

In light of the ubiquity and increasing efficiency of audiovisual media, the act of listening has become the object of singular artistic research, both diverse and innovative. It is akin to a project, an experiment and a critical practice. The artists and composers convened here use sensory modalities in widely different manners, in order to describe or produce a particular state of reception or interpretation of sound, of the beliefs it entails, the information it conveys, and the individual and collective territories thus determined. The works in this exhibition are audiovisual gestures inspired by a practical or imaginary experience of sound. They invent a sensorium in both formal and conceptual terms. They go beyond the notions of silence and enlargement of the acoustic spectrum, which were opened up by the work of John Cage, whether to experiment with the potentials and limits of perception or to re-examine the material and instrumental culture of recording and broadcasting techniques.

#### Christian Marclay

(1955, USA, lives in London)  
*4,000,000 Minutes*, 2000 – 2016, LPs  
*Mixed Reviews (American Sign Language)*  
1999 - 2001, video, color, 30 min

Christian Marclay has worked since the 1980s in an intense back and forth between music and the visual arts. Through reuse and sampling, many of his works question the cultural and artistic remains of the analogue sound culture and its very process of an imprint (index) of sound on a material surface. The floor at the opening of the exhibition is covered with old LPs. Visitors are invited to trample these remains which amass a volume of stored past time. *4,000,000 Minutes* offers an unstable ground and situation reversal. Only memory and imagination will enable us to temporarily 'play' these records, producing a virtual silent cacophony and an effective destruction. In his video, *Mixed Reviews*, a hearing impaired actor interprets a collage of texts sampled from music criticism, in which writers try to describe the music they heard. His performance is unmistakably musical although it is silent, and his gestures resemble those of a symphony conductor. *Mixed Reviews* is conceptually loud while literally silent. It is both a testament about the impossibility of communication and a compelling instance of translation creating new forms of art. For the deaf, music is a different experience than for the hearing, and this work calls into question the hierarchy that values the musical experiences of the hearing over those of the deaf.

**Alvin Lucier** (1931, USA, lives in New Heaven)

*Music on a Long Thin Wire*, 1977, string, oscillator, magnet, amplifier, two tables.

Alvin Lucier is one among the most important American composers from the pioneering years of experimental electronic music. His work started in the early 1960s through an intense artistic dialogue with John Cage. In search for an experience of listening that is both explorative and contemplative, Alvin Lucier famously produced music by amplifying his brain's alpha waves in *Music For Solo Performer*

*In the case of music, the performers can manipulate the acoustic context in a plastic way, and the listeners have options of finding the details and the constructs within that plastic environment that they can use to rework their own understanding and perception along cultural and social lines. I'm not talking about simply an interpretive reception, but an active engagement used at its moment of reception.*

- Tony Conrad (1940 - 2016)

*Esma'* runs through BAC's two floors. During the exhibition, the main space on the ground level will be the site for regular musical performances. Based on Melissa Dubbin and Aaron Davidson's *Volumes for Sound*, the concerts will trigger a constant evolution of the display, reflecting various spatial settings for listening. A parallel program of performances, lectures, screenings and workshops will be presented at the BAC auditorium and at other locations.

(1966) and began to pick up the vibrations of the ionosphere surrounding the Earth's magnetic field, otherwise undetectable to the naked ear in *Sferics* (1981). One of his landmark works, *Music On a Long Thin Wire* is a sound installation where a long piano wire is extended from one end of the room to the other, and set into vibration by a sine wave oscillator. Through a closed circuit involving a giant magnet and microphones, a rich range of sonic phenomena is produced as passersby enter the electromagnetic field that translates into sound. The piece results in a hypnotic continuum of aerial music which both condensates the space and time around a tense, single straight line and sets the audience into movement within the sound volume it creates.

**Francis Aljys** (1959, Belgium, lives in Mexico)  
*Railings*, London, 2004, video, color, sound, 14:34 min

One of numerous Aljys's 'interventions' in a city, *Railing* stakes an element from the vocabulary of architecture which refers to a threshold and boundary between two spaces, and transforms it to an instrument of resonance. This very simple gesture makes the city 'sounds' and the steps of the artist a tempo that perverts the status of the grids and fences he knocks on. This combination of rather random steps and music opens another territory stretching between absent-mindedness, awareness and fine-tuning.

**Moyra Davey** (born in 1958, Canada, lives in New York)

*House* (Montreal), 2016, 9 photographs, 30x46cm each

This work consists of nine photographs taken in a shop selling second-hand House Music records. Davey mailed these photographs from her studio in New York, primarily to Beirut where they never arrived, then to Paris. Their surfaces bear marks of their journey - bits of tape, scratches and stamps- from origin to destination through various multilayered movements. The physical transportation of those photographs is exemplary of multi-dimensional movements across

# Esma' إسماع Listen

Lawrence Abu Hamdan . Francis Aljys . Vartan Avakian  
Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz . Moyra Davey  
Melissa Dubbin and Aaron Davidson . Pierre Huyghe  
Alvin Lucier . Christian Marclay . Olaf Nicolai  
Sharif Sehnaoui Jessica Warboys . Cynthia Zaven

Curated by Marcella Lista and Marie Muracciole

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materials (recording, photography) and economic and geographic displacements. All in all, these movements represent the progression of the listening experience through time and space and evoke the different interpretations that arise from the contexts they propagate through.

**Cynthia Zaven** (1970, Lebanon, lives in Beirut)  
*For Voice and Forest*, (2016), video, color, sound, 2:57min

Composer and pianist, Cynthia Zaven has produced a number of sound installations and videos where she works around the thresholds between visual and acoustic experiences. Created specifically for *Esma'*, her video *For Voice and Forest* is based on a performance that explores the spatial dimensions of sonic phenomena in a landscape by reflecting on the perception of distance, scale, and focus: from emergence to near-disappearance, from humming to mere enunciation of a "voice". It is a child that we hear and see inhabiting the corner of a forest. This presence passes through a landscape where she could be either wandering or acting some imaginary narrative that we won't know.

**Melissa Dubbin** (1976, USA) and Aaron S. Davidson (1971, USA) - started working together since 1998 and they live in New York  
*Volumes for Sound*, 2010 – 2015, MDF boxes, speakers

The sculptures of *Volumes for Sound* compose a score of shapes: those of the Hi-Fi furniture that usually encase the home listening equipment. Serving simultaneously as a stage, listening device and sculpture, the resulting construction of geometric forms hosts inverted speakers. The sound of amplified music produced during performances is muffled by these filtering entities. The piece requires the listeners to lend an attentive ear and to over-activate their availability to the music. A documentation of previous exhibitions and the different displacements produced by the activations of the *Volumes* will be completed during the show and throughout the performances which will be held on **27 April, 1 and 29 June**.

**Pierre Huyghe** (1962, France, lives in Santiago, Chili)  
*Silence Score*, 1997, pencil on printed paper, artist proof

With the help of computer software, Pierre Huyghe transposed the noises from a CD recording the first performance of a seminal and radical piece of music: John Cage's *4' 33''* (1952). Huyghe makes the concert into a traditional sheet music whose notes may in turn be performed with a conventional musical instrument. On the one hand, the sounds occurring during this particular recorded performance are thus precisely facsimiled, while, on the other, Cage's concept is deliberately misinterpreted.

**Olaf Nicolai** (1962, Germany, lives in Berlin)  
*Probestück (specimen) 1*, 2013, Vinyl cut, soundtrack  
Performers:  
a . Truike van der Poel (soprano)  
b . Tobias Schlierf (countertenor)  
c . Truike van der Poel (soprano) and Tobias Schlierf (countertenor)  
Recording: Digital Masters Stuttgart  
Producer: Frank Bretschneider (Berlin)

Olaf Nicolai's conceptual work has, on various occasion, approached sound and music. It does so through an interest in political and artistic questioning of Aesthetics, its constructed language and value. This time he refers to the architecture of Le Corbusier's Convent of La Tourette, near Lyon, France. This is where Le Corbusier appealed to the musical ear of Iannis Xenakis to design large stained glass windows, in accordance with his own reliance on the golden section in designing the proportions of the building. In his turn, Nicolai relied on the same principle to compose a graphic space, the equivalent of a visual score that is an invitation to explore the musical imagination. Here, professional singers give separate readings of these abstract geometric shapes, resulting in strangely similar interpretations that Nicolai explores as possible paths for non-professional composition.

**Vartan Avakian** (born 1977, Lebanon, lives in Beirut)  
*Composition with a Recurring Sound, Beirut, 2016*, copper alloys, radio waves and a river  
Commissioned by TandemWorks for the project "Hammoud Badawi"

The sound of the Beirut River flows through a small sculptural piece, creating a discreet almost inaudible resonance. Part of a larger project about the river of Beirut, *Composition with a Recurring Sound* broadcasts the sound of the water flow through radio frequencies that can be heard in the surroundings of Beirut Art Center. The act of 'ghosting' the sound of river through live radio transmission renders Avakian's sonic movement a gesture of resistance rather than documentation. During the course of the exhibition additional sound installations will be placed in the neighborhood of the river. Visitors will be at some point invited to walk to some spots in the public space where they can experience the impermeability of the barriers separating the city from the river, and can actually witness the limits of the city, as drawn by the river.

**Jessica Warboys** (1977, UK, lives between Suffolk and Berlin)  
*Hinge Bow*, 2013, painted wood, stainless steel, directional speakers.  
Soundtrack by Morten Norbye Halvorsen

The spiral configuration of *Hinge Bow* (2013) creates the image of an acoustic cornet with folded or sliced sheets of paper. Composed in collaboration with musician and sound artist Morten Norbye Halvorsen, a vibratory soundtrack, structured from sine waves, seems to wind and unwind the shape wrapped around the

sculpture, establishing a fragile dialogue between the visible and the ambient. Warboys is a visual artist and encompasses several media - sculpture, painting, film and sound - and is generally based on the processes of transformation of materials, stretched to the point of instability. She emphasizes the traces of her own gestures and the manifestations of matter, and her work highlights the process of formation rather than the finished form.

**Pauline Boudry** (1972, Switzerland) and Renate Lorenz (1963, Germany) - started working together since 1998 and they live in Berlin  
*To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe in Recognition of Their Desperation*, 2013, 16 mm film/HD, 18 min.  
Performers: Rachel Aggs, Peaches, Catriona Shaw, Verity Susman, Ginger Brooks Takahashi, William Wheeler

This installation features a film based on a composition by Pauline Oliveros, *To Valerie Solanas and Marilyn Monroe in Recognition of Their Desperation* (1971). The American composer, who pursued the idea of 'deep listening' and the enhancement of perceptions, dedicated her piece to two feminine figures destroyed by the dominance of representations. The piece values the unpredictable and unknowable possibilities that might be activated by non-specifying pitches and rhythms. Boudry and Lorenz introduce the 16mm-camera as an additional performer, constantly moving and interacting with individuals or groups of performers. As the artists state, "the whole performance of the piece is shot in one continuous take, while only the editing process introduces extreme close-ups which highlights a fetishist interest into details of bodies, instruments and costumes. Nothing is

known in advance of making the music. The instructions are chosen in order to insist on what Oliveros describes as "a continuous circulation of power" between listening and sounding - a give and take that requires, in her words, "an unusual attention to the relationship between oneself and others". The work poses the question of the possibilities and limits of a politics of musical and filmic forms. Can sounds, rhythms and light produce queer relations? Can they become revolutionary?"

**Sharif Sehnaoui** (1976, Lebanon, lives in Beirut)  
*Sound Capsule*, 2016, musical instruments, Max/MSP software, patched by: Jeff Leubow; sound engineer: Fadi Tabbal.

Performers:  
Sharif Shenaoui  
Nikos Veliotis  
Tarek Atoui  
Ghassan Sahhab  
Tony Elieh

In this work, Sharif Sehnaoui proceeds to build a polyphonic structure that will evolve over time in the exhibition, within a specific acoustic space designed for short concerts that will be given at precise intervals in a small space that fits only eight guests attending. Sharif Sehnaoui will perform and invite other musicians to perform these short concerts. A recording from each will be subsequently stretched over the duration of the exhibition, constructing a progressive multi-layered composition. The work ends up exposing time itself by means of a process that travels from a primary structure through a saturated sound field. The concerts will be performed on **11 May, 1 June, 29 June and 27 July**.

**Lawrence Abu Hamdan** (reincarnated in 1985 in Aman, lives in Beirut)  
*The All Hearing*, 2013, video, color, sound 12 min.  
*Conversations with an Unemployed*, 2013, light box, photographs  
*Rubber Coated Steel*, 2016, video, color, sound, 21:47 min

For *The All Hearing* (video, 2013) and *Conversations With An Unemployed* (light box, 2013) Lawrence Abu Hamdan has met with two Cairene Sheikhs and suggested that they address the issue of amplification and noise pollution in the public space in Cairo in their Friday sermon. The result is confrontation with the city soundscape that is largely regulated through military crackdown and manifested in the government dictates of Friday sermons. The light box displays a magnification of the audio tapes on which the sermon was recorded, where layers and layer of recordings superpose, thus, questioning repetition and difference in the form of a sort of archaeological excavation of sound. His most recent video work, *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016) depicts a ballistics trial based on sound analysis, following the solicitation of the artist as a "private ear" in the case of two young Palestinians shot by the Israeli Army. Here, the artist's work dealing with the issues of forensic evidence and the weights and ambivalences of speech, questions the core of a politics of listening.

## Program of screenings and performances

> Sharif Sehnaoui, *Sound Capsule* (2016)  
Wednesdays at 6pm:  
27 April • Sharif Shenaoui, acoustic guitar  
11 May • Nikos Veliotis, cello  
1 June • Tarek Atoui, electronic  
29 June • Ghassan Sahhad, kanoun  
27 July • Tony Elieh, electric bass

> Melissa Dubbin and Aaron Davidson  
*Volumes for Sound* (2010 – 2015)  
Wednesdays at 6pm:  
27 April • Janice Misurel-Mitchell  
1 June • Fadi Tabbal  
29 June • Performer to be announced later

> Lawrence Abu Hamdan  
*Rubber Coated Steel* (2016)  
Daily throughout the whole period of the exhibition  
6pm on weekdays  
3pm on weekends

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