



photo crédit Johnson Ngo

Darsha Hewitt's artwork evolves out of experiments that explore the physics of electricity and look for ways to use it as raw material. Hewitt's hands-on practice is driven by her interest in demystifying the invisible systems embedded throughout domestic technology. Curiosity, discovery and wonderment are leading elements that inform her experimentation as she creates situations in which magical effect and familiarity can resonate.

At Skol the artist presents *Electrostatic Bell Choir*, a sound installation that harnesses the kinetic potential of electrostatic charges emitted from Cathode Ray Tube televisions and uses it as a driving force to strike a series of electroscopic bells.

Darsha Hewitt (b. 1982) is a Canadian artist based in Montreal. She was recently awarded an International Stipend for Young Artists in Sound Art from the Federal State of Lower Saxony and Braunschweig HBK (DE) (2013). In 2011, Darsha received an International Work Stipend from The Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst in Oldenburg (DE). She has exhibited her artwork across Canada, in Mexico, Scandinavia and Europe– including presentations at: Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst (DE), Make Art Festival (FR), Píksel Festival (NO), La Periferia (MX), MUTEK (CA), Studio XX (CA) and Interaccess (CA). Darsha is currently an MFA candidate in Open Media at Concordia University and an Assistant Researcher at Hexagram: Centre for Research-Creation in Media Arts and Technologies. She is also a member of Perte de Signal – one of Québec's leading digital art collectives.

Alongside her artistic practice she is an independent technician, consultant and educator. She frequently works with international production studios, digital arts organizations, media labs and universities. She is an organizer of the Open Source Residency Program at Perte De Signal. She was the coordinator of L'oeuvre ouverte – the 2nd international PureData Convention (2007) and a delegate at The Banff New Media Institute's Grounding Open Source Hardware Conference– the first Open Source Hardware summit (2009). Most recently darsha.org has become an associate to Casper Electronics.

The artist gratefully acknowledges the support of the Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, Le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Perte de Signal and Le Musée des ondes Émile Berliner.

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In a 1999 interview with *EsoTerra* magazine, Japanese sound artist Masami Akita (better known as Merzbow) described noise as “the unconsciousness of music.” In marrying psychoanalytic theory to a classification of the combinatory possibilities of sound, Akita was perhaps inferring that there is a heightened authenticity to more ‘base’ and ‘styleless’ modes of composition. Furthermore, we might describe the brave artists that delve into this murky domain as explorers, committed to engaging the materiality of sound itself rather than polite systems of arranging it. The Canadian media artist Darsha Hewitt’s ongoing interrogation of the tools and trappings of domestic space represents a similar exploration of the unconsciousness of everyday environments and expectations. Working largely with repurposed consumer electronics, Hewitt peels away the intended functionality and social rituals associated with these devices to reveal the universe of underlying invisible forces that animate them.

On encountering *Electrostatic Bell Choir*, a viewer steps into a strange hybrid space that references both the living room and the laboratory. Comprised of an array of flickering cathode-ray tube (CRT) televisions, each with an accompanying set of electrostatic bells, the installation ‘performs’ an intricate percussion routine of tingling and CRT firing. In 1742, electrostatic bells were invented by the German professor of natural philosophy Andrew Gordon and his apparatus was the first to transform electrical energy into mechanical energy. To describe it simply, a delicate charge-sensitive pith ball hangs down from a simple metal stand between small bells. The metal chains that affix the bells to the framework conduct electricity, and the thread supporting the pith ball does not. When the bells are exposed to an electrical charge, the ball is sequentially attracted to and repelled by the bounding bells and

bounces back and forth between them until the charge dissipates. Each node in Hewitt’s ‘bell choir’ picks up its charge from the static electricity generated by the firing of the CRT in the adjacent television as it cycles on and off, while the broader TV array is sequenced through a central control circuit. With this reflexive assembly, Hewitt has queued up an aperiodic electromechanical orchestra that subtly serenades visitors.

Electrostatic Bell Choir demonstrates Hewitt’s fascination with everyday consumer electronics on a few fronts. First, the intended use of obsolete CRT televisions is completely ignored and the devices are employed to generate a static charge rather than act as a vessel for broadcast media. Muted, devoid of a signal, the sets pulse on and off in a snowy silence that is only punctuated by the arrhythmic pings of tubes firing and the decrescendo of ringing that follows. Secondly, the mechanical bells in the electrostatic assemblies have been salvaged from rotary phones and grandfather clocks – hardly the expected sources for components of either scientific or musical instruments. Hewitt’s ‘sounding’ environment is comprised of technology and materials that have been reclaimed, reworked and redeployed as a rhythm machine, a dreamy abstraction of domestic space. In this inversion of the living room, the telltale glow of the 20th century hearth has been replaced by bursts of white and pink video noise that explode like tiny supernovae, each conjuring a delicate aural constellation in their wake.

Greg J. Smith is a Toronto-based designer and researcher with interests in media theory and digital culture. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the forthcoming digital arts magazine *HOLO*, a regular contributor at Creative Applications Network and a designer at Mission Specialist.