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Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker & Thierry De Mey, *Top Shot* (2001)

Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker & Thierry De Mey

Top Shot

Sounding City at Budascoop, Kortrijk, Belgium
Encountering the work of Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker in a sound art exhibition makes sense. The Flemish choreographer and founder of groundbreaking dance group Rosas often departs from the movements and patterns of classical choreography and ballet, in the end transcending these disciplines to arrive at a unique form of theatrical performance more closely related to contemporary music and art.

This year's Klinkende Stad (Sounding City) sound art tour and exhibition in the Flemish city of Kortrijk welcomed visitors at its central location, the Budascoop arthouse cinema, with *Top Shot*, a video installation by De Keersmaecker and

Thierry De Mey. A film maker, composer and musician, De Mey has collaborated with Rosas since its foundation in 1983, most notably on the music for and cinematic rendition of De Keersmaecker's seminal choreography *Rosas Danst Rosas*.

Top Shot is built around a five minute video loop of De Keersmaecker dancing a fragment of her very first piece, *Fase, Four Movements To The Music Of Steve Reich* from 1982, in particular the movement to a recording of Reich's composition *Violin Phase*. The solo dance is filmed from a camera hanging high above the performer, who is dancing on a sand-covered floor. Her movements gradually mark a circular pattern in the white sand resembling the shape of a rose window or Catherine wheel ('rosace' in French). The video is in turn projected onto a mass of sand, on

which the audience is free to walk around. In relation to the rigorous structures in De Keersmaecker's work, the brutalist architecture of Budascoop gives an extra dimension to this 2013 realisation of *Top Shot*, installed in the middle of a wide spiral staircase of naked concrete.

The installation, first realised in 2001, could easily be regarded as a playful footnote to the extensive Rosas oeuvre, but at the same time it encapsulates De Keersmaecker's key working principle of stripping down and opening up. For instance, in her solo dance in *Top Shot*, she references ballet through the movements of her feet gliding through the sand and her white dress accentuating every spin.

At the same time she strips all these movements of their classical context by

drawing geometrical forms in the sand, more like a visual artist. The rose shape is likewise stripped of its European religious connotations. Like Steve Reich in much of his music, De Keersmaecker takes rudimentary historical forms and builds them into new, opened frameworks.

Top Shot is an ingenious clockwork that is close to capturing the essence of Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker's work. The same dance was performed live by the choreographer herself at MoMA in 2011; and the only things missing from this video installation are the facial expressions and the visceral sound of breathing and movement, both of which communicate so much emotion in De Keersmaecker's choreography when it is experienced in a live setting.

Marinus de Ruiter

Aura Satz

Impulsive Synchronisation

Hayward Gallery, London, UK

Aura Satz's installation adjacent to the Hayward Gallery is a room full of sound – essentially, underwater recordings of military vessels – while at the centre stands a looped black and white projection of Austrian-American actress Hedy Lamarr.

The background facts for this artwork are pretty staggering, and read like a resumé of a Thomas Pynchon novel. In 1941 Hollywood film star and part time mathematician Lamarr teams up with her neighbour, avant garde composer George Antheil, to submit a patent application. The technology they've invented is called frequency-hopping, and the aim is to assist the US war effort by protecting radio-controlled torpedoes from enemy interference. Antheil had been trying to

synchronise pianolas – 16 of them in his soundtrack for Fernand Léger's 1924 film *Ballet Mécanique* – and reckoned that player piano rolls offered a technical means of synchronising rapid changes between frequencies. Lamarr, one presumes, did the maths.

It's a long way from Lamarr's role as Hollywood screen-zine fodder, notorious for quotes like, "Any girl can look glamorous. All you have to do is stand still and look stupid." But Lamarr's grasp of weapons technology probably stemmed from her first marriage, to the half-Jewish, fascist-fancying Austrian arms dealer Friedrich Mandl, who defended his wife's reputation by buying up copies of her 1933 erotic movie *Ecstasy*. Satz tackles the subject with a projection of Lamarr on board a ship, her sultry beauty at full throttle as she flashes Morse code with her torch. The clip is from *Come Live With*

Me, released in 1941, the same year as the patent application. It's projected onto a double-layered screen made from specially commissioned pianola rolls, the rows of tiny perforations recalling early computer paper scrolls. The roaring soundtrack is a compilation of torpedo motors, submarines and sirens; all vintage World War Two recordings.

Given all this sexy back story, how come the installation feels so flat? Repeatedly I went back into the darkened, curtained room in an attempt to figure why the atmosphere was so unenticing. Lamarr and Antheil were pushing the envelope of the technologically possible, and theirs is a tale of heroic failure. Antheil's 16 pianolas refused to synchronise, and frequency-hopping was not adopted by the US military till the early 60s, by which time Antheil was dead and Lamarr was getting arrested for shoplifting.

Satz's installation, on the contrary, feels technologically bland. The torpedo sounds may have originated on optical recordings or 78 shellacs, but digitised they just sound lo-fi. The projection screen is supposed to be turning but doesn't (maybe a temporary glitch), and it's not a real pianola roll anyway. Lamarr's image isn't synched to the sound, and the slow flicker as she randomly appears and vanishes made my eyes ache. It's irritating to have to read so many research notes to make sense of the artwork, and the dramatic over-reaching of the patent just isn't captured in any artistic mystery in the room. The piece has some of the depressing digital flatness of an unambitious museum exhibit. As opposed to a torpedo approaching your hull at 45 knots, its guidance system teasingly manipulated by Austria's most ruthless and alluring woman.

Clive Bell