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Klara Lidén's *Paralyzed* (2003)

Rotterdam Philharmonic play Varèse, with projections by Gary Hill

Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop-Music As Subject Of Visual Art

Kunsthaus, Graz, Austria

Smack in the middle of Graz – a genteel Austrian town famous for its museum of medieval armoury and a dish of boiled beef – lies the Kunsthaus, a lump of blueberry bubblegum positioned among the winding streets and alleyways as though a giant had spat it there. The blue biomorphous structure, seemingly floating above its reception area below, houses Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop-Music As Subject Of Visual Art, curated by accomplished German writer, theorist and scenester Diedrich Diedrichsen.

'Pop music' seems an odd, even meaningless, choice of term in relation to most works on display here, and the title only points you in a vague direction: rock (obvious), paper (packaging, LP covers), scissors (montage, collage).

Opening night: two bodies lie contorted on a small stage, one writhing and rolling around a guitar, the other clambering over a Nord synth. Slender limbs in awkward unison, chopping away at clunky, chugging (dis)chords. The limbs belong to Kim Gordon and Jutta Koether, who are making the gawping arthouse public nervous and uncomfortable. Can we laugh? Is it serious? The ungainliness of this spectacle, its muted provocation, is utterly captivating.

'The freakout' is a recurrent theme in the exhibition itself: not least in Gordon and Koether's *Sacred Body Practice* (2009), where three tiny chambers (titled *Complete Solution 1,2* and *3*), made out of soundproof material, house portable DVD players showing different documents: Julie Cafritz in a basement banging on her guitar repeatedly shouting "Fuck"; Noise Nomads noising off somewhere in Massachusetts; and trio Twodeadsluts Onegoodfuck, jumping around naked in a storm of power electronics in a barn in Oregon. The films are private viewing of individual freak moments.

Swedish artist Klara Lidén's video *Paralyzed* (2003) features the young artist in a train carriage, dancing uninhibitedly in undergarments to The Legendary Stardust Cowboy's track of the same name. 'The Ledge', little known except for lending his

name to half of David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust moniker, is an obscure outsider artist of debatable talent. He becomes significant here as a conduit to Lidén's liberation from social constraints – or paralysis – as in this work's title.

In Art & Language's enclosure, visitors have an opportunity to get their freak on by singing karaoke versions of Red Crayola songs. Albert Oehlen's *Rock* (2009) is an oddly shaped painting bearing the words "Help I'm A Rock", which, besides being a Frank Zappa title, also alludes to someone who can't freak (rock) out. The exhibition's main commission, Mike Kelley's freakish and vulgar *Sex, Drugs, And Rock And Roll Party Palace* (2009), recalls Paul McCarthy's work with large scale inflatables. It consists of four enormous bouncy castles shaped like a church, a mushroom, a cartoon figure, etc, onto which are projected snippets of hardcore porn films (catering to every possible taste), occasionally interrupted by short flashes of biographies of musicians such as organist Richard Ellsasser and the jazz organist Milt Herth. It's hard to imagine what Kelley is trying to achieve with this barrage of nonsequiturs.

Lucy McKenzie's painting *Untitled* (2002) portrays a female painter dressed in overalls, painstakingly reproducing the logo of Krautrock label Brain as a mural. Her efforts have been defaced with a phallic scribble, creating a multilayered image – a painting, featuring a painter, with paint splashed over it: a double image of male behaviour: the fastidious completist and the infantile defacer.

Shows around music and art have flooded galleries and museums internationally over the past few years, dedicated to musicians who are also artists, and the other way around, as if needing to prove an already obvious crossover between the two domains. If Diedrichsen's referencing of 'pop music' is supposed to pertain to popular culture as opposed to the classical canon, then it sends the wrong signals. Having said that, this show has more coherence than most of its predecessors for its active engagement with the artists and for its many commissioned works.
Anne Hilde Neset

Varèse 360°

Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

11 years in the planning, the Holland Festival finally staged the complete works of Edgard Varèse (1883-1965) over two nights. The Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Asko|Schönberg ensemble and choir Cappella Amsterdam collaborated in Varèse's innovative orchestrations, including the famous *Ionisation* for 13 percussionists (1931), and a world premiere of *Étude Pour Espace* (1947), integrating additional orchestral parts projected via speakers surrounding the audience.

Varèse 360°, produced with London's Southbank Centre, was a commissioned collaboration with renowned video artist Gary Hill. The circular floor plan of the venue – the rusty reservoir of a former gas factory – proved an appropriate place for Varèse's dissonant, clanging modernism.

Although meant to enhance the music, Hill's projections felt unnecessary and intrusive. Already on the first night, feverish pleas emerged from audience to "get rid of the visuals". After the finale, when conductor Peter Eötvös invited Hill on stage, the video artist received full-throated boos from all the audience.

A precedent for Hill's commission is Bill Viola's well received visual interpretation of Varèse's *Déserts* (1954) made for television in 1995. Hill is one of the few video artists with a resumé approaching Viola's. His unsuccessful contribution to Varèse 360° can be attributed to a conflict between fundamentally different approaches: perfectionism versus process.

Varèse destroyed many of his compositions – the remaining body of work was not intended to be experimental, although it sounded erratic to contemporary ears. Viola's *Déserts* complies with the composer's perfectionism. Its video montage conscientiously anticipates the sudden musical movements.

Hill's process art is defined by experimentalism. His staged interactions between video, sound, text and the human body often result in permanent installations or films, but his initial performances are unforeseeable in their outcome. For Varèse 360°, Hill created an

experimental environment which clashed with the perfected musical works. His lavish video canvas for this show included three cinema-size screens behind the stage and three movable hanging screens. In a central space, artists invited by Hill interacted with music, video and objects; Charles Stein, for instance, used small cameras to create images with statues and glass spheres gathered on a table.

On rare occasions the visuals touched on the intensity of Varèse's music, for example when images of scaffolding moved over multiple screens, as if a ghostly presence surrounded the grandstand. Soprano Anu Komsi and flautist Jeanette Landré – who excelled in the solo piece *Density 21.5* (1936) – stood out visually through dresses shaped like 3D models and laced with luminous threads.

However, what was intended as a visual counterpoint boiled down to a distracting hodgepodge. Repetitive stock videos of waveforms, people with headphones and outdated computer graphics interchanged with live images of performers scribbling abstractly with charcoal or attempting to translate the music into paper sculptures and sign language.

While the music was continuously outstanding, visually interesting orchestrations like *Ecuatorial* (1934), featuring oddly shaped cello-theremins, were pushed to the background.

The Holland Festival often stages incongruous combinations of music, theatre and art. For instance, this year composer and turntablist Marina Rosenfeld gathered a line of 35 local schoolchildren to sing along to iPods playing Ligeti's choral masterpiece *Lontano*. Rosenfeld turned Ligeti's concept for the piece – moving from darkness to light – into an unpretentious symbol of hope for the audience.

However, by coupling a meticulous performance of Varèse to Hill's experimental attitude, the festival made an unbalanced choice. It's a challenge for director Pierre Audi, responsible for the staging of Varèse 360°, to find a middle ground between orchestra and art for the scheduled Paris and London performances.
Marinus de Ruiter