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Written by **Rebecca Catching**
May 1, 2008

Bang a gong - 366 sound artists get it on

In 1995, Art Clay was on tour with some friends when it suddenly occurred to him that carting a cello around Europe was heavy work. That idea led to the creation of the air bow, a highly-portable, hi-tech instrument with keys instead of strings, one that could replicate the sound of a cello.

But In the wild and crazy world of sound art, anything goes. Clay soon discovered his invention could also mimic the sound of a dog barking, and much more besides. Needless to add, sound artists are hardly conventional. Its practitioners, including John Cage, Brian Eno, Yoko Ono and Luc Ferrari, comprise a motley band of rebels with backgrounds in science, technology, art and, of course, music.

Some sound artists defy categorization. Cathy van Eck, for example, who performs *Parkour*, a French urban sport that involves jumping off buildings – van Eck does so with speakers strapped on her back. Kathy Rae Huffman creates soundscapes – soundtracks designed to accompany a stroll through an area of a city which can be listened to on a portable music device like an ipod.

In Shanghai, a similar concept was used during the 2007 *Get it Louder* exhibition, a soundscape created by noise music collective Noishanghai as a soundtrack to a drive through the city.

Which brings us back to Art Clay, who, along with fellow sound artists Achim Lengerer and Dani Gal, will present two separate and unusual projects this month as part of Zendai Museum's *366 Intrude: Art and Life*.

Clay's interactive sound work, *China Gates*, makes most science fiction plots seem dull. At a pre-arranged time, Clay will send a signal via satellite to a group of roving participants; the signal will activate a light-emitting device attached to their wrists, at which time they've been instructed to bang a small Chinese gong. As they move about in a sea of frequencies, another device, mounted in a conical straw hat, will transmit their whereabouts via GPS. That information will be fed into a system which in turn changes the melody of the piece. If all goes as planned, Clay will hold a simultaneous performance in Basel and the movements of the players there will affect the sound of the China piece and vice versa.

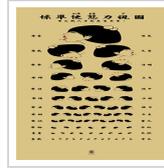
Despite its futuristic nature, *China Gates* brings us back to a very old musical concept, that of the Chinese canon. Unlike the Western canon, where a round, or musical composition, is comprised of two or more voices singing exactly the same melody over and over again at a set distance ("Frère Jacques", for example), Clay says, "the Chinese canon changes because the distance between the voices can change. The person starting can actually be overtaken by the person who came in afterward."

In short, the piece will explore issues of group dynamics and individualism. "Buckminster Fuller wanted to create a system to run wild in," Clay explains. "Here the choices you make will affect the piece as a whole and the synergy as a group is what creates the music."

Meanwhile, Achim Lengerer and Dani Gal will pursue a similar theme in their work *Voiceoverhead*. Gal has collected various archival audio recordings from radio broadcasts and records, snippets of our collective memory, which are remixed in real time by the artists. Like two stumping politicians they stand at lecterns embedded with speakers and conduct what amounts to a musical dialogue. Their samples include material from Israeli political speeches, East German radio archives and speeches from members of the Black Power movement. Though they try to avoid obvious samples, JFK's "Ich bin ein Berliner" gaffe, for instance, they do want people to recognize the samples.

"People's personal memories are connected to certain sound pieces," says Lengerer, "so the work is most effective when people recognize a few pieces and their own memories start to work."

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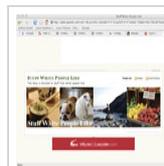
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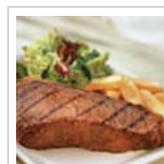
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Put another way, the seemingly discombobulated audio snippets are designed to create a memory stream. The editing process, Lengerer points out, is not like that of classical radio editing. Rather, in this work, "the content becomes clear and then disappears," he says. Like our own memories the sounds are fleeting and layered, distinct at first, then gradually merging over time.



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*China Gates, Xintiandi, 181 Taicang Lu,
by Madang Lu, May 24, at 2, 3 and 4pm.Voiceoverhead, May 10,
for information visit www.intrude366.com*



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