



Musik für Barbaren und Klassiker

Sean Dower / Staalplaat Soundsystem / Joris Van de Moortel / Els Viaene / Stevie Wishart

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Musik für Barbaren und Klassiker breaks the traditional boundaries between concerts, sound installations, sculpture and music. The exhibition creates as such a place where the dynamic of exchange between performance and spatiality.

Sean Dower

In the late eighties Sean Dower was trained to be a sculptor at the Camberwell School of Art in London. He was already active as a drummer and performer in the industrial and noise scene, and from there he became interested in performance art. From 1988 to 1992 he was part of the Bow Gamelan Ensemble, a performance group known for its exuberant percussion happenings and acts at industrial sites in Europe, Japan and America. After 1992 he attended the residency program of the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. His work has been shown at Matt's Gallery in London, MOMA in New York, W139 in Amsterdam, Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Timothy Taylor Gallery in London and Tate Britain in London.

In his visual practice Sean Dower often tests the sculptural and performative possibilities of film, photography and sound.

His most recent work, *Ground Control*, was designed specifically for this exhibition. A white car with fluorescent green painted glass is shaking due to low frequency sounds emanating from a soundsystem inside. The result is an unlikely mix of elements from different subcultures, aligning surprising parallels between noise, DIY and car tuning.

The Brown Sound is a 12" 45 rpm brown vinyl record with sound frequencies so low at times they are no longer audible to the human ear. Yet there is an impact on the human body, at least according to an illustrious urban legend, well known among musicians. 'Brown noise' is supposed to make humans lose control of their bowels and causing nausea, due to resonance, and is presented here as a scatological counterpart to the more sophisticated Stendhal Syndrome (a fit of hysterics because of the overwhelming beauty of art).

Next Door is a remake of a 1991 work. A glass is fixed on the wall, seemingly as an invitation to listen to what is being said on the other side of the wall. But instead the viewer gets to hear an unintelligible monologue. At best one might recognize a French-speaking person, who is talking in a lofty way. No matter what images the sound of the voice may bring up, the real significance of the words remains unsolved.

The video *33 1 / 3 rpm* shows an animation of two pink balls spinning in a vacuum, while at each rotation the additive scratching sound of a record player's needle builds up into a surround sound crescendo.

In the video *Automaton* percussionist Steve Noble is improvising on a drum kit in a very clean white setting, while a high definition camera meticulously scans the curves and the metal of the instrument. In an intricate panning, the drummer and the camera develop an intriguing dialogue: speed, variation and rhythm on one side; and a drawn, restrained and elegant circling on the other.

In the space next to the office, one finds *Shelter*, a composite of images taken during a concert by the eponymous Straight Edge/Hare Krishna band in London in 1996. Again, the focus is on key codes from a subculture. What seems to be aggressive behaviour, is rather to be understood as channelled energy; what looks like drug or alcohol intoxication, is in fact group feeling and spirituality.

Joris Van de Moortel

Joris Van de Moortel was trained in sculpture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. In 2009 he was a laureate at the HISK in Ghent. In recent years he distinguished himself with strong and consistent contributions to art exhibitions and fairs at home and abroad. His work can be seen at the Armory Show in New York (2010), on Volta Basel (2009), Hoet-Bekaert Gallery, Gent (2008) and in De Singel in Antwerp (2008). That same year he was temporarily attached to the Department of Architecture at the University of Ghent, in the context of a monographic study of museums.

Creation and destruction are often close together in the sculptures and installations by Joris Van de Moortel. Yet as a spectator you get the impression that the artist is very precise and confident in this balancing of two extremes: the work always exhales a restrained and compressed energy. Every stage of ruination leads to an immediate building back up as an organism that constantly regenerates itself, so there is not really a beginning, middle or an end of the work.¹ This does not mean that the artist allows the forms of his work to run rampant. For example, what is striking is the often very close association between a given form or object and its sheath. This pendulum between destruction and protection, between opening up and shuttering, gives his work a strong autonomous character.

In *Netwerk* he presents two skillfully isolated forms that call for volume and explosiveness. In the sculpture *Hit the snare, don't you dare* a drum kit is locked in a tight white oversized architectural form. In a second sculpture, *One hit makes it split*, the glass case of the work is completely shattered because the amplifier exploded with a big bang. Joris Van de Moortel often exposes his installations and sculptures to the greatest of violence. It is as if he wants to say that under the cracks, the broken glass and sampled carpentry the work contains a core which may endure the greatest impact: a turbulence, a bulldozer, a gunshot, ... but also the continued silence and isolation of an exhibition space.

Stevie Wishart

Stevie Wishart is a composer who studied composition and sound at the University of Cambridge & Oxford and the London Guildhall School of Music. Initially she specialized in playing historical instruments like the hurdy-gurdy. Today, she composes and improvises with laptop, violin and voice. Central to her own musical path is the constant quest in looking for new possibilities of alignment between acoustic and electronic sound sources.

The Sound of Gesture

Recently she spent two years in residence at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe, in order to develop new sensors and software for violin and computer. While playing, her movements are mapped out in detail and sent to the computer. This allows her to manipulate

¹ See Oscar van den Boogaard, *Hisk reports studio visits*, 2008

the sound of her violin herself while playing, by adjusting and duplicating sounds so that a continuous interaction between acoustic and electronic sound textures is created. The musician simultaneously plays a visible (acoustic) and invisible (digital) instrument. The purpose of *The Sound of Gesture* is to reveal to the public the complex potential of this technology, so that the intentions and meanings of her movements are easier to monitor and predict. Just like a pianist builds tension by lifting his hands before he touches the keys, Wishart wants to show the audience how they can decode her newly developed musical language. So, by following her movements, they can learn to anticipate the manipulation of the violin sound.

The *Sound of Gesture* consists out of several parts. In *Mono-Stereo Study No. 1* she shows how the movements of her arm affects the sound of her violin solo alternating between mono and stereo, so that the scope of the sound varies continuously.

Frozen Particles deconstructs the layers of interaction between sound and movement. A first screen plays the score and the annotations of the piece, a second shows the sound as it appears on the laptop screen, while upon the third screen the musician herself comes into the picture. The piece shows how Stevie Wishart is simultaneously both the solo player and the digital orchestration, delivered upon the boundary between composition and improvisation. Through the sensors she can freeze notes, generate samples, adjust the volume, create echoes, ...

In an interview with Ludger Brümmer, head of the Institute of Music and Acoustics in ZKM, she elaborates on the musicological consequences of the advanced equipment at the root of *The Sound Gesture*.

Slow Motion is a composition that evokes a time gap, the image of a musician trapped in a feedback loop between instrument and computer.

Staalplaat Soundsystem

Staalplaat is a platform that has specialized in sound art and experimental releases since the early eighties. It was founded by Geert-Jan Hobijn, a Dutch designer, curator and sound artist. In 2000 he launched Staalplaat Soundsystem. This artist initiative, which was later joined by the Berlin curator Carsten Stabenow and sound artist Carlo Crovato, creates sound installations or interventions that take place in public space, and often entail the character of a happening. Some examples of projects are: a piece for more than one hundred machines, a ballet for twelve polishing devices and a concept for one hundred fans. *Floating Islands* is an installation that was first launched upon the Spree in Berlin, and then upon the Leie in Kortrijk: a floating orchestra of flutes made from PET bottles, which were powered by engines from vacuum cleaners.

The Ultrasound of Therapy

The Ultrasound of Therapy is a work in progress that emerged when Staalplaat Soundsystem was invited to do a project in a building that used to be a hospital, a former 'salle des malades' in Lille, France. *The Ultrasound Therapy* is an entity that adapts to the individual needs of each 'patient', just like a hospital does. Each visit begins with a diagnosis. Based on a Q&A form, each visitor receives a personalized treatment. Then, the therapist takes the patient to a hospital bed. Each bed is used for a different acoustic and sensory treatment, ranging in duration and intensity. Sometimes it has a relaxing effect, sometimes it produces energetic responses, and in rare instances it may also invoke a short repulsion effect. There are meditation videos, bass speakers connected to the beds in order to enhance a physical sensory experience of sound plus a sinus wave whose frequency is based on the Indo-Tibetan theory of vadaçakra. The facilities were mainly designed by Staalplaat Soundsystem itself, though other artists were also invited to contribute, such as Simon Wickham-Smith, Mark Bain, BMB.con, GX Jupitter Larsen and video maker Bas Van Koolwijk. *Hot Shaking* for example, is a treatment with an electric blanket, a 1000W theatre lamp and a blindfold. The blanket is equipped with audio transmitters that play excerpts from Adham Hafez Cairo, a vocalist and composer who was trained at Helwan University in Cairo. Staalplaat Soundsystem developed themselves, among other items, the Electro Pattern

therapy, where electro-massage pads are placed upon the patient so that the rhythmic patterns from pieces of music by Ryoji Ikeda, can be experienced through body and muscles.

Els Viaene

Sound artist Els Viaene began her career as a reportage and documentary maker for national radio. As an artist her interests are focussed upon the structures and natural rhythms of 'found materials' and 'field recordings'. With this material, she creates compositions, live performances and architectural installations, soundscapes, through which the listener can wander into an imaginary organic environment. Each intervention plays upon perception and shows how the processes of seeing, hearing and physical location interfere with each other. Els Viaene also played a central role in *Exploring the Room*, an audio performance by Lab[au] from 2006 as well as earlier performances in *Netwerk* and *Happy New Ears*. Recently she worked on new projects with Herman Asselberghs, Yves Coussement and Manon de Boer. She also has made soundtracks for the films and videos of Annemie Maes, Everlyn Nicodemus and Roman Kirschner.

The Mamori Expedition Testbed 1:3 799

In the fall of 2009 she spent in residence at the Mamori Artlab, a studio situated on a lake in the Amazon rainforest. Mamori Lake is a natural environment with endlessly varying soundscapes, ranging from the cacophony of thousands of frogs to the subtleties of insects whose soft sounds coordinate and synchronize with each other. The purpose of the residency was to explore how these multi-layered soundscapes can be recorded and reconstructed elsewhere, without losing their endless variation and depth. During a trip through the jungle Els Viaene opted to record the sounds of the forest with a microphone while simultaneously registering the GPS location of the sound recorded. Based on data from the GPS, an audio parcours could be reconstructed. In *Netwerk* Els Viaene built a scale model of the original route, consisting of several basins in which the recorded sounds are played underwater, unedited and raw. The viewer receives an unfinished score to hear, through which with the use of a hydrophone they can formulate their own auditory journey.

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