

Educator Guide

In February 2009, Gallery Crawl visited New Langton Arts and San Francisco's City Hall to see the exhibitions **Every Sound You Can Imagine** and **Spiraling Echoes**. This guide provides resources for educators to support the utilization of this online virtual visit to the gallery to teach about contemporary art. The Gallery Crawl video can be found at www.KQED.org/gallerycrawl. Information about taking your students to the galleries can be found at the bottom of this guide.

Exhibitions *Every Sound You Can Imagine* and *Spiraling Echoes*

Location New Langton Arts, San Francisco [Google Map](#)

City Hall Rotunda, San Francisco [Google Map](#)

Grades 6 - 12

Standards Addressed Artistic Perception, Creative Expression, Aesthetic Valuing

The Exhibitions

Every Sound You Can Imagine: Introduction by New Langton Arts

Experimental musical scores are considered as works of visual art in *Perspectives 163: Every Sound You Can Imagine*. This group exhibition samples the wide array of notational strategies and explores the cross-fertilization between musicians and visual artists, revealing the vital connections between experimental sound art and cutting-edge visual art.

In the late 1940s, European music experienced a crisis of representation. The traditional system of staff notation that had served to determine the performance of musical works began to give way to new compositional strategies that dispensed with the musical staff and, instead, populated the page with idiosyncratic symbols, diagrams, and written instructions. Such compositions were, in part, a response to electronic instruments that could record or produce not merely the twelve pitches of the European scale but what artist John Cage called "the entire field of sound." They also revealed the influence of jazz, a renewed interest in improvisation, and the desire to dissolve the hierarchy between composer and performer. This exhibition traces these developments, from the first wave of experimental notation in the 1950s through its resurgence in the late 1990s, when musical notation sprang off the page and into video, photography, sculpture, and new media.

Spiraling Echoes: Introduction by San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery

Spiraling Echoes by San Francisco-based sound art pioneer Bill Fontana is a project of the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery. The exhibition engages highly specialized sound equipment mounted inside the [City Hall] Rotunda that will transmit historic and contemporary sounds of San Francisco in ultrasonic beams as narrow as a thread. As you walk through the Rotunda's main and upper walkways, your path creates a sound composition unique to you.

The Art Forms

Musical Compositions as Visual Art

Christoph Cox and Robert Shimshack co-curated *Every Sound You Can Imagine*. Excerpts from their essays about viewing musical compositions as artwork are quoted below.

“A large white sheet of paper is speckled with a few dozen black lines or bars—some horizontal, some vertical, some fat, some thin. In its geometric asymmetry, it might be mistaken for a sketch by Piet Mondrian or Kasimir Malevich. In fact, it’s a musical score: Earle Brown’s December 1952. Graphically, Brown’s piece bears only a distant resemblance to a traditional musical score, as though all the notes and most of the staves had been erased, leaving only a fragmentary scaffold. As musical notation, it is thoroughly idiosyncratic, eschewing the standards of conventional sheet music in favor of a symbolic language all its own.”

-Christoph Cox

“Almost 20 years ago, while I was visiting the studio of the artist Joseph Kosuth, he showed me a musical score by John Cage. Immediately, I could understand the relationship between the Cage piece, Kosuth’s work and Conceptual Art in general. Cage’s bold musical lines formed a pattern of notes and annotations that echoed the cancelled words and phrases that Kosuth was then working with, and at the same time recalled the lines, linguistic experiments, and patterns of radically reductive and idea-based artists such as Sol Lewitt, Hannah Darboven, Lawrence Weiner, Agnes Martin, Dan Flavin and Fred Sandback, whose work I admired or was collecting.

Cage is the only well known contemporary composer who consistently made visual art. I became very interested in the idea that, for him, the musical score was simply another context in which to make a drawing using the “rigid” framework of musical notation. Shortly after learning about Cage’s compositions I attended a performance of one of his works that required varying intervals of silence between sounds and realized how successfully he had managed to translate the ideas of Conceptual Art into musical form.”

-Robert Shimshack

Sound Art

Bill Fontana is considered to be a Sound Art pioneer. The origin of experimental music and sound art dates back to the advent of innovative visual and musical works that responded directly to the cacophony of the new urban metropolis in the early 1900s. Embracing the new modern landscape and experimenting with its accompanying mechanical noises, artists and musicians began composing and performing pieces using the sounds of industry and the urban world as their instruments.

Sound Art (continued)

In the late 19th century, the German Romantic style of music, with its sweeping orchestral compositions based upon the diatonic scale was very popular. The term diatonic refers to any scale of five tones and two semitones produced by playing the white keys of a keyboard instrument. The diatonic scale is considered important because, of all possible seven note scales, it has the highest number of consonant intervals--the highest number of tones that are pleasing to ear when played together. The most popular composers of the time, Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner, followed the rules of harmony and the diatonic scale to create consonant music, which was felt to be expressive of the beauty of nature and the romantic ideals of the period.

However, by the end of the century many artists and composers had rejected Romanticism, seeking instead to embrace the new ideas associated with modernity which were at odds with the pastoral idealism of the 19th century. Musical innovations such as the advent of the 12-tone music and the idea of dissonance and atonality effectively eliminated the domination of 19th century traditions, and opened a wide field of possibilities for composers.

From the end of World War II to today, more and more electronic and recorded sounds have become part of the technical musical palette, including a variety of genres of sound art and musical composition such as noise art, musique concrete, sound poetry, serialism, minimalist composition, and biofeedback, among others. Composers who used existing or found sounds, such as Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison soon had accumulated a vast diversity of new sources, materials, and ideas from which to compose their work. These artists further expanded the exploration of instrumentation, using both traditional and non-traditional instruments, and playing them in new ways, such as strumming, scratching, or scraping the inside of a piano and its strings. New compositional techniques were also used, such as layering multiple recorded and electronically produced sounds together to create new colors.

John Cage was one of the first artists to attach contact microphones to instruments, scratching the microphone heads, and creating electronic distortion and feedback to achieve new sounds. He also worked to take away the "rational" control of the composer, and instead, placed increased importance on the performer. To do this, Cage would present performers with a general graph or road map of the composition, giving them a range of sonic choices to make, but left the actual choices up them, so that there would always be an element of chance and unpredictability in the outcome.

Most of these traditions continue today as many artists around the world seek to create new pieces using every available technique. Further advancements in technology only increase the possibilities for composers of new and experimental music. The inclusion of natural sounds with industrial sounds in re-mixes of industrial, techno, hip hop, and other genres of music help to create a rich and layered soundscape.

Teaching with Gallery Crawl

Using video in the classroom can breathe life and meaning into almost any lesson. In the arts, video can be particularly effective for introducing large concepts, aspects of the creative process, and key arts-related vocabulary to introduce students to discipline-based and concept-based study. Using media in the classroom helps connect students with faraway places and promotes critical viewing skills and media awareness. For more information about using media in the classroom download KQED's [Media Tips](#) teaching tool (a direct link is provided in the resource section of this guide).

Using a Gallery Crawl video in the classroom allows student to virtually view a local art exhibit, while listening to firsthand information about exhibitions from curators, gallerists, and artists. In order to present Gallery Crawl to your entire class, you will need a projector and computer with the capacity to stream video. Alternatively, assign students to watch the video on their own or in groups. After soliciting student responses to the video, continue the lesson by implementing hands-on or discussion activities to deepen the impact of the media – ideas are provided in this guide.

Making the Most of your Virtual Visit

The following activity ideas may be used in the classroom after viewing the Gallery Crawl Video, **and/or** after a school tour of New Langton Arts and San Francisco City Hall Rotunda.

❖ Listening to the Environment

Have your whole class sit quietly with their eyes closed for one minute or so and listen to the ambient sounds of their immediate environment. Have each student take a mental note of how many different sounds they heard, both the faintest and the loudest, then discuss with the whole class and list all the different sounds they heard. Assign this same exercise to students at their own homes or walking to school. Discuss with students how much of their world they understand through hearing.

❖ Sound Environment

Have students become an environment of their choosing using sound effects alone. Break the class up into teams of four to six players and have each group decide on *where* they are. Using sounds only, no language, have the students become the components of their chosen environment. Suggest places like the metro or train station, a school bus, a jungle, a shipyard, etc. In addition to vocalizations, allow students to use found objects or those in the classroom, such as metal objects like spoons, or paper to being crinkled, a straw in a glass of water or dripping water. Have all the other students close their eyes while one group is presenting, or have the group stand out of sight of the class. Let the class guess what the environment is. If you have the technology, you could also try recording the experience in the classroom, and then play it back for each group to evaluate their performance.

❖ Create Music

Have students create experimental music to images evoked by written poetry or a visual painting. Use both abstract and more concrete images and have students try to create a musical landscape that matches the image they are seeing or hearing. Keep in mind that every piece has a beginning, middle and end, and that silence is also an important part of making music. Alternatively, play samples of experimental music or sound art and have

students practice a free drawing exercise where they draw or paint abstractly, interpreting the sounds they hear. Suggested local musicians include Pamela Z, Paul Drescher, Walter Kitundu, Loren Chasse, and Matt Davignon.

❖ **Researching Edgard Varèse**

Take a look at the following website on Edgard Varèse, a composer who describes himself as “not a musician, but a worker in rhythms, frequencies and intensities”:

<http://www.zakros.com/mica/soundart/f02/varese.html>.

Look at the written score of his piece *Poeme Electronique*, and listen to a copy of the piece. In writing scores for new music, composers had to become quite creative in writing for non-traditional instruments and electronic sounds. Have the students take a crack at creating their own scores based on recording samples from sound art. Challenge students to think of ways to express length or duration of notes (maybe just by indicating how many seconds something takes place), their volume, texture, or other qualities, such as watery or metallic sounds or the way rocks sound when struck together. Often a composer will create a “key” or table that explains the kinds of symbols he/she is using, and what they mean. Have students create a key that describes the symbols for the different “instruments” or sounds they hear.

Visiting the Galleries

Both New Langton Arts and the City Hall Rotunda are located in San Francisco, CA. *Every Sound You Can Imagine* will be on view through March 5th, 2009 and *Spiraling Echoes* will be on view through May 8, 2009. For gallery hours and public transportation information, visit the galleries Web sites listed below.

Resources to extend learning about the exhibits, the art form, and featured artists

New Langton Arts <http://www.newlangtonarts.org/>

San Francisco Arts Commission <http://www.sfartscommission.org/>

Wikipedia entry on Sound Art http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_art

Wikipedia entry on John Cage http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_cage

Wikipedia entry on Bill Fontana http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Fontana

Bill Fontana's Web site <http://resoundings.org/>

The following KQED Spark documentaries may be used for compare/contrast purposes and to extend learning about experimental music and sound art:

KQED Spark documentary about experimental musician, [Paul Drescher](#).

An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

KQED Spark documentary about experimental musician, [Amy X Neuburg](#).

An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

KQED Spark documentary about sound artist [Loren Chasse](#).
An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

KQED Spark documentary about musician and inventor, [Walter Kitundu](#).
An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

KQED Spark documentary about musician and inventor, [Matt Davignon](#).
An in-depth Spark Educator Guide accompanies this video.

Visit the KQED Spark Web site for additional Educator Guides and videos about local contemporary artists at www.kqed.org/spark. Also available are educator resources on media literacy and production, using video in the classroom, standards-based arts instruction, program development, and more. For more information about KQED's Arts Education resources, send an email to ArtsEd@KQED.org or call 800.723.3566.

Direct Links

- Gallery Crawl: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/gallerycrawl/>
- KQED "Media Tips" Tool: <http://www.kqed.org/assets/pdf/arts/programs/spark/video.pdf>
- Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery: <http://www.npg.si.edu/>
- Paul Dresher Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4758>
- Amy X Neuburg Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=14800>
- Loren Chasse Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4606>
- Walter Kitundu Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8440>
- Matt Davignon Spark video: <http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8663>