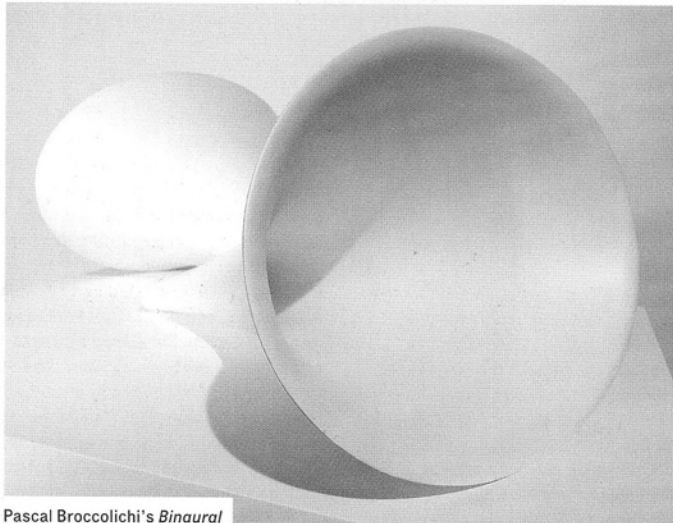


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Pascal Brocolichi's *Binaural*

Sound By Artists

Galérie Frédéric Giroux, Paris, France

Published in 1990, the anthology *Sound By Artists* remains a landmark in the history of sound art. Spanning all kinds of sound works as well as visual pieces evoking imaginary sounds, it includes Christian Marclay's seminal *Sound Page* – a transparent plastic insert engraved with grooves that conjures up imaginary music in the reader's mind. Conceived as a homage to the anthology, the exhibition *Sound By Artists* focuses specifically on such works. It shows that imagined sounds can be as evocative and absorbing as real ones.

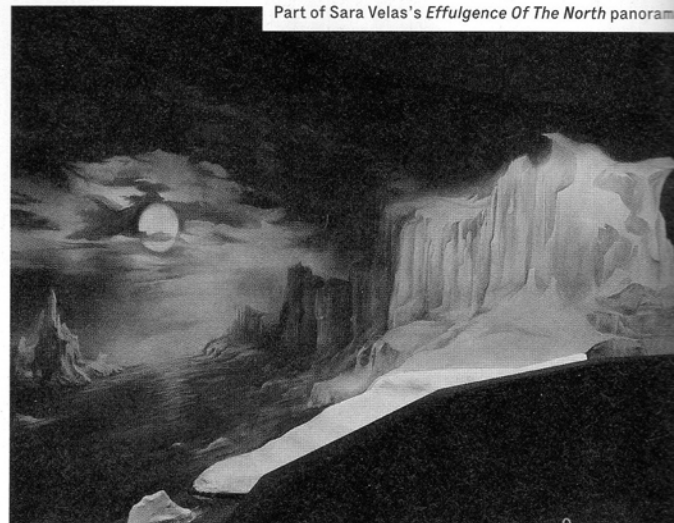
Curated by French sound artist Pascal Brocolichi, the 19 predominantly silent works making up the show employ different techniques to fire the visitor's aural imagination. Dominique Blais's *Les Machines Orphelines* (*The Orphaned Machines*) consists of two ghostly stripped down plastic models of Revox tape recorders that owe their title to the obsolescence of the technology to which they refer. Their empty reels turn silently, calling to mind the myriad sounds produced by the Revox in its heyday. Pierre-Laurent Cassière's *Vent Tendu* (*Stretched Wind*) is an anamorphic drawing of a previously realised installation consisting of a cable stretched across the length of a room. This installation consisted of transducers that transmitted sampled wind sounds to the cable, causing it to vibrate. Only when visitors applied their ear to the cable could they hear these sounds of air that had travelled through the cable and not – paradoxically – through air. As visitors in the gallery contemplate the silent drawing on the wall, they too listen out for sounds of wind or air.

In other pieces the reference to sound is oblique and indirect. Jérôme Poret's *The Frozen Estonian Black Metal Forest*, *Sonicdrawing* is a cartoon-like wall drawing in which a giant black line – a reference to the speed lines used by manga artists to denote movement and emotion – cuts across a white background. It conveys the immediacy of sound, and the sheer size of it represents the experience of high volume. In a more contemplative vein, curator Brocolichi's own *Binaural* consists of two silent white cones resembling giant ears. Echoing the theme of the exhibition, they appear to be absorbed by sounds that only they can hear.

Several works do incorporate sound. Pierre Beloüin took the Magritte-like photograph *Blue House* during the course of a residency in Canada. At the same time, he recorded the sounds occurring in the vicinity of the place where he took the photo. He then sent the recordings and picture to two composers, asking each of them to compose a soundtrack for the photograph in his stead. Visitors can listen to these two soundtracks based on mediated realities over headphones in the gallery, while contemplating the photo itself.

Arnaud Maguet's *Experimental Music Fans* consists of nine harmonicas affixed to the blades of an overhead electric fan, evoking the American bluesmen who played harmonica beneath fans in hot weather. As the fanblades spin round, air is propelled through the harmonicas, which emit a soft ethereal drone audible only when silence reigns in the gallery. As in the case of the other pieces in the show, you have to listen in order to hear.

Rahma Kazam



Part of Sara Velas's *Effulgence Of The North* panorama

Sara Velas

Effulgence Of The North

Velaslavasay Panorama, Los Angeles, USA

Geographically speaking, the Velaslavasay Panorama is located just about a mile west from downtown Los Angeles, but this unusual project exists in a time and space far removed from the typical LA iconographies of perpetual youth, CGI cosmetics and paparazzi following this person or that. The central attraction of the Velaslavasay is a 360 degree painting entitled *Effulgence Of The North*, depicting a polar landscape with ice floes coming into view out of a cold nighttime backdrop. This type of immersive painting was popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, as vehicles for entertainment that would eventually fade against the bright lights of cinema. The irony of resurrecting such a spectacle in Los Angeles is painfully self-evident, and Sara Velas – the mastermind behind the Velaslavasay – wisely shifts focus toward the sublime.

Housed in a building that was originally a 1920s theatre called Fairyland and later a union hall for many decades, the Velaslavasay immediately harks back to an age long past. Through the lobby, with its small vitrines with readymade objects that may or may not be for sale, a narrow staircase led me to the small round room which houses *Effulgence Of The North*. As my eyes adjusted to the darkened space, details of the polar environment began to emerge. An ice floe here, a distant mountain there. An uncanny sense of quiet and stillness pervaded the room – and upon further study, those ice floes and mountains literally popped out of the pictorial plane as sculptural elements that extended toward the centre of the room. Sound of

cracked ice and running water crept on the side of the event horizon, followed by static-laden sferics from VLF recording the Aurora Borealis. Then, the low-wattage bulbs that lit the painted surfaces subtly shifted colour, giving the illusion that a self-illuminating aurora was actually taking place in that very room. The brushstrokes of the painting itself always kept the artist in place, even as the lights and sounds ebbed and flowed in this fully immersive installation. The experience was hypnotic and awe-inspiring.

In working through *Effulgence Of The North*, which was completed in 2005, Velas employed composer Moritz Fehr, who also brought in the purring drones, refrigerators and a soft, ethereal chorus from two female singers. Soo Yon Susie and Asami Morita realised the sculptural elements; and Rosco Posada worked through much of the engineering (light, electrical, structural, etc). The whole project required a fully orchestrated sensibility and it is one that Velas has articulated with considerable skill. But *Effulgence Of The North* was not her first panorama, as the distinction goes to the *Panorama Of The Valley Of The Smokes* (2000), which was located in Hollywood and was demolished by a speculating developer who is still sitting on a vacant lot.

Beyond the *Effulgence Of The North*, the Velaslavasay also enjoys a well kept garden filled with cacti, succulents and even a handful of carnivorous plants. There is also a theatre for performances and screenings, whose programming tends towards the same eccentric aesthetic that persists within Velas's panorama: a delicate balance of old and new to arrive at something new.
Jim Haynes