

The Other Room

A Long Beach Sound Walk

By Kevin Ferguson
October 7, 2008 1:57 PM



I recently spent a diverse Saturday night in hometown Long Beach checking out most of that night's fifth annual [Soundwalk](#). I've been in the area, more or less, for all of the other four Soundwalks but never made the time for it until last month. In fact, up until now my time spent with sound art has been limited to [Beuys'](#) sound poetry and the occasional Laurie Anderson record (who would fit perfectly at the walk, maybe next year).

By and large the pieces were cool, but some of the concepts got pretty redundant. For example: the nature vs technology concept was visited, revisited, and re-visited ad infinitum, with only a few of the finished products turning out original. One of those bright shining examples in the natural field was "Peaks" by Robot Repair Projects, an

American art collective. Using photographs of mountain ranges as the basis, Robot Repair Projects mapped the peaks and valleys of each range to form a sound wave. Each range emitted a low rumble that surprisingly appeared to get louder the less dynamic each mountain range was.

By far my personal highlight, though, John P. Hasting's "Sound Spiral", another high concept sound installation but not nearly as heavily nature-themed. Tucked away in a small backyard on the north side of Broadway was Hasting's meditative spiral: eight speakers aligned in a perfect [Fibonacci](#) Spiral. Each speaker played a tone that decreased in pitch (each speaker's pitch was half as low as the previous)

Maybe it was the installation's relative isolation (seemed like nearly everything else there was attracting hordes) or the high-minded concept of it-which I'm always a sucker for-but Spiral won me over. The combined effect of the tones, as loud as it was, ended up being more relaxing and meditative than anything else I had seen (or heard) that entire night.

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Raises the age-old question: is it art...or not. Or is even the determination of art in the eye (or in this case, ear) of the beholder. Suppose a tree fell in the forest... but nobody was there, would it be art Just kidding...okay, suppose loggers felled trees in the forest in a deliberately cascading series, so as to produce an equally cascading sound. And they recorded it.

Would that be art? Would it be art if they claimed it so? Would it be art if somebody else, anybody else, claimed it to be so?

Final question? Were there any Baltic throat singers performing?

Jeff

Adolfo Guzman-Lopez | [October 8, 2008 8:21 AM](#) | [Reply](#)

This and other "sound art" reminds me how I need to more frequently, stop and hear the sounds



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around me. I interviewed a CalArts composition professor, Michael Pisaro recently about an eight hour piece he performed on the rooftop of an Echo Park building. The aim of the performance was to have the performers (stand up bass, keyboards, other instruments) harmonize with the surrounding street sounds such as buses, chatting pedestrians and helicopters. At one point during the performance I closed my eyes and heard a sound that could have come from the performers or the street. That was cool.

Edi Faal | [October 9, 2008 7:47 PM](#) | [Reply](#)

I was at a gallery museum in Hokkaido where various pieces of sculpture and hanging canvases had their own sound note as part of the art piece exhibited. The clever Japanese arranged the speakers somehow so that you didn't hear any of the sound upon entering the hall, but when you approached a piece of art you found yourself enveloped in a pretty discrete cone of sound little wider than three or four feet. I was told then the technique involves some sort of interference technique so that the sound waves cancel eachother outside of the individualized cones. Technology aside, it was a pretty spectuacular effect when I encountered it for the first time.

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