

Breaking the Sound Art Barrier

ART COLLECTING
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SAN FRANCISCO—Galleries and museums here were making a lot of noise this fall.

Ranging from the ambitious architectural installations in "Rooms for Listening," a show at the San Francisco and Oakland galleries of the California College of Arts and Crafts to an audio installation by Bill Fontana at the edgy commercial space Refusalon, a number of exhibitions in the Bay Area were redefining the hard-to-grasp and hard-to-collect category of "sound art."

The model of sound art as atonal music, found harmonies, or dissonances—or even as compositions of silence, à la John Cage—is giving way to a notion of sound art as something with a more sculptural presence—and visual (or video) components.

This was very much the case with "Aural Sex," the September exhibition at the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco. Organized by independent curator Marcia Tanner, "Aural Sex" featured mixed-media works by seven emerging artists, including New York video artist Adriana Arenas, New York conceptual artist Nina Katchadourian and Oakland-based sound artist Ed Osborn.

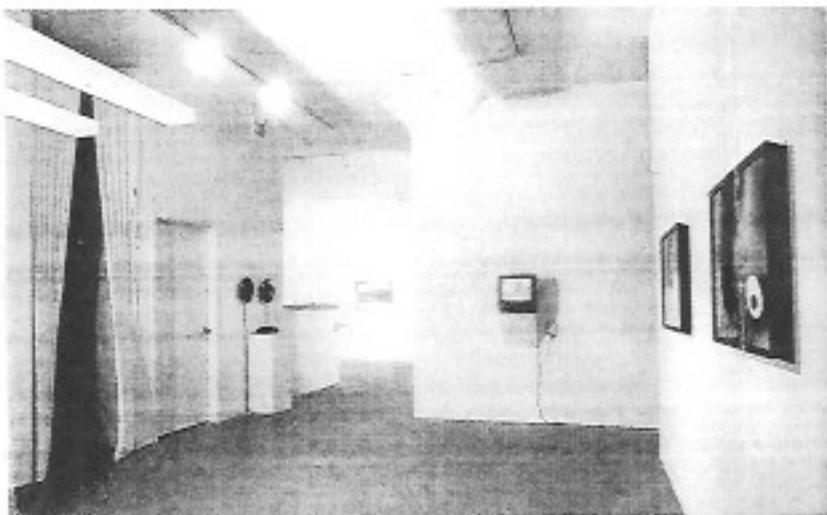
Why the interest in sound now? "I do one adventurous group show every year, where we can work with new artists and new ideas," says Clark, who represents Arenas and Katchadourian. "We're so saturated with sound," adds Tanner. "Artists are investigating the psychological means to filter out noises, and then they're bringing the noises back into consciousness. All of the artists in the show were incorporating found sounds in their work."

And collectors seem to be listening. Clark says that sales, though limited, were encouraging. Among the works sold were *Surface Spoils: Concrete Music from Europe, 1999*, by Katchadourian, a \$5,000 installation using a CD and audio tapes, and videotapes by Chicago artist Allison Rutan, at \$300 each. Prices went as high as \$9,000 for the DVDs of Arenas's *Sweet Illusion*, which was featured in this year's "Greater New York" exhibition at PS1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, jumping to \$15,000 when sold with a pair of video projectors, a videotape and two DVD players.

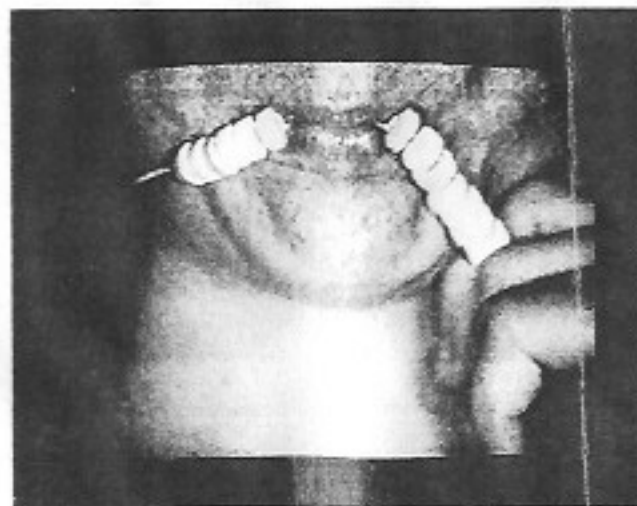
"I'm amazed by the people who had bought only painting and sculpture to date but have now started collecting sound

work," Clark says. "I'm always pleasantly surprised that you can sell this kind of work."

Sound shows also spilled over into other local venues. Along with contributing a video installation to "Aural Sex," young New



Bay Area collectors and museums are boosting the market for sound art. Above: an installation view of "Aural Sex," a show of sound art that ran this fall at Catharine Clark. Below: *Hips and Lips, 2000*, a video by Connie Walsh also in the exhibition.



audio sculpture called *Blue Vinyl* at the Traywick Gallery in Berkeley. It consisted of speakers embedded in—and some of the artist's Iris prints hanging from—a vinyl niche in the wall. At the same time, Refusalon presented a beautiful installation by San Francisco-based audio pioneer Fontana, featuring two decades' worth of recorded ocean sounds. Refusalon offered Fontana's work, configured with Tannoy speakers and other high-end audio gear, for \$75,000.

Despite growing interest by private collectors, museums may still be the primary market for such work. At press time, for instance, Clark had just sold *Night Sea Music* by Ed Osborn to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, reportedly for around \$10,000.

"We're thinking that sound may be an institutional market, at least for the time being," says Maureen Pskowski, director of Chicago's Donald Young gallery, which has been working with media artists such as Gary Hill and Bruce Nauman for many years. "Individuals are beginning to buy, but sound is not selling like hotcakes. We're all still figuring out how to market and package it."

GLEN HELFAND