



SHORTWAYS

ART OF NOISE

SOUND-ART INSTALLATIONS MAKE A COMEBACK— SO WHAT'S ALL THE CLAMOR ABOUT?

Most visual art forms can be avoided, even in the middle of an exhibition. Don't like a particular painting, photo or sculpture? Walk away—problem solved. Artists who work with sound, however, have an advantage—their art can be immersive. Still, finding the right spaces for this kind of experience has been tricky in the past—galleries have not always been receptive environments for sound installations. Seattle sound artist Trimpin says this is changing, and with sound installations turning up in assorted galleries in California and New York, his assessment seems correct. Nonetheless, some sound artists are looking beyond traditional display-models for their sonic tours.

Recently, Trimpin adapted his 1992 installation "Phffft!" for an echo-filled room in Seattle's Henry Art Gallery. "Phffft!" uses no electronic synthesis or amplification ("Our body responds differently to natural sounds," he explains); computer controlled bursts of air create each song. Forced through found objects including plumbing pipes, metal lampshades, and spouts from soda dispensers, the air bursts echo around the room, turning the room itself into an instrument and adding a site-specific aspect to the work's reception.

Other artists have opted for alternative exhibition options, too. Bill and Mary Buchen avoid galleries—and make their work more accessible—by creating what they call "sonic architecture": installations in public spaces including parks and museums. At the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, they transformed the correctional facility's courtyard into an environment where students and staff could experiment with sound and nature; an earlier installation in Lexington, New York, the Harmonic Compass, features a tuning system generated by the topography of the Lexington Valley.

Members of the MELA (Music, Eternal, Light, Art) Foundation also found an alternative method not only to get their work shown, but to have complete control over the exhibit space. Directed by La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, "Dream House" was a sound and light environment constructed in their own living space in New York. Though it just recently closed, the Foundation's "Dream House" operated successfully for a staggering 12 years.

Plenty of opportunities exist for the curious to experience sound art: The Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden recently hosted "Visual Music," an exhibition exploring the relationship between color and music; *In Resonance*, a panel discussion at Seattle's Bumbershoot festival during Labor Day weekend, 2005, focused on Sound Art; the Electronic Music Foundation (EMF) is sponsoring, in December 2005 and March 2006, "An Ear To Earth," a festival and symposium including panels, concerts, and installations, all focusing on "the nature of our sonic environment and how it affects us." Also, Trimpin's latest sonic art installation, "Sheng High," runs from September through November at Seattle's Consolidated Works.

A sound-art installation manipulates not only the sound itself, but the listener's experience as well, and though the "music" of an installation is not played live, the nature of the art form means sounds are "performed" in a way that can't be matched by other prerecorded source. Typically these exhibitions create unpredictable and unusual effects—something we can't reproduce through our everyday micro-management of sound through radio, CD players & iPods. The nearest sound-art installation offers no less than a sonic vacation. TAYLOR LONG

TRIMPIN, PHFFFT! 1992. AS INSTALLED AT THE HENRY ART GALLERY, 2005. MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION. PHOTO RICHARD NICOL.