

the sound-producing exhibits, being described as 'a series of "mute images" that encourages reflection on aural experience without recourse to sound' (this could be said to be an area neglected by those curating exhibitions of sound art). One of the more modest but most effective of these is Christian Marclay's cumulation of monochrome photographs of entry-phone doorplates, each punctured with a different pattern of holes near which to position one's ear. Decontextualised, they take on a presence like that of the circular patterns carved on neolithic megaliths.

The flickering aurora borealis is supposed sometimes to be accompanied by an equally mercurial sound, though it has never been successfully recorded. Hannah Rickards has collected and transcribed verbal descriptions that are thus the only records of this alleged sonic phenomenon. One of these transcriptions she has screen-printed on canvas, suffused in green light. Rambling, hesitant and repetitive, the text is evidence of the impossibility of convincingly describing a sound. The quiet of the gallery foyer, where this work is shown, is randomly sundered, just when you least expect it, by a sudden clap of thunder – or rather, a field recording of a clap of thunder that Rickards slowed down to a length of several minutes, then employed a composer to transcribe for woodwind and string instruments. A performance of the resultant score was recorded, and in turn accelerated to restore it to its original brief time span. When we know that this is an orchestrated thunderclap (an explanatory typed text on the gallery wall is part of the work), it does make us listen to it a lot harder.

The disjunction between the cosmic scale of the origination of a sound and the absurdly mundane quality of its eventual transcription into human terms is a feature of a number of the other works in this exhibition. The tiny, momentary sound emitted by Katie Paterson's sidereal doorbell, attached to an interlinking door in the gallery, is supposed to represent the last audible gasp of a dying star, though exactly how is not clear.

A number of exhibits have a theatrical aspect, albeit in miniature. Most theatrical of all is a film by Ragnar Kjartansson, a typically self-indulgent sub-operatic Rhinemaiden fantasy enacted by his three languorous blonde nieces, who drape themselves across a circular plinth in a neoclassical setting, repeatedly singing the same short refrain over the course of a day. Curiously compelling, Kjartansson's film was made in real time in one six-hour take by a rotating camera. Like Erik Satie's seemingly interminable *Vexations*, once you start listening to it, you can't stop.

Equally hypnotic, though in an utterly different way, is an impromptu film made from the driving seat of his car by Anri Sala. Circumnavigating a lorry park in Arizona, Sala becomes aware that two stations on his car radio are cutting in and out of each other, as snatches of baroque music alternate with redneck country music. Viewing the resultant film loop repeatedly transforms it into a courtly round dance. Another rotational presence in the same gallery echoes Sala's film: Haroon Mirza's kinetic assemblage *Siren*, 2012, a precariously balletic arrangement in which a revolving lightbulb scrapes the edge of an upturned cymbal and produces a loud buzz from an old portable radio set.

Few if any of the works in this exhibition connect directly to the parallel world of contemporary musical composition, however unorthodox or installation-based. The exception is the exhibition's one historical interloper, the American percussionist and composer Max Neuhaus (1939-2009), whose John Cage-influenced mission became to 'remove sound from time, and set it, instead, in place'. The exhibition features ephemeral documentary material: posters,

an invitation card, press cuttings and a well-known photograph of his literally immersive swimming pool event *Water Whistle*, 1971, where both the performers and audience were underwater. Interesting though this material is, it whets the appetite for more historical reference points in this exhibition, or otherwise for none at all.

On a practical curatorial level, 'Listening' has successfully overcome (as far as it can ever be wholly resolved) the all-too-familiar propensity for exhibitions like this to become uncomfortable arenas for acoustically competitive works. Belinfante has dealt with this incipient problem by deftly choreographing lighting sequences and the intermittent operation of some of the more attention-seeking exhibits to create multi-forked, non-coercive pathways for the visitor around the exhibition.

Exhibitions about sound shown in art galleries used to be uncommon. Now they are everywhere you look, as it were, and as this exhibition demonstrates, they no longer just display art objects that make sounds. This exhibition provides a useful and generally engaging survey of current visual art with a central acoustic or verbo-vocal dimension. And it also sets a benchmark for how such exhibitions should be framed and presented. ■

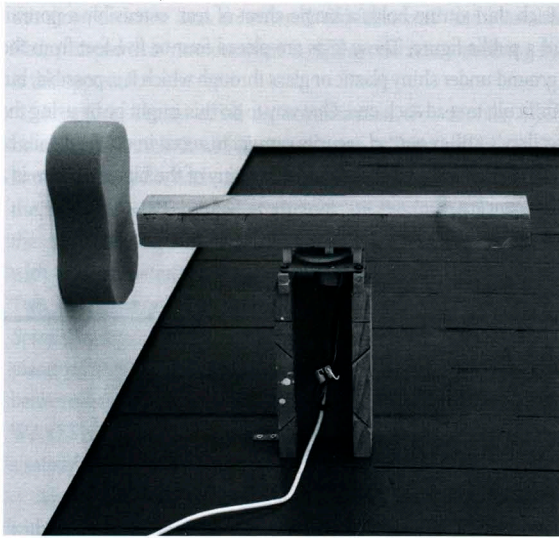
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Rie Nakajima: Fall

noshowspace London 7 November to 6 December

In 2012 in a small theatre in Deal, *Waiting* was performed in homage to John Cage for the 100th anniversary of his birth. Among the musicians participating was the Japanese artist Rie Nakajima with '*s-teaming*', a sound performance. Diverse objects such as marbles, whistles, nails, toys, ping-pong balls, paper cups and glass bottles were casually yet deftly moved around the surface of one of the cabaret tables. Random sounds resulted from their chance confrontations, as Cage commented: 'Let's just have fun with sounds ... music does not obligate us to do anything ... Theatre is all the various things going on at the same time.' His precepts that seeing and hearing are inseparable, that duration is common to both sound and silence, were made manifest in 'Cage's Satie: Composition for a Museum' at MAC Lyon in 2012 (Reviews AM361). Nakajima was trained as a sculptor. In her installations and performances she 'spatialises' sound through a dialogue between site and objects set into movement by improvised corporeal gestures. Where some experimental composers use prerecorded sounds from everyday sources, Nakajima does not 'do' remix – she prefers to let things happen.

Nakajima's exhibition 'Fall' was at the noshowspace, which is literally small, white and apparently empty. Gradually one glimpses objects: suspended from a spinning disco ball on a string slowly winding up and down is a white cloth in sad surrender, its motorised routine occasionally floundering and folding, like a dying swan. To the right, a thin black coil twists out of the wall with a whistle in its mouth, a snake about to warn us. The beads in the whistle rattle a faint tweet. Left of mid-space squats a block of wood balanced on a mechanised lever: gliding back and forth it presses a yellow sponge into the wall, emitting a muted sigh of expiration. Off-centre, a white plastic rod on a plaque of MDF hovers back and



forth playing blind man's buff. A second black tube with a whistle meanders its way out of the back wall, peering left and right like a Medusan head. In the rear space, a fine metallic chain rises up and rolls down into a coil, not quite noiselessly. On the walls are three 'automatic drawings': carbon paper tattooed with traces of jumping batteries. Birds in a snowstorm? The itch to interpret persists. Nakajima says: 'There is a sort of mapping, people see and imagine parts of the body but I have no figuration intended, no meaning.'

Bricolage sustains her recycling of found objects – even the whistles are old, the motors come from shop window displays – yet she says: 'Everything I do is new, I never repeat anything. Materials should be free to do anything. I don't pay too much attention, I like things you can ignore, the space and object help each other.' Her nonchalance hints at a Duchampian 'indifference'. She says: 'I pick up something and put it into space and see what comes out of this, they need each other. It is not about fabricating nor about space but by putting it in space they start to interpret each other.' Above all is her aim to strip away: 'I am interested in limitation ... I want to collaborate with objects to make something interesting in space as we are both limited if alone.'

The exhibition closed with a performance in collaboration with Keiko Yamamoto. Objects were placed in the centre and spectators squatted around the edges of the room. Nakajima sat next to her flea market wares: cups, bowls, lids, tins, bottles, dice, marbles, whistles, a Mickey Mouse, batteries. Sudden sounds and spiky gestures were enacted by Yamamoto, chanting words and stamping feet. Nakajima responded by touching her objects, prodding, almost caressing them towards signs of life through sound, not unlike the role of a midwife. From such contrasting choreographies transpired a narrative, rare in her solo performances.

'From performance,' she has said, 'I learned how to concentrate for the audience.' Nakajima becomes part of the audience through her listening. She sets things going, listens, then moves objects to different spaces where their life is their duration. This

was demonstrated in her award-winning performance last year at the QEH. Her objects were posed like still-lives around the vast auditorium in the most unlikely places: behind seats, in the aisles, deliberately off-stage. They were scarcely noticeable. Her act consists of looking around hesitantly before slipping into a discreet assignation with each cluster where objects are gently picked up, turned over and reconnected. Slight and darting, reflective as a shadow, her animation respects the object's own life. By letting go, Nakajima allows it to breathe and come into being through its interaction with others. The 'inframince' blips of noise gradually expand into a cacophony of sounds, encompassing yet specific, compelling yet not spectacular. The absence of scenario creates a sense of constant surprise sustained by her quiet contemplation and odd fleeting gesture. Hypnotised by her calm, enchanted by her non-technology – we are led up her garden path, a path with the purpose of purposelessness. ■

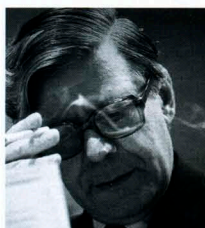
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Art & Language: Nobody Spoke

Lisson Gallery London 14 November to 17 January

The title of Art & Language's current show, 'Nobody Spoke', refers, according to A&L veteran Michael Baldwin, to 'the embarrassing silence that punctuates the disjointed sound of many voices'. The exhibition, then, may be regarded as a moment of awkwardness, a void, or a refusal to accept an established trajectory or belief. Baldwin's remark is embedded within an engaging dozen-page discussion between A&L and Joanna Thornberry in the accompanying catalogue, in which the theme of the plurality of voices, including, a bit clumsily, the 'voice' of the artwork, takes a prominent role. A&L seem to be suggesting, both in this printed exchange and through the structure of the exhibition itself, that such Bakhtinian pluralism may be a necessary counter-strategy to the hyper-reductive readings so prevalent in contemporary art – readings not only of specific works but also of the idea of what reading itself might entail being of vital concern in A&L's practice generally. Here, Baldwin refuses to give Thornberry's question about the relation of A&L's writing to their studio work a tidy reply, supplying instead an ambivalent but cognitively acute response: in the world of A&L, neither the material artwork nor the accompanying – if sometimes cogently abstruse – textual infrastructure takes the primary role. Meaning is made manifest (so A&L's multi-material approach implies) within, around and across the various collisions, overlaps and cunningly constructed lacunae that comprise their practice.

The work in the gallery is divisible into several distinct parts: a quartet of paintings collectively titled *Sea Ghosts*, all 2014; an installation of 17 chairs and a PA system, *Nobody Spoke*, 2013-14; a large number of framed *Drawings from the Winter*, 2012-13;



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