

SPEAKERS AS PIXELS

by Louise Benson | October 3, 2014



Obra Sonora ('Sound Work' in Spanish), the exhibition is the first by the artist that is dedicated only to sonic installations. "Sound has always been a crucial element in space making, and a fundamental part of building an environment," he says.

The exhibition is made up of four pieces, each housed in a separate room. As Lozano-Hemmer is quick to point out, the logistical considerations of a wholly sound-based show is key, most immediately in the spacing and setting of volumes to avoid cross-contamination between works. Within each installation, though, the hum, buzz and murmur of overlapping notes and voices are used to powerful effect. The layering of thousands of simultaneous individual sounds channels is dubbed "speaker as pixel" by Lozano-Hemmer, citing the miniaturisation of electronics within these intricately constructed collages. "Most of my use of sound in this show is not at a compositional level, but rather more as a modular element to create massive arrays," he explains.



RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER'S NEW SHOW AT CARROLL/FLETCHER BUILDS LAYERED SONIC PORTRAITS THROUGH A SERIES OF IMMERSIVE INSTALLATIONS.

In 'Pan Anthem', the first piece encountered upon entering the gallery, hundreds of national anthems from around the world are placed together in a collective clamour. Grouped in order of national military spending per capita, their songs of pride and glory become a blare of insistent noise. In a deftly wry touch, Lozano-Hemmer has placed those countries with the greatest expenditure nearest to the gallery entrance; activated by the movement of visitors, it is this cluster of speakers that are first to fire off their cacophony of anthems. "It is a weird experience," he muses. "Usually the typology of an anthem is celebratory and quite military. They have an archetype that is quite heroic, so when you're presented with that information here it produces a certain tension."

This tension runs also through 'Sphere Packing', a series of 3D-printed spheres designed to concentrate the entire musical output of a eleven selected composers into singular entities. Each sphere represents a particular composer, studded with tiny loudspeakers – one for each piece in their oeuvre. The installation again hovers in the liminal space between individual works and a newly collective composition; between recognisable music and indecipherable noise. Lozano-Hemmer relishes the interplay between the two, pushing his audience to trace their own path through the densely packed sounds, even placing their ears directly against the spheres. "To be honest, if someone comes to my exhibition to hear sound quality, they're looking in the wrong place. If they would like to hear Wagner properly, they need tickets to the opera," he says, frankly. "Here, it's not linear."

Lozano-Hemmer emphasises the unknown outcome of much of his work within the exhibition, entwining this with a keen sense of the absurd. From 'Last Breath', an installation designed to store and circulate the breath of a person forever – "It's a living memorial, but it's also this



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quite ridiculous idea of trying to capture somebody's breath and keeping it in circulation" – to 'Voice Array', an interactive installation that uses glimmering white LED lights to visualise and play back the voices of thousands of gallery visitors, he opens up his work to the active participation of the public. "It allows for immediacy, spontaneity, and intimacy."

The greatest intimacy of the exhibition comes from its multi-layered construction, the muffled noise of the clash and collision of its many sounds drawing its audience in. Passive viewers become active participants: activating anthems, moving closer to the spheres, and throwing their own voice into the fray. In *Obra Sonora* sound data is not only gathered and re-presented, but destabilised, opened up, and newly transformed.

