

I am Sitting in a Room

**Sven Anderson, Chloe Brennan, Karl Burke,
Adam Gibney & Theo McNab**

Curated by Belinda Quirke

Sat 18 Jun - Fri 5 Aug 2022



GROUND FLOOR

Theo McNab Schizogenesis No.2 1975 Acrylic on canvas 323 x 200 cm Collection of The Office of Public Works

Gallery 3

Chloe Brennan Plosives 2019 Photogram series

THIRD FLOOR GALLERIES

Gallery 1

Sven Anderson

This Voice 2022

Three-channel sound installation. Eight twelve-minute passages interspersed with variable length silences

Four prints

Giclee printing on 400gsm Hahnemuhle photo rag paper with archival grade pigment inks. 133 x 133cm POA

Five framed documents

Liner notes from LPs Derek Hill's private record collection. Variable Derek Hill Collection

Chloe Brennan Different Dusts Super 8mm film Credits | Text: Chloe Brennan | Theremin: Philip Christie, Chloe Brennan | Synthesizer: Philip Christie | Drums: Jim Christie | Narration: Sarah Edmondson | Soundscape remixed from the track I'm in There by experimental music project The Bonk

Theo McNab Linear Hole 1972 Lithograph 81 x 56 cm Private Collection

Theo McNab Study 3, Nightfall Acrylic on canvas 59 x 59 framed Collection of the Office of Public Works

Theo McNab Sleep 10/25 1976 Silkscreen 60 x 45 cm Collection of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Gallery 2

Karl Burke

Convergence 2022

Theo McNab Room 3/2 1975 Oil on canvas 163 x 100 cm Collection of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Theo McNab Black Tension No. 1 1971 Mixed media 140 x 91 cm Collection of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Adam Gibney Spatial Meditation 4: Silencing Silence 2022 Mixed Medium

I am Sitting in a Room

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This exhibition takes its name from the Alvin Lucier 1969 infamous piece “I am Sitting in a Room”, in which the composer narrates a script and continually re-records each sounded recording on tape, until his voice is gradually replaced by the resonant frequencies of the room. Lucier recites

I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have..

In interview at MIT¹, Lucier notes that the composition formed after hearing how Amar Bose, founder of the Bose Corporation expanded the sound field of his speakers by listening to “recycled sound” through his loudspeakers. Lucier performed the piece throughout his life and like all “live” performance; distinctions appear pendent on the room in which it is performed, and how it is heard and absorbed by our apparatus (body and ear). In the recording I am listening to, Lucier speaks in an exact pronounced voice - except for his noticeable and coincidental stutter on the word “Rhythm”, “Not” and “Smooth”. As the piece is rerecorded thirty two times, all text and speech impediments disappear, transformed into, and absorbed by room tones, leaving only a trace presence of rhythmic activity. It is the nature and gradual transformation of sound heard, the passage of time listening, the listening environment of the embodied, and the space it resides, that comprises the full composition and audience experience. Rerecorded and performed throughout his life, ‘I am

sitting in a room’ marked both personal and significant arrivals and departures within his practice, and often involved collaborative performances with the artist and wife, Mary Lucier, whose degenerated Polaroid progressions would cycle simultaneously.

Eliane Radigue often described her compositions as a “shimmer” of light on water. Theo McNab’s (d. 2015) geometric resonances slowly release a sheen of frequency. In his early work of the seventies, the surface comprised of black satin as in ‘Black Tension no.1’ or sculpted canvas as in ‘Schizogenesis no. 2’. In ‘Sleep 10/25’ and ‘Black Tension no. 1’, a liminal colour spectrum /metal suggest a liminal space. McNab noted “People imagined it to be a beam of light going through space. But to me the tension of opposites was such a Munch-like scream of such a high pitch that you couldn’t hear it”.² McNab refers to frequencies that exist but cannot be heard, investigating universal mathematical principles which govern sound, and, as McNab posits, can visualise sound.

Edmund Husserl’s “The Origin of Geometry” speculates, “that it is the existence of what is objectively there for (for actual and possible geometers, or those who understand geometry). Indeed, it has, from its primal establishment, an existence which is peculiarly super temporal and which-of this we are certain-is accessible to all men, first of all to the actual and possible mathematicians of all peoples, all ages; and this is true of all its particular forms”.³

McNab’s work lies between number and ratio of the Fibonacci series, seasonal landscape, and abstraction. Number is of all things and helps us understand the natural universe. He regularly photographed open or enclosed spaces, documenting its fluctuating light. His work is often numbered, referring to various spaces (‘Room’, ‘Passage’) or calendar time, ‘Spring’, ‘January’, ‘February’. His vast architectural canvases often comprise of painted geometric layers of gradating light and colour, guiding one to a principal opening, as in Passage 29 (1975). McNab does not wish to see his painting as abstract occupying a “territory between reality, as I perceive it sometimes, and truth as I perceive it sometimes”. Instead McNab is “interested in our feelings about existence, and our desire for order; whether manifested in mythology, philosophy or mathematics”.⁴ There is certainly a liminality of optical play in monochromatic diagonals and

overlays throughout his composition, field distortions unsettling the eye, diffracting soundwaves. The presence of his early black reliefs are of an obvious parallel to monolithic sound systems, monumental black moulded speaker grills.

Commissioned by the Office of Public Works, Sven Anderson draws from the vast music collection comprising of some 1500 LPs, 45's and 78's of the late painter Derek Hill, at Glebe House, Donegal. As Hill's career was firstly immersed in set design and painting for opera and theatre studying under Dr Josef Gregor, Richard Strauss's librettist, unsurprisingly the operatic voice features strongly within his collection of "splendid old 78s"⁵. Anderson speaks of the impossible task of capture; of recording a performance and the resonating difference of listening on each person's approach in a specific location. His work, "This Voice" diffracts this collection from century old performance, to recording, re-recording, to listening experience, to a point of his arrival and listening at Glebe house, and resulting OPW commission within exhibition. Andersen's notes certain labels attract him such as Club 99, Rococo records and Vocal Record Collector series. It is of interest that Club 99 and the Canadian Rococo records, rerecorded old 78s, of singers of the early 20th century, were originally produced as limited edition 99's. Three Meyer sound speakers channel multi-layered ghost presences of singers past, rerecorded, compressed from Opera house to 78 and often to LP which Andersen describes as making "the idea of a voice being used to fill extreme volumes of space, of being harnessed with different emergent recording technologies and then pressed on to so many fragile physical surfaces, seems quite extreme". Anderson subtly unveils the compression of the female voice by dominant males roles of composer, conductor, impresario, recordist, and critic of the music industry, within a selection of liner notes. A somewhat melancholy echo is reflected in the use of operatic portrait within Anderson's shifting fractal geometries and wave pattern prints.

Karl Burke's new work 'Convergence' is primarily concerned with an inquiry into the spatial nature and experience of sound, involving a site-specific sculpture/sound installation. With exceptional joinery skills, Burke channels the middle gallery as one might "chamber" a body of a musical instrument, allowing pockets of sonic activity and human encounter to occur. Four OSB

wooden walls retune the gallery into a maze like structure. There is a sophisticated consideration of what is being honed within the room, of listening to it timbre and particular frequency. In text conversation with between Burke and artist, Dennis McNulty, the particular expression, "rounding the corners" is shaped when discussing the treatment of sound. As McNab considers the seasons within his work, Burke's presence throughout the gallery is a consideration of sonic nuances, light and shadow, and a seamless integration of McNab's 'Passage 3/2' and 'Black Tension no. 1'. Burke grips the workhorse transience of the "PA" system, from political rally to rockfest, here defragmented into four separate speaker placements within the room. Instead of their usual outwards installation towards an audience, speakers face towards his wooden structures, saturated with the sonic reverberation of modular synth waves. The walls have ears.

In "I am Sitting in a Room", Chloe Brenan uses the Theremin as a sensor of forces below human perception in "Different Dusts". The air is filled with particles of remnants and resonances and often toxic origins. In installation, the film illuminates room dust from projector to screen to the sound of frenetic drum kicks and snare crashes. The title of the piece is taken from Elizabeths Bowens *A Time in Rome* in which she writes:"The knowledge of Rome must be physical, sweated into the system, worked up into the brain through the thinning shoe-leather. Substantiality comes through touch and smell, and taste, the tastes of different dusts.

The Theremin is an instrument that the body and hand does not touch. The proximity of the users arms to its two antennas, control in both the pitch and volume, the body is the grounded earth of electrical signal. In ways, both machine and body seek each other out through particles and unseen forces, until committed signal occurs. Brenan refers to an intuition, a sense "Alert and on end, hair follicles register the gradient of Celsius and Fahrenheit". The voice in spoken overlay to 'Different Dusts' and in frozen motion within Brenan's 'Plosive' series. Here Brenan speaks words from Virginia Wolfs 'To the Lighthouse', the resonant word make visible through a glass blowpipe yielding amorphous objects.

As we have progressed publicity for this exhibition, there is a twitter bot that is programmed to trawl the twitter sphere and tweet everyone that has used

the phrase “I am sitting in a Room” with “I am sitting in a room different to the one you are in now”. It is oddly gratifying and apt that Lucier’s work is some way transformed beyond a physical room, through an automated continuance resonance of a bot. Gibney’s work ‘Spatial Meditation 4: Silencing Silence’ utilises bells as ritual or meditative punctuations in navigating our societal soup of religious and mindfulness philosophies. Gibney’s feedback mechanism is triggered by children’s’ bells, which lowers

a microphone towards a speaker creating feedback, reminiscent of Eliane Radigue’s first feedback experiments ‘Jouet Electronique’ (1967) and ‘Elemental’ (1968). However, feedback within ‘Gibney’s piece activates a “SHHHH shhh!” voice attempting to silence the feedback. Whilst Brennan’s theremin connects human and machine through invisible accord. Gibney’s algorithmic programming is constantly in flux, in an all too familiar hierarchical struggle of belief.

For the purposes of navigating through the exhibition, all artists have timed their installations in loose sequence.

Belinda Quirke 17/06/22

¹ <https://mta.mit.edu/video/interview-alvin-lucier>

² Carty, Ciaran, "Visual thinking", The Sunday Times, 06/09/87

³ Husserl, George, The Origin of Geometry, University of Nebraska ed, 1989, p 160

⁴ Kelly, Liam, Surface and Structure: Work of Theo McNab and Charles Tyrrell. (Catalogue), Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1987

⁵ <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/hill-82-1.194199>



Baillíúchán an Chomhairle Ealaíon
Arts Council Collection



OPW Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works