

Listening on display

Citation for published version (APA):

Semmerling, L. (2020). *Listening on display: exhibiting sounding artworks 1960s-now*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20200430ls>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2020

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20200430ls](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20200430ls)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Listening on Display Exhibiting Sounding Artworks 1960s-now

1. The challenges of exhibiting sounding artworks do not lie in the often-proclaimed incompatibility of sound with the conventions of the visual art world, but in the ideas that artists and curators have come to attach to the sounds and in the ideals they have developed about how these sounds are supposed to be experienced.

2. Exhibitions of sounding artworks can and should be understood as communal listening rehearsals that inculcate and consolidate specific sensory repertoires, i.e. community-specific ways of listening, over time.

3. By approaching institutional infrastructures such as museums or alternative art spaces as taskscapes shaped by the embodied practices of artists, curators and technicians, research can expand from the interpretation of finished exhibitions to the analysis of the dynamics of exhibition-making.

4. Exhibition histories have long been constructed on the basis of curatorial innovation, but they can also be traced by identifying hubs of sustained exhibition activities. This allows for new insights into densely networked fields of practice outside of the established art historical canon.

5. Art historians and sound studies scholars should stop lamenting the impossibility of reconstructing the original sounds of artworks, and instead focus their efforts on unraveling the ways in which contemporaries used to listen to those works back in the days.

6. Ethnographers would do well to expand their notion of the field to include historical materials like archival video footage or recorded interviews. When approached ethnographically, these materials reveal their embedding in the practices of everyday life and engage the researcher of the present in unexpected ways.

7. The disciplines of museum studies and art history have a lot to learn from listening to visitors' own descriptions of their experiences with artworks in exhibitions, so they have to find ways to engage those visitors in conversations.

8. Neither curators nor artists should proclaim that a curatorial strategy does justice to an artwork without explicating their understanding of the sensory repertoire(s) from which the artwork in question has emerged.