

Christian Marclay

born 1955 in San Rafael, California; lives and works in London and New York

Biography

Visual Arts and Music

In the Exhibition

Dual Swiss American citizen, raised in Geneva

1975: Studied visual arts in Geneva

1977: Studied sculpture at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston

1979: Founded the Bachelors, a performance group, with guitarist Kurt Henry; first pieces with vinyl and record player

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Visual Arts and Music

Christian Marclay is a musician and visual artist, presenting his works in exhibitions as well as clubs. Until the 1990s, he primarily performed in music clubs, where he expanded on the art of turntablism (the manipulation and use of records and turntables) as a DJ and artist. The playback device becomes the instrument—a concept that László Moholy-Nagy had already formulated but not practically applied in the 1920s. Marclay finds his material in a wealth of discarded records covering an entire repertoire of music, including kitsch and trivia. For Marclay, it is less about the classic concept of making music or composing than it is about making a collage of existing materials—not only in terms of sounds but also in terms of the physical condition of the recording media. Vinyl records take on a new visual aesthetic value through his adaptations while »recycled records« become objects of visual arts.

One of Marclay's central interests is the exploration of the sound dimension of objects as well as all their visual elements. This links to and expands on Marcel Duchamp's idea of sound art. Marclay's sound installations and sound objects are never completely detached from the artistic and provoke a game of imagining things unseen or unheard.

Using a variety of methods, Marclay shows how residual sounds (remaining resonances) are inherent in the material world. This means a psychoacoustic phenomenon in which even a static object can suggest a sound.

His work *The Beatles* (1989) is a pillow with a pillow case crocheted from magnetic tapes. Taking as a material the storage media of audio cassettes and connecting this with the particular title brings forth associations of the sound of the Beatles from our musical memory. In addition, the reference to this analogue recording technology evokes the crinkling sound of these audio tapes, which has now become a historical phenomenon. In other works where Marclay uses the same material, sound is actually created by the thinly coated tapes themselves.

While recording materials like vinyl records and audiotapes contain, by their very nature, residues of what has been heard or is audible—at least in our imaginations—in recent years, Marclay has been increasingly evoking sound in purely visual ways. His video work *Surround Sounds* (2014–2015) shows a collage of four silent projections of onomatopoeic cartoon lettering that triggers the experience of sounds.

Marclay has also used the principle of collage in purely cinematic works. His 24-hour opus *The Clock* (2010) is a series of film fragments in which a scene can be viewed for every minute of a day, showing that particular time on a clock.


Marclay's original relationship to musical modernism has recently become more significant again. At the beginning of 2018 he performed a *Meta-Concert* in relation to Jean Tinguely's large kinetic sound sculpture *Méta-Harmonie* in Basel with Okkyung Lee on cello, Luc Müller on drums, and himself creating sounds with a variety of everyday objects.

Author: Lona Gaikis




Christian Marclay, »Tape Fall«, 1989
Reel-to-reel tape player, magnetic tape,
speaker, and ladder, dimensions
variable. Private Collection, New York.
Courtesy of the artist & Paula Cooper
Gallery, New York. Image via
artslant.com; © Christian Marclay

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Christian Marclay, »Méta-Concert«,
2018
Performance with Okkyung Lee (cello)
and Luc Müller (perc.), and Jean
Tinguely's »mechanical sculptures«,
Museum Tinguely, Basel, January 26,
2018. Image via srf.ch; © Christian
Marclay

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Christian Marclay, »Surround Sounds«,
2014–2015

Four silent synchronized projected
animations, 13:40 min each, looped,
Edition 1/5, 2 APs. Photo: Courtesy of
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; image
via paulacoopergallery.com; © Christian
Marclay

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In the Exhibition

Christian Marclay

Live at Közgáz Jazz Klub, Budapest, 1987, with Christian Marclay, 20:15 min.

Film: Czaban Gyorgy, Közgáz Vizuális Brigád

This film shows one of Marclay's early sound experiments. He plays on four turntables simultaneously with repurposed records, creating a composition determined by coincidence. Some of the records wobble and distort the sounds because the hole for the center spindle has been offset; others get stuck or only make noise because the sensitive needle hits glued break points too often.

The »anything-goes« of postmodernism, its relationship to quotes as well as superfluous material from the 1980s and 1990s seem to come alive here in sounds. They mix with a new form of *musique concrète*, because the crackling and jumping of the records has the same value for Marclay as the melodic set pieces. Just like the bruitism of the Futurists, as well as John Cage, all the sounds in the world are meant to be part of his music.

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