

Olivia Block; Maria Chavez; Marcus Fischer; Robin Rimbaud, a.k.a "Scanner;" Jana Winderen

SOUNDSCAPES

Thursday, May 17–Saturday, June 9, 2018

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery and Sherwood Payne Quillen '71
Reception Gallery

**MOSS
ARTS
CENTER**

Silence is difficult. A hum or a rustle breaks that purity.

—*The New York Times*, May 15, 2001¹

The exhibition *SoundScapes* is a selection of sound works featuring multi-channel compositions by five of today's leading practitioners of sound art, experimental music, and field recording. The term "soundscape" is often spoken of in terms of listening to natural environments and all that our ears are able to detect at a given moment—bird songs and insects, wind, rain, leaves rustling in the breeze... Soundscape can also refer to a piece of music, rich with a variety of abstract sounds.²

The works in this exhibition are all designed for multi-channel playback. Three speakers are placed in front of the listener and two speakers are placed on the opposite side of the room. A sub-woofer transmitting lower frequencies sits on the floor. While 5.1 audio is generally a system for home theatre and at one time, for cinemas, the format has proven useful to a number of artists interested in placing sounds and moving them in an expanded listening space that the larger number of speakers and dispersion system affords—beyond the traditional stereo (two-channel) format. While some sound artists and musicians look to new technologies, others look to the past for instruments and objects that may enhance a sense of nostalgia or tonal "color." For example, Marcus Fischer takes recordings of vinyl records, while Olivia Block uses and manipulates sounds from her collection of second-hand microcassette tapes.

People unaccustomed to experiencing sound installations will often say, "I don't know anything about sound," as if they won't be able to appreciate what they're about to hear. Ask yourself if you find the sounds interesting. Is there a successful use of time as one sound moves to another or a repeating loop finds its course? Is there an interesting use of space? Do you feel the vibration of sounds on your skin? Do the compositions allow you to daydream and create your own narratives—or internal images? The easiest approach may be to stop yourself from thinking too much and just close your eyes and listen.

Stephen Vitiello
Curator, *SoundScapes*

¹ Jennifer S. Lee, "An Audio Spotlight Creates a Personal Wall of Sound," *The New York Times*, 15 May 2001.

² For those interested in a longer, detailed discussion of the soundscape, Canadian composer and educator R. Murray Schafer's landmark book *The Tuning of the World (The Soundscape)*, 1977, is an essential text.

Works in the Exhibition

Olivia Block

oliviablock.net

Lists of Objects and Values, 2015 (excerpt)

Duration: 8 minutes, 19 seconds

Lists of Objects and Values is constructed of found recordings from the artist's collection of used microcassette tapes. Patterns are revealed through the layering of these sounds. The tapes contain spoken lists of objects and monetary values, including a woman listing her QVC sales, a small business owner walking through an office park lobby and naming each piece of equipment and furniture in the room, a man listing his possessions after a divorce, and a woman rehearsing the spoken text of a Free Mason ritual. In *Lists of Objects and Values*, "the selected sounds demonstrate how people utilized microcassette recorders during the late 20th century as journals, logs, and record-keeping devices." Igor Kopytoff writes in *The Social Biology of Things*, "I think of these recordings as inadvertent expressions of 'methodological fetishism' of things. When I listen to the recordings myself, I hear the lists of objects as catalogues of waste."

Maria Chavez

mariachavez.org

The Center and Periphery, 2018

Duration: 24 minutes

The Center and Periphery takes outdoor field recordings from the Fish House on the estate of Robert Rauschenberg in Captiva Island, Florida, tiering or layering the delicate aural documentations into various layers of sparseness and density. The work is meant to recreate "sonic photos" of the Fish House and transform them into a hyper-auditory image, with different configurations reshaping the moments to represent a sonic memory of a special place.



▲ Olivia Block, photo by Peter Kaars

▼ Maria Chavez, image courtesy of the artist



Marcus Fischer

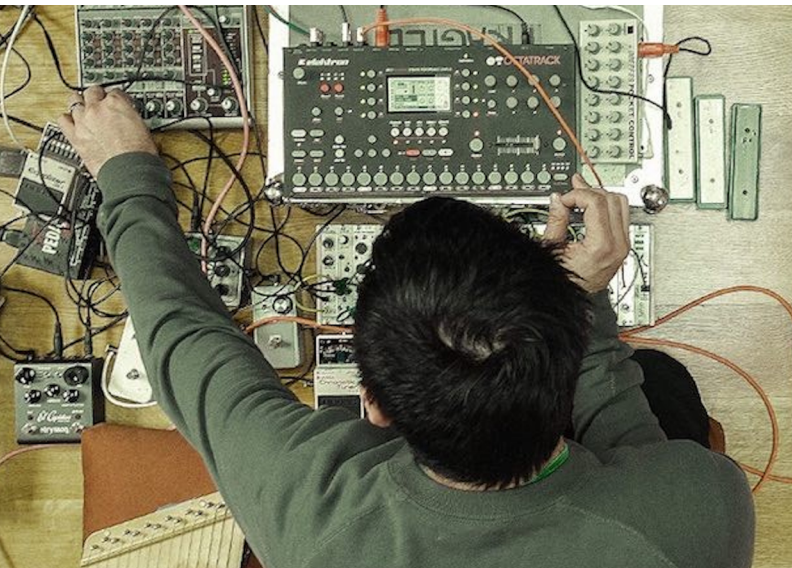
mapmap.ch

Circular Ruins, 2018

Duration: 8 minutes, 33 seconds

The runout groove of a record is where the spiral cut that contains the album's music meets the circular inner groove. The needle travels endlessly in this space until the record is stopped or the needle is lifted off the surface of the record. *Circular Ruins* examines the repetition and variation in these moments after the music on a vinyl record ends. Through amplification, filtering, and physical manipulation of six identical LPs, a landscape of textures starts to emerge.

The Circular Ruins was originally an album released in 1998 by the Olympia, Washington-based band Nova Scotia (Marcus Fischer, Alex Neerman, and Jason Powers). This year—the 20th anniversary of the album's release—presented itself as a fitting time to revisit this release and shift the focus past the music that the LP contains.



▲ Marcus Fischer, image courtesy of the artist



▲ Scanner, photo by IWP Photographic

Scanner

scannerdot.com

Dark as a Raven, 2016

Duration: 14 minutes, 8 seconds

British musician Scanner's piece *Dark as a Raven* bridges environmental ambience with an ominous electronic soundtrack. "The work," comments Scanner, "responds to the capacity of a raven to mimic human sounds, so recordings of ravens speaking were spliced into emblematic phrases, both abstract and strange."

Dark as a Raven was originally commissioned for an installation in the ancient Hazel and Thoroughsale Woods, located in the town of Corby in central England. The title of this piece references the raven—which in ancient Greece was thought to be a mythological oracle and a messenger between the Greek god Apollo and humankind—as well as the name of the town itself, the original meaning of which is "dark as a raven."



▲ Jana Winderen, image courtesy of the artist

Jana Winderen

janawinderen.bandcamp.com

Spring Bloom in the Marginal Ice Zone, 2017

Duration: 20 minutes

Originally commissioned for the Sonic Acts Festival in Amsterdam

Jana Winderen is a sound recordist with a background in mathematics, chemistry, and fish ecology from the University of Oslo. In *Spring Bloom in the Marginal Ice Zone*, she brings us into an underwater listening space of sounds many of us have never heard before. Winderen writes, "The listener experiences the bloom of plankton, the shifting and crackling sea ice in the Barents Sea around Spitsbergen towards the North Pole, and the underwater sounds made by bearded seals, migrating species such as humpbacks and orcas, and the sound by hunting seithe and spawning cod." These are sounds that might be valuable to a marine biologist, but there is also a musicality and a magic in the beauty, rhythms, and textures picked up by Winderen's underwater microphones. Additionally, in one sense the sounds of the living creatures in this work become a voice in the current political debate about the earth's fragility and threats to it, given that the Marginal Ice Zone is an extremely vulnerable ecosystem where the phytoplankton present in the sea produces half of the oxygen on the planet.

About Stephen Vitiello

Stephen Vitiello is a sound and media artist, whose installations, performances, photographs, and drawings have been exhibited around the world in museums, galleries, and public spaces, including the Moss Arts Center (2013). Among his solo exhibitions are those at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts (beginning in 2011 and ongoing); the Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York (2014); and the High Line, New York (2010-2011). His work has been presented in group exhibitions at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Richmond, Virginia (2018); the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2013); PS 1/MoMA in Long Island City, New York (2011-2012); the 15th Biennale of Sydney in Australia (2006); the Cartier Foundation in Paris (2002); and the 2002 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (2002). Vitiello is based in Richmond, Virginia, where he is a professor in the kinetic imaging program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Also on View

Laurie Anderson: *Invented Instruments*
Thursday, April 26–Saturday, June 9, 2018
Ruth C. Horton Gallery

ICAT: Open (at the) Source
Trace
Monday, April 30–Saturday, June 9, 2018
Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

Upcoming Summer Exhibitions

Sitting Pretty: The Chair Re-Envisioned
Thursday, June 21–Sunday, August 12, 2018
Ruth C. Horton, Miles C. Horton Jr., and Sherwood
Payne Quillen '71 Reception Galleries

William Wegman: *Sit!*
Thursday, June 21–Sunday, August 12, 2018
Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor



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Gallery Hours

Monday–Friday, 10 AM–5:30 PM
Saturday, 10 AM–4 PM
Admission free

To schedule a tour or class visit, contact megh79@vt.edu.