

# The Dallas Museum of Art

presents

## Sounds Modern

performing

*More direct, more immediate, more physical:  
music shaped by the art of Jackson Pollock*

Friday, March 18, 2016, 7:00 pm

Horchow auditorium

### Program

*Novara* (1962)

Earle Brown (1926-2002)

*Durations I* (1960)

Morton Feldman (1926-1987)

### Performers

Mike Capone, viola

Toshiro Chun, trumpet

Mia Detwiler, violin

Joseph Klein, conductor

Andrew May (Assistant Director, Sounds Modern), violin

Elizabeth McNutt (Director, Sounds Modern), flute and alto flute

Kourtney Newton, cello

Connor O'Meara, bass clarinet

Eva Polgar, piano

### Acknowledgments

This concert is made possible by a grant from the Earle Brown Music Foundation. Sounds Modern also thanks the DMA and the UNT College of Music for their support. The next Sounds Modern event, *Stellar Sounds* (2 pm on Saturday, May 21, at the Fort Worth Modern) will be a musical celebration of the work of Frank Stella.

### about Sounds Modern

Flutist Elizabeth McNutt conceived the Sounds Modern series as an invitation for modern art lovers to enjoy the best innovative modern music. Sounds Modern explores the sonic dimensions of visual and plastic arts, bringing the artwork to life in the concert hall. Sounds Modern regularly presents concerts the Modern Art Museum at Fort Worth, and at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. In addition to directing Sounds Modern, McNutt also directs the Nova new music ensemble at the University of North Texas, where she teaches in the flute and composition areas. Sounds Modern assistant director Andrew May is on the UNT composition faculty.

[www.soundsmodern.org](http://www.soundsmodern.org)

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## Notes

Jackson Pollock had a major influence on the music of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Composer Earle Brown described Pollock's work as one of "the earliest, and still the predominant influences on my conceptual attitude;" Morton Feldman said it turned him toward "a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore." This program celebrates Pollock's work with music from the early 1960's in which these two visionary composers reflect the spirit and practice of Jackson Pollock.

### from Kyle Gann's essay *If Jackson Pollock Wrote Music:*

In 1951 the photographer Hans Namuth made a film of the painter Jackson Pollock at work. Using his famous "drip technique," Pollock made a painting on glass that would eventually be titled simply Number Twenty-Nine. The glass was placed horizontally and Namuth filmed from underneath it as Pollock splattered and dripped not only paint but pebbles and shells. Riding the crest of his fame as the victorious bad boy of modern art, Pollock in the film is unselfconscious, spontaneous, consummately in control. For the soundtrack, the film's producer Paul Falkenberg first wanted to use bits of Indonesian gamelan music, but when he played them for Pollock, the painter complained, "But Paul, this is exotic music. I am an American painter!"

Pollock's wife Lee Krasner, an important painter in her own right, knew of a young composer who might be perfect for the music. Pollock and Krasner went over to audition him. He was a young friend of the avant-garde composer John Cage named Morton Feldman. Only 25 years old, Feldman was completely untried, ... [but] for whatever reason, Pollock and Krasner were impressed enough with the young unknown to give him the job. Feldman wanted to use a single cello, overdubbed. Lean, quiet, and austere, the music marked a new style for Feldman, one that he would cultivate into perhaps the most recognizable musical style of the late 20th century [this style can also be heard in *Durations I*]. Pollock had placed his bet well: by century's end Morton Feldman would go on to become one of the most influential composers of the second half of the century, and also the one most attuned to modern painting. Of working on Pollock's film, Feldman later said, "It was the beginning of my life, really; I hadn't had entree and now people were talking about me."

In the middle of the 20th century, the arts exploded into a new and unsettling realm of abstraction. Paintings were no longer paintings of something; they were simply paint. ... For some composers, notably John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Earle Brown, music was now about sound the way paintings were about paint. ... [and] listeners were being asked to relinquish the ideas of a steady beat and of hummable melodies, music's equivalent of representation. ([http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/essay\\_gann07.html](http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/essay_gann07.html))

### from Earle Brown's notes to *NOVARA*

Spontaneous decisions in the performance of a work and the possibility of the composed elements being "mobile" have been of primary interest to me for some time... For me, the concept of the elements being mobile was inspired by the mobiles of Alexander Calder, in which ... there are basic units subject to innumerable different relationships or forms. The concept of the work being conducted and formed spontaneously in performance was originally inspired by the "action-painting" techniques and works of Jackson Pollock in the late 1940's, in which the immediacy and directness of "contact" with the material is of great importance and produces such an intensity in the working and in the result. The performance conditions of these works are similar to a painter working spontaneously with a given palette.

*NOVARA* is an "open-form" work and uses many of the less characteristic sounds of the instruments that are sometimes referred to as "noises" but are nevertheless instrumental sounds which can extend the formal and expressive potential of the work. "Open-form" means that all of the sound materials in the work are notated and controlled in the score but that their sequence, juxtaposition, tempi, and repetition are left to the spontaneous (during the performance) decisions of the conductor as the performing process develops and unfolds between himself, the sound materials, and the musicians. The form of the work is therefore unique in each performance but it is always *NOVARA* because only those composed sound events may be used.