

Zero dB

Curated by [Andy Rising](#)

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Zero decibels refers to the quietest, or lowest amplitude, sound that the human ear can hear. Prolonged exposure to any sounds above 85 dB can begin to cause permanent hearing damage. Our range of perceptible sound is quite small when compared to the larger possible spectrum of sound waves, perceptible or not, however we are quite unique in our differentiating abilities within these limits. We have the ability to connect sound over distances, understand sound as metaphor, translate sound as visual texture, and these are just a few of the ways we are able to re-interpret and understand our small, but uniquely nuanced range of auditory perception. In this exhibition I wanted to focus primarily on the concept of audio-spatial works which exemplify our ability to assemble landscapes from sound cues in the real world and in digital form. These artists are concerned with sonic landscapes reaching in scale from the assemblage of the micro-universe in string theory to a world scale visualizing the global network of communication via telephone. In general sound art can be difficult to define and understand. Sound art and soundscapes are hybrid languages calling upon histories of music and visual art for supplement. It is a relatively new art form, and the electroacoustic aspect of it stretches only as far back as the beginning of the digital age. It can come across as ambiguous because of how it tends to subvert any direct representation or upset our ingrained training in the construction and experience of music, but at the same time is immediate and immersive. The field of electroacoustic presents a number of potential challenges to assumptions about what Western art music is: as John Cage noted as early as 1937, it opens up the entire field of sound as musical sources. Barry Truax states that "the serious use of environmental sound in music is potentially disruptive and even subversive to the established norms of the artistic field" (1995: 1). Electroacoustic music can shift attention from pitch relationships to timbral possibilities of sounds. As a result, much electroacoustic music confounds traditional forms of musical analysis (Tenney 1986: 4). Soundscape composition, with its focus on environmental sound, could be considered a type of electroacoustic music that is particularly resistant to traditional analysis and categorization. (1) Because of this tendency towards ambiguity, I would like to define a few terms that may provide insight into the language and consideration of these sound installations. First of all, a Soundscape Composition can be defined technically as portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field for study. The term may refer to actual environments, or to abstract constructions such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an environment. (1977: 275) By sonic environment, Schafer is referring to "the ever-present array of noises, pleasant and unpleasant, loud and soft, heard or ignored, that we all live with" (1977: jacket notes). This acceptance of all sounds is similar to that of

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John Cage, who said that the use of electrical instruments "will make available for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard" (1961: 4). Recording equipment makes any sound in the world available: it can be isolated from its context and treated as a sound object, or the interplay of sounds within a specific environmental context can be the focus of attention. Schafer's statement in his definition that abstract constructions such as musical compositions are soundscapes particularly when considered as an environment refers to the importance of context in soundscape composition. (1), an attempt to make dimensional that which exists only in human perception, because remember sound has an elusive physicality, much like light, where it only exists in a wave form until interpreted by the human. The artists presented here are also a quite formal type of sound artist in the sense that they are interested in sound as sound, as both subject and object of the work, and in just a few works I've tried to assemble a spectrum covering major elements of contemporary soundscapes, such as Keynote Sound, Soundmark, and Sound Signal. Keynote Sound refers to the way in which all of the ambient sounds of a place begin to make up the tonal background character of a place, such as wind or traffic noise. I invite the viewer to contemplate this especially when considering 'Aperture.' Sound Signal refers to the foreground sounds of a place signifying a particular idea, such as in the piece '95 Chimes,' and Soundmark, derived from the term landmark, can easily be understood as a primary texture in 'Voice Mosaic' where an interconnected geography blinks and blips on a colored quilt symbolic of communication networks. Also the 'Performances with electroacoustic Clothes' defines a certain personal sphere within which is contained the audio-sensory manifold around one's self in relation to sphere's held by others. 'Studies for sensitive hands' in particular the work 'The body of Ligia' takes this personal sound space to a new level by territorializing areas of soundscape on the female body and playing it like an instrument. The works in this exhibition are all necessarily time-based and dialogue with the spaces they are exhibited in, however the site of those exhibitions differs significantly. Some of the works are documentations of installations at a particular time and place, and to be experienced directly would need to be witnessed in person, while the others are directly accessible in real time through media available at the site of the installation, here online. I invite the viewer to contemplate the difference between the two and make an imaginative leap to "go to" the sites these works occupy to understand their context. Debra Swack's work '95 Chimes' continues her interest in the shapes of sound. The concept of the interplay of sound and vibration as material form also functions metaphorically in her aesthetic for the string theory set forth by Brian Greene (Layman's Note: The essence of string theory, as Green records in his book *The Elegant Universe*, is that vibrations replace particles at the subatomic level as the building process, rather than building block, of matter and as these tiny one-dimensional filaments vibrate differently, they shape matter differently.)

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But the initial variables in the sound work are gathered digitally and edited since Swack's aesthetic includes the concept of composition. (2) Eric Socolofsky's work 'Aperture' recreates an ambient digital space where minimal forms of moving light and sounds are intended to place the viewer in a contemplative mindset absorbing the permeability of ourselves in a space. Jennifer Schmidt's work 'Wish You Were Here' uses a hacked form of greeting cards to playfully transport the viewer to various "in-scapes." This work remixes field recordings, which are a specific genre in sound art and recording more commonly used to record natural sounds at a particular site (think recordings of bird calls you may have heard,) but rather than represent any particular place, these remixes rely on the idea that field recordings have a transportive effect. Browsing through this 'gift shop' of cards may be reminiscent of cards found at a National Park Interpretive Center, or the assorted kitsch shops that spring up in these places, but rather than post cards from a 'real' place, these are a reminder of a vacation to a landscape of the mind. 'Voice Mosaic' is a real-time interactive display that can be manipulated by calling into a number and entering a pin on any telephone, cell or otherwise, from anywhere in the world. This piece exemplifies the ways in which we are all completely connected across the digital landscape and attempts to give a voice and sound to our itinerant and anonymous sites of interface. Benoit Maubrey has been making 'electroacoustic Clothes' and creating choreographed performances of people donning them since the early 1980's. He and his group, Die Audio Gruppe have been on the cutting edge of incorporating sound and performance almost from the beginning of the digital media age. Carlos Sandoval, finally, is added to this exhibition for his work 'The body of Ligia,' although 'Studies for sensitive hands' also connects the space of sound to the limits of the human body, so that the body itself becomes the landscape moved upon to produce and experience sound. My goal with this exhibition is to highlight work that, although working within the confined limits of human aural perception, expands or hones our faculty of understanding the contemporary context surrounding soundscapes. Christoph Cox sums this sentiment up well in his article 'Return to form: Christoph Cox on neo-modernist sound art - Sound - Column' "To the postmodernist, the new sound art might seem to retreat from social and political concerns. But neo-modernism has a politics of its own--a distinctly avant-gardist one that recalls both Greenberg and Theodor Adorno and implicitly criticizes postmodernism for its symbiotic relationship with the culture industry. In eschewing mass-media content, the genre proposes a more radical exploration of the formal conditions of the medium itself. Against the anesthetic assault of daily life, it reclaims a basic function of art: the affirmation and extension of pure sensation." (3) Reference Websites: 1. <http://cec.concordia.ca/econtact/NAISA/soundscape.html> 2. <http://www.asci.org/druck540.html> 3. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_3_42/ai_110913969

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95 Chimes

By **DEBRA SWACK**



“95 Chimes” is a digital sound sculpture/installation that relates string theory to music (see “New York Arts Magazine”) and the origin of matter and provides a three-dimensional musical metaphor for these smallest particles of matter and the harmonies, vibrations, and energies they produce. It was recorded in Sept. 2005, in the Banff Center for the Art’s Luscar recording studio under a co-sponsorship grant. The project was first presented at the ASCI SciArt Symposium in 2002 at the Museum of Natural History in conjunction with the Einstein exhibit. It has been nominated for a Creative Capital grant and mentioned in Stephen Wilson’s Information Arts (MIT Press 2003).

Aperture

By **eric socolofsky**



aperture focuses on the ways sound and light affect spatial perception. multi-channel sonic textures, generated from recordings of existing spaces, encircle the space of the installation. a rear-projected ceiling is used as a display and light source, describing arcs of motion, intensity, and color. transitions between audiovisual textures echo transitional places in architecture, places that deal with changes in scale, use, material, and motion. by contextualizing these changes of sound and light in physical space, aperture enables visitors to gain a greater awareness of the composition of their individual perceptions of space.

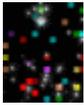
Wish You Were Here

By **Jennifer Schmidt**



A site for interactivity and reception, “Wish You Were Here” is a collective soundscape of audio greeting cards meant to be experienced within the hands of participants through physical and aural sampling. Our sounds are of field recordings, fragmented and manipulated to reinterpret the conventional notion of a sentiment in the model of a greeting card. Re-contextualizing recorded material within this format places limits—including time, compression, and availability—while initiating an accessible, portable, and participatory narrative.

Voice Mosaic



Voice Mosaic is a web-art work that converges speech and image, building a visual mosaic on the web with the chosen colors and recorded voices of people who interact with it by phone from any place in the globe. The voice interface works through phone calls from any telephone – mobile or not (call (800) 289-5570 or (407) 386-2174 (in US) / PIN number: 9991421055). The mosaic is seen/heard in real time on the web at www.voicemosaic.com.br

Performances with electroacoustic Clothes

By [Benoit Maubrey](#)

Performances with electro-acoustic clothes: General statement (partly from 1991): The art we make is not “high tech“, it’s normal. The electronic tools we use are cheap and commonplace and can be found inside a lot of toys that litter a child’s playroom floor. Furthermore integrated circuits (ICs) can even add to a person’s charm. Loudspeakers have long been integrated into modern homes, mass transportation, and public spaces — wherever you find people, you’ll find loudspeakers. It seems only logical that both these elements be combined: even your neighborhood policeman beeps and crackles as he walks his beat. The

Audio Gruppe’s equipment and computer chips are obtained from surplus electronic parts, they’re essentially modern junk. When you superimpose them over peoples’ bodies it may look kind of strange at first, but so did “Walkmans” (and for that matter telephones) when they came on the market. One of the key aspects of my work is the interdisciplinary character — situated somewhere between the worlds of avantgarde music, sound art, dance, theatre, performance, street theatre, fashion, and electronic art. At the same time I feel that by equipping traditional clothing (uniforms, tutus, kimonos) with modern technology I’m seeking to create something meaningful and exciting: fitting people’s bodies with interactive sound-making devices gives the performance a sense of immediacy and surprise. But in today’s world an artist can also play endlessly around with modern computers and machines but what is it’s meaning? – I myself feel the need to work with traditions and myths. An Audio Ballerina and her equipment is nothing without her classical tutu, no more an Audio Geisha without her loudspeaker-studded kimono. I cannot work without a reference to the past or the world around me.

Studies for sensitive hands

By [Carlos Sandoval](#)



'Studies for sensitive hands' is the creation of a sound instrument employed in various ways. "The body of Ligia" is a live-electronics piece based on a human female-body as an abstract, conceptual generator of sound. The body (as any other extended musical instrument) is divided into

several territorialized sound landscapes. The female body still is the cliché for beauty, but also refers to diverse contradictory, codified symbols, either sexually, politically, socially and historically. The composer is inspired in this contradictions and intends to extrapolate them into sound. For this, he presents the relationship between the performer and his musical instrument as an oxymoron: the "passiveness" of a normal musical instrument, as an object, is simply transferred to the socially accepted "passiveness" of a female body as an object, but here a living, semi-responsive body submit the performer to diverse bi-directional emotional and physical shapes: from sexual tensions, to ever-changing technical, expressive and impetuous situations.