

APO33

Grande exposition d'art sonore - première édition

Interviewed by Julien Ottavi

October 2011

1. How would you define the title 'Sound Artist' and Would you describe yourself as a Sound Artist? If not, is there a preferred title you would use to describe your profession?

I'm not sure how I would define "sound artist." I have the feeling that when most people use this term to describe themselves they are trying to say that they are working with sound outside the context of music. This then brings us back to the discussion about what music is, if anything involving the perception of sound is music and, if not, where does the music stop and where does idea of working with sound in a non-musical context begin?

Personally, I don't refer to myself as a "sound artist" nor to my work as "sound art." Much of my installation work is more concerned with how we perceive space rather than the sound in a space. I use sound as a means of finding different ways to think about space and how we experience it. In this sense, I would put my work more in the context of visual art. For example, in the sense of sculpture, which also deals with how we perceive an object and its relation to space. I'm also interested in exploring social structures through sound, which again uses sound more as a means of exploring social spaces than having sound be the focus of the work.

I am also a musician, however. I play drums, percussion, electronics and compose on computer and in the form of graphical scores. There might be some overlap in terms of techniques used to produce sound in this context and that of my installations, etc., but for me with music sound is definitely more in the foreground, is more the focus.

So, I would therefore refer to myself as "artist" and "musician."

2. How do you *hear* the world? For example is sound different from noise or music? Could you explain your relationship to sound as a material use in your works?

For me, as soon as I perceive sound it is music. I don't differentiate between "noise" or "music." In a sense, I find these terms obsolete, though I still use them as they are the most efficient way of talking about sound work with most people. With specialists like ourselves, I feel we can often move away from this terminology, but in more common practice they are perhaps still useful.

One could then argue, "So if you perceive all sound as music, then why aren't your installations musical works?" Which would be a fair question, but the answer would be that in these works, or in my radio pieces where I interview people about sounds in their environments, I would say that the sound aspect is not the main focus here: more accurately, I'm working with sound to examine how we perceive the world around us and even how we stand in relation to our own perception.

My strictly musical work – concerts, compositions, etc. – also deal with issues around perception, but seen from a more holistic standpoint, the sound aspect plays a much more prominent role.

3. Where do you locate your own practice and how did you arrive at this position?

I began working with sound as a drummer in rock bands. I used to do long tours all over the United States and Europe, and over time I began to develop a feel for different spaces and their relation to the sound of my instrument, the sound of the music I was playing and to the social dynamics of each performance situation.

I started working with electronic music in the early 1990's, beginning to compose using environmental recordings and samplers. This experience widened my notion of sounds to working with them as musical objects, bringing sounds out of what had been for me a more conventional musical context. I was now perceiving sounds removed from their physical entities (i.e. instruments) or contexts (from their traditional usage, like a car horn or a kettle whistling; or from their social situations, such as a crowd of people).

In the pursuit of recording sounds for compositional purposes I became increasingly aware of environmental sound in relation to different spaces, not just physical spaces but also social ones. And this led me to think of using sound as a means of examining how we perceive space, both as a social and physical entity. In this context, I decided the format of the room installation could be a good way of investigating these new questions I was raising for myself.

4. Which form(s) does 'Sound Art' take? How would you recognize a sound piece/composition as 'Sound Art'?

I guess that I don't really think so much in these terms. I often meet people who say "I'm a sound artist," but when I experience their work I often ask myself why they don't just call themselves a musician? I sometimes get this notion that "musicians" are seen as something less aesthetically or conceptually developed as a "sound artist." Which, of course, I don't agree with. As I straddle both worlds I often here people talking about the other side with great misunderstanding or even contempt. Indian classical music, for example, deals with many issues that one might normally only associate with "sound art," but perhaps in an even more advanced and elaborate fashion.

Perhaps, then, we should just talk about the "sound arts" – all these disciplines which use sound, in whatever way: as a melody, as an object, as a documentary medium, non time-based, spoken word, etc. There are so many approaches. The idea of Sound Art seems meaningless to me.

5. Gallery, public space, concert hall or others?

I prefer to show work in public spaces, though I am not strictly averse to working with galleries, concert halls, etc. What I like about a public space – and here I am mainly talking about my work in the context of installations – is that there is no pre-conceived notion about the work. When one enters a gallery or a museum or any space designated to exhibit works of art, we walk through the door with a certain sense of expectation: perhaps we are hoping to be amused, intellectually stimulated, impressed,

irritated, whatever. When someone stumbles upon a work in a public space they might first have to ask themselves “What is this? Is this a work of art? Is this a joke? Is this a mistake, is something wrong here, etc?” There is much more space for them to navigate their thoughts in than if they had perceived this work in an art space.

I also prefer public spaces because they tend to be more unstable situations than in an art space. Especially in my site-specific work I want to engage with a specific environment, embracing all its problems, advantages, daily permutations. This kind of challenge often reveals new conceptual considerations which might not have been apparent in the more controlled environment of a designated art space.