

John Hansard Gallery

University of Southampton
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Free Admission

Open Tuesday to Friday 11–5
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About us

John Hansard Gallery is a world-leading centre for contemporary art. Launched in 1980, the Gallery showcases innovative work by UK and international artists through exhibitions, off-site projects, research, publications, education and outreach programmes. Bringing artists and communities together, the Gallery makes a vital contribution to the cultural life of the city and region and encourages new practice by today's best artists and curators.

In 2016, the John Hansard Gallery will move to a new city centre location as part of Southampton's new arts complex, a VIP Project for the city supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, led by Southampton City Council in partnership with Grosvenor Developments Ltd.

John Hansard Gallery is part of the **University of Southampton** and supported by **Arts Council England**.

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S3A Future Spatial Audio
for an Immersive Listener Experience

PRESS RELEASE

Aura Satz The Trembling Line

3 December 2015 – 23 January 2016

The Trembling Line is an exhibition of works by Aura Satz exploring acoustics, vibration, sound visualisation and musical gesture with an aim to wrest the space between sound and image, to see how far these can be stretched apart before they fold back into one another. The title, *The Trembling Line*, refers in part to the basic principle of vibration, a disturbance of equilibrium, such as the stimulation of motion and sound through friction, but also to the possibility of challenging static notation systems and destabilizing the experience of seeing and hearing.

The centrepiece of the show is the film and sound installation *The Trembling Line*, which explores visual and acoustic echoes between decipherable musical gestures and abstract patterning, orchestral swells and extreme slow-motion close-ups of strings and percussion. It features a score by Leo Grant, projected through an innovative spatial audio rendering system built by the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research (ISVR) as part of the S3A research project on immersive listening.

Violin bows appear as angular lines cutting across the screen in rhythmic sequences, like a swarm of insects or windmills. Strings vibrate, unsettled in a state of continuous oscillation. Formal continuities are drawn out between throbbing slowed-down vibrations and real-time musical sequences, as the trembling pace of a tremolo becomes a relentless pulse. The multi-channel speaker array is devised as an intimate sound spatialisation system in which each element of sound can be pried apart and reconfigured, to create a dynamically disorienting sonic experience. It features small swarms of sounds, amplified as they gush through the sphere, intricate musical gestures travelling in circular and counterpoint patterns, and dense surges of tremolo rolling across the acoustic range. The sound sphere recalls an inverted fly's compound eye, which turns inwards onto the listener. It becomes the inside of a musical instrument, an acoustic envelope or cage of sorts, through which viewers are invited to experience the film and generate cross-sensory connections and counterpoints between the sound and the visuals.

The exhibition includes *The Absorbing Wall* (2015), based on an anechoic chamber, along with five closely inter-connected films: *Vocal Flame* (2012); *Oramics: Atlantis Anew* (2011); *Onomatopoeic Alphabet* (2010); *Theremin* (2009); *Automamusical* (2008).

Some of the works address the visualisation of sound as a morphing language in which patterns of sand, salt or fire correspond to sounds in unexpected ways. Others address gesture-less mechanical music or the compelling gesturality of a theremin, a sensitive instrument that is played without physical contact, merely by waving hands in its proximity, affecting the sounds produced by the electromagnetic field.

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Satz is also interested in female figures that are largely excluded from mainstream historical discourse, in an ongoing engagement with the question of women's contributions to labour, technological invention and scientific knowledge. *Oramics: Atlantis Anew* centres on the invention of a new sound-generating machine and correlated notation system invented by British electronic music pioneer Daphne Oram in 1957. Using principles of drawn-sound (the inverse of the other works which look at sound visualisation), Oram invented a system for sonifying graphic shapes and creating a new language of unheard electronic sounds. Similarly, *Vocal Flame* addresses popular manifestations of the female disembodied voice, visualised as a wave of flames using an acoustic device known as a 'Rubens' Tube'.

The Absorbing Wall provides an acoustic vacuum, a silent nexus separating the various films. Five photographic stills of the ISVR's large anechoic chamber convey a visual patterning of sound-absorbing elements, positioned in off-kilter angles that break away from the geometric regularity typically associated with the space.

The Trembling Line is the result of Aura Satz's year as Artist-in-Residence at the University of Southampton, funded by The Leverhulme Trust and the university. The residency represents an innovative collaboration between the artist, the Department of Music and the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research (ISVR) that explores the conceptual translations between different art-forms, acoustics and technologies, and reflects ongoing exchanges between the composers, performers and acoustic engineering staff and students. Many of the 3D audio technologies were developed by the research team of the S3A project, an EPSRC-supported programme grant (see Editor's Notes for details).

Editor's Notes

Aura Satz's practice encompasses film, sound, performance and sculpture. She engages with technological objects that tap into ideas of knowledge and communication in their use of notation systems, languages or encrypted codes. She has performed, exhibited and screened her work nationally and internationally, including Tate Modern, Hayward Gallery, Barbican Art Gallery, ICA, the Wellcome Collection, BFI Southbank, Whitechapel Gallery; Experimenta, London Film Festival; Oberhausen Short Film Festival; the Rotterdam Film Festival; the New York Film Festival. She is Tutor in Moving Image at Royal College of Art, London.

Aura Satz: The Trembling Line is a John Hansard Gallery exhibition funded by an award from The Leverhulme Trust Artist in Residence Scheme (principal investigator: Prof Jeanice Brooks, Department of Music), with additional support from ISVR and the Music Department, University of Southampton. ISVR collaboration coordinated by Dr Filippo Fazi.

ISVR team: Dr Filippo Maria Fazi, Dr Dylan Menzies, Dr Andreas Franck, Dr Marcos Simon Galvez, Mr Michael Cousins, Mr Diego Murillo Gomez, Miss Alicia Alonso-Carrillo and Dr Matthew Wright as acoustic research consultant. The researchers who contributed to the development of the technologies at the core of the advanced spatial audio reproduction system, including those at ISVR, are engaged in the project "S3A: Future Spatial Audio for an Immersive Listener Experience at Home". S3A is an EPSRC-supported programme grant carried out in collaboration between the Universities of Surrey, Salford, and Southampton and the BBC. For more information on S3A visit: www.s3a-spatialaudio.org/wordpress

Speaker array construction: Ian Watson. Music Department collaboration coordinated by Jeanice Brooks. Violin: Kanon Miyashita, Kath Roberts, Hannah Preston, Jessica Lawless. Viola: Dr Thomas Irvine. Cello: Cerys Beesley, Manikka Marchant. Bass: Paul Cox. Directed, edited and filmed by Aura Satz. Soundtrack composed by Leo Grant. Filmed with support in kind from ILLad, University of Southampton, with special thanks to Stephen Caspar and Joe Brett. High-speed sequences filmed with Quench Studios. Support in kind from Gallo Speakers.

The Absorbing Wall is dedicated to the memory of Stuart Croft.