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Tarek Atoui

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e-flux

Jad and Tarek Atoui: Through Rust and Dusk

Jad and Tarek Atoui: Through

Sanna Almajedi talks to Jad and Tarek Atoui about their experimental music duo, Through Rust Dusk. The conversation is followed by an excerpt of their performance at e-flux on September 26, 2022 that incorporated improvisation, custom made instruments, field recordings, and electronic sounds.

Read more about Tarek Atoui's *The Whisperers* (October 1–December 10, 2022) at Flag Art Foundation [here](#).

Jad Atoui is a Beirut-based sound artist and improviser. He composes and performs electronic and electro-acoustic music and has worked with musicians like John Zorn, Pauline Oliveros, Laurie Anderson, Chuck Bettis, and Anthony Sahyoun. During his formative years in New York, Atoui found interest in the New York avant-garde scene. He began working closely with NYC downtown musicians and learning improvised music techniques, while also working at the Stone and the Guggenheim Museum. In 2015, Atoui spearheaded the "Biosonics" project in collaboration with scientist Ivan Marazzi where they used bio-sonification of behaviors as compositional tools. The project was later published in John Zorn's *Arcana Book Vol. XVIII* and premiered at National Sawdust as part of The Stone's commissioning series. Atoui has given and co-directed workshops at Marfa Sounding, Ashkal Alwan, and Beirut Synth Center, and has been a resident at The Stone, The National Sawdust, Beirut Art Center, Arab Image Foundation, and Sharjah Art Foundation.

Tarek Atoui is an artist and composer born in Beirut. His work stems from performance and looks into how sound can be perceived with sensory organs other than the ear, how sound acts as a catalyst for human interaction, and how it relates to social, historical, and spatial parameters. The point of departure for his works is usually extensive anthropological, ethnological, musicological, or technical research, which results in the realization of instruments, listening rooms, performances, or workshops. Atoui has presented his work internationally at the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates (2009 and 2013); dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, Germany (2012); the 8th Berlin Biennial (2014); Tate Modern, London (2016); CCA NTU, Singapore (2017); Garage Moscow (2018); the 58th International Art Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia (2019); the Okayama Art Summit 2019; the Sharjah Art Foundation (2020); The Fridericianum (2020); And Pinault Collection (2021). He was appointed co-artistic director of STEIM studios in 2007, and of the Bergen Assembly, a triennial for contemporary art in Norway in 2016. He is the recipient of the Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize 2020. Tarek Atoui currently lives and works in Paris, France.

e-flux music is curated by Sanna Almajedi.

Category

Music, Podcast

Subject

Sound Art

Participants

Tarek Atoui, Jad Atoui, Sanna Almajedi



LES "À VENIR" DE DANH VO ET TAREK ATOUI

PAR MARC DONNADIEU.

EXPOSITIONS GALERIE CHANTAL CROUSEL, PARIS, JUSQU'AU 20 NOVEMBRE 2021.

À la galerie Crousel, deux expositions personnelles n'en forment plus qu'une. Le projet des artistes Dahn Vo et Tarek Atoui, de cueillette photographique en constellations sonores, invite ainsi à une "communauté qui vient".

Dans *la Communauté qui vient*, Giorgio Agamben en appelle à l'exposition de singularités pour ce qu'elles sont, et non pour les présupposés, attributs, rôles ou fonctions à travers lesquels on voudrait les définir ou les classer a posteriori. Cette communauté qui vient ne s'incarne donc jamais, à strictement parler, dans un être là définitif et impérieux. Elle ne cesse de venir, de s'inventer des à venir et des devenir. Tel semble être également le projet qu'ont développé Dahn Vo et Tarek Atoui pour la galerie Chantal Crousel. Et ce qui devait être deux expositions personnelles simultanées est devenu un seul et même territoire de possibles où s'affirme une forme inédite de "nous" choral et pluriel sans que s'efface la singularité propre à chacun.

CUEILLETTE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE

Il est vrai que l'un et l'autre se connaissent et s'apprécient depuis longtemps, et que Vo, dans la ferme où il vient de s'installer aux alentours de Berlin, possède et active régulièrement les œuvres d'Atoui qu'il lui a achetées, en particulier au solstice de la Saint-Jean, avec des amis musiciens. Mais ce qu'il y a de plus bouleversant dans ce projet, c'est la façon dont leurs œuvres, en s'infiltrant l'une dans l'autre, en s'hybridant l'une à l'autre, se soutiennent, s'étaient et s'épaulent. Et cela, qu'elles soient communes ou autonomes, réunies ou séparées.

Danh Vo nous présente presque pour la première fois l'herbier qu'il constitue jour après jour de toutes les plantes de ce nouveau territoire de la campagne allemande dans lequel il va faire (sa) demeure, manière inédite de se faire accueillir à travers une pratique de cueillette photographique. Car à travers cet herbier, il ne fait pas exister ces fragments poétiques de nature qui préexistaient bien avant lui, mais tente de (ré)exister à travers eux, de (re)trouver une voie/voix dans l'égrènement de leur nomination que son père, en moine copiste, inscrit sous chaque image. Tarek Atoui ne fait pas autre chose à travers son travail de collecte de vibrations, de timbres, de murmures et de chuchotements – son exposition s'intitule *The Whisperers* – qu'il nous restitue de façon tout aussi rigoureuse et précise qu'ouverte à l'imprévu et l'imprévisible de celui qui va s'en saisir. Ici, pour un ensemble d'œuvres, les visiteurs ; là, pour un autre, les élèves de la classe de maternelle de l'École alsacienne de Paris que fréquente son enfant et avec laquelle il a travaillé pendant le confinement au fil de cinq ateliers. Les sons de l'eau, du bois, de la pierre, du verre, du laiton, du bronze. Les sons des matériaux des œuvres de Vo. Les sons des territoires naturels ou urbains. Toutes ces sonorités, toutes ces fratries et sororités sonores que l'artiste restitue et amplifie selon une autre forme de paysage où chaque élément acoustique se retrouve relié, connecté, par de fines, ténues et fragiles lignes d'énergies, de tensions et de résonances, à l'instar de balises interactives d'émotions et de poésie temporaires, nomades et disséminées dans l'espace. *Not everywhere but anywhere...*



Tarek Atoui, vue de l'exposition *The Whisperers*, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2021, Ph. Nick Ash

CONSTELLATIONS SONORES

Bien évidemment, Danh Vo repart une nouvelle fois de la séminale dernière lettre envoyée avant sa décapitation par le prêtre missionnaire catholique Théophile Vénard en 1861 à son père, et recopié par Phung Vo, père de l'artiste. Mais sa (re)lecture résonne autrement dans ce contexte de par les métaphores florales de l'existence humaine qui y sont inscrites : "Un léger coup de sabre séparera ma tête comme une fleur printanière que le Maître du jardin cueille pour son propre plaisir. Nous sommes tous des fleurs plantées sur cette terre que Dieu cueille en son temps, un peu plus tôt, un peu plus tard. [...] Tâchons tous de plaire, selon le parfum ou l'éclat qui nous est donné, au souverain Seigneur et Maître." Ce qu'expriment tout à la fois l'herbier et les fragments de statues particulièrement précieuses contenues dans des caisses à claire-voie. Et celles-ci semblent bien plus soutenir comme des attelles ces corps en morceaux que les enfermer et les sanctuariser. Chez Tarek Atoui, ce sont nos voix qui pourraient se (re)formuler, voire renaître de façon presque épiphanique, à travers le parfum et les éclats des subtiles constellations sonores disposées dans l'espace de la galerie et à notre disposition. Saurons-nous être à leur écoute de leur grain comme à l'écoute de nous même ? Saurons-nous accepter leur dépassement, et leur faire confiance ?

La vie, notre rapport aux choses, à notre passé, à notre culture ou à notre mémoire sont là comme en réparation. À nous de savoir saisir le potentiel et les devenirs de cette exposition en nous dessaisissant de nos a priori et de nos certitudes, en nous débourdissant de nos pierres que nous avons rendues muettes parce que refermées sur elles-mêmes et devenues sans signification, sinon sans usage. Car, comme l'annonçait Vladimir Jankélévitch : "Le devenir contrarie l'arrondissement plastique de l'objet, car il est la dimension selon laquelle l'objet se défait sans cesse, se forme, se déforme, se reforme et se transforme ; le changement que le devenir fait advenir n'est pas modelage, mais modification continuée." La communauté qui vient à laquelle nous invite leur projet, c'est très précisément ces modifications continues qu'il nous faudrait observer, recueillir puis accueillir, voire fertiliser et faire rejaillir, à partir de ces grains et ces voix que ces deux artistes simplement et humblement nous proposent, à l'instar d'une offrande faite au monde.

Marc Donnadiou



Danh Vo et Tarek Atoui, vue de l'exposition, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2021, Ph. Nick Ash

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Danh Vo et Tarek Atoui, vue de l'exposition, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2021, Ph. Nick Ash



Danh Vo et Tarek Atoui, vue de l'exposition, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2021, Ph. Nick Ash

Couv. : Danh Vo et Tarek Atoui, vue de l'exposition, galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2021, Ph. Nick Ash.

Marc Donnadiou
Les "à venir" de Danh Vo et Tarek Atoui
Art Press, November 4, 2021
<https://cutt.ly/uR8RSBa>



Tarek Atoui performing at the opening of his exhibition
Cycles in 11, 2020, Sharjah Art Foundation, Dubai.
© Sharjah Art Foundation, Dubai

The Interview
by Ross Simonini

Tarek Atoui

“I want sound to be objectified in a certain way”

Every so often, a composer, seeking total musical freedom, breaks down the materials of music itself. So they build their own instruments, from scratch. Exponents have included Harry Partch, Daphne Oram, Pat Metheny, Björk and the Boredoms, to name a few. Tarek Atoui is a visual artist working on the outskirts of this rarefied group of innovators. He has built a knot of glass tubes into which he blows across pools of water to vary the pitch. He plays a turntable covered in sand with an animal horn and a bundle of herbs. His instruments are objects of sculptural beauty, activated through touch and breath and motors.

For the Beirut-born Atoui, though, these instruments are only one element of a controlled situation of organised sound – others include place and history, which he researches through travel, and the curating of his performers, who are often nonmusicians. His ongoing piece *WITHIN* (2012–), for example, is an improvised performance by deaf people, who play instruments designed to emphasise the haptic qualities of musicianship, rather than aural ones.

The sound of Atoui’s performances is richly textural, and often resists conventional musicality. His 2019 exhibition *The Wave*, at Okayama

Art Summit, was a collection of many of his instruments playing automatically, and together they produced a metallic flutter of clicks, teeming with skittering creatures. Other works approach abrasive noise, free improvisation and drone. When performing, Atoui often appears to be lost in an emotional trance, twisting his face like a blues guitarist as he taps a stone with a mallet or explores a knob on a wooden box.

Atoui and I spoke in the autumn of 2021. He and I discussed his innovative methods of listening to music and the challenges of being a musician in the ecosystem of contemporary art.

Acoustic Behaviours

ROSS SIMONINI *Did you begin as a musician or as a visual artist?*

TAREK ATOUI The starting point was a musical one. Even today, I consider myself to be always doing composition.

RS *But you don't release much music in the form of albums.*

TA I have released very few things. Bits and pieces of things here and there, besides a record release in 2006. And this characterises a bit like my situation and who I am and what I do.

RS *You've mentioned John Cage as an important early influence. How did you start with music?*

TA My interest in music came at eighteen with electronic music, new music, experimental music and noise music. This led me to electro-acoustic music and the work of composers such as [Karlheinz] Stockhausen and Cage and many of his peers and colleagues of that time. At the same I was discovering improvised music.

RS *Do you still consider your music to be electronic?*

TA Yes, totally. And when I also say it's all composition, this is one aspect of what I mean. What I do today is, I still use the computer and the ideas of sequencing and managing time and events, but instead of being applied

inside an abstract piece of software on the computer, now it's a motor, or a sculpture.

RS *When you're making instruments, what is your starting point?*

TA At this point, it tends to start more and more from the organic materials themselves, and from thinking of ways of extracting sound or broadcasting sound through these materials. And then the electronics come at play when needed, by exploring the properties of materials and their acoustics, resonances and acoustic behaviours.

RS *Working in this way, have you come to any sort of perennial truths about the relationship between visuals and sounds? I'm thinking for example of the Boubou/kiki effect, and how people around the world have similar visual associations for the words 'Kiki' and 'Boubou'.*

TA No, not really, but something I'm now deeply convinced of is the capacity of our brains to structure and make sense of how we receive and interact with sound. You see, whether we are a trained listener or somebody who listens to abstract noise music, we are both capable of listening in the same way. And that's a nice starting point for me to create listening conditions.

RS *What kind of conditions?*

TA Like the condition of proximity, of being able to be close to the source of sound, to witness

the mechanism. To see the process of sound happening. Like a piece of ceramic being struck by a bouncing wooden marble. Or two branches rubbing against a rough metallic surface which is amplified with contact microphones.

RS *Is this why you don't release much audio on its own, because you want the sound and visuals to be married?*

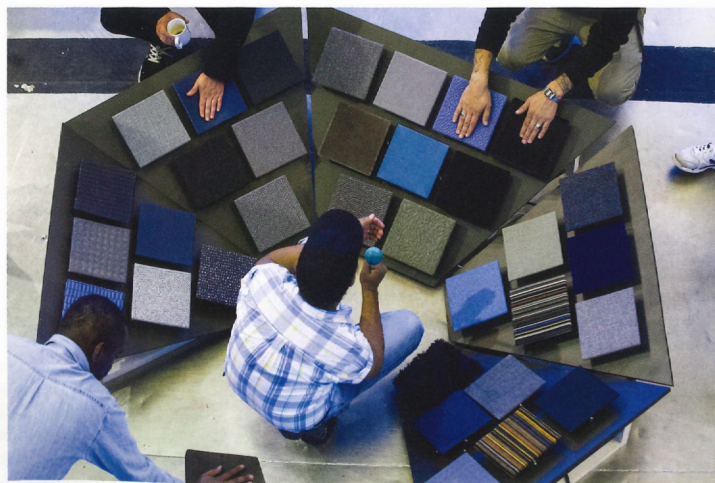
TA Exactly. It's not just about making it into a record and like having people be able to experience it in stereo. I want sound to be objectified in a certain way, in a certain sense, or offering people a different duration – where you can spend hours listening to something, not just like 20 minutes.

All about the source

RS *Do you enjoy recorded music?*

TA I also like the abstraction of the source of the sound. I like field recordings, I like found footage. I like listening without knowing where it came from. But I have to also question the space in which I am listening to the sound system, and the sound terminal through which I am listening.

RS *Right. It's like laptop speakers – we consider them low quality now, but in 50 years we'll remember that sound nostalgically.*



WITHIN, 2016, performance at Sentralbadet, Bergen.
Photo: Thor Brodreskift

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TA Yes. But what is poor quality and what is good quality? That's relative, in a certain way. Should all sounds have the same qualities? As a composer, it's very nice to be able to navigate between ultracompressed, ultramodern, powerful sound and the old, degraded sound of the wax cylinder, one of the earliest forms of sound recording. I find it great to have cheap speakers along with supergood speakers. This palette is supergood.

RS *Each speaker is its own kind of instrument.*

TA They're really identities. You can sometimes buy cheap amplifiers that are very loud and harsh and barky, and sometimes those are amazing.

RS *How do you listen to other people's music?*

TA I have a situation now – I have been listening to all the records that my musician friends gave me after their gigs during the last five years. I have 60 records and I'm listening to these with a turntable plugged into a transducer connected to a metal bucket in which water is dripping. This is the left channel. And the right channel is sending the sound to an underwater speaker inside a glass box.

RS *How does it sound?*

TA Inside the glass is very resonant. Sound underwater travels superfast. So it bounces very harshly and quickly against the glass. You are in a very strange acoustic space when you listen through something like this.

RS *Do you also listen to music casually, through your earbuds and a phone?*

TA Yes.

RS *So you're not resistant to that kind of listening?*

TA No, on the contrary, I find it fun. I just also find it fun listening inside the water tank. If you don't like what you're listening to, or you want to play with it, you can just add more water or subtract some, or you can blow bubbles into the water. You can play with disturbing this aquatic environment, and it makes listening playful.

RS *How do you start making instruments?*

TA I came into instrument-making from a digital space, from doing computer programming, then I shifted this knowledge to circuit boards and DIY electronics. That's how I started building my first instrument, and then I started working with other people who do other types of instruments, whether strings or wind. So I went backwards, in way.

RS *With your own instruments, you're always a novice. You're not dedicating 30 years to mastering the harp, for instance.*

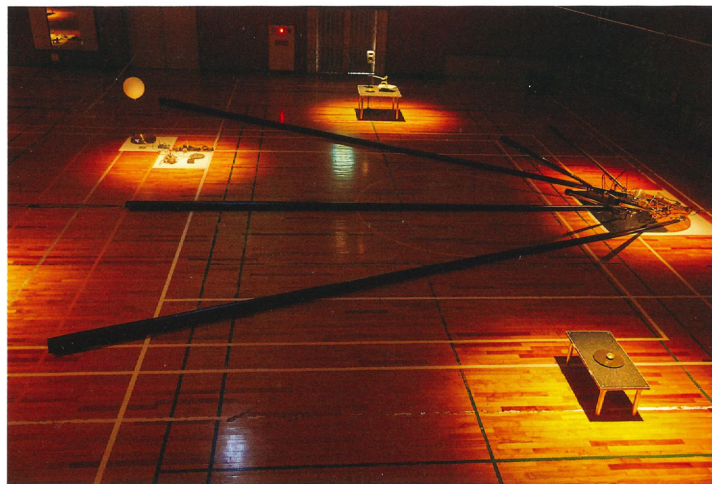
TA Yes, you see, this approach has its limits. So it's not that type of mastery. I think I would like to master a more general way of listening. This is as important as learning one instrument.

RS *Do you consider tuning systems when you're making instruments?*

TA Sometimes, but that's where I regret not having studied music earlier. I tried to study solfège and musical notation and acoustic instruments, like the clarinet, but I realised it's going to be a lot of work. So I studied electroacoustic music and programming and film recording, and sound editing. And I knew that this kind of production is an instrument that I could learn better with focus. I think now we have enough tools and history behind us to be able to consider traditional musicianship as an additional quality a musician has, but it's not the only, fundamental quality anymore. I think people should not be so concerned about this. This is not what makes great musicians.

Finding unity

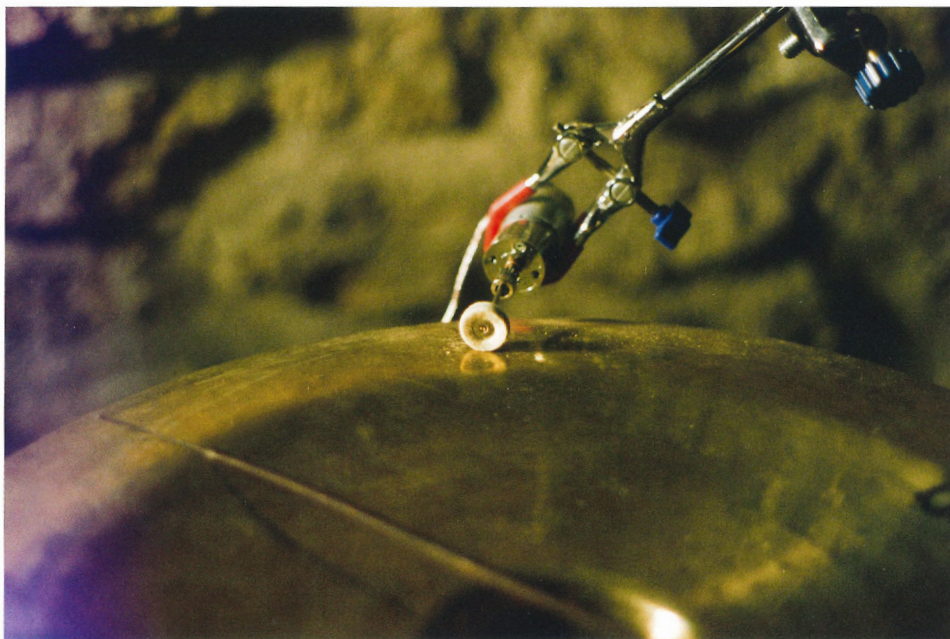
RS *As someone working with improvisation, do you find that you're searching for a certain feeling when you're making your music?*



The Wave, 2019 (installation view,
Okayama Art Summit, 2019). Photo: Ola Rindal







above Tarek Atoui, studio view
preceding pages *WITHIN*, 2012–
(performance view, Sentralbadet, Bergen, 2016).
Photo: Thor Brodreskiift

TA Yes, when a unity happens between the body, the sound and the instrument. When everything seems to be in conversation with the space and with the people. But what you learn with time is not to force this feeling, and not to think that it comes from any situation where you're in full confidence.

RS *Have you found that working within contemporary art contexts changes the nature of musical performance?*

TA It allows me to go to different places. It has put me in situations that were uncomfortable and difficult, but at the same time liberating. It invited me to rethink the way I was building my machines and responding to different contexts that the artworld offered, like working outdoors, or in museums where the acoustics would not be perfect or where people's attention was not like a concert situation. And of course, someone's first reaction could be to say, ok, this is not a good way to perform, and actually yes, it is not a good place to transpose the musical discourse, but there is definitely something you can do with it and things you can learn from it.

RS *Art seems not to have decided on a correct set of parameters and musical systems in the way that the music world has.*

TA Yeah. But there are parts of the world where it's the same institutions doing the music and the arts, and there is not much cultural diversity.

But I like these situations – where the musicians, artists and filmmakers are all in dialogue with each other.

RS *Can you discuss any particular art context for performing?*

TA In 2009 I was commissioned to do a performance in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates. It was supposed to be in a closed courtyard, and there were so many people outside, unable to get in. But at the last minute it didn't feel right. Why would it be in a courtyard, in a closed space, where you could still hear the music from outside? And so we decided to play outside. And then it became for me a very nice, memorable moment. The audience mixed and merged with people in the street and it felt like a real opening was happening in the city.

RS *We think of music as isolated artform, to be watched and heard in a concert hall, but traditionally it was woven into ritual and ceremony and daily life.*

TA Yes. I did a performance at the Berkeley Art Museum in 2015, and for this we put nine huge Meyer Sound subwoofers inside the building. These were very resonant in the building. People could view the performance from different levels in different floors. It lasted an hour and a half, but it was nice to see that people were not even looking at the performers. They could listen to these very low-end vibrations through the wood, through the materials of the architecture.

At that moment, the building and these different people all came together at once.

RS *Do you test the acoustics in buildings where you work?*

TA No. To test and predict the behaviour of nine subwoofers inside a four-storey nineteenth-century building requires a large budget.

RS *You seem to have a more punk approach to the situation.*

TA Yeah, it feels right. For me, I'm always considering where to spend effort and where not to spend effort. I don't want to worry about a lot about calculations and validating them.

RS *Do you think you're moving towards the Cagean philosophy in which all sound is music?*

TA Well, no. Of course, all sound can be music, depending on how you want to use it and work with it. But sound can be so many things. It can be a source of energy. It can be a source of emotion to be manipulated. It can be other things besides being music, and it's nice to be manipulated.

The Whisperers, a solo exhibition by Tarek Atoui, is on view at Chantal Crousel, Paris, through 20 November

Ross Simonini is a writer, artist, musician and dialogist. He is the host of ArtReview's podcast Subject, Object, Verb



WITHIN, 2012 – (performance view, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, 2017). Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

all images Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

OCULA

Conversation | Artist

Tarek Atoui's Sonic Environments

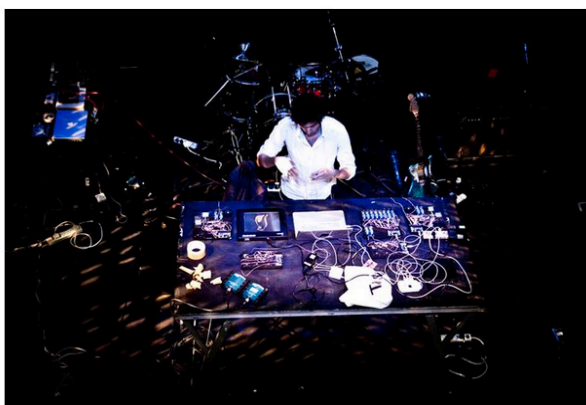
In Conversation with
Nadine Khalil
Sharjah, 17 March 2021

Performance view: Tarek Atoui, *1/E Elefsina*, Aisxylia Festival, Elefsina (2015). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.



In Tarek Atoui's totalising sonic environments, space, architectures, bodies, and instruments can be both conductors and receptors of sound. The innovative Beirut-born, Paris-based sound artist and composer builds and instrumentalises sonorous objects, materials, and physicality, which resonate in collective compositions and generate different acoustic landscapes.

At the moment, *Cycles in 11* at the Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) (26 September 2020–10 April 2021) spans 11 years of his practice and collaborations in Sharjah, especially his work around deaf culture, which originated with the project *WITHIN* (2013). Growing out of a 2008 SAF residency, *WITHIN* became foundational to the ways in which Atoui studies the perception of sound by the hard of hearing and nuanced perspectives towards listening.



Tarek Atoui, *Un-drum 2: The Chinese connection* (2009). Performance view: Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Nadine Khalil
Tarek Atoui's Sonic Environments
Ocula, March 17, 2021
<https://cutt.ly/HxthZDA>

His corresponding examinations of how sound performs in space has led to a transdisciplinary network of musicians, researchers, and instrument-makers who have built musical devices that are accessible to all degrees of hearing.

Sharjah is also where Atoui's gallerist Chantal Crousel first encountered his work in 2011, during *Visiting Tarab*, a Performa 11 commission with SAF, which drew from the world's largest repository of classical Arabic music by Lebanese collector Kamal Kassar.



Performance view: Tarek Atoui, *Visiting Tarab*, Performa 5, New York (2011). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Moving from one archive to another, Atoui is in the process of building another sonic library, recording and sampling sounds at harbours and inside military bases, fish markets, and oil tanks around the world in the *I/E* project (2013–ongoing), a new iteration of which is in Kassel for his first solo exhibition in Germany at the Fridericianum, *Waters' Witness* (3 October 2020–28 March 2021). The recordings, stored in the form of 'sound boxes', reflect changing audio palettes that echo their underwater and industrial contexts, and translate into distinct material and spatial considerations.



Tarek Atoui, *I/E Elefina* (2016). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn.

In his sonic ecologies and propositions, Atoui abstracts, embeds, and embodies sound in transitory forms, shifting roles between researcher, programmer, composer, performer, and collaborator, often inviting others to intervene. His oeuvre sits at the cusp of redefining the language of visual and performing arts and challenging contemporary sound production. The aural becomes a catalyst in situating our relationship to time, presence, and space as he investigates and experiments with the thresholds of audibility, amplification, and accessibility.



Tarek Atoui, *The Ground* (2018). Exhibition view: *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–10 April 2021). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Sharjah Art Foundation, 2021.

Atoui's output contests traditional hierarchies of perception and modes of listening, positing an all-encompassing, fluid vision that connects instrumentation to bodies and gestures toward hearing movement. His accomplishments, which have taken him from the Sharjah Biennial (2009, 2013) to documenta in Kassel (2012), the Berlin Biennale (2014), and Venice Biennale (2019), have earned him the 2022 Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize, with USD \$200,000 and production expenses covered for an upcoming solo exhibition at The Contemporary Austin's Jones Center in Texas and the FLAG Art Foundation in New York.

Upcoming projects include his participation in the 13th Gwangju Biennale (1 April–9 May 2021), the 50th edition of the Darmstadt Summer Course (31 July–14 August 2021), and Struer Tracks, a sound art festival taking place between 20 August and 5 September 2021 in Denmark.

In this conversation, Atoui discusses his experimental practice in sound.



Tarek Atoui, *The Ground* (2018). Exhibition view: 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, *May You Live In Interesting Times*, Venice (11 May-24 November 2019). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Andrea Avezzù.

NK First of all, congratulations for the FLAG Art Foundation Prize. Do you know what you will do for it?

TA I have an idea. I'm looking at the different audiences and people I've worked with in the past as components of the work, reaching out to music students, associations for the deaf, and a whole array of people with varying degrees of expertise.

The challenge is to have them work together in interesting ways. What I want to do, especially given the current circumstances, is create a collective work that stems from both studio and performance processes. I want to first open a laboratory for researching sound practices that can be activated as a residency or workshop space. An exhibition will be born from this laboratory, as well as an on-site performance programme.



Performance view: Tarek Atoui, *Organ Within*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (27 June 2019). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Guggenheim Museum.

NK Do you think virtual practices are something artists have to do more and more these days?

TA While I'm trying to initiate these remote studios to which I send instruments, sound objects, and ideas, and work with people there, I'm still advocating for the opportunity to meet in a space and work together.

‘Even a small plastic cup is a space you can play and record sound in. You can broadcast a whole installation in it. I feel at ease in architectural space, because sound has this ability to travel and occupy it.’

NK You often talk about bridging the worlds of music and art. What was the definitive moment that launched you into the field of contemporary art? Did it start with your relationship with the Sharjah Art Foundation?

TA It's not something that just suddenly happened. It occurred progressively, in that I always had an interest in the art world and its practices. There were several encounters with artists like Lamia Joreige, who I was a software developer for. But I think Sharjah represented the moment when I received a substantial art residency, invited by Jack Persekian after our encounter in Amsterdam in 2008.



Exhibition view: Tarek Atoui, *WITHIN*, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (18 February–25 March 2017). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn.

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NK I remember seeing you play in Beirut's underground venues in the late 1990s. Did you ever think you would become an artist?

TA I knew that my studies in economics and cultural management was not the path I was going to follow, but it took me some time to find out what this would be. Even though I realised it would be linked to music and sound, I wasn't sure what aspect of the field it would be in. Was it going to be composition for dance? Theatre? Film? Touring with bands?

After one album release, I realised I wasn't interested in the latter. And little by little, I transitioned into making sound, which I found I cherished the most.

NK When did you first get into sound performance?

TA I started in France around the year 2000. I was DJing in techno music at the time.



Opening performance: Tarek Atoui, *WITHIN*, Bergen Assembly, Sentralbadet, Bergen (2016). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

NK A lot of your performances are improvisational, where you co-create with others. Although you incorporate technological tools, you often activate handmade instruments in performance. How fundamental is programming to your language, allowing this interaction to occur?

TA It's a great tool, and one that I still use both conceptually and practically. When it comes to activating my compositions, programming is a tool that I'm in control of and can employ like a meta-instrument, in how it can structure a research process and bring something mathematical in.

NK Even your instruments are open work, disassembled and reassembled in sound. What led you to handmade apparatuses?

TA The idea of the material took me to craft. Thinking about the sound of ceramics led me to work with ceramicists.

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Tarek Atoui, *Un-drum 1: strategie of surviving noise* (2009). Performance view: Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

IK Your work looks at the body as a vessel of resonance, but also considers the machine as a body, such as with the 'Un-drum' series (2009–2010). How would you formulate this relationship between the body and the machine?

A *Un-drum / strategies for surviving noise* (2009) was the first time I built this machine. It set up the cornerstone of my relationship to instruments, as well as to gesture in performance in ways that still echo today—all that changes is the medium and the ways in which things are built.

I moved from work that was digital in nature and that could be done by myself to compositions that call upon the craft or know-how of specialists. Yet the logic of putting things together, like building an instrument's software, is still the way I create a score with several improvisers.

The 'Un-drum' series included ideas like blowing up the surface of a small digital controller, the MIDI, and magnifying certain gestures to make them absurd or impossible to execute in relation to notions of virtuosity in the classical form. These are still present in my work, and you can see inversions and distortions of these notions in acoustic instruments that are no longer computer-based or digital.



Tarek Atoui, *I/E Abu Dhabi* (2018). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Alex Guirkingier.

Nadine Khalil
Tarek Atoui's Sonic Environments
Ocula, March 17, 2021
<https://cutt.ly/HxthZDA>

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

NK Do you think you would have been this subversive in sound if you were trained in classical music?

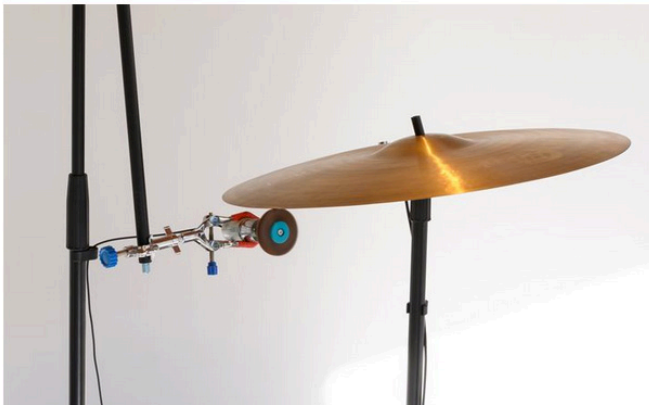
TA There are people who are trained classically who are similarly disruptive but still have a significant technical mastery, to which a conceptual layer is added. In my case, I don't have this virtuosity.

From an early stage, I didn't propose rhythms or structures when I interacted with musicians, who came from jazz or classical music backgrounds, for example. I only had concepts or abstract ideas to put on the table.

‘I like the idea of releasing the potentiality of a space by not erecting walls. In many of my works, the spaces are totally open, connecting with the outside as much as possible.’

NK There still seems to be an urge for you to break a boundary, whether it's sonic or perceptual. Where does this drive come from?

TA It's really coming from an awareness of what was established before me, of understanding the history behind sound practices, and growing up in an artistic environment that was very rigorous and therefore not easily satisfied. There's always an attempt to push things further and ask yourself the question of what lies beyond this point, or how it can be done differently.



Tarek Atoui, *Pulses in II* (2020). Exhibition view: *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–10 April 2021). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Sharjah Art Foundation, 2021.

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NK Going back to 'Un-drum', tell us about the second one in the series: *the Chinese connection* (2009), and how it compared the cultural shift during the Maoist Communist revolution to the pan-Arab movements in the ways it created a new mythology of modern art forms and social change.

TA It was a specific commission from Jack Persekian for an exhibition called *Disorientation II: The Rise and Fall of Arab Cities* (21 November 2009–20 February 2010), which was about the fall of the Pan-Arab movement and my contribution to this was to kind of skip that debate and instead, look at how it compared with the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

NK Is it true that you have lost some of your hearing due to a detainment in Lebanon? And do you think that's what led you to working with deaf people?

TA I think that's a simplification, although I have read it in the press. 'Un-drum' functioned as a process of healing in order to move away from that, and it's honestly not that intense. I feel the difference between my ears sometimes when I'm tired or stressed, but otherwise, I'm not suffering from it.



Tarek Atoui, *The Wave* (2019). Exhibition view: *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–10 April 2021). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Sharjah Art Foundation, 2021.

NK Do you distinguish the act of listening from hearing? In much of your work, these are simultaneous processes and listening becomes active.

TA Both can be part of the same world. Hearing is a form of listening. There's this exercise of returning to an unconscious state of listening, which is something similar to naïve listening—when you listen to music and you don't know who's doing what within the piece. You don't distinguish the instruments from each other, you just listen to the ensemble as a whole.

NK Now that you're back at the Sharjah Art Foundation with *Cycles in 11*, much of this show relates to durational facets marking over a decade of collaborative work. Can you say more about the work *Pulses in 11* (2020)?

TA *Pulses in 11* forms part of the introduction to the show. It's this idea of the metronome that punctuates the space when you enter it, where there's a corridor on the right with all these stones that are acting more like mega-frenetic metronomes.

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Tarek Atoui, *Pulses in II* (2020). Exhibition view: *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–10 April 2021). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Sharjah Art Foundation, 2021.

- NK They look like contraptions driven by water. Why did you incorporate water?
- TA Because of the organic quality of the water drop, like sand in the hourglass. There's an inexactitude to water, which takes time to fall, and is affected by its environment.
- Different notions of metronomes were combined together, such as the strict, digital metronome of the computer. Then you had a disc in ceramic that was rotating to the rhythm of 11.
- NK Why is 11 significant?
- TA It's a time signature or rhythmic cycle in Arabic music.
- NK So time becomes abstract if there's no linearity to it.
- TA The rhythm is not regular at all. There's a structure that propels the water to drop, but then the drop happens in a very irregular way. Sometimes it drops in one second and sometimes in ten, so yes, there's an abstraction to it.



Tarek Atoui, *Palais de Jf* (2020) (detail), Exhibition view: *Cycles in Jf*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–30 April 2021). Commissioned by Sharjah Art Foundation. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Omar Rashied.

- NK Sound is then both elemental, as part of nature, and psychoacoustic or manipulable. You seem to blur the lines between instrumentation and materiality, using the material as an instrument by permuting an electric current through it. Can the body also be seen as a responsive conductor or machine?
- TA Maybe it's an augmented body—an organism that is heightened by technology—but I wouldn't say that it becomes mechanic or machinic through this augmentation. The machine is not a substitute to the body you see, or at least this doesn't form my relationship to technology.

‘Silence is complex; it’s more a state of mind or an inner disposition than an absence.’

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NK You have a very intuitive way of working with space in your installations. How significant is the space around the sound, through which sound migrates?

TA Even a small plastic cup is a space you can play and record sound in. You can broadcast a whole installation in it. I feel at ease in architectural space, because sound has this ability to travel and occupy it.

I like the idea of releasing the potentiality of a space by not erecting walls. In many of my works, the spaces are totally open, connecting with the outside as much as possible. I'm not saying that the space is always an instrument necessarily. There are cases when spaces are and others when they aren't. Prehistorical caves, for example, were set up according to resonance, and where people felt comfortable in terms of sound.



Tarek Atoui, *The Wave* (2019). Exhibition view: *Cycles in II*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (26 September 2020–10 April 2021). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Sharjah Art Foundation, 2021.

NK Do you think we have enough words to describe sound?

TA Not really, especially not in sign language.

NK Do you see with your ears?

TA Yes.

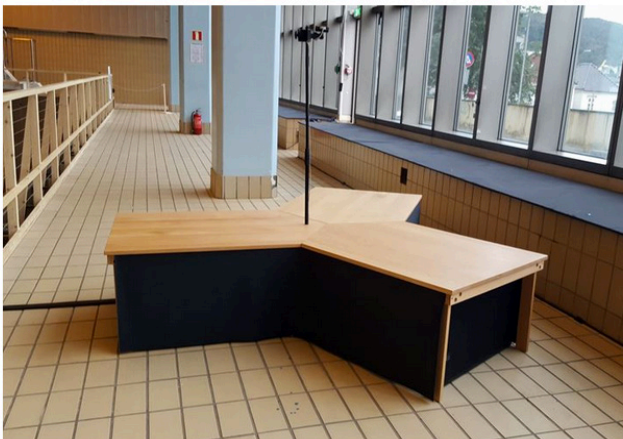
NK You've often said that the human voice occupies a very narrow range of frequency, which you've learned from those who cannot hear it. The monumental bass synthesiser, *Zero Point Nine*, which you developed at a residency with the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, works with subsonic sounds that produce ultra-low-frequency electronic sounds that are felt before they are heard.

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TA Yes, it is an instrument that was made during my research with deaf communities, in collaboration with Meyer Sound, which manufactures subwoofers. The idea was to come up with a language similar to sign language—a system that would translate finger movements into bass frequencies. These are gestures that are familiar to deaf people who are very skilled at using their fingers.

NK As a mode of communicating?

TA Yes, the movements and the bass frequencies become a system of communication combined. Although it's a very technical instrument, it's also very intuitive, in that anyone moving their hands or fingers would immediately get a result. So you can bypass the technicality by just standing on it and moving your hands.



Tarek Atoui, *Zero Point Nine* (2016). Performance view: *WITHIN & Infinite Ear*, Bergen Assembly, Sentralbadet, Bergen (2 September–1 October 2016). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

NK Are sound and silence binary? And what is silence in sonic terms?

TA They aren't, but this is a tough question. Silence is complex; it's more a state of mind or an inner disposition than an absence.

NK *The Reverse Collection* (2016) is intriguing from an anthropological point of view. You began with ancient instruments you were given permission to record, which were played to instrument-makers who engineered new objects that produced the same sounds according to their interpretations.

TA I was concerned with how objects, shapes, and functions could change with oral transmission. The experiment was conducted with about a dozen instrument-makers from all over the world, to see what they would imagine without an awareness of the actual instruments behind the recordings I was sharing with them, from Berlin's Ethnological Museum.



Tarek Atoui, *The Reverse Collection* (2016). Performance view: Tate Modern, London (16–23 September 2016). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Thierry Bal.

Nadine Khalil
Tarek Atoui's Sonic Environments
Ocula, March 17, 2021
<https://cutt.ly/HxthZDA>

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

NK Your other site-specific work has been quite different, such as your field research in China's Pearl River Delta for *The Ground* (2018), first presented at Mirrored Gardens in Guangzhou. Why did you decide to focus on elements of agriculture and architecture for these instruments, also made in collaboration with craftsmen and electronic engineers?

TA It came from observing a very unique urban topology around 2010, when Guangzhou was progressively expanding and agricultural practices were starting to get entrapped between building blocks and rapidly growing urbanscapes. From there, I started looking closer into how people were producing in this context.

NK Your work *I/E* (2013–ongoing), on the other hand, takes different ports—Abu Dhabi, Athens, Singapore, Porto, Beirut—as points of departure. It functions as an aggregation or assemblage—some people have called it a sound library. It's the first time you seem to be collecting and trapping sound inside material, instead of diffusing or disseminating it. What are you going to do with all of these sounds?

TA I'm still in the process of collecting. The question of what happens to this library of sounds becomes more important when you consider that I recorded in Beirut a few months before the explosion. Hopefully I will have the answers after a few more cities. Now I'm aiming for the big harbours in Europe, like Antwerp or Hamburg.



Tarek Atoui, *Zero Point Nine* (2016). Performance view: *WITHIN & Infinite Ear*, Bergen Assembly, Sentralbadet, Bergen (2 September–1 October 2016). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

NK How significant are field recordings, and the need to be inside environments, especially in terms of electronic music?

TA Field recordings and electronic sound were all part of the same education and vocabulary for me. Electroacoustic music is very much interested in this idea of a sonic object—as seen in Pierre Schaeffer's *objets sonores*—which in the early stages was a field recording.

NK What is the residue of sound? What is left behind?

TA It's something very personal, but also totally unpredictable in terms of its impact and interpretation. It could be that you visit my pieces and you're left with a memory of falling off your bike for the first time, for example. Sound can bring you back to something that is very intimate. —[O]

Nadine Khalil
Tarek Atoui's Sonic Environments
Ocula, March 17, 2021
<https://cutt.ly/HxthZDA>

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Sharjah Art Foundation

Tarek Atoui *Cycles in 11*

It's no overstatement that Tarek Atoui's work is literal music to the art world's ears. Sitting somewhere between art display, performance, and sound lab, Atoui's solo exhibition "Cycles in 11," curated by Sharjah Art Foundation director Hoor Al Qasimi, occupied the heritage house of Bait Al Serkal, and unfurled more than a decade of collaboration with the Foundation and its wider community.

Atoui's relationship with the Emirate is longstanding. It started in 2008, when the electroacoustic composer was invited to participate in the inaugural March Meeting, which set the stage for his art-world debut. What followed was a decade of exploring different modalities of listening, composition, and performance, and the ensemble of custom instruments on view at Atoui's show stand as testimonials that challenge the constraints of what it means to be a musician today, taking performances outside of the concert hall and

into other realms. Conceived and built in several steps with musicians, composers, and artists, "Cycles in 11" was also a starting point for a regional and international residency program that extends into 2022.

One of Atoui's long-term projects is *I/E* (2014–), in which steel rails are affixed with sound capsules that play recordings of different seaports around the world. From Singapore to Porto and Beirut, raw audio is captured from the unfrequented depths of the ocean, the inner mysteries of oil tanks, and the hullabaloo of fish markets, using recording devices inserted into metal, stone, and wood vessels. The Sharjah iteration, in collaboration with French musician Eric La Casa, echoes a vague archeology of sound excavated from the Zayed and Khalifa seaports as well as the mangroves of Abu Dhabi, and laid out in the open space of the Foundation's Art Square. With this growing library of sounds of the unknown, Atoui attempts to archive the sonic identities of spaces.

The sound recordings show up again in *The Wave* (2019), mixing the organic with the synthetic. The resonances of cow bone on volcanic stones from central France, percussive cymbals and gongs, and an electronic harmonica left aural imprints in space. In this composition, a large wooden platform peeking between the flora and open-air architecture forms the base for some nine instruments from previous projects. Serving as reeds, seven acrylic tubes rolled up telescopically, resembling horns of variable length, protrude from the platform as

sound emanates from six small buzzer speakers, washed over by a fan blowing compressed air in a biome that expands modes of listening beyond the aural.

Likewise, *The Ground* (2020), a collaboration with Guangzhou's Vitamin Creative Space and Mirrored Gardens, activates visual, haptic, and aural modes of comprehending sound. Composed of a room resembling a DJ setup, the installation spans over five years of research into the ecology and agricultural processes of the Pearl River Delta. The custom acoustic and electronic instruments on view are a result of craftsmen and electronic engineers interpreting the musings Atoui recorded in a notebook: "Like the cycles of soil that recovers from fertilizer, *The Ground* has no beginning and no end . . . Its pulses and rhythms are the traditional brick walls of the Mirrored Gardens . . . Its instruments are the swamps, the stones, and the wood of this place . . ."

What is evident is that Atoui is less interested in music-making and composition than he is in looking at sound as an elemental force of nature, vibrating particulate swirls traveling away from the source and crashing into other particles. He gives form to the hidden frequencies and acoustic properties of the everyday, forming a sonic and visual orchestra that reverberates in the landscape.

RUBA AL-SWEEL

Installation view of TAREK ATOUI's *The Wave*, 2019, composition for *The Disharmonica*, *The Duofluctus*, *Horns of Putin*, *The Lithophone*, *The Lymaçon*, *The Piezophone*, *The Rotator*, *Sub-Ink* and *The Spin Collector*; sounds from *I/E Elefsis*, *I/E Abu Dhabi* and *I/E Singapore*; wood; acrylic tubes; speakers; fan, dimensions variable, at "Cycles in 11," at Sharjah Art Foundation, 2020–21. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.



monopol

Magazin für Kunst und Leben

Künstler Tarek Atoui

"Sound muss durch den ganzen Körper gehen"



Foto: Alexandre-Guirkingier

Tarek Atoui und Chris Watson 2015 am Tempel von Elefsina, Griechenland

Der Künstler Tarek Atoui sammelt auf seinen Reisen Geräusche und Geschichten. Jetzt eröffnet seine erste deutsche Einzelausstellung in Kassel. Im Interview erzählt er, was er von gehörlosen Menschen lernt und wie ihn der Klang immer wieder austrickst

Tarek Atoui, Sie sind gerade in Kassel und bauen Ihre Soundinstallation "Water's Witness" im Fridericianum auf. Der Ausstellungsraum wird ja immer als wichtiger Faktor angeführt. Aber als Soundkünstler nimmt er für Sie eine ganz elementare Rolle ein, oder?

Grundsätzlich ja. In dieser Ausstellung wird es aber noch ein bisschen anders sein als sonst, denn ich werde Sound in Metall und in großen Marmorsteinen verwenden, der Raum befindet sich also quasi innen. Durch diese Konstellation mussten wir noch einmal ganz neu denken und ausprobieren. Ich werde also zum Beispiel keine regulären Lautsprecher nutzen wie sonst. Aktuell experimentieren wir noch, wie das am besten funktioniert. Es ist vor allem ein Arbeiten mit dem, was das Material einem gibt. Wie man aus diesem Material Sounds extrahieren kann, wie man mit ihm und aus ihm heraus Sounds komponieren kann.

Katharina Cichosch

«Künstler Tarek Atoui "Sound muss durch den ganzen Körper gehen"n.»

monopol, September 29, 2020

<https://cutt.ly/Ghhfljy>

Grundlage der Installationen werden sogenannte "Soundscapes", Klanglandschaften von Häfen sein, die Sie seit einigen Jahren in aller Welt aufnehmen. Wann und warum haben Sie mit dem Sammeln begonnen?

Das hat ganz intuitiv angefangen. Ich wollte den Sound dieser Städte einfangen, die aus Häfen geboren wurden. Wo der Hafen reflektiert, was sich rund um ihn herum entwickelt hat. Angefangen habe ich vor fünf Jahren. Nach und nach sind so Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zusammengekommen, aber auch Materialien aus den Häfen. Dies alles kehrt nun in dieser Ausstellung zurück: Der Marmorstein beispielsweise geht zurück auf den Hafen von Athen, aus den Innenräumen eines massiven, griechischen Tempels. Der Stahl geht zurück auf den Hafen von Abu Dhabi, er hat sehr merkwürdige und interessante akustische Eigenschaften. Es ist gewöhnlicher Standard-Konstruktionsstahl, wie man ihn in Abu Dhabi in riesigen Mengen verwendet – das Baugeschehen dort ist bekanntlich sehr aktiv.

Gibt es einen bestimmten Bezug zur Stadt Kassel – abgesehen vielleicht von der Athen-Verbindung, die auf der letzten Documenta eine Rolle spielte?

Geografisch gesprochen, ehrlich gesagt, nicht. Aber tatsächlich spielte Kassel für mich 2012 eine wichtige Rolle, und das war auch während einer Documenta. Damals habe ich eine ganze Weile in der Stadt verbracht. Ich kam sechs Monate vor der Ausstellung, habe viele Leute kennengelernt, und diesen Ansatz, mit dem ich heute arbeite, entwickelt. Ich glaube, Kassel war erst die zweite Station nach Sharjah, an der ich diese Methoden ausprobiert und genutzt habe.

Zwischenzeitlich haben Sie neben Soundperformances auch ganze Sets an Instrumenten entwickelt, teils in Zusammenarbeit mit gehörlosen Menschen. Einen Teil der Ausstellung werden die sogenannten "Tables of Content" darstellen, mit dem Sie Ihr Publikum einladen, selbst Teil der Komposition zu werden. Wird das angesichts der Corona-Auflagen überhaupt möglich sein?

Ja, absolut! Das Publikum kann sich zu Workshops anmelden und wird dann von meinem Team oder auch mir selbst begleitet. Später werden Mitarbeiter des Fridericianums die Workshops anleiten. Die "Tables of Content" sind Teil dieses Vorschlags, den ich in der Ausstellung mache – hier von Experiment, Bildung und Vermittlung der Prinzipien, auf denen die Arbeit basiert. Es sind Zusammenstellungen, die ich aus früheren Instrumenten konzipiert habe. Und sie sind so gestaltet, dass mehrere Leute gleichzeitig zusammen spielen können – egal ob Anfänger oder Profis, gehörlos oder hörend.

Und dann?

Ich mag offene Stimmungen, die ein Spielen in total intuitiver Weise ermöglichen. Folglich ist das, was da herauskommt, Klang in einer wirklich rohen, primären Weise. Das ist für mich die Kraft von Sound – wenn es vibriert, man ihn spüren kann, in unmittelbarem Kontakt zu ihm kommen kann. In den Räumen, die ich kreiere, geht es nicht um einen einzelnen Weg des Zuhörens. Es geht um viele Möglichkeiten, Sound zu erfahren: durch das Auge, die Ohren, den gesamten Körper. Jeder Einzelne kann also sein ganz eigenes Hörerlebnis in diesem Raum erschaffen. Die Arbeit mit gehörlosen Menschen hat mich gelehrt, Situationen zu kreieren, die verschiedene Zugangsweisen zugleich ermöglichen. Wir sind alle auf eine bestimmte Weise taub. Unsere Beziehung zu Sound ist, im Gegensatz zum Bild, sehr intim. Nicht umsonst schließen wir oft die Augen, wenn wir zum Beispiel Musik hören.

Gleichzeitig wohnt den von Ihnen mitkonstruierten Instrumenten oft auch eine große ästhetische Anziehungskraft inne. Wenn man sich diese Kontraptionen anschaut, will man sofort ausprobieren, wie man sie verwendet, wie man sie zum Klingen bringt.

Ja, natürlich ist die Ästhetik des Instruments ein wichtiger Teil der Einladung, es auch zu spielen. Sorgsam mit ihm umzugehen. Ich habe allerdings auch Instrumente, die sehr grob aussehen. Jedes Projekt hat seine spezifische Ästhetik. Generell ist es mir aber wichtig, dass alle Instrumente ansprechend und schön aussehen. Nicht wie Prototypen, sondern wie etwas, das man tatsächlich spielen kann und soll. Darüber hinaus haben sie alle ein Eigenleben – sie sind nicht mein Eigentum. Wenn ich an Instrumentenbauer herantrete, dann haben sie eine *carte blanche*, die Instrumente zu produzieren, an andere Leute zu verkaufen. Das ist es, was ich aufgrund dieser Arbeit finde: das Potential, dass sie in ganz andere Dimensionen und Formen fließen und dort weiter verbreitet werden kann.

Sie arbeiten mit vielen Menschen zusammen, nicht nur mit Instrumentenbauern, sondern auch mit Komponisten, Musikern oder wie hier mit dem Ausstellungspublikum oder dem Museumspersonal. Wodurch auch Sie selbst immer wieder unterschiedlichste Rollen einnehmen.

Genau, für mich ist ein Projekt dann gut, wenn viele meiner Fähigkeiten zum Tragen kommen, als Komponist, Künstler, Computerprogrammierer - oder auch schlicht als menschliches Wesen. Am Anfang eines Projekts baue ich einfach etwas, um es anderen zu geben, ihnen Zugang zu ermöglichen. Manchmal bin ich Lehrer, manchmal Koordinator. All das ist Teil der Praxis. Sobald das Projekt entwickelt ist, beginnen all diese Dinge zu verschmelzen.

Welchen Anteil hat die elektronische Musik für Sie gespielt, die ja schon in ihren Ursprüngen eine höchst experimentelle Angelegenheit darstellt?

Das ist eine gute Frage! Denn tatsächlich komme ich gewissermaßen von dort. Als ich damals nach Paris gezogen bin, habe ich elektroakustische Musik studiert und viel in diesem Feld gearbeitet. Es gibt aber für mich keinen Unterschied zwischen Algorithmus und dem Organischen, zwischen digital und analog. Für mich hängt alles miteinander zusammen. Es kommt nur auf die Betrachtungsweise an, wie man zum Beispiel den Klang eines Wassertropfens beschreibt – letztlich ist auch dieser ein elektrisches Signal.

In einem Interview von 2019 haben Sie erklärt, noch immer keine Definition von Sound geben zu können. Und tatsächlich beschreibt das Wort, ähnlich zur Farbe, ja beides: die physikalischen Wellen, die Klang kreieren, und die Weise, wie diese als Sound im Körper und Gehirn wahrgenommen werden. Und das ist wieder abhängig voneinander. Sind Sie einer Definition inzwischen nähergekommen?

Nein, ehrlich gesagt nicht. Ich fühle mich sehr demütig gegenüber diesem Phänomen ... Es ist etwas, das man nicht beschreiben kann. Wenn du versuchst, es zu fassen, wird es dich immer wieder austricksen. Der beste Weg ist daher meiner Meinung nach: Zu genießen, wie man Sound in seinen mannigfaltigen Aspekten entdecken und erleben kann. Vielleicht werde ich irgendwann einmal eine Antwort darauf haben. Aber jetzt aktuell bin ich nicht derjenige, der erklärt, was Sound ist oder was er sein soll.

ARTFORUM



Tarek Atoui. Photo: Matteo Bellomo Fabrica.

August 14, 2020 at 3:32pm

Tarek Atoui Wins 2022 Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize

Lebanon-born, Paris-based artist and composer Tarek Atoui has won the 2022 Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize. The biennial award includes \$200,000, a scholarly publication, and a solo exhibition that will open at The Contemporary Austin's downtown location in spring 2022 and travel to the FLAG Art Foundation in New York.

Atoui's ethnomusicological practice is multidisciplinary and collaborative, bringing together sound engineers, instrument makers, musicians, and local communities to create installations and live performances. "In such unprecedented times, the museum is grateful to have the opportunity to support Atoui and his collaborators as they continue to create different ways of experiencing art and sound to several communities. His sensitivity to place through research and collaboration are perfect for our times," said Heather Pesanti, the Contemporary's chief curator and director.

Atoui's selection committee comprised Pesanti, University of Chicago art historian Darby English, Los Angeles County Museum of Art director Michael Govan, Chinati Foundation curator Ingrid Schaffner, Tate Modern senior curator Catherine Wood, and FLAG director Stephanie Roach. "Tarek Atoui: Cycles in 11" will open at the UAE's Sharjah Art Foundation this fall. In 2021, the artist's work will be included in the 13th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea.

« *Tarek Atoui Wins 2022 Suzanne Deal Booth / FLAG Art Foundation Prize* »
Art Forum, August 14, 2020.

<https://www.artforum.com/news/tarek-atoui-wins-2022-suzanne-deal-booth-flag-art-foundation-prize-83671>

Mousse Magazine

REVIEWS

If the Snake: Okayama Art Summit 2019

Japanese director Kurosawa Kiyoshi sets his stories in anonymous zones, or in buildings that appear freshly abandoned. *New York Times* critic Terrence Rafferty describes it thus: "There's a distinctive kind of setting in a Kurosawa picture: he often shoots in decaying, forgotten-looking neighborhoods of Tokyo, in areas that feel somehow provisional, temporary, misconceived as places of human habitation or activity."¹ Even when set in an actual megalopolis, the locations are not representative (and thus less recognizable abroad) thanks to the director's use of off-screen action and long, distant shots in purposely empty spaces.

Okayama, currently host to the second edition of the Okayama Art Summit, is known overseas by a niche demographic of denim nerds as a world epicenter of jeans making and home of some of the most internationally respected brands. A small, pretty town. Not very trendy. Home to a beautiful castle built at the end of the sixteenth century and the charming Korakuen Garden, but often overlooked by visitors to western Japan. It feels like an innocuous version of the fictional cities that serve as backdrops to the thrilling, dystopian *Shin Megami Tensei* games: obviously Japanese, but without the distinctive metropolitan elements, and oblivious to its own aging, whether in terms of the population or the architecture. Familiar and alien at the same time.

Pierre Huyghe, the show's curator, reminds Kiyoshi's *oeuvre* not only for his astute use of the city but also for something else they have in common: Kurosawa, as if in a subtle and perverse game with the Japanese studio system, has produced work fitting the canons of the horror genre only to hide more authorial preoccupations, as in a codified Trojan Horse. In his desolate visions, cities are ghosts (as noted), but more often than not the actual monsters are loneliness, guilt, repressed traumas, disguised—as if at a Halloween party—as supernatural creatures. In the same way, Huyghe offers the illusion of touching on themes in which the complexity of visual art is too often presented as world-saving formulas (f.e. in solemn biennale statements, in event titles) but builds instead a non-didactic chiaroscuro that speculates on ossified ideas about the individual, creativity, and art; about the expansion of artificial intelligence in range and firepower; about gruesome environmental devastation. All elements of a puzzle programmatically lacking a unique judgment, a single allegorical moral.

The epicenter of one of the possible plots—the summit is articulated in several central buildings in the city—is perhaps the Hayashibara Museum of Art. This graceful small museum designed by the architect Maekawa Kunio, a student of Le Corbusier and a master of Kenzo Tange, has been completely emptied of its drawings, traditional clothes, and swords. Behind one of the desolated vitrines, all of sudden, a ghostly anime figure materializes in a projection, *Two Minutes Out of Time* (2000). She's Ann Lee, a character that Huyghe and Philippe Parreno bought from a Japanese agency specializing in designing characters for anime and manga. Ann Lee recounts with acute, painful self-awareness her feelings on being an ambiguous, artificial, fungible fiction. Devoid of an agency of her own, she stumbles in an introspective short-circuit that freezes her into glacial evanescence at the end of the video. After the screening, Ann Lee comes back, this time in flesh and blood, interpreted by a local girl, in Tino Sehgal's *Ann Lee* (2011). Now she elaborates on how pleasant it is to have the body she has recently obtained and how interesting it is to make new acquaintances ("Before, I only met Pierre and Philippe"), then asks visitors if they think there is a relationship between being a "sign" and melancholy. Then she salutes politely and exits the scene.

A permutation of these two sequential works—the estranging, existential brooding of an image that presents herself (itself?) as a sentient subject, an envelope that conveys different artistic projects while conscious of being an industrial product—was earlier presented at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. But in Okayama, Ann Lee is the puppeteer, the secret protagonist. In *BOB* (2018–19), Ian Cheng's video housed in the next room, an AI creature evolves while visitors interact with it via an app. Perhaps Ann Lee empathizes with Bob. They are both self-contained, but continually solicited and diverted along their paths by foreigners. Are they companions when no one's around to see? Perhaps the black balloon built by Ryan Gander, stuck on the ceiling by the ticket office of the Okayama Orient Museum, is Ann Lee's? Perhaps in one of her possible incarnations she could have attended Uchisange school before the collapsing birth rates in Japan turned it into an abandoned building?

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Inside the school, Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni present an intricate and vaguely frightening science-fiction plot involving the last mortals on the planet kidnapping immortal humanoid prisoners to prevent them from fleeing into space. The story/work unwinds through sculptural installations, including environmental elements like trees, school furniture, and stuffed animals constrained in chalky material. We discover in a farther room that they are ruins of and allusions to the story recounted in a video, *The Everted Capital 1971–4936, The Unmanned, Season 2, Episode 2* (2019): a live, artificial-intelligence-operated edit of a twenty-four-hour performance. Another dim-lighted room hosts a collaboration between Pierre Huyghe and Matthew Barney. Two aquariums: the French artist's contains an aquatic micro-ecosystem, the American's an electroplating system that produces, slowly, a copper sculpture. From a window it is possible to see the school pool, filled with a liquid simulating the average northern European skin-tone—Pamela Rosenkranz's *Skin Pool (Oromon)* (2019)—reflecting John Gerrard's video *X. laevis (Spacelab)* (2017) from a large screen posted as an advertisement placard on a nearby building, a TV studio. The animation reproduces the slow-motion choreography of a frog, partially inspired by the experiments that the scientist Luigi Galvani carried out at the end of the eighteenth century to understand the relation between brain impulses and muscular movements and those undertaken on *Endeavor*, the 1992 space mission, seeking to determine whether frogs could reproduce in zero gravity.

Also from the same window, Etienne Chambaud's *Calculus* (2019) is visible: a replica of Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker* in which the human body is absent, leaving just a perforated rock, and Pierre Huyghe's *Not Yet Titled* (2019), a hyper-fast visual translation of a thinking brain scanned. The nearby school gym is filled with Tarek Atoui's musical instruments that produce a continuous, hypnotic sound without human intervention. Elsewhere Tajima installed Jacuzzi tubes that inject into a room wind spills aimed at specific body points indicated by traditional Chinese medicine. Too bad no bodies are there; the installation is conceived for a ghost body, or sporadically a visitor who wants to test the system. Etienne Chambaud, at the same location, dispersed a dust made of bone fragments, making the floor of the Tenjinyama Cultural Plaza slippery, and invented a heating system to make the walls replicate the temperatures of various human diseases (*Fever* [2019]).

The path of dissection, dispersion, and recombination of human body and thought through a path of quiet (or careless) science fiction is revealed in its dimension of "fictionality" in Lili Reynaud-Dewar's video *I Want All of the Above to Be the Snake* (2019), projected in a small building attached to Okayama Castle. The performer, dressed in silver paint, retraces all the locations in the city occupied by the Art Summit, providing a metanarrative and extra-diegetic voice that brings us back to the quiet Japanese town.

The young Okayama-born collector Yasuharu Ishikawa, who has the ambitious and generous intent to inaugurate a museum of contemporary art within a few years, is the promoter of the summit, now in its second edition. The European art crowd may already be familiar with him through the exhibition *Intimate Distance*, curated by Yuko Hasegawa in 2019 and featuring works from his collection; it inaugurated Hôtel des Collections, the newest addition to Nicolas Bourriaud's Mo.Co. (Montpellier Contemporain), born of the ambition to make the French city a crucial hub for international contemporary art in the Mediterranean basin. The highly successful choice of Pierre Huyghe showed a masterful command of an enigmatic and circular cinematic narrative—as suggested by the title—capable of re-signifying well-known masterpieces (I am thinking in particular of Paul Chan's works on display) with subtle touches, of using spaces and connotations in surprising ways, of whispering instead of proclaiming.

1. Terrence Rafferty, "This Time, the Horror's in the Normality," *New York Times*, March 6, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/movies/08raff.html>.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Tarek Atoui, *Glitter Beats and Wild Synths / the wave*, 2019, "IF THE SNAKE" installation view at Okayama Art Summit, 2019
Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Ola Rindal



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Pierre Huyghe and Etienne Chabaud, "IF THE SNAKE" installation view at Okayama Art Summit, 2019
Photo: Ola Rindal

Francesco Tenaglia
« *If the Snake: Okayama Art Summit 2019* »,
Mousse Magazine, November 23, 2019.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Matthew Barney & Pierre Huyghe, "IF THE SNAKE" installation view at Okayama Art Summit, 2019
Photo: Ola Rindal



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Dahn Vo, *Massive Black Hole in the Dark Heart of our Milky way*, 2012. Exhibition: *Intimate distance. Masterpieces from the Ishikawa Collection*, 2019 at MO.CO.HOTEL
DES COLLECTIONS, Montpellier

Francesco Tenaglia
« *If the Snake: Okayama Art Summit 2019* »,
Mousse Magazine, November 23, 2019.

ARTIST PORTRAIT: TAREK ATOUI AND THE ELEMENTAL FORCE OF SOUND

TOGETHER WITH DEAF STUDENTS, ARTIST TAREK ATOUI CREATED NEW INSTRUMENTS – IN SEARCH OF A UNIVERSAL PERCEPTION OF SOUND.

There are instruments that are so rare that even regular concert-goers would need a bit of luck to hear them. The Ondes Martenot is one of them: Since 1928 this marvelous device has been a talking point as one of the first electronic musical instruments in the world – although to a layperson it initially just looks like a kind of organ. The instrument uses a wire, however, to produce swirling, unpredictable, ghostly sounds similar to those, incidentally, of the Theremin – a much more widely known instrument invented in Russia that same year (which many will know, for example, from the Beach Boys’ song “Good Vibrations”).

To this day, the Ondes Martenot remains a popular yet rare exotic item among musical instruments. French composer Olivier Messiaen wrote an entire piece for the instrument, “Radiohead” guitarist Johnny Greenwood loves the instrument dearly, and even Daft Punk like using the extraordinary sounds of the Ondes Martenot for their recordings.

INSTRUMENTS GALORE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD FORMED PART OF THE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

That said, among the more exotic instruments the Ondes Martenot is at least relatively well known. So, what must all the musical equip-

ment have been like that artist Tarek Atoui was able to discover a few years ago at Berlin’s Dahlem Museums? Instruments galore from all over the world formed part of the museum collections, not one of which the sound artist was familiar with. And not one of which came with instructions on how to play – a few brief notes had to suffice by way of indications. Atoui invited several musicians to his rehearsal and recorded the sessions. In a second stage, he then played these recordings to instrument-makers and asked them to build devices that would make the same kind of music – a principle that’s familiar from reverse engineering, i.e. the construction of equipment and machines based on existing models.



ONDES MARTENOT, IMAGE VIA [WIKIMEDIA.ORG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ondes_Martenot.jpg)

Katharina Cichosch

« Artist portrait : Tarek Atoui and th elemental force of sound », SchirnMag, August 25, 2019.



TAREK ATOUI, ITERATION ON DRUMS #2, 2016. TAREK ATOUI (29-09-2018) © PRINTEMPS DE SEPTEMBRE.
PHOTO: FRANCK ALIX

Subsequently Atoui brought each of these newly built instruments to the stage himself under the title “The Reverse Collection” – like the “Koto”, a construction made of bunched organ pipes that are connected to an air compressor via copper cables and whose sounds could be heard, for example, in the “Reverse Collection Sessions” at London’s Tate Modern.

TAUTLY STRETCHED DRUM SKINS WITH COLORFUL MARBLES AND WELL-WORN BOUNCY BALLS

A similar form of experimental instrument research is involved in the seemingly puzzling gadgets that are currently being presented on view at the SCHIRN: tautly stretched drum skins on which, for example, brightly colored marbles and well-worn bouncy balls await an as yet a yet indeterminate purpose. They are initially merely something to look at, to be brought to life when played. Some of these instruments stem from Tarek Atoui’s collaboration with the Al Amal School for Deaf Students, where the artist first met up with deaf and hearing-impaired students in 2012 to explore the possibilities of sound creation.

As is usual for Atoui, he again worked with experts in the field, with composers or instrument-makers – or, in this case, with the designer Thierry Madiot. In playing on the resulting instruments and in the performances inevitably questions arise that no doubt interest artists and audience alike. Is there a universal reception of music and sound that goes beyond individual perception? And if so, where might we find it? In the deep bass frequencies, for example, that observers can feel at least as strongly as they can hear them? Alongside these sorts of tactile experiences, Tarek Atoui’s works also offer very simple visual qualities, for example, which can then be perceived by both deaf and hearing people alike: Similarly to the legendary Ondes Martenot, the works of the series “Iteration(s) on Drums”, with their colorfully shimmering tops appearing like the product of a child’s playroom, also develop the allure of fantastical, carefully considered instruments – all the more so once you know they can indeed be played.



TAREK ATOUI, EXHIBITION VIEW © SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, 2019. PHOTO: MARC KRAUSE

Since 2012 the artist has therefore been on a permanent mission, sometimes to expand sound perception by the most individual sensations, and at others to pinpoint it to one denominator common perhaps to all people, be they deaf or hearing. Born in 1980 in the Lebanese capital Beirut, at 18 years old Tarek Atoui moved to France to study contemporary and electronic music at the conservatory in Reims. Ten years later he became co-director of the STEIM Studio, an Amsterdam institution for electro-instrumental music. In between times, Atoui records his own tracks and designs software tools that can be used both as raw materials for his own compositions and as a tool for musical training. He is probably best described as a musician, Tarek Atoui once surmised in an interview with "Ibraaz" magazine, but he doesn't seem to be truly happy with this self-characterization.



TAREK ATOUI, EXHIBITION VIEW © SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, 2019, PHOTO: MARC KRAUSE

Likewise, Atoui does not feel himself to be part of a community of musicians. This may be because of his equitable notion of authorship – or rather his rejection of any classic understanding of works or authors as such. In other words, he is very much in the spirit of the times, of course, in which even animals can be given credit for paintings and photographs



TAREK ATOUI, EXHIBITION VIEW © SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, 2019, PHOTO: MARC KRAUSE

and the artist or curator collective represents an increasingly popular way of creating work. Yet where there is no single author, clear definition of the artwork can sometimes be difficult: The constructed instruments are initially just extraordinary instruments, while the sound recordings are mere documentation of their being played.

SOUND PERMEATES ALL MATTER AS AN ELEMENTAL FORCE OF NATURE

The common thread running through Tarek Atoui's work is most likely the fact that his interest lies less in classic music-making or writing of song structures and more in the sound itself, which permeates all the material as an elemental force of nature. Atoui likes to talk about the resonance that the sound triggers in its environment – and that too is meant in quite elemental terms: The vibration of the sound, he explained in a video for the Tate performance, penetrates water, wood and all materials. A very particular form of resonance, one might add, is that of the human body itself, where sounds and noises may trigger not only various physical, but also the entire spectrum of emotional reactions.



TAREK ATOUI, EXHIBITION VIEW © SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, 2019, PHOTO: MARC KRAUSE



BIG ORCHESTRA

19 June – 8 September 2019

Katharina Cichosch
« *Artist portrait : Tarek Atoui and the elemental force of sound* »,
SchirnMag, August 25, 2019.



REPORTAGE

A VENISE, UNE BIENNALE À BOUT DE NERDS

Par Judicaël Lavrador Envoyé spécial à Venise
— 27 mai 2019 à 18:06 (mis à jour à 19:54)

Flots d'images numériques, prise de pouvoir de la machine sur l'humain... En convoquant dix ans après leur émergence une majorité d'œuvres du post-Internet, l'édition 2019 peine à anticiper les formes de demain.

Malgré la concurrence féroce des biennales, triennales et autres foires curatées qui désormais couvrent leur vocation marchande sous un vernis intello et créatif (avec tables rondes toutes les heures et performances en entracte), la *biennale d'arte di Venezia* reste un thermomètre et une boussole indiquant le Nord et le Sud, les artistes chauds et les artistes froids jusqu'à ce que la prochaine édition viennent rebattre les cartes. Cette année, ça ne loupe pas. Casting, humeur, tonalité, déclaration d'intention : pas grand-chose de commun entre cette édition et la précédente, laquelle fut intitulée par Christine Macel «*Viva Arte !*» avec le sourire optimiste du point d'exclamation, une liste d'artistes féminisée, et une volonté de faire sortir du placard de l'histoire celles (et ceux) qui, passionnés par le «collectif», envisagent l'œuvre comme un tissu de relations sociales plutôt qu'une pièce à part. En 2019, ça ne sourit pas. Le commissaire général, l'Américain Ralph Rugoff, en poste à la Hayward Gallery de Londres et qui réussit une solide biennale de Lyon en 2015, adopte plutôt une moue dubitative et aurait aussi bien pu ponctuer son titre flou, *May You Live in Interesting Times*, de points de suspension.

Deux fois les mêmes artistes

«Puissiez-vous vivre à une époque intéressante...» Ah ? La formule dit tout et son contraire. A dessein : Rugoff ne croit guère aux professions de foi visionnaires, aux manifestes esthétiques ni aux discours synthétiques qui ventriloqueraient les artistes. Du coup, il s'efface devant eux et invite à les regarder. A deux fois. Le seul geste du commissaire de cette édition consiste en effet à exposer deux fois les mêmes artistes. Une fois au pavillon international des Giardini, et l'autre à l'Arsenal. Sans que l'on puisse nécessairement reconnaître une même patte, un même style, un même format, un même sujet. Voilà de quoi contrecarrer la pression du marché qui ne retient d'un artiste que ses hits et l'enferme vite dans une case, un registre, un type de pièces quand lui n'a qu'envie de s'essayer à tout autre chose. Mais être ici et là peut être risqué : éparpiller le travail sur deux lieux dilue l'impact de chacune des propositions. Autant dire que la plupart des artistes ont souvent mis leurs œufs dans le même panier, exposant une grosse pièce dans l'une des expos et une plus modeste dans l'autre, sans d'ailleurs que la première soit toujours la meilleure. Au contraire.

Bouillonnement cérébral

Surjouant la schizophrénie que cette vision en miroir (et comparative) implique, l'expo à l'Arsenal lève son rideau par une toile qui louche. Ce *Double Elvis* peint par George Condo est un portrait de deux ivrognes se faisant face, verres à la main et toute fierté ravalée sous leurs traits de bonshommes de pacotille, dans un pastiche argenté de Warhol et de ses toiles sérigraphiées à l'effigie du rocker. Aux Giardini, c'est une brume fraîche et épaisse masquant l'entrée du pavillon international que Lara Favaretto fait pleuvoir avec l'intention avouée de figurer le bouillonnement cérébral dont le bâtiment serait la marmite. Dans laquelle on rentre alors, presque à tâtons, perdu dans le brouillard, puis un peu méfiant, tant ce coup de l'écran de fumée a déjà été vu.

L'expo est bruyante, tapageuse et spectaculaire au point de paraître elle-même dépassée par le déferlement d'images, de sujets, d'objets, de matériaux qu'elle déverse. Elle multiplie les écrans qui, installés en forme de panoramique avec vision à 360 degrés (Hito Steyerl), de labyrinthe, ou de décor de maison en ruine (Kaari Upson), déversent un flot d'images numériques aux couleurs acides : un bain chromatique toxique et souvent kitsch où plus rien ne vous rattache à quelque fil narratif que ce soit, tant les revirements de situation et les changements de peau des personnages sont programmés en rythme accéléré. Les bandes-son, assourdissantes, ne sont pas en reste. Dans cette veine cacophonique, la vidéo de Christian Marclay exploise la concurrence (mais aussi nos tympanes et notre patience) en superposant *48 films de guerre* (son titre) dans un seul et même cadre, de telle sorte que cet indigeste sandwich d'images prend à l'écran la forme d'une espèce de vortex aspirant l'œil vers le néant. Le dernier dispositif est moins immersif que répulsif, tant il met les nerfs à rude épreuve : un long et étroit couloir éclairé par Ryoji Ikeda au feu blanc de néons fluorescents, que vous n'aurez d'autre choix que de traverser au pas de course à moins de finir en larmes.

Cette année, Venise, cette biennale plus que centenaire (la première édition eut lieu en 1895), épuise et malmène, étourdit et rudoie. Ce ramdam, fil rouge et bande-son folle d'une large partie de l'expo y fait sonner le chaos du monde, le désastre écologique bien avancé, notamment celui des océans, l'exploitation à outrance des ressources naturelles. La Nigériane installée à Bruxelles, Otobong Nkanga, déploie ainsi, au ras du sol de l'Arsenal, une longue sculpture en forme de veine de marbre, qui lui vaut le lion d'argent et qui se voit comme un paysage saigné à blanc. Le tapage, c'est encore celui des discours haineux des suprémacistes blancs américains que répercute l'Américain Arthur Jafa dans *The White Album*.

Cheval blanc chéri

Récompensé du lion d'or, l'artiste y entremêle des images de ces extrémistes armes à la main et insanités plein la bouche, aux portraits des êtres qu'il aime, y compris des animaux et ce cheval blanc qu'il chérit. Ici comme dans les autres pièces, le monde et ses troubles sont ce que les nouvelles technologies, les médias, les réseaux sociaux enregistrent, répercutent, et amplifient de lui. Le bordel qui est ici déversé est un bordel global où tout le monde parle en même temps, depuis son canapé face à sa webcam ou son téléphone. A l'image de cette installation de Neil Beloufa, qui assied le spectateur sur le banc de machines de salles de sport, face à des écrans. Ils montrent des soldats du monde entier témoignant, via Skype, de leur routine entre deux séries de pompes et de longues plages de jeux vidéos pour tuer le temps. A la biennale de Venise, la guerre, le désastre, le cataclysme écologique n'existent que sur les réseaux sociaux, en images de synthèse, énoncés par des voix de synthèse. «*May You Live in Interesting Times*» est à ce titre pessimiste : les expos actent la prise de pouvoir des machines. Et leur cède la place, fût-ce ironiquement.

Alors, les Giardini et l'Arsenal mettent au-devant de la scène des robots qui agitent violemment leur mécanique célibataire. A l'image de ceux du duo chinois Sun Yuan et Peng Yu, qui balaient puis projettent, en boucle, un liquide rouge sang contre les vitres de leur enclos. A l'image encore de ce portail en fer forgé programmé par Shilpa Gupta pour s'ouvrir et se fermer, *ad libitum*, contre la cimaise d'une salle du pavillon international, jusqu'à la creuser peu à peu. L'activité aussi vaine que débridée de ces machines qui assurent le spectacle à grand frais contraste avec l'inertie qui colle aux représentations anthropomorphes. A Venise, la figure humaine semble systématiquement cabossée, croûteuse, ridée, dévertébrée, paralysée et défaite. Ce sont les bustes de Nicole Eisenman, les masques grimaçants de Jean-Luc Moulène ou les personnages sans corps réduits, par Alexandra Bircken, à des tuniques de cuir trop larges, pendouillant à des échelles trop hautes. C'est encore l'immense sculpture en tissu de ce passager courbé en deux, la tête entre les mains, sur son siège d'avion (Yin Xiuzhen). Dans chacune des deux expos internationales, l'espèce humaine relève peu la tête, comme si elle attendait son heure, celle de sa fin.

Dans cette cohorte maussade et glauque de victimes un peu trop consentantes et résignées à la fin du monde, quelques œuvres manifestent plus d'allant et saisissent l'époque à bras-le-corps. Tout au long de l'Arsenal, la Sud-Africaine Zanele Muholi, qui se définit comme «*une activiste visuelle*» tendance *queer*, affiche ses autoportraits, qui la montrent peau noire brillante, coiffure à l'élégance extravagante, braquer fièrement ses yeux dans les nôtres. Quant à la Nigériane Njideka Akunyili Crosby, elle dépeint ses modèles noirs d'un pinceau feutré, dans des camaïeux soyeux qui tranchent avec les teintes kitsch et la surexcitation puérile des œuvres numériques, convoquées ici en trop grand nombre.

Sonorités éclectiques

Cette édition fait ainsi la part belle aux artistes du post-Internet, nerds turbulents dont les images liquides et criardes envahissent les salles d'expos au milieu des années 2000 avant qu'on ne s'en lasse. Cette édition vénitienne les rameute donc un peu à contretemps. Et finit par là où elle aurait dû commencer, avec la mélodieuse installation musicale et sculpturale de Tarek Atoui, où des objets aux formes et matières vernaculaires tournant sur eux-mêmes produisent un concert *live* dont les sonorités éclectiques semblent tout à la fois cavernueuses et aériennes, ancestrales et futuristes, incarnées et spectrales. Cet art-là, qui adopte une échelle relativement modeste, et en *live*, combine spectacle et expérimentation, science et magie, représente de manière plus pertinente les aspirations de la scène contemporaine. ◀

Judicaël Lavrador Envoyé spécial à Venise

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Art Quarterly



Robert Barry
"Tarek Atoui: Ways of Hearing"
Art Quarterly - Summer 2019

Ways of hearing

Composer and sound artist Tarek Atoui performs and exhibits internationally, and across disciplines, creating installations and participatory musical performances that explore how we listen to, feel and produce sound. As he prepares for his participation in the inaugural Yorkshire Sculpture International he discusses his work and the recent projects he'll be bringing together across multiple locations in Leeds and Wakefield. Interview by *Robert Barry*. Portrait by *Gary Calton*





Born in Beirut in 1980, Tarek Atoui studied electronic music in Paris. His lateral approach to the subject includes the creation of new instruments and collaborations that can involve both experts in diverse fields and broad public participation. These often take the form of long-term projects such as *WITHIN*, which investigates sound and music in relation to the deaf and the hard of hearing; *I/E*, an exploration of coastal cities through sound recording; and *The Reverse Collection*, instruments created by professional instrument-makers based solely on the sounds of musical exhibits from the collection of the Ethnological Museum at the Dahlem Centre in Berlin.

Robert Barry: You've said that when you're working in a particular place you don't like to prepare too much, because your expectations always come up against reality. Is that true of your approach to the project here in Yorkshire?
Tarek Atoui: Definitely! At the moment there is very intense preparation, building pieces bit by bit, but then the final structure is something I don't want to have overly planned. The way I work, when I enter a space and place a musical instrument or loudspeakers, is to work with the properties of the space. The moment of installation is a moment of composing, not just of setting things up technically. What I tend to do is put everything in the middle of the space, then start turning things on one by one and seeing how they 'dialogue' with

the space and also between themselves. Then the form and the composition of the space takes place from listening.

RB: Beyond the fact that you will be working once again with musical instruments and in collaboration with large groups of participants, what was the initial idea behind this project?

TA: This is the first time I'm going to reflect on my practice. Over the past seven years I've shifted from doing a lot of things on my own to collaborating with a lot of people, whether they are musicians from different backgrounds, instrument-makers or researchers. This led to major projects that stood over several years, such as *The Reverse Collection*, which started at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin [which holds more than 9,500 string, wind and percussion musical instruments from all over the world], and led to the creation of a new ensemble of instruments. Then there's *WITHIN*, the project that I'm still doing on sound and deafness, and *I/E*, that's about harbours and field recordings.

'Audiences including professional and amateur musicians, the hearing, the deaf, young and old, all come together'

Each of these is still ongoing in its own way, but bringing them together here is the start of a series of exhibitions that I call a 'synthesis' exhibition. For this, not just the instruments, but also the compositional principles – the ideas of collaborating, of improvising, of working with space, as well as the objects themselves – come together and are assembled again in different ways and according to different imaginaries. So in the context here, different audiences will be able to meet – from professional musicians to amateurs, from the hearing to the totally deaf, from young to old, from student to professional. All these aspects are getting combined and approached in the same way.

RB: So what you call a synthesis is not the same as a retrospective?

TA: No, not at all. Coming from the field of sound practices, it's really a synthesis in the sense of a synthesiser, where the oscillators and the sine waves [different sound-generating modules] are these projects, and the synthesiser is the sum of all these components.

RB: Can you tell me more about your project *WITHIN*, and how your ideas about the deaf experience of sound have developed over the course of this project?

TA: This started with an encounter with a school for the deaf in the United Arab Emirates. It was an experiment that I wanted to conduct. As I was coming from electronic music and working with



THE REVERSE SESSIONS, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KURIMANZUTTO, MEXICO CITY/NEW YORK. PHOTO BY STUDIO MICHELE ZABE. I/E © ALEXANDRE GIBRANGER



Facing page: I/E, performance at the Serralves Foundation, Porto, Portugal, 2018; top: *The Reverse Sessions*, performance at kurimanzutto, Mexico City, 2014 (a precursor to *The Reverse Collection*); above: I/E, performance at Durub Al Tawaya, Warehouse421, Abu Dhabi, 2017

low frequencies, I was quite interested in knowing how deaf people relate to this, because they sense vibration much better than us. So, I went with subwoofers [loudspeakers designed for low frequencies] and electronic tools that I had created, and spent time working with a school in Sharjah. I took on this task of saying, 'How can all the parameters of music-making be revisited from a deaf and hard-of-hearing perspective?' First it was an enquiry into sound, into listening and into modes of sound perception, then those enquiries evolved into mutated ideas of making instruments that can be heard and played by deaf *and* hearing people.

RB: Can you point to anything specific that you have learnt about the deaf experience of sound over the course of this project?

TA: It's the richness of listening that was opened to me. Listening was not just with the ears, as we would think, but it was also listening with the fingers, with the bones, with the eyes, listening to the body and to gestures. All these became modes of listening. If you consider that the reception mode in a performance situation is happening through all these channels, it invites you to remap a lot of the relationships inside that space.

You become more subtle about how to use vibration, and how to create compositions that articulate the visual, the gestural, the sonic and the vibrational in one complex discourse, and also to create situations where you are aware from the beginning that you're not trying

to create a level ground for everybody to get the same experience. You are, rather, creating a ground that is fertile, and then people can sculpt their own experience in it.

I often start my introductions at concerts saying, 'Nobody will hear the same thing, and there is no need to worry that you're not getting everything.' On the contrary, people are invited to walk or to change positions in the space, to sit near certain sound sources, or sometimes to take balloons and listen through the vibration of balloon membranes.

Also, the way you work with light inside the concert space is very different. If you are trying to focus on movement and gesture, then you end up lighting the space and not creating dark atmospheres. When it comes to equalising instruments, you wouldn't necessarily augment the low-end spectrum, but rather try to add what is missing for deaf people. So, all these things together, if we bring them to one observation, it's really that all senses are connected and interdependent. 'Handicap' becomes an expertise, actually.

RB: How did you become interested in sound?

TA: Through literature, I would say. I didn't come from a musical family. But I was reading a lot when I was a kid, and from literature it was theatre, and from theatre, I came to music. Electronic music is something I really discovered when I arrived in France, when I could start to buy records and mix them together and do

BOTH PHOTO BY THOR BRIDGESHAKE



experiments with them. Then at some point I entered the class of electroacoustic music – not really knowing what electroacoustic music was! It was just the possibility for me to keep on doing experiments with turntables.

RB: Do you think your approach is still influenced by this sense of the theatrical?

TA: Yes, maybe – at least the sensation of being on stage. Something I did in my early works was to bring back the body into the equation of making electroacoustic music.

RB: You're quite known for your very physical performances on stage. Is that a way of emphasising this role of the body?

TA: It's just a way of letting it free, of letting the body loose, and having it become part of the act of improvisation. And that's why I built these electronic interfaces that employed big surfaces and wide movements.

RB: You worked for a while as the co-artistic director of the STEIM [Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music] in Amsterdam.

TA: It was the director [the late] Michel Waisvisz who was the true reason why I got into this institution. The work of Waisvisz is super-important to me still today. He was thinking precisely about these issues of the body and improvisation. He had built these glove systems [*The Hands* (1984-)], a wearable system of gestural control for electronic music], a very dynamic

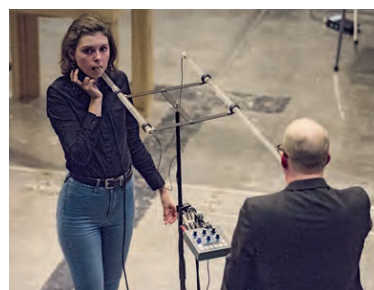
way to play samples and to do collage in real time with digital controllers in the shape of gloves. Also, he conducted research work on 'sufficient' electronic instruments that are not powered by electricity or which take electricity from the Sun or from the body.

Waisvisz was mobilising all these ideas on the one hand for professionals, putting them at the service of musicians and composers who were all residents at STEIM, and also working with young audiences, bringing these technologies inside schools and cultural centres.

RB: Your work remains, on one level, essentially music. What for you is the difference between art and music?

TA: On a conceptual level I don't think there's a difference. Both are as rich as one another, but unfortunately today we miss their complementarity. We've lost the interconnection of contemporary practices between and beyond mediums. Contemporary practices in sound, image, sculpture, cinema, if they all have a place within one institution, that would be the contemporary art institution.

For me, it's a difference that is much more practical, but it opens up to important things. To give you some examples: the music world today – unfortunately – doesn't allow a composer to work with duration, if you want to make a piece that lasts six months, that unfolds in a space over time. The music world doesn't work with this logic. It works more with shorter intervals. There are



Top and above: *WITHIN*, performance at Bergen Assembly, Bergen, 2016; facing page: *WITHIN*, performance at Le Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse, 2018



© LE PRINTEMPS DE SEPTEMBRE. PHOTO BY FRANCK ALIX

also situations for dealing with reception and performance that the music world does not offer – for example, where people could encounter something by chance. So the art world is offering material, spatial frameworks that are very interesting to explore for musicians today, that are at the core of the contemporary discourse.

RB: One project that has marshalled a lot of different institutions, *The Reverse Collection*, is interesting in the way that it turns the colonial gaze back on itself. What are your thoughts on the sometimes vexed issue of appropriation in music and art?

TA: *The Reverse Collection* unfolded from these ideas of appropriation and decolonisation. But I didn't want to tackle them frontally. More interesting, for me, was the work of ethnomusicology and what researchers were doing inside this institution [the Ethnological Museum at the Dahlem Centre, Berlin], than what brought these instruments to the institution. When you come to the collection of a museum of instruments, you immediately realise that the instruments are not played any more. They are preserved and they are treated – sometimes chemically, sometimes physically. Then the instrument is at rest, *ad vitam* [forever].

I asked the conservators of the museum, 'What's the purpose of this instrument, besides being exhibited as a sculpture?' They say, 'It's material for research. Ethnomusicologists can come and measure it and make a replica, but you

don't play it.' That's where the idea came of saying, 'Why not try and make replicas out of the sound and not the model?' Then we entered this long debate with the museum. 'Is it possible to play these instruments one more time, and in what conditions and how?' Of course the first answer you get is 'No'. Then negotiation starts.

The idea was not to propose something in conflict with the traditional methods of ethnomusicologists or to put them in question. It's just taking another parallel. This is one way to make a replica. What is another way?

RB: There are instruments that are 40,000 years old, such as a flute made out of an animal bone. When you approach creating new instruments, how much do you feel you're still part of this 40,000-year tradition?

TA: I think the practice is really still the same. It brings us to the question of who's doing what for whom? Is the musical piece coming from the existence of the instrument, or is the instrument coming from a musical idea or a composition?

'Listening is not just with the ears; it is with the fingers, the bones, the eyes, listening to the body and to gestures'

Both are valid, and this has been the dynamic ongoing thread, instruments coming from engineering and physics, and instruments coming from creative ideas and necessities. Techniques and technologies transform, but it is still the same primitive need.

RB: A lot of your work seems to approach sounds from beneath in different ways. In *I/E*, you're taking sounds from underground or underwater, elsewhere you're looking at sounds below the threshold of human hearing. Even *The Reverse Collection* suggests a kind of ethnomusicology from below. How should we understand this sense of 'beneathness'?

TA: It's more the idea of covering a spectrum, an attempt at thinking what's outside the margins or outside our bandwidth, or outside our reach as human beings – and sometimes also outside our speed as moving bodies or computing entities. That's the crucial thing: this sensibility to what we might be missing.

● Tarek Atoui's work can be seen as part of 'Yorkshire Sculpture International 2019', 22 June to 29 September, at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds Art Gallery, the Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and outdoor locations across Leeds and Wakefield. yorkshire-sculpture.org, free to all

Robert Barry is a writer and composer, and visual arts editor at The Quietus.

Le Monde

Impressions vénitiennes de déjà-vu

Spectaculaire, numérique,
à surreprésentation américaine,
la 58^e édition de la Biennale
révèle peu de surprises

ARTS
VENISE (ITALIE)

Luna Park? », s'interroge le quotidien *La Nuova di Venezia e Mestre* à propos de la 58^e édition de la Biennale de Venise. Non sans raison, car on y trouve beaucoup d'attractions, au sens Disney du terme, et le goût du spectaculaire. Et il est facile de s'y perdre, plus encore cette année que les précédentes. Il faut rappeler que la Biennale associe une grande exposition d'art actuel, signée d'un commissaire qui occupe l'Arsenal et le Pavillon international aux Giardini, et, d'autre part et dans les mêmes lieux, les pavillons nationaux. De ceux-ci, au nombre de 90 cette année, les gouvernements concernés sont, plus ou moins directement, responsables. Depuis longtemps, les pays, grands ou petits, démocratiques ou pas, savent l'importance d'une participation à Venise, le « soft power » de l'art ayant, croit-on, une image plus désirable qu'une formation de chasseurs-bombardiers. Or, ce qui frappe d'abord cette année,

c'est la discordance de tons, plus accentuée que d'ordinaire, entre les deux manifestations.

La Biennale est confiée chaque fois à un commissaire différent. Cette année officie l'Américain Ralph Rugoff, qui dirige habituellement la Hayward Gallery, à Londres. Il ne s'agit donc pas d'un débutant, et sa Biennale de Lyon, en 2015, était plutôt une réussite. Il l'avait nommée « La Vie moderne », titre vague. Celle de Venise a été baptisée « *May You Live in Interesting Times* » (« Puissiez-vous vivre en des temps intéressants »), titre qui n'engage non plus à rien.

Solution de facilité

Et c'est en effet la première impression : rien d'un manifeste, peu de risques, rien de très saillant ou de très provocant, un échantillon représentatif de l'art actuel. A ce détail près : l'art actuel vu des Etats-Unis, surreprésentés. Sur les 83 artistes retenus, 26 vivent sur le territoire nord-américain, ont calculé nos confrères d'*Artnet News*, près d'un tiers du total. L'attention du commissaire est bien plus relâchée quand il s'agit d'Amérique latine et d'Afrique. Celle-ci ne peut être représentée par les Afri-

cains-Américains, qui traitent d'expériences et d'histoires différentes. Aussi n'est-elle là que grâce à la Norvégo-Nigériane Frida Orupabo, et ses travaux sur le métissage et le racisme, et à Otobong Nkanga, également nigériane, qui évoque symboliquement l'exploitation des ressources naturelles et des populations en dessinant au sol une longue veine de verre et de marbre. L'Inde bénéficie heureusement de plus de considération : photographies de Khyentse Norbu, de Soham Gupta ou de Gauri Gill, et sobre et sombre hommage à tous les poètes emprisonnés dans l'histoire de l'humanité rendu par Shilpa Gupta. Leur présence est l'une des rares escales hors du *mainstream* du monde – et du marché – occidental, avec celle du Libanais Tarek Atoui. Ce compositeur d'électro-acoustique a recueilli en Chine des pratiques instrumentales traditionnelles, qu'il transpose dans des formes étranges, disques de céramique ou violons bizarres, qui produisent des sons nouveaux tout en étant des sculptures très séduisantes.

Il y a d'autant moins de surprises que M. Rugoff n'a donc choisis que 83 artistes – une cinquantaine de moins que d'ordinaire –

et voulu qu'ils soient tous à la fois au Pavillon international et à l'Arsenal. Décision discutable, qui restreint la diversité et peut apparaître comme une solution de facilité assez paresseuse. Décision dangereuse pour les artistes eux-mêmes. Il y a ceux pour qui l'épreuve est cruelle, tel Danh Vo, Danois d'origine vietnamienne mis naguère en vedette par la collection Pinault. Il y a les artistes de grande qualité dont on a souvent vu des œuvres meilleures, les Américains Jimmie Durham et Henry Taylor ou le Suisse Christian Marclay. Il y a ceux que menace l'académisation de leurs premiers et remarquables travaux, comme la photographe sud-africaine Zanele Muholi ou la peintre américaine Julie Mehretu.

D'autres échouent à être également convaincants dans les deux lieux. La terrifiante vidéo d'Arthur Jafa *The White Album*, consacrée aux suprémacistes blancs aux Etats-Unis, se doit d'être vue *in extenso*, mais on se passerait sans peine de son installation de pneus enchaînés. Frappante est *Eskalation*, installation de l'Allemande Alexandra Bircken, qui suspend des corps figurés par des bâches en latex à des poutres ou à des échelles à l'Arsenal : on croirait du Piranèse, mais combien banales sont ses deux motos découpées afin, paraît-il, de « pacifier » un engin d'une virilité excessive.

Nostalgie des « sixties »

Il faudrait aussi lui dire qu'Arman a déjà fait ça, bien avant sa naissance (en 1967). Il faudrait montrer un catalogue de Tetsumi Kudo à Christine et Margaret Wertheim, dont les dioramas de co-raux sont loin de la puissance symbolique des paysages d'une nature dévastée qu'il fabriquait dans les années 1960. Cette décennie est très présente, la Biennale ayant cette année un côté pop art de troisième ou quatrième génération dans les techniques (réemploi de la publicité et des images de presse, surimpressions, collages) et les sujets (la consommation, les marques). Alex Da Corte refait du Rosenquist en une jolie maquette, avec des enseignes miniatures électriques. Tavares Strachan refait du Hamilton ou du Paolozzi en plus grand, et Carol Bove refait du Chamberlain. On croirait que M. Rugoff, né en 1957, cultive la nostalgie des années de son enfance.

Son autre tropisme, ce sont les nouvelles technologies, le numérique dans toutes ses applications, métamorphoses, formes liquides, images de synthèse, robotique... Les spécialistes se nomment Ian Cheng, Ryoji Ikeda, Jon Rafman, Hito Steyerl, le duo Sun Yuan et Peng Yu. On ferait volontiers leur éloge si leurs travaux, pour les uns, ne suscitaient l'ennui tant ils sont longs et redondants, et si d'autres ne faisaient penser que l'on a déjà vu mieux, réalisé avec bien plus de rythme et d'invention : dans les jeux vidéo, les séries et, depuis longtemps, au cinéma grâce à *Starships Troopers* (1998), de Paul Verhoeven, les *Alien* depuis 1979, sans remonter à Kubrick et son *2001* de 1968. Le robot peintre énervé et le robot serpent furieux de Sun Yuan et Peng Yu ne sont pas à la hauteur de telles comparaisons. On aurait aussi pu s'attendre à des réflexions sur les usages militaires et répressifs de ces nouvelles technologies, mais les « temps intéressants » de Rugoff sont peu politiques – hors le territoire

ques beaux moments loufoques, dont une visite en fanfare du Palais idéal du Facteur Cheval.

Ratages douloureux

Par comparaison, les pavillons voisins (Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne, Japon, Danemark) sont d'un conformisme fastidieux. On y est sérieux et sobre jusqu'à l'ennui. Aux Giardini, en dehors de M^{me} Prouvost, la récolte du reste est réduite : le pavillon de l'Espagne d'Itziar Okariz et Sergio Prego sur la consommation muséale, la Grèce, avec le récit politique de Zafos Xagoraris sur la Biennale de 1948 et les musiques de verre de Panos Charalambous, l'installation vidéo d'Angelica Mesiti pour l'Australie – quoique un peu pesante par moments. Il y a aussi quelques ratages douloureux, la palme revenant à l'Egypte, où des sphinx en plastique doré ont non seulement perdu leur nez, mais aussi leur visage, remplacé par des écrans... A moins qu'on n'accorde la palme aux poupées encaçées du pavillon belge, car rien n'est plus triste qu'une blague qui tombe à plat.

Même alternance à l'Arsenal. Ne conservons que les réussites : au pavillon du Pérou, les réflexions satiriques de Christian Bendayan sur le stéréotype de l'Indien cannibale, abondamment diffusé par l'anthropologie, la propagande chrétienne et le tourisme en mal d'exotisme, sont mises en images sous forme d'*azulejos* et d'assemblages à base de papillons ; l'installation nocturne et onirique de Joël Andrianomearisoa marque la première présence de Madagascar à la Biennale ; ou encore, l'installation et la vidéo *Written on Water*, de Marco Godinho, au pavillon du Luxembourg, qui associe Homère au désastre actuel des réfugiés noyés en Méditerranée avec une ampleur poétique évitant le pathos. ■

PHILIPPE DAGEN
ET HARRY BELLET

Biennale internationale d'art
de Venise, jusqu'au 24 novembre.
Du mardi au dimanche,
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A partir de 25 €. Labiennale.org

office



Sound it Out

May 14, 2019

What exactly is sound, anyway? Does it exist on the physical plane, or is it merely a sensation we take for granted? Or is it essentially just a vibration, a movement in the ether that quivers from its origin to the ear, becoming, in the end, just a signal sent to the brain?

And when we make a sound, what are we creating?

These are the riddles that dance around you when you experience Tarek Atoui's work at kurimanzutto. Based on the mechanics of a church organ, which distributes compressed air to the flutes above, Atoui has constructed a version where the whole thing horizontally snakes across the floor of the gallery, the "flutes" to which the air, released by a leaf blower, is distributed resemble drums-cum-coffee tables, each one having a unique intended interaction with the viewer.

As he presented the work, his toddler son scampered about the little tables, demonstrating rather flawlessly how you're supposed to navigate the piece: little jingle bells are placed on a vibrating drum-table in one corner; heavy bags placed on the central console to control the distribution of the compressed air; balancing levers lightly tapped in order to send them swaying; sliding trap doors on the sides adjusted to create variations in pitch. The sound it produces is an atonal thrum, a tremor felt throughout the body. It is little wonder that the artist is interested in how sound is experienced by the deaf, and his project is an exercise in music made to be experienced by those who cannot hear.



Above: Installation views of 'Organ Within.'

Tell me about the project.

This project is actually the result of two years of work and development on an idea that started with the synthesis of different projects over the last 5-7 years, I'd been working a lot with experimental music and what instruments allow in terms of new ideas of performing and collaborating, improvising, scoring. What I've been working on is an exploration between art and music, navigating ideas of an object as a tool for finding new ways of expression.

So it's like a deconstructed church organ — why a church organ?

Well, because it's historical and symbolical, also its sonority — it's one of the most complete instruments.

Do you feel like there's a religious connection?

Not necessarily, but there's a spiritual quality without being necessarily religious, you see, in terms of sound.

You know what it reminds me of is the Tibetan singing bowls.

Sure, it has this sine wave quality to it. The resonance of the sound is very pure.

It goes right into your brain. Have you explored that?

There is a very strong connection between the sound of an organ flute and the sound of a gong or a singing bowl.

It also reminds me of the conductor who's deaf – did you think of Beethoven?

Yeah, of course, definitely. But beyond the anecdote, there's lots of subtlety to the story.

Can you describe that project in the back room a little bit?

It's the first iteration of an orchestra I built for deaf and hearing people, we started a several-week long program of composers and residents working with amateurs, professionals, deaf and hearing people, and it's a very long, deep exploration of what it means to play together outside of the ears and outside of any consideration of who's deaf, who's hearing, putting all these considerations aside.

How do you feel the deaf people who participated reacted?

The reactions are multiple, but somebody like Robert, who conducted the orchestra, we've ended up working together regularly.



Above: Installation views.

And he's deaf?

Yes, the conductor is profoundly deaf, he doesn't hear anything. But what they take out of it could be one shot experience where they participate to deconstruct precepts or preconceptions about what sound is for deaf people, or what it means to play an instrument or make music. It can go much further into a series of collaborations that aren't one shot.

Why deaf people? What led you to this?

It's the intuition of thinking that deaf people have another understanding of sound on a daily basis than us, and I was asking, what is that like?

Are you close with a deaf person?

A lot now because of this project.

Were you a musician before, or what made you so interested in sound?

I studied sound art. You see, I wasn't a musician, I'm not a professionally trained musician, I really studied sound from the perspective of contemporary composition and interactive composition, and it being physical matter than relates to space which relates to the body — so these notions were there from the beginning.

Is this your son?

Yes

What's his name?

Sohal.

Where are you from?

Lebanon.

And how old is he?

Two and half.

He was the star of the show.

He knows how to play, he's very familiar with all this.

Did he influence the project at all?

No, not really, but he was there through the process.

He was the star of the show.

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Did he influence the project at all?

No, not really, but he was there through the process.

So you're going to do a series of concerts with this or?

Yes, there's a series of residencies that start next week. Every week is a different guest that works with this instrument, and then at the end there is this big finale at the Guggenheim.

And how are they going to manipulate it? Basically they can do whatever they want?

Yes, yes. I'm very curious to see their appropriation and interpretation of the thing.

And how did you choose these people, are they artists or?

It was actually through my assistant Robert (different from the conductor), who controls the music shop, he chose notorious people or people who have been here in the experimental, improv, electronic scene.

So deejays and artists and people like that?

Deejays, sound artists, improvisors, electronic musicians. Some are even deaf, of course.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

<http://artradarjournal.com/2018/06/11/the-ground-from-the-land-to-the-sea-tarek-atouis-rhythm-and-improvisation-at-ntu-cca-singapore/>

Art Radar

“The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore

Lebanese artist Tarek Atoui presents four projects on rhythm and improvisation at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

“The Ground: From the Land to the Sea” brings together some of the most important works by the sound artist, forming a musical and spatial composition in the gallery.



Tarek Atoui, “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”, 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Tarek Atoui’s exhibition **“The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”** at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore) is an introspective, visceral experience. Pulling together an assortment of pieces from four projects by the Lebanese sound artist – including *I/E* (2015-ongoing), *The Ground* (2013-ongoing), *The Reverse Collection* (2014-16) and *WITHIN* (2012-13) – NTU CCA Singapore’s exhibition space is converted into an echo chamber that houses Atoui’s interwoven sounds and musical objects.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

<http://artradarjournal.com/2018/06/11/the-ground-from-the-land-to-the-sea-tarek-atouis-rhythm-and-improvisation-at-ntu-cca-singapore/>

Art Radar



Tarek Atoui’s performance during opening night of his exhibition “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”, 23 March 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

“The Ground: From the Land to the Sea” is not only an opportunity to familiarise oneself with **Tarek Atoui’s** diverse oeuvre, but is also a chance to consider the works’ connections to each other, with each component of Atoui’s practice coming together in this exhibition to become an ensemble, a composition. Curator **Khim Ong**, who co-curated the exhibition with Professor Ute Meta Bauer, told *Art Radar*:

The composition developed in the space. Tarek moved the instruments around, listened to how the space responded to the sounds, and tested different combinations. He composed as he went along, and everything was orchestrated on-site.



Tarek Atoui, “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”, 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

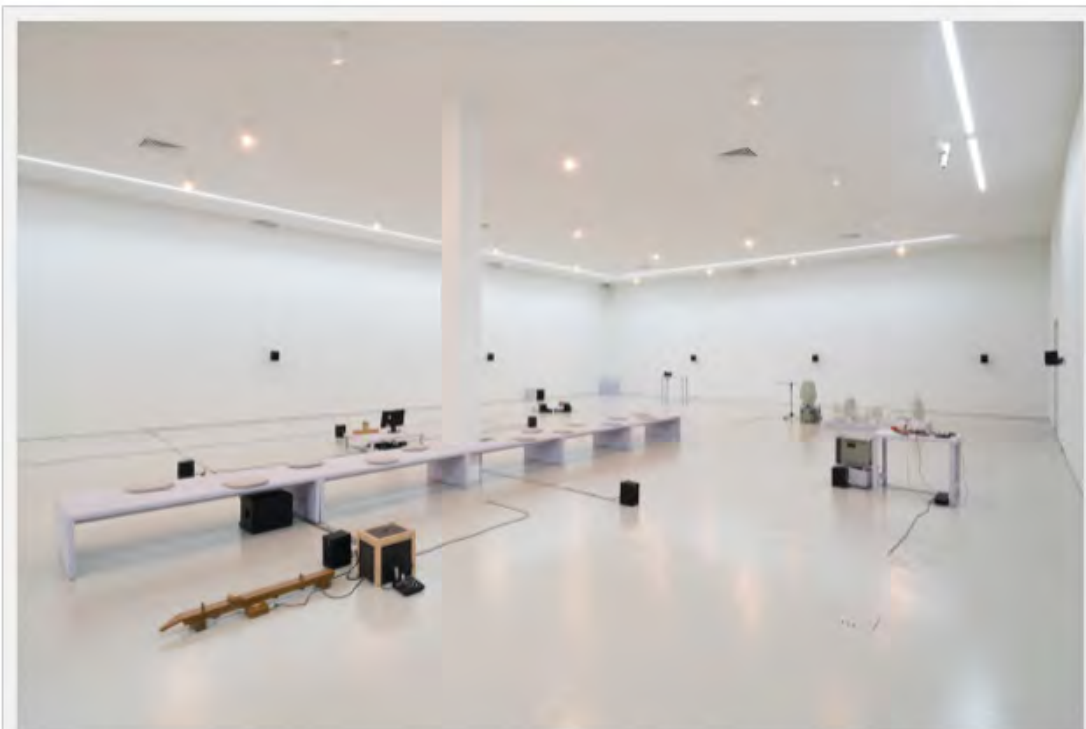
<http://artradarjournal.com/2018/06/11/the-ground-from-the-land-to-the-sea-tarek-atouis-rhythm-and-improvisation-at-ntu-cca-singapore/>

Art Radar



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

On view until 24 June 2018, the exhibition at **NTU CCA Singapore** also provides a unique perspective on the centre's current overarching research topic, "CLIMATES. HABITATS. ENVIRONMENTS.", which explores issues related to global ecosystems. Through collected audio samples and the creation of new music-making contraptions, the audience is thrust into an audio-visual environment that collapses the boundaries between geographic places (and, in some way, transcends them) to invoke sonic meditation through a playful symphony of aural imagery.



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

<http://artradarjournal.com/2018/06/11/the-ground-from-the-land-to-the-sea-tarek-atouis-rhythm-and-improvisation-at-ntu-cca-singapore/>

Art Radar



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Surrounding the exhibition space are twelve speakers that project sounds of underwater environments as well as human and industrial activities. Collected from harbours that the composer visited in Athens and Abu Dhabi, as well as waterfront sites and islands along Singapore’s shores, the audio loop is a presentation of Atoui’s ongoing project entitled *I/E*. These collected audio samples reverberate across the entire room, and support the cacophony of sounds coming from the instruments dispersed across the gallery space. Many of these unique musical objects were made collaboratively with other musicians through projects such as *The Ground*. In this ongoing series, Atoui works with luthiers, craftsmen and electronic engineers to develop instruments based on his observations of nature in the Pearl River Delta in China.



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

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Art Radar



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Situated near the entrance of the exhibition are beautifully-displayed, textured ceramic discs from two bodies of work, namely *The Spin Library* and *The Spin Library / Series #2*. The former was inspired by patterns in nature and were created by Chinese artist Wu Lou. The latter was a collaboration between Atoui and Wu Lou that originated from Atoui's exploration of Tarab and classical Arab music. In "The Gound: From the Land to the Sea", these discs are played on turntables, one of which Atoui developed for the exhibition.

Unlike regular turntables, *The Turntable/ Study #1* rotates at irregular speeds, allowing different interpretations of the ridges and grooves of the discs to unfold over the course of time. The interplay between rhythm and improvisation energises the white cube that contains Atoui's projects, and expands the audience's understanding of an exhibition. The works in Atoui's "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea" are not static artworks or a single sound piece playing on a loop. Their differentiations over time, though slight, parallel the ever-changing environments and relationships that Atoui captures through his projects and collaborations.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

<http://artradarjournal.com/2018/06/11/the-ground-from-the-land-to-the-sea-tarek-atouis-rhythm-and-improvisation-at-ntu-cca-singapore/>

Art Radar



Tarek Atoui's performance during opening night of his exhibition "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 23 March 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Aside from the automated instruments, Atoui has also invited several Singaporean and international musicians to respond to and play some of the musical devices on view. Each invited musician will occupy NTU CCA Singapore's gallery space for several days, appropriating Atoui's installation to create a new body of sounds. Audience members wandering into the exhibition may or may not encounter some of these musicians. Although NTU CCA Singapore has posted dates of when the artists are working in the space, they have chosen to keep the times of these musical interventions anonymous. Curator Khim Ong explains:

It's an unexpected encounter for the audience. It's almost as if you're stepping into someone's studio. It's not a performance.



Tarek Atoui, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 24 March – 24 June 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, installation view. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Wrong, Jean. « “The Ground: From the Land to the Sea”: Tarek Atoui’s Rhythm and Improvisation at NTU CCA Singapore », *Art Radar*, June 11, 2018.

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Art Radar



Tarek Atoui's performance during opening night of his exhibition "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", 23 March 2018, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. Image courtesy NTU CCA Singapore.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

By creating an unconventional aural environment for musicians and the audience to come into contact with each other, Atoui has created a musical platform as much as he has created a score. In this platform, traditional ideas of how musicians and the audience are supposed to behave melt away. In "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea", the playing of and appreciation of music is not a spectacle of performance, but an introspective relationship with the instruments and the sounds they produce. The audience, the musician, the artist, the gallery space and the environments that inspired Atoui are seamlessly integrated into a whole composition. To quote American composer, accordionist and a central figure in the development of experimental and post-war electronic art music, Pauline Oliveros,

Listening can be focused, linear and exclusive and listening can be open, global and inclusive.

"The Ground: From the Land to the Sea" by Tarek Atoui is on view from 24 March to 24 June 2018 at NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Block 43 Malan Road, Singapore 109443.



Installation view of **TAREK ATOUI**'s "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea," NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018. Courtesy NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

THE GROUND: FROM THE LAND TO THE SEA TAREK ATOUI

A strange etymological affinity between "composition" and "compost"—both taken from the Latin *componere*, meaning "to put together, to collect whole from several parts"—found its way into Paris-based, Lebanese sound artist Tarek Atoui's most recent solo exhibition, "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea." Following Atoui's preoccupation with the latent possibilities of sound composition, the exhibition was devised for both an immediate encounter and a durational unfolding, where processes of deep listening, activation and collaboration were crucial in "de-composing" the encoded expectations of performance.

Yee, Marcus. « The ground: From the land to the sea Tarek Atoui », *ArtAsiaPacific*, June, 2018.
<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/TheGroundFromTheLandToTheSea>

ArtAsiaPacific

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TAREK ATOUI, *I/E*, 2015, photo documentation of recordings in Athens. Copyright Alexandre Guirkingner. Courtesy the artist.



TAREK ATOUI, *I/E*, 2015, photo documentation of recordings in Athens. Copyright Alexandre Guirkingner. Courtesy the artist.

Yee, Marcus. « The ground: From the land to the sea Tarek Atoui », *ArtAsiaPacific*, June, 2018.
<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/TheGroundFromTheLandToTheSea>

ArtAsiaPacific

Upon entering the gallery, one is immediately immersed in aural washes of trickling water and snapping shrimp emanating from a nearby speaker. Crackling static from maritime communications punctuates this repose. These were sounds taken from the project *I/E* (2015–), a growing library of field recordings from harbors and coastlines by Atoui and his collaborator, French sound artist Éric La Casa. Moving around the garland of twelve speakers, one hears the dawn chorus of Elefsina, a city on the outskirts of Athens, emanating from the corner of the gallery, occasionally blending into the mangrove song of cicadas. The listener was enfolded within a continuum of sound, space and moving bodies, rather than dissolved into an unintelligible sonic bath.

Drawn from cities such as Abu Dhabi, Athens and Singapore, the composition of field recordings revealed the connective tissue between the land and the sea as a dynamic constellation of trade, security, ritual and ecology. Diverging from the academic discipline of ecoacoustics, these recordings did not claim to be a mimetic documentary of site. Instead, Atoui emphasized sonic abstraction, an untethering of sound from location that brings to mind Robert Smithson's distinction between the site and non-site. This paradoxical encounter with the soundscape chimed between placement and displacement, immersion and attention. By lending a listening ear to the circumambient track of place, the location became at once foreign and intimate.

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Chantal Crousel



Installation view of TAREK ATOUI's "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea," NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018. Courtesy NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

Yee, Marcus. « The ground: From the land to the sea Tarek Atoui », *ArtAsiaPacific*, June, 2018.
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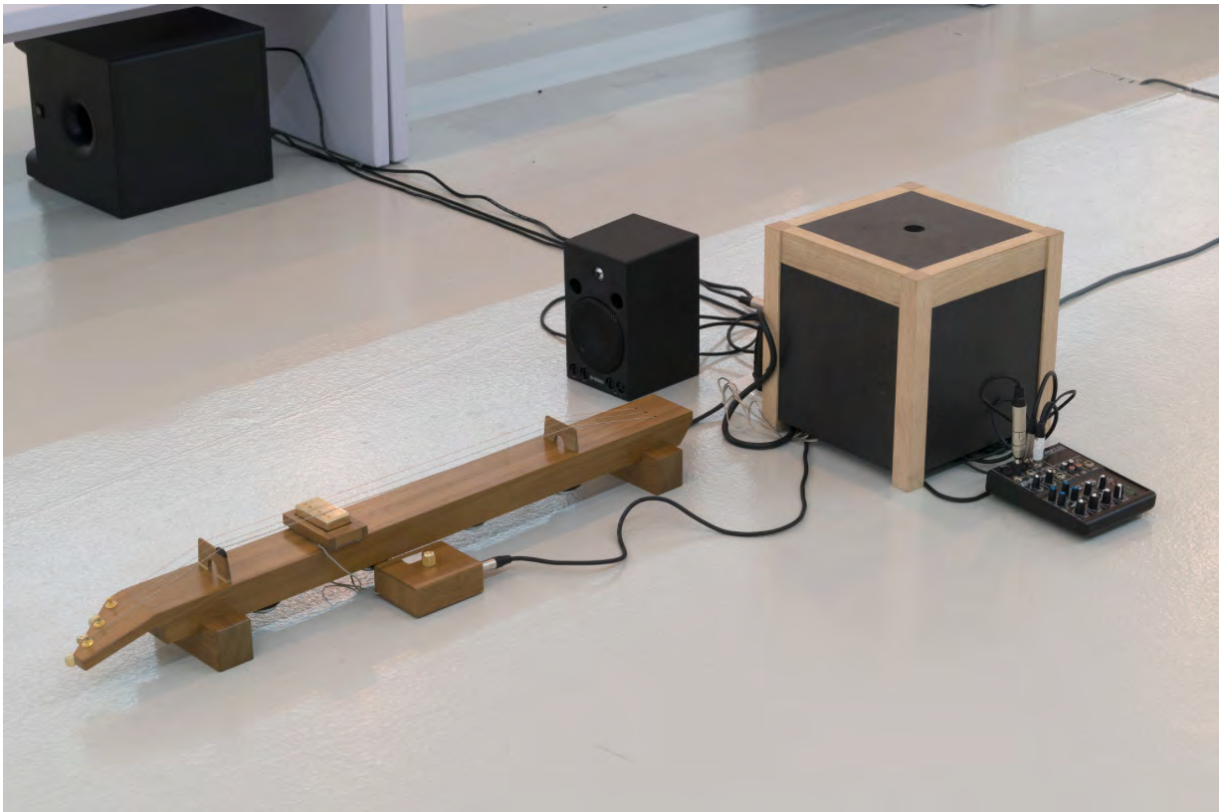
Installation view of TAREK ATOUI's *The Spin Library* (detail), 2017, ceramic discs, turntable and various objects, dimensions variable, at "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea," NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018. Courtesy NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.



Installation view of TAREK ATOUI's *The Turntable / Study #1* (detail), 2018, programmed turntable, dimensions variable, at "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea," NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018. Courtesy NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

Instruments developed for *The Ground* (2017)—a five-year project in collaboration with Mirrored Gardens, a field-cum-creative space in rural Guangzhou that falls on the intersections between contemporary art and agricultural practices—produced further resonances between sound and site as they transposed the artist's observations on agricultural, architectural and craft practices along the Pearl River Delta. Collections of such instruments were on display in *The Spin Library* and *The Turntable / Study #1* (both 2018), which were more resonantly environmental in their formal interplay of sound and materiality, as opposed to the indexing of nature. Listeners were re-tuned to the contact between surfaces as a locus of sound. The set-up involved a collection of ceramic discs played on a record player, hacked to synchronize with external sounds. A wide selection of styluses, from branches to feathers, traced the granules and grooves of the gyrating discs, some beating to rhythms derived from classical Arabic music.

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Chantal Crousel



Installation view of **TAREK ATOUI's** *The Trichord*, 2017, string instrument, dimensions variable, at "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea," NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2018. Courtesy NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

Likewise, *The Trichord* (2017) was an instrument playable by both hearing and deaf persons. Aside from plucking its strings, the pressure of one's hand on the instrument's dense wooden frame absorbs its reverberation, thus modulating the feedback loop. To listen is also to feel its vibrations across the floor, the eddying of the air. Developed for WITHIN—a project exploring diverse ways of experiencing sound by deaf and hearing people—*The Trichord* was not merely an instrument for the symbolic inclusion of the deaf, but also for hearing persons to experience multimodal ways of listening. These instruments intertwined tactile, visual and aural elements, transporting one to a sensorium where sound is unignorablely relational, inseparable from its very plasticity.

Yee, Marcus. « The ground: From the land to the sea Tarek Atoui », *ArtAsiaPacific*, June, 2018.
<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/TheGroundFromTheLandToTheSea>

ArtAsiaPacific

Collaboration invoked another ecology in the exhibition. Atoui, together with Singaporean music curator Mark Wong, and sound artists Yuen Chee Wai and Vivian Wang, invited a host of sound practitioners—many of whom are from Singapore's experimental music scene—to tinker with the installations throughout the exhibition's run. Vivian Wang, the first of twelve guests, mentioned "a sense of bliss" from her explorations, and that learning to play the instruments was like "getting to know someone", a process that was not undergirded by mastery. Without the pressure to perform, these interventions accumulated into an abundance of tactics in hearing and playing for the committed listener, unraveling the contingent, prototypical ethos behind these instruments.

"The Ground" transformed the gallery into a sonorous instrument, a jamming studio, or a listening alcove, flouting any expectations of finish and fidelity. After all, the authoritative score is mere paper—material for compost. It is in the breakdown of sound that capacious ways of listening, or rather, sensing, re-emerges.

Tarek Atoui's "The Ground: From the Land to the Sea" is on view at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore until June 24, 2018.

frieze

TAREK ATOUI Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, France

The gallery fills with a gusting wave of bass. I can, of course, hear it – it's like an engine revving from the bottom of a well – but more striking is the way it feels, thrumming through my chest, neither inside nor outside but, somehow, both at once. The musician is playing something called a Sub Ink, a sub-woofer hooked up to a drawing mounted on a music stand: sounds are produced by fingers tracing the graphite marks. It is just one of a collection of unusual musical devices filling the main space at Galerie Chantal Crousel: there are also wooden tables mounted with large metal springs and screws, a laptop operated by a series of finger pads laid out like a hand, and a floor-based cockpit of differently textured textile samples, each of which is connected to a range of noises.

This strange orchestra is part of 'WITHIN', an ongoing collaboration between artist Tarek Atoui and a growing number of individuals, groups and organizations. Atoui launched the project in 2012 to explore the ways that deafness can make us think differently about the experience of both sound and performance. So far, there have been iterations at Sharjah Biennale in 2013, the Berkeley Art Museum in 2015 and several institutions in Europe – most recently the Bergen Assembly in Norway last year. As part of the project's development, Atoui has worked with the curatorial duo Council (Sandra Terdjman and Gregory Castera) as well as sound engineers, composers and groups of people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Atoui's aim is for these instruments to end up in a music school or educational institution. In the meantime, they are in regular use at Chantal Crousel.

The exhibition, which also includes five videos of the project's previous

iterations, involves a busy programme of events. Aside from the Sub Ink, the highlight of the opening performance was the playing of the Ouroboros. Taking its name from the ancient symbol of a serpent eating its own tail, the instrument is made up of two lengths of transparent tubing held horizontally in the air. The player – one of several professional musicians performing alongside Atoui – places speakers to their throat and lips before one of the tubes. By opening and closing their mouth, the player controls the Ouroboros's sounds: the effect is soft but insistent, like a spectral calling from through the trees.

On my second visit to the gallery, the Ouroboros had a very different effect. I arrived as Atoui was giving a lesson to a group of deaf children. One girl struggled to control the instrument: her mouth opened and nothing came out but her determination was striking. So, too, was the way the children communicated: through touch, gesture and a constant attentiveness to the actions and intentions of one another. Sign language requires such focus. It also requires clear sightlines, as Atoui explained, citing pioneering deaf architect Jeffrey Mansfield, in an excellent interview in the exhibition booklet.

Watching the children, it became clear that Atoui's strange instruments are less geared towards a performance for an audience than towards facilitating a process of discovery. This involves a different conception of play and of sound: not only heard from afar but felt as a texture at the fingertips or a humming through the chest. As an onlooker, it's hard not to feel left out, but this only reinforces Atoui's premise: that there are limits to both sight and sound, limits at which each sense blurs, often unnoticed, into something else entirely.

Tom Jeffreys

This page

Above
Jorge Macchi,
Still Song, 2005,
installation view

Below
Tarek Atoui, *WITHIN*,
2017, performance
documentation

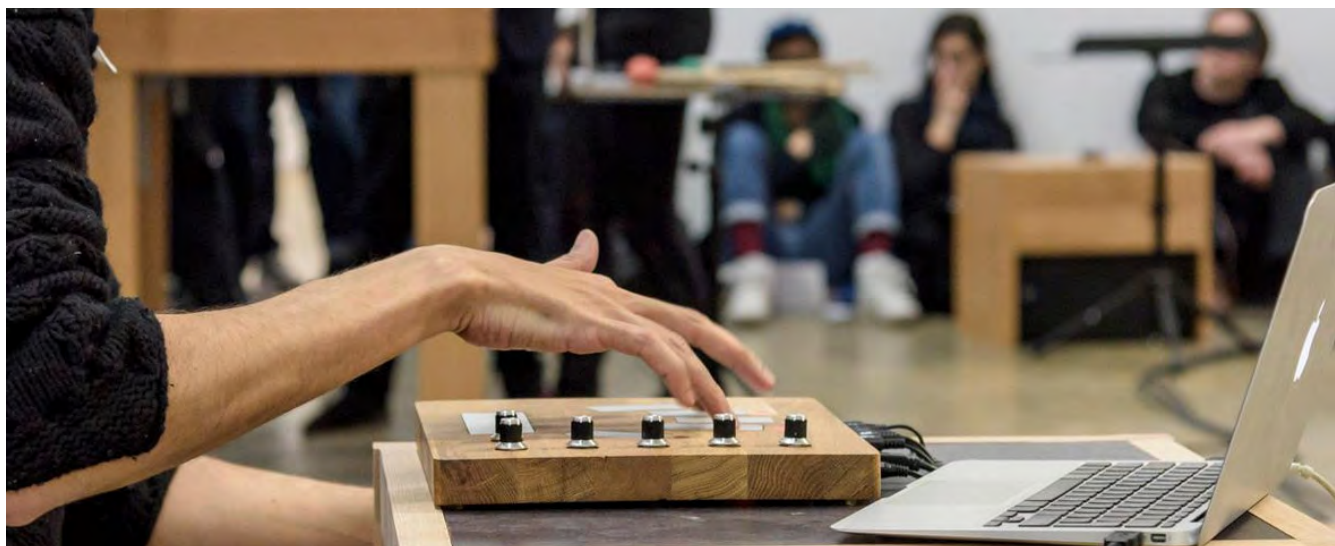


Above
Gian Maria Tosatti,
*Sette Stagioni
dello Spirito* (Seven
Seasons of the Spirit),
2016–17, installation
view

Below
Tarek Atoui, *WITHIN*,
2017, installation view



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REVIEW – 10 MAR 2017

Tarek Atoui

Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, France

BY TOM JEFFREYS

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Tarek Atoui, 'WITHIN', performance view, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris, February 18, 2017. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; photograph: Florian Kleinfenn

This strange orchestra is part of 'WITHIN', an ongoing collaboration between artist Tarek Atoui and a growing number of individuals, groups and organizations. Atoui launched the project in 2012 to explore the ways that deafness can make us think differently about the experience of both sound and performance. So far, the project has had iterations at Sharjah Biennale in 2013, the Berkeley Art Museum in 2015 and several institutions in Europe – most recently the Bergen Assembly in Norway last year. As part of the project's development, Atoui has worked with the curatorial duo Council (Sandra Terdjman and Gregory Castera) as well as sound engineers, composers and groups of people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Atoui's aim is for these instruments to end up in a music school or educational institution. In the mean time, they are in regular use at Chantal Crousel.

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PAROLES D'ARTISTE **TAREK ATOUI**

« La performance est une expérimentation »

À la galerie Chantal Crousel, à Paris, Tarek Atoui présente ses instruments et performances sonores liés à l'univers malentendant.

Le projet *Within* que vous menez depuis plusieurs années se concentre sur la perception des sons par les sourds et malentendants. Pourquoi cet intérêt pour l'univers sonore ?

Si une ligne directrice du projet s'est dégagée – avec le temps et l'expérience –, c'est celle qui consiste à apprendre des personnes sourdes et malentendantes la façon dont elles perçoivent le son, afin que nous révisions notre compréhension de ce phénomène et comment musiciens et praticiens du son peuvent réinventer leurs habitudes de composer, improviser, diriger, créer des instruments et penser l'espace d'un concert ou d'une performance. J'ai développé un intérêt pour l'aspect physique du son, comme quelqu'un qui vient de la musique électronique et travaille avec les basses et les sensations physiques de ces fréquences-là. Et l'avantage d'un public de personnes sourdes et malentendantes, c'est qu'elles ne comptent pas trop sur leurs



oreilles pour saisir le son. L'acte d'écoute tel que nous le comprenons passe par les oreilles, mais l'écoute fait appel en réalité à la totalité de nos sens, c'est quelque chose de physique, tactile, visuel.

Vous adressez-vous aussi aux personnes n'ayant pas de déficiences auditives?

Bien sûr, l'idée n'est pas de s'adresser exclusivement à un

public de sourds ou de faire un projet qui ne marche qu'avec eux. C'est au contraire de créer un terrain commun, de partir de la culture sourde pour rejoindre

Vue de l'exposition de Tarek Atoui, « *Within* », à la Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. © Photo : Florian Kleinfenn.

le monde des entendants et d'utiliser ce projet et tous ses développements pour créer des situations, où justement les deux publics travaillent ensemble et communiquent sur le fait de jouer des instruments et de la musique expérimentale et nouvelle, une notion qui ne leur est peut-être pas très familière.

Dans l'exposition sont présentés des instruments. Que sont-ils concrètement ?

L'exposition présente cet ensemble d'instruments créés à différentes étapes du projet, aux États-Unis, en Allemagne, en Norvège, ici en France, et qui tournent tous autour d'une question que j'ai posée à différents profils de personnes (des créateurs d'instruments, d'enseignants, des programmeurs, des artistes du son, des éducateurs en art) : « *Que serait un instrument s'adressant à la fois à un public sourd et entendant et qui pourrait être joué par les deux ?* »

Et ces instruments sont les différentes réponses obtenues. Par la suite, les créer a été un processus un peu plus complexe, car une fois la question posée, les personnes avec qui je collaborais ont parfois fait un croquis ou

une proposition sur papier que j'ai exécutée dans des ateliers ou des résidences, avec un public de sourds. Cela a permis d'affirmer un design ou de pousser plus la pièce. Ce ne sont pas simplement les instruments qui sont là, car ils sont pour moi une composante, un médium dans l'articulation de ce projet qui a différentes facettes ; comme si l'on disait que l'instrument est un objet et, en même temps, une partition et une installation sonore. Le public peut voir ici trois choses : une installation sonore dans la mesure où ces instruments sont en train de rejouer des extraits de performances passées ; il peut parfois tomber sur des répétitions de performances à venir, puisque je considère le tout comme un atelier également ; et enfin les performances elles-mêmes, qui sont des moments de restitution pour des compositions faites par moi-même ou des compositeurs invités.

Votre travail est-il intrinsèquement lié à l'idée de performance ?

Bien entendu, et avec le temps, je ne considère plus la performance comme étant l'aboutissement d'un processus, mais je m'en sers

aussi comme de moments d'apprentissage, d'expérimentation, de mises en situations pour aller ailleurs. C'est-à-dire que mettre en place une performance me permet parfois de comprendre les limites d'un instrument ou de pousser plus loin quelque chose en création. Ou bien créer une situation de performance avec un espace précis me permet de tirer des observations qui vont nourrir autre chose. Et je la considère de moins en moins comme ce mouvement ultime de restitution qui vient créer une synthèse. Cela m'ouvre vers différentes directions, et pour moi la performance n'est plus nécessairement une finalité en soi. Mais cette expérience que j'ai de l'utiliser à d'autres fins, c'est ce qui me plaît dans mon travail.

Propos recueillis
par Frédéric Bonnet

TAREK ATOUI. *WITHIN*, jusqu'au 25 mars, Galerie Chantal Crousel, 10, rue Charlot, 75003 Paris, tél. 01 42 77 38 87, www.crousel.com, t1j sauf dimanche-lundi 11h-13h et 14h-19h.

La question du public, d'un siècle à l'autre

OLIVIER DONNAT

Département des études,
de la prospective et des statistiques
MCC / SG / SCPIC

Au départ, il y a bien longtemps – plus d'un demi-siècle – tout était simple : l'ambition des pouvoirs publics en matière culturelle était de permettre au plus grand nombre d'accéder aux grandes œuvres de l'art et de l'esprit en menant une politique d'aménagement du territoire et de soutien à la création et à la mise en valeur du patrimoine. En un mot, il s'agissait de construire des équipements, puis de veiller à la qualité de l'offre proposée tout en favorisant la fréquentation la plus large possible.

Le public ou le peuple rassemblé

La notion de public renvoyait alors à l'idée d'une participation commune à un évènement, d'un collectif soudé par l'unité de lieu et de temps. Elle prenait tout son sens dans une double opposition au domaine privé/commercial (la culture comme lieu préservé des lois du marché et des intérêts économiques) et au domaine privé/intime (la culture comme lieu « neutre » où les citoyens se trouvaient en quelque sorte dépouillés de leurs identités particulières par l'universalité des œuvres auxquelles ils étaient confrontés).

Les pionniers de la démocratisation pensaient le public au singulier car ils partageaient la conviction que la confrontation directe aux œuvres permettait de rassembler le public/peuple dans toute sa diversité, à l'instar de Jean Vilar qui entendait « réunir dans les travées de la communion dramatique le petit boutiquier de Suresnes et le haut magistrat, l'ouvrier de Puteaux et l'agent de change, le facteur des pauvres et le professeur agrégé¹ ». Dans l'esprit du temps qui était le leur, très marqué par l'idéal républicain, le caractère universel de l'art devait permettre de toucher chacun, sans médiation et sans pédagogie, et le public était perçu à l'image du Peuple, c'est-à-dire comme une réunion d'individus délivrés de tout système d'appartenance, un tout d'égaux et de semblables, sans distinction de race, de religion, d'opinion ou de capital culturel.

Les résultats des premières enquêtes sociologiques² ont rapidement mis à mal cette représentation du public en mettant en évidence l'existence de fortes inégalités dans l'accès à la culture. À cet égard, les

conclusions de la sociologie de la domination de Pierre Bourdieu et celles de la sociologie des loisirs de Joffre Dumazedier, qui étaient alors les deux courants dominants en sociologie de la culture, étaient convergentes : le public réel des maisons de la culture, des théâtres ou des musées présentait un profil souvent bien différent du public imaginé, et le désir de culture ou le plaisir pris au contact des œuvres, loin d'être spontanés et universels, faisaient souvent partie du legs hérité de son milieu d'origine.

Le passage au pluriel : les publics jeunes, spécifiques, empêchés, etc.

La contestation de la représentation du Public/Peuple s'est accentuée à la fin des années 1960 à travers notamment l'émergence de la notion de « non-public », avant que la perspective ne change plus radicalement au début des années 1980 avec l'abandon du terme « démocratisation » au profit d'une politique des publics pensée au pluriel : on commence alors à parler de publics jeunes, de publics spécifiques ou de publics empêchés, etc. au moment où – notons-le – les représentations du social voient un recul marqué des approches en termes de classes sociales au profit d'une conception plus individuelle de la société.

La nécessité de « connaître ses publics » devient rapidement une figure rhétorique obligée pour la plupart des responsables culturels : des observatoires sont créés, des services de développement des publics sont mis en place dans les grands équipements, et les enquêtes de fréquentation se multiplient³. De nombreuses actions sont alors initiées en direction de catégories de population particulières, des prisonniers aux handicapés en passant par les jeunes des quartiers difficiles, sans parler de celles relatives aux cultures régionales ou communautaires. Paradoxalement, ce foisonnement de politiques ciblées mises en place au nom de l'efficacité pour traiter la question des inégalités d'accès à la culture a eu pour effet de la dissoudre : le fait de découper le « non-public » en une série de publics spécifiques a eu pour effet de réduire la question des inégalités d'accès à celle des exclus, vidant la question du public d'une grande

1. Jean Vilar, *Le théâtre, service public*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 147.

2. La plus célèbre de ces enquêtes est celle qui fut menée sur la fréquentation des musées d'art et donna lieu à la publication de l'ouvrage de Pierre Bourdieu et Alain Darbel, *L'amour de l'art*, Paris, Minuit, 1966.

3. O. Donnat et S. Octobre dir., *Les publics des équipements culturels. Méthodes et résultats d'enquêtes*, Paris, MCC, 2001 (Travaux du DEP, 27).

« Le comportementalisme algorithmique, c'est ce qui reste de l'habitus lorsqu'on a fait disparaître les structures sociales. »

Dominique Cardon, *À quoi rêvent les algorithmes ?*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 71

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

partie de sa substance. À force de s'intéresser à des populations particulières, on a fini par oublier que c'était l'ensemble des catégories de population faiblement diplômées – et non les seules fractions les plus visibles socialement – qui continuaient à se tenir à distance des équipements culturels.

Le regard sociologique porté sur les pratiques culturelles a dans ces mêmes années contribué à décentrer la question du public en soulignant l'importance croissante prise par la « culture à domicile » du fait des progrès spectaculaires de l'équipement des ménages en appareils audiovisuels. Dès lors que la majorité des contacts avec la culture se déroulaient dans un cadre privé, il devenait de plus en plus difficile de continuer à poser la question des inégalités d'accès uniquement en termes d'aménagement culturel du territoire, comme au temps des maisons de la culture. Les nouvelles perspectives ouvertes par la suite autour des notions d'éclectisme et de dissonances culturelles⁴ n'ont fait que renforcer ce constat, en mettant en évidence la diversité croissante des formes d'engagement dans la culture et en portant une attention plus grande à la pluralisation des conditions de socialisation ainsi qu'aux appartenances de genre ou de génération. En un mot, la nécessité d'une réévaluation du cadre conceptuel dans lequel était pensée la question du public était largement admise, avant même que l'arrivée du numérique et d'internet ne rende cette exigence plus impérieuse.

Publics, usagers et communautés en ligne

La diffusion massive du numérique et d'internet au tournant du siècle a en effet accéléré plusieurs tendances à l'œuvre au cours des décennies précédentes, accentuant notamment la porosité entre culture et distraction, entre le monde de l'art et celui du divertissement et de la communication. À bien des égards, c'est la conception même de la culture – ses contours et ses découpages, son autonomie et ses hiérarchies internes, ses fonctions sociales – qui s'est trouvée ébranlée car dans le monde numérique, les images, les musiques et les textes circulent et se mélangent, passant d'un écran à l'autre sans les contraintes du monde physique ; et les différences qui s'étaient

construites au fil du temps entre domaines artistiques, entre producteurs, médiateurs et consommateurs ou entre amateurs et professionnels tendent à s'estomper.

Ce brouillage des catégories traditionnelles qui servaient jusqu'alors à appréhender le monde de la culture est manifeste quand il s'agit de penser ce qui était naguère désigné comme la question du public. En effet, les technologies numériques ont permis (et permettront encore plus demain) aux équipements culturels d'enrichir considérablement leur offre en proposant une palette diversifiée de services « à distance ». Si les bibliothèques, les musées ou les lieux de spectacle vivant restent bien entendu les lieux privilégiés de la confrontation directe aux œuvres, tous sont aussi appelés de plus en plus à devenir des centres de ressources et des prestataires de services à distance, surtout bien entendu quand ils disposent de richesses susceptibles d'être numérisées. Dans quelle mesure est-il dès lors toujours pertinent de parler de public pour désigner l'ensemble des personnes concernées par les différents usages de l'offre en ligne ? Si le terme de public relève de l'évidence quand il s'agit de spectateurs assistant à un concert ou à une représentation théâtrale, faut-il le conserver pour ceux et celles qui regardent un concert sur leur portable ou qui visitent une exposition sur leur tablette ? Ce débat n'est pas nouveau : certains spécialistes s'interrogeaient déjà il y a plusieurs décennies à propos de la télévision⁵ pour savoir si les personnes regardant en même temps un programme de télévision sans jamais avoir eu l'occasion de se croiser ou d'échanger constituaient un public ou s'il fallait parler à leur propos de quasi-public. La diversité des écrans connectés que nous connaissons aujourd'hui donne toutefois une tout autre dimension à cette question : plutôt que de continuer à parler de publics, ne convient-il pas de parler d'usagers, qu'ils viennent ou non en personnes dans les équipements concernés ?

La question de l'accès à la culture se trouve en quelque sorte dédoublée, sinon démultipliée tant les modes d'accès et les formes de participation sont désormais nombreuses. Les outils numériques en effet invitent sans cesse les visiteurs ou les spectateurs des

4. B. Lahire, *La culture des individus. Dissonances culturelles et distinction de soi*, Paris, La Découverte, 2004.

5. Voir par exemple M. Souchon, « Un public ou des publics ? », *Communications*, n° 51, 1990.

équipements culturels à devenir des acteurs de leurs propres expériences culturelles mais aussi des relais d'informations ou des critiques en produisant commentaires, avis et recommandations et en les partageant sur les réseaux sociaux.

Aujourd'hui, le recul est encore insuffisant pour prendre la réelle mesure de cet ébranlement des frontières et des catégories qui servaient à penser la question des publics, d'autant plus qu'il n'est pas facile de se défaire du vent d'optimisme qui a accompagné la diffusion d'internet. Ce nouveau « média à tout faire » a en effet été paré, dès l'origine, de multiples vertus en matière de démocratisation : plus de liberté pour exprimer ses opinions et son potentiel créatif, plus de facilités pour accéder à l'ensemble des productions culturelles, plus d'opportunités pour découvrir des contenus originaux ou pour enrichir ses expériences culturelles, etc. la liste des promesses faites par les acteurs et les militants d'internet est presque sans limite. À les écouter, on a souvent le sentiment que les outils numériques, en supprimant l'obstacle de l'éloignement géographique et en rendant l'accès à la culture « gratuit », permettent de réaliser, tout de suite et maintenant, ce qu'André Malraux fixait comme objectif à la politique culturelle⁶.

La puissance des discours ayant accompagné la diffusion d'internet est telle qu'elle perturbe incontestablement notre perception de la réalité et par conséquent l'appréciation qu'on peut porter sur la nature exacte des effets du numérique sur nos rapports à l'art et à la culture. Toutefois, si un tel exercice est si difficile, c'est aussi et surtout en raison de la profonde ambivalence des pratiques en ligne.

L'ambivalence actuelle des pratiques numériques

Il n'est bien entendu pas question de contester l'étendue des facilités qu'offre le numérique en matière d'expressivité et d'accès aux œuvres et aux contenus. Le contenu de nombreux blogues, plateformes de partage ou sites collaboratifs, au premier rang desquels Wikipédia, et surtout le succès qu'ils rencontrent en témoignent. Il convient par conséquent de prendre au sérieux la « nouvelle ère de démocratisation, celle des compétences⁷ » qui s'est ouverte depuis le tournant du siècle, mais faut-il pour autant saluer « le sacre de l'amateur » et céder à l'enthousiasme des discours sur la culture contributive ? Les résultats d'enquête sont là pour rappeler que les « véritables » amateurs, ceux et celles qui participent directement à la production de contenus en ligne, demeurent toujours minoritaires. Les comportements en ligne n'échappent pas en réalité à la loi de puissance qui veut que, pour une activité donnée, seule une très faible minorité de participants soit très active, une part un peu plus importante ait un engagement plus modéré tandis que la grande majorité demeure sur le registre de la simple consommation occasionnelle et/ou superficielle.

Les résultats d'enquête sont loin, par ailleurs, de confirmer les vertus prêtées au web en matière d'ouverture d'esprit, de curiosité et de goût pour la diversité culturelle. En effet, si les outils numériques rendent

possibles les échanges avec des personnes inconnues ou très éloignées physiquement, ils permettent aussi à tout un chacun d'écarter (sur l'instant ou de manière plus durable, sinon définitive) les « indésirables », ce qui tend à favoriser l'homogénéité des réseaux de sociabilité. De plus, la logique des algorithmes, dont le rôle est chaque jour plus prépondérant, tend à confiner les individus dans un environnement familial en les orientant vers des interlocuteurs qui partagent les mêmes valeurs ou vers des consommations en phase avec leur profil ou leurs habitudes : en postulant que les internautes feront ce qu'ils ont déjà fait ou ce que leurs proches ou semblables font, les algorithmes « nous emprisonnent dans notre conformisme⁸ ». Finalement, il apparaît donc que le jeu combiné des réseaux sociaux et des algorithmes, loin d'encourager la curiosité et le goût de la découverte, s'avère d'une redoutable efficacité pour produire de l'entre-soi et favoriser une conformité croissante aux goûts et aux opinions de son groupe d'appartenance ou de sa communauté, fut-elle élective.

Par ailleurs, le fait de pouvoir accéder directement aux œuvres et aux contenus culturels sans intermédiaire, dans un contexte général de gratuité, a pu faire croire à une émancipation générale à l'égard des contraintes marchandes et des formes traditionnelles de transmission. Sur ce point aussi, la réalité du monde numérique est là pour rappeler avec force les limites d'une telle perspective : la numérisation, en faisant des contenus culturels des biens non exclusifs et non rivaux, a certes permis l'essor de nombreuses activités en marge des lois de l'économie marchande mais elle a aussi rendu possible la mise en marché de nouveaux domaines d'activité et permis au capitalisme digital d'atteindre, à l'échelle de la planète, un niveau de concentration inconnu jusqu'alors. Parallèlement, si elle a offert des armes aux individus ordinaires pour prendre leurs distances à l'égard des intermédiaires et du jugement des experts, elle a en même temps placé les moteurs de recherche en position hégémonique, substituant à la médiation humaine une *médiation sans médiateur*, dont les contraintes et le pouvoir d'imposition sont d'autant plus forts qu'ils s'exercent de manière invisible à travers des dispositifs technologiques.

Cette profonde ambivalence des pratiques en ligne actuelles invite à ne pas céder au déterminisme technologique. Le monde numérique est certes dominé par de fortes contraintes technologiques et de puissantes logiques économiques, mais le jeu reste ouvert, à condition de ne pas laisser les principaux acteurs d'internet façonner nos goûts culturels via les algorithmes. C'est probablement là aussi que se joue aujourd'hui pour les équipements culturels la question des publics de demain. ■

6. Rappelons en effet ce que déclarait André Malraux au moment de présenter le budget du ministère des Affaires culturelles à l'Assemblée nationale en 1967 : « Il faut bien admettre qu'un jour on aura fait pour la culture ce que Jules Ferry a fait pour l'instruction : la culture sera gratuite. »

7 P. Flichy, *Le sacre de l'amateur. Sociologie des passions ordinaires à l'ère numérique*, Paris, Seuil, 2010.

8. D. Cardon, *À quoi rêvent les algorithmes ?*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 70.



Tarek Atoui, *WITHIN*
Performance, Sentralbadet, Bergen Assembly, Norvège (2016)
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris
Photo : Thor Brodreskill

WITHIN s'intéresse à la manière dont la surdité peut changer notre compréhension de la performance sonore, son espace de diffusion et ses instruments. Débuté en 2012, le projet *WITHIN* a évolué au cours des invitations et expositions. Pour Bergen Assembly, Tarek Atoui a développé de nouveaux instruments, dont le design et la jouabilité sont le résultat d'une collaboration avec des fabricants d'instruments acoustiques, des designers de hautparleurs, des programmeurs informatiques, des compositeurs et des personnes sourdes et malentendantes de différents âges et pays. En septembre 2016, l'ensemble des instruments a été réuni pour la première fois à Sentralbadet, une piscine abandonnée au centre de Bergen (Norvège) où compositeurs et musiciens amateurs et professionnels, sourds et entendants, ont été invités à investir l'espace d'exposition et à expérimenter ces instruments, en les jouant séparément ou en ensemble.

Sawa, Dale Berning. « Why Tate Modern's new collection of musical instruments is striking an unfamiliar chord », *The Guardian*, Friday, September 2, 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/02/why-tate-moderns-reverse-collection-of-musical-instruments-is-striking-an-unfamiliar-chord>

theguardian

Why Tate Modern's new collection of musical instruments is striking an unfamiliar chord

It's an instrument - but how do you play it and what does it sound like? The discovery of a stash of obscure instruments has inspired a performance artwork at Tate Modern - Dale Berning Sawa took part

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



📷 Tarek Atoui with the *koto*, organ pipes connected to an air compressor. Photograph: Oli Cowling/Tate Photography

I'm standing in the recently opened South Tank performance space of Tate Modern, in front of about 50 people and a koto. The koto is one of a group of sculptural instruments in Tarek Atoui's installation *The Reverse Collection* and any resemblance to the traditional Japanese string instrument of the same name is – at best – tentative. This koto is comprised of a bundle of organ pipes set on a table frame, connected via copper tubing and taps to an underfloor pipe that is connected to an air compressor. Mounted at regular intervals around the bundle are metal strings, with a microphone installed beneath them to pick up your every move.

I've watched the artist Vincent Martial, who made the koto for Atoui, play it, but unlike most of the instruments I know, there are few sounds here I can immediately attribute to specific gestures. It's not that the sounds are new to me: the methods of their making are. I can't yet see what I'm hearing. So I'm in front of

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an audience and I'm not sure what to do. But that's not a bad place to start. I'm not nervous; I'm listening.

The Reverse Collection was born in 2013, in the storage facilities of Berlin's Dahlem museum, which houses the city's ethnographic and anthropological collections. Atoui, a Lebanese artist who works with hearing, sound and people, was on a recce ahead of the eighth Berlin Biennale. And in the museum's stash of historical instruments from around the world, he came up trumps. Except for a simple archival reference, the instruments were without any indication of their sociocultural provenance, or, crucially, any instructions on how to play them. They were just things that make sounds. So Atoui invited established musicians and improvisers to play with them, and recorded what happened.

There is very little experiment in much experimental music – by definition this project ensured there would be

Stage two saw Atoui ask instrument makers to listen to those recordings – layered and edited – and create new instruments on which one might be able to play something similar. Traditional luthiers didn't know what to make of that request. But a handful of artists working in the outer reaches of music-

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Photograph: Oli Cowling/Tate Photography



making were intrigued. Léo Maurel, a musician based in north-east France, who has spent the better part of a decade making hurdy-gurdies, heard in Atoui's sound files tonal, timbral drones he recognised. Other makers included Thierry Madiot, a Parisian sound artist and trombonist, whose work used horns, balloons and compressed air, and Martial, a flautist, and one half of improv duo Sonambule, whose instrumentarium is a menagerie of rerouted musical tools. It makes sense that the koto is Martial's creation, an implausible wind-string hybrid that seems almost built to resist mastery.

For the first month of the Tate show, a gaggle of mostly London-based musicians were invited to perform on these instruments daily, in groups of three to five. Atoui and the makers held back from telling us how to play anything: they mostly focused on on/off mechanisms, and what to do if something stopped working. These daily sessions were the preamble to a series of larger group ensembles playing “compo-

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sitions” by Madiot, and later that month by celebrated British saxophonist John Butcher, and then Atoui.

The 10 instruments are arranged as work stations on a factory floor. Several use compressed air, most combine percussive and drone-generating abilities, all of them are odd, at times even funny. There's the aquaflute (a wobbly plastic-air-and-water contraption); two sets of horns that function – very differently – with balloons and compressed air; the orgue à clapets or valve organ (all metal tubing and woodwork, strings and tiny objects), the babasse (a hurdy-gurdy of sorts), the toui (a kind of horizontal, deconstructed bagpipes) and a motorised bow. Lastly, on two raised platforms are the lithophone (a thicket of slate pieces balanced on conical cardboard feet) and the spin (a set of ceramic vessels, some small and unglazed, others, tall and lustrous, with frozen jellyfish-like layered skirts, along with a potter's wheel).

What these instruments have most in common is a kind of wilful abstruseness. As Butcher put it, “Most of us, in search of new methods and materials, have spent years controlling comparatively unstable things on our instruments.” Here, the volatility is native, and it forces you to stay awake. Which is what improv at its best does anyway. Bradford Bailey, another of the musicians, said that that kind of destabilisation is what brought him to this world to begin with. “There's very little experiment in much experimental music,” he added – by definition this project ensured there would be.

During performances, the players move from one instrument to another in a silent, barefooted dance (shoes on those platforms are simply unthinkable), and the most riveting moments come when two or three people descend on the same thing. It's intimate, like watching skilled workers teaming up to repair something delicate. They visibly navigate that thin line between totally focusing on the sound they're each making and being hyper aware of every other sound being made. And then there are the moments when people stop playing. Listening, intently, to what's happening around you sharpens your focus. In the same way that an empty patch of grass will, the more you stare at it, slowly reveal insect life and movement, so moments of quiet cause the space you're in to seemingly expand with sound, until even the lightest circling of a hand along the rim of a porcelain jar has an audible resonance.

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Atoui's artwork is difficult to locate. The instruments are not the work – precious and visually arresting though they might be, they are just instruments – and nor are the recordings, which are just documentary. Atoui defines his relationship with the instrument makers as an exchange, not a collaboration: “I don't want to take up too much space in their work.” Tate curator Andrea Lissoni, meanwhile, sums up the work as the result of a communal conversation, a cooperative endeavour, with all the political weight that phrase contains. And that is perhaps where the beauty of the piece lies. It's in the gesture, the invitations, the encounters. It is the poetry in making a silenced instrument sing again, and in making use – with your hands – of a museum collection. It is the space Atoui made for six instrument makers and 49 musicians to play, the sound of someone listening.

- The Reverse Collection. performances take place at Tate Modern, London SE1, on 16 and 23 September. tate.org.uk.

- This article was amended on 5 September as the captions had incorrectly identified Tarek Atoui in both pictures. The lead picture was also changed to one of Atoui.

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BY-ORGEL: Ett av instrumentene er tekstiltiber med ulik tekstur og ulik lyd. - Elevene har vært med og samle inn lyder i byen. Dette er et slags orgel med lyden av Bergen, sier Tarek Atoui.

Komponisten som lærer lyd av døve

I mange måneder har Tarek Atoui og døve bergenselever utviklet nye instrumenter. Nå fyller triennalekunstneren Sentralbadet med musikk, lydmasasje og drikke med eget lydspor.

CATHRINE KRANE HANSEN
cathrine.krane@bt.no
foto ØRJAN DEISZ

Sentralbadet er forvandlet til et gigantisk visningsrom der komponist og vibbefanger Tarek Atoui presenterer hittil uheorte lyder på helt nye instrumenter. Atouis arbeid er ett av tre hovedprosjekter under Bergen Assemblé 2016.

Hele september fylles den avstilkede svømmehallen med utstilling og lydkunst.

Hvilken drink passer til lyden av fotosyntesen? Hvordan låter

en råtnende sopp? Og hvordan føles vibrasjonene av en håndball kontra en fotball?

Det er slike spørsmål Tarek Atoui og hans hørende og døve medspillere har syslet med de siste månedene. I november i fjor innledet den libanesisk-franske lydartisten et samarbeid med Bergen døvesenter og elever på Nordahl Grieg videregående skole. Sammen videreutviklet de Atouis instrumenter for folk som ikke hører med ørene, men føler lydvibrasjonene i andre deler av kroppen.

Fleire lokale komponister og musikere er også involvert. Inkludert samtidsensemblet BIT 20 medvirker rundt 50 personer på diverse konserter og aktiviteter.

Film og massasje

—En perfekt lekeplass, sier Tarek Atoui om Sentralbadet.

Han har drevet med lydprosjekter for døve i mange år, og har presentert sine arbeider flere steder i verden, blant annet på velrenomerte Documenta i Kassel i Tyskland. Men dette er første gang han samler alt på ett sted.

BT har fått en smugttitt i Atouis store lekearena for åpningen 1. september. Rett ved inngangen er et massasjerom der publikum kan bestille time for lydmasasje. Triennaleledere Haakon Thuestad har allerede fått prøve fenomenet.

—På massasjebenken får man hørselevern slik at man skal kjenne at lyden kommer fra andre steder enn ørene. Det er svært avslappende å få lydmasasje, forteller han.

Studenter fra Griegakademiet har fått kursing i dette og skal hjelpe besøkende i gang i massasjerommet. I et lite filmrom vis-à-vis skal utvalgte

FAKTA

Bergen Assembly

- Bergenstriennalen AS er opprettet av Bergen kommune, og er en samtidskunstmønstring som arrangeres hvert tredje år.
- Triennalen eies av Bergen kommune og finansieres i hovedsak av kommunen og Norsk Kulturråd.
- Første utgave av triennalen Bergen Assembly var høsten 2013 og hadde over 16.000 besøkende, derav 1203 betalende.
- Den andre utgaven startet med utstillinger i vinter og intensiveres i perioden 1. september til 1. oktober.
- De tre kuratorgruppene som deltar i 2016 har et prosjektbudsjett på 400.000 euro hver.
- Haakon Alexander Thuestad er direktør. Kunstnerisk råd består av Maria Hlavajova, Ute Meta Bauer, Ranjit Hoskote, Bruce Ferguson, Solveig Øvstebo, Ingar Dragset og Ina Blom.

filmer og videoer relatert til lyd og hørsel vises.

Drink med lydspor

I arealet som før huset trenings-senter er saunainspirerte møbler bygget på stedet av studenter ved Bergen Arkitektthøgskole. Café White Cat blir drevet i samarbeid med døvemiljøene i Bergen. Her kan man kjøpe drikke med tilpasset lydspor.

Kuratorduoen Council, Sandra Terdjman og Grégory Castéra, står bak kafékonseptet og utstillingen «Infinite Ear».

– Vi vil gi publikum lyder de aldri har hørt før. Nå finnes det

han bl.a. videreutviklet instrumenter for døve i samarbeid med ikke-hørende elever. Sammen med musikere deltar elevene på åpne øvelser og ukentlige konserter i Sentralbadet fra 1. september til 1. oktober.

● Atoui samarbeider med kuratorduoen Council, Berkeley Art Museum, Bergen Døvesenter, Bergen senter for elektronisk kunst (BEK), Bergen Arkitektthøgskole, Griegakademiet og en rekke andre aktører. Totalt medvirker rundt 50 musikere, kunstnere og komponister.

● Atouis arbeid er ett av Bergen Assemblys tre hovedprosjekter.

så gode mikrofoner at vi faktisk kan ta opp lyd av fotosyntesen, sier Grégory Castéra.

Duoen bor i Paris og har samarbeidet med Tarek Atoui om lydprosjekter for døve siden 2013. Målet er å gi en kulturell, estetisk og sanselig tilnærming mellom døvekultur og hørendes kultur, især når det gjelder kommunikasjon av lyd.

Føler musikken

– Jeg begynte med dette fordi jeg er interessert i lydens virkning på kroppen. Døve registrerer lyd via vibrasjon, berøring, øynene og tegn. De kan endre vår måte å oppfatte lyd på. Døve mennesker har lært meg mye, nå tenker jeg mer på hele kroppen når jeg komponerer, sier Atoui.

Nedenfor stupetårnet, på dypet i bassenget går han frem og tilbake mellom instrumentene. I flere uker har han arbeidet her nede, hatt øvinger med døve elever og musikere, og finjustert de originale instrumentene.

Prosjektet i Sentralbadet blir et nytt, stort kapittel av Atouis lydprosjekt «Within», som har pågått i flere år. Med trommestikke i en hånd og den andre plassert på instrumentet kan døve kjenne hvordan det låter.

– I starten var elevene beskjedne, det tok litt tid å bryte isen. Men nå kommer det stadig flere og vil være med og spille, forteller komponisten.

Sammen med andre amatører og profesjonelle musikere skal elevene være med på åpne øvinger og konserter nede i bassengområdet.

Stian Helland er en av elevene som deltar.

– Jeg synes dette er et flott prosjekt fordi det er spennende å kunne føle musikken. Vi laget forskjellige instrumenter og lyder. Det var interessant å jobbe sammen med Tarek, vi brukte tegnspråktolk og det gikk bra, forteller han.

Nå håper han det også skal gå bra å spille for publikum i Sentralbadet.

Alt gratis

– Med dette prosjektet gir vi Sentralbadet tilbake til bergenserne. Det er en flott anledning til å vise at kunst og kultur er et naturlig innhold i bygget. Hit kan folk komme og tilbringe hele ettermiddagen og alt er gratis. Ettersom vi bruker et offentlig bygg, synes jeg det bør være åpent for alle, sier Haakon Thuestad.

Det blir med andre ord ingen betalende publikummere å telle, slik det var ved forrige triennale, der det i etterkant ble debatt om publikumstallene.

Thuestad forskrer at Bergen Assembly likevel skal klare å telle hvor mange som besøker volum 2 av Bergen Assembly.

Og han har tro på godt besøk. For lavere terskel enn gratis inngang i kjente, offentlige bygg finnes knapt, mener direktøren for Bergens egen kunstmønstring.

FAKTA

Tarek Atoui

- Kunstner og komponist, født i Libanon i 1980.
- Flyttet til Frankrike i 1998 for å studere lydkunst og elektroakustisk musikk. I 2006 utga han sitt første soloalbum.
- I 2008 ble han kunstnerisk leder for STEIM Studios i Amsterdam, et senter for forskning og utvikling av nye elektroniske musikkinstrumenter.
- Har presentert arbeider ved bl.a. Sharjah-biennalen i De Forente Arabiske Emirater, New Museum of Contemporary Art i New York, Documenta 13 i Kassel, Serpentine Gallery i London og den 8. Berlin-biennalen.
- Til Bergen Assembly har

TAREK ATOUI, I/E (JARDIN DU CARROUSEL, PARIS, OCTOBER 24 AND 26, 2013) *I/E* is a movable sonic feast involving a shipping container transformed into a collaborative space and sound studio (using software created by Atoui), with each performance tuned to the container's current location. For one of these concerts, not far from the Arc du Carrousel, Atoui realized, along with fellow musicians Kazuyuki Kishino and Uriel Barthélemy, a performance dripping in electronic noise and improvisatory free-jazz exuberance. □

Presented by the Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

10. Tarek Atoui, *I/E*, 2013. Performance view, Jardin du Carrousel Paris, October 26, 2013. Photo: Marc Damage.



BERLIN BIENNALE

David Zink Yi In der Silbermine



DAVID ZINK YI
„The Strangers“, 2014, Videostill

Es sollte keine gewöhnliche Reise in die Heimat werden, als David Zink Yi im März 2012 nach Peru flog. 14 Monate blieb er dort, so lange wie seit 1991 nicht. Damals, mit 17, war er nach Deutschland gezogen, machte hier das Abitur, studierte Kunst in München und Berlin. Zink Yi wurde 1973 in Lima geboren. Ein Großstädter, der sich für seine jüngste Recherche in Peru einen sehr entlegenen Ort aussuchte: eine Silbermine in den Hochanden.

Obwohl Zink Yi mit seinen Skulpturen von Riesenkalmaren aus Keramik in den Nullerjahren sehr erfolgreich war, hat er sich nicht auf bestimmte Formen und Medien festlegen lassen. Mithilfe von Fotografien und Videos – Letztere kreisten vor allem um Musik (Zink Yi hat gemeinsam mit kubanischen Musikern eine Latin-Band gegründet) – hat sich der Künstler zuletzt verstärkt mit Fragen der Identitätsbildung beschäftigt. In seiner Zweikanal-Videoinstallation für die Berlin Biennale konfrontiert er die Knochenarbeit in einer Silbermine in der Ayacucho-Region mit Landschaftsaufnahmen aus derselben Gegend.

Ayacucho hat eine grausame Geschichte, die bis heute nachwirkt. Doch Zink Yi lässt die politischen und sozialen Probleme in der Region beiseite. Seine Videoinstallation „The Strangers“ besteht aus zwei Filmen, die gleichzeitig auf zwei über Eck platzierte Wände projiziert werden. Es sind abwechselnd Aufnahmen von Gesteinsformationen im Freien und von Arbeiten in einer Silbermine zu sehen. Blaue Neon- und gelbe Stickstofflampen tauchen die Arbeiter und ihre Plackerei in ein fast expressionistisches Licht. Durch die Phasenverschiebungen der beiden Schnittversionen dominieren zeitweilig auf beiden Seiten die still-bizarren Landschaften, dann wieder beherrschen die Pressluftschlämmer der Mine das Geschehen. Mitunter stehen sich aber auch die unbewegten Aufnahmen der Gesteinsformationen außen und die brutalen Aufnahmen der Erzgewinnung unter Tage dialektisch gegenüber.

„Die Fremden“, das könnte sowohl die außerirdisch wirkenden Felsen als auch die nicht aus der Region stammenden, ihre Bodenschätze ausschachtenden Kumpel bezeichnen. Was in Ayacucho passiert, will Zink Yi nicht kommentieren. Er verlässt sich auf die formale Kraft der Bilder, auf die Wucht der Gegensätze, das Drama aus Stille und Krawall. *Jens Hinrichsen*

Tarek Atoui Die Dahlem Sessions

Ab dem späten 19. Jahrhundert brachten die Forschungsreisenden der westlichen Welt nicht nur Pflanzen, Tiere und materielle Güter mit nach Hause, sondern auch Tonaufnahmen. Unter der Leitung von Erich Moritz von Hornbostel entstand in Berlin ein ethnomusikalisches Archiv mit 16 000 Audioaufnahmen aus der ganzen Welt. Für seinen Beitrag zur Berlin Biennale wollte Tarek Atoui die Sammlung Hornbostel, die sich heute im Besitz des Ethnologischen Museums in Dahlem befindet, besuchen – machte bei seiner Visite aber einen Zufallsfund, der ihn seine Pläne über Bord werfen ließ.

In Nebenräumen des Dahlemer Museums entdeckte Atoui Hunderte Musikinstrumente nicht-westlicher Herkunft: Schlaginstrumente, Wind- und Streichinstrumente in Schubladen und Vitrinen, versehen lediglich mit einer Archivnummer, die nichts über die Nutzung oder Herkunft verrät. Wie alt sind diese Instrumente? Woher kommen sie? Wer hat sie gespielt? Und zu welchen Zwecken? Bei vielen der Exponate sind diese Fragen heute nicht mehr eindeutig zu klären, bei anderen hätte Atoui Recherchen anstellen können – doch das wollte er gar nicht.

Versuchen Anthropologen, die Vergangenheit zu rekonstruieren, entwirft der Soundkünstler Parallelwelten. Für seinen Beitrag zur Berlin Biennale lud Atoui neun Musiker aus den unterschiedlichsten Weltregionen ein, die obskuren Instrumente zu bespielen. Während der Biennale werden die Soloaufnahmen der „Dahlem Sessions“ zusammengeführt und vor Livepublikum fortgesetzt. „Ein Museum erforscht solche Instrumente, aber sie werden hier niemals bespielt. Mich interessiert hingegen ihr Klang“, erklärt der 1980 in Beirut geborene Künstler.

Atoui sammelt seit Jahren Sounds aus aller Welt und bringt sie in seiner Kunst mit teils selbst entwickelten Programmen zur Aufführung, so zuletzt auch auf der Documenta in Kassel. Ihn interessiere das Instrument als *found object*, der Antagonismus von Regeln und Improvisation, die Frage, wie Wissen durch Sound übertragen werden könne, erklärt er. „Jedes Instrument hat eine Geschichte. Aber in dem Moment, wo man es in die Hände nimmt, beginnt eine neue Geschichte.“ Vielleicht drehe sich das Spiel am Ende um. „Ich mag den Gedanken, dass ein Anthropologe in ferner Zukunft unsere ‚Dahlem Sessions‘ entdeckt und dann zu rekonstruieren versucht, welche Instrumente auf den Aufnahmen zu hören sind.“ *Sebastian Frenzel*



TAREK ATOUI
„/E“, Performance, Place du Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, 2013

CHANTAL PONTBRIAND

Tarek Atoui is a musician of Lebanese origin who studied electroacoustic music at the French National Conservatory of Reims. In the last few years he has performed at the Sharjah Biennial (UAE), the Cassel Documenta and the Serpentine Gallery in London.

This interview was conducted in June 2013 in Paris, where he lives and has been represented since April 2013 by the Chantal Crousel gallery. In our conversation we go back over the challenges of his praxis and his research, focusing on present-day and traditional forms of music alike. Tarek Atoui's approach is part of a perspective that is more historical than geographical; it illustrates a desire to "go towards", seeking to invent and apply, via sound, the collective dimension in art.

TAREK ATOUI

A COLLECTIVE SOUND?

C.P. **Your praxis mixes musical and physical performances. To start with, could you specifically discuss this?**

T.A. One of my main research themes lies in the articulation between body, instrument and composition, as is clear in particular in my “Un-Drum” performance series.¹ By systematically starting out from one of these parameters, it was a matter of thinking about how to reconfigure the relation between them. The more the project advances, the more they tend to become layers connected to one another.

¹ Initiated in 2009 and performed with engines and softwares designed by the artist, the “Un-Drum” series starts from singular experiences in which personal history, collective memory and engineering are mixed: the arrest of the artist during the Lebanese war in 2006 – during which he permanently lost partial hearing in his left ear – (*Un-Drum 1/Strategies of Surviving Noise*), the result of the Cultural Revolution on music, theatre and arts in China (*Un-Drum 2/The Chinese Connection*) or the scanning electron microscope which inspire to him a tool allowing to decompose a music piece in several thousand micro samples from which he constitutes a huge sound database (*Un-Drum 3/The Semantic Scanning Electron Microscope*).

For a while now I wanted to explore a process where the instrument would have a decisive place and, through compositional principles, make it possible to produce a performance. So I tried to observe what sets a classical instrument apart from the ones I build and the interfaces I use, especially in terms of physical effort. In the first case, the harder you strike or

blow, the higher the volume is. In the second, the bodily intervention can only have a very low impact, or, conversely, it can bring in major consequences. This is a difference which interests me. What drew my attention from the outset towards electronic and experimental music was the possibility of an instrument you couldn't have complete control over, that would help to get away from systematic things – and, in due course, from a form of virtuosity –, and that, each time, you would have to listen to again and learn, in order to be able to play it. For

me, the instrument is the point of departure, and the relation I have with it has given me the stuff with which to create a performance situation.

C.P. **Is it on this basis that you imagined your participation at Documenta 13 in Kassel in 2012, as well as the performance you put on for the opening?**

T.A. What is an instrument today? How does it differ from a tool? When does an object like a hammer stop being a tool and turn into an instrument? What mobilizes and transforms it? I wanted to deal with all these questions for Documenta with *Metastable Circuit*, and the available time I had and the environment were favourable to research and creation. My project was organized in three parts, and wasn't reduced to the performance put on at the Fridericianum for the inauguration. Throughout the exhibition at the Orangerie, I had a space that I called La Lutherie, and imagined as a place for discussing and inventing ways of getting these reflections to exist. Two months before the official opening of the event, I went to Kassel to different kinds of public (schools, students, members of the science club, inhabitants of certain neighbourhoods, etc.) to tell them about the project. I invited them while I was building my instrument. That creative space whirred into action on several occasions during the show. I also invited writers, sound artists, musicians and composers to present instruments they'd come across during their careers and research. Another dimension of the project consisted in broadcasting the interviews and public sessions held at La Lutherie on the web radio Hr2 Kultur.

C.P. **On that occasion, you were also invited to re-visit Erkki Kurenniemi's instruments.²**

T.A. ^{2*} Erkki Kurenniemi is a Finnish mathematician, nuclear physicist, designer, philosopher and artist who was born in 1941. He was one of the pioneers in the design of electronic instruments using digital technologies.

That in fact was the third part of the project, in particular through the performance *DIMIs Re-connected*. The first digital synthesizers created by Erkki Kurenniemi in the early 1969s are held at Helsinki University, which I visited several times to learn about and test how they worked for myself. Kai Lassfolk, Mikko Ojanen and Jari Suominen, all university musicians and researchers and familiar with these instruments, helped me a great deal. What struck me is that Kurenniemi has not really written a user's manual. He always said that he was proposing a possible utilization, but that others, intuitively or empirically, could quite well design their own version. I like the idea of an evolving instrument, whose reality is not fixed by writing. The Electric Quartet especially caught my attention. As one of the first electronic musical instrument collectives, it developed in the early 1970s. Involved is a system devised for four people, each one having his or her own sound, rhythmic or melodic, which makes it possible to improvise simultaneously. During my research I've often wondered what would happen if one or more people were to build an instrument and play it collectively. The question being: what new forms of collaboration and composition can produce this kind of plan?

C.P. **Is this collective-related process specific to your proposal for Documenta?**

T.A. Since the project on Erkki Kurenniemi, this approach has become fundamental in my work. My intent was to connect his inventions to my

computer so as to create a machine that can be played by four people, like the Electric Quartet, but with each player affecting and controlling the sound of the others. This shared effort gives rise to a sound density that no longer permits the musicians to perceive their respective contributions.

C.P. **So are you taking on the conductor's role?**

T.A. Yes, in a way. I function like a sort of orchestrator-*cum*-redistributor of a sound flow between the machines. But at the same time I also take part in the performance and thus place myself at the same level as the others.

C.P. **In a word, you're the person who mixes all the sounds produced.**

T.A. Precisely. If I've learnt one thing by working with this kind of system, it's that it's based on mutual trust. Since Documenta, the idea I had of an instrument, be it for individual or collective use, has developed considerably.

C.P. **This concern seems recurrent in your work, as is shown in particular by *Within*, the programme in four movements during the 2013 Sharjah Biennial and involved a collaboration with a group of deaf students.**

T.A. Absolutely. Even in my project *Visiting Tarab*, on the Tarab, classical Arabic music, it's always there. For me the instrument is no longer necessarily an interface or a material object, but it will sometimes even become abstract matter capable of encouraging or underpinning a creative process. For example, if you write a poem while listening to music, this music in a way becomes the poet's

instrument. The sound itself can become an instrument because it is thenceforward transformed. In collective works and approaches, being aware of this offers a lot more possibilities in terms of writing and time management. So it was a matter of trying to recreate the Tarab by using contemporary aesthetics and techniques.

C.P. **So we come back to your Documenta proposal, which also played on this principle of mobility and transformation.**

T.A. The Kassel instrument was designed to be moved by truck and installed in different places in the city. I gave about 20 performances, from the Fridericianum to an alternative music club, by way of a cinema and a boat, i.e. extremely diverse situations and publics. There was that idea of "going towards" which was important.

C.P. **The globalization phenomenon has developed hugely in the past two decades, not only on the economic level, but on the artistic level as well. How do you see this new deal?**

T.A. The main thing in my eyes is knowing where my work is situated in relation to the history of contemporary music and performance. I do my utmost to stay as close as possible to this tendency and worry less and less about geography as a criterion for defining myself artistically.

MARCHÉ DE L'ART
MONDE

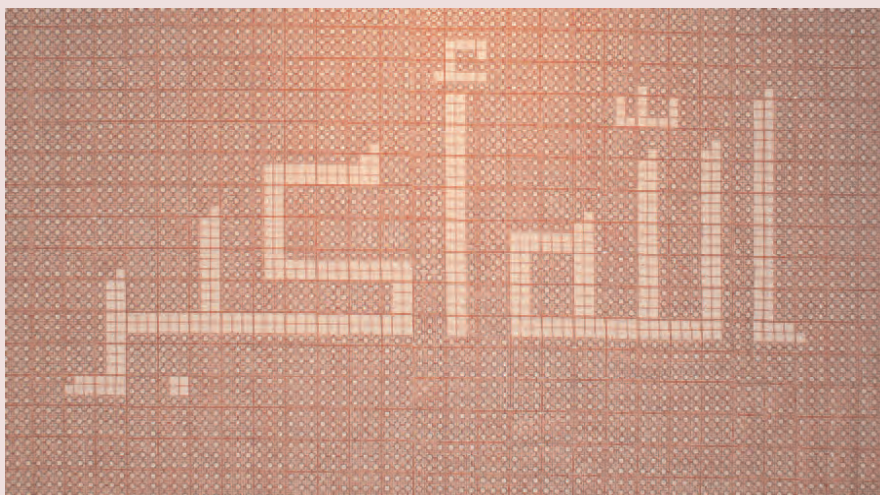
Fiac 2013

Grand Palais, Paris,
du 24 au 27 octobre

FIAC, le pari de la performance

Cette année la FIAC célèbre sa 40^e édition. Pour l'occasion les « in » et les « off » décident de frapper fort, et multiplient les événements d'envergure. Pour mieux flirter avec Art Basel ?

CLÉA DARIDAN



Ahmed Mater, *Allah-o-Akbar*, 2011, Slick 2013

La galerie The Third Line, venue de Dubaï pour la seconde fois, confirme de Bâle à Paris sa place de jeune galerie prospectrice. Aux côtés de Youssef Nabil et Farhad Moshiri, elle expose de nouveaux talents comme la Bengali Rana Begum remarquée l'an dernier, devenant ainsi un acteur clef de l'art contemporain au Moyen-Orient. Place Vendôme, Tadashi Kawamata présente, avec le soutien de Kamel Mennour, une œuvre *in situ* au sommet de la colonne. Intitulée *Tree Huts*, cette sculpture est un prolongement de sa réflexion sur l'espace architectural et social, confrontation inattendue avec le style XVII^e de Jules-Hardouin Mansart. Après Hassan Khan en 2012 et Dan Graham en 2011, le Louvre poursuit

son action en faveur de la performance en accueillant un projet créé spécialement par Tarek Ataoui. L'artiste libanais virtuose du *sampling* met en place dans les jardins du Carrousel une structure sonore nomade, mêlant enregistrements d'archives, improvisation et sons électroniques, activée lors de séances spéciales avec des musiciens invités.

HORS LES MURS ET OFF

Dans la longue liste des foires *off*, on commencera par SLICK désormais installée sur les berges de Seine. Le Saoudien Ahmed Mater représenté par Emerge (Paris) propose *Allah-o-Akbar*, un grand format manifeste composé de douilles de balles en plastique. On se rendra ensuite à la YIA (Young International Artists) qui

a pour particularité de présenter cette année 80 *statements*, disséminés entre quatre espaces du Marais. On soulignera l'engagement des galeristes participants, désormais relégués au second plan au profit de leurs artistes. Ainsi Loevenbruck fait place à une œuvre grand format de Morgane Tschember, jeune artiste française que l'on avait pu apprécier en 2010 dans le cadre d'un solo show à la Fondation Ricard : *Swing* est une nef monumentale en lévitation, invitant à une déambulation mystique. Le Palais de Tokyo rendra enfin un vibrant hommage à la scène contemporaine française, avec l'exposition très attendue de Philippe Parreno qui offre, pour la première fois depuis sa réouverture, l'ensemble de ces 22 000 m² à un seul artiste.

DOCUMENTA (13) Künstlerauswahl

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



Tarek Atoui „Un-drum 2: The Chinese Connection“, 2010, Experimentaclub, Madrid

TAREK ATOUI

In der Orangerie will der Libanese ein musikalisches Labor wachsen lassen. Selbstverständlich mithilfe von Elektronik

Computer sind keine Menschen. Und doch erinnert die Art, wie Tarek Atoui mit dem Laptop umgeht, das Mischpult bedient oder ein Touchpad berührt, an ein Verhalten, das eigentlich nur bei Paaren zu beobachten ist. Es wirkt, als flüsterte er oder stritte sich mit den Maschinen, als bekämpfte oder streichelte er sie. Vor allem aber scheint er mit ihnen zu tanzen.

Wie in Schardscha, der Hauptstadt des gleichnamigen Emirats, wo Atoui seine jüngste Performance auf einem Platz in der historischen Altstadt aufführte. Im März dieses Jahres eröffnete er ein Konzert oder vielmehr eine Klanginstallation, die Flötenspieler, Trommler, Gitarristen, Sänger und immer wieder Atoui selbst mit seinem Equipment mehrere Stunden ohne Unterbrechung realisierten.

Tarek Atoui wurde 1980 in Beirut geboren und studierte am Konservatorium von Reims in Frankreich Elektroakustik und zeitgenössische Musik. Eine Ausbildung, die die experimentellen Formate beförderte, die Atoui bei der Performa in New York (im November 2011), der Transmediale im Berliner Haus der Kulturen der Welt (2007) oder eben in Schardscha präsentierte.

Zwischen weißen Mauern erklangen traditionelle arabische Musik, elektronischer Sound, minimale Geräusche und religiöse Lieder. Eine Zusammenstellung, sagt Tarek Atoui, die nach einer Weile *tarab*, einen tranceähnlichen Zustand, erzeuge. „*Tarab* ereignete sich in den Hinterhöfen“, erzählt Atoui, „in denen die Menschen lange Zeit zusammensaßen und auf verschiedenste Art und Weise kommunizierten.“

Der Aufführungsort von Atouis Performance in Schardscha ist im Grunde auch ein Hinterhof, ein versteckter Ort, durch den die heiße Wüsten- und die kühle Meeresluft weht. Bei der Documenta in Kassel will der Künstler nun die Orangerie beziehen. Wie könnte das aussehen?

Wo traditionell Bäume und exotische Pflanzen stehen, soll ein Laboratorium wachsen, in dem Tarek Atoui zusammen mit Studenten Instrumente bauen möchte; keine Werkzeuge, mit denen lediglich Töne erzeugt werden, sondern Objekte, mit denen man sprechen kann.

Außerdem plant Tarek Atoui diverse Auftritte. Seine technische Ausrüstung, die Rechner, Bildschirme, Kabel und Knöpfe, die Hard- und Software, soll um Sensoren erweitert werden, die auf Atouis langen, schlanken Körper reagieren und auf die er selbst antworten muss. Zwischen den digitalen, computergenerierten Klängen, den Geräuschen aus Radios, Kinos oder Archiven dürfte das auch in Kassel ein sehenswerter Paartanz werden. *as*

Isabella E. Hughes. "Desert Beat: Tarek Atoui", *Art Asia Pacific*, September 2012.

<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/80/TarekAtoui>

Desert Beat: Tarek Atoui

Profiles: Interview BY Isabella E. Hughes from
Sept/Oct 2012



TAREK ATOUI setting up four microphones in the desert of Ash Shigaya, north of Kuwait, to record the sound piece *Unplified*, 2012. Courtesy MinRASY Projects, London.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

On the May morning after the debut of sound artist Tarek Atoui's newly commissioned piece *Unplified* (2012) at the Museum of Modern Art in Kuwait City, Atoui, who had only a few hours of sleep the night before, was surprisingly energetic. Wearing one of his signature quirky, androgynous sweaters despite the already intense heat, Atoui was quick to smile and crack sarcastic jokes. Born and raised in Lebanon and now based in Paris, he sat down with me to discuss his new installation and the collaboration process with MinRasy Projects—an organization run by Rana Sadik and Samer Younis that produces and displays contemporary art projects in Kuwait—before recounting how he began his career as a sound artist, as well as his upcoming work.

Atoui's *Unplified* was a sound installation presented inside a blindingly illuminated portacabin, which was located in the museum's searingly hot courtyard. The temporary building was split into two connected rooms without air-conditioning. The first room was empty except for an audio recording of desert sounds, filtered through Atoui's custom-designed feedback system. Installed in the second room were four microphones that amplified the listener's movements in the space so that the emptiness of the desert was replaced by the sound of human presence, together forming what Atoui describes as a "full sonic experience." He began our breakfast by explaining that the process of creating *Unplified* was "like an experiment . . . I didn't know what was going to happen in the desert. I know my studio in Paris, but this was quite extreme."

How did the collaboration between you and MinRasy Projects come about?

Isabella E. Hughes. "Desert Beat: Tarek Atoui", *Art Asia Pacific*, September 2012.

<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/80/TarekAtoui>

It started with a form of commission. Over the past few years, MinRasy had been inviting artists to work on the theme of the Palestinian presence in Kuwait. Before me, there were Tarek al-Ghoussein, Khalil Rabah and others, so I am a continuation of this project. In my case, what Rana Sadik proposed was doing a sound installation based on a book by Ghassan Kanafani, titled *Men in the Sun* (1963), about three Palestinian refugees who die en route to Kuwait, where they plan to seek work. What Rana told me is that when she read this book, she could imagine or hear the sounds that Kanafani was describing. So this is how things started.

What do you hope is communicated through *Unplified*?

I have no hope at all! I really don't know what I hope people get or feel from it. It is a very abstract piece of work; you can relate to it on different levels. Based on the response I received yesterday, there are a diversity of experiences you can get out of it. I developed this as a conceptual sound piece with a complex relation to the book, but I didn't have a specific intention . . . I know it is not an easy piece; it is not an environment that you can stand at ease in. It's hot and it's saturated, in terms of light. The sound, as well, is saturated and these three elements function together. What I really like is that these elements reproduce the intensity that I wanted.

On the subject of the elements, this is quite different than most of your other pieces, which are primarily sound-based. *Unplified* mimics a desert environment through its use of oppressive heat and blinding light. Was this your idea, to create a desert environment in which to experience the work?

Actually it was Rana's idea first to present it this way, and I thought it was great. With Rana you can dare to push boundaries, and she offered me this possibility. And then I thought that, yes, this is how it should be. I'm used to working in a more typical exhibition space and presenting my work in a more modest way. Now the piece is a full ensemble that also contains sound, and these elements are not easily separated.

Just like the main characters in the book, who traveled across the desert from Basra, in Iraq, to Kuwait inside a water tanker, you also made this journey. What was that experience like?

Well, this was not my idea, actually; it was Rana's again. It happened in December 2011 and my trip took only a few hours. But it was good that I did the journey anyway, as it helped my process. I knocked on the water tanker I was traveling in, but it wasn't interesting, so I didn't use this sound.

Instead of using the natural, raw sounds of the desert that you recorded, you manipulated them. How did you do this and why?

I didn't want to create an illustration of the sound environment of the book. The idea was to transform this into something else, to use the story as a generator to produce something different. But there is still a relationship to the novel: having four speakers relates to the number of characters in the book. The idea was to tune the analysis system on each speaker to act differently, creating a symphony, where each speaker generates a different sound and the four create the piece together, but when you move through the space, you can still hear each one on its own. I didn't want to use or show the sound in a raw way. The sound loop in the installation is two hours long, cut down from seven hours of recorded sound footage.

Isabella E. Hughes. "Desert Beat: Tarek Atoui", *Art Asia Pacific*, September 2012.

<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/80/TarekAtoui>

Sound art in the Middle East is still something of a rarity. How did you begin your career?

When I was a teenager, I was a techno DJ, but after DJ-ing for a while I got bored and thought that I better study something more seriously. I really started sound art when I finished high school and went to university in France, where they teach these things. At some point, I started coming back to the Middle East and began doing projects here.

You have worked all over the world, from New York, to Kassel for Documenta, Seoul and other cities. Though you are from the Arab world, how much is the region a point of reference in your artwork?

Not much, actually. What really interests me is not the regional context of the Middle East, but perpetuating and prolonging things related to the history of sound art and contemporary music. A lot of the questions that interest me come from this discourse, with less and less regional connotations, even if the material or themes are taken from this environment.

What is coming up next for you?

After participating in Documenta this summer, I will start a project with a British performing-arts troupe called Forced Entertainment, who are reinventing contemporary theater. Then I'm going to Beijing and Hong Kong at some point, to continue the project shown in Documenta; and I will perform *Revisiting Tarab* at the Serpentine Gallery [in London] during Frieze week in October.

Nana Asfour. "Tarek Atoui: Visiting Tarab", *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2011.
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2011/11/tarek-atoui.html>

THE NEW YORKER

Tarek Atoui: Visiting Tarab

Posted by Nana Asfour



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

When he was growing up in Beirut, Tarek Atoui had little interest in Arabic music. He wasn't alone; many Lebanese of his generation, myself included, tuned in to mainly American and European music. He left Lebanon in 1998 and moved to France, where he studied contemporary and electronic music at the French National Conservatory, in Reims. Since he graduated in 2003, he's been travelling the world performing his own brand of sound art, which relies on manic body movements to control the sounds of machines he built himself. Much of it involves knob turning, he says, "like playing systems of faucets."

Atoui has made music about Lebanon before—this piece, from his "Un-drum" series, draws upon his arrest and torture during the 2006 war—but it wasn't until Atoui received an invitation to participate in this year's Performa biennial, in New York, that he immersed himself in his own musical heritage. After some preliminary research, he decided to focus on tarab, a trance-like effect associated with a form of Arab art-music from the early twentieth century. (To get a taste of tarab, listen to the Sufi singer Abdel Nabi al Rannan and Asma al Koumsariya.) Atoui was attracted to the improvisation, which binds the audience to the performer. "Tarab is not a music genre but a state of 'melotrance' that you reach after being exposed to music for a certain amount of time," Atoui told me. Tarab, he said, "used to happen in courtyards, where people would come and sit for hours."

While he delved further into tarab, Atoui remembered hearing about Kamal Kassar, a Lebanese lawyer, musician, and collector of traditional Arabic recordings. Kassar had spent years scouring the Middle East and beyond for rare old 78-rpm discs and studio tapes dating back to 1903. Atoui invited musicians he wanted to collaborate with for the Performa commission—from the experimental hip-hop musician DJ Spooky to Tokyo-born composer Ikue Mori—to Lebanon to peruse Kassar's stash. "The idea was to open up the collection to a number of musicians from different practices but all related to sampling," Atoui said. He saw this as an opportunity to not only educate other musicians but also himself. "Even though I am from this culture and this region, I knew as little as they did."

Kassar, who has created a foundation to digitize and preserve his collection, proved to be an avid tea-

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cher. In his climate-controlled music pavilion in the Lebanese mountains, Kassar treated the musicians to hour-long lessons in Arabic music history. These not only included recordings played on an old gramophone, but also archival images and film footage, as well as live performances. "Kamal created this environment that was like being in a space out of time," Atoui said.

As he went through the music, Kassar explained the difference between Arabic forms such as doulab, qasida, taqsim, and samai. (Those of us who have not enjoyed Kassar's private lessons can learn more at Maqam World and Traditional Arabic Music.) To render the music more accessible to his guests, Kassar divided the material into sections—urban, rural, religious, etc. Mori was drawn to a rhythmic form called bashraf; others found an affinity with the breathing of Koranic music, drumming from the north of Egypt, Sufi music from the south. After choosing the tracks that appealed to them, the visitors returned home to work on their own compositions for Performa.

They kept in touch with Atoui, who had to figure out how to bring all the pieces together. "A lot of them were careful about not offending this culture," Atoui told me. "They were very precise about how they cut sentences to the meaning of the songs."

On Saturday, at Performa, Atoui will string the works of the sixteen invited musicians into three suites of about an hour and a half each. It will open with Atoui's own composition, based on a traditional set of Egyptian violin solos filtered through his custom-made electronic contraptions and interrupted by a variety of samples of film and ambient sound. After his solo performance, each of his collaborators will take the stage to play his or her own piece, with Atoui returning several times during the evening to improvise. He will direct another tarab session in March in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, this time with an Arabic orchestra and seminars on traditional and contemporary music. If his generation were better informed about their musical heritage, Arabic music, would, Atoui says, "take a completely different shape."