

Gallery 3

Helmut Lemke

KLANGELN VIII

Helmut Lemke's work customises everyday objects, making them surprising components within installations in gallery environments. As with all three exhibits currently at Cornerhouse, Lemke's work has an important visual dimension, drawing attention to the environment it has been constructed for. Gallery 3 has been left luxuriously empty containing the sounds that are present all the time, ready to have the sonic compositions of the audience added to them.

KLANGELN VIII, part of the Klangeln series, is a site-specific work within the ceiling space of Cornerhouse Gallery 3. Oversized bows play a number of strings, which criss-cross above the heads of visitors. The Klangeln are set in motion by opening specially commissioned books placed on tables. Each book operates two different Klangeln, making it possible for visitors to act as composers and musicians. Klangeln are intriguing instruments that have been used by Lemke in various installations and performances since 1998. A play on the German words for sound, Klang, and fishing, Angeln, Klangeln are created from fishing rods manipulated to behave as stringed instruments.

Lemke has worked with self-made instruments, constructed from everyday objects, for many years and believes there to be little or no magic in the physicality of his work. He strives to make the mechanisms of the work and the relationships between their appearance and sounds they produce transparent. Lemke sees this transparency, and the fact that these instruments are available for all to play, as emblematic of democracy and continues his belief that artists must display social responsibility within their work. Lemke has acknowledged that the context within which he performs or exhibits is not only important but of political value - an essential aspect of his practice.

Lemke's background lies in free jazz, which he began playing in his native Germany 30 years ago. Influenced by musicians including Evan Parker, Peter Brötzmann and Captain Beefheart as well as punk and blues, these 1970's music scenes were strongly associated with left-wing politics, especially in Germany. He quickly and easily moved from focusing on music towards work that included performance and sculptural aspects. For six years he was a member of the Heinrich Mucken artist group with whom he performed at Documenta 8 (1987), Kassel. Without formal musical or artistic training Lemke describes these experiences as his 'art school'.

Developing a practice over thirty years Lemke now acknowledges that his role within what he makes is increasingly less about creation, and more about understanding and responding to the existing sounds in the locations where he works. The initial steps of making a work are to listen intently and without prejudice for long periods to the sounds that occupy and seep into the spaces. It is only after this that he feels it is possible to respond appropriately to the environment.

Lemke was born in North-West Germany. He has been presenting the process-based results of his investigations into site specific sound for 30 years. He has performed and exhibited widely throughout Europe and in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore, and collaborated internationally with musicians, visual artists, poets, dancers, scientists, performers and filmmakers. He has released many solo and collective recordings of his performances. Since 1995 he has taught at art academies and universities in Germany, France, England, Finland and Thailand. He was Research Fellow in interactive Arts (Media Events) at Manchester Metropolitan University (1997) and currently holds an AHRC- Fellowship at the University of Salford.

All three exhibitions were produced in partnership with Sonic Arts Network. **sonic arts network**

The Space Between: Experiments for Speakers is a Cornerhouse and Sonic Arts Network co-commission.

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Bob Levene

The Space Between: Experiments for Speakers

Staalplaat Soundsystem

The Ultrasound of Therapy

Helmut Lemke

KLANGELN VIII

24 June - 30 July 2006

Cornerhouse presents three solo sound installations to coincide with Expo Manchester, Sonic Arts Network's annual UK festival of experimental music and sound art (23 - 26 June). Two of these are new sound exhibitions from artists Helmut Lemke and Bob Levene, and the third is a UK premiere from Amsterdam-based sound and performance collective Staalplaat Soundsystem.

In Gallery 1, Bob Levene shows work that is driven by her curiosity about the relationship between sound, its source and how it is represented. Her work, *The Space Between: Experiments for Speakers*, includes a newly commissioned audiovisual installation. In Gallery 2, Staalplaat Soundsystem's extreme and immersive sound installation *The Ultrasound of Therapy* gives visitors the chance to undergo a unique personal sensory experience. Reclining on a hospital bed, 'patients' receive personalised sound therapies. And in Gallery 3, Helmut Lemke invites visitors to create their own sound compositions in his new work *KLANGELN VIII*, which transforms fishing rods into intriguing instruments.

These separate exhibitions explore three diverse aspects of what is possible within art utilising sound, when presented within the gallery space. There are a number of threads linking Levene, Staalplaat Soundsystem and Lemke. Each continues the spirit of the field, using and refusing to differing degrees the attributes of high-tech and low-tech, performance, improvisation and participation, minimalism and conceptualism, and the use of the everyday.

Experimentations in music and art have been intertwined throughout the 20th century, key relationships being those between abstraction and jazz, and the use of sound in the multidisciplinary practices of artists involved in Futurism and Fluxus. As Minimalism and Performance Art developed through the 1960s, artists including Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Carolee Schneemann encountered and collaborated with dancers and composers like Yvonne Rainer, Merce Cunningham and John Cage, blurring the points of influence and re-influence. Later in the 1980s artists such as Laurie Anderson and Bill Fontana continued to push the possibilities and English artists including Max Eastley made significant investigations into sound and kinetic sculpture.

John Cage's work in particular made possible much within contemporary music and art, with *4'33"*, first performed in 1952, remaining iconic, controversial and influential. The score requires the pianist to remain silent for the entire duration of the performance, allowing the audience to hear the unpredictable and unintentional sounds of the concert hall environment. Equally, a seminal work by Robert Morris, *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961), seems a pertinent influence on the artists shown here, especially Bob Levene. The work is a cube made of walnut wood with a tape player secreted inside that plays a sound recording of the box being made.

Today, sound art has become a genre, alongside its siblings of experimental music, electroacoustic music, performance and visual art, with practitioners choosing their preferred medium, and mode of presentation, whether it be the gallery, the concert hall or public space, and then moving fluidly between the possibilities they allow.

Books and articles about the history of sound art are available to read and buy at Gallery Reception.

Gallery 1

Bob Levene

The Space Between: Experiments for Speakers

Bob Levene's work is driven by her curiosity about the relationship between how we use technological hardware like microphones, speakers, radios and telephones, and our expectations of the sounds associated with them. She explores the relationship between what is making the sound, what is recording the sound and the corresponding images and representation of particular activities. She experiments with subtle changes to each, at times accentuating their dislocation, sometimes making visual representations of the scenario, and at other times creating playful visual and audible puns. When experiencing her work, the viewer may become aware that the physical activity represented on screen doesn't marry with the sound they hear.

Approaching sound art from the perspective of fine art, her methodology owes much to the research and process-based work of artists like Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci.

The work exhibited by Levene in Cornerhouse is split into two related groups: ***Experiments with Microphones*** (2005) and ***Experiments for Speakers*** (2006, commissioned by Cornerhouse and Sonic Arts Network). As her use of the word 'experiment' in the works' titles suggest, Levene set up a number of scenarios, looked at the results and then refined the experiments further, distilling her research into the works on show here. One set of experiments was based around microphones and the others around speakers.

Experiments with Microphones (2005) is made up of 5 short performances to camera on 3 monitors: *Exercise Video* (5'16"), *From Walk to Run* (2'21"), *Metal and Bucket* (1'27"), *Testing Microphone* (52") and *Spinning Hum* (2'55"). These playful and sometimes humorous video and audio works experiment with the performative actions involved in making sound, using the voice, the artist's body and everyday objects. Within each work, different kinds of microphones have been employed to record an activity or movement made by the artist. *Testing Microphone* depicts one microphone on a stand that has been extended to its maximum height, making it appear odd in scale. The artist lunges at the mic whilst counting from one to ten, as if carrying out a sound check. In *Exercise Video*, Levene holds a mic in her mouth which picks up her exertions. In *Metal and Bucket* the mic has been separated from the camera, and actually appears in shot at the far end of the room. This creates a disruption between sound and image, with the sound diminishing as the action moves towards the camera.

All the other works exhibited make up the series ***Experiments for Speakers***. Central to this series is the projected video of bees, which is both mesmerising and beautiful. Incredibly simple, this film initially appears hectic and chaotic as the bees fly in and out of shot and focus, but after a short time the chaos gives way to pattern and repetition. With the high contrast of the film making details only fleetingly visible, the activity of the bees becomes almost like a drawing.

A further video projection shows a fixed shot of a field with pockets of activity occasionally taking place within it. The audio track of the activity appears out of sync with the images. This was achieved not by editing after filming, but in situ by placing the microphone at a significant distance from the camera. The resulting film seems uncanny and odd, like a considered version of 'bad dubbing'. As one watches the film, the incidental activity of the characters becomes fascinating and absorbing.

The third work uses the physical qualities, as well as the functional aspect, of two speaker cones that have been removed from their boxes, creating a formal sound sculpture. Both cones are operating as speakers, but cupped together the sound each makes is trapped and restricted.

Bob Levene studied at Hull School of Art and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee and has performed and exhibited her work in a number of festivals and galleries including The Globe Gallery, Newcastle; NRLA, Glasgow; fa projects, London; Free Fall, Peterborough Digital Arts; The 7th International Computer Arts Festival, Maribor, Slovenia and Inport International Video-Performance Art Festival Estonia. She has completed residencies in Colima, Mexico; Braziers, Oxfordshire and Hull Time Based Arts, Yorkshire. She has recently been awarded an artsadmin Bursary.

Levene also works with artist Rob Gawthrop under the name Automated Noise Ensemble who have exhibited and performed at Futuresonic, Manchester; Burning Bush Festival; Dundee Contemporary Arts; Radio Radio, Manchester; 54D North Festival; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull and recently released a vinyl picture disc record of their performance Turntable Strings.

www.boblevene.co.uk

Gallery 2

Staalplaat Soundsystem

The Ultrasound of Therapy

Staalplaat Soundsystem are an audio art collective based in Amsterdam initiated by Geert-Jan Hobijn, who works with Carlo Crovato and Carsten Stabenow. The collective is an eclectic mix of techno culture and sound art installation. At the heart of their work is a low-tech philosophy, the aim of which is to make their installations appear simple, revealing to audiences how the highly original sound and performative elements are made. In contrast to much media art, it is not the technology that is central to their work, but the ideas that lie behind it.

Hobijn was the founder of the well respected Staalplaat music label, which founded in the early 1980s and continues to operate a shop in Berlin. Staalplaat Soundsystem combines knowledge of this scene with a performative element. Writer Josephine Bosma has noted that the collective "have developed into a trashy extravaganza with the down to earth simplicity of the Cagean music universe. Every event is tailored to fit its environment."

Since beginning in 2000, Staalplaat Soundsystem has created a multitude of mechanical orchestras using all manner of consumer electronics. Previous performances have starred 12 floor polishers, *Sweet Sissy and the Ballroom Hiss*, and a composition for one hundred electric office fans titled *Aviator* was presented at Kiasma, Helsinki in 2004. *Floating Islands*, a large sound and light installation made with Erwin Stache for the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Berlin utilized fifty vacuum cleaners, plastic bottles and lights. The interactive element of Staalplaat Soundsystem's

work is a theme currently under development, and visible with the installation within Cornerhouse ***The Ultrasound of Therapy***. The work gives visitors the chance to experience a unique personal sensory experience. Inspired by the French hospital 'La Salle des Malades', the installation mimics a clinical environment, complete with hospital beds and apparatus. 'Patients' will be treated by artist 'doctors' and 'nurses' to personalised sound therapies, ranging from the relaxing and energising to the disturbing. In addition to the individual therapeutic sounds, an overall acoustic is created for the whole space, unifying it into one immersive sound installation.

The group have previously worked with audience participation at the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrueck, Germany, where the installation *Sale Away*, invited members of the public to use their mobile phones, to play a complex mechanical orchestra. ***The Ultrasound of Therapy*** has been performed at Townhouse Gallery of contemporary art in Cairo, I.D.E.A.L. at Le lieu unique, Nantes and at Kapelica Gallery for Bitshift", Ljubljana. The collective have also performed and exhibited extensively in Europe and Asia, including at The Avanto Festival at the Finnish National Art Gallery Helsinki, Art Vinyl Museum Weserburg Bremen, The Electronic music festival at CEMC Beijing-De Midi (2005) and Sonar, Barcelona (2002).

www.staalplaat.org

Events

Please book tickets for all events, including free ones, at Box Office.

Exhibition Tours

Sun 25 June, 3.00pm and Thu 27 July, 6.00pm

Lesley Young, Cornerhouse Visual Arts Education Officer, will give informal introductory tours to the three exhibitions. *The tour on Thu 27 July will be BSL interpreted.*

Free. Galleries 1, 2 & 3

One Hour Intro:

Sonic Art and Electroacoustic Music

Thu 6 July, 6.00pm

An introduction to the key themes of sonic art and electroacoustic music from its Futurist beginnings in the early 20th Century to contemporary practitioners.

Led by David Berezan, composer, lecturer and Director of the electroacoustic music studios (MANTIS) at the University of Manchester.

£2.50 full / £2 concs. Cinema 1 Education Space

Curious Sound:

Performance and Discussion

Sat 1 July, 2.00pm - 6.00pm

Artists Helmut Lemke, Bob Levene and Lee Patterson perform their work live and join a related discussion with artist Hayley Newman and David Toop, musician, author and curator of *Sonic Boom* at Hayward Gallery.

Lee Patterson uses the inherent sonic possibilities of everyday objects and places to make his work, seeking to reveal the unexpected audio potential of seemingly mute objects. Hayley Newman began her performance career in the early 1990s with much of her solo work involving sound and its direct relation to the body.

The afternoon will consider the diverse approaches of each performer and how these relate to the differing methodologies of low-fi and electroacoustic sound art.

£6 full / £4 concs. Gallery 3

Exhibition Tours for schools, colleges and other groups can be specially arranged. Please contact us to arrange in advance by email (lesley.young@cornerhouse.org) or phone (0161 200 1525).