

SEEING SOUND

Welcome to KADIST San Francisco for the exhibition *Seeing Sound*. We are delighted to have you join us today and our staff is here to facilitate your visit.

You will discover three current trajectories of sound art practices through the works of Marina Rosenfeld, Aura Satz, and Samson Young.

The curator of this exhibition, Barbara London, is one of the most influential curators in the field of video, media and sound art since the early 1970s and one of KADIST's advisors. She conceived *Seeing Sound* as a traveling exhibition, produced by Independent Curators International (ICI). Its international tour debuts here in San Francisco and will continue through 2025 in different expanded iterations.

Enjoy your visit.

IN A PERPETUAL STATE OF FLUX, and resisting common classification in art history, sound has been used by contemporary artists for decades all over the world. Barbara London was among the first to exhibit experimental sound art, which she heard at alternative venues in downtown New York in the 1970s. In 1979, she curated the exhibition *Sound Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA)—so early in the history of curating the medium that there was no need for another title—with works by Connie Beckley, Julia Heyward, and Maggi Payne (who taught at Mills College in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1972 to 2018). Due to the small space set aside for this presentation of sound art, then marginalized as a medium, the works were shown one at a time, in rotation, for a couple of weeks each.¹ In the following decades, artists' engagement with ever-changing technologies would open new possibilities for sound art and expand its audience, feeding London's curatorial practice, which was already committed to this art form. London would forge close relationships with pioneering and up-and-coming artists approaching sound from a variety of disciplinary angles and pushing boundaries of art and technology with poetry, humor, irony, and politics. She worked with Bill Viola, Joan Jonas, and Brian Eno, to name a few, who were among the first to fine tune their respective video installations by using state-of-the-art loudspeakers, enabling them to place as much emphasis on sound as on image.² She also facilitated connections between numerous visual artists and composer-musician-performers such as artist Bruce Nauman and composer Steve Reich, whose respective experiments with sound, music, and film would continue to influence each other.³ London founded the Video-media Exhibition & Collection Programs at MoMA, where she worked between 1970 and 2013, and organized other major exhibitions of sound art, including *Looking at Music* (2008), *Looking at Music Side 2* (2009), *Looking at Music 3.0* (2011) and *Soundings: A Contemporary Score* (2013).

Approaching sound as a material, the artists featured in *Seeing Sound* at KADIST attend to sounds in their surroundings that may go unnoticed and examine power structures within music, feminism, and labor. Marina Rosenfeld's *Music Stands* (2019) transforms common sound equipment, such as the speaker and music stand, into a sonic ecosystem that amplifies sounds and speaks to the privileged access of hearing and sounding bodies. Using the rotary dial phone, one of the most important inventions of the last century, Aura Satz's *Dial Tone Drone* (2014) invites us into an intimate dialogue about feminist histories within sound art. Samson Young's video *Muted Lion Dance* (2014) peels back the musical accompaniments of the traditional Chinese lion dance performance to reveal the sound of the performers' physical labor. The installations by Rosenfeld, Satz, and Young imaginatively unite sound, word, and silence in space and probe larger questions about these intangible but essential elements of daily life: How is communication mediated? Who has access to sound? What and who do we listen to? What is the role of technology?

With headphones notably absent, *Seeing Sound* cultivates a complex sonic environmental experience and allows for multiple modes of communal listening. Giving sound a visual and physical presence, the exhibition reflects on the ways in which artists have engaged with our often inattentive relationship to sound. As these sonic experiences in the gallery become a metaphor for broader social dynamics, *Seeing Sound* invites visitors to reflect on what has gone unlistened to and unattended at a time of need, solidarity, and care.

NOTES: 1. London, Barbara. "Sounding: From the 1960s to the present" in *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013. 2. *ibid* 3. London, Barbara. "Curator's Perspective: Barbara London." Online Lecture, Independent Curators International (ICI), April 6, 2021.

Seeing Sound is a traveling exhibition curated by Barbara London, with the support of Research Assistant Kristen Clevenson and produced by Independent Curators International (ICI). This exhibition and tour are supported, in part, by the Nokia Bell Labs Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) program and with the generous support of ICI's Board of Trustees and International Forum.

Aura Satz

***Dial Tone Drone*, 2014. Sound work for telephone, with telephone mp3 player, chairs, table, 14 minutes.**

In the first gallery of KADIST, you are invited to pick up the vintage telephone handset, or call the provided phone number from your own device. You will then listen to a conversation between two old friends: the respected electronic music pioneers Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) and Laurie Spiegel (born 1945). The pair congenially discuss drones—sustained sounds, notes, or tone clusters—and their use in music composition. For both Oliveros and Spiegel, drones have been an important component of their unconventional electronic work as each marched quietly to their own drum, experimenting with electronic signals as well as audio and videotape. Their fascination with drone music aligned with Satz's own interest in alert signals and attempts to forge a new understanding of hypervigilance and emergency through sound as a perceptual trigger of danger. In reality, this discussion between Oliveros and Spiegel never took place. The recording is a montage of excerpts from separate conversations they each had with Satz over phone and Skype, played against drone compositions by the two pioneers. The first half of the fourteen-minute composition features excerpts from *Horse Sings from Cloud* (1975), an accordion score with voice by Oliveros, and the second half from *Expanding Universe* (1974-76), a computerized composition by Spiegel. *Dial Tone Drone* reflects on the use of drones with all their political, conceptual, meditative, and musical implications.

Aura Satz is a London-based visual artist whose work encompasses film, performance and sculpture and emphasizes the complex relationship between humans and machines. Her entry into sound began through a series of projects that revolved around magic, born of an interest in how a ventriloquist's falsetto voice always seems to emanate right from a puppet's mouth. Satz's trajectory orbits around two major topics. One involves the art and science of music, sound technology, vibration, and acoustics. The other involves social and political factors, especially issues of gender and the rediscovery of important contributions women have made to the development of technology, namely as inventors of new systems of notation, encryption, and sound-making.

Marina Rosenfeld

***Music Stands*, 2019. Steel, UV prints on Dibond, foam, audio components, computer, sound, dimensions variable.**

The installation consists of music stand-like structures and a corresponding set of panels and acoustic devices that direct, focus, obstruct, reflect and project sound in the gallery. Together the components play on the connection between aural and social relations signified by the music stands. An episodic score emanates from the work's sound system, momentarily interrupting the atmosphere with brief eruptions of electronic sounds and vocality. At the same time, the microphones and loudspeakers subtly amplify the sounds of visitors and mix them with the sound score, heightening their acoustic presence. The installation addresses the possibilities of "staging" sound and speaks to the privileged access of hearing and sounding bodies and the political economy of music-making.

Marina Rosenfeld is a New York-based composer and artist working across disciplines. Since the 1990s, when she mounted her first all-female electric-guitar ensemble under the name Sheer Frost Orchestra, her works have probed the intersections of experimental practices in sound with performance, installation, and sculpture. Rosenfeld has also performed as an experimental turntablist since the late 1990s, creating improvised music with a distinctive palette of hand-crafted dub plates.

Samson Young

***Muted Situation #2: Muted Lion Dance*, 2014. Actions, instructions, single-channel video with sound, 7:21 minutes.**

In the video, Chinese lion dancers perform the auspicious procession traditionally presented at special occasions such as weddings or during the Lunar New Year. Yet, the customary percussive sound of drums and cymbals are absent. Instead, it is the sound of the performers' physical exertion that comes to the forefront, revealing the beautiful, exhaustive rhythm of their craft—their feet hitting the ground, deep inhales and exhales, and the rustling of their clothes. This video is one of the early works in *Muted Situations*, a series that Young started in 2014 as text-based instructions for staging situations in which sonic foregrounds are muted. Young's interventions consciously suppress dominant sounds and voices as a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalized. This process of muting also disrupts viewers' expectations about familiar situations and make apparent certain assumptions about hearing and sounding. This approach to muting speaks to another form of artists' experimental engagements with sound as a medium.

Samson Young is a Hong Kong-based artist whose practice interlays multiple narratives and references with sound and cultural politics at its heart. His compositions, drawings, installations, radio broadcasts, and performances engage with topics as varied as military conflict, identity, migration, and political frontiers past and present. On the process of muting, Young notes: "muting is not the same as doing nothing. Rather, the act of muting is an intensely focused re-imagination and re-construction of the auditory."

BIOGRAPHIES

BARBARA LONDON is a New York-based curator, writer, and KADIST advisor, who founded the Video-media Exhibition and Collection Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). Her book *Video Art/The First Fifty Years* (Phaidon) was released in January 2020 and her podcast *Barbara London Calling* launched in August 2020. London was one of the first to integrate the Internet as part of curatorial practice, with *Stir-fry* (1994); *Internyet* (1998); and *dot.jp.* (1999). She organized one-person shows with such media mavericks as Laurie Anderson, Peter Campus, Teiji Furuhashi, Gary Hill, Joan Jonas, Shigeko Kubota, Nam June Paik (whose retrospective is currently on view at SFMOMA), Song Dong, Steina Vasulka, Bill Viola, and Zhang Peili. Her thematic exhibitions at MoMA included *Soundings: A Contemporary Score* (2013); *Looking at Music* (2009); *Video Spaces* (1995); *Music Video: the Industry and Its Fringes* (1985); and *Video from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto* (1979).

MARINA ROSENFELD has exhibited her work internationally at the Park Avenue Armory, MoMA, the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, Portikus Frankfurt, the Kitchen, and the Artist's Institute, as well as numerous biennials and international surveys including documenta 14 (2017). In the contemporary music field, she has created works for Borealis, Wien Modern, Time:Spans, MaerzMusik, Pro Musica Nova, Donaueschingen, and Ultima festivals, among many others. Her turntablist collaborators have included Christian Marclay, George Lewis, Okkyung Lee, Ikue Mori, Annette Henry aka Warrior Queen, Ben Vida, DJ Olive, and Christof Kurzmann, among many others too numerous to list. As a composer for dance, Rosenfeld created live improved music for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company between 2004 and 2008, and composed original scores for choreographers Ralph Lemon (*Scaffold Room*, 2014-2015) and Maria Hassabi (*PLASTIC*, 2016, *STAGED?*, 2017, and *STAGING*, 2017-2018). In 2020 she began a collaboration with Experiments in Art and Technology at Bell Labs Nokia. Rosenfeld has been the co-chair of the MFA in Music/Sound at Bard College since 2007, and has been a visiting professor at Cooper Union, Harvard, Yale School of Art, and Brooklyn College.

ABOUT

INDEPENDENT CURATORS INTERNATIONAL (ICI) supports the work of curators to help create stronger art communities through experimentation, collaboration and international engagement. Curators are arts community leaders and organizers who champion artistic practice, build essential infrastructures and institutions, and generate public engagement with art. Our collaborative programs connect curators across generations and across social, political and cultural borders. They form an international framework for sharing knowledge and resources—promoting cultural exchange, access to art and public awareness for the curator's role.

AURA SATZ has performed, exhibited and screened her work internationally including FACT, Liverpool; Site Gallery, Sheffield; Galleria Civica di Arte e Contemporanea di Trento; De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea; the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern; AV festival, Newcastle; and in London at Whitechapel Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Barbican Art Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), Jerwood Space, Tate Britain, Beaconsfield Gallery and Artprojx Space. Her recent films are *Little Doorways to Paths Not Yet Taken* (2016) and *Entangled Nightvisions* (2018). Satz currently teaches at the Royal College of Art in London. A key figure among a talented generation of younger artists who engage with sound, Satz has received widespread critical acclaim across her nearly two decade-long practice.

SAMSON YOUNG has had solo exhibitions at Goethe-Institute, Hong Kong (2013); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2015); and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2016). His *Songs for Disaster Relief* was presented at the Venice Biennale (2017). Select group exhibitions include *Innovationist: The Spectacular Journey of New Media Art*, Taipei Contemporary Art Museum (2013); *The Wizard's Chamber*, Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland (2013); *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Para Site, Hong Kong (2013); *48HR Incident*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney (2015); *Retrograde*, Logan Center Gallery, University of Chicago (2016); documenta 14 (2017); and *One Hand Clapping*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2018). Young was a recipient of the Bloomberg Emerging Artist Award in 2007, and the BMW Art Journey award in 2015. He received his BA in music, philosophy, and gender studies at the University of Sydney before obtaining an MPhil from the University of Hong Kong in 2007 and a PhD in music composition from Princeton University, New Jersey, in 2013. He maintains an active practice in classical music composition.

NOKIA BELL LABS is the world-renowned industrial research arm of Nokia. Over its more than 90-year history, Bell Labs has invented many of the foundational technologies that underpin information and communications networks and all digital devices and systems. This research has resulted in 9 Nobel Prizes, three Turing Awards, three Japan Prizes, a plethora of National Medals of Science and Engineering, as well as an Oscar, two Grammy awards and an Emmy award for technical innovation.

SEEING SOUND

June 9–July 24, 2021

KADIST San Francisco
3295 20th Street, CA 94110
Open by appointment
kadist.org

KADIST believes contemporary artists make an important contribution to a progressive society, their work often addressing key issues of our time. KADIST, a non-profit organization dedicated to exhibiting the work of artists represented in its collection, encourages this engagement and affirms contemporary art's relevance within social discourse. KADIST's local hubs in Paris and San Francisco present exhibitions and events, and organize residencies and educational initiatives, as well as producing projects online and via social media. Concurrently, KADIST is actively establishing networks across five areas—North America, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Asia and Latin America—inviting new artists into the collection and initiating collaborative programs, especially exhibitions with museums of each region. Together, they aim at facilitating new connections across cultures and creating vibrant conversations about contemporary art and ideas.

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GO BEYOND THE EXHIBITION



Listen to the podcast series *Barbara London Calling* on Apple or Spotify. In each episode, London interviews a pioneering or up-and-coming artist working at the forefront of technology and creativity. Find the episodes with Marina Rosenfeld (30 mins) and Samson Young (44 mins). They talk about their works in *Seeing Sound*.



Watch the video of Barbara London presenting her practice and the traveling exhibition *Seeing Sound* on Vimeo (80 mins). The video was produced by ICI as part of their *Curator's Perspective* series.



Watch the video of Barbara London and Aura Satz discussing Satz's practice on Vimeo (60 mins). The video is produced by KADIST.