

Trained as a composer, Sergei Tcherepnin (b. 1981) works at the intersections of sound, sculpture, and theatre. Connecting computers and amplifiers to surface transducers — devices that convert electrical signals into vibrations — he orchestrates complex multi-channel compositions in which objects are transformed into speakers. These objects often take on hybridized personalities, becoming strange characters that invite various kinds of play between things and bodies, suggesting new possibilities for intimacy with sound.

Central to Tcherepnin's exhibition at Murray Guy are three boxes clothed in fabric and metal, embedded with transducers and placed in different positions within the gallery. Each box emits a pair of tones that is designed to bring about the production of a third distinct tone — the “eartone” or “difference tone” — within the listener's inner ear. Many of these performed tones alternate in patterns that are calculated to keep the third “eartone” constant, while shifting the listener's perception of it within his or her body.

Sound comes alive in and around these boxes, as Tcherepnin carves up the gallery into distinct listening scenarios and folds them into one other. Staring up from the floor, three rusted metal rain shields address visitors in strange, distinct voices; while resembling haggard characters from the city, they animate themselves, but without ever moving. Circular surveillance mirrors emit high-pitched tones — reflecting, interrupting, and distending the gallery's sonic topography, periodically turning the entire space into an eartone box. A New York City subway bench invites visitors to sit down and watch various activities of listening — to slow down, reflect, and become sensitive — while vibrations resonate from its base.

Responding to the privatization, standardization, and disciplining of sound — a time when all sound files are compressed into mp3s, and often played through earbuds whose presence we are conditioned to forget — “listening” to Tcherepnin's exhibition involves a more expansive state of activity: listening by touching, listening by opening, listening by sitting, listening by feeling, or listening by looking. Visitors, in particular, are asked to notice how their ears respond to the boxes — to consider the ear as a neurophonic instrument, and the human nervous system as a sonic interface. While immersing the head in a “private” listening space, these boxes foreground the listening body, putting it on display.

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