



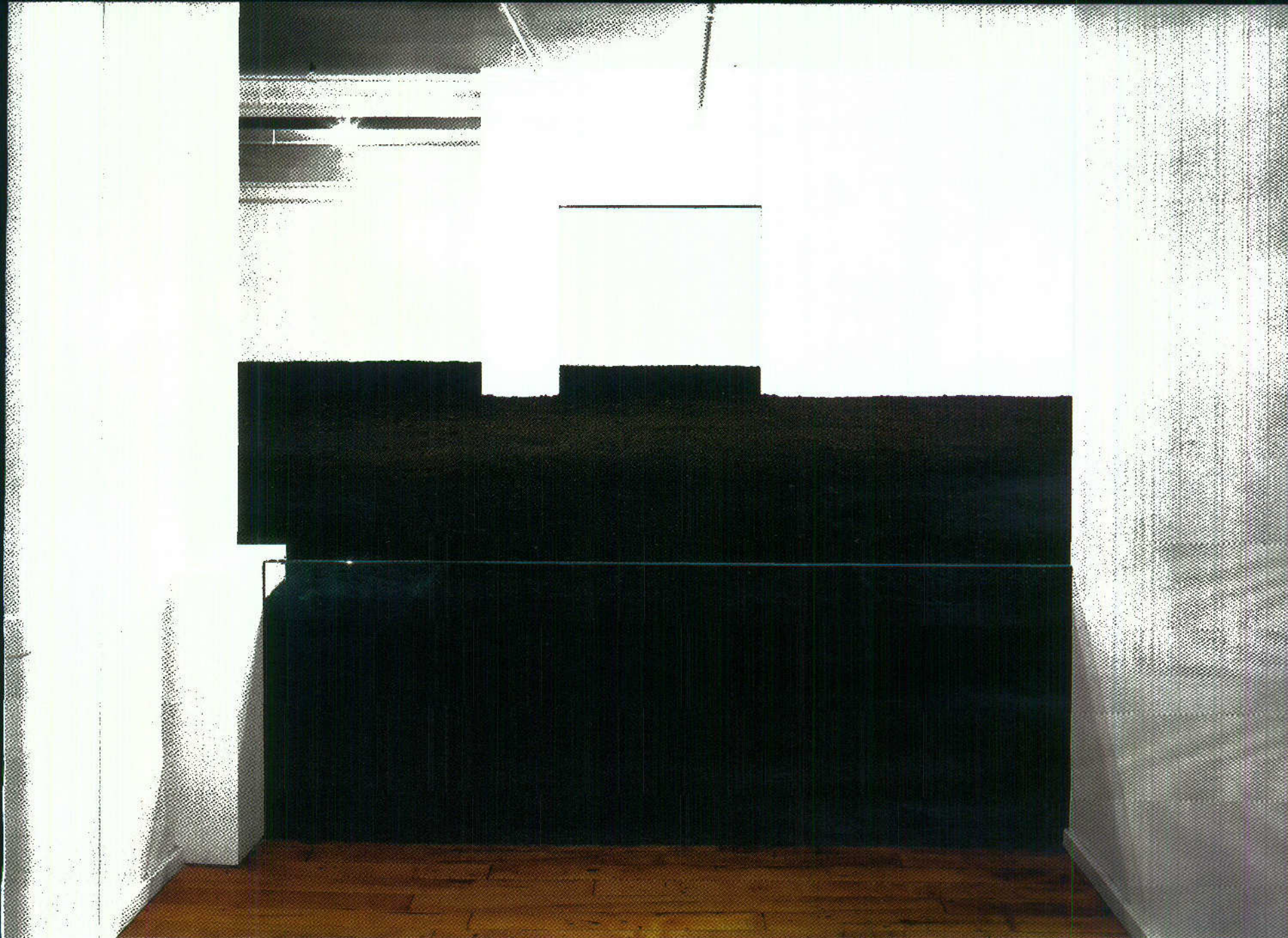
# SOUND & G

By ALAN LICHT

Music and painting have always existed side by side, but it was the deconstruction of painting into formal elements in the early 20th century that made possible the breakdown of music into pure sound. As a result, painters and musicians each began to take further interest in what the other was doing, starting with Wassily Kandinsky and Arnold Schönberg, each of whom dabbled in the other's milieu: the former played the cello, and the latter painted in addition to composing. Kandinsky became fascinated with Schönberg, and the two began a correspondence. Kandinsky came to use "dissonant" color under the influence of Schönberg's 12-tone harmonies. Later in the century,

as artists like Jean Tinguely and Harry Bertoia began to investigate the latent sonic properties of their sculpture, so too did musicians begin to consider sounds as something to be collaged rather than simply as letters or words in musical sentence constructions.

Another formal correspondence between painting and music involved the parallel between noise and dirt, both traditionally undesirable elements that in modernism moved from outside the area where the work was to be experienced (the concert hall, the exhibition gallery) to being incorporated into the work itself. In the early 20th century the Futurist Luigi Russolo and John Cage



# SPACE

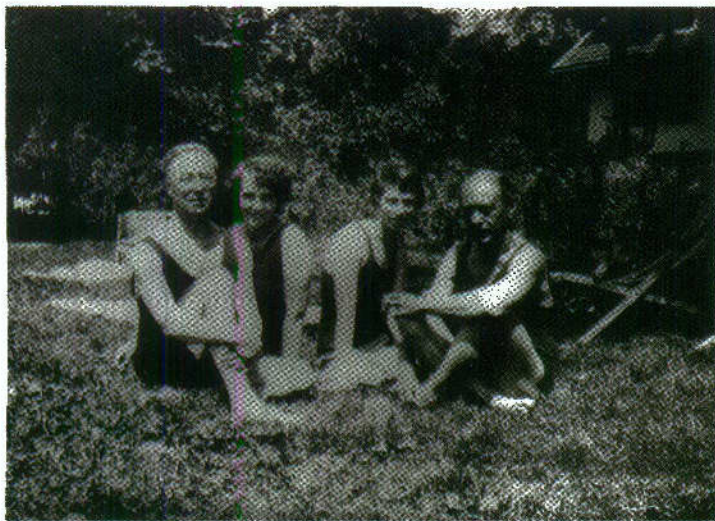
MARIAN ZAZEELA AND  
LA MONTE YOUNG  
**THE MAGENTA LIGHTS, 1981**  
INSTALLATION VIEW, DREAM  
HOUSE, 6 HARRISON STREET,  
NEW YORK  
PHOTO: JOHN C. IETZ  
© THE ARTISTS  
COURTESY RIZZOLI PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK

WALTER DE MARIA  
**THE NEW YORK EARTH ROOM, 1977**  
INSTALLATION VIEW,  
DIA ART FOUNDATION, NEW YORK  
PHOTO: JOHN C. IETZ  
© DIA ART FOUNDATION, NEW YORK  
COURTESY RIZZOLI PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK

incorporated noise into their compositions. In the same period, Georges Braque started mixing sand in pigment in 1912; Andre Masson and Jean Dubuffet followed suit in the 1920s and '40s, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Robert Rauschenberg made *Dirt Painting for John Cage* (1952–53), pointing in yet another direction forward by affixing real plants to the canvas. And, indeed, beginning in the '60s, the Earthworks movement, or Land art, took this interest in soil to new depths.

That the first generation of sound artists (Annea Lockwood, Bill Fontana, La Monte Young, Maryanne Amacher, Bernard Leitner, Max Neuhaus) emerged at the same time as the Earthworks and Land artists cannot be coincidental.

Sound art took its cue from Cage's injunction to listen to all sounds, natural and man-made, and in doing so eventually shifted the stage from the concert hall to the environment itself. Like composers' search for alternative music spaces and sounds other than those of musical instruments, the development of Earthworks was the logical extension of the search for art far from the walls of galleries and museums, and without paint, canvas, or clay. Art could be environment rather than object and so could sound. Instead of being packaged into discrete chunks—songs, compositions—sound could be a continuing presence that simply became part of the surroundings.



FROM LEFT  
WASSILY AND NINA KANDINSKY  
WITH GERTRUD AND ARNOLD  
SCHÖNBERG, PÖRTSCHACH AM  
WÖRTHERSEE, AUSTRIA, 1927  
COURTESY ARNOLD SCHOENBERG CENTER,  
VIENNA

BILL FONTANA  
EARTH TONES, 1992  
SIX LOW-FREQUENCY SPEAKERS  
BURIED IN THE EARTH  
OLIVER RANCH, SONOMA  
COUNTY, CALIFORNIA  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RIZZOLI  
PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK

FACING PAGE  
ROLF JULIUS  
MUSIC FOR A FROZEN LAKE,  
JANUARY 1982  
RECORDED PIANO PLAYED  
OUTDOORS  
PERFORMANCE STILL, BERLIN  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RIZZOLI  
PUBLICATIONS, NEW YORK



Walter De Maria is a pivotal figure here. In the late '50s he was artistic director for mixed-media events at the San Francisco Art Institute, a series produced by La Monte Young.<sup>2</sup> They became friends, and both moved to New York in the early '60s. De Maria was a drummer who played informally with Young in an early version of the Velvet Underground and with philosopher-musician Henry Flynt. De Maria had already started formulating the idea of working with land as art, as evidenced by the pieces he contributed to the self-published art-music book *An Anthology* (edited by Young and Jackson Mac Low), which included *Art Yard*, *Beach Crawl*, and *On the Importance of Natural Disasters*, all made in 1959–60. De Maria's *Mile-Long Drawing in the Desert* (two parallel lines drawn in chalk, running for a full mile in the Mojave Desert, conceived in 1962 but not realized until 1968) resembles Young's 1960 *Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris* ("Draw a

## Sound art took its cue from John Cage's injunction to listen to all sounds, natural and man-made, and in so doing it eventually shifted the stage from the concert hall to the environment itself.

*straight line and follow it*"), and in 1968 he recorded an album called *Drums and Nature*, which features his drumming on top of cricket chirps on one side and ocean sounds on the other. A similar recording serves as the sound track to his 1969 film *Hardcore*, in which he and fellow Land artist Michael Heizer enact an Old West cowboy duel while the camera does endless 360-degree pans over the Nevada desert landscape.<sup>3</sup>

De Maria also did Young the good turn of introducing him to Heiner Friedrich, who went on to found (with Philippa de Menil) the Dia Art Foundation and became the leading sponsor of both artists. In this respect, De Maria's *Earth Room*, a gallery space filled two feet deep with dirt (first realized in Friedrich's gallery in Munich in 1968 and then permanently in New York in 1977), can be compared to Young's *Dream House*, a kind of "sound room" that fills a downtown loft not far away from *Earth Room* with a dense soundscape. Although visitors could not walk around in the dirt the way they could walk through the sound waves in Young's environment, the similarities in the aesthetic of both these works and between the artists overall cannot have been lost on Friedrich.

Other examples from the period bear out the zeitgeist that the De Maria-Young relationship suggests. Robert Smithson looms large. The translocation

of land to gallery spaces in his non-sites is felt particularly in the sound works of Fontana and Amacher. The former's *Kirribilli Wharf* (1976) took sounds from a pier in Sydney and sent them into an eight-channel gallery installation, while his more recent work *Earth Tones* (1992) consists of loudspeakers buried in the ground in a Northern California ranch that issue high-frequency sounds piped in from the Pacific Ocean. In Amacher's "City Links" series, begun in 1967, sounds from urban environments—harbors, steel mills, factories, airports—are transmitted in real time via telelinks to other locations, including galleries and the artist's own studio. The parallel to Smithson's works is also clear in George Brecht's 1970 multimedia event *Journey of the Isle of Wight Westwards by Iceberg to Tokyo Bay*—inspired by an article about the possibilities of translocating land masses by harnessing them to icebergs—which featured a performance by the Scratch Orchestra and the creation of a graphic score in reaction to their playing.<sup>4</sup> Bruce Nauman's untitled conceptual piece from 1969 called for the drilling of a hole a mile into the earth and placement of a microphone inside it: the mic would feed into an amplifier and speaker in an empty room, thus combining ideas of both site and

non-site. More recently Hans Haacke's former student Christian Marclay created the video *Guitar Drag* (2000), in which an amplified electric guitar is tied to the back of a pickup truck and driven over varying terrain.<sup>5</sup>

Conceptual artist Les Levine wrote in a 1969 issue of *0 to 9*, the journal founded by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, that "environmental art can have no beginnings or endings"; likewise sound artists have sought the elimination of time. Music is a time-based art, while with a visual-art object there is no fixed duration for its appreciation. A sound installation, however, even if it's seemingly static and fixed, may require an extended period of time for the listener to fully understand everything the piece has to offer and to absorb the structure the sound artist has intended.<sup>6</sup> A visual artwork manages to freeze a moment in time as an image; installations that use loops or drones are an attempt to sustain a sonic moment long enough for you to examine detail as you would with a more conventional work of art.<sup>7</sup>

The long-term parameters of Earthworks like Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) or Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969) are mirrored in the long durations of sound art. Young's aforementioned *Dream House*, conceptualized in 1962 and realized at mul-



triple sites thereafter, including a permanent location on New York's Church Street open since 1993, is a room with an unchanging sine-tone sound installation, meant to go on eternally, in a light environment created by his wife, artist and musician Marian Zazeela. Neuhaus's *Times Square* has put a soothing drone under a grate in New York's Times Square since 1977. Charlemagne Palestine pioneered "meditative sound environments" at a church in Los Angeles in the early '70s, during which he performed his "Spectral Continuum Drones," tracing the "evolution of a sonority" that began with a single organ tone and grew over the course of several hours into a full spectrum of tones and overtones.

To some extent, sound works like these also developed from musical compositions of extreme repetition, notably Erik Satie's *Vexations* (1893), a piano piece that reiterates a melody, with two different harmonizations, 840 times; as critic David Toop has observed, the piece "was creating a kind of machine, or installation." A performance of *Vexations* organized by Cage in 1963 at the Pocket Theatre in New York lasted 18 hours 40 minutes, while a performance by Richard Toop (no relation to David) at Arts Lab in London in 1967 lasted 24 hours. Richard Toop remarked that "the piano was in the outer foyer, where there was an art exhibition, so that the music became a real '*musique d'ameublement*.' People walked round the piano, talked, sometimes stopped and listened."<sup>8</sup> Musicians aspiring toward the same contemplation afforded a visual artwork were in the same position as choreographer Yvonne Rainer, who, in discussing her 1961 solo work *The Bells*, said that dance "was at a disadvantage in relation to sculpture in that the spectator could spend as much time as he required to examine a sculpture, walk around it, and so forth—but a dance movement—because it happened in time—vanished as soon as it was executed." Her solution was to repeat seven movements, in varied sequence, direction, and parts of the room, over seven minutes—"in a sense allowing the spectator to 'walk around it.'"<sup>9</sup>

Techniques of repetition and long tones not only demonstrate an aspiration to stop time but also the predilection for the avoidance of "uncomfortable" silences so prevalent in our currently sound-saturated society, from the ubiquitous iPod to the museum audio tour. While this concern is certainly related to the way our society is technologized, it has more primal roots as well. You can hold a note vocally only for a short period of time, until you run out of breath; psychologically this connection may be part of the equation of silence with death. Bill Fontana has written, "Sounds that repeat, that are continuous and that have long duration defy . . . natural acoustic mortality."<sup>10</sup> Tactics of repetition and extended duration serve the dual purpose of temporal extension

and opposing silence (and, on a subliminal level, lengthening life itself). And the use of echo—the most obviously physically indexed technique of this sort—seems to expand not only time but also space.<sup>11</sup> In a 1985 interview in the journal *Daidalos*, sound artist Bernhard Leitner notes:

The Taj Mahal contains a huge empty domed space above the crypt. The mass, the weight of the walls, the shape and dimensions of the dome . . . and the extremely hard and polished surfaces . . . sustain a tone for up to twenty-eight seconds. In this space, a simple melody played on a flute will interweave with itself, going on and on to become an almost timeless sound. The room never ends.

Beyond issues of duration and environment, Earthworks and sound art share a final concern: salability. Sound installations have yet to find a market among collectors. Compare sculptor-painter-architect Tony Smith's famous remark on highway landscapes as art ("There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it"), which was prompted by a drive on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike, with this comment by Michael J. Schumacher, proprietor of the Diapason sound art gallery in Manhattan: "Sound is experience, so there's no point in trying to make it into an object as a collector's piece. So I'm trying to create situations where people come to it as experience, and value that."<sup>12</sup>

For that matter, consider these claims by Smithson: "the world is a museum. Photography makes nature obsolete. My thinking in terms of the site and the non-site makes me feel there's no need to refer to nature anymore."<sup>13</sup> Think of it in conjunction with Kandinsky's insistence, decades earlier, that

imitations of frogs croaking, of farmyards . . . are worthy of the variety stage and may be very amusing as a form of entertainment. In serious music, however, such excesses remain valuable examples of the failure of attempts to 'imitate nature.' Nature has its own language, which affects us with its inexorable power. This language cannot be imitated,<sup>14</sup>

With the advent of field recordings, classical music's attempts at replicating nature became outmoded. Sound art proceeds from that point, and its practitioners regard sound as a force as elemental as earth or water, light or air.

This essay has been adapted from the author's *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories*, published this month by Rizzoli. For endnotes, turn to Index, p. 110.

## INDEX

### Design: Minister of Culture

**"BLACK PANTHER: THE REVOLUTIONARY ART OF EMORY DOUGLAS"** is on view through January 20, 2008, at MOCA/Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles ([moca.org](http://moca.org)). The book *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, edited by Sam Durant, was published by Rizzoli.

### Dance: The Revolution Has Been Televised

**ROS INDEXICAL**, a Performa Commission with Documenta 12, will be performed November 18–19 at the Hudson Theatre at the Millennium Broadway Hotel, New York ([performa-arts.org](http://performa-arts.org)).

### Introducing

**JOHN GERRARD** will be included in the following group shows: "Existencias," Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (musac), Leon, Spain, through January 6, 2008 ([musac.org.es](http://musac.org.es)); "Are We There Yet?" Elizabeth Foundation Gallery, New York, November 30–February 2, 2008 ([efa1.org](http://efa1.org)); and "Blown Away," Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, opening January 25, 2008 ([kam.uiuc.edu](http://kam.uiuc.edu)). His website is [johngerrard.net](http://johngerrard.net).

**NAOTAKA HIRO** will be showing at the Box, Los Angeles, next spring. He will also curate an exhibition at Garash Galería, Mexico City, next spring ([garashgaleria.com](http://garashgaleria.com)). His video *Flood Patrol* will be included in *Saison Vidéo 2008* ([saisonvideo.com](http://saisonvideo.com)). He is represented by Misako & Rosen, Tokyo ([misakoandrosen.com/en/](http://misakoandrosen.com/en/)). His website is [naotakahiro.com](http://naotakahiro.com).

### En la boca de la cobra

#### FIGURE CAPTIONS



Fig. 4. Sombrero colectivo, 2004. Plaited palm leaves, 18 x 98 x 98 in.

Fig. 6. Rethinking Housing Affordability, 2006. Digital image, 60 x 60 in.

Fig. 7. Palas Por Pistolas, 2006–2007. Metal recuperated from guns, wood, 47 x 14 x 2 in.

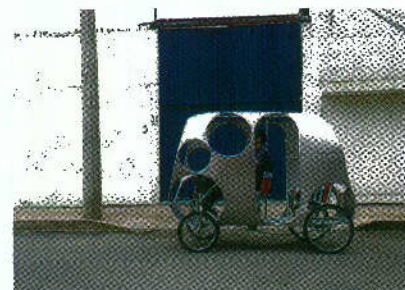


Fig. 8. Velotaxi, 2007. Human-powered passenger vehicle, 4 x 7 x 4 ft.

Fig. 9. Density=Cross Institutional Collaboration, 2006. Digital image, dimensions variable.

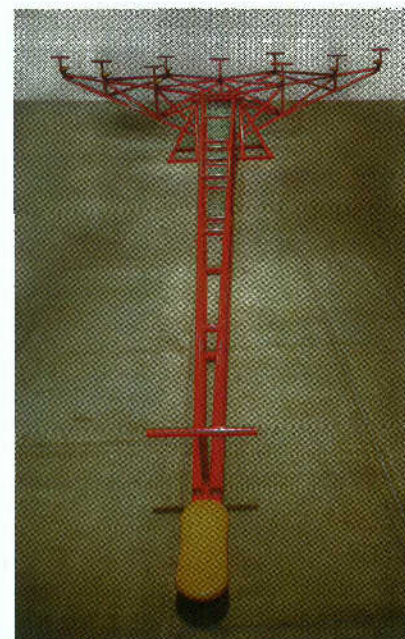


Fig. 10. Leverage, 2006. Steel, paint, and wood, 4 x 39 x 20 ft.

Fig. 11. Barry Le Va Goes to San Ysidro, 2006. Digital image, dimensions variable.

Fig. 12. Debord(er): An Urbanism Beyond the Property Line, 2006. Digital image, dimensions variable.

All images courtesy the artists.

**TEDDY CRUZ** is owner of Estudio Teddy Cruz, La Jolla, California ([california-architects.com](http://california-architects.com)).

**PEDRO REYES** is represented by the Yvon Lambert gallery, New York ([yvon-lambert.com](http://yvon-lambert.com)), and Blow de la Barra, London ([blowdelabarra.com](http://blowdelabarra.com)).

### Sound & Space

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Suzann Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 24–25.

<sup>2</sup> Boettger, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, Young and Marian Zazeela made an abortive attempt to record for Columbia Records in 1968 in which they went to the beach and sang with "ocean resonances." Spending a week at Columbia executive John McClure's house, they rehearsed and had a sound truck record them one day, but, Young said, "the ocean didn't sound good and the wind was blowing my pitches all over the place." He asked to try again, but the label preferred the idea of simply overdubbing ocean sounds. Young refused and the project stalled. See Edward Strickland, "The Well-Tuned Piano: An Interview with La Monte Young," *Fanfare* 11, no. 1 (Sept./Oct. 1987): 85.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Parsons, "The Scratch Orchestra and the Visual Arts," *Leonardo Music Journal* 11 (2001): 7.

<sup>5</sup> The context in which Marclay's video appeared, some two years after the horrific murder of James Byrd in Texas, of course gives the piece an entirely different range of associations.

<sup>6</sup> Young's *Dream House* installations are set up so that visitors may spend hours in the space and make repeat visits, and, he notes, "it may be necessary to experience the frequencies for a long period of time in order to tune one's nervous system to vibrate harmoniously with the frequencies of the environment."

<sup>7</sup> Tony Conrad has commented that the music he played with Young, John Cale, and Zazeela in the '60s "was an effort to freeze the sound in action, to listen around inside the innermost architecture of the sound itself," which suggests that the group functioned as a sort of real-time performance sound installation, with the performers also serving as audients. Young has always considered the live appearances to be "excerpts" from a developing, continuous musical work.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Gavin Bryars, "Vexations and Its Performers," *JEMS*, <http://www.users.waitrose.com/~chobbs/Bryars.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London: Routledge, London, 2000), 115.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Fontana, "Resoundings," <http://resoundings.org/Pages/Resoundings.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Akio Suzuki is a sound artist who has investigated echoes as an aural method of mapping space.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Smith's statement appears in Boettger, 57; Schumacher's was made in an interview with the author on May 27, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "Discussion with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," in Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 246.

<sup>14</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art," quoted in Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 106.

### Optical Disillusion

**ROSALIND NASHASHIBI** has an exhibition at the Frankfurter Kunstverein through January 13, 2008 ([fkv.de](http://fkv.de)). She is represented by doggerfisher, Edinburgh ([doggerfisher.com](http://doggerfisher.com)), Store Gallery, London ([storegallery.co.uk](http://storegallery.co.uk)), and Harris Lieberman, New York ([harrislieberman.com](http://harrislieberman.com)).

### Hell Is Other People

**ERIK VAN LIESHOUT** has a solo show at Galerie Bob van Orsouw, Zurich, through the end of November ([bobvanorsouw.ch](http://bobvanorsouw.ch)). He will be showing with Kelley Walker at De Hallen, Haarlem, December 8–March 2, 2008 ([dehallenhaarlem.nl](http://dehallenhaarlem.nl)). His work is included in the following group shows: "Port City," Arnolfini, Bristol, through November 11 ([arnolfini.org.uk](http://arnolfini.org.uk)); "If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution," Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, through January 6, 2008 ([muhka.be](http://muhka.be)); and "Brave New Worlds," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, through February 17, 2008 ([walkerart.org](http://walkerart.org)). He is represented by Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam ([fonswelters.nl](http://fonswelters.nl)), and Galerie Christa Burger, Munich ([galerieburger.de](http://galerieburger.de)).

### Working Practice

**CHRISTOPHER MCELROEN** will be directing *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans, by Paul Chan and the Classical Theatre of Harlem, November 2–3 in the Lower Ninth Ward and November 9–10 in the Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans. The performances are presented by Creative Time ([creativetime.org](http://creativetime.org)).

MODERN PAINTERS, ISSN 0953-6698, IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY EXCEPT A COMBINED ISSUE FOR JULY/AUGUST AND DECEMBER/JANUARY BY LTB MEDIA, 111 8TH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10011. APPLICATION TO MAIL PERIODICALS POSTAGE RATES IS PENDING AT NEW YORK, NY, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO MODERN PAINTERS, P.O. BOX 5847, FT. LAUDERDALE, FL 33310-5847.



## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Sound & Space  
SOURCE: Mod Painters 19 no9 N 2007

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:  
<http://www.modernpainters.co.uk/>