its original location. By the public opening of the library in September 1955, Bertoia's metal screen was once again above the book return desk, just to the right of the main entrance on the ground floor. Mayor Thornton upon seeing the work reinstalled even declared that he now liked the work because he found out it was not a 'mural,' but a metal screen.⁴ In the end, the new Dallas Public Library, inclusive of the Bertoia, was considered a great success, and by the late 1950s, the sculptural screen became a shorthand logo for the library. The sculpture continued to appear on promotional materials, even after the sculpture was relocated to the J. Erik Jonsson Central Dallas Public Library in 1982, where it still resides today.

¹ Vernon Porterfield, "New Dallas Library," *Library Journal* 80, no. 21 (December 1, 1955): 26-69.

² "Art for Art's Sake: Library's Abstract Mural Sparks Query: What is it?" *Dallas Times Herald*, June 26, 1955.

³ Allen Quinn, "... A Bunch of Junk" Mayor Comments on Gilded Mural," *Dallas Morning News*, June 28, 1955.

⁴ "Art Screen up Again at Library," *Dallas Times Herald*, September 1955.

Harry Bertoia's untitled multiplane construction in the Dallas Public Library, c. 1955. 2022 Estate of Harry Bertoia / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: courtesy Dallas History and Archives Division, Dallas Public Library.

FEATURES

GOOD VIBRATIONS
CHASING THE SOUNDS
SOUND AS SUTURE
TO STAVE OFF SILENCE
NOW PLAY THIS





GOOD SOUND VIBRA

Artists Olivia Block and Luke Fowler listen in on the sonic life of Harry Bertoia's sounding sculptures.

As part of its Sightings series, and as a complement to the Harry Bertoia retrospective, the Nasher Sculpture Center commissioned renowned media artist and composer Olivia Block to make a new sound installation from recordings of Bertoia's sounding sculptures in the exhibition *Harry Bertoia: Sculpting Mid-Century Modern Life*. Block's recent work reflects her interest in time, wind, shadows, and the acoustic properties of physical materials like metal and wood. The new composition, titled *The Speed of Sound in Infinite Copper*, highlights the sounding sculptures' ability to create a palpable sonic space while allowing the audience to activate the sonic experience by moving about the room. Block complements the changing aural environment projecting the silhouettes of the movement of the sounding sculptures across the floor and up the walls of the Corner Gallery at the Nasher.

Here for *The Nasher*, Block joins Scottish artist Luke Fowler in conversation about her new work. In 2018, Fowler was the first artist to create a sound work for the Nasher Sculpture Center, *Gone Reflections (Part 2)*, a composition made by directing sine waves of similar frequency ranges, ascending in one and descending in the other, through the collection's massive Naum Gabo sculpture, *Constructed Head No. 2*, and Barnett Newman's *Here III*. Both made of stainless steel, the unique forms of each work affected the way the sine waves moved and reverberated through them, creating unexpected tones.



Olivia Block records Bertoia's sound sculptures at the Nasher.

LUKE FOWLER

My first experiences of listening to sculptures was of mute sculptures—you know, sound from sculptures that weren't intended to be sonic. And I had this period around 2006 when I was on residency in Germany, and I would go around sticking contact mics onto sculptures and listening to the sound of the world filtered through some modernist metal sculpture. And that was absolutely fascinating because there was this parallel with the way that I was doing photography or film, the way I was thinking about the way that we edit, the way that the edit creates this sort of temporal compression, and also the way that certain lenses can show you the world from the perspective of an animal, or a child, or whatever ... or a bird. And so, this idea of contact listening really interested and excited me because I could hear the internal sound, the internal life of something that would ordinarily be inaudible, right?

So that was my whole introduction into listening to sculptures. And then when I came to the Nasher [to do my exhibition], I was influenced by David Tudor and Alvin Lucier and Arp—rest in peace—because I was thinking about placing these drivers onto the sculptures and sending sound waves through them that then made [the sculptures] vibrate at specific sound resonant frequencies. And to me, that was kind of the inverse of what I'd been doing in this passive role of, like, you know, placing the stethoscope onto the patient. This was more like giving the patient an electric shock.

OLIVIA BLOCK

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

FOWLER

[laughter]

BLOCK

First of all, I love this idea of listening to this internal world of the sculpture. Especially because whenever I see something like a Richard Serra, that's all I can think

about. All I want to do is hit that sculpture! Like just ...

FOWLER

... a massive gong.

BLOCK

Yeah! You can't just look at something like that and not imagine what that would sound like, right? So, I love this idea of hearing that. It's also almost like the sculpture itself is listening. You're hearing what the sculpture is hearing, uncovering that hidden world of sound inside this material. And then it's funny because your piece at the Nasher and then what I'm planning to do with the [Bertoia sounding] sculptures is almost like we are coming at this idea from completely different directions, because your piece started with sine waves. And you're inserting these sine waves into the metal so that you can sonify this metal and people can actually hear how the material itself is resonating at certain frequencies with the sine waves. And so, it's almost like you are making them sing. Or



the sculptures are starting to sing with the transducers, or exciters.

FOWLER

Drivers, yeah. Exciters.

BLOCK

Yeah, exactly. And, in my case the recordings of the sounding sculptures start with these incredibly complex overtone structures. It's almost like it's all overtones. There's no, even, semblance of a sine wave there.

FOWLER

So are they odd or even harmonics? Can you even say?

BLOCK

Well, you can't say because it's completely different depending on how you touch them. It depends on which combination of which rod at which distance. Initially, my approach was to find the resonant frequency of each of the sculptures that I was working with, but then I realized that was completely impossible because it completely depends on how the sculpture is behaving with itself. If you're just getting three of these rods touching each other, that resonance and that overtone structure is going to be very different than if two of these other rods are vibrating. So, it's almost like this kaleidoscope you can't quite focus on. So, I decided instead to use my ears. Each of these sculptures was absolutely singing one tone louder than everything else. Each of them has this ringing tone, and so I was just listening for that. And each sound sequence from each one of these sculptures starts with a complexity and then ends with one tone. So, it almost like ends with the sine wave, whereas yours starts with the sine wave and it ends with this complexity, this material complexity. Mine starts with the material complexity and ends with the single tone. So, it's almost like the exact reverse or something like a mirror image, which is cool.

FOWLER

It's almost like additive versus subtractive synthesis. ... What is so fascinating about invented instruments is that

there are no conventional ways of playing them, right?

BLOCK

Yes.

FOWLER

I'll tell you a story about it. Do you know the artist Richard Youngs?

BLOCK

Yes, and you've worked with him?

FOWLER

Yeah, we collaborate quite a lot. And I went to Richard talking about being an autodidact. At one point, I decided that I wanted to be able to sing. I wanted to sing in pitch.

BLOCK

Cool. [laughter] And does that not come easily to you normally? Or?

FOWLER

Ah, well, I've never sung in my life. And I just decided that I wanted to be able to sing. And so, I took what I thought would be singing lessons with Richard. And he said I was kind of like his partner, who, if he puts his hand on the nape of her neck, could hit the notes. She could feel the vibration if he was singing the same thing, then reach vibration through this way of touching.

BLOCK

That's beautiful.

FOWLER

He said, "Your problem is pitching." I said, "What's the problem with it?" He said, "You're not doing it."

FOWLER AND BLOCK

[laughter]

BLOCK

So then, what did you do? Did he try this thing where he was touching the back of your neck?

FOWLER

Yeah, so then he told me about this thing, the touching. And I think what I am saying is that you know

"THE COMPLEXITY OF THE [SCULPTURE] WAS ALREADY SO INTERESTING THAT I JUST WANTED TO SET IT INTO MOTION."

- OLIVIA BLOCK

there is a conventional way of singing and, with pitch, there is a conventional way of bowing a cello, in a way that the intonation of the instrument comes through. The note comes through rather than the unintended sound, right?

BLOCK

Right.

FOWLER

But with these invented instruments, like Bertoia, there is no conventional way of playing them. And there are no instructions on how to play them. So how? Was that liberating or scary? Or?

BLOCK

It was a little bit of both. I know that you also make instruments, and I was listening to those recordings with the kind of string instrument that you were making. And it was interesting because I did notice it was more of a metallic sound than like a cello would be. I mean it was like you could hear the tambour of the material, which is my interest too. Like, my interest in something like a pipe organ isn't in being virtuosic about the playing of it. It's about the instrument itself. It's about how those materials and the architecture around the materials make the sound, make the instrument sing. And so, I think the same is true for the [sounding sculptures]. And I actually felt a conflicting desire to both play the instrument, almost like a percussion instrument, and then on the other hand just to activate the thing once and let itself play out. And so, I actually ended up going with the latter of the two because I felt like the complexity of the [sculptures] was already so interesting that I just wanted to set it into motion, basically. Each one I just set in motion and watched how long the decay took, and how long it took for the motion to stop. So, I think I made a decision at some point. We were recording and we [had] mallets and we were banging on the lower part of the rods at one point, which is a beautiful sound. But I felt like it almost narrowed down the feeling of



it into this kind of history of percussion, and I didn't want to do that. It made it smaller to me somehow, like it wasn't about these creatures anymore. It was just more about the performance of it. So, then I just decided to let the creatures speak.

FOWLER

Bertoia himself says that there's no way of notating these. He said notation is out the window with these creatures because they're not single notes, for starters, they're not pitching single notes. They're clusters. They're microtonal clusters ... You know, this microtonal dissonant structure, and the way that he plays them is the way that he plays them. And so, that's what's really exciting for me about the liberation of these sculptures by you working with them. Or by them being, like you talked about, them being played like an aeolian harp, like by the wind.

And did you feel like you could transcend the legacy of Bertoia?

BLOCK

Not at all. I can't, I didn't even try. In fact, I felt like this

piece is really about his absence. There literally is not going to be a sculpture present [in the gallery]. And [Bertoia] is not present, and just thinking about the absence of the sculpture in the space and creating this place where the listener fills the gaps of that absence, in a way. So, I sidestepped that feeling of his legacy. I can't even shoulder this at all. Because it's a lot. I chalked this up to getting a little older in my life and thinking about just like, [sigh] remembering people is important. That's all. There's nothing more. There doesn't have to be. I mean, it is more complex than that. Like in terms of the ideas and the sounds and the presence and everything, but I think I am just beginning to understand connections and how art travels through time. I was just like constantly feeling like "keep it simple ... don't try to comment too much on this legacy or anything like that."

"THIS IS BEAUTIFUL... I'VE TAPPED INTO SOMETHING COSMIC."

-OLIVIA BLOCK

FOWLER

There's something really beautiful [about this], and very, for me, connected to oral history and to traditional oral culture. In Scotland, there's a strong history of singing and telling stories. There was this famous storyteller called Duncan Williamson, and he said that when you tell a story you are standing on the shoulders of your ancestors, and of everyone that's told the story before you. And it's your duty not to fuck that up, not to fuck that story up. You know? And, not to change it. I mean, you add your own personality to it, but you're not completely changing the plot or the characters. You're just speaking through the story and the ancestors are speaking through your voice.

BLOCK

Yes, exactly. It does feel like that, especially because Harry Bertolia seemed to think of these [sculptures and their sonambient] in such a metaphysical way. I didn't get the sense from reading about him that he was super conceptual about these pieces. He was just like, "this is beautiful ... I've tapped into something cosmic." And so, in a way it's almost like thinking back to this origin story of the maker of these creatures, these Sonambient creatures, where he drops that piece of metal on the floor and hears it and is awakened to this possibility. And then, like your story about listening, all of a sudden, he's awakened into the sound of this sculpture that isn't making any sound. I studied anthropology, and it reminds me of all the tribal creation stories made from sound and light and sky and earth, and how layers

of things are built into meaning from that. I am not as interested in the history of modern sculpture in that sense in this project. It's much more about this, the music of the spheres and the origin [stories].

FOWLER

So, I've got one last question for you. Obviously, there was this exciting moment in the 1970s when Bertolia's sculptures were being placed in public buildings, and I feel like you know that moment has passed [and that they are] being decommissioned. You know, it's not fashionable to have a sound sculpture. Why do you think that is? Why do you think his work became unfashionable or fell out of favor?

BLOCK

That's a good question. I'm not sure that the sound sculptures ever did gain that kind of moment. I mean, people did buy them ... but just based upon my knowledge, the sculptures didn't behave the way that they thought they were supposed to. ... I think it was sort of like there was a tension between where these objects should be placed in terms of the visual aesthetics of the architecture that surrounded [them], you know like: "Where should they be inside? Should they be outside? How should the sound sculpture be sounding? Should it be from the wind? Or should it be from people coming and playing them?" There was never any clear kind of direction about that because I think, on one hand, some people are like, "Yes, you play. You put your hands on these. That's what he would have done. That's what he would have wanted." But then there's kind of like another opinion of like, "Do not touch these. These are works of art." Which is why this whole thing—this Bertolia retrospective and your piece at the Nasher, too—is so cool. The fact that [the Nasher] is taking this whole sound aspect of these sculptures on is really cool.

FOWLER

Yeah, taking it seriously ... Also, I just wanted to say that I really love the way you're using light in the piece.

BLOCK

Yeah, I mean, it's impossible to ignore that. That's such a strong part of Bertolia's work. Actually ... because he was in the Midwest, and so thinking about tall grass moving and the light through it. When you see that light through grass or trees moving, it's such a special thing. ... That was the other aspect of those pieces that was just mind blowing. Just the way [they were] letting in the light, the movement was just really beautiful, so, part of the piece that I will do is just the shadows [from these sculptures].

FOWLER

Yeah, in absence of a score [the shadows] become like a score. Don't they?

BLOCK

Absolutely.

FOWLER

And it's the same seeing the rods from the top, seeing that perspective and then seeing how they interact and move. They're like a swarm of bees. The material is an illustration of what they're doing sonically. This again, this sort of sonicfication ... gets to that vibration, you know?

TOP and PREVIOUS: Bertolia's sounding sculptures arranged at the Nasher Sculpture Center, 2022 Estate of Harry Bertolia / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: courtesy of the artist.
LEFT: Olivia Block (b. 1970). *The Speed of Sound in Infinite Copper*, 2022. Sound and video installation.

“IN THE BEGINNING,

it was just chasing the sounds and finding new sounds.” This is how Christina Kubisch describes her first forays into an ongoing project known as the *Electrical Walks*: experiential, semi-guided sound tours the artist has created in cities around the world, from Berlin to Riga, New York to Mexico City, Hong Kong to Athens and Reykjavik, and more than 70 other locales. But rather than listening to the ambient noises of urban life, Kubisch dials in on the frequencies that normally evade detection. These walks rely on specially built headphones, designed by the artist in collaboration with engineers, that register electromagnetic signals from the environment and convert them into audible sound.

A pioneering German sound artist and composer, Kubisch (b. 1948) studied painting, composition, and electronic music and trained as a professional flautist. In her early career she intersected with such pivotal figures in the world of experimental music as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, and Annea Lockwood, but by the 1970s she was primarily focused on incorporating different forms of sound technology to create experiential and often participatory forms of art, working with performance, sound installation, electromagnetic induction, and ultraviolet light.

The *Electrical Walks* grew out of early pieces she constructed using induction cables. In the early 1990s, while Kubisch was in San Sebastian, Spain, to install a large cable installation, she walked through the gallery and suddenly heard many other sounds—sounds that were not ones she had devised for the piece. She was distraught and assumed the interference was due to a technical failure. But then, the epiphany: On the other side of the wall was a post office, and she came to realize that the electromagnetic frequencies from the computers there were transmitting through the walls and being channeled by her cables. It was at that moment that Kubisch realized: “I’m no longer alone with my installations.”

The first official *Electrical Walk* was held in Cologne in 2004. When she is devising a new walk, the artist maps a given section of the city, particularly noting electromagnetic hot spots like ATM machines, security systems, or public transit where signals are particularly noticeable or distinctive. Some sounds are more or less the same everywhere, but the artist notes that different regions often have a similar soundscape: For example, the sounds found across cities in Asia, or throughout Eastern Europe, are more similar to one another than to cities in Western Europe. Quite often public transit systems—such as a bus, or even the difference between an electronically run subway system as opposed to one operated by a driver—provide some of the most distinctive source material. Kubisch now observes that in the early aughts, much of the machinery in use was still analog. As a result, the sounds she discovered using her headphones were often more musical and rhythmic. Digital sounds, which proliferate now, tend to be based on higher frequencies and have a different timbre.

Kubisch sees the *Electrical Walks* as opening up a portrait of a city to its inhabitants. Through the guided use of technology and the formative individual and group encounters, participants are immersed in new areas, environments, and material (if unseen) realities of a place that they otherwise feel they know intimately. Reflecting on her childhood in the years immediately following the Second World War, Kubisch recalls playing in the urban ruins and inventing games centered around finding treasure that she and her playmates believed was hidden beneath the rubble that surrounded them. In a way, the *Electrical Walks* achieve a similar act of revealing multiple worlds running alongside one another. Sometimes we just “need someone who opens up these worlds for us,” Kubisch muses. Someone who helps open up “these other possibilities.”

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The following is an excerpt from “The Sound Can Touch You Directly: Christina Kubisch on Electronic Sound Art,” interview with Caitlin Woolsey for In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing, a podcast from the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute. Interview recorded November 23, 2020.

CHRISTINA KUBISCH

From the beginning, what I tried was to make a portrait of each city. And actually, the electromagnetic portrait of a city is in a way very close to other [kinds of] portraits of the city, like if you would do acoustic field recordings, or if you would make a social study. The electromagnetic world reflects what is going on in the city: Where the places with a lot of money and banks are; where the shopping areas are; where residential areas with very small electromagnetic fields are [located]; where are the strange sounds coming from? ... Every city is different. And besides the global [machines that are the same everywhere], sounds like the security safety entrances at the shops, you always find something which is only in *that* city, which is really typical for that city. But [the process] has changed in the sense that some years ago, I started to make guided walks. Before, I just had a map. The map was my score, and [it was] a score for [other participants] ... who would go out themselves. Later on, I thought it would be nice again to be with people to go around. So, for example, in New York two years ago [in 2018], during the festival *Time:Spans*, I had two *Electrical Walks* lasting one hour and a half. ... The public I [encountered] was so different every day ... from housewives who had never [experienced] anything like it, to specialists and musicians. They were all together. And they all started to talk. So, this is something I like very much, and which nowadays is very much part of the [*Electrical Walks*] as works, as guided walks.

But still for every *Electrical Walk*, I [create a] map version. What is important is that there are places people know, but which may be places they never go. When I go to a new city, I'm very naive. I don't know anything, so I can go to places where [locals] would never go because they think it's not interesting. I can just go to a courtyard or walk around the corner, or go to a place they think is very boring, and I find something interesting. It lets them know the city from a view they would not have normally.

CAITLIN WOOLSEY

Is that how you start, when you're developing a new sound walk in a new city? That you go on your own explorations and just listen?

KUBISCH

In the beginning, I just follow the sounds. That's the nicest day. The first day is always the easiest day, because I just walk around. From time to time, of course, I have to rest my ears because it's very tiring. And I make notes. I always have a map of the part of the city where the work will take place. The difficulty is that it's always a circular walk because people have to get their headphones and then bring them back. And so sometimes in this area I will have places that are not as interesting, but [the participants] have to go through to come back, or to get somewhere. So, there are many possibilities. In the beginning I find so many sounds. Then in the end, I have to really limit them, and make a kind of choice, and kill my favorite electromagnetic babies and so on. It's very hard. But if it's a good walk, I feel it's a kind of continuity. This takes at least another two days [to finalize the route], and then there has to be the text [that accompanies the walk].

When I'm ready, I always ask one of the organizers ... to go with me to get feedback. Sometimes they say it's too long, or say 'do a little bit more here.' I'm so used to the sounds sometimes that I'm a little bit too quick, or I have too many things [included]. But since they [are] listen[ing] to it for the first time, they need more space and more time. All this is always good [as part of the creative] experience [for me to get] feedback from other people. This part is quite important to me because

the normal thing is to go to a concert and to sit there, and you have your beautiful or whatever experience, and clap hands, and then maybe afterwards you have a glass of wine or you talk to your friends, but that's it. But here, it's ... people who [have] never met [before], who are coming from different backgrounds to do something they [haven't done] before. In the beginning, sometimes, they're even a little bit afraid, because I bring them, for example, into places and they know they look a little bit strange with the big headphones on, and they know they behave in a strange way, they know other people are looking at them. But after 10 minutes, they forget. If it's a good group it's really fun, because they start to go everywhere and make experiments and they move. ... I like this group experience.

WOOLSEY

Do you think about potential political or social dimensions of your work? How the walks bring people perhaps into neighborhoods or into parts of the city that they wouldn't normally go because they wouldn't feel comfortable, or it wouldn't feel like a place that would be open to them?

KUBISCH

There are several things [at play]. To participate [in an *Electrical Walk*], you behave as you would not behave normally. If you go into a shop and you [wander] very closely along a cosmetic counter, for example, the creams and the lipsticks, and you listen to them, you don't look at them ... someone very often will come [up and] say, 'What are you doing?' You can give them the headphones and say, 'Listen. It sounds interesting,' or 'It sounds terrible,' or whatever. But you see very often that people will get suspicious because you don't behave the way you are expected to behave. This is, for me, always an interesting experience. Sometimes [people will] even say, 'Don't enter the shop again.' When we had a group in Spain, we had the police [called on us]. So, things like that happen too, but not very often, fortunately.

Then, of course, there is the discovery of this magnetic world by itself. All this is around us and we had no idea before. And the question that comes up all the time is: What does it do to us? Is it good or bad for our bodies? And these discussions are very important, and they arise almost every time after any *Electrical Walk*. And it's also discovering that what you see is not a very secure thing. I mean, you may look at something—and the sound is so different. You look at a park, and you hear a heavy beat. Listening, you now know there is something maybe under the earth.

I think the *Electrical Walks* make you feel a little bit unsafe. They take you out of your normal perception. And if you consider this a part of politics, then I would say, yes—the work is political as well.

“I'M NO LONGER ALONE WITH MY INSTALLATIONS.”

-CHRISTINA KUBISCH

Christina Kubisch
ELECTRICAL WALKS
 KØBENHAVN 04.09.09 - 19.09.09



- 1 JAZZ KULDEREN**
Pick up your headphones. Listen to the security gate at the entrance to the shop. Be careful, it can be quite loud if you walk close. Walk slowly down Skindergade towards Kådemønstergade.
- 2 SØVEL**
Security gate. If you want to enter a shop, turn off and take off the headphones as the gates get louder the closer you get. Please handle the headphones with care along the route.
- 3a 3b 3c ESPRET**
Listen to the security gates.
- 4 SPARXZ**
Security gates continue.
- 5a 5b 5c SØKED I LUXURY, MAREN MØLLER, FRENCH CONNECTION**
Walk up and down between these three very different sounding security gates.
- 6 EUM**
Listen to the security gate at the corner entrance. Then turn right and walk down Skindergade.
- 7 FRONNS HOUSE**
Stop at the rear end of the parking house entrance. In the very corner to the left of the window with the sign NO SMOKING. Move your head from left to right in the very corner to the left of the window.
- 8 SØKESIDE 8**
Put the headphones as close as possible to the small security panel on the left side of the portal SØKESIDEN.
- 9 FONA**
Take off and turn the headphones off while walking in, then turn them on again, approach the different TV screens and listen to them as closely as possible – sensing the difference between Plasma, LCD and Crystal TV.
Please turn the headphones off while leaving through the security gate.
- 10 MAGASIN**
Enter Magasin with the headphones turned off, then turn them on again when inside and walk slowly around in the cosmetics and perfume department. Listen closely to the lipsticks, make-up items, displays and light arrangements of Miss Factice, Blue Lagoon and others. Explore the world of beauty. Turn the headphones off before leaving. Have a little sonic rest while walking down Store Kildegade.
- 11 LIX & SHIP BANK**
Move your head as close to the screen of the cash machine as you can.
- 12 HELLSGÅNDEKØRSEN (CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT)**
Enter the courtyard through the gate in Niels Hemmingsens Gade and walk slowly around the church. You might hear music, voices and other sounds. If you don't, try again later – it's worth it. Walk out of the courtyard through the gate in Valdemarsgade, turn right and walk through the small passage to Gråbrødrestræde. Walk towards the Gyttugsgade and the northern part of the walk. Alternatively, return to Sankta Sofie and head to the headphones.
- 13 SYNAGOGUE**
Go along or sit down in front of the fence and listen to the sounds from inside the buildings.
- 14 BARONVÅN BYPASSGÅDE**
Stop at the entrance and look at the antennas above Nørrebro Station. Then slowly walk in and through the passage.
- 15 DANSKE BANK**
Enter the bank through the corner entrance and listen to the sounds of the various types of bank machines in the foyer.
- 16 NØRREBRO STATION**
Walk down the stairs to the ticket level, listen to the ticket machines and continue further down the escalators to the tracks. Explore the station with the trains arriving and departing. Take the lift back to street level, and cross Niels Jørgensgade.
- 17 NØRREBRO STATION**
Walk through the main station entrance down the stairs just after the ticket level. Walk around and listen to the different ticket machines, the automatic photo-booth, the train lines TV-monitors and the light-dimming advertisement screens. Buy a two-zone ticket and continue down the stairs to the right to the S-train tracks.

- 18 S-TRAIN**
Take the S-train train two stops from platform 4 to the Copenhagen Central Station. Enjoy the ride and its sounds.
- 18a CENTRAL STATION HALL**
THE HALL: Explore the hall by walking around slowly: machines, lights, screens, etc.
- 18b BAGSAGE LOCKERS**
Use the stairs down to the Ibsensstrædegade exit just after track 1/2 and then turn left. Walk slowly through the room along the lockers. Take the lift back to the main hall.
- 18c MAIN TICKET SALES**
Enter the ticket sales situated on the right hand side just before the Vesterbrogade exit. Position yourself near the counters where you see the employees behind glass screens. You will hear a special kind of conversation. Leave the station through the Ibsensstrædegade exit. Cross the street.

- 20 TIVOLI SPILHALLER (THE TIVOLI GAMBLING HALL)**
(The gambling hall with direct access from the street). Take off and turn off the headphones before entering. Have a few coins ready and play on the machines with the headphones on – the older machines are especially recommended. Do stop in time.
- 21 RÅDHUSGÅRDEN (THE TOWN HALL ARCADE)**
Walk slowly through the arcade. Stop at the glass door N. 18 Vesterbrogade on your right hand side inside the arcade. Exit the Arcade and cross Rådhuspladsen (The Town Hall Square).
- 22 STRØMØT (PEDESTRIAN STREET FREDERIKSBORGGADE)**
Listen closely to the red-LED signs on the wall next to the Money Exchange at Frederiksborggade number 28.

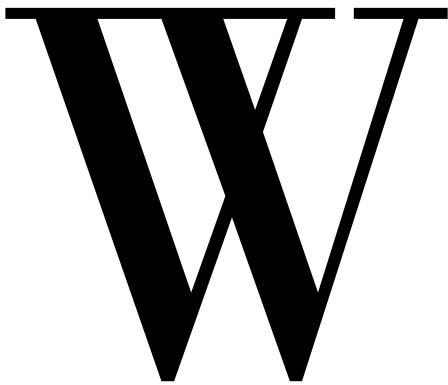
Walk slowly down Strøget back to Skindergade, through Jørgens Passage. Hand in the headphones at JAZZ Kådemønstere where refreshments are available and questions about Electrical Walks Copenhagen are welcome.

TOP: Christina Kubisch engaging in an *Electrical Walk* in Oslo, Norway, May 2019. Photo: Frank Paul. © Christina Kubisch.

SOUND A S SCULPTURE

The provocative, bodily connections of sound within sculpture that chronicles lives lost to violence.

CHRISTOPHER BLAY



hen looking at sculpture, it is counterintuitive to think about the sonic properties that are latent in the materials that make up three-dimensional art, since they are not a foundational attribute of the medium. Sculptors create a visual experience which engages our sense of sight and our ability to perceive height, width,

and depth. Granted, they also sometimes count on our sense of touch to fully express their ideas, as when we walk through one of Ernesto Neto's sculptures, or on a Carl Andre floor sculpture.

Stepping beyond the three-dimensional ever so briefly, and moving closer to the sonic, there is sometimes an invitation (or maybe a temptation) to thump, as when we select our favorite melons at market, in order to get a sense of what material sounds like. I have participated in, and observed, this kind of sonic curiosity. Hang around any of Richard Serra's Cor-Ten steel sculptures long enough, and it is bound to happen. At the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Serra's *Vortex*, a vertical steel sculpture acquired by the museum in 2002, is a site where many curious art enthusiasts do that exact thing. Standing in the center of the vortex, surrounded by curved steel arching upwards, a reflection on the tornado that tore across Fort Worth's Cultural District in 2000, you can usually find visitors clapping, shrieking, or otherwise tapping the steel surfaces of *Vortex* to experience the echoing sounds it makes.

Discovered sound in sculpture as experienced in *Vortex* can't be overlooked when thinking about how sculpture that primarily engages us visually can sometimes surprise us when we are able to hear or feel what we also see. The University of Texas at Austin's Landmarks Public Art Program produces Sound in Sculpture, a program in which student

musicians compose music inspired by the sculptures in the museum's collection. While it is a more conceptual connection between the visual arts and music, it is nevertheless a useful way of imagining some of the possibilities of the two forms. Tapping into what an object evokes or alludes to is a fuller engagement and can make personal and subjective experiences slightly more tangible.

Nick Cave's first soundsuit, for example, made in response to the beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police in 1992, fuses the performative with the sonic, the sculptural with the sociopolitical. The artist and the dancers with whom he works don the suits for performances which produce swishes, chimes, and rattles that are the inspiration for the name of the more than 500 suits Cave has created to date. They are at the same time beautiful, mythological, and emotional. Cave recounted in a podcast for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, "It was me asking myself: What does it feel like to be discarded, viewed less than, dismissed as a Black male?" The original wearable suit, made of twigs, was followed by others, created from found object elements acquired from thrift stores, markets, and antique shops. Cave's sculptures function with duality and come untethered from their forms. Soundsuits, when exhibited, still have potential energy that reverberate because of their performative nature. But they also represent a mystical transformation, not unlike when the Kru people of Liberia, my father's tribe, don ceremonial head and body dress for rituals and dances, and when we experience those objects in museums. When Cave talks about the anonymity his soundsuits bring to the wearer and about how it forces us to see each other removed from the color of skin, the work also becomes a refuge, a protective talisman. Beyond all this, they are also simply beautiful.

I think about sound in my own work as an artist when making the connection between things we cannot fully express and things we cannot fully experience. *Microaudiotellarevolution*, a 2009 installation I mounted at the now defunct Gallery 414 in Fort Worth, included recorded readings on 12 cassette tapes played on tape recorders across from a series of headphones in the shape of the map of Liberia. The content was transcripts from the trial of Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, who was later convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands.





2.



Another element, gas masks hanging on a wall with untethered headphones, facing a series of unplugged microphones, suggested justice falling on deaf ears.

Feel Me?, a 2021 installation, which includes an oversized wall painting of a black shooting target silhouette (with the phrase “Feel Me?” painted in the middle), and a sound recording of gunshots, included a haptic vest that reverberated with the sound of gunfire, creating a sense, if only a sense, of the impact of being shot—a phenomenon all too frequently experienced by Black people at the hands of white police officers, and something that is constantly on my mind as a Black artist in America.

A recent experience had me circling back to one work in a recent exhibition, which exemplifies the sound/sculpture intersection. It was Nadine Robinson’s *Coronation Theme: Organon* in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts exhibition *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*. The large-scale installation of black speaker cabinets, 30 in all, were stacked and constructed to form an architectural approximation of the facade of Atlanta’s historic Ebenezer Baptist Church where Martin Luther King Jr. was pastor from 1960 until his assassination in 1968. The sculpture pulsed with the echo of organ music playing segments of Handel’s *Coronation Anthems*, overlaid with snippets of sermons, prayers, and voices from protest demonstrations. There was also a steady bass hum that vibrated through the sculpture that felt like standing in quicksand, transfixed.

The towering speaker cabinets, with the capacity to physically move objects with vibrations, still appeared almost restrained in the brightly lit galleries of the VMFA. The sound, tactfully reduced so as not to detract from the rest of the exhibition, was a clarion call that beckoned from the struggles for justice and equality over 60 years ago. Revisiting *Coronation* in early November at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, when the show travelled here, was no less moving. I stood in front of it a little longer, and with each moment, felt a little more. As Robinson employs it, sound and sculpture can add even more dimensions and layers beyond seeing and hearing.

In her sculptural installation *American Monument*, 2019, artist lauren woods and collaborator Kimberli Meyer presented vinyl recordings of 911 calls and bystander audio from 22 incidents of police killings of Black civilians. By providing an interactive environment (visitors were encouraged to walk through the installation and, if they so desired, could stop at any pedestal and play one of the 22 recordings) the installation could be experienced differently by each person and allowed for a fuller, deeper moment every time the recordings were played.

Where Cave, woods, and Robinson meld sound and sculpture, possibilities for deeper engagement and stronger connections that already exist separately are revealed. However, their praxis codifies how the two should connect by bridging the space between what can be observed and what can be felt (experienced). Sculpture alone is everything that it needs to be—a fully realized object in space that has a relationship with the physical world and the viewer. Sound—the vibrations we experience and translate—occupies an internal, psychological (emotional) space. These works leverage a broad spectrum of materials and media in fusing the two. And where they connect, the layers are more complex, and the experiences are all the richer for it.

1. Nick Cave (b. 1959). *Soundsuit*, 2006. Fabric, sequins, fiberglass and metal, 100 x 26 x 13 in. (254 x 66 x 33 cm). Miami: *30 Americans*. Photo: courtesy of Rubell Museum, Miami.

2. lauren woods (b. 1979). *American Monument*, 2018 (installation view). San Diego: *American Monument 25/2018* at the University Art Museum at California State University, San Diego. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

3. Christopher Blay (b. 1967). *Feel Me?*, 2021. Wall painting, pedestal, haptic vest, recorded gunshots. Austin: *Power, Traps, and Targets* at Big Medium. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

4. Nadine Robinson (b. 1968). *Coronation Theme: Organon*, 2008. Speakers, sound system and mixed media. Houston: *Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material, Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Photo: Victoria Nguyen.



3.

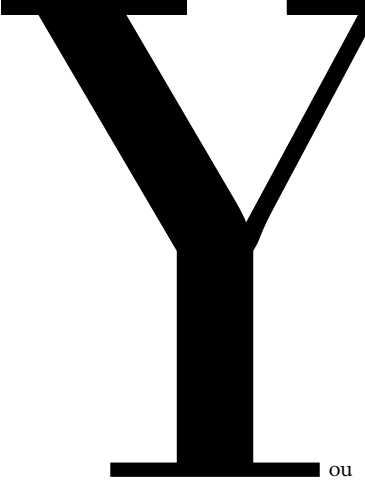


4.

to
stave off
silence

**Finding the Line on Which to Progress: The Fracturing of Silence
in Three Scores by John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, and Dick Higgins.**

BRANDON KENNEDY



ou

could feel the stuttering, semi-halt slowly rolling across the surface of our now somewhat realigned planet. The unknown, the uncertainty, the slow quiet expanse that pushed doggedly through the lines of standard operation, bringing every thought-to-be-comforting sound to an end amid the ponderously looming question of “when can it all begin again?” Not anew—mind you—but just begin, again ...

When in doubt, I found myself walking, thinking, listening. More of the same, mostly alone, sometimes on nearby sidewalks, though more and more frequently seeking solace in nature—in civic pockets or just beyond—pondering its rhythms and finding a constant, readymade answer in my breath, footsteps, and surroundings.

I thought about sound within the expanse of the experience of amorphous “pandemic time” while pondering exactly what the score for John Cage’s ambient masterpiece *4’33”* looked like for the musician(s) not playing it. How did an attempt at *not exactly* silence play out on paper? Was there conventional notation or a lack thereof? An instructional sentence or an opening directive? Well, it seems, varied: yes and no/ perhaps, and *that depends*.

On August 29, 1952, musician David Tudor performed *4’33”* for the first time in Woodstock, New York. Tudor sat down at the piano and preceded to perform the composition by opening the keyboard lid to mark the beginning of the first movement—of which there were three in total. Fittingly, the keyboard lid was also closed at the end of each movement, marking time, and relegating the ambient sound from the audience (and the environments and noises just beyond) as the performative elements of the work as a whole. A composition enclosed within the mirrored gestures of preparing an instrument to be played, then closing it again upon completion. Audience members stirred at the notion of measured chance as composition while they were—some perhaps unwilling—participants in this initial, simple but grand gesture.

As the original notational score was lost (by some accounts even before the initial performance), the exact components of Cage’s conventional scoring are not known. However, a year later, the composer decided to make a graphical score of the work, using vertical lines to demarcate the passage of time, i.e., “1 page = 7 inches = 56 seconds.” These thin, ink lines drift upward on the folded onionskin paper replicating the passage of movements of

time initiated by Tudor a year earlier, yet they also visually mimic the seams between the white monochromes of Rauschenberg (a noted influence on the work). The line ends when the desired length of time is reached and is capped with a numerical clarifier of the elapsed moment. 30”; 2’23”; 1’40”.

On the cover of the folded composition—which also serves as the title page—Cage directs: “FOR ANY INST[R]UMENTS OR COMBINATION OF INSTRUMENTS.” (A tongue-in-cheek rejoinder from the sly wizard of chance.) Nevertheless, *4’33”* is not held steadfast to its titular time-elapsed directive either; the work can be performed with movements of any particular length (or none), allowing for an expanded idea of what the title of the composition holds, as it may not even contain the exact amount of time that has just passed during its performance.

From what I currently understand, there are at least three definitive versions and yet another that exists as a variation of the reproduced typed version with annotations below in Cage’s *Zen architect’s CAPS*. In it, he recalls the second performance and its particulars while the typed text block above recalled the same of the first. Three movements demarcated above by I, II and III with a (line break) / TACET / (line break) following each roman numeral. “Tacet” simply means “in silence” and can either be an adverb or adjective, directive, or qualifier. This score can be readily purchased today, if so desired or even needed.

In a New York bookstore where I was employed almost two decades ago, I coveted a bound item of graphical notation before knowing what it even was, or what it is “exactly” (or even could be): *TREATISE* by Cornelius Cardew, published in an oblong folio format with a white comb plastic spine and glossy printed cardstock covers. It had 193 pages, no instrumentation or directions for performance, just the bibliographical info, “... The Gallery Upstairs Press, Buffalo, New York, 1967. ...”

Cardew—trained formally as a draftsman and graphic designer—worked on the meticulous, complex construction from 1963 to 1967, presenting the score as an evolving, left-to-right progression of shapes, symbols, numbers, and linear elements.

The key rules of the composition’s design are laid out plainly on the score’s cover, allocating a bold horizontal line at center (separating title and composer) and two staves at bottom with a margin below (between which is the publisher’s info). These two components ground the notation, as the midline is the point from which all “action” evolves, and the two blank staves below propel the score along, pushing the traditional containers of notation as timekeepers, the only constant in a forthcoming sea of interpretation and improvisation.

As the cover design lines bleed into the beginnings of Cardew’s actual score, inexplicable numbers and figures sometimes arrive just above, and circles cluster off the center line, with all matter of swoops, slides and pockets, enclosing

opportunities for the interpreting musicians to carve out their responses and establish motifs to be picked up or riffed upon further downfield.

Aside from the performers' interpretation, the question here is time. Does the entire ensemble move along at the same pace from page to page? If so, how? (Absence of a conductor seems to be an unwritten—yet mostly adhered to—rule.)

Quite often, the score is displayed sewn together as a moving image—page-edge to page-edge—forming a graphic video scroll that rolls out as a projected score for both the musicians and viewer to keep time, interpretation, and visual relativity consistent. No tempo markings are given, but the consensus seems to land at an andante, “a moderately, slow pace,” walking slowly enough to have a conversation perhaps.

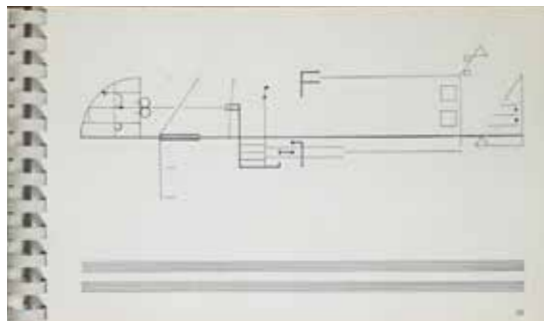
As the score animates and expands, it can be read as a utopian landscape revealing a poignant, visual lyricism and a curious, inner logic that sometimes recalls the playfulness of a Paul Klee drawing or a blackboard equation being rendered in real time by Saul Steinberg. Visual graphical motifs expand and contract as the composition evolves, allowing for translation and reintroduction as the musicians have opportunities to build and expand upon an aural vocabulary befitting Cardew's wondrous narrative of lines and shapes.

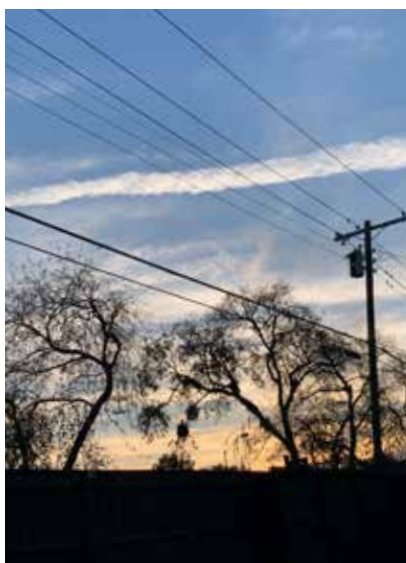
At the close of a recent sojourn westward, I dropped into a bookstore on the way to the airport. After I had handled a good half dozen of collectible volumes, asking for items tucked behind the counter or inquiring about pricing, I saw a page of the grail of Fluxus scores above my head and to the left. Just above the bookcases, slightly beyond my gaze, a reflection of several bullet holes puncturing a large, printed sheet of musical staves for full orchestra reckoned quietly with the violence of such a gesture secured behind glass.

A cornerstone of performative documentation, Dick Higgins's politically potent, yet still somewhat irreverent *The Thousand Symphonies* (1968) is a work emanating from the violence and consternation in the heady days of the Vietnam War and social upheaval and unrest of the era.

Handwritten across the top, “1 - Allegro Vivace / Symphony No. 464 462 / by Dick Higgins / Page 1/4,” the folio page ran from piccolo at top to contrabass at bottom and included a vocal component—solos and chorus—tucked in just before the strings rounded down. Nevertheless, the blank composing page had been riddled with entrance wounds, about two dozen, somewhat randomly distributed by the discharge of a police captain's 9 mm submachine gun in a college town on the East Coast.

Higgins was invited to participate in *Gun Show* at Douglass College in 1968 by curator John Goodyear, and decided to participate by activating one of his earlier—and most ambitious—works from his *Danger Music* Fluxus performance directives, No. 12, “Write





a Thousand Symphonies” (March 1962). Gathering up a sizable quantity of blank orchestral scores, Higgins enlisted the expertise of Captain Toby of the South Brunswick police force to effectively score the work, as he “decided it could be more worthy if one could set all the policemen in the USA to composing symphonies ...” as it seemed they “... have nothing better to do than to chase down teenagers and for possessing miniscule amounts of marijuana and throwing them in jail, thus ruining their lives.”

This was a violent act, with repercussions felt at every level of conception, actualization, interpretation, listening (one would imagine) and the documents themselves, as they rest on the stands of the orchestral members, and even on the walls of museums (and bookstores) today. A conductor hands out the scores to the appointed musicians as they deem appropriate and necessary to the given performance. Higgins’s instructions dictate that the performers play in typical fashion—left to right—and can “repeat any fragment, any rip of paper crossing their parts indicates the shape of the musical event as well as they may play. The lack of a rip means that they are silent during the movement.” Not only do these gunned-down orchestral scores bear the marks of their making, but occasionally spray paint spreads shadows through the holes, or mud from the shooting range scores a palimpsestic echo of the wrought destruction.

The ways in which we mark time: to make peace with the spaceless chaos of random noise, or to improvise ambient sounds led by the ledger of the line. An extension of the point to another, itself a marker of place. Now extended—length—by means vertical or baseline, allowing for the reception of near silence enclosed within the timed envelope of chance; an interpretation of a graphical model provided by the composer; or even yet, the body of the composition itself riddled with holes of lethal intent, to be interpreted by eyes echoing the voids in the notational structure itself, opening the wounds again through performative interpretation and giving them the recall of loss in real time.

We begin as we end, by being open to the act of listening itself. Allowing for a variety of interpretations, we choose what to hear and identify as part of a greater whole. How we interpret another’s set of directives or visual cues presents an opportunity to further the definition of exactly what the composition can encapsulate within its score, its performance, and the concept of silence itself.

It rests between us, and the concepts rendered by Cage, Cardew and Higgins in their compositions wrestling with the notion of interrupting silence with a certain quality of line. A proposition that propels this listener to begin an amble anew, ears open and a mind full of possibilities as to what the future could hold—and sound like—that is, if we’re truly open to listening to it.

now play this

KEN SHIMAMOTO

A wild idea to couple renowned musicians with Harry Bertoia's sounding sculptures leads to a history-making experiment in music and art.

Throughout his career, the writer, poet, and record producer David Breskin has explored the intersections between music and other art forms. For the six concerts that comprised ‘SCULPTING SOUND: Twelve Musicians Encounter Bertoia,’ presented at the Nasher February 22-27, in conjunction with *Harry Bertoia: Sculpting Mid-Century Modern Life*, Breskin added the immediacy of live performance to the concept.

Each concert featured two world-class players taking turns performing on their main instrument and manipulating Bertoia’s sounding sculptures—a series of “shadow duets.” On successive nights, audiences heard guitarists Nels Cline and Ben Monder, trumpeters Ambrose Akinmusire and Nate Wooley, saxophonists Ingrid Laubrock and JD Allen, acoustic string players Jen Shyu and Brandon Seabrook, drummers Marcus Gilmore and Dan Weiss, and pianists Kris Davis and Craig Taborn. Breskin’s longtime collaborator, engineer extraordinaire Ron Saint Germain, was on hand to record all the concerts, as well as additional material by the musicians using the Bertoia sculptures.

Bertoia sought to create an instrument anyone could play without training or practice (or that could be “played” by nature without human intervention). Around 1960, inspired by hearing the sound a single wire made when it broke while he was bending it, Bertoia started building his “tonals,” at first soldering beryllium copper rods to wire grid bases. Later, he used drilled flat metal bases. When activated by touch, wind, or ambient vibration, the rods jostle together as they undulate, creating a unified voice rather than a percussive clatter.

Bertoia deliberately varied the length of the rods in each piece, so that none sounds a specific pitch; instead, the listener hears a wash of sound from many tones of proximate pitch that evoke sounds of nature. The artist added “cattail” tops to rods, recalling the wheat fields of his childhood in Italy, and cylinders to add ringing sounds. He experimented with different metals and built larger pieces—first gongs for thunderous sounds, later bell-like “singing bars” of varying lengths. He used what musicians now call “extended techniques,” such as rubbing the edge of a gong with wet fingers to create haunting, eerie sounds. The sonic palette of Bertoia’s tonals has influenced a variety of musicians including Angelo Badalamenti, John Cage, Brian Eno, the Kronos Quartet, and Ryuichi Sakamoto.

In his “Sonambient Barn”—a stone structure in the woods on his farm in rural Pennsylvania—Bertoia created a meditative space where he could enjoy the sounds of his favorite pieces, displayed in groupings to make an array of sounds available in each station. The swaying of the rods, the tones they produced, and the vibration they created in the floor all combined with the green light from the woods outside the barn to produce a total sensory environment.

From Bertoia’s brother Oreste, a recording engineer, came the idea of tape recording “concerts” of the pieces in the barn. Bertoia self-released the first recordings of his sculptures’ sounds under the rubric *Sonambient* in 1971. He compiled 10 further LPs which were released in 1978, the year of his death. The albums found a receptive audience in a world where 20th-century innovations had expanded listeners’ understanding of what music is or can be—where color and texture can be as important to music’s impact as are pitch and rhythm. In 2015, Important Records remastered the 11 albums and released them in a CD box set to coincide with the Bertoia centennial. In 2021, Third Man Records reissued the box set on vinyl.

The musicians Breskin selected for ‘SCULPTING SOUND’ have spent decades honing their craft and are accustomed to taking musical risks. The duet pairings were intended to highlight stylistic contrasts. The concerts were originally planned to incorporate 15 pieces from the Nasher exhibit, but Celia Bertoia of the Bertoia Foundation agreed to send another 20 pieces that were formerly housed in the Sonambient Barn for the purpose of these concerts.

Breskin and I spoke via Zoom last December, a couple months before the concerts.

KEN SHIMAMOTO

What was your first exposure to the Bertoia sounding sculptures?

DAVID BRESKIN

When I was a teenager, my father had a Bertoia “cattails” piece, about head high, a 4x4 copper 16-rod. “Cattails” means that the rods have weights on the top of them. That became a fixture in his den, near a sliding glass door that went out to a deck. He had multiple sclerosis and was unstable on his feet, and at one point, he was losing his balance and he mistakenly grabbed onto the object he could see, which was the sound sculpture, and he and the sound sculpture went down to the floor. And the sound that it made was tremendous and quite startling—like the gong at the beginning of *Birds of Fire*, the Mahavishnu Orchestra album.

SHIMAMOTO

How did this series of concerts at the Nasher come about?

BRESKIN

I was attending a Julian Charrière show at the Dallas Museum of Art, across the street from the Nasher, and was able to reacquaint myself with Jeremy Strick, who’s director of the Nasher. I’d been looking at this Bertoia show they had coming for some time, maybe a couple of years, and in the back of my mind I always had this idea that wouldn’t it be just wild fun to organize something where you had really great musicians, could corral a bunch of Bertoias and say to these musicians, “Sic ’em! Let’s play in the real sense of play.” It was sort of a pipe dream, but I thought “There’s no harm in mentioning this,” and Jeremy was extremely receptive to it.



SHIMAMOTO

I want to spend some time talking about how you came about selecting the musicians, and the format in which they’re being presented.

BRESKIN

How do these 12 become our dirty dozen? There’s always some randomness to it, and some quirks of just following your nose—or your ears—to things that you think might be provocative. We’re not going to just celebrate virtuosity; we’re looking to celebrate the people who are the most creative and open. These 12 are all not just great instrumentalists,

they’re great improvisers. That’s key. While some of these artists may bring in some prepared material, whether it’s sketch-like or more formal, the sets will be largely or wholly improvised. Bertoia said every person who plays [his sculptures] is going to sound different because every person is different.

To your second question about the format, originally, I had just the basic idea: musicians meet Bertoia. But as I started to think it through, it dawned on me that whenever a Bertoia sounds, it really sounds and it goes on for a while. So if you make the musician play their instrument and essentially duet with themselves, you’re foreclosing a lot of opportunities for interactivity. I thought a way around this might be if I engaged with the Bertoia material while the musician played their instrument. But that would be less interesting than another musician on par with the first guy or gal playing. So maybe the way to do it is a little like Noah’s Ark: they come two by two, and they’re grouped so we have the same instrumentation. I’m not going to pair a pianist and a drummer, or a saxophone player with a guitar player. They have to have a certain kind of cooperation, a sense in the moment, but no one has experienced this before, so there’s necessarily a kind of experimental aspect to it. You have this kind of tension between a chance thing, novelty, and then an incredible mastery, but in dialogue with a respected peer. It ratchets up the possibilities for disaster. It also ratchets up the possibilities for deliciousness and depth and reflexivity—where one thing becomes very reflexive to something else, so you get a third thing.

Every musician will be in the day before their concert and will get time, hopefully several hours, to explore the material. I will be there as a little bit of a guide. Celia Bertoia, one of Harry Bertoia’s two daughters, who’s an expert at this and is very supportive, will be there, if not for the whole festival, then for part of it to help introduce them. We’ll have some of Bertoia’s tools that he purpose-built to play some of these tonals. We’ll have mallets for the gongs and that kind of stuff, so hopefully [the musicians] will have enough experience, even if they didn’t meet Bertoia till the day before. They’ll have slept with Bertoia that night, and we’ll see what kind of shotgun wedding we can create the next day.

SHIMAMOTO

This meeting place of preparation and chance is the essence, I think, of experimental music. There’s potential for unplanned events the musicians are going to have to respond to.

BRESKIN

It clearly will be an attempt at art, not craft. The key distinction between art and craft is that the craftsperson knows what they want to make, and how to make it. The artist never knows completely what he or she wants to make. The work has to talk back to them. They have to discover something in it for it to really be art. It’s, again, the difference between art and entertainment. The entertainer gives somebody something they already know they like. The artist gives something to the audience that the audience didn’t know they liked yet. And discovers that they liked it.

SHIMAMOTO

One of the things that made my jaw drop about this lineup of performers is the contrast between some of them. Looking at the trumpet players, for instance, I can’t imagine two players more different than Ambrose Akinmusire and Nate Wooley.

BRESKIN

Maybe it’s me being slightly devilish or acting as a provocateur, just to set something in motion. The idea, from my curatorial point of view, is to try to create some rich and fragrant juxtapositions, and hopefully there’ll be some friction. And with friction, you get heat. With heat you get some light, you know. That’s the goal, whether it happens or not. So, while Ambrose and Nate are both amazing trumpet players, you know

Nate's very focused on extended techniques and maybe playing with his amplifier and doing all kinds of things that are more associated with the avant-garde in terms of contemporary classical music and "new music." Whereas Ambrose might come more squarely from the jazz tradition, and yet he's made a record with a string quartet and a rapper.

SHIMAMOTO

The Jen Shyu/Brandon Seabrook [acoustic instruments] pairing is particularly fascinating to me. Besides being an instrumentalist and singer, Jen is also a dancer. I'm wondering if she'll incorporate movement into her performance. Perhaps not a good comparison, but it makes me think of Harry Partch—incorporating beautiful objects with movement and music.

BRESKIN

I don't know. Jen can do everything, as well as sing in eight languages. She very well may sing. And movement is obviously a key thing for her. Brandon moves a lot when he plays, too. The haptic quality of his playing is quite profound, and the physicality.

That triggered something in my memory. There was a show at the Met in New York many years ago. Toward the very end of the show were some Bertioia sound sculptures. I knew they were there because as I walked through the galleries, I could hear the sound getting louder and louder. The Bertioias were up on a kind of pedestal, you weren't supposed to touch them. But there's something about these things. You have to touch them. You have to make them sound.

SHIMAMOTO

The spirit in the metal is calling out to you.

BRESKIN

There's something entrancing about [the Bertioias] because each one holds the potential to release sound. So there's implicit desire for movement and captured movement, and then your movement releases the energy of the pieces that's always built up inside. There's always this latent energy that we'll now be allowed a free range shot at.

SHIMAMOTO

One of the things all of the musicians will be dealing with is that the acoustic properties of the Bertioias in that [Nasher Hall] space are going to eat up certain areas of the frequency spectrum. They won't know where those are going to be, and they might have to modify on the fly.

BRESKIN

This is not a pristine environment, like a concert hall would be, so there will definitely be some sonic challenges. As Shannon Jackson used to say, "Nothing beats failure but a try." We're going to try to make some beautiful things happen here. History will sort out whether it's interesting or not, but that shouldn't ever get in anyone's way from trying to make something happen.

SHIMAMOTO

Bertioia documented the sound of his tonals. He definitely knew that their sounds were of interest and would be of enduring value.

BRESKIN

In an interview for the Archives of American Art, speaking of the 100 or 110 pieces in the Sonambient Barn, the interviewer says, "So, it's like your orchestra in a way." And Bertioia says, "... it could be perhaps a little more, but it may become an available musical tool for some artists who are seriously minded to explore some possibilities to express their personality." In some ways, I feel like what we're doing is what Bertioia had in mind 50 years ago: that there would always be this latent potential for these things that he put into the world, that he was aware might be used. It's just taken 50 years.

SHIMAMOTO

Ron Saint Germain will be there recording everything. You two have been working together a long time.

BRESKIN

The mix on [Ronald Shannon Jackson's album] *Man Dance* was '82. We've had a fruitful partnership over the last four decades. The thing that's amazing about Saint is that he's done everything—from Jimi Hendrix, Bad Brains, Ornette Coleman, the Sam Rivers loft jazz sessions of the '70s, to Soundgarden and Sonic Youth, solo piano recordings to Mick Jagger and U2 remixes, too. I don't know anyone that has that breadth of experience. When we did [Kris Davis and Craig Taborn's album] *Octopus* night after night, each night in a very different context, different city, different sets of pianos, and whatever, he recorded live-to-two-track on the fly. But he is also a guy who has spent 10 days mixing a single that ends up being a Top 10 single in the pop world.

**"... LET'S PLAY IN THE REAL
SENSE OF PLAY."**

- DAVID BRESKIN

SHIMAMOTO

How did programming these concerts compare to the process you go through when you're making a record?

BRESKIN

As a producer, I've never felt like an auteur. Given the kind of music I've been involved in, you don't ever want to do that, because you're foreclosing more possibilities than you're opening up. I view my role as more of a facilitator trying to create situations, create play, and then be able to step back and let things happen. Programming 'SCULPTING SOUND' was not dissimilar. Both things are trying to set up people for success. You know it's a broad brush because we're not having to sequence tracks, we're not having to build a narrative. We don't have a lattice to build this on, there's nothing preexisting, which is kind of the wonderful terror of doing it. But even that will turn out to be a narrative. Despite everyone's best intentions.

SHIMAMOTO

I suspect there'll be little precedent for this in most people's experience who are going to be there. How do you expect them to respond?

BRESKIN

It's almost like a Rorschach test because it will be so reflective of who the person is, accepting the experience or not. I think some of it will be whether people can kind of let themselves go and let their previous expectations of what music is supposed to be kind of evaporate, and the more people can do that, I think the more positive the experience will be.

Harry Bertioia's sounding sculptures installed at the Nasher Sculpture Center. 2022 Estate of Harry Bertioia / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Kevin Todora.



Elmgreen & Dragset (b. 1961 and 1969).
The Whitechapel Pool, 2018.
Photo: courtesy of the artists.

VOICES

ARTIST TALK: SEEING THE FUTURE
ARTISTS ON ART: GOOD BONES
NASHER PRIZE DIALOGUES: A THRESHOLD TO FICTIONAL LIVES

SPRING 2022

SEEING THE FUTURE

Poet and linguist Alysia Nicole Harris speaks with artist Tavares Strachan about redressing Black histories to create new possibilities.



1.

Presented on November 17, 2021, at the Nasher Sculpture Center.

ALYSIA NICOLE HARRIS

So, I don't know if you know this, but we have an overlapping experience: We both went to Yale and we both have done some weird experiments in Russia at various times in our lives, and I'm interested in talking to you about this impulse to explore these really extreme environments and climates. I'm curious about where the impulse to dislocate comes from.

TAVARES STRACHAN

I really love your question; I've been thinking a lot about nostalgia recently. Several years ago, I had a studio visit that ended studio visits for me for a while just because I was very distraught. We artists are, as you know, a very sensitive bunch and this critic at the time had said, "Well your work is becoming very nostalgic," and I thought OK, what does that mean? And fundamentally—as a linguist, I'm sure you're aware of this—but we don't always know what we mean when we say words. But the word nostalgia comes from the collision of two Greek words. It was more-or-less invented

by a physician, I think around 1688 during a war, and the soldiers at war at the time were experiencing a grave longing for the homeland. That's fascinating for me because when you're from the diaspora like me, and you come from the Bahamas—imagine being in one place and many generations later waking up in another place, and then having someone tell you that your feelings of nostalgia don't really make sense and you shouldn't reflect on your history. So, I think the idea of not being able to process one's own story in a public way, or even in a private way, or in a way that is validated by culture, presents dissonance that I think is problematic, but as an artist, very fascinating.

HARRIS

I'm interested in this notion of nostalgia or longing or maybe even exile—feeling not quite at home in a variety of different places or trying to explore a home that is retrievable. I'm interested in how that intersects with the neon sculpture that you have here with the phrase "You belong here." That phrase seems so static

but there's a lot of fluidity, a lot of change, a lot of openness present, especially in the use of the "You" and "here." So, I'm curious about how that openness constructs itself in this piece, but also in terms of what you're talking about in trying to find that space of home.

STRACHAN

The great John Baldessari has a quote which is "Artworks are really good at pointing at things that are not in the room." And so, the question is: who are you? And where is 'here'? And I think we all struggle with fitting in, and I think this work is about sameness. There's so much work done around how we're different, and so I think that the work for me is a kind of lyrical word play. I think that's the case for a lot of work that has language in it, because you read it, you almost repeat it like a lyric from a song, and in that way, you become a part of it, and it becomes a part of you. It's something that I enjoy, but I also think it has a dark undertone. You know, if you really feel that way, then why you gotta say it?



2.

HARRIS

Right, that's something that's so striking to me. I thought this phrase could be interpreted in so many different ways, depending upon the context in which we are in. It could be uttered in a space where it's already affirming what people already know: 'Of course, I belong here.' It could be uttered in a way that is trying to invite people into a space who might not feel welcome. Then I also think of the 'you' who potentially is saying it to themselves—that 'you belong here'—trying to convince yourself that you have the capacity to take up space. And what's interesting is that 'you' and 'here' are both deictic elements, so they get their meaning, their reference, from context, but it's also interesting because this piece is floating [on water], so it's also changing in terms of the location even as you're encountering it.

STRACHAN

I think one of the main ingredients of being an artist is this relationship one has to being disoriented, and disorientation is a fundamental part of creative practice. I think that so much of the world's problems are resolved through allowing oneself to go through the process of being disoriented.

HARRIS

You're working with light or illumination, and that seems to be a conceptual play, but I wonder if you could talk about the importance of this notion of visibility—what we can see and what we can't see.

STRACHAN

I think there's something that is profound about the Black experience at this moment,

especially in the art space, when there is this perception that there's so much coverage being given to artists of color. I think that when you're from the island I grew up on—the population is 250,000 people—and when you move to America and say you want to be an artist, there's this kind of vibe about you having to get in line. If you go to the museum, there's no category for the place that I'm from at the museum. And so, when you are working in the visual arts it doesn't necessarily feel like a welcoming space for you, and I think that it is significant for us to name that as a thing: who's allowed to be an artist and who's deciding? And I think we all are [deciding], in some way, and it's important for us to think through that, because the next philosopher or great thinker or the great-great-grandson of Marcus Garvey is sitting on one of those islands, just waiting for a shot.

HARRIS

I think about the ways [your work] is actually creating space, using space as a material for future possibilities, but also for historical redress and the way past figures have this kind of anaphoric relationship, where you are availing them opportunities to speak back into a narrative that they were excluded from. And I think that that's a way of creating space, not just in a gallery or museum, but actual space in the narrative for people to slip in and interweave themselves. ... You're talking about the narrative as material. I love this piece, *The Encyclopedia of Invisibility*, because it's a sculpture, it's an object, but it's also a body of knowledge. How did this piece come about and what is its ongoing process?

STRACHAN

I have this fundamental belief that we're all talking to our younger selves, and so I think all the artists that I love—all the poets, the architects—they're making work for their younger selves. In this case, I used to go to my grandma's house and read the encyclopedia. I always thought: what's up with this? How do they know? And not only how do they know all of it, but who's deciding what is in it and what is not in it. I thought to myself then, 'well, as soon as I get the chance, I'll make my own.'

HARRIS

[Your encyclopedia has] 17,000 entries. How do you decide what goes into it?

STRACHAN

I think that it's all the stories that I was interested in as a child that weren't really told in any way that was enlightening or that reflected the folks that I was going to school with or seeing in my neighborhood, but that I thought needed a place to be. And so, I wanted to try to represent invisibility, and what invisibility looks like. And I think that in this moment of chaos that we're in as a civilization, we're occupying that space where we're trying to negotiate the future by talking to the past.

HARRIS

But it's a liminal space. It's a space of uncertainty and questioning what you know and don't know and then [questioning] the criteria for coming to those conclusions, which is something that strikes me about this work—to really analyze, as an object, these bodies of knowledge that we have created. I think science is one of the ways that we're

advancing this project of human knowledge, and I think art is another way that you advance that work of human knowledge, but you're looking at science with a kind of skepticism and exploiting the nooks and crannies. I guess I'm saying science is a space of uncertainty. How do you navigate that? I'm thinking of this installation, *EIGHTEEN NINETY*. The amount of knowledge is overwhelming.

STRACHAN

The reason it's called *EIGHTEEN NINETY* is because there was kind of enlightenment for adventures in 1890. This is right on the edge of abolition and so there's all this pent-up, creative energy. And this is the year where there were the most patents submitted to the patent office in the history of the world, even up to today. In addition to that, the majority of the patents that were submitted were by Black folks, which is crazy. And [in 1890] you're seeing re-creations of some of those inventions, mixed in with some of the text of the encyclopedias, as a kind of assemblage, collage painting, but that becomes a room as a backdrop, for again, a story about invisibility. But I think it's profound because information can change reality. If you say to a kid, "Oh, by the way, you come from a long line of scientists," in a community where someone might be telling that kid, "You can't be a scientist," that information fundamentally—again, this is my argument for why art is profoundly significant and important in this moment—that information changes all of us.

HARRIS

That point that you made about the majority of the patents being submitted from Black folks reminds me that for such a long time, Black folks could be objects of study, could be analyzed, experimented on, manipulated for purposes external to our own benefit, but we couldn't be bodies of knowledge. Our literal bodies could not produce knowledge that could be useful to the wider world, and that mechanism of redress in your work is to question that and to actually put Black observers, Black artists, Black inventors, Black scientists into the position that they have always been able to hold as observers of the world, of people who are able to analyze and to communicate. To give that contribution meaning and weight is also really powerful in this moment, and to be able to say to that kid, "Yeah that's you, that's you right there."

STRACHAN

In early college, I had eczema, and one of the things that the doctor prescribed was cortisone, and cortisone was discovered by a Black man. And I think knowing this is important. I think it's this kind of cat and mouse game, not necessarily about invisibility but what's visible and why it's visible. Because

usually [what is visible] is taking the space of something that is not there, so why do we know the things that we know? It makes me think about school curriculums, and that's just how power is constructed, right?

HARRIS

I want to talk about power in this image, *Every Knee Shall Bow*. So, what's the deal with the title of this piece?

STRACHAN

One of the biggest inspirations for the encyclopedia project, and a lot of the work that I make, is the fact that when I was in school in the Bahamas as a kid, you never learned about anyone Black. I know more about Columbus and the conquistadors than I know about anyone from Nairobi or Ethiopia or the Sudan, but there was this kind of diamond in the rough which was music. Music was a space where all these hidden gems about history and these untold stories were. I would go to school and learn what they were teaching me, and then I would go home and the drug dealer across the street would be playing reggae. In that music, which was kind of shrouded in this kind of chaos of the neighborhood, was information about Haile Selassie or Marcus Garvey or Prince Emanuel or the Nile or civilization or inventions of mathematics or architecture or ... all this is embedded in the words to the music, which is my real education.

This Ethiopian man, His Majesty Haile Selassie, met up with Queen Elizabeth and, because emperors outrank queens, she had to bow to [him], and I think he's the only person she's ever taken the knee for. And so, I decided to make this work that was a kind of a meditation on this relationship, this collision between these two powerful entities. I mean, we can wax on and on about [how he was the] Ethiopian Mussolini, but the general premise here is that he's a short, frail, but very powerful emperor. And then there are these meditations about religion in the Caribbean and Rasta and Rastafarianism, and who gets to decide what's a religion and what's not. Who decides what a god is? And this idea of being able to play with these bits of history, because I think that's how the future happens—you ping-pong moments of the present with the past, and then you end up with the future.

1. Tavares Strachan (b. 1979). *We Belong Here*, 2021. Neon, 532 x 176 in. (1351.3 x 447 cm). Installation at Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Tavares Strachan. Photo: Jurate Veceraite.
2. Tavares Strachan (b. 1979). *EIGHTEEN NINETY* and *The Encyclopedia of Invisibility*, 2018/2020. Approx. 1,354 panels; UV ink, vinyl, graphite, oil stick, Mylar, collage, acrylic, Sintra, leather, gilding archival paper, maple, felt. Overall: 72 3/4 x 267 7/8 x 231 5/8 in. (184.9 x 680.4 x 588.4 cm). Book: 15 3/8 x 13 3/8 x 5 in. (39.1 x 34 x 12.7 cm). Installation of *In Plain Sight* at Marian Goodman Gallery, London, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Tavares Strachan. Photo: Lewis Ronald.
3. Tavares Strachan (b. 1979). *Every Knee Shall Bow*, 2020. Oil, enamel, and pigment on acrylic, 96 x 96 x 2 in. (243.8 x 243.8 x 5.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Tavares Strachan. Photo: Jurate Veceraite.



JET

OCTOBER 2, 1952 15c
A JOHNSON PUBLICATION

THE TRUTH
ABOUT FEMALE
IMPERSONATORS

JET

OCTOBER 2, 1952 15c
A JOHNSON PUBLICATION

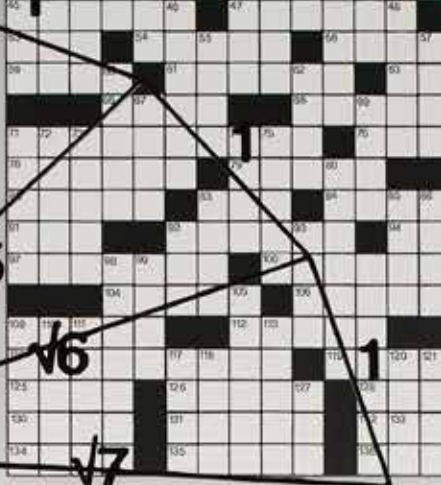
THE TRUTH
ABOUT FEMALE
IMPERSONATORS



HAILE SELASSIE:
He expands his empire
while other kings
lose their grip



AFRICA'S LAST KING



54" 137.2 cm

24" 61 cm

2" 5 cm

17" 43 cm

PAUL



GOOD BONES

A sculpture by Alberto Giacometti inspires a painter's musing on Mexican memento mori.

FRANCISCO MORENO



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3.

Excerpted from the Nasher's Instagram series 'Artists on Art,' in which artists offer reflections on a work from the Nasher collection.

When I was invited to the Nasher to look around and choose a work to speak about, I was immediately drawn to this amazing sculpture by Alberto Giacometti called *Head-Skull* from 1934. I had this immediate reaction to the work. I began to think back to when I was 7 years old in Mexico at my uncle's wedding, where there were these Mexican sugar skulls on the table as decoration, and I was so blown away by these things. Skulls and skeletons are the main symbol of Mexico's Day of the Dead, a multiday holiday that involves family and friends gathering to pray and to remember their friends and family members who have died. Now, these objects—sugar skulls—are so beautiful. They're made of sugar, chocolate. They're sculptural; they're decorated by hand; they're edible, which, as a 7-year-old, is super enticing. They're representative of death, yet colorful and vibrant. So, at 7 years old, my first sculptural encounter is this sugar skull at my uncle's wedding.

Fast forward 11 years. I am in America now studying painting in college, and at this point I'd become an American citizen and I was mining Mexican symbols to better understand my personal background. My dad introduced me to the etchings of José Guadalupe Posada. This print by Posada

is called *La Calavera Catrina*, and I was fascinated by this image because the skeleton of the Catrina is personified. She almost seems welcoming, funny, like she would tell you this really interesting joke or story—like, you almost want to get to know this Catrina, right? The hat is over the top. It's almost three times bigger than the skull.

What I find fascinating about the sugar skull and the Catrina is that artists or craftsmen were using the sugar skull as a starting point and then altering it in some way, whether by decorating it or dressing it up.

This interest in skulls in art led me to learn more about how the skull is implemented in Mexican history, and it taught me that the motif has been used for thousands of years, usually symbolizing death, mortality, and the vanity of earthly life. A beautiful example that I saw was in an exhibition of artifacts from the ancient city of Teotihuacan at the de Young Museum in San Francisco in 2018—the Aztec 'circular relief' from the Sun Pyramid, made around 300 to 458 AD. It's probably not as it was presented in the past, but it's still incredibly beautiful, and what I want you to remember from this piece is that the stone is supposed to represent folded paper around the skull. It's very simplified. It's not representative

of an actual skull. It's not anatomically correct, and then you have this folded paper around the edge, so it's definitely stylized, but still speaks to the motif of the skull.

Now we fast forward to 1997 with Mexican sculptor Gabriel Orozco's *Black Kites*. This is one of my favorite contemporary sculptures. Orozco covered an actual human skull with drawn graphite. So, if you look at the top of the skull, you see this checkered pattern, and it doesn't wrap around this skull but is more projected, and it begins to warp as it goes around. So you are, in a sense, aware of the dimensionality of this skull. It's also interesting because it had to be carefully drawn, so even though this is the skull of someone [dead], Gabriel Orozco, in a way, brings [them] back to life. This skull can be readily understood as a memento mori, or a reminder of death, a common symbol in the European still life tradition. I know it seems dark, but I really see this with optimism. It is for me a reminder to be present today because in the end, we only have a certain amount of time here on this earth.

Now, with that said, I'd like to invite you to look at Giacometti's *Head-Skull*. Before we talk about Giacometti, I want to just look at the sculpture from a formal perspective. It is

kind of like the Aztec relief, right? It's very simplified, very geometric, very polygonal. It is composed of different planes. This line cutting through the center of the piece continues to the top. Now, if you come to the right side, you can see that it is very simple. It's almost like an egg that's become a polygonal egg, but you still see the slit of the mouth, so he's still giving you just the right amount of information to invite you to the other side. As you come to the other side, you begin to see characteristic qualities of the skull. I love the eye socket here. You know it's a very, very simplified eye socket. He just drew a perfect circle and just carved just the right amount. You see this bottom line that comes across? That is representative of the jawbone. The square where the eye socket is, is representative of the cheek. And then if you come farther back, the left side is a little bit within the right side to say like, oh maybe this is something that exists within, right?

Alberto Giacometti sculpted this in 1934. He sculpted this toward the end of his involvement with the Surrealist movement and, I quote, "Giacometti explored themes like introspection, dreams, and madness, incorporating the imaginary universe of everyday objects into his works."¹ The idea of a skull—that's the ultimate everyday object that all of us always carry around within our bodies, right?



4.

¹"Suspended Ball (Boule Suspendue), 1930-31," Guggenheim Bilbao, 2018, <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/learn/schools/teachers-guides/suspended-ball-boule-suspendue-1930-1931>.

1. Gabriel Orozco (b. 1962). *Black Kites Print*, 1997. Digital print on paper. Image: courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.
2. Jose Guadalupe Posada (b. 1852). *La Calavera Catrina (Skull of the Female Dandy)*, c. 1910. Zinc etching, 13.6 x 9.1 in (34.5 x 23 cm).
3. Circular relief, 300–458 AD. Stone, 49 1/4 x 40 1/2 x 9 7/8 in. (125 x 103 x 25 cm). Museo Nacional de Antropología / INAH, 10-81807. Archivo Digital de las Colecciones del Museo Nacional de Antropología / INAH-CANON. Image: courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Something that I think is very important about this piece is that Giacometti was part of the Surrealist group in Paris, and he decided to transition to leave it. And here you see this very polished sculpture, but around 1935 he gave up on his surrealist influences to pursue a deeper analysis of figurative composition. And this is important because I think we as artists change and evolve. What I knew of Giacometti before I learned about this work were these very visceral figurative sculptures of skinny humans, skinny figures that were also the subject of his paintings, these somewhat monochromatic portraits of sitters, stylized. And you could see every brushstroke as you can see his fingerprints in the sculptures.

It's fascinating that he went from making something like *Head-Skull* to then making very visceral figurative sculptures. I think that's a testament to how artists need to evolve. They need to change, especially today with all this pressure to have a "brand." I'm kind of jealous of older artists that didn't have to worry about that, right? They could just make their work and talk to their friends.

And with that said, I'm going to talk a little bit about how I use this skull in my painting. Here you see *The Allegory of Weed Gummy and Alcohol Induced Anxiety*. This figure is confronting these substances that have created this experience of anxiety. You see a lot of demons taunting him and torturing him and making him feel very uncomfortable. Toward the right, you see this skeleton that has a cowboy hat and this AR-15. I mean, he could be representative of toxic masculinity. Thinking back to how Posada personified his Catrina, this skull I painted is a character that has existed in the past, exists today, and will exist in the future. And he's interesting because he came from an etching that Hans Holbein did from a series of works called *The Dance of Death*. So again, I'm pulling from art history and using it to inspire my works today.



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6.

4. Alberto Giacometti (1902–1966). *Venice Woman III (Femme de Venise III)*, 1956. Bronze, 47 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 6 7/8 in. (120.7 x 34.3 x 17.5 cm). Succession Alberto Giacometti / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY 2022. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.
5. Alberto Giacometti (1902–1966). *Head-Skull (Tête-crâne)*, 1934. Marble, 7 3/8 x 7 3/4 x 8 1/8 in. (18.7 x 19.7 x 20.6 cm). Succession Alberto Giacometti / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY 2022. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.
6. Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543). *The Old Man*, from *The Dance of Death* series, ca. 1526, published 1538. Woodcut, sheet: 2 9/16 x 11 5/16 in. (6.5 x 4.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1919.
7. Francisco Moreno (b. 1986). *The Allegory of Weed Gummy and Alcohol Induced Anxiety*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 51.2 x 76.8 in. (130 cm x 195 cm). Photo: courtesy of the artist.



7.

A THRESHOLD TO FICTIONAL LIVES

Architecture and fabricated history in the work of three artists.



1.

*Art historian and Nasher Prize juror **Briony Fer** speaks with artists **Michael Elmgreen**, **Nina Beier**, and **Martin Boyce**, excerpted from *Nasher Prize Dialogues: Sculpture + Architecture*, presented in partnership with CHART, Copenhagen, Denmark, on August 31, 2019.*

BRIONY FER

I'm delighted to be able to chair this afternoon's conversation between these three artists. We're in some ways expanding the notion of design to touch on architecture, but in a way, I think all of us might feel there's a problem with the idea that art or sculpture might be *about* architecture? Are you as artists working with architecture design as a raw material, as a cultural material, as a literal, palpable material like any other? What is it that you're doing with it?

I think it's very interesting to bring you three together. In some ways, one can imagine certain overlaps perhaps, but you have such distinctive practices. I think one of the things that we'd really like to do is loosen up the categories—to think of sculpture in a more expanded sense, but also to think [about] what might go under the sign of architecture and design. I'd like to just ask each of you, even if we complicate this later, what it means for you if one's going to say that you work with architecture.

Michael, can I start with you? Is that a meaningful or meaningless question?

MICHAEL ELMGREEN

As an artist, you can't imagine not being dependent on space. You need to have a place to show your work, and, of course, space influences the way the audience perceives your work, the setting, the social context. Geographical location and the aesthetics of the architecture that surrounds you. [Ingar Dragset and I] started out with a practice—because we didn't have any proper art education—that was questioning the format of the white cube, the standardized format of showing art because it looks more or less the same all over the world. We started questioning that until we found out that the art spaces are not going to change just because we questioned them. ... So I would say we put architecture on a survival course sometimes to see if it can survive our interpretation and our handling of it. And if it can get a new kind of identity or consciousness through how we treat it.

FER

Nina?

NINA BEIER

Well, it's funny. I wouldn't have consciously thought about architecture in a direct way to my practice, but I do think that all people who make sculpture rely on the language that has been produced within design and architecture, as well. But because we work in this field, we have the choice of either representing these existing tropes or borrowing from them, and it's a constant negotiation of bringing these things in dialogue. I think it can be quite fruitful to think about [architecture] as the language that is shared between the fields.

FER

Martin?

MARTIN BOYCE

I think sometimes when these associations are made, you instantly want to resist them,



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and as your practice develops, you become less conscious about what it is that you're looking at. There may have been a time when it was clear that I was really drawn toward a certain language of the history of design and architecture, but as the practice develops, it includes so many things. And I think, really, I'm very interested in constructed landscape, and interiors and the psychology of interiors, and having an arrangement of objects or an arrangement of sculptural fragments you can build. You can create a cityscape, or you can create an archetype of space, like an urban park or a corporate lobby space through the introduction of specific objects or specific types of objects, and I think that's where sculpture and space and architecture kind of collapsed together in my practice.

FER

There have been moments in 20th-century art and architectural history where things must have felt much more certain, you know, that desire for unity that was the Bauhaus. This desire for a utopian totality that modernity or modern life could in some ways bring these different elements together. But something has perhaps come out of that, and that's the idea that it was all a bit of a fiction. That [utopia] is imaginary. The *mise-en-scène* of the Bauhaus rather than pure form following function was as staged as anything else, and in some ways all your practices do speak to those sorts of fictional environments.

ELMGREEN

I think we very much question certain tendencies in modernist architecture and design. Bauhaus had an amazing utopian vision of mass-producing furniture in materials that at that time were cheap leather and chrome and steel and so on. And what happened to it? Well, the Bauhaus's furniture are luxury goods today, and not for their big working-class martyrs. Bauhaus housing is also very hard to live in, but very attractive for connoisseurs to own, and the idea of architecture at that time was 'we know what the people need,' as if we would have completely standardized needs in our everyday lives and routines. Fortunately, we've come to a certain point in our culture where we have to admit that we are quite diverse. We live in different ways with different desires. We have different dreams. We have different backgrounds, and therefore such standardized models are very difficult to work with in today's reality, and that's maybe where [Elmgreen & Dragset] come in and sometimes either mock or question or displace or alienate some of these truths of modernist design. And say, 'hey, what if?'

FER

Nina, perhaps yours is a practice that

references architecture the least explicitly, but certainly the idea of the world of things, the world of props. Talk us through some of these images.

“I LIKE THESE OBJECTS BECAUSE THEY ARE THESE [PROTECTORS] OF THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND THE OUTSIDE.”

- NINA BEIER

BEIER

I worked with these guardian lions, and I like these objects because they are these [protectors] of the threshold between architecture and the outside—between the private space and the public space. And when we were talking about this meeting of architecture, design, and art, for me, this has been the object that has posed the most interesting attention of that field. When they arrived at my studio, they were placed outside in the back garden next to the trash bins, and they look fantastic there; they created this threshold; they brought the architecture with them when they were standing there. When they were picked up and brought on the van to the exhibition space, they looked amazing standing on the van, in the elevator. Every stage along the way, I was amazed at their ability to carry this power of the role that they were initially made for. And then the moment they made it into the exhibition space, they were just marble sculptures, and I couldn't bring out their power. Now, I've just installed them in the outer spaces of institutions—the stairwell, the toilet, the kitchen—so now they've found this in-between space where they somehow hold onto [their power].

FER

A threshold that is not something fixed but mobile and is actually a psychosocial threshold as much as a literal built boundary between spaces. Martin, would you say that you're also using the space of an installation ... not referencing the built environment, necessarily, in an explicit way?

BOYCE

I think it comes and goes. There's been times when there's been very specific objects I referenced, and the social cultural history of those objects feeds into the work and can be

unpacked in a way. And then there's other works that become much more open and less specific and really functioned in a more poetic way.

Some years ago, I was living in Berlin for a short period, and I had a bit of time on my hands where I could really develop [a] project. I had come across this image of these four abstract concrete trees, which were made by the sculpture brothers, Jan and Joël Martel, and I just became really fascinated with this structure, and I began to take apart the tree and developed a repeat pattern based on the tree. I developed a typography that came out of the repeat pattern, and still to this day I have a pallet of shapes that come from the original trees that I use within the sculptural language of the work.

The image of the hanging chandelier was from an installation in Venice, and in the original palazzo, when we went to visit for the first time, there were these really gaudy Murano glass chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. On the plane back from seeing the space, two things occurred to me: I wanted to replace the Murano glass chandeliers with a sculptural equivalent, and I wanted to introduce autumn leaves into the rooms. My instinct was to somehow wedge one landscape into another—to bring this idea of a garden into an interior. And so when I went back to the studio, I had to figure out what this chandelier would be, and I took this model of the Martel tree that I had made, and I just inverted it. So, here on these pieces, you can see the repeat pattern that was developed from the trees.

This is a ventilation grille piece. There have been many different iterations of the ventilation grille sculptures, and they are among the smallest works that I've made, physically, but when you install, say, five ventilation grilles throughout a series of rooms or even one room, then the whole architecture of the space becomes part of the work. And this is really interesting ... you're talking about the idea of thresholds in relation to sculpture, in relation to art and installation, because these pieces really became these thresholds between the interior spaces that we occupy in a building and the unseen guts of a building: the conduits and pipes and so on, that we were not party to in architecture but are going on around us.

FER

Perhaps we can jump forward, Michael, to some of your work where you dramatize some of these differences between inside and outside. Could you say something about your interest in interiors?

ELMGREEN

I mean interior design has had quite a bad reputation. The reality in our world today is a very few of us can actually afford to have an

architect making our space. So, we have to express our identities and organize our lives on the inside. And therefore, I think an interior is a much more interesting cultural signifier than architecture is, because architecture is just the result of maybe a pretentious architect making his landmark in the middle of the city, whereas how we decorate our homes tell about our times today, our identity, our ways of living.

When [Elmgreen & Dragset] were invited to do a pavilion [at the Venice Biennale]—actually, we were invited to do two pavilions because Ingar is Norwegian and I'm Danish [and those nations are neighbors]. We thought of these [pavilions] as domestic houses because they have somehow the scale of a villa or an embassy in a posh neighborhood. And in Venice, you also have this situation where everyone is competing [for] the prize, like winning the prize for growing the biggest pumpkin in your garden or something. So, [we thought] let's make these into real domestic settings of collectors, because in private collections, the interior—the design of the house—is playing quite a significant role. The house might be shaped after the collection. The collection might also be shaped after how the house and the architectural settings are, and we wanted to highlight the fact that people actually collect [art] for all kinds of weird, insane reasons and not only as investment or market prices. ... But people also collect because of passions. So, we made these two houses of collectors in Venice ... to give people a possibility to see artworks in a different setting. Sometimes, if you come into an exhibition, and you are in a typical white cube, I think the first thing that comes to mind is: is it a good artwork or is it art at all? And that's so not interesting. I mean, it's interesting what the artwork is telling you. What kind of message is it giving you? What is it doing to you? And ... if you change the environment, if you erase the institutional framing and turn it into something else, suddenly you look at the art world in a way where you feel "oh, I can also sit down at the sofa or sit at the desk" and you look at the art world in a more personal way, not in such a hieratic-viewer situation.

FER

I think the word in French for a show home is a *maison témoin*, a kind of 'witness home.' It has a kind of criminal air to it. In some ways, certainly in a work like this, Michael, you even scripted that kind of fictional life of your protagonist. And I think both Martin and Nina, you also imagine a viewer is a protagonist that enters into your scene, as it were. I wonder how you would see the viewer entering some of your installations. Martin, perhaps particularly in relation to that Eames work where you're invoking Eames—

you know, you have these precious modernist design objects interspersed with sculptures and other things that we live with. Could you describe what you're doing with that Eames connotation?

BOYCE

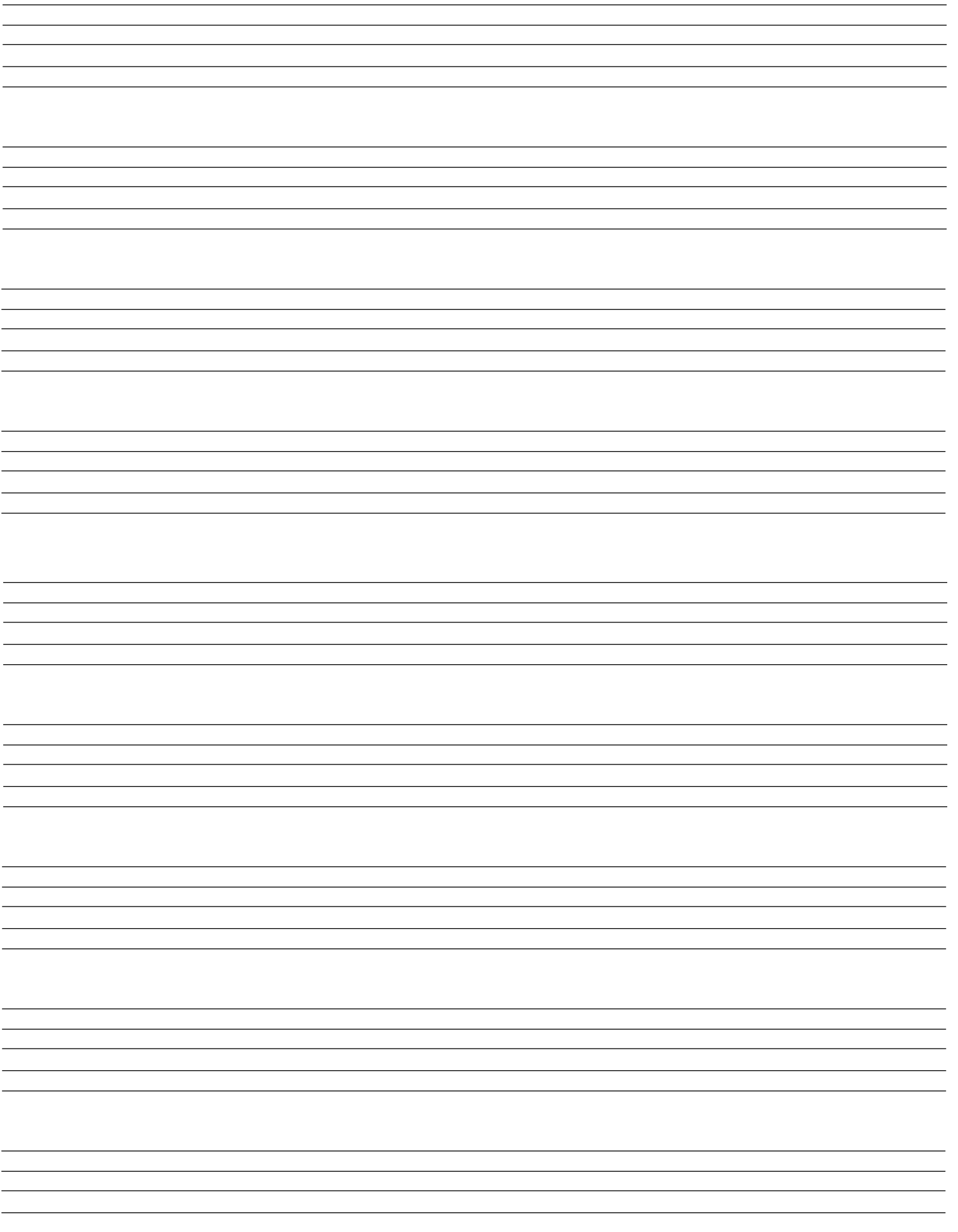
I became really fascinated by these [Eames-designed] modular shelving systems, and also the matter of the Eames House itself; they both came about around the same time. And of course, they seem to represent, in such a very concise way, this idea of the transparency and democracy of the modernist project. But the more I began to look at them and think about them in relation to the present that I made them within, the Los Angeles that they now may occupy, in its own fictional sense, wasn't the Los Angeles that they were born into. I was really interested in this more paranoid, dystopic kind of landscape that they might now be part of, and so I began to imagine this sort of parallel noir landscape that they might occupy.

In this case, for example ... this sculpture is completely remade ... but then I dusted the object in darkness. I wanted to see an object under bright light, but for it to look like it was in the dark. ... All these strip lights [create an] uncomfortable kind of presence [by] using these off-the-shelf fluorescent lights to create the spider's web. So, it's really this idea of introducing an imaginary, parallel world.



6.

1. 2019 Nasher Prize Dialogues panelists gather in Copenhagen. Photo: Joakim Züger.
2. & 5. Elmgreen & Dragset (b. 1961 and 1969). *The Collectors*, 2009. Danish and Nordic Pavilions, 53rd Venice Biennale 7 June–22 November, 2009. Photo: courtesy of the artists.
3. Nina Beier (b. 1975). *Guardian* (detail), 2019. Marble, soap, beard trimmings, 51.18 x 66.93 x 21.65 in. (130 x 170 x 55 cm). Installation view *Housebroken*, Kunsthal Gent, 2019. Photo: courtesy of the artist.
4. Martin Boyce (b. 1967). *A Forest (I)*, 2009. Powder-coated aluminum, steel chain, electronic components, 72.83 x 49.6 x 49.6 in. (185 x 126 x 126 cm). Photo: courtesy of the artist.
6. Martin Boyce (b. 1967). *Between the Airport and the Beach*, 2013 (on the ceiling). *When Now is Night*, 2002. Photo: courtesy of the artist.





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