

Silence. Silent?

Christina Kubisch / Robin Minard

October 22nd - December 3rd 2011
Vernissage Friday October 21st 7pm

Think of Silence... What do you hear? Text by Silja Lehtonen

The exhibition of Robin Minard and Christina Kubisch brings together two artists who study forms of silence in their works. What makes this pairing particularly interesting is that Minard has a direct approach to silence with his installations and video works that evoke it in their mere delicate, almost fragile appearance, while Kubisch deals with silence in a more conceptual manner, using surprising technology and activating the audience.

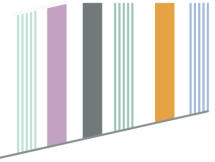
Both artists, originally trained as composers, are best known for works that are to be experienced in public spaces. Robin Minard has since 1994 presented installations entitled *Silent Music* in various spaces. The artist offers the installations and their tiniest of sounds as a passing experience to anyone functioning in the same space with them, perhaps only by chance. Focusing on the acoustic space, Minard has moved away from the temporal performance of music. In *Silent Music* and in his writings, Minard emphasises the important role our surroundings have on how we hear and experience sound, and how sound equally shapes these surroundings. This includes the everyday public spaces we spend so much time in.

Christina Kubisch has investigated the sounds of public spaces in her *Electrical Walks*, which she has been working on around the world since 2003. Using electromagnetic induction, she makes the sounds of electromagnetism around us audible. In order to hear these sounds of the city that usually do not reach our ears, one must walk around, preferably along routes suggested by the artist, and discover them using specially made earphones. These sounds reveal a curious, parallel acoustic environment; a soundscape of the city that is everything but daily and ordinary.

For the two artists who often operate in public spaces the intimacy of a gallery opens up an interesting opportunity to interact with each other and re-shape the space. Within the gallery walls they offer different experiences of silence, the most intimate of the soundscape.

The experience of silence is considered to be valuable. Silence belongs to situations that are solemn, sublime, spiritual and sacral. As a result it has even been commercialised. It is regarded as necessary for contemplation and concentration. Most people in the Western world need silence to rest and relax. This, of course, does not mean absolute silence, which is paradoxical to even write about – even at this moment when I am sitting in a 'silent' room alone. It is impossible to acknowledge silence without recognising the opposite: silence may surround you densely, but the thicker it is and the more you listen to it, the more you hear. Silence is not emptiness. It fills our ears just as sound does. Hidden sounds are revealed by silence: the sounds of the buildings inside and the sounds of the atmosphere and climate outside – and ultimately the sounds of one's own body functioning.

For many of us nature is the first place that comes to mind when thinking of an environment where one would find silence. The sounds and silence of nature contribute as an integral part to the aesthetic experience of it, although historically the beauty of nature has mainly been approached and appreciated through vision. This is also apparent in the history of visual art. However, solitude, peace and quiet are greatly valued in a walk in natural surroundings even though, when one starts to listen more closely, it is exactly the sounds of nature that create this feeling of silence. The aesthetic experience of nature's silence requires a sensibility to its gentle sounds: the wind, the rustling of the leaves, birds singing, the trickling of a stream.



Silence and nature come together in the interesting combination of two video works by both artists. Robin Minard and Christina Kubisch make references to these themes from opposite directions, thus adding new levels to each other's works through their dialogue. In his video piece, produced in collaboration with Susan Meinhardt, Robin Minard takes the viewer by the water. Water is an element that can be easily imagined as a surrounding where one could enjoy the silence of nature. In reality, of course, water is not silent at all. More likely the sound of water running in a stream is a calming sound that would make us stop and listen intently and quietly. And the filtered sound of the glacial river presented in Minard's work creates an intense, enveloping kind of silence. This is Robin Minard's goal in all his work: to make the audience sensitive and drawn in to the many different qualities of silence.

In Christina Kubisch's part of the joint installation silence is tackled conceptually, although her reference to the actual word 'silence' is extremely direct. Her video shows the word repeated in different languages, not as an utterance nor in writing, but as sonograms; making visible a spoken word describing the non-audible. The word is presented without sound, true to its meaning and turned into a visual pattern. Nature may not be an apparent theme in this work, but as one of Kubisch's interests it begins to have a fascinating presence when combined with Minard's sounds and images of water.

Installed together, these two video works and the other works in the exhibition form a space where silence and sound, nature and technology, flow in and out of our ears and eyes. The attention of the audience will shift between the visual and the auditive. The soundscape of our daily life usually requires blocking out a great deal of sounds and noise in order to be sensitive to what we really want and need to hear. In their works, Robin Minard and Christina Kubisch offer a different act of listening, where every sound is relevant. So think of silence, and start listening.

Silja Lehtonen