EMPAC

ON SCREEN/SOUND: NO. 14

FRI / APR 08, 7:00 PM

Ornament Sound Experiments
Oskar Fischinger

Study No. 7
Oskar Fischinger
Music: Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 5

Polka Graph
Mary Ellen Bute
Music: Shostakovich's Polka from
The Age of Gold

Tarantella
Mary Ellen Bute / Music: Edwin Gerschefski

Sirens
Ryoichi Kurokawa / Music: Novi_sad

Rensselaer

ON SCREEN/SOUND

This year-long film series takes a close look at—and listen to—the way film-makers have employed the sonic dimension of their form to complement, challenge, and reconsider our experience of the moving image.

Presenting cinematic performance, artists' moving image, and Hollywood feature films, each *On Screen/Sound* program delves into the relationship between movie sound and image tracks, highlighting some radical examples of the aesthetic power and technical potential of sound in cinema. From musical theater to the music video, experimental shorts to industrially produced features, the series explores the affective and technical relationship between sound and image through the art of Foley, experimental music, found footage, soundtrack imaging, synched, multi-channel, and non-diegetic sound.

ON SCREEN/SOUND IS CO-CURATED BY EMPAC'S VICTORIA BROOKS, CURATOR OF TIME BASED VISUAL ART, AND ARGEO ASCANI, CURATOR OF MUSIC.

ON SCREEN/SOUND: <u>NO.</u> 14
APR 08, 7:00 PM

On Screen/Sound: *No.14* brings together a series of films from the 1930s and '40s by early animation pioneers Mary Ellen Bute (1906-1983) and Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967) with a digital moving-image work made over 70 years later by Novi_sad and Ryoichi Kurokawa.

Both Mary Ellen Bute and Oskar Fischinger explored the correspondence of moving images and sounds in their work. Many of Fischinger's films combine image and music into tightly choreographed works of motion. He continually advanced the technical and aesthetic boundaries of abstract film. Notable techniques include early silent film experiments of thinly sliced wax forms to "ornament sound" films created by photographing objects onto the optical soundtrack of the filmstrip to create "direct" sound from the material. Between the 1930s and '50s, Bute's films were grounded within the tradition of "visual music" through a series of abstract film techniques that she called "Seeing Sound." An early proponent of electronic art, Bute undertook collaborative research with Leon Theremin, and by 1954 she used a cathode ray oscilloscope to create several abstract films.

Equally committed to the innovative intersection of the visual and sonic, Novi_sad and Ryoichi Kurokawa project animation into the 21st century with their 2012 collaboration, *Sirens*, which uses data processing to create pulsing, impossibly detailed images and sounds.

Ornament Sound Experiments (1932)
Oskar Fischinger

Study No. 7 (1931)
Oskar Fischinger / Music: Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5*

Polka Graph (1947)
Mary Ellen Bute / Music: Shostakovich's Polka from *The Age of Gold*

Tarantella (1940)
Mary Ellen Bute / Music: Edwin Gerschefski

Sirens (2012)
Ryoichi Kurokawa / Music: Novi_sad

Approximate runtime: 69 minutes

FILM NOTES:

Ornament Sound Experiments
Oskar Fischinger
1932, 35mm transferred to HD video, 7mins
Courtesy Center for Visual Music (CVM)

"Between ornament and music persist direct connections, which means that Ornaments are Music. If you look at a strip of film from my experiments with synthetic sound, you will see along one edge a thin stripe of jagged ornamental patterns. These ornaments are drawn music—they are sound: when run through a projector, these graphic sounds broadcast tones or a hitherto unheard of purity, and thus, quite obviously, fantastic possibilities open up for the composition of music in the future. Undoubtedly, the composer of tomorrow will no longer write mere notes, which the composer himself can never realize definitively, but which rather must languish, abandoned to various capricious reproducers. Now control of every fine gradation and nuance is granted to the music-painting artist, who bases everything exclusively on the primary fundamental of music, namely the wave—vibration or oscillation in and of itself. In the process, surface new perceptions that until now were overlooked and remain neglected. Possibilities that are definitely significant for a scrupulous and profound creator of music, for example, precise overtones or timbres characteristic of a certain voice or instrument can be reproduced with accurate fidelity through these drawn patterns. Or, when desirable, the profile of sound waves could be synchronized exactly, wave-trough with wave-trough, so that their dead-centers would coincide, sounding in perfect accord. Or, furthermore, new musical sounds are now possible, pure tones with a precision of definition in their musical vibrations that could not be obtained formerly from the manipulation of traditional instruments.

A number of experiments that I have just made confirm the unprecedented range and significance of this method. The soundtrack on present-day films is only 3 millimeters wide, but the artist of the future will naturally require the full width of the film-strip just for his musical composition. It would be essential for a complex and distinct composition, with the abstract, diverse effect of an orchestra, to utilize several 3mm soundtracks running parallel to each other. Each track would produce a different, well-defined sound, and planning them together, the composer could design and organize overlapping and intersecting wave patterns, on the minutest level.

In reference to the general physical properties of drawn sounds, we can note that flat and shallow figures produce soft or distant-sounding tones, while moderate triangulation give an ordinary volume, and sharply-pointed shapes with deep troughs create the loudest volume. Shades of grey can also play a significant role in drawn music-ornaments. High-contrast definition of the wave form decisively creates the prevalent sound effect, but as long as one places such a "positive" (well-defined) wave somewhere in the foreground, one can simply overlay other wave patterns simultaneously by using grey shades for the secondary sound effects. Study of sample soundtracks containing these complex tonal patterns reveals that not only do the layered ornaments produce refined, intricate musical sounds but also they appear unexpectedly as attractive abstract visual images.

A combination of any chosen sound-images is readily imaginable. The potential in this area is unlimited. But there are also other possible uses for graphic sound ornaments. Personal and national characteristics should be able to be identified by their corresponding ornament manifestations. The German style of singing, for example, with its emphasis on loud and ringing chest tones, creates a much sharper visual profile on the soundtrack than the softer, more melodic French style of singing with its emphasis on limpid head tones that produce rounder optical wave undulations.

The new methods introduced here offer new, fruitful stimulation that should be provocative to the whole musical world. Perhaps through the development explained here, the creative artist, the composer, will not only find a completely new way of working, but also he himself can simultaneously produce his creative expression in an indelible direct graphic which will be definitive in that he shall not be dependent on any reproduction by

foreign hands, since his creation, his work, can speak for itself directly through the film projector.

The basis of designing a graphic art that can be actuated by a beam of brightest light will be the definitive, direct building blocks of music. Now it is the task of Industry to produce practical equipment that will enable every competent person to work in this manner. Besides a camera with the appropriate apertures for such soundtracks, the new equipment must include, certainly, the ability to play back the recorded sound on some speaker at any time, as often as the composer may want. These music artists must also be concerned with combining their musical compositions created in this new manner together with appropriate optical imagery. This should result in the potential for combination of sounding ornaments with visible filmic, spatial forms and movements. With that union, the unity of all the arts is definitively, finally achieved, and has become unquestionable fact."

—*SOUNDING ORNAMENTS*, OSKAR FISCHINGER, 1932
(Detail from display card by Fischinger, showing some of his "ornaments")
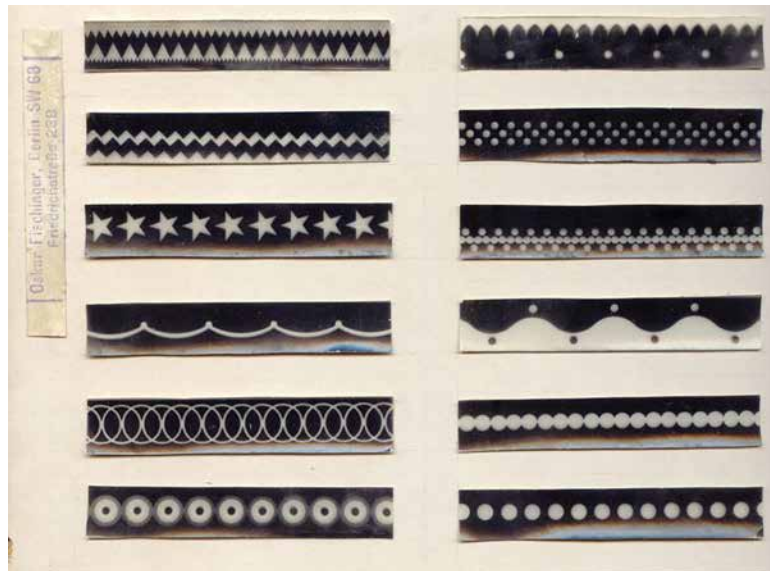
Study No. 7
Oskar Fischinger
1931, 16mm, 3mins
Courtesy Center for Visual Music (CVM)

"For *Study No. 7*, Fischinger found in Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5* a perfect vehicle for his optical experiments. On one hand, the sharp, fast rhythms are an ideal counterpoint for Fischinger's first complete exploration of absolute darkness as a space matrix, with hard-edged shapes twisting, flickering and curving through it, rushing past the viewer, razor thin, with astounding illusions of depth. On the other hand, the sensuous gypsy violins are played off against soft but solid shapes that curl about each other with rich geometric languor. Altogether the images are an excellent culmination of the basic visual concepts Fischinger had been working out in the first six studies, wherein the figures gain a modicum of interest in themselves, but function primarily as tracers of complex space constructs. Conceived, charted and executed like the rest of the black and white studies with thousands of separate charcoal drawings on paper, the classically simple effects here are no less amazing in their own way than the astounding multiplicity of *Study No. 8*."

—DR. WILLIAM MORITZ, FILM CULTURE

Polka Graph
Mary Ellen Bute
1947, 16mm transferred to HD video, 5mins
Courtesy Center for Visual Music (CVM)

"let your eyes and ears dance this one for you"   —POLKA GRAPH, 1947

A key example of Mary Ellen Bute's later color animations, *Polka Graph's* lively abstract forms are edited to Shostakovich's *Polka* from *The Age of Gold*. Moving through a colorful palette of geometric patterns and organic motifs that dance across the screen, Bute represents the atmosphere of the music through a series of repeated animated motifs. The animations transition into room-like architectural perspective in the final phrases, punctuating the flat colored backdrops to reveal a three-dimensional screen-space.

Tarantella
Mary Ellen Bute
1940, 16mm, 5mins
Courtesy Center for Visual Music (CVM)

Made with seven thousand drawings and with a piano accompaniment by Edwin Gerschefski, *Tarantella* includes an interlude by Bute's artistic peer, the Canadian animator and filmmaker Norman McLaren. It has been noted by historian William Moritz that Bute reused drawings that McLaren had made directly onto celluloid for her previous 1940 film *Spook Sport*.

Bute premiered her short films prior to the Hollywood feature films in prestigious theaters such as Radio City Music Hall. Although not necessarily commercially successful, this did ensure that a huge number of people saw Bute's films during her lifetime, even though after her death they were not distributed or studied to the same degree as her peers, Norman McLaren, and Len Lye.

Sirens
Ryoichi Kurokawa / Music: Novi_sad
2012, 44.16mins, digital projection
Courtesy of Cimatics

Sirens, a project conceived by musician Novi_sad, is a series of five audio visual pieces designed to explore the aesthetics of data. This collection of digitally rendered visual formulations and sound compositions are inversely related to the performance of global economic markets—the more the stock market's statistics/indexes/numbers fail, the more developed and complex the coupled sounds and visual sequences become.

Novi_sad commissioned five musicians (Richard Chartier, CM von Hausswolff, Jacob Kirkegaard, Helge Sten, and Rebecca Foon) to each create an original track for *Sirens*. These pieces were then spectrally analyzed, filtered and re-synthesized to reflect the fluctuations of stock market performance. The audio was then given to Japanese visual artist Ryoichi Kurokawa to pair with his process of generative visualization and cinematic practice to enhance the relationship between moving image, sound, and data.
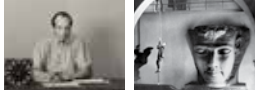
ON SCREEN/SOUND

THU / FEB 04, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #9

Picture and Sound Rushes / Morgan Fisher

Blackmail / Alfred Hitchcock

THU / FEB 18, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #10

Pierre Vallières / Joyce Wieland

The Arbor / Clio Barnard

THU / FEB 25, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #11

It Heat Hit / Laure Prouvost

3# Manifesto A Track #1 / Tony Cokes

Slow Zoom Long Pause / Sara Magenheimer

Der Grosse Verhau (The Big Mess) / Alexander Kluge

THU / MAR 03, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #12

Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance
  Godfrey Reggio / Music: Philip Glass

What does unstable time even mean?
  Charles Atlas / Music: Eric Holm

Many Thousands Gone / Ephraim Asili / Music: Joe McPhee

The Deccan Trap / Lucy Raven / Music: Paul Corley

Fade to Slide / Christian Marclay / Music: Bang on a Can All-Stars

THU / MAR 24, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #13

Berberian Sound Studio / Peter Strickland / Music: Will Slater

FRI / APR 08, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #14

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  from *The Age of Gold*

Tarantella
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Sirens / Ryoichi Kurokawa / Music: Novi_sad

THU / MAY 12, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #15

Untitled (The Ghost of Modernity)
  Miguel Angel Rios

La Région Centrale / Michael Snow

STAFF

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies
Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer
Argeo Ascani / Curator, Music
Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer
David Bebb / Senior Network Administrator
Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Administrator
Michael Bello / Video Engineer
Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts
Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer
Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator
John Cook / Box Office Manager
David DeLaRosa / Desktop Support Analyst
Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator
Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations
Johannes Goebel / Director
Ian Hamelin / Project Manager
Ryan Jenkins / Senior Event Technician
Shannon Johnson / Design Director
Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician
Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician
Stephen McLaughlin / Senior Event Technician
Josh Potter / Marketing and Communications Manager
Alena Samoray / Event Technician
Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator
Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager
Kim Strosahl / Production Coordinator
Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer
Dan Swalec / Master Electrician
Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer
Michael Wells / Production Technician