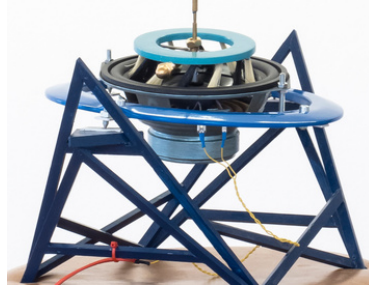


GALERIE MAZZOLI

is pleased to present



The Last Refuge
Solo show by Douglas Henderson

Opening on the 7th of October, 7 pm

Open till 18th of November, Tue - Sat, 2 pm - 6 pm

Galerie Mazzoli is proud to present “The Last Refuge,” the sixth solo exhibition by Douglas Henderson at its Berlin location.

Sound art can certainly be regarded as a medium of its own, for it is neither a purely acoustic nor a purely sculptural art form, but rather both or something in between. It was established by composers and musicians with one foot planted in the world of music who then ventured into the visual realm and found firm footing there, and by visual artists whose work naturally developed an acoustic dimension without them necessarily defining themselves as composers. Sound art is a field in which many new and surprising developments are still taking place. Largely banal attempts to visualize music or to set visual art to music have been left behind as it has asserted its independence and its own niche, promising multi-layered, multi-sensory experiences that directly confront human perception.

It is rare to encounter a sound artist who has, as well as being a professionally-trained composer with experience in many sub-genres of electronic music, ventured so deeply and with such formal certainty into the realm of installation art that he can be called a sculptor without any reservations: Douglas Henderson is an exceptional and multi-talented artist, and a true inventor when it comes to the physical generation of phenomena that are simultaneously optical and acoustic. Everything about his objects and installations is immediately visible and audible because his ingenuity lies in revealing phenomena that are easily understood but have simply never been integrated in such a way before, resulting in kinetic works of art that are so astonishing that one can hardly believe what one is seeing and hearing. Henderson has not only developed a particularly keen sense for the innovative interplay of acoustic, mechanical, and optical phenomena that can be united in a work of art, but also the considerable craftsmanship to transfer this into concrete objects.

The installation “The Last Refuge” features three kinetic objects with three blue flags that twitch and spin atop various pedestals. The mechanics are driven by vibrations from embedded loudspeakers. We hear what seems to be music; harmonies can be perceived. For this piece, the artist sampled a record produced by the United Nations that features 28 different national anthems performed by an orchestra, breaking them down into rather pathetic, unidentifiable sounds. For this mix of anthems paired with waving flags in a United Nations shade of blue, the title “The Last Refuge” refers to a quotation by English writer Samuel Johnson: “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” The three waving flags seem to be in conversation. Their movement is achieved through various means, but primarily with brushes and loudspeakers that set themselves in motion through their own vibrations. Playful and comical, but by no means l'art pour l'art. Here we see Henderson's enigmatic irony: the funny flags of the installation point to the dark side of a stale internationalism that can potentially be used to hide bad intentions and particularistic, nationalistic ideas.

On the other side of the front room, a related work bears the title “16 Tons.” Its blue, waving flag wobbles precariously on a partial hemisphere, and again, the artist's critical engagement with political world events flashes through the cheerful and humorous nature of his works: The soundtrack is based on the same United

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Nations recordings, but only the anthems' final, tonic harmonies. The main part of the sculpture is tethered to a weight on the ground with "16 Tons" written as a relief. This refers to a song of the same title from the 1940s that Tennessee Ernie Ford made into a number one hit in 1955, which critiques the systematic exploitation of coal miners. Considering how Henderson has expanded his work to hint at topics such as low wages, dependencies that resemble slavery, and authoritarianism, which unfortunately remain prevalent around the world, such a flag waving nicely to such globally prevalent political and social controversies seems simultaneously comical and cynical, particularly with the endlessly repeating, final chords in a major key.

The gallery's two back rooms are populated with works that focus on sounds that are not to be heard, but rather to be seen. "tremble," for example, transfers the vibrations of six individually controlled loudspeakers, which lie below 20 hertz and are no longer audible to the human ear, into visible movement, which six hanging silk squares precisely translate into composed wave patterns. In the process, different patterns are created in an endless loop on the coordinated cloth panels, which together perform a kind of choreography. The mechanics behind this are visible and self-explanatory when it comes to the transmission of the frequencies. The overall impression is that of an unknown, waving flag.

"Shimmy" is constructed similarly to "tremble," and employs the same principle to make patterns appear and disappear in silk fabric. Two overlapping sheets of silk reveal distinct interference patterns as one passes by. However, whenever sound is present, the silk fabrics start to vibrate, and these disappear once again.

A series of works with the title "Various Silences" consist of loudspeakers that do not produce any sound at all, but instead refer to concrete art and optical art with wave patterns visible on the relief of the loudspeaker chassis. When the viewer passes by, different linear curvatures become visible depending on their position, until a certain perspective reveals parallel lines. This dynamic transformation draws attention to the finely structured sculptural and wave-like form of the chassis. In the middle of these "Silences," we encounter a drawing of a dangerous object—silence may sound like tranquility and eternity, but can it last? The fuse is lit. And it's short.

Martin Schick

Douglas Henderson (Baltimore, 1960; lives and works in Berlin)

After early studies in painting and film he turned to music composition and theory, for which he received a B.A. from Bard College and PhD. from Princeton University, studying with Milton Babbitt, and Paul Lansky. Among his awards are a 2015 PrixArs Award of Distinction, the 2013 Deutscher Klangkunst-Preis, a 2012 Gigahertz-Preis for electroacoustic music, a 2008 Rockefeller Foundation MAP Award, a Foundation for Contemporary Arts fellowship, and in 2007 he was a guest of the DAAD Berliner Kuenstlerprogramm.

His solo exhibitions at the Stadtgalerie Backnang 2022, Saarländmuseum Moderne Galerie 2021, Berman Art Museum (Pennsylvania USA) 2019, Galerie Mazzoli, Finstral Studio 2018, and Studio 10 (NYC) are complemented by participation in multiple group shows at ZKM (Karlsruhe), as well as The Drawing Center (NYC), Ars Electronica (Vienna), Humboldt Forum | Berliner Schloß, Akademie der Kuenste Berlin, The Whitney Museum of American Art (New York City), daadgalerie (Berlin), The Kitchen (New York City), Pierogi Gallery (NYC), and has enjoyed the support of grants from the Berliner Senat, Kunstfonds Berlin, Meet The Composer, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, The Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Creative Time, and the New York State Council for the Arts. His work has been included in numerous international festivals like Ars Electronica, Romaeuropa, Transart Festival, New Music America, Stierischer Herbst, Inventionen, Seoul International Festival of Computer Music and Citysonic.

He previously chaired the Sound Art Department at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2001), and has lectured at Brighton Arts College, HKB Bern, UdK Berlin, Saarbrücken HBK, FAMU Prague, Edinburgh College of the Arts, Napier University Philadelphia, SUNY New York City.