

Samson Young

A dark theme keeps me here, I'll make a broken music

17 December 2016 – 5 March 2017

Samson Young (*1979) is a sound artist and composer from Hong Kong. He studied music, philosophy, and gender studies at the University of Sydney and has a doctorate in composition from Princeton University. In 2017 the artist will be featured in the Hong Kong pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

From the perspective of a composer, Young conceives sound works, installations, performances, drawings, sound walks, and films. His works usually make concrete historical and social references and often deal with conflicts. Each of his projects involves a great deal of background and field research. His work is motivated by scientific precision and conceptual rigor. The result is a very powerful and aesthetically expressive language.

The importance of the aesthetic investigation of sound in Young's work is illustrated above all by his journeys, which follow in the tradition of sound walks and field recordings. For instance, for his work *For Whom the Bell Tolls: A Journey into the Sonic History of Conflicts* (2015–), he traveled to five continents to visit historically significant bells and record their sound. The result was an archive of bell sounds, which Young will use to compose a new piece.

While he was at the various locations waiting for the bells to ring, he created a series of drawings entitled *Landschaft* (on view here on the first floor). In these “sound drawings” the artist translates the noises of his environment and the ringing of the bells into musical notation. His works represent an unusual contribution within the complex relationship between music and visual art and open up new perspectives for the perception of sounds as well as pictures.

The Kunsthalle Düsseldorf is showing a selection of works from Samson Young's oeuvre on three floors. *A dark theme keeps me here, I'll make a broken music* is the artist's first institutional exhibition in Germany and Europe. Along with the series *Muted Situation* (2014)—directions for listening to sound situations in a new way or perceiving the political qualities of sound itself—and a selection of works from the series *Sound Drawings* (2015–), the exhibition also features large-scale installations in which Young deals with conflicts and wars.

On the first floor, visitors will encounter the work *Canon* (2016), a performance installation that uses a long-range acoustic device (LRAD). The LRAD is a sound cannon that is capable of broadcasting sounds in a straight beam to a precise target over a range of 1000 meters. These devices are frequently deployed by law enforcement against protesters as well as to repel birds on private properties, usually by broadcasting distressed-bird calls.

Canon is a combination of a sound installation and a live performance. At the broadcasting location, a musician performs a bird whistle with an LRAD unit in response to a background track consisting of recordings of bird songs and distress calls. At a second site, which takes on the rough appearance of a fenced-off park, bird songs seem to emerge from nowhere, their source invisible. In the foreground is a small red fountain—a replica of a bowl that Vietnamese refugees were given on their arrival in Hong Kong. This work offers a distilled take on the topic of migration.

The second floor features several works that deal with conflicts. In *Stanley* (2014), the artist takes up the history of a beach of the same name in his native city of Hong Kong. This momentous place was not only the site of an internment camp, but also where the battle for the defense of Hong Kong was lost during World

War II. The centerpiece of the show, *Nocturne* (2015), is a live performance that will take place over the entire duration of the exhibition. For this work, Young collected video recordings of night bombings – predominately U.S. attacks in the Middle East, ranging from the Gulf War to the campaign against ISIS – and edited them into a six-hour-long film, which plays mutely on a laptop. As he watches, the artist uses household objects and “live foley” techniques to reproduce the sounds of explosions, gunshots, and debris as accurately as possible. His “sound effects” are broadcast on site via pirate radio frequencies.

In *Pastoral Music (But It Is Entirely Hollow)* (2014–) the artist visited the Gin Drinkers Line and recorded himself singing the Cantonese children’s song *Of Forests and Pastures* in a reverberant bunker. The song ends with the words “My dear friend, what’s on your mind?” This work will be presented daily along with the sounding of the bells in the Andreas Kirche next door.

Press images are available for download at www.kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de.

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This exhibition is supported by

Bowers & Wilkins



JULIA STOSCHEK FOUNDATION e.V.

The exhibition and the catalog were made possible as part of the Kataloge für junge Künstler (Catalogs for Young Artists) prize with support from



Alfried Krupp von Bohlen
und Halbach-Stiftung

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