

While Interwoven Echoes Drip into a Hybrid Body – an Exhibition about Sound, Performance and Sculpture

21st January – 26th March 2006

Rita Ackermann & Agathe Snow, Dave Allen, Peter Coffin, Chris Cunningham & Björk, Delia Gonzalez & Gavin Russom, Paul Etienne Lincoln, Mileece*, Seb Patane, Banks Violette

In recent times the use of sound has precipitated an increased fusion between performance art and sculpture, resulting in the emergence of new hybrid forms. These new forms not only question traditional sculpture by expanding conceptual boundaries, they also liberate sound from its peripheral status as a prop for performance and video art. The works displayed in the exhibition continue with the new “crossover” consciousness of the 1990s and demonstrate the hybridity and diversity of these forms.

The early 20th century attempt to write a shared history of the fine arts and music, as well as its attempt at the visualisation of music – by pioneers such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) or Paul Klee (1879-1940) in painting, and Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941) or Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) in avant garde film – was not the first time music was an important theme in the visual arts. As early as the 18th century the French Jesuit Louis-Bertrand Castel (1688-1757) constructed a model for an ocular harpsichord (a visual or colour harpsichord). Later, in his writings on the theory of colour, Johan Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) explained his observations on the interplay between colour and sound. In the 1920s the German film-making avant garde chose the visualisation of music as its task. The aim was to create a form of painting, detached from its static, two dimensional limits, and to anchor it in the fourth dimension. This “eye music” (“Augenmusik”) created a unity between image and sound information and can be seen as the breeding ground for the development of comprehensive audio-visual spatial experience. After World War II such experimental hybridisation was decried by leading modernist art critics, who proclaimed a strict separation of aesthetic categories. In the mid 20th century, through leading figures such as John Cage (1912-1992), Yoko Ono (*1933) or George Brecht (*1926), the convergence of the fine arts and music gained new meaning through performance and the use of the body. From the mid 1990s, when new forms of presentation and spheres of activity were sought in the fine arts, music, above all pop and DJ culture, was taken up again under the title “crossover”. This exhibition engages with the tradition of this experiment and the questions it poses, but takes up new tendencies which lie in the framework of the discussion concerning sculpture versus installation, sound and performance.

Peter Coffin (*1972) and his light organ *Untitled (Light Organ)* (2005) have carried on the tradition of Louis-Bertrand Castel, in the search for a means to provide the observer with a synaesthetic experience. Every one of the instrument’s sounds has been allocated a colour and a whole colour spectrum can be formulated within one octave. Upon playing the appropriate melody on the organ, a colour composition is projected, the form of which is a sculpture in the shape of the Empire State Building. The work playfully raises the theme of synaesthesia, a phenomenon which has only been taken as a subject for serious research since the beginning of the 1990s. In his writings and compositions the composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), himself a synaesthetist, was obsessively occupied with the conversion of colours, sounds and noises taken from nature into artificially created sounds. Messiaen’s piano composition *Catalogue d’Oiseaux* (1956-1985), created from a background of collected bird noises, was a starting point for **Dave Allen’s** (*1963) conceptual work. Allen carried out a retranslation and immersed two white-rumped shamas (*Copsychus malabaricus*) – renowned for their quick learning abilities – in the sounds of Messiaen’s *Catalogue d’Oiseaux*. By the end of the exhibition the idea was that the two shamas would be able to whistle the composition – or at least fragments of it. An artistic-scientific translation of natural sounds is carried out electronically in the work of **Mileece*** (*1978). A group of philodendrons are arranged sculpturally, with electrodes attached to them as the data source for their sound. The extracted data, which could be potential communication platforms for plants, are transformed into sound by means of a self-conceived programme. In a similar way a scientific experimental arrangement is staged in **Paul Etienne Lincoln’s** (*1959) *Sinfonia Torinese* (2003-2004), creating complex microcosms peopled by fantastic machines and enigmatic instruments. *Sinfonia Torinese*, which, as the title suggests, pays homage to the city of Turin, is a complicated creation of various objects. Bottles, distilling machines and curious objects are arranged on a piano that is operated not by keys but by a punch card. **Chris Cunningham’s** (*1970) music video *All Is Full of Love* (1999), which he created with the singer **Björk** (*1965), has at its centre a machine that can not only reproduce itself, but is also an autonomous subject,

at once a loving, singing and soulful entity. Two asexual cyborgs are engaged in a sexual act, but this only happens through the intervention of other machines. Cunningham's fascination with merging the technological and the living informs his entire work and makes a distinct appearance in this video which, despite its virtual character, demands of the viewer comprehension of its actual sculptural aspect. The work *Junkie* (2005), a three part video projection with a table sculpture by **Rita Ackermann** (*1968) and **Agathe Snow** (*1976) illuminates the human body in a contrasting manner. In this work artificial bodies are not humanised but robot-like, seemingly human bodies thematised for their conflict of "interest". In an unfocussed setting, bathed in deep red tones, a body cannons around in a postmodern dance-like way and in apparently eternal repetition directed to the other – both are clothed in gender neutralised total body suits. In the process the one attempts to jump on his opposite number, to merge with him, the other refuses this gesture. The music by Michael Portnoy (*1967) extends the dance sequence to a troubled ritual of longing and rejection. **Seb Patane's** (*1971) dance floor sculpture based on 1950s design, takes as its subject the relationship between music and body culture in a theatrical manner. Since the advent of electronic music and club culture, dance – as an activity in an anonymous crowd – has become a high performance act incorporating fitness. This interest in the anonymous theatrical body is already revealed in his drawings based on illustrations from "theatre gossip magazines" at the turn of the century. **Delia Gonzalez** (*1972) and **Gavin Russom** (*1974), both active musicians, attempt to construct an analogy between sound and modernist architecture with their self-made synthesizers. For the exhibition they will produce a sculpture filling the room, related to a Russian constructivist stage set. **Banks Violette's** (*1973) black gleaming new gothic sculptures engage the formal aesthetic as well as the content level of heavy metal. He exemplifies that which is conscious in the subculture of black metal music – a staged symbolism of death and decay oscillating between beauty and barbarity.

!INFORMATION!

For further information please contact the curators of the exhibition: Raphael Gyax & Heike Munder.

A catalogue of the exhibition is available featuring essays by the curators and others.

Public guided tours: Sundays, 22nd January, 12th February, 5th & 26th March, 3pm as well as Thursday, 16th March at 6.30pm.

Opening hours: Tue / Wed / Fri Midday–6pm, Thur Midday–8pm, Sat / Sun 11am -5pm.

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