

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc



Performance with KlangMöbil sculptures at the Big O Weekend



Sculptures at Big Orchestra

Big Orchestra

Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany

Up until now the idea of 'exhibiting music performance' has mainly been a challenge for artists and musicians themselves, attempting to break traditional formats and overcome the limits of art spaces on the one hand and music venues on the other. In an interview for the group exhibition Big Orchestra at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, sound artist Hans van Koolwijk expressed a common desire he had noticed between himself and many other listeners at music performances: to be inside the sound or at least to be able to approach it and walk around it.

When it comes to actually institutionalising this concept and making it mainstream, the recent opening of the multimillion dollar venue The Shed in New York could be a watershed moment. With its flexible architecture and its intention of fusing art forms, it might well serve as a model for other institutions in bringing together art and live music to create something new and possibly transcendental. Earlier this year, one of its first events, Reich Richter Pärt, brought together two-dimensional artworks of painter Gerhard Richter with ensemble

and choir music by composers Steve Reich and Arvo Pärt, in two large white-walled spaces where audience and performers could keep a close distance.

Reich Richter Pärt, with multiple performances during the day throughout the exhibition months, felt like a blockbuster version of a concept that was still presented as radical a year or so before. Earlier this year, curator Ari Benjamin Meyers had formed an ensemble of musicians to present contemporary compositions in a gallery setting. Meyers's Kunsthalle For Music exhibition at art space Witte De With in Rotterdam presented flexible line-ups performing avant garde compositions and new pieces in day-long programmes, moving through multiple rooms. Kunsthalle For Music served as a laboratory simultaneously preserving the conceptual foundations of these works while loosening them from their original context, letting them become catalysts for new collaborative forms.

The Big Orchestra exhibition appeared similarly ambitious in instigating new directions in art, taking place inside an actual Kunsthalle, rather than the conceptual Kunsthalle For Music. Here

artists and musicians interacted on a more material level: cascaded over an elongated rectangular space were a couple of dozen objects that could be considered hybrids between visual artworks and musical instruments. Musicians played these sculptural instruments in a series of live performances, sessions and workshops, of which select recordings were played back on screens with headphones at the exhibition.

Participating in the performances was the Frankfurt based Ensemble Interface, which previously had commissioned Hans van Koolwijk to build a series of sound sculptures to perform with. Of these Klangmöbil sculptures some can be driven like bikes, some can be carried, and some have either strings or mouthpieces or percussive parts; but unlike regular instruments their mobile elements influence their sounds, with for example the suspension stretching the strings or the brake dampening the drum.

More assertive than the ensemble's rather explorative improvisations were the performances on David Zink Yi's series of coloured box-like structures entitled *Being The Measure*, by several

percussionists. Using Afro-Cuban rhythms, they closed the gap between ancient traditions and abstract shapes that could well be associated with some of the most metaphysical modernist art.

Big Orchestra included highlights of artists' instruments of the past decade. Only a few were accessible to casual visitors, for example Carsten Nicolai's installation of prepared vinyl records and turntables. Some were too fragile for that, such as Carlos Amorales's ceramic ocarinas or Rie Nakajima's collection of tiny kinetic objects. Some were too loud, such as Guillermo Galindo's giant gong-like Ángel exterminador, made from a discarded, rusty piece of metal fencing coming from the Mexican-US border. Or too dangerous, such as Pedro Reyes's *Disarm* series made from firearms confiscated by Mexican authorities. However, their tactile appearance was suggestive enough. Like Orm Fennendahl's non-obtrusive exhibition soundtrack, incorporating sounds from all of the sculptures on display, Big Orchestra did not feel particularly finished, but rather as a vital strand to a fairly underexposed artistic discourse. **Marinus de Ruiter**

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt/Marc Krause