

# In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound

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Organized by the University Gallery in collaboration with Cecilia López and Jules Gimbrone

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JESÚS FUENMAYOR
PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND VISITING CURATOR
UNIVERSITY GALLERIES

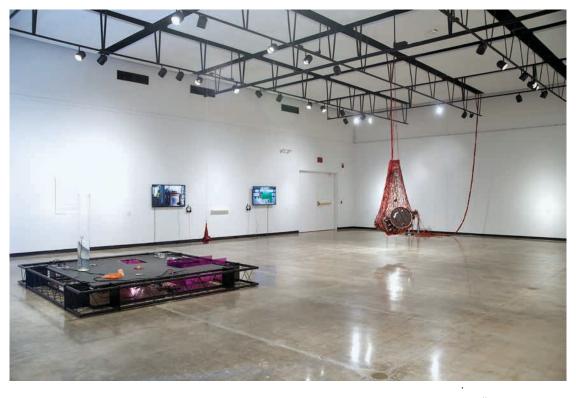


Installation view of the exhibition In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Bryan Yeager "F\*\*k Transparency": An Introduction to In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound

The strong afternoon sun shone through the tall group of pine trees to my right as I walked up the stairs from the parking lot of Fine Arts Building C. It was a hot, late summer day in Gainesville, and I had come to campus to see In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound fully installed at the University Gallery for the first time. Vision blurry from squinting through the sun and walking fast, my field of vision was not much more than indistinct blurs, but I could hear the sounds of the campus all around me. I did not need my sight to recognize the familiar sources of those sounds: a squirrel, absolutely unconcerned with human presence, skittering at the base of the trees, a pair of students walking up behind me chatting about the exam they have to take, the clank and thud of heavy metal doors closing around the side of the building. As familiar as I am with this area, these sounds were indices for objects, which I did not need to see to recognize. As I pulled open the door to the gallery space and stepped through that all changed.

With my eyes adjusting to yet another change in light, the sounds from the works in the exhibition washed over me with the cool, climate-controlled air of the interior. High piercing frequencies, low buzzing, rhythmic knocks, long droning tones, and intermittent rattling all reverberated throughout the space. Loud, and in many ways jarring, I was nonetheless struck by how much the alien cacophony did not seem chaotic. Surveying the exhibition as a whole, taking in the large installation pieces that occupied much of the floor space with the video and sound pieces installed along the walls, I felt like there was a system of signs and relations that connected the sounds and objects, in much the same way that there had been walking up on campus, but that I had entered a space in which I was not prepared to recognize those connections. The works in coming together as a whole had generated within an area that I was normally familiar with a kind of completely foreign space filled with semiotic relationships that I was not equipped to understand. I could hear the sounds and I could see these objects, but I could not quite discern their relation, nor properly assign one to the other. This ability to generate ambiguity and re-install an uncertainty within the familiar, to reveal as unstable and fluid all that seems solid and inherent, is a remarkably useful function for an exhibition to perform in our contemporary moment.

Entering the gallery and turning to the right, one is immediately confronted by Nikita Gale's imposing installation, INTERCEPTOR (2019–2020). Composed of a large metal framework based on the design of a crowd control barricade, which has been wrapped in tangled microphone cable and accompanied by microphone stands, INTERCEPTOR certainly looks, within the din of all the works running at once, like it should make sound. Upon approach and inspection, though, it is still. The metal doesn't ring.



"NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: The title In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound is a reference to the exhibition Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine curated by Cathy de Zegher (1996). There she argued for the feminine as a subject in constant flux in the same way we understand the artists experimenting with sound as engaging in a practice that implies to question the fixed identities associated with art. As de Zegher wrote in her catalogue essay for the exhibition, her curatorial "working method allows gender to be considered not as constituted coherently in different historical contexts but as intersected by racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities," a way of understanding how to approach difference and multiplicity that has become increasingly pertinent in our times. For us, concomitantly, to engage in an exhibition where the works deal with sound is to work with a matter in constant flux. The subtitle, Experiments in Sound refers to the legendary collective Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) funded in 1967 by engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer and artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman, that also produced the mythical series of performances known as 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering in 1966, a historical reference that is relevant for this exhibition focused in a group of contemporary artists that have been experimenting with sound in their work.

Installation view of the exhibition In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Bryan Yeager The cables don't buzz. Then you realize that although at first it seemed to have all the tools required to make sound, the stands don't actually have microphones in them and the cables don't connect to outlets or speakers but are just punched roughly into the drywall behind the barricade. It stands silent within an abundance of sound, a powerful evocation of important questions about authority, power, pretense, and access.

One of the giveaways that INTERCEPTOR makes no sound is that despite being made of resonant materials, it doesn't vibrate. While standing in front of Gale's piece, though, the viewer is likely to feel deep, rumbling vibrations emanating from a source behind their back. Located across from INTERCEPTOR that source is Jules Gimbrone's Traps and Transmutations 2 (2020). Turning around to face the work the viewer is confronted with a large metal and plywood frame stage functioning as a sounding board that resonates with the frequency of a recording played through it. That recording is composed of, at different points, heavy breathing, monophonic chanting, deep bells, and other more abstract noises. Various objects including knives, cast soap, water balls, microphones encased in resin, and onionskin lie atop the stage and shake and rattle along with the vibrations produced by the recordings played through the stage. The piece is large, loud and forceful. It utilizes sound in the production of sound, establishing strong but unpredictable relationships between the recorded past and the observed present, between the stage and the objects that sit atop it, and between the viewer and the space. While taking in Traps and Transmutations 2, I felt compelled, at one point, to lean over the stage to get a better look at the items that were dancing across its surface and, when I did so, the tip of my foot inadvertently touched the metal base of the stage sending sudden and surprising vibrations up my leg. This unexpected haptic activation simultaneously shocked and tickled me, resulting in my own body being "trapped" by the work and integrated into the soundscape as I exhaled a startled curse.

Turning from Gimbrone's Traps and Transmutations 2 and walking deeper into the gallery, along the wall from Gale's INTERCEPTOR, the visitor arrives in front of two pair of headphones through which they can listen to Thessia Machado's Contents: UF (2020). The artist gathered two sets of statistics in preparation for the piece. One set was derived from the University of Florida and University Gallery's own space (e.g. year of founding, total square footage and number of outlets, lights, etc.). The second came from the population demographics of the student body of the University of Florida. These two sets of numbers were then converted into sine wave frequencies that each produced their own tone. The artist then composed these tones into two arrangements that together make up a sonic diptych. Recorded as to emphasize interactions between the pitches—frequency beating, cancellations and other interferences—the tracks produce an aural portrait of the gallery space and the student body it serves. These tracks are accompanied by a visual component, a design printed on laser-cut vinyl applied to the wall in front of where the viewer stands, detailing the statistics utilized and representing the relationships between them. When listened to while the other

works in the exhibition are sounding in the background, the exterior sound leaking into the headphones from outside and the compositions playing through the headphones combine to produce a living portrait of the space in that exact instance, combining measurable features of the gallery with what is happening within it at that moment.

Continuing on from Contents: UF, the visitor is confronted with Nikita Gale's DESCENT (2019) as it is displayed along the back wall of the gallery. DESCENT is an audio-visual piece in which a voice recording done by the artist is played, while a digital representation of the sound waves that make up that recording is projected onto the wall of the gallery. The projection is subtitled with the text of the narration in which the artist loosely discusses her relationship with her family, her name, and the right to illegibility, as a driving percussive rhythm and combinations of white, pink, and brown noise play in the background. At one point the narrator exclaims "Fuck Transparency" and this statement is only made all the more forceful by the complex network of sounds generated within the exhibition space as a whole.

The viewer would have noticed one of these sounds, a wavering, piercing pitch as soon as they walked into the gallery. Walking away from DESCENT and toward the hanging sculpture to the left, the pitch would warble and vary. The work producing that somewhat discomforting tone, Cecilia López's Red (d) (2020), actively responds to the presences that come and go around it. The work consists of speaker wire that has been woven into a net that holds drums suspended from the ceiling. Small contact microphones are dispersed along the wire that makes up the mesh turning the hanging installation into a complex sound producing feedback organism. The microphones pick up the resonant frequencies produced by the drums, which are in turn affected by the space and movement within the room. This signal is then transmitted through speakers from whence it is re-detected by the microphones producing an often high-pitched sonic feedback that is specific to the arrangement and occupancy of the gallery space at any given time. This feedback is shaped by all of the other works in the exhibition, the vibrations in the air caused by the sounding of those works, and the number of people filling the space, to produce, in effect, a sonic doubling of the experience of the exhibition. This doubling is then fed back repeatedly into the gallery space, itself. This adds another layer to the code switching being performed whereby even once the visitor learns to recognize the initial auditory signature of say Traps and Transmutations 2, that signature is then inputted into a process by Red (d) that transforms it with a special and specific accounting for the visitor's own presence, and plays it back in a new, unfamiliar form.

Passing by Red (d), the visitor arrives at the wall opposite of Machado's Contents: UF and comes to two screens playing videos with headphone attachments. The works shown on the screens are Nao Nishihara's Diligent Machine (2019) and Lucie Vítková and stevie may's Twins Performance Project (2017). Nishihara's Diligent Machine is a tall six-meter high assemblage including oil drums and a wooden frame that slowly moves across track.

As it moves, mallets beat the sides of the drums. The work is labeled as a machine, but while it has many parts that are working together in a complicated arrangement, it has no clear purpose. An exploration of the relationship of sound to work and efficiency, Nishihara has produced a machine that serves to signify the absurdity that often lurks within notions related to a "proper" or "effective" use of time.

Twins Performance Project (Lucie Vítková + stevie may) is a video recording of an intimate performance held by the artists on a fall evening in Brooklyn. In the video presented as part of the exhibition, stevie may dances as Lucie Vítková performs on a synthesizer, surrounded by various objects, including cans, keys, and plastic lids. Vítková's performance is not musical in a traditional sense. She uses the synthesizer to produce an abstract accompaniment to may's careful and flowing choreography, neither bound by conventional notions of synchronization nor rhythm.

Completing the circuit of the gallery, the viewer arrives at the desk of the gallery sitter, near the entrance, on which sits a speaker playing Adrian Piper's Bach Whistled (1970). Bach Whistled is a durational performance soundtrack in which Piper whistles along to recordings of Bach's Concertos in D Minor, A Minor, and C Major, respectively. At the beginning the whistling is relatively strong, clear, and on key. As the performance progresses it becomes weaker, flatter, and less accurate to the original score. Perhaps motivated to put their ear down near the speaker by the volume of the other works in the exhibition, the visitor hears an orchestral arrangement of Bach being played seemingly distantly as Piper whistles her interpretation of the piece. Piper does not seem to sound along with the orchestra as much as confront it. She refutes the seemingly definitive orchestral rendition of the piece with an overlaid reminder that musical notation and composition is not something that simply is but something that is interpreted. That there is much more possibility within that notation than its most common, most put-forward, or most forcefully normalized realization. In this way, Bach Whistled serves as an excellent endnote for the exhibition because after the tour through this unfamiliar soundscape one arrives at the end with a better recognition of the ambiguity, not just in the shockingly dissonant, but also in the seemingly conventional and harmonious.



Installation view of the exhibition In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Bryan Yeager

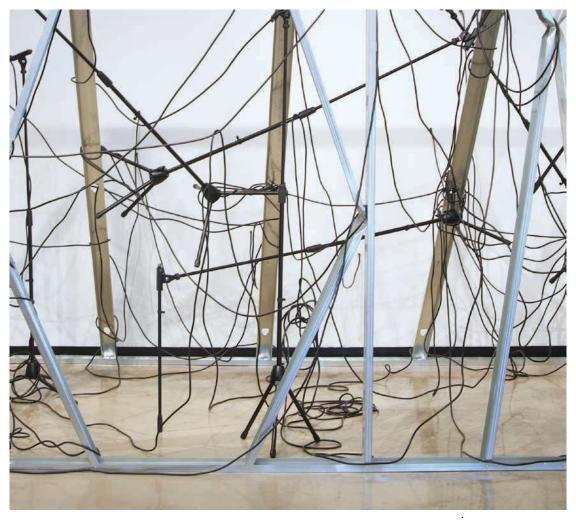
### NIKITA GALE in conversation with JESÚS FUENMAYOR'2

— JESÚS FUENMAYOR: As part of the University Galleries fall exhibition In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, we are including your installation INTERCEPTOR (2019–20). It is a work that adds a complex dimension to the idea of experimenting with sound. INTERCEPTOR departs from a nineteenth-century barricade design (based on an "ideal barricade" construction by Louis-Auguste Blanqui from his Manual for an Armed Insurrection, 1866). The work's relation to sound is visual or metaphoric, because it is a soundless piece. Could you please describe the work and the ideas that motivated you to produce it?

— NIKITA GALE: In thinking about the infrastructure of crowd control, I became interested in the ubiquity of barricades at protests and other large public gatherings like concerts and political rallies. Barricades have origins in a very radical material tradition, having been made out of refuse by the working classes in nineteenth-century France to block and redirect the flow of street traffic as a means of protecting themselves against state violence. These structures also served as social spaces and ad hoc stages for these citizen insurgents to address one another. Through the advent of mass production and appropriation, barricades have now become a mobile architecture that controls how crowds and audiences are allowed to take up space; they are no longer technologies of "the people" but are now technologies of authority. The freedom to speak and to listen is negated by the physical control rendered by barricades' presence. INTERCEPTOR considers exclusion and protection, radical expression, and how the regulation of space influences the regulation of speech and listening.

— JF: Some art professionals may remember that Michael Asher, one of the central figures of institutional critique in this country, once produced an installation using the same type of construction materials that you use for INTERCEPTOR. I am referring to Asher's intervention at the Santa Monica Museum of Art [now the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] in 2008, in which he—by consulting exhibition design plans and diagrams—rebuilt every temporary wall that had been constructed since the museum's move to its new location in 1998. Rather than actual walls, he used metal or wooden studs to create a sort of "skeleton map" of the institution's exhibition history. The similarity with Asher's installation and INTERCEPTOR could be merely coincidental, but I find it extremely compelling as a way of understanding your work and how it points to how "institutional critique" is not politically and socially engaged enough. Could you elaborate on how you think this piece, or the legacy of institutional critique, relates to your work and new experiences in contemporary art?

<sup>-2</sup> This interview previously appeared in the online magazine Art Journal Open, July, 2020.



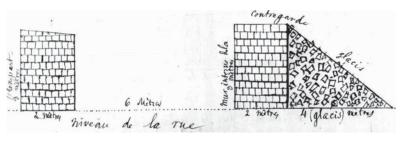
Nikita Gale, INTERCEPTOR, 2019-2020 (detail), photo by Bryan Yeager —Nc: If I'm going to think through my relationship to the work of Michael Asher, I would think about that particular work through the processes of inversion and compression or accumulation. By this I am referring to the ways in which, through Asher's compression of time in this piece—by placing into one space all of the studs for temporary walls for exhibitions mounted over the course of a decade—he creates an inversion of the use of the wall. The wall stud as support and foundation suddenly becomes porous, and also prohibitive to delineating a space that can be occupied by the viewer.

With INTERCEPTOR, these processes of inversion and compression are also at play, but in pretty different ways. I am interested in the stud as a ubiquitous material that is used in wall construction. Walls are architectural features that simultaneously define space and support artworks, as surfaces for projections or for hanging and framing artworks; in this way the wall shares a common use or objective with the barricade in its division of space, but it remains porous. In thinking about the significance of the music studio, particularly as a site of Black creative production, I find that the materials that are used in the transmission of sound, and for the support of tools of production and sound extraction, have an ambient presence that reflects the ambient quality of these foundational materials, like wall studs, in space. So through the process of inversion, INTERCEPTOR uses objects that facilitate the production of sound and space to inhibit both.

— JF: It is thought provoking that in this work you seem to be inverting the logic of "countervisuality," one of the strategies that has been more commonly used to politicize artistic practices since the sixties. This work does not transmit any physical or real sound but evokes an imaginary sound: the sound of rebel multitudes. Because it speaks through silence, incorporating into its visual language a subversive undertone, I find it particularly meaningful in light of our current political context. Could you address INTERCEPTOR's relation to this context and how that relationship may have shifted over time?

—Nc: Well, I think the idea of silence is particularly meaningful in this moment, especially in thinking about how systems inflict silence as a form of authority. The shadow bans on social media, blocking hashtags, and blocking internet access in general are just a few of the political uses of silence and blocking for the purpose of disenfranchisement. But as a counter to its use by authority, silence is a very useful and radical tool of refusal. It can be threatening, and the sound theorist Michel Chion even suggests that when we encounter things that we expect to make sound but do not, it can often seem downright antagonistic and "diabolical." I'm really into this idea of radical silence and what that actually suggests. We generally understand how an audio tool like an audio cable works: it carries a sound signal from a recording device (like a microphone) to a processing device (like an amplifier) and then to an output device (like a speaker). The cable itself is silent, but you understand that sound is being transmitted elsewhere even if it's in a register to which you may not have access.





Nikita Gale,
INTERCEPTOR, 2019,
exhibition view,
Fall Apart: Nikita Gale
& Pat O'Neill,
Martos Gallery, New
York, January 11—
February 24, 2019
(photo by Charles
Benton/ Martos Gallery,
provided by the artist)

Louis-Auguste Blanqui, reference drawing of ideal barricade construction, from Manual for an Armed Insurrection, 1866 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the artist) I think this is a political moment when this idea of register has been thrown into relief in a profound way. There is radical Black leadership that has been having conversations about racialized violence and systemic oppression for decades and centuries, and they will continue to have these conversations in registers that are not all that accessible for the majority of America, which is only recently trying to catch up. This brings me back to the significance of sound in the history of the Black experience in America, particularly slave spirituals and work songs, which were always coded with meanings only legible to the enslaved—the sounds of which, in the ears of the planter and slave driver, registered differently that they did in the ears of the Black slaves. Then from here, I start to get really excited about talking about the formulation of audiences, but that's another conversation entirely!

- JF: One of my motivations for presenting In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound is to explore identity politics in the arts in a different light, in order to create a more productive and nuanced connection between artistic practices and the political issues of our times. How do you feel your work connects and/or creates bridges between the political and the arts?
- —NG: The work implicates contemporary materials in historical processes of alienation, appropriation, control, and violence. A barricade is a wall is a slave code is a freeway is a predatory loan. And to quote Emma Amos, "It's always been my contention that for me, a Black woman artist, to walk into the studio is a political act."
- JF: I think it is important for the art community to engage questions that are often not considered relevant because of the way our relationships are governed by a preexisting set of power relations. Black Lives Matter and other initiatives are now being engaged by many different communities. Do you have any thoughts on how to address, in a critical and pertinent way, our current political debate in the art community?

-NG: LISTEN TO BLACK WOMXN.



Nikita Gale, DESCENT, 2019, HD video with audio, video still, courtesy the artist

## JULES GIMBRONE in conversation with JESÚS FUENMAYOR3

- —JESÚS FUENMAYOR: Together with Cecilia López you participated in the organization of this exhibition and helped shape it into what it is now. I think it is because there was not one single curatorial voice but all of us working in conversation to find the best way to present a productive experience of the works that the outcome of this exhibition is so successful. Can you please discuss your input during the process of organizing the exhibition? What were the key decisions for you?
- —JULES GIMBRONE: I think my orientation towards any show that wants to collect around the idea of sound is to make sound a problem. What I mean by that, is that often sound art works are set apart in this exceptional category where works that involve sound are clustered together as if they have some implicit connection. Consider having a show in which "paint" was considered enough of a concept for grouping of works. What I am more interested in is what sound does in a work, as I like to think in my own practice, sound is more of a method of working rather than a medium. And I guess, my interest in involving Nikita Gale's "silent" work in this show, beyond my admiration for her and her work, was that I think that Gale is thinking through the mechanisms around sounding as a place for interrogating power systems. And this is the exact type of dynamic content that I think makes working with the concept of sound, and the structures around sounding so exciting. There is always a call and a response. For me, that is the place in which these works reside.
- JF: There are two elements in the selection and presentation of the works that I find crucial to understand what is at stake. One, is that instead of doing what most museums and galleries do when they present works with sound, isolating the works from each other (for group or solo exhibition) we took the radical decision of presenting the works all at once in the same space. At the beginning I was planning to present the works in isolation and you and Cecilia convinced me not to do that.
- JG: Yes, while I don't think that all works that include sound would be able, or want to function in this way, I do think Cecilia and I were interested in the ways in which our pieces speak to each other in the gallery. Actually, I think many works that we would consider "sound art", many "sound artists" would be adamantly against because of this type of bleed and loosening of control. But for us, we were really interested in hearing our pieces commune.
- JF: Ever since Felix González-Torres did his series of take away pieces in the early 90's, I think there has been an opening to this possibility of incorporating fragmentation as guiding force in the artwork's relationship with the viewers. How important is the incorporation of a fragmented experience in your work? Where does this necessity comes from?

.3 This interview was conducted via email during November and December, 2020



Jules Gimbrone, Traps and Transmutations 2, 2020, detail, photo by Mark Hodge

- JG: I think you are asking about the importance of the works being assembled in different ways that are determined by the objects and impulses available at the time. Yes, in this way when referencing early González-Torres I do love the generosity, not only in the specific items that were "taken away" but in his generosity of giving the work as a link that connects us through time. He is offering us a link to the past in the current iterations of the work, and the past is still present. Like I said in the talk, I think that artists who come from a time-based background—music, dance, video, performance, etc.—this question of fragmentation is always explicitly. There is never the pure, singular, experience, but rather something that someone can take with them and then potentially revisit at a later date in a new form.
- JF: Another of the common threads in the exhibition is that all of the works have had other iterations. They have been presented in other places and shapes in other moments. I think that is an aspect of the works that is more important than has been recognized, and I would like to discuss it with you because it brings up and amplifies this discussion on the unicity of the work of art.
- JG: This reminds me of this idea of remixing, which is basically a series of new iterations of some "thing" from the original. When done in an interesting way, when you listen to a remixed song, not only do you hear the new version but you hear the old version as well, and most interestingly you hear the space between the old and the new. That space, or conversation—be it rhythmic or pitch-based differentiations—between the past and the present is most juicy, and leads to this idea of the illegible and contingent subject.
- JF: In his essay for this catalog, Mark Hodge, the curatorial assistant for the exhibition, narrates how the felt at the time he first saw the exhibition. His explanation is for me exemplary of what we all are expecting from this experience: an open-minded visitor who goes around and gets the best of the many different possibilities they have to interact with the works. Would you agree with that definition of the reception of works? How do you imagine a viewer in front of your work? What would you like them to do?
- Jc: I think it isn't as much what I want a viewer to do, as much as that I want a viewer listening: to be made aware of this constant call-and-response set of contingencies that construct their ability to be aware at all. Legibility is a central question to my work. How does a subject appear as solid, with a set of desires, needs, experiences, and affects within an ever-changing cosmology of actants that have stakes in that subject appearing or disappearing? Disorientation is always there, if you are willing to walk into the void of that space. I am interested in creating a set of interactions that just throws in relief the types of performed disorientations that we are always experiencing. I think for trans people, or people who are not actually made real in the dominant systems, we have acute knowledge of this type of dissociation, and I try to bring that way of perceiving to all. Why? Because I think that our western belief in the quantifiable real has been a force of violence in our world.



Jules Gimbrone, Traps and Transmutations 2, 2020, detail, photo by Kayla Burnett

— JF:In your article Touching a Third Sound:Trans-Sensing in a World of Deepfakes you mentioned that "by attending to this digital moment, and this crisis of real/fake, in new, hybrid, synesthetic ways, we open up a third way for meaning to appear. Perhaps as we move deeper into the web of visual dominance, our only way forward will be to cultivate new, integrated ways of sensing our world." I was surprised by this idea of integration of how we sense the world, coming from an artist like you who seems to be promoting the opposite, promoting fragmentation and disintegration. I guess what you are referring to is the process and not to the objects that you present. Could you explain to me how through the process of fragmentation you think it is possible to integrate our ways of sensing the world?

— JG: In this article I was pointing towards a type of sensory awareness that trans people must cultivate in order to read our environments for real or perceived harm, and how this type of "trans-sensing" necessitates a certain attunement that goes beyond a flattened, often binary-based visual perception mechanism. In the case of deep-fakes this environment is contingent on technologies shaping our understanding of truth in a sea of digital information. I think it is time for all of us, not just those who are threatened, to become more sensitive to everything around us, especially through and with these new technologies. It is often those who have inherited the most power from this patriarchal hetereonormative racist economic machine who don't seem to need to be sensitive to the other, perhaps because their very existence necessitates a certain degree of not-seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting and feeling. It is through realizing how we fragment, and that there are multiple forces at play, that we can begin to integrate.

I think that in my work I try to make more explicit the presence of diverse sensory textures that play with mis-understanding through auditory and visual illusions. Maybe in a way, I set up these disruptions between the senses in order to re-wire our habitual response to sensory input. I wouldn't say I am interested in fragmentation and disintegration as an end experience as much as I use these methods as a way to evoke disorientation, which may act as a sort of re-set to being able to actually perceive contingent systems rather than absolute truths.

— JF: Among the most reiterative problems that comes with the organization of this type of exhibition of works by artists experimenting with sound, is the issue of how to define "sound." You and the other artists in the exhibition don't like the idea of being referred to as "sound artists" or to call what you do "sound art." Again, during the panel discussion, you said: "Sounds are inherently contingent" and that "Sound is not as specific as itself" "You could go to a painting show and talk about sound." I found that idea extremely interesting. You are denying that the goal of what we are doing is to present a media specific type of exhibition because sound cannot be bound to itself or defined as a category. Would you agree with this understanding? Could you expand on this idea of the specificlessness of sound?



Jules Gimbrone,
Traps and Transmutation,
2015, view of the
exhibition The Social
Register, Park View,
Los Angeles, 2015,
photo Jules Gimbrone,
courtesy of the artist
and Park View
/ Paul Soto

— JG: Yes, sound isn't as much a thing as it is a force. Energy is the ability to cause change, and sound is the movement of energy through a substance. Sound is a type of energy transfer like kinetic, mechanical, light, heat, etc. Sound is vibration, and so it is something that happens, or a methodology more than a form. In conceiving it in this way, it becomes a phenomenon which is contingent on a set of dynamic relationships—most clearly the relationship between the vibrating energy and the medium through which it is moving, or the relationship between the sounding object and the listening membrane. Taking this into consideration, for me, sound can be used to talk about contingent relationships, as any type of energy transfer system will make clear.

But what specific dynamics we are observing or developing in our individual practices may vary widely. And, I guess, I am more interested in that content than I am in sound as an end to the conceptual framing.

#### CECILIA LÓPEZ IN CONVERSATION WITH MARK HODGE-4

- MARK HODGE: Jesús credits you with bringing this exhibition together and making it happen in the shape that it has now taken at University Gallery, here, at the University of Florida. What motivated that development for you?
- CECILIA LÓPEZ: Well, I worked with Jesús in 2018 when he was the curator of the Cuenca Biennial in Ecuador. I had a piece there and there were a few other sound pieces in that exhibition. I think that he has an interest in that field. I feel like in the art world, sound art is something that is like relatively new. It's a new media intersection. Later, he mentioned to me that he was going to curate this show at the University

Later, he mentioned to me that he was going to curate this show at the University of Florida, and we started having all these conversations about artists currently working with sound. Working with sound in a way, but in a much more material-based way than say a straightforward musical performance.

- MH: Right, most all of the works in the exhibition still have a sculptural element to them in some sense.
- cl: Yes, and, also, I feel like there are [elsewhere in the art world] a lot of works in which sound is treated as an accessory. If it's in a video it is an accessory to the video. Involved, but secondary. Like with incidental music in theater. So, Jesús and I were having this conversation about people whose work treats sound as a primary material or as a central concept. He was questioning who these artists were, and I was pointing out that usually in, say, New York it is hard to find people who work with sound in such a way and those people who do are not necessarily featured heavily.

It's different in different worlds. I am sort of part of the experimental music world, too. In those circles there is a lot of what I would describe as an arms race in terms of the use of technology. Everyone wants to use sixteen channels to make it sound really immersive, but maybe the concept would actually work better with a mono channel. I always have this critical view of the use of technology in which, if the technique is not in service of the idea, then the idea ends up lost in the technique. So, our conversation became about who is working with sound where the concept directs the technology and the sound is central to the concept. I mentioned to Jesús some artists whom I knew and we began to talk about how we could collaborate. From there it took the shape it took.

— MH: I would like to discuss further an element of what you said. I recently did an interview with Thessia Machado, as well. She said you invited her to participate in the show. One of the topics that we talked about was how one of her interests as an artist is in flipping the hierarchy in installation art. Many installations have sound, of course, but the sound is a peripheral aspect. The works in this show, they have physical aspects as installations, but they are driven by the sound. Sound has moved from the periphery, to the center.

.4 This interview was conducted on September 15,



2020, detail, In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Mark Hodge

- cl: The idea is to think about the sound as a physical object too. It's a sound wave. It creates a change of pressure in the air. There's a physical manifestation of the sound. The artists we tried to bring together consider that materiality as important as any other.
- MH: A lot of times, we do say that sound is a medium, but I think most people, when they say that, mean it more like "genre" of art. In your work and the other works in the show, there's the sense that sound is media, the same sense as any sculptural material like stone or wood. It is something that truly has a physical presence that affects the objects around it. Speaking of your work, Red (d) consists of this net of microphone cables suspended from the ceiling and filled with drums. It is connected to speakers and contact microphones turning its structure into an instrument that resonates with the bodies of the drums. Why did you choose the specific work you did to include in this show, given what we have just discussed?
- cl: That is interesting for me. It's a work that I've presented in previous iterations. It's a tricky work. I called it Red (d), which is "network" in Spanish and a color in English. Red (d) is a piece I have used in many different ways. I've presented it as an installation where it was like a shapeless thing hanging from a column. I've presented it as a performance, filtering the sounds that this feedback organism produced through synths. So, I have done it in a few different ways, but I'm still curious about how the work behaves in an art context and how people relate to it.

Mostly when I presented it in the [Cuenca] Biennial it was in a very particular location, but people would go and touch it, even if that was not encouraged, and, Red (d) responded to that. I was curious about that human factor within the context of an exhibition in a gallery space.

- MH: That seems to be very much not only part of the experiment with your piece, but also a focus with this show overall. How these works interact together and with visitors in the gallery. Red (d), in particular, is an extremely sensitive piece. It picks up whatever goes on around it. The piece is working as this kind of receptor and producer of activity in the space. It's like you've created a machine for translating the entire space and what goes on there into sound.
- cl: That is definitely a goal. We will see how it works out, but it's something that I discussed with Jesús when we were discussing who to invite and what the approach to the show would be. Sound art is usually so compartmentalized when it is presented in museums and galleries. We wanted for the visitors and the artworks to be in open conversation with each other. We talked about strategies for making the pieces work together, and then at some point I remember talking with Jules [Gimbrone] and we said to each other, you know, maybe we should just let it be and embrace the results. Now it's going to be hard to tell what the results of that are because of COVID19 we cannot be there in person, but still.
- MH: These are some of the challenges that are often associated with sound art. Questions of presentation and how to use the space. What other challenges are there for artists who work primarily with sound in the contemporary art world today?



Cecilia Lopez, Red (d), 2020, installation view, Roulette Intermedium, Brooklyn, New York, 2019, photo by Wolfgang Daniel, courtesy of the artist. Cecilia Lopez, Red, 2018, installation view of the exhibition, Living Structures, XIV Cuenca Biennial, Museo de las Conceptas, Cuenca, Ecuador, 2018, photo courtesy Fundación Bienal de Cuenca

- ct: Usually, I observe this conundrum of comparison in the field. Often, a comparison between music and sound art. Sometimes artistic interventions in sound can seem monotonous, compared to music, and people note that. Other people seek to emulate the immediacy of visual arts in sound. There's a drive to make sound art immediately consumable in the way a painting seems to be, but time and space in sound are inseparable. It's about the discourse between a person and sound as it unfolds over time, but people are hesitant to stay in a gallery space for an extended period. If you sit for an hour in a sound installation and you perceive that nothing has happened, nobody is giving you that hour back, and it seems like it was a waste, but there was a discourse there.
- мн: I think that's an excellent point that there is always a discourse between space and time and the receptor of them. What sound art does is it reveals that clearly and keenly, whereas the discourse with time is elided with visual art because one thinks that they can see it and immediately take in everything they need to note, of course, that's not the case. Sound art works to make that point clear.
- cl: I mean either successfully or not, but still I feel like that point is not worked out often conceptually enough because of the drive to compare with other forms of art.
- MH: Moving to another question, this one comes from Jesús. He has said that one of the goals of In, Of, From is to explore identity politics in the arts in a different light in order to create a more productive and nuanced connection between artistic practices and the political issues of our time. How do you feel your work connects and/or creates bridges between the political and the artistic?
- cL: I'm Argentinian. I have lived in the States for five years, and I feel like identity politics here works in a very specific way. As much as I understand the reason for these politics to take the shape they do and that that shape helps in some context, I feel like sometimes there is a drive to compartmentalize or categorize groups that should actually be working together. The large scheme of things can be blurred out by those firm distinctions. So, when Jesús asks about seeing identity politics in a different light or in a more productive way, that's the way that I'm going to approach it. That art can help to empathize more than to separate. In my work, I have a political position and a logical position, but I don't like to be didactic with my work. My aspiration is that that position is going to transpire from the work itself without me having to make an obvious statement.

Particularly, I like for my work to speak on questions concerning the normative use of technology. The fact that we usually use technology in such a standardized way without questioning how much agency we have in that process. Overall, trying not to be naive about the fact that technology is developed by institutions and those institutions invite us to use them, but we're actually helping them develop and profit off of more technology.

- мн: That goes back to the arms race you were talking about earlier.
- cl: It's not coincidental, there's a cost. I prefer to leave these topics obscure in my work, but still help to generate questions I feel are important.



Cecilia Lopez, Red (d), 2020, detail, In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Mark Hodge

<sup>—</sup> MH: If the viewer is as attentive as one might hope, a much more nuanced response can come out through the work than in a generalized statement straight from you.

<sup>—</sup> cl: It's comes back to a question of interactivity, for me, between the work and the person taking it in, that we have been discussing throughout this interview.

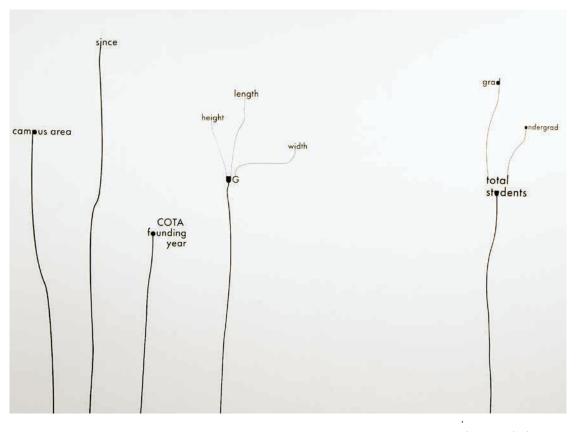
### THESSIA MACHADO in conversation with MARK HODGE.5

- MARK HODGE: I thought we would start our conversation with your work for In, Of, From. Could you describe the piece and the ideas that motivated you to produce it, briefly?
- THESSIA MACHADO: The piece shown at the University of Florida [in University Gallery] is called Contents: UF. This is the third iteration of this piece, and what I really enjoy about it is that I can customize it for the venue, the gallery, or the institution, where it will be shown. What it entails is gleaning data and information from the site and then doing a very direct and arbitrary translation from this data. I'll get a set of numbers and then transform these numbers directly into frequencies.

I like to play with the idea of having the data come from the different aspects of a place. In this case, for this show there's some information about the physical campus: the size of the gallery, the acreage of the campus, etc. And then I like to contrast that with statistics concerning the people who inhabit the space, i.e. the student populations and demographic percentages, etc., because to me it's the people who animate the space. That's where the energy comes from right through to physical spaces.

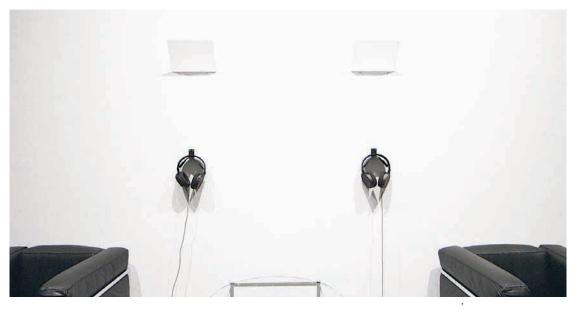
- мн: I am curious about how you generate the sound frequencies from the statistics. How do you convert the number to sound?
- TM: I use a very straightforward frequency generator that generates a sine wave. It's a pure tone for each number in the statistic set. I have my six numbers, and I'm able to have all six of them in this generator, and it produces these pure tones. That's my way of engaging with the data. Then, I'll just play it. I'll play the different tracks of these six frequencies and make a single track activating them at different times. That part is all very intuitive. You can't tell by listening to an individual tone how it will interact with different tones. What you get is a lot of frequency beating or some interference. Sometimes, when you play two tones together they create this distortion-like effect. I'm playing with this dynamic in between the physicality of sounds and acoustic electronic aspect of how the sound waves interact with each other.
- MH: What made you want to be a part of this exhibition with the other artists who are in it, and then also include this specific work versus any other that you might have considered?
- TM: To me it's always exciting to be part of a group show with other artists who are also working with sounds and to see how the works come together. It's incredibly frustrating that we're not going to be there and actually be in the space [because of complications due to the COVID-19 pandemic]. As far as the piece that was chosen for the show there was a little bit of back and forth. Initially, we wanted to do a different piece that had more of a physical presence in the space.

.5 This interview was conducted on September 10, 2020



Thessia Machado, Contents: UF, 2020, detail. In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Bryan Yeager It was a piece that has three bass strings installed right on the on the wall. It would have had a sculptural element to it and been activated by motors, but it was just too tricky to install without my presence. It is a little bit part of my practice that I'm very DIY with everything I do. I'm very hands on. The way that piece was built necessitated my presence for fine-tuning and adjusting. The new piece we went with, Contents: UF, is more straightforward on that front.

- MH: Now that I've heard you describe Contents: UF, I think there is something interesting about doing a work like it on a university campus. You have generated these sounds that represent the architectural space and sounds that represent the people and with them you reconstruct sonically the interaction between the two. Given the relationship between the student population and the physical campus space is so varied and integral to the college experience, I think Contents: UF fits well in a campus art gallery. All of the artists in this exhibition place an emphasis on sound in their work. Do you have any thoughts on the challenges faced by artists who work with sound in the contemporary art scene, today?
- TM: I think it's it has been interesting to see the evolution of galleries and exhibition spaces toward being more open to sound art, and then, also, the pitfalls of this opening. A lot of times, there isn't much thought given to the experience of the viewer. Gallery spaces are often not that well prepared and one has to think about sound bleeding into other spaces interfering with other pieces and so on. It is a lucky thing for my practice that I'm very open to interference. If there is another sound piece in the space, I welcome the dialogue. This has to do a lot with my own practice performing experimental music improvisation. That part of my practice shows through to the installation work. I am always interested to think in terms of collaborations with the acoustic quirks of any space. I'm very interested in that. This interest also carries over to conversation with other artists work, as well.
- MH: That's a key focus point of *In*, *Of*, *From*, the acceptance of sonic interactions within the gallery. One of the shows often considered foundational for the medium was the Barbara London's show in held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1979 that was called, simply, *Sound Art*. The exhibition consisted of three works by three individual artists that were installed separately and successively for three weeks each. It was set up in such a way to avoid the bleed over of sound between the works. Here it seems the artists who were involved in putting it together want that interaction between the sound of the works and the space and anything else that's going. What is different about what is being staged in this exhibition?
- TM: I think maybe a change is occurring with the artists themselves in this larger acceptance of sound. We are in exhibition spaces, and we are thinking about these interactions as we create work, as well. When I create installations, I often think about the gallery sitters, that the person is not driven crazy by a repeating loop of sound. I'm very aware of that experience. It's something that does come into play when I'm designing a piece.



Thessia Machado, contents: acc operations, view of the exhibition Thessia Machado / Toward the Unsound, Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, 2019, photo by On The Real Film, courtesy of the artist.

— MH: Shifting from formal to political concerns, Jesús has said that one of the goals of In, Of, From is to explore identity politics in the arts in a different light in order to create a more productive and nuanced connection between artistic practices and the political issues of our time. How do you feel your work connects and/or creates bridges between the political and the artistic?

— TM: That is a complex question. There is a lot to sort of tease out of that one, but I would say that for the most part my work is not overtly political. It's not something that I bring into my studio a lot, but I am a person in the world. I am a queer person in the world. I am an immigrant and person in this country, so I think a lot of times, just the fact that I'm making art, the fact that I'm presenting it, the fact that I'm talking about it, has a political effect. And you know the visibility and generosity among people who are practitioners of sound art is something that I've encountered and been pleased with. I have a background in visual arts and the traditional fine art world is much more closed off. But, yes, as far as the political angle goes, I tend to be a little bit more subtle about it and try to change people's minds and open people's minds by just being there, listening to what they have to say, and being open to their interpretation of my work.

#### NIKITA GALE

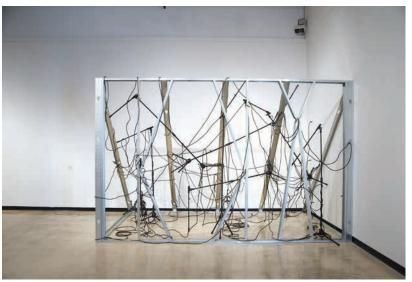
is an artist living and working in Los Angeles, California and holds a BA in Anthropology with an emphasis in Archaeological Studies from Yale University and earned an MFA in New Genres at UCLA. Gale's practice is often structured by long-term obsessions with specific objects and the ways these objects gesture towards particular social and political histories.

INTERCEPTOR, 2019–2020 Installation Microphone stands, cables, metal studs 96 x 155 x 98.5 in.

Gale's large installations, such as INTERCEPTOR, are informed by the relationship between histories of protest and the urban landscape and, more recently, new theories about mass communication, social relationships, and listening. This work features a crowd control barricade, which signifies authority and power; however, the artist has reconfigured this item with unplugged microphone cables and stands in an innovative sonic orientation that grants it new currency and meaning.

DESCENT, 2019 HD video with audio 00:08:21

DESCENT is an audio-visual piece in which a digital representation of the sound waves of an audio recording appears on a screen. The recording, which can be listened to through headphones, features the artist discussing family relationships and the family surname, which Gale no longer takes, while music and assorted other sounds play in the background.



INTERCEPTOR,
2019–2020,
installation view
of the exhibition In,
Of, From: Experiments
in Sound, University
Gallery, University
of Florida, Gainesville,
2020–2021,
photo by Bryan Yeager



DESCENT, 2019,
HD video with audio,
installation views of
the exhibition
In, Of, From:
Experiments in Sound,
University Gallery,
University of Florida,
Gainesville, 2020–2021,
photo by Bryan Yeager

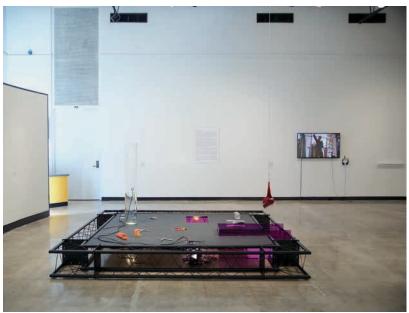
#### **JULES GIMBRONE**

(b. 1982 Pittsburgh; lives and works in NYC) creates fragile corporeal sound and sculptural ensembles that highlight the differentiations between modes of perceptual acquisition—specifically visual and sonic—within complex and precarious arrangements of subjects and objects.

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Traps and Transmutations 2, 2020
Installation
Metal, plywood, vinyl, acrylic, amps, transducers, lights, cables, glass vase, knives, cast soap, water beads, T-shirt, ice, microphones cast in resin, onion 204 x 111 x 111 in.
00:08:21

Traps and Transmutations 2 is a cosmology of vibrating actants and actors composed on a resonating stage. The traps come in the appearance of static forms, recording mechanisms and quantifiable technologies. The transmutations are all of the forces pushing away from, cutting, degrading and liberating these forms as they are vibrated by the sound sent through the stage.



Traps and Transmutations
2, 2020, installation
views of the exhibition
In, Of, From: Experiments
in Sound, University
Gallery, University
of Florida, Gainesville,
2020–2021,
photos by Bryan Yeager







Traps and Transmutations 2, 2020, details, photos by Kayla Burnett

## **CECILIA LOPEZ**

is a composer, musician and multimedia artist from Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her work explores perception and transmission processes focusing on the relationship between sound technologies and listening practices. She works across the media of performance, sound, installation, sculpture and the creation of sound devices. She holds an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College and an MA from Wesleyan University in composition.

Red (d), 2020 Installation Speaker wire, speaker cones, piezoelectric microphones, drums, cables, amp, mixer 210 x 115 x 252 in.

Red (d), in its different iterations, is a piece that investigates interactions with unstable acoustic feedback systems. It is simultaneously a sculpture and a sonic process. The piece consists of a speaker-wire woven net that holds drums and functions as a complex sound producing feedback organism. The cables that make up the net are connected to speakers and contact microphones turning its structure into an instrument that resonates with the bodies of the drums.

36 WORKS IN EXHIBITION



Red (d), 2020, installation views of the exhibition In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photos by Bryan Yeager

## THESSIA MACHADO

is a visual/sound artist, instrument builder, and performer whose work plumbs the materiality of sound and its effect on our shifting perceptions of space. She creates circumstances in which to mine the matter of her pieces for their innate physical properties and the sonic and visual relationships that can arise from their interactions.

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Contents: UF, 2020

Installation

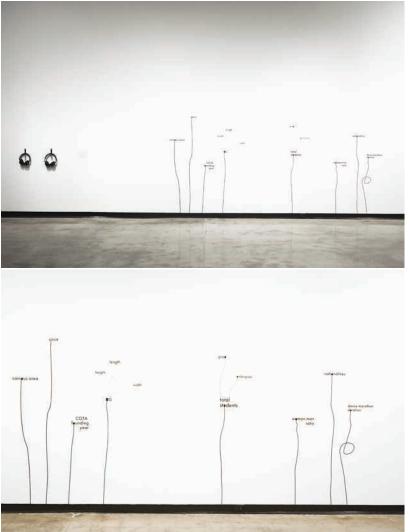
Vinyl, audio players, audio tracks, headphones

60 x 237 x 14 in.

Energy: 00:03:12

Locus: 00:03:34

Contents: UF is an arbitrary and non-scientific system of transposing data gathered from a space into a sonic portrait of the gallery and its functioning. Two sets of numbers gleaned from the University Gallery space (e.g. year of founding, total square footage and number of outlets, lights, etc.) and the population demographics of the University of Florida are input into a frequency generator. The resulting tones are then used to compose a sonic diptych, which reveals the interactions between the pitches—frequency beating, cancellations and other interferences—that make physical this abstract information.



Contents: UF, 2020, installation views of the exhibition In, Of, From:
Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photos by Bryan Yeager

#### NAO NISHIHARA

is an active interdisciplinary practitioner of sound activities, sound art, performance and instruments production. Recent exhibitions include Machine with Heart again (2020, Bankart Yokohama), SUPER-TRAJECTORY (2019, Tainan City Art Museum, Tainan), Kangkangee Art Project (2018, Busan Korea), Hiroshima City Contemporary Art Museum (2017, Hiroshima). He has recently performed at Folly Systems: A Real-Time Media Festival (2019, Roulette Intermedium NYC), and Super Deluxe Tokyo, Experimental Intermedia NY, Judson Memorial Church NY, 2016.

Diligent Machine, 2019

HD video documentation of the installation as presented at Taipei Syntheticmediart 00:02:43

Nishihara's Diligent Machine is a towering six-meter high assemblage that slowly moves across a 17-meter-long track. Its title suggests that the mechanism is constructed for work, yet its performance is unhurried. Reflecting on the hyper speed at which society moves today, Nishihara proposes a reconsideration of what efficiency and work entail. About this work Nishihara says "Working on sound for years, I notice myself obeying the sound. You have to hear and follow what a sound tells you to do. It may say, for example, 'stronger!' or 'softer' or 'use a heavier mallet!' In this way, sounds always talk to you and you create a work together. That is how this machine was made."

40 WORKS IN EXHIBITION



Diligent Machine, 2019, installation view of the exhibition In, Of, From:
Experiments in Sound, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, 2020–2021, photo by Bryan Yeager

#### ADRIAN PIPER

is a prolific artist, philosopher, and pioneer of conceptual art, who has profoundly shaped the field through her diversification of art practices and introduction of feminist, post-colonial, and black histories into conceptualist practices.

Bach Whistled, 1970
Performance soundwork
00:45:00
Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation
©APRA Foundation Berlin
APRA Inventory #70013

Bach Whistled is a durational performance soundtrack in which Piper whistles along to recordings of Bach's Concertos in D Minor, A Minor, and C Major, respectively. At the beginning the whistling is relatively strong, clear and on key. As the performance progresses it becomes weaker, flatter, and more plaintive.

In conjunction with this exhibition the University Galleries presented Adrian Piper Dance Lessons at the Gary R. Libby Gallery.

# LUCIE VÍTKOVÁ

is a composer, improviser and performer (accordion, harmonica, hichiriki, voice, and tap dance) from the Czech Republic. Her compositions focus on sonification (compositions based on abstract models derived from physical objects), while in her improvisation practice she explores characteristics of discrete spaces through the interaction between sound and movement.

# stevie may

is a multidisciplinary artist working primarily in movement, sound, video, and textiles. Her work is loosely centered on developing practices aimed at dismantling patriarchal values and assumptions and complicating feminism as a transwoman. stevie has an ongoing collaborative sound and movement practice with Lucie Vítková, and has worked extensively with the Bureau for the Future of Choreography.

Twins Performance Project (Lucie Vítková + stevie may), 2017 HD video documentation of performance 00:24:01

Presented here was a video recording of a performance shared on the evening October 28, 2017 in Brooklyn, NY, in which stevie may dances as Lucie Vítková performs on a synthesizer, surrounded by various objects. The performance was organized by Kirsten Scnittker, Amity Jones, and Tara Sheena.



Lucie Vítková +
stevie may,
Twins Performance
Project, 2017,
installation view
of the exhibition
In, Of, From:
Experiments in Sound,
University Gallery,
University of Florida,
Gainesville, 2020–2021,
photo by Bryan Yeager

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EXHIBITION UG-08-2020
In, Of, From: Experiments in Sound

SEPTEMBER 17, 2020—
JANUARY 29, 2021

JESÚS FUENMAYOR

CECILIA LÓPEZ

JULES GIMBRONE

Organized in Collaboration with

UNIVERSITY GALLERY

MARK HODGE
Curatorial Assistant
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