

Tune Up Your Ears

Interactive and experimental sound installations transform the living space at each stop on the Roosevelt house tour

By Adam Grybowski

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DOUGLAS Repetto begins his sound installation "Study for Time Travel" by suspending two speakers from the ceiling.

The artist, who has presented work at the Whitney and the Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art, swings them through space at different rates. They play the same sound at different frequencies, altering a listener's perception. On his Web site he describes the split signal as a "primitive form of time travel."

Mr. Repetto will present a new version of "Study for Time Travel" May 30 during the Roosevelt house tour. Seventeen artists have created a sound installation for each of the tour's 13 homes. Artists range from students to MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant recipients to the internationally renowned, like Mr. Repetto.

"He's a world famous artist, a seminal figure," says Brad Garton, director of Columbia University's Computer Music Center and professor of composition.



Scott Smallwood's "Sound Lanterns," a solar powered sound installation.

The installations will be experimental in nature, and include interactive design and visual components. One will be solar powered.

"What they all have in common is sound," says curator Victoria Estok, a Hunter College student pursuing her master of fine arts degree in integrated media arts. "Sound is less understood than visual imagery. Consciously and unconsciously, what we hear affects how we live and what we're capable of."

The idea of merging sound installation with a house tour is to create "a sculptural musical experience as people come into the house," Mr. Garton says. "It's a way of presenting this new music in new context, but the context is kind of fun. In my old age I've become kind of allergic to sitting in a dark concert hall and listening to the masters."

The house tour grew out of a 2007 Roosevelt Arts Project event, Art Walk in the Woods, held in the town's central green space area. "It was enormously popular," Mr. Garton says. "The big thing in new media is site specific stuff."

Ms. Estok's installation, "Audio as the Realm of the Dead," was set off the loop, deeper in the woods amid a skunk cabbage grove. She took found recordings of deceased Roosevelt residents, edited them so only their voices remained on the track and played them through speakers among the trees. "It was like they were speaking to you," she says.

The installation was an extension of her final project while a Goddard College undergraduate, in which she was exploring how people perceive death.

"I wanted it to be a memorial," she says, noting listeners' initial caution. "This is the kind of town where generation after generation stays. It was powerful for them to hear voices they thought they were never going to hear again."

Ms. Estok, in collaboration with sound and video artist Daniel Iglesia, will present a similar installation for the house tour. The voices of the dead aspect will be merged with field recordings, and the audio will be synched with 3-D video of architectural drawings.

After the Art Walk, RAP began to imagine what other types of events could feature similar installations, and landed on a house tour. "Roosevelt houses are kind of bizarre," Mr. Garton says. The town was founded 75 years ago as a planned community, part of the Works Progress Administration. Its houses, generally painted white, are identified by cement blocks, rectangular living spaces and flat roofs.

"For me it's all about communicating and connecting with people," says Mr. Garton, a Roosevelt resident and RAP board member. "I think the idea of art functioning in a vacuum is totally wrongheaded. This is the kind of stuff I really like to see happen."

Mr. Garton will perform along with Terry Pender and Dan Trueman in what he calls his "weird laptop folk group" that combines laptops with folk instruments like the mandolin. The result is a type of ambient electronic music rooted in folk idioms and traditions. "We tend to write kind of pretty music," Mr. Garton says. "It fills the room with weird sounds."

Mr. Trueman, who has received grants from the Guggenheim and MacArthur foundations, teaches composition at Princeton University and performs in numerous ensembles, including the Princeton Laptop Orchestra, or PLOrk. Mr. Pender, the mandolin player, is associate director of the Computer Music Center at Columbia, where he is also a professor.

Although not traditional, Mr. Garton's band will be the most musically traditional installation on the house tour. Much of his work is making algorithmic compositions; that is, he designs computer programs to make music and then tweaks the program during performances. "It's like you're improvising with a process that's unfolding," he says. "I like this idea of working with a process. It's a way of getting a handle on a structure of music I really enjoy."

He concedes his band mates are more talented musicians than he is. "The computer does all the hard work," he says.

The Roosevelt Sound Installation House Tour, *sponsored by the Roosevelt Arts Project, will begin at the Roosevelt Public School, Route 571, Roosevelt, May 30, 1-5 p.m. Suggested donation: \$5; 609-448-5614.*

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