



SMALL MUSIC

ROLF JULIUS

Commissaires d'exposition : Maija Julius

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Places of Quietude

I have long been thinking about how to create spaces where you can withdraw and find rest, where you can see, hear and concentrate, where you are cut off from the outside world while participating in it. They should be simple, empty and create an atmosphere of silence, with the help of art or music, or both combined.

I look for places that can be hidden, in private apartments, in public buildings, which can be in the basement, or alone in a forest, near a lake, or in the noisy city. They should be scattered everywhere: in Berlin, where I live, in Tokyo, Los Angeles or New York; the whole world could be covered by an even closer network of these quiet zones, becoming ecological art niches for everyone.

One should have access to them at specific times and have the right to enter them alone. In my opinion, the simple fact that zones of tranquility exist can help to calm this world. Quietude places are not necessarily acoustically silent; on the contrary, they can be noisy, so they are quiet on a different scale. At the Society for Contemporary Art in Bremen, at the beginning of the year, I took my first steps towards this kind of space. Chamber Music No. 1 was the title: a small empty room with the exception of two rectangular white columns topped with speakers. The speakers were directed towards the middle of the room, in front of which there was a chair where one could sit and, with the music in his back, look through the windows at the Weser Bridge with all its traffic and the river. In this case, the music was very important, so important that one was not supposed to concentrate on it, and all the more reason to look through the window. The music from the two speakers merged at the neck level of the listener, and he felt it there.

I'm thinking about other places like that, some without windows, rooms that contain a single work: a floating iron plate, for example, that seems to float through the music, to float quietly... I'm thinking about places where you can retreat alone, rooms that create an atmosphere of silence, but not a stupid silence... how can I put it... an active silence, a kind of suspended, quiet state.

There are several works that I could entrust to such places, simple texts perhaps, or yellow and blue pigments, or speakers that breathe?

Rolf Julius, 1987

Born in 1939 in northern Germany, Rolf Julius was initially trained as a classical artist. At the end of the 1970s, he gradually discovered certain contemporary composers (notably La Monte



Young at festivals or on the radio) and became more involved in sound performances that he realized in public parks or alternative contexts. Thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, Rolf Julius was already laying the foundations of a work in which sound space is privileged: he explored in an experimental way the possibilities offered by sound diffusion techniques, but already (and this will be a constant in his attitude) the works were developing in a permanent concern for the relationship with the space of the world, and with nature. The years 1983-1984 mark an important moment in the life of Julius, who leaves to live in New York: he meets most of the essential artists and composers in the field of experimental avant-garde, notably John Cage but also Takehisa Kosugi, who will remain for him a true master from now on. The attendance of all this period of intellectual and artistic effervescence in the United States allows Julius to confront his short personal history with the one that has been developing across the Atlantic for more than twenty years. His work is no longer isolated, and upon his return to Europe it finds a new audience. But it was in Japan that the work was very quickly recognized and enthusiastically received: the artist was regularly invited there for performance concerts and exhibitions where he could show his drawings and sculptures. The relationship with Japan is not a coincidence, however: there is in Rolf Julius's work an extreme concern for formal precision and elegance, which is also due to the place that emptiness occupies in the works. (An obvious link with classical Japanese culture will be found in the way he integrates daily kitchen bowls or containers as sound diffusers, but above all in the many occasions when he installs his "small music" (Small Music is the title of the collection of his texts published in Germany) in traditional gardens.

Julius's work was first presented in France in 1980 in Paris (Ecouter par les yeux, l'Arc, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris), at the Centre d'art la Criée in Rennes (1988), then the artist was regularly shown in Grenoble (Broken Music, Le Magasin, 1989-1990), Lyon (Musique en scène, 1996), Dijon (Frac Bourgogne, 2001) and Paris (Galerie Lara Vincy, 1997 and 2002) in solo exhibitions and contemporary music festivals. The largest presentation of his work took place at the Frac Limousin in 2003. He is present in many French public collections.