

[ART JOURNAL]

Shock and audio

Seven artists explore the aural dimensions of perception and reality as part of *TranSonic*, an annual exhibition of sound art

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Sound art is a relatively new and hard-to-define category. A recent expression of the art form by local sound artists was a series of live performances that used images and sounds at the Digital Art Center, Taipei (台北數位藝術中心) for the second annual *TranSonic — Sounding Objects* (超響—發聲體) exhibition.

But for Wang Fujui (王福瑞), event curator and one of the participating artists, the genre suggests many more possibilities than just performances. So-called “sound-producing objects” are one of these possibilities, and they are the focus of the second part of *TranSonic*, which is currently on display at Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術).

The group show features a collection of sound installation pieces by seven artists, most of whom are studying at the Graduate School of Art and Technology (科技藝術研究所) of Taipei National University of the Arts (國立台北藝術大學).

“Sound art is in its nascent phase in Taiwan. The experiments [so far] have been mostly focused on ... live performances ... This exhibition is a bit like a statement that points to a new direction — sound artists are now creating new sound-producing objects and using them to develop new vocabularies,” said Wang, one of Taiwan’s foremost practitioners of sound art.

Among the technically sophisticated self-built sound-producing objects on display is Wang Chung-kun’s (王仲坤) *Kong Qi* (空器). This device releases compressed air at high speeds, which activates valves inside acrylic tubes of different lengths to generate different sounds. By exposing the process through which sounds are made as a result of physical vibrations, the artist aims to highlight the tactile domain of sound rather than the sense of hearing.

Inspired by the theremin, an electronic musical instrument developed by Russian inventor Leon Theremin in 1919 that can be controlled without contact from the player, Yeh Ting-hao’s (葉廷皓)



Chang Yung-ta, *Trembling — Symphony Version*. PHOTO COURTESY OF GALERIE GRAND SIECLE

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: *TranSonic — Sounding Objects* (超響—發聲體)

WHERE: Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), 17, Alley 51, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷51弄17號)

WHEN: Through Aug. 8. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 1pm to 6pm

TELEPHONE: (02) 2578-5630

ON THE NET: www.changsgallery.com.tw; transonic2009.blogspot.com

Simulatautomation (模擬或器) allows visitors to alter the speed, frequency and volume of pre-programmed sounds by moving their hands near sensors on a control board. These sounds in turn control images projected onto a wall.

“The sensors are the extension of my body. They make me feel like a cyborg,” said Yeh.

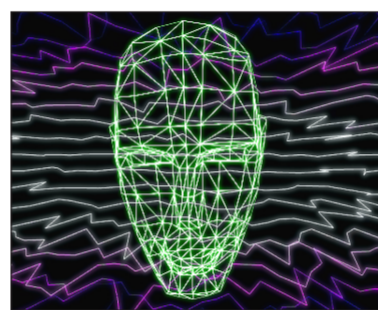
Wang Fujui’s *Sound Disc* (聲碟) comprises six identical sound-producing objects made from hard discs, mini microphones and speakers. These create a feedback loop that builds into “a blanketing of abstract sound,” to use the artist’s words.

The noise resembles the raucous chirping of cicadas one hears in the summer. Stand in front of the work long enough and one begins to understand why the artist calls the

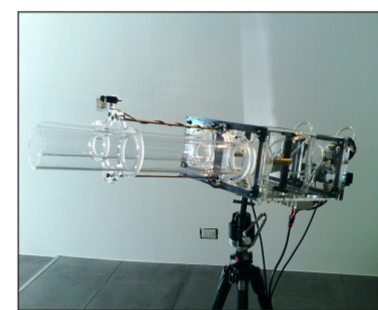
sound “blanketing.” It envelops the listener in a hypnotic rumbling that could very well induce a meditative, if not trance-like, state of mind.

“My works are made to show certain kinds of emotions and mental states that I feel most strongly about. I don’t need mind-altering substances to be in a certain state of mind,” said Wang.

Two other installations draw their inspiration from childhood memories. When Chang Yung-ta (張永達) was younger he was fascinated by the eerie sound created by fast-forwarding or rewinding cassette tapes. *Trembling — Symphony Version* (微顫—交響樂版) is the grown-up version of Chang’s childhood game and uses classical music tapes and a device that resembles a music box. The apparatus is designed to “read” the magnetic tapes incorrectly



Above: Wang Fujui, *Sound Disc*. Left: Yeh Ting-hao, *Simulatautomation*. Right: Wang Chung-kun, *Kong Qi*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALERIE GRAND SIECLE



so as to create “analog errors,” which are increasingly rare and valuable amid digital precision, the artist said.

Static Position (靜電位) by Wang Lien-cheng (王連成) looks like an acrylic plate with circuits and three “stun guns.” The device is activated when a person approaches it, causing the stun guns to generate beeps that sound like insects being electrocuted by a bug zapper.

“I often get mosquito bites when

I visited my grandparent’s house in the countryside. When I was a kid, I felt great pleasure when I heard the sound of them being killed by the bug zapper, but at the same time I was frightened by the deadly electric shock. I want to incorporate both of the sensations in my work,” the artist said.

A word of warning: To avoid electric shock, gallerygoers should not touch *Static Position*.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Futurism

WHERE: Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall (國立中正紀念堂), 21-1 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)

WHEN: Until Oct. 11. Open daily from 9am to 6pm

TELEPHONE: (02) 2391-1183

ADMISSION: NT\$250; concession tickets available

DETAILS: No ticket sales after 5:30pm



Futurism without a past

Futurism is a centenary exhibit that focuses on the Futurist movement’s obsession with youth, speed and technology while glossing over its more violent, fascist elements

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

The design of Futurism, an exhibit of Futurist movement sculpture, painting, furniture, clothing and writings, purports to demonstrate how contemporary the movement was by focusing on its obsession with youth, speed, and technology, but glosses over its violent, anti-environment, anti-feminist and fascist elements. Consequently, the show, installed in the bowels of the recently unrenamed Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall to mark the centenary of the Futurist movement’s founding, fails to explain the ideological underpinnings that facilitated its rise.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti proclaimed the arrival of the art movement in his *Futurist Manifesto*, a screed published in *Le Figaro* in 1909. “We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice ... We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.” The original article, along with many other futurist writings, is displayed at the exhibition, but it would require a telescope to read as it is fixed under glass that is displayed about 1.5m behind a barrier. There is no accompanying Chinese- or English-language translation.

And yet, although the ideological aspects that gave birth to the

movement are barely touched upon, the chronological and artist-centered structure of the exhibit is notable because it illustrates the manner in which the artists’ pictorial experiments thematically investigate the development of some of the era’s technologies — particularly the speed of vehicles — and social developments, such as the growth of cities.

“[T]he world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed,” Marinetti wrote in his *Manifesto*. “We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit.”

Giacomo Balla explores this dispensation in *Velocità + Luci*. The shapes painted on the canvas are fractured into parallel and circular strokes of browns reminiscent of a car’s outline. Beams of white emanate from these forms and express the velocity of automobiles.



Top: Giacomo Balla, *Velocità + Luci*. Above: Ivo Pannaggi, *Il Lavoro*. PHOTOS: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

Roberto M. Baldessari also investigates the motion of vehicles in *Treno alla Stazione di Lugo*. The focal point of the painting is a woman dressed in red who is approaching a steaming locomotive that is in the process of entering a station. Employing a visual language similar to the Cubists, the lines in the immediate foreground are fragmented in a way to offer multiple perspectives, while the background trails off into a blur. It deftly replicates the perception of looking through the window of a train moving at full speed.

The city, with its industrial buildings and frenetic street activity, was a favorite subject of the Futurists.

Ivo Pannaggi examines the relationship between man and architecture in *Il Lavoro*. The painting shows a man standing triumphantly on the upper reaches of a partially finished building and

peering down at two fellow workers below. Verossi’s (Albino Siviero) *In Volo su Ponte Pietra* offers us a look at what Pannaggi’s human figure might see. The viewer is looking at a canal many stories below, the straight lines of the waterway and bridge that spans it suggest feats of engineering perfection and man’s control over nature.

Whereas the earlier canvases portray a terrestrial perspective, Tullio Crali transports the viewer up into the sky *Incuneandosi Nell’abitato*. Here we see the city from an airplane cockpit as it nosesides towards the ground.

Though concerned with depicting the latest technological advancements and their effects on human perceptions, the Futurists were also interested in putting their stamp on everyday items, as is demonstrated by the clothing, sculpture and furniture that make up the middle part of the exhibit.

These objects along with the themes of the paintings demonstrate the relevance of the Futurists to our own society. And yet, it’s difficult to imagine that the organizers weren’t aware of the message they were sending when they decided to hold an exhibit of artists who celebrated war and fascism — without focusing on the more politically sensitive aspects of the movement — within the walls of a monument built to memorialize a right-wing dictator.

Celebrity Interview



PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Girls

CONTINUED FROM P14

They did go to the late Jade Goody’s wedding. “She had a wish list of things she wanted, and she asked us to perform,” Buchanan says. “I’ll never forget, we were performing, and she whispered to me, ‘Can I come up there with you?’ And she did, and so did [Goody’s husband] Jack. It was lovely. She looked gorgeous. It made me go and get a smear test afterwards,” she adds.

Range is nodding. “So did I, and I wasn’t due for a year,” says Range.

It’s both gratifying and unexpected to find the trio so forthcoming. What they’ve previously been known for is aloofness, towards both interviewers and each other. Today it’s the opposite. When they arrived at this hotel meeting room they immediately rearranged the chairs so that they were side by side, and now they’re sitting in a row, cheerfully interrupting each other in a show of togetherness.

Occasionally their responses seem a touch media-trained (on the subject of November’s new album, which was recorded entirely in America with an array of hit-making American producers, such as Red One and Ryan Tedder: “We wanted to make the album as Sugababes as possible and wave the British flag — it’s not an American-aiming album at all”), but they can also be rewardingly open. For instance, Berrabah has been riled by a celebrity magazine’s claim that she’s had breast implants (“Omg!!!!!! I just saw star mag who say I’ve had a boob job!!!!!! He he, I cracked up!!!!!!” she tweeted), and wants to set the record straight, right here.

“I’ve got 34B boobs,” she says, unbuttoning her checked shirt. Underneath is a tight white vest top, and underneath that is a perky, all-natural bosom. “Some magazine enhanced my boobs, and they had some plastic surgeon say I’d definitely had a boob job!” She buttons up her shirt, still aggrieved.

Berrabah was born in Hampshire, southern England, but her parents are Moroccan, and she was raised Muslim. “I don’t practice — I’m only just learning about it,” she says. Why doesn’t she make more of it — mention it in interviews? It could only be a good thing for people to know that a member of one of the UK’s highest-profile pop groups is Muslim. “People can be judgmental,” murmurs Buchanan, clearly not happy with this strand of the conversation. “There’s too much pressure on young women to be role models. My management put pressure on me because I said on Twitter I went to a strip club. He didn’t make me take it down, but he wasn’t happy about it. I just went with a few of my friends. I’m not hurting anyone, and I’m a good person, so why should it matter?”

She’s certainly good enough not to express schadenfreude at Mutya Buena’s lackluster solo career. After leaving the Babes, whom she’d cofounded with Keisha, and complaining to interviewers that the band had dismissed her attempts to stay friends, her album flopped, and she was last seen on this year’s *Celebrity Big Brother*. “I thought she came across well,” Buchanan says blandly. Berrabah sympathizes, too. “If people have a family, why blame them for taking money to look after them?”

Such pragmatism is a Sugababes hallmark. They don’t romanticize music; they’re passionate about it, but are also acutely aware that Sugababes is a business, which entails taking hard-headed decisions. When they found themselves feeling complacent at the time of *Catfights and Spotlights*, their immediate reaction was to up their game. They signed to Jay-Z’s stable of in-house songwriters and producers, Roc Nation, and decamped to Los Angeles to record the new album. “We were nervous at first because we were working with producers like [Lady Gaga producer] Red One. We sang on Lady Gaga’s mike!” swoons Range. “This is our biggest break, signing with Roc Nation.”

“And now we have 10-hour dance rehearsals with Beyonce’s choreographer,” says Berrabah. “We’ve pushed ourselves and stepped it up so much.”

The result is an album that combines American polish and British invention. Cowritten by the band, who take pride in having a great deal of creative input into their records, its first single is the grinding, fiercely catchy R’n’B number *Get Sexy*. It incorporates the chorus of Right Said Fred’s *I’m Too Sexy*, and, in case anyone missed the blatant let’s-get-physical message, promotional copies of the single come packaged as giant condoms. Ladies, really ...

“[The record company] came up with the condom idea, and we said yeah, it’s funny. But we wouldn’t sell [the condom packaging] to our younger fans. I don’t think it’s appropriate,” Range says primly.

The condom wrapper, the strip club and their uneasy relationship with the celebrity media are peripheral issues, though. The one unassailable thing about the Sugababes is their talent. No one can impugn their ability to sing — the gift that distinguishes them from all the other groups of girls in tight jeans and glossy makeup. I tell them I saw them play at a party given last year by the Music Industry Trusts to present an award to the head of their label. They sang acoustically, to piano accompaniment and, until then, I hadn’t realized how stunning their voices were. Heidi laughs. “We always do an acoustic number at our gigs, but some people don’t realize we can sing. There was a woman at a gig screaming to our tour manager: ‘I didn’t bring my child to see people mime!’ And he had to take her to the sound booth to prove we were doing it live.”

Get Sexy is released on 31 Aug. on Island.