

MAMA

Material Sound

Education Resource

MURRAY ART MUSEUM ALBURY

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Education Resource

This education resource has been written by Murray Art Museum Albury in conjunction with Museums & Galleries of NSW.

Social Media

Hashtag: #MaterialSound
Murray Art Museum Albury: @mamalbury
Museums & Galleries of NSW: @mgnsw

Itinerary

Managed by Museums & Galleries of NSW, *Material Sound* will tour nationally between 2020 – 2022 to the following locations (subject to change):

- 01
- Manning Regional Art Gallery, NSW
 - Warrnambool Art Gallery, VIC
 - Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, TAS
 - Bayside Gallery, VIC
 - Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, NSW
 - Hervey Bay Regional Gallery
 - NorthSite Contemporary Arts, Cairns, QLD
 - Artspace Mackay, QLD
 - Maitland Regional Art Gallery, NSW

A Murray Art Museum Albury exhibition, curated by Caleb Kelly and presented nationally by Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its funding and advisory body.



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Introduction

This resource aims to engage students with the themes and ideas explored in *Material Sound*, focusing on a selection of the artists and their works.

The key ideas and activities that this resource will explore include:

- Listening and the body
- Generating energy and power
- Creating sounds and audible reactions from found objects
- Inventing instruments with unlikely materials

While these activities have been written with upper primary and lower secondary students in mind, the concepts addressed can be made accessible and adaptable to learners of all ages and abilities. Teachers are free to adapt these learning activities to suit their context and their students. This resource has considered **Australian curriculum links, accessed here:** <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/#>

Years 5 and 6

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Visual Arts	
ACAVAM115	Develop and apply techniques and processes when making their artworks
Design & Technologies	
ACTDEK020	Investigate how electrical energy can control movement, sound or light in a designed product or system
Music	
ACAMUM088	Explore dynamics and expression, using aural skills to identify and perform rhythm and pitch patterns

Years 7 and 8

Visual Arts	
ACAVAM119	Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes
Design & Technologies	
ACTDEK031	Analyse how motion, force and energy are used to manipulate and control electromechanical systems when designing simple, engineered solutions
Music	
ACAMUM092	Experiment with texture and timbre in sound sources using aural skills



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Vicky Browne, *Cosmic Noise* (detail), 2016/2018, stoneware ceramics, electronics, glass, laser toner powder, foil, wood, copper, reeds, rope, leather, metal. Installation view, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pompom, Sydney. Photo: Tyler Grace



Curator Caleb Kelly speaking at the *Material Sound* Opening Weekend, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Artwork pictured: Vicky Browne, *Cosmic Noise* (detail), 2016/2018. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pompom, Sydney. Photo: Jules Boag

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About the Exhibition

Material Sound is a multi-form exhibition that draws together six art practitioners and collaborative groups, each creating an experience of sound within installations constructed from everyday materials. Handmade instruments and electronics, recycled components, outmoded technologies, fake technologies, imagined sounds, and silences are brought together to challenge the way we think about materiality in a cumulative sound experience.

Material Sound features work by artists Vicky Browne, Pia van Gelder, Caitlin Franzmann, Peter Blamey, Vincent and Vaughan Wozniak-O'Connor, and Ross Manning, whose works and practices investigate sound and materials within art and performance. These artists are at the forefront of an international interest in the material qualities of sound and its modes of generation. In Australia, this interest

particularly addresses the ecological consequences of the materials we so readily consume and discard.

Material Sound is curated by Caleb Kelly and has emerged from his ongoing engagement with sound in contemporary practice. Over a 20-year period, Kelly has developed an acute sensitivity to how sound shapes our experience of art. His research, writing and exhibition projects encourage us to move our attention beyond the visual to embrace a more complete bodily experience of the work we encounter in art spaces.

In the video linked here, Kelly explains how he composes the gallery space with sound and how the act of sensing our senses can open up our experience of the world in and out of the gallery. <https://youtu.be/HL1gQ5G5v-0>

Glossary

Installation

A form of art, developed in the late 1950s, which involves the creation of an enveloping aesthetic or sensory experience in a particular environment, often inviting active engagement or immersion by the spectator.

Sound Art

Art which uses sound both as its medium (what it is made out of) and as its subject (what it is about).

Outmoded Technologies

Outdated computer hardware, software, technology, services or practices that are no longer used, even if they are in working condition. Examples include the cassette tape, typewriters, pagers, turntables.

Materiality

To speak of “materiality” in contemporary art is to emphasize the material qualities of the art materials employed. Obviously, all art is made out of some material; however, much of art prior to modernism did not place emphasis on the materials themselves, but rather the image which they made up.

Performance Art

A term that emerged in the 1960s to describe a diverse range of live presentations by artists, including actions, movements, gestures, and choreography. Performance art is often preceded by, includes, or is later represented through various forms of video, photography, objects, written documentation, or oral and physical transmission.

Kinetic art

Art that depends on motion for its effects.

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Pia van Gelder

Originally from Sydney, Pia van Gelder is an electronic artist, teacher and researcher. Her practice often involves interactive installations and performances that explore contemporary and historical ideas of technology, energy, the body and our environment.¹ These works often involve designing and building electronic instruments that are presented in performance and interactive installations.

Pia van Gelder's *Recumbent Circuit*, 2016 is formed from two wooden benches that are designed for reclining. The piece is activated and controlled by the body's energy, drawn from an individual sitting on the bench with their bare feet placed on a diagrammatic circuit board. The conductivity of the skin works in tandem with the nervous system to produce a modulated tone that lowers in pitch as the audience member relaxes into the situation. This is not unlike the function of a lie detector – the sounds produced representing the level of relaxation of the sitter.

07 Watch Pia discuss her work and bio synthesisers here:
<https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/primavera-2016/Pia-van-Gelder/>

Pia van Gelder in Material Sound – video by MAMA
Video: <https://youtu.be/Hx7rXoLBDtA>



Pia van Gelder, *Recumbent Circuit*, 2016. Electronics, speakers, wood. Installation view, *Primavera 2016: Young Australian Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2016. Image courtesy and © the artist. Photo: Jacquie Manning

¹ *Sounding the Future* Catalogue. (2017). Ultimo, NSW: UTS Gallery.

Describe

The artist describes her art as instrument building – do these look like any other instruments that you have ever seen? Draw an imaginary instrument that you would like to invent in the space below – describe which part or parts of the body would be used to ‘play’ it and how!



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Explore and Experiment

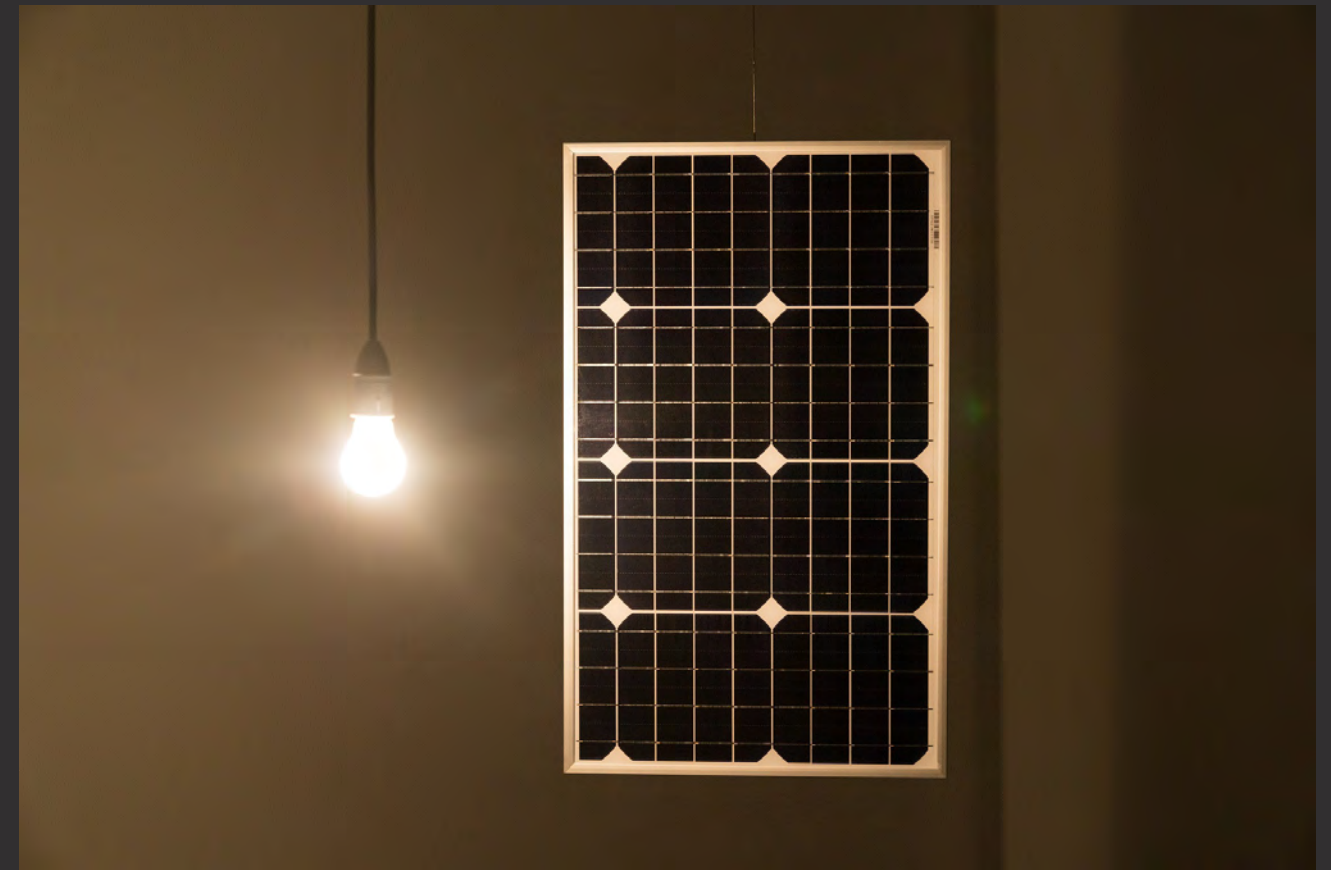
Recumbent Circuit utilises the phenomenon of biofeedback - biofeedback, prompts a subject to focus their attention on a particular function of the body, for example, their breathing, heart rate, or brainwaves, as a way of gaining better control of that function. As you interact with this artwork do you think the experience of listening to the noise your body is making makes you more or less relaxed?

An example of biofeedback is to concentrate on your heartbeat or breathing and consciously try to slow them - what are some other situations in which you might use biofeedback to relax or be calm?

Activity

Lie on the floor or sit in a chair silently with your eyes closed. Listen carefully to the closest sounds you can hear (your breathing or a clock in the room for example) and then focus on the most far away or faintest sounds you can hear. Write them down or share them afterward.

- how did the sounds overlap or interrupt each other?
- how did the room or space you are in effect the sounds both close and far?
- did the act of listening change the way you feel and how aware you are of your body and surroundings?
- how well did you recognize sounds both near and far – were they the same sounds as others heard?



Peter Blamey, *Single-Planet Orrery and the Energetics of Stored Moonlight* (detail), 2017, photovoltaic panels, light bulb, monitor, mirror ball motor, speaker, transistor radio. Installation view, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Photo: Tyler Grace

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Peter Blamey

Peter Blamey is a Sydney-based artist who creates sound through performances, videos, recordings and installations. His work often explores the connections between objects and energies, reimagining and reworking everyday encounters with mundane materials and technologies. He is also interested in our experience of energy generation, use and wastage.

In *Single-Planet Orrery and the Energetics of Stored Moonlight*, 2017, Peter Blamey uses solar energy to power a small transistor radio fixed to the back of a slowly rotating solar panel, suspended from the ceiling. Hanging alongside the turning solar panel is a conventional electric light bulb, the source of the ‘solar’ energy. The radio is powered up and down as the panel rotates into the radiation of the light’s energy emission, producing a rising and falling wave of radio static. The second component of the installation is the sound produced by another photovoltaic panel, this time powered by images of the moon screened on a television monitor.

Describe

Look at how Blamey has constructed *Single-Planet Orrery and the Energetics of Stored Moonlight*. What techniques and materials did the artist use to construct this work?

Explore and Experiment

The electricity used to power both the lightbulb and video is made up of both good (sustainable) and bad (coal powered) sources. This then powers the solar panels and produces sound. What issues around energy and the environment do you think the artist is wanting us to think about?

What other items around your home or school are solar powered and why?

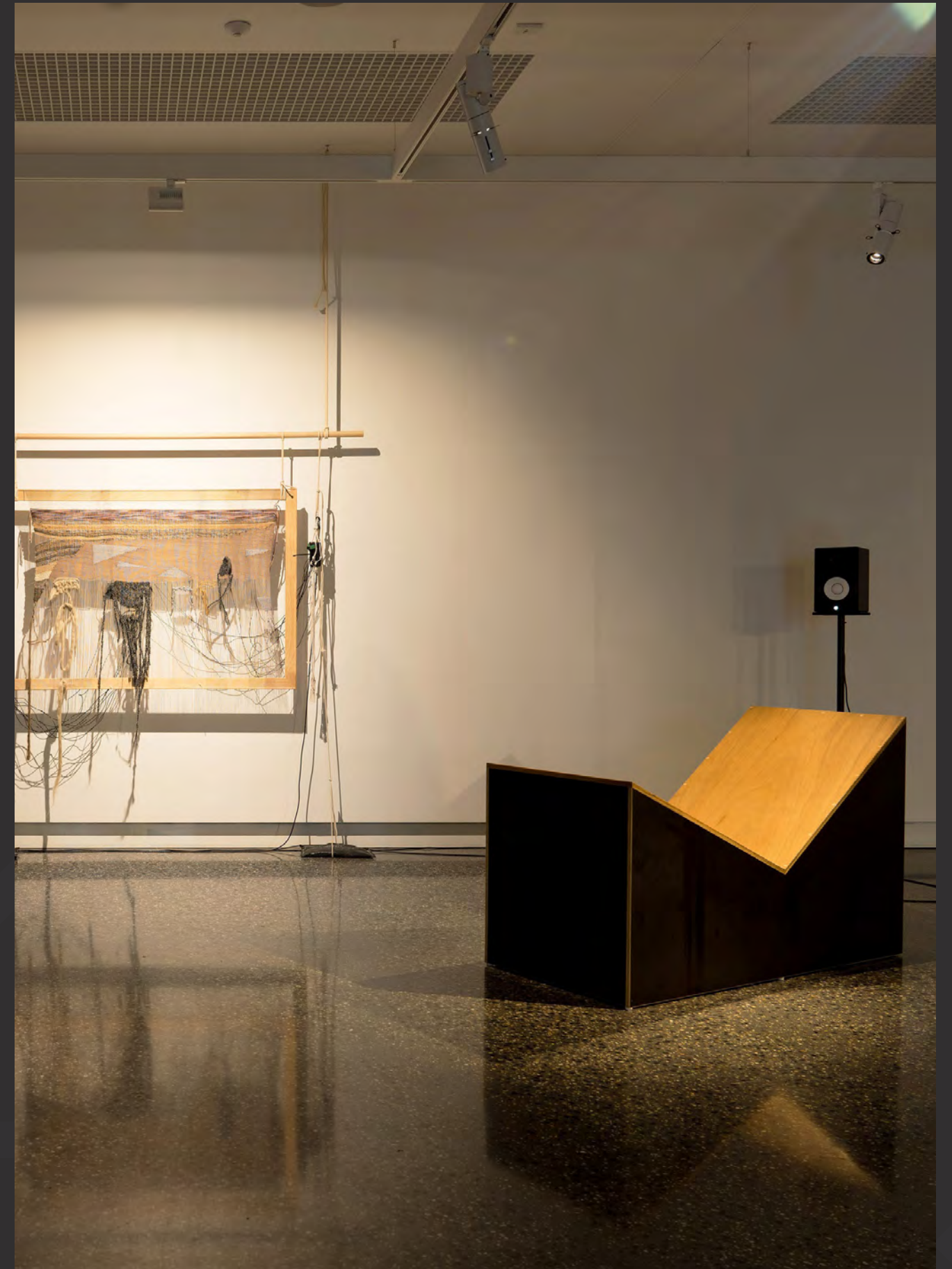
Activity

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An orrery is a mechanical model of the Solar System that illustrates or predicts the relative positions and motions of the planets and moons. The earliest found orrery is from between 100 – 150 BC. Create your own orrery out of cardboard, modelling clay, pop sticks or other craft items. Investigate ways to power your orrery using different forms of energy (kinetic, wind, solar).



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Pia van Gelder, *Recumbent Circuit* (detail), 2016 and *Soft Synth No.1* (detail), 2018. Installation view, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Tyler Grace

Vicky Browne

Vicky Browne is a New Zealand artist based in the Blue Mountains. Many of her works explore sound as a key theme. Browne works in an experimental manner, building her own record players, radios and noise machines out of found materials. The handmade nature of Browne's works reveals a close connection to these materials.

The kinetic installation that makes up *Cosmic Noise*, 2016/2018 suggests an astronomical explosion, the big bang, that leads us to the idea that life exists throughout the universe, held within space dust, meteoroids and far-flung planets. A multitude of objects hang from the ceiling, some slowly spinning, while others are clustered under the mobiles. The works include, for example, a turntable playing a copper record, on which are the sounds of bells and birdsong, through a speaker made from sticks. As the platter spins, a branch attached to the centre spindle slowly and gently taps metal pipes that hang from the ceiling. While other parts of the assemblage do not make any sound; rather they draw on the overall sonic nature of the installation to allow us to imagine the sounds.

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“I do think that every thing/object/material has a known sound. The way we know a material is not only through sight or touch, part of knowing the material is sensing the sound it makes. For instance, if we take a piece of wood we sense the sound of what it would make if we drummed our fingers onto it; hence it is part of the way we know the material.”

- Vicky Browne interviewed by Caleb Kelly, 2014, as quoted in *Materials of Sound: Sound as (More Than) Sound*, 2018, Caleb Kelly, published in the Journal of Sonic Studies



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Vicky Browne, *Cosmic Noise* (detail), 2016/2018, stoneware ceramics, electronics, glass, laser toner powder, foil, wood, copper, reeds, rope, leather, metal. Installation view, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Pompon, Sydney. Photo: Tyler Grace

Describe

Describe the objects that you see in this artwork. What materials are used in this work? Why do you think the artist has arranged them in this way?

Explore and Experiment

Collect a range of different objects and materials. Without showing anyone your objects, divide into groups and take turns to make a noise using your collected objects. Ask them to guess what is making each noise and what material the object is made out of.

- Were they correct?
- Do noises always 'match' the materials that made them?
- How do you think Vicky Browne plays with this idea and surprises the audience in her work?

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Activity

1. Using found objects, create your own unique musical instrument. Use it to create sounds and show your class. How many different sounds can you make from different materials?
2. Make your own instruments out of vegetables! Check out vegetable orchestras from around the world and learn how to make instruments out of vegetables here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyGh5Kfcik> and here: <http://salfordacoustics.co.uk/vegetable-instruments>

² Kelly, C., Riddle, N. and Pickering, B. (2018). *Material Sound*. Albury: Murray Art Museum Albury.



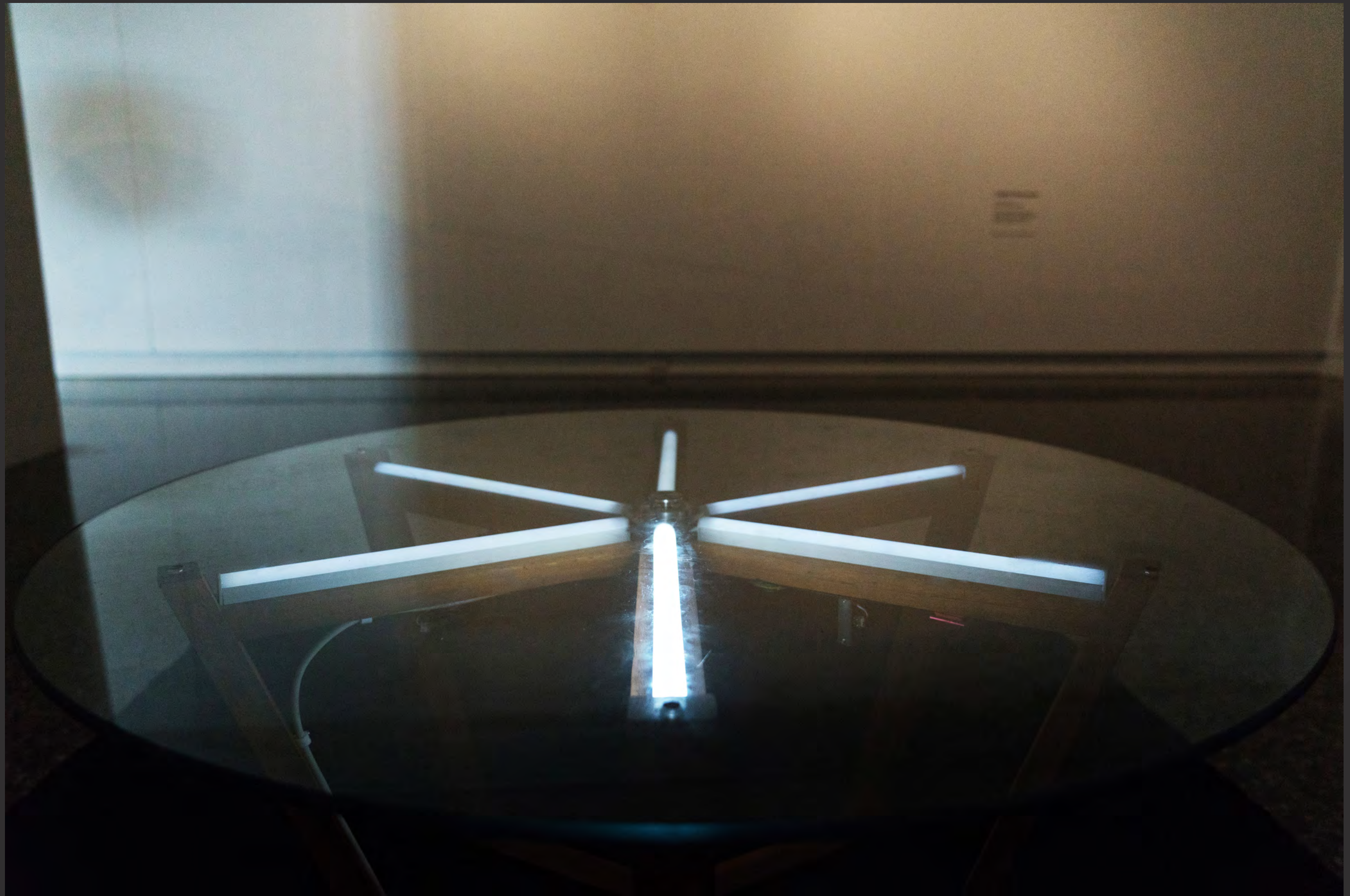
16

Caitlin Franzmann

Caitlin Franzmann's practice explores contemporary art's potential to prompt change through thoughtful listening, dialogue and self-empowerment. In reaction to the fast pace and sensory overstimulation of contemporary urban life, she creates situations to encourage slowness, mindful contemplation, and social interaction in both galleries and public spaces. These situations include conversation-based works and immersive sonic spaces such as wearable listening sculptures, architectural interventions and audiowalks.

Caitlin Franzmann's artwork *Drawn Together, Held Apart*, 2017, is made from a glass table with a surface transducer speaker which allows the artist to turn the table into a speaker. The table also contains lights which turn on as you approach it. To hear the sounds coming from the speaker the audience needs to place their ear on the glass tabletop. A faint sound can be heard from a distance but it is only when an ear is placed directly on the glass that the full sound spectrum can be experienced. Thus, we hear the sound component of the work not in the usual way of hearing through air but by listening directly to the vibrations resonating through the glass tabletop.

The artist asks us to experience this work together and to slow down, sit, talk and listen.²



Caitlin Franzmann, *Drawn Together, Held Apart*, 2017, custom made table with inbuilt surface transducer speaker, LED lighting, proximity speakers, audio. Installation view, Murray Art Museum Albury, 2018. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Tyler Grace

Describe

What do you think the artist is trying to tell us? How does this artwork make you feel? Does the artwork make you slow down and look at or listen to the things around you?

Explore and Experiment

Artists interact with the events and issues of their time by using metaphors and symbols in their work

Discuss this statement with your class and examine how the world is represented by artists in their artworks. For example, in this artwork the artist wants us to reconnect with each other in a world which is often impersonal and disconnected - do you think that Franzmann used a round table rather than any other piece of furniture in *Drawn Together, Held Apart* for a reason?

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Activity

The sound used in this artwork is a mix of found recordings from news reports, ritual chanting and spiritual guidance messages, woven together with electronic music. Explore the idea of music and sound as language. Use your phone or tablet to record sounds that you hear in your day-to-day life. With your classmates, think about how you can use the sounds you have collected as reactions to one another. Play this interaction to the class.



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Further Links

Watch a video of highlights from the show at MAMA here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNVqY8zZzuA&feature=emb_logo

Artist Videos

Peter Blamey in Material Sound– video by MAMA
 > video: <https://youtu.be/vnswXoyHhvE>

Vicky Browne in Material Sound – video by MAMA
 > video: <https://youtu.be/7aeZ3Zw2ckE>

Caitlin Franzmann in Material Sound– video by MAMA
 > video: <https://youtu.be/6edd8wLt1FE>

Pia van Gelder in Material Sound– video by MAMA
 > video: <https://youtu.be/Hx7rXoLBDtA>

