

CHRISTINA KUBISCH: HIDDEN FROM VIEW

At a lecture in San Francisco earlier this year, Christina Kubisch talked as much about seeing as hearing. This fact might be considered unusual, or paradoxical even, for an artist who has made a career predominantly out of creating and capturing sound. And yet, it is precisely through promoting an intense interplay between the eye and ear that Kubisch's works afford an opportunity to "see" the world more clearly, to apprehend its subtleties in a more nuanced way.

What does Kubisch reveal and how does she allow us to understand our contemporary reality differently? How can sound be anything other than something "hidden from view"? While her early scores revel in the challenges of annotating sound created through more unusual means (such as thimbles scraping on glass), Kubisch's recent works immerse audiences in existing soundscapes. Her custom-made headphones, for example, induct the wearer into a parallel world of electromagnetic sound. The throbbing, crackling, pulsating, rhythms of this dimension are the manmade tracks that we have overlaid onto nature's compositions. They emanate from transit systems, buildings, lighting displays, security installations, and more, creating a giant sound symphony of sorts, and animating the seemingly lifeless lumps of concrete and metal that generate them.

In this way, Kubisch's works can also be understood quite literally as conduits between this aural dimension and another. An immense copper-wire braid, installed at the Hans Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, was Kubisch's sci-fi update on Rapunzel, the Grimm Brother's heroine who lets down her hair to connect her to the world outside the tower in which she is held captive. In the fairytale hair functions as a conductor and in Kubisch's work it is the copper wires that relay sound. Audiences could listen to minimal recordings of glass and electro magnetic sounds bouncing off the tower's striated, concave surfaces and amplified by a number of speakers, which lined the floor around the braid, creating a giant reverberating bell jar of sorts.

In general, Kubisch promotes this heightened awareness of our surrounds through relatively modest means. Often working at sites which are disused and or burdened by their histories, prison cells at Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary, for example, or the Gasometer Oberhausen, the artist synthesizes past and present through the sparing use of contemporary media such as phosphorescent paint, UV or LED lights, and various forms of sound cabling. While light quite literally illuminates the textures and patterns of time's wear and tear, or occasionally obliterates them, it also opens up new possibilities for interpretation. The cracked plaster of eroded jail cell ceilings is transformed into constellations, a car park into a deep-sea aquarium. Sound complicates and enriches these sensory experiences. Together they create environments that account for multiple histories, and futures, in a spirit of true contemporaneity.

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