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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 21 ISSUE 2

Mary Sherman: What if You Could Hear a Painting

EDITED BY LANFRANCO ACETI

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Preface

Mary Sherman's work straddles painting, sculpture, installation and performance. Painting, however, remains its driving force – the form's past mysteries, present forms and future possibilities are at the root. Conventional definitions of artistic disciplines are thus overturned along the way. Modular in nature and formal in configuration, her work makes painting's latent touch audible through sound. With the aid of mechanics and digital tools, it is brought into the 21st century, into the realm of time and space – but never at the expense of its physical or psychological charge. The work is meant – like the face of a beloved – to stimulate our curiosity, make us smile, give us reason to pause. To even, perhaps, illuminate a truth.

This book and the accompanying media  serve as a catalog for Sherman's show *Dream Mechanics/ Mécaniques oniriques* at OBORO, curated by Tamar Tembeck – and more. Inspired by Florian Dombois' book *What are the Places of Danger. . . Works 1999–2009*, it is a snapshot of a turning point in Sherman's career, when her paintings started to come off the wall and sound became an integral

component of her work. "Though my work may seem to suggest otherwise, I think of myself a painter," she writes. "I am in love with the medium, with the fact that despite repeated cries of its death, painting has endured throughout the centuries, able to respond, adapt and speak across time and place. I am sure that painting continues to have this power to captivate us because it stimulates three senses: most overtly, the visual, more covertly and, perhaps, more indelibly, the aural and tactile. And it is this sensate tease – this suggestion and refusal to be explicit – that forms the core of my work: I am interested in exploiting these relational interactions to make concrete painting's latent 'music'; to make tangible its touch through the audible; to bring painting into the 21st century, into the realm of time with sound."

Increasingly, such ideas have necessitated her learning to machine, program and work with collaborators – such as engineers, composers, sound artists and, in some cases, with artists around the world as part of the large-scale projects for TransCultural Exchange." 

This aspect of her work – its existing in multiple locations, being kinetic and incorporating sounds – makes it almost impossible to really grasp the full scope Sherman's work in book form. This, of course, is a problem with nearly all multi-sensory art and (one could argue) with books on art in general. Much of the pleasure of experiencing the work is lost, but new insights can still be gained. To help in this endeavor, this book includes links to the works' audio and video components ¹ and a limited edition DVD. And, perhaps, one could say this is how a tome of her work should be. Sherman's work often addresses the existential reality that true understanding is malleable and beyond any certain grasp, but it is nonetheless compelling.

Lanfranco Aceti

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Director, Museum of Contemporary Arts

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The media is available at <http://transculturalexchange.org/marysherman/catalog.html>
2. TransCultural Exchange is an artist-run organization that Sherman founded in Chicago in 1988 to facilitate an exchange exhibit and related programming between Chicago and Vienna. Since then the organization has grown, producing over 200 projects in more than 60 countries and necessitating its incorporation as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2002. Today, it is based in Boston and is perhaps best known as the producer of an *International Conference of Opportunities in the Arts* biennale.
3. <http://transculturalexchange.org/marysherman/catalog.html>