

## Interview on occasion of Serena Korda: Breakthrough Bosse & Baum, 2019

Bosse & Baum: Could you talk about your interest in sound as a medium of more indirect, fluid and poetic representation, and how that relates to the subject of your work?

Serena Korda: Listening has been a key influence on my sound making, in a culture that values the visual over all else, listening as one of our senses seems to have been left behind in terms of our evolution. Concepts of "Deep Listening" established by avant-garde electronic musician Pauline Olivero's asserted a difference between hearing and listening, as well as creating an approach to making her own music there was a spiritual almost transcendental form to the exercises she created to enable other people to use this approach to develop their own creative output. The development of "Deep Listening" came at a time of great social turmoil the 60's and Olivero's saw what she was doing as having a healing potential making a case for listening as a kind of activism. She didn't develop this meditative music alone she started to become interested in movement in combination to ways of listening that she was developing working alongside her tai chi teacher and also with contemporary dancer Elaine Summers. So there is something in my interest in sound as political or a form of activism. There are also the poetic and transcendental qualities of Henry David Thoreau's observations of unpremeditated music found on his walks in nature. Thoreau finds music and composition in the way sound travels through a space into you as a vessel and also even finds technological interventions in the landscape such as the telegraph pole to be a form of Aeolian harp, transmitting frequencies and becoming a harp for the wind to play.

B&B: Following up on New Age philosophies, which are an interest to you, no space is an empty or neutral space but always loaded with residues of energy, or one could say with certain politics, for which the *Resonators* act as transmitters. How do you view your work's relationship to the concept of "politics of space" and conditioned/ing space and the physical body in space? Do you consciously respond to the context of White Cube spaces for example?

SK: My background is actually in creating spaces for the public realm and I didn't actually come to making sculptures or gallery shows for white cube spaces until a few years later in my practice. I think this is why my work still holds on to site of place as reference point for making and developing works, siting it in the real world, with real lived experiences. I guess the interest in the New Age is about how this combination of marginalised thinkers that I am interested or become interested in all seem connected to the spiritual in some way, always bringing things back to something transformative or the potential of something transformative occurring if you open your mind to a specific way of seeing. I definitely see the works as transformative of experiences and encounters that I have had in a specific site but that tap in to a collective form of consciousness that becomes far greater and moves far beyond the realm of the site itself. This would be why I am fascinated by 'thin places', access points really in to other worlds. These are points that I find in the sites that I engage with and therefore yes I do see the objects and installations as portals or transmitters of these potential other worlds.

B&B: You talked about the "scientific and imaginary holding equal weight" for you and an interest in New Age philosophy and spirituality as well as quantum physics and science, two fields that are conventionally at odds with each other in contemporary discourse - could you talk about how you bring them together in this exhibition and why you think that's important?

SK: 'Breakthrough' is the culmination of a lot of research into Planetary Harmonics, Sound Healing, Astrophysics, Radio Telescopes and the notion of the Music of the Spheres. I classically weave a story using these spiritual and scientific realms as this is the kind of worldview that I align myself with one that does not demystify or marginalise esoteric thought. Inspired by the fact that during periods like the renaissance eminent scientists were often magicians, astrologers and mystics harnessing their spiritual beliefs with the way in which they read and understood scientific advancement, this pluralist worldview enabled people to have a deeper sense of knowing and as the Enlightenment drew in it upheld rational logical thought over imagination and this is how we spent the next 300 years mechanising nature, our bodies and the world around us. Now we see that scientists at the threshold of their fields are upholding imaginative thought and talking more like shamans than ever before (this is especially true in fields that examine plant consciousness), so I actually think we are moving closer to a more plural worldview and embracing new age thought more readily because of a need to see the

world in a new way becoming more connected to the world around us in order to save the planet from what this mechanised worldview has inflicted on us in terms of environmental devastation.

B&B: Following from the previous question, do you think of either of these fields as religious or as fulfilling certain roles of religion in their respective communities of followers? Are there aspects of either you are sceptical/critical of and does that inform your practice?

SK: I think it is human nature to want to believe in something, I am actually quite scared of what fundamental religion and fundamental science can do in terms of making people dogmatic and closing their minds. The scientists that I collaborate with and can have conversations with are the ones that embrace imagination in their approaches, this is the healthy balance that I strive for in my approach to making as I believe that the rational and the imaginative need one another in order to thrive and one can not be privileged over the other. I think it is too easy to say science is a religion but I do feel that I have met people in my collaborations that are so rigid in their thinking and belief in scientific logic and fact that they marginalise all other thought blocking themselves from certain experiences and ways of seeing. Equally I think there is a danger to think that anyone involved in the esoteric community is always using the agency of magic for good, there are plenty of examples especially during the making of Clairaudience where I met people who didn't believe in gravity and thought that the earth was flat and NASA was the biggest enemy, this kind of thought can fuel fascism and often people embedded in these conspiracy theories are racist.

B&B: With the pressing issue of climate change, new ways of thinking about metaphysics have entered discourse, such as Hyperobjects and OOO (object-oriented-ontology) that emphasise objects-to-object relations as opposed to an entirely Anthropocentric understanding of our perception of reality. These aesthetic theories encourage quasi-animistic worldview and a more metaphorical understanding of our interactions with nature, animals and objects possess hidden qualities - could you talk about your work's relationship to ecological concerns and focusing on the life and representation of objects and Flora instead of people (even if its "through" physical people)? What do you think of the idea of "metaphorical", indirect interaction in relation to your artworks?

SK: Animism has been an interest in my work for many years, it started with an interest in puppets and the way people brought objects to life, infused by fairy tales and mythology of things having secret powers alluding to a secret life of objects. I think this is why I was drawn to performance and making things that could be activated in some way either through the audience interacting with the object or them witnessing the object come to life and upholding a sense of illusion as their disbelief was suspended. This power of objects slowly became more acutely focused on the natural world and the environment, as I was lucky enough to work with a wonderful artist called Ian Johnstone who was very inspirational in terms of his connection to nature, as well as being an artist he was a bee keeper and permaculturalist. This definitely led me to embrace the deep connection between people, animals and plants, it fuelled a desire to want people to feel more connected to nature through sound and sculpture. And so much of my work without being overtly didactic had a concern with finding portals in to other worlds and often embracing other ways of thinking in order to access something that had the potential to transform the viewer through experience. So even though the focus as you say is not on people there is something very visceral and bodily about the sculptures in 'Breakthrough', these are Resonators but in some way they are also representative of the Daughters of Necessity that play a specific frequency on each sphere that rotates around a spindle controlled by Ananke their goddess mother of necessity and fate.

B&B: Related to the previous question, given the context of global warming and climate change today, do you think "the Natural" might be automatically political - will an artist who chooses materials and references from nature in their practice automatically be connected to related global debates?

SK: I think that the pressing issues have made nature inherently political but I don't think all artists working with nature as a theme are political, I have shied away from defining my work as being about climate change, as although I believe art has the power to change people ways of seeing, I don't want to shove an idea down peoples throat, it is a gentle kind of activism I suppose a bit like Pauline Olivero's listening as activism. I think the artist has to align their work with politics but it can be subtle. Sadly I feel so much work that aligns itself with climate change doesn't make any difference to the situation, you know like actually going and demonstrating or holding up traffic like Extinction Rebellion who I believe were unfairly touted as champagne

socialists who could afford to hold up the traffic and take time off work. I think we definitely have to move away from the idea that environmentalism is a middle class issue, it needs to become everyone's problem.

B&B: Your work is interested in rituals, especially rituals that are communal and a shared experience, as well as the supernatural, and derives motifs and forms from nature - given these associations, would you say there is an element of witchcraft in your practice and if so what aspects of it inspire you?

SK: I wouldn't necessarily align my ritual practices with any one form of esotericism, I would definitely say that I dabble in different forms of magic and hope to bring that into how I work with people, in many ways the way I work with people and ritual are also a form of social experiment to see how these groups will work within the structures that I present them with. Ultimately I want to try and normalise ritual through these encounters expressing the idea that you need no prior knowledge of certain magic forms in order to invent your own traditions. Ultimately many of the traditions that we attribute to paganism often really date back to quite recent history. Ritual is embedded in our daily lives and the more people can find ways to access their own ritual making the more empowering this will be. I do not identify as a witch and therefore couldn't call what I do witchcraft it is much more about the psychology of groups and group dynamics and the power of working with a group of people to make something magic happen.

B&B: Following up on the previous question, what do you think of the relationship between witchcraft and feminism and how does that relate to your work?

SK: There is a strong connection between feminism and witchcraft in the sense that women are finding agency and a voice through this modern day resurgence and interest in witchcraft. There is also something important in readdressing the demonisation and genocide that were the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th Centuries, a text by Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, has really inspired my interest in the explanation of why this period might have occurred highlighting the rise of capitalism and the fact that magic and witches had to be stopped as they didn't fit in with the developing system of the period, they were not deemed productive and even worse were unpredictable and therefore a distraction from the goal at hand. Women who were once upheld in the community as healers were persecuted, they were also often single, unable to have children or elderly and therefore not helping develop the productivity of the economic system that was being implemented. These ideas were very inspiring during the making of the Jug Choir and I think any work that is addressing the witch hunts or trying to readdress the notion of witches as evil is essentially a feminist pursuit.

B&B: Your work derives inspiration from myth, history and fiction - what do you think about the role of myths and magic generally, and with regards to forming communities and potentially dealing with trauma as a way of escapism as an individual or a community? How could that be relevant in our contemporary society?

SK: I think it is interesting to note that in times of great economic or political turmoil fantasy/role play and mythology become popular within society, this definitely suggests that people would rather get lost in this form of harmless escapism to deal with the world around them that they feel powerless within. I feel that storytelling is an important form of escape but something that Walter Benjamin highlights in *The Storyteller* is that people that have had first hand experience of trauma like the world wars (in the context of the time this essay was written) shows that people find it very difficult to tell the whole story of the horrors or atrocities that they have suffered. I have a lived experience of this as my father was a Holocaust survivor and as much as I asked him over many years to tell me his story I never totally understood the whole thing, the dots didn't all join up, he was willing to talk to me but it felt like the full horror of what he had experienced stopped a chronological orderly telling of it.

B&B: When researching the UFO sound's sites you yourself performed "deep listening" in stillness with no other distractions and occupations other than sitting still and experiencing your surroundings and nature - in our age of accelerated time, abundant screens and radically shortened attention spans, how do you view the significance of "stillness" and embodiment in both the making and experiencing of your work and the sound piece *Clairaudience*?

SK: Something that has become obvious to me through a lot of my sound work is that we have become a culture that privileges the visual over all other mediums, we are saturated by images and text in our daily lives and have somehow lost our ability to listen and yes in some ways to be still. When looking back we see how preliterate cultures privileged sound and face to face interactions, this is made very clear by the importance of acoustics

within architectural spaces from amphitheatres to Gothic cathedrals and the development of western harmonic music. There is a correlation between space and sound that has been lost in modern times with the development of electricity and amplification. But my point is that this was a period where sound and listening specifically were important not only to enjoying the music or performance in a space but also to survival. "Deep Listening" definitely highlights a slowing down of sorts allowing the space around you to command your attention and respect. The way I work isn't always through stillness, especially with the UFO sites I recorded there was a lot of walking in these spaces, which offered again another element to the recording which is about how my presence is also having an impact on the space I am exploring. It was also freezing when I made these recordings so sometimes not as meditative experience as you may have at first thought, there are many parts of the recordings where I am swearing and running back to my car because my hands have become frozen and lost all feeling, there is quite a lot of fear in some parts of deep listening as you are often going to the edges of spaces, like reservoirs and seeing signs that warn of "cows beware". I guess because these spaces also had this prehistory of sightings it added another layer of fear and perhaps danger of what might be encountered. Something to highlight is that this kind of field recording is a solitary task which also adds to a sense of fear, especially when referring to the idea of hearing things.

B&B: Pottery and clay objects have a significance for you in that, as you quote the author Hugh Gordon Porteus, they are 'one of the very first, rough working daughters of Necessity', which originally didn't have an aesthetic purpose but were instruments of domestic labour. Having elevated them into a white cube space transformed from functional tools into almost breathing tactile bodies with their respective, distinct voices, would you say there is an element of foregrounding invisible labour and labourers in your work? Alternatively, do you think the *Resonators* are or aren't in this sense, "fetishised" objects?

SK: I don't think I could describe my work as being about invisible labour but instead about visible labour, the act of working in clay in itself is one that is enormously physical and hard going on ones body, the way that I work with clay often involves multiple forms in large scale meaning there is a repetitive act of making the same thing or roughly the same thing over and over again by hand. This is especially true of the *Resonators* which were made by throwing clay on the wheel, built up gradually with different sized rings being thrown and then stuck together. There are also the ring marks you see on the *Resonators* which are a visual reference to the act of working clay with my hands. I am interested in the animation of objects so for this reason they could be seen as fetish objects, but they also serve a function to allow you to hear and experience something differently, they are transformative or enable a transformative experience of how sound travels through the air to your ear and they also become an extension of the human body, the ear in this case adding further to their fetish potential.

B&B: Craftsmanship and materiality/physicality are important visceral elements in your art works in an age where both in artistic practice but also in the sphere of labour (domestic or otherwise), technology and the immaterial/digital are growing increasingly dominant. Would you say there is a sense of nostalgia in your practice - nostalgia for a return to nature, and seeing your interest in mythologies and folklore, to an almost more primordial state of being in the world? Do you think nostalgia is a progressive form of being and creating, do you think it has a political dimension?

SK: Again I don't know if I would align myself with the word nostalgia in this circumstance, I like working with my hands and this visceral quality to the work is something that I see as an antidote to the more immaterial practice of art making, much of my work is about trying to enable people to access a deeper way of seeing or feeling the world around them, making the invisible or inaudible palpable in some way and this is why I use more visceral physical techniques, I wouldn't say it is because I have a nostalgia for the material but that it allows me to express something far more primordial and instantaneous that I feel is maybe lost in the more virtual approach to making. I think nostalgia is often used in a pejorative way especially within contemporary art, I don't turn my back on technology or advancing methods of recording and producing sound in my work hence I wouldn't describe my practice as back to basics. But often as an artist sometimes you don't have access to the most high tech of equipment or techniques and these limitations can create work that is more powerful and touches people in a more immediate way than something with a glossy finish, I was always taught at art school to find ways of making and use limitations financial or technological to my advantage as one can create the most powerful forms of expression through these limitations.

B&B: The *Resonators* function as instruments of connection and intimacy bringing viewers together in the gallery as active participants- what's your thoughts on the state of interpersonal connections and alienation today, and

how do you view art's (yours on in general) relationship or potential in influencing that? Do you think it's important to bring the "interconnection" of the world into the gallery space?

SK: I guess my practice comes from a participatory and socially engaged space and this is definitely important to me when working in a gallery context that there is some form of connectedness in a physical sense with object and viewer. It is perhaps a left over from having worked with lots of communities and worked in arts education, something that I feel deeply about engagement and capturing the attention of the viewer.

B&B: You mention a connection to the afterlife and to spirituality, the Resonators being transmitters and conduits of voices from Beyond and from the past. As I interpret it, your work is a non-literal, subtle sonic representation of memory and of a non-linear, web-like sensorial history. Your instruments act almost as gateways to the Subconscious and to this infinite archive. Could you talk about your work's relationship to personal and/or collective memory and possibly the concept of trauma and "silenced" memory, and to the Subconscious?

SK: The memory of a space, the memory of an experience in that space all told through sounds and the idea of the residue of what is left when a whole community like that of Todmorden imbues these sites and stories with belief, breathing life into what could have just been a one off news story. There may or may not be truth in this paranormal activity but if enough people want to believe in these stories then my question whilst making the recordings is what is left from this collective consciousness of a place? The person that showed me these sites was a local bookshop owner called Colin who was truly passionate about creating a space for people to explore either their interest or their lived experience of UFO sightings in the area, he set up the UFO club in Tod which is very well attended by the local community and its environ. The meeting that I attended was very interesting with a few people talking openly about their lived experience of UFO sightings in Tod and nearby. Some of these people were very spiritual about their experience others were very paranoid feeling that they were being followed or surveyed by police because of their paranormal experience. This made it clear to me that I was not interested in the people and their stories as Colin was but actually much more interested in the power of the collective unconscious and what this left in the places where these things had been experienced. I really feel Colin has a genuine desire to create a safe place for people who have had these experiences to feel free to express what has happened to them no matter what their beliefs or conspiracy theories. It felt like a troubled place to inhabit but I really respect what he is trying to do as it did feel like a potentially healing space for people to be present in and to share sensitive information within.

B&B: The *Resonators* have the capacity to pick up on selected, unique frequencies from complex "noise" or chaos, making them into quasi Translators. The position of a translator, though perhaps seemingly neutral, can also be seen as a position of selective power - the power of a storyteller. In my subjective view of reading your work, the "noise" can represent any context of data and information - be that historical, socio-political, artistic or otherwise - and the *Resonators* are devices foregrounding and constructing certain frequencies, certain elements of a story, into the official, canonised narrative. They are the gatekeepers determining what is accessible information and what remains "white noise" - could you share your views on this interpretation, and whether you regard them as neutral vessels and mediators, or as objects with active agency and power? If so, what is the nature of their power?

SK: I really like the interpretation of them as storytellers, although I had never thought of them in this way, I definitely see them as active and complicit in transmitting something to the viewer and as I have said previously perhaps as an extension of the viewer giving them some kind of super human power to hear something different or to attune to something within the ether. They are also a representation on some level of the Daughters of Necessity that drone at a specific frequency controlling our fate, so in some way yes this is their agency and power, giving the viewer the ability to attune themselves to something specific within the chaos.