

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

presents

Sounds Modern

performing

Replay

Saturday, April 16, 2022, 2:00 pm
Modern Art Museum auditorium

Program

White Helmets as white as death – (2017)
Niloufar Nourbakhsh (b. 1992)

Fratres (1980)
Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

Joy Boy (1974)
Julius Eastman (1940-1990)

— intermission —

Cobra (1984)
John Zorn (b. 1953)

Musicians

Sarah Ruth Alexander, voice and electronics
Aaron Brent, electronics
Kathleen Crabtree, viola
Mia Detwiler, violin
Aaron Gonzalez, double bass
Joseph Klein, prompter
Steven Heffner, double bass
Stephen Lucas, piano and electronics
Andrew May, violin (Sounds Modern assistant director)
Elizabeth McNutt, flute (Sounds Modern director)
Kourtney Newton, cello
Paul Slavens, piano
Christopher Teal, drumset

Notes

In new music, repeat performances are rare. In this concert, we revisit works we particularly love from past concerts celebrating four artists who are again featured in the Modern's latest exhibition, *Recent Acquisitions*: Kehinde Wiley (2015: *A New Republic*), Mark Bradford (2020: *End Papers*), Shirin Neshat (2021: *I Will Greet the Sun Again*), and KAWS (2016: *Where the End Starts*). We find these musical works as timely as the subjects of this exhibition. In light of recent events, we are particularly drawn to these works which vary from the sublime to the absurd.

Shirin Neshat presents personal, political, and mythical narratives through images of the human form and calligraphy. Contemporary Iranian women composers embody parallel narratives through sound, human performance, and the calligraphy of music notation.

Niloufar Nourbaksh, *White Helmets as white as death*

Khalid Farah, former builder
Abu Omar, former blacksmith
Mohammed Farah, former tailor

These are a few of the names of nearly 3000 volunteers who work for the White Helmets organization; since 2014 they have saved more than 82,000 civilian lives in mercenary-controlled Syria. Their motto is: "to save a life is to save all of humanity." In this piece, I aimed to depict the most beautiful nature of this organization: to remain a human under the most inhumane conditions of war, which brings nothing but a thick blanket of destruction, death, and hopelessness. I searched for beauty in the most extreme and intense instrumental ranges of violin, viola, and flute, because the White Helmets have taught me that we must never give up hope. No matter how extreme the environment is, we must always fight for what's right. – Niloufar Nourbaksh

Kehinde Wiley's works put modern American figures into compositions, contexts, and frames that invoke the European tradition; the cognitive dissonance of these juxtapositions is central to his artistic statements. Composers confront this dissonance daily: expressing the experience of our own time and place through the medium of concert music means framing one's ideas in the written language, instrumental practice, and stylistic expectations of classical musicians steeped in the European past. *Modern Subjects, Classic Forms* — how can they be reconciled?

Arvo Pärt, *Fratres*

Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has composed many versions of *Fratres* ("brothers," in Latin), dating back to 1977. It is based on a simple chord progression of expanding phrases, always returning to the dominant and followed by a percussive refrain. This variation on the "ground bass" technique of the Baroque creates a traditional frame for the Pärt's meditative musical vision, influenced by Russian Orthodox church music and the resonance of bells; Pärt himself has used the term "tintinnabuli" to describe this practice.

Mark Bradford's paintings are wonders of recontextualization, reinventing materials like billboards and end papers through their recombination into a deceptively smooth surface. A group performance is likewise much more than the sum of its parts. Modern composers and improvisors – particularly women, LGBTQ+ artists, and artists of color – are likewise

reinventing chamber music performance, questioning the norms of the written score and making the concert stage a context for a meeting of diverse perspectives.

Julius Eastman, *Joy Boy*

Composer, pianist, and vocalist Julius Eastman devised a unique notational practice that invites active engagement from performers who collaborate in the invention of gradually evolving minimalist forms. The weaving and repetition of delicate sounds is reminiscent of Bradford's layering and burning of end papers in his works. Eastman's often-shocking titles, of which *Joy Boy* is one of the least controversial, confront difference and demand engagement with Eastman's own reality as a gay Black artist.

KAWS is well known for his appropriation of tropes from animations and pop culture, and his irreverent sense of humor. For this concert, we chose pieces exploring similar terrain: music that uses juxtaposition rather than development and transition, works influenced by popular culture and cartoons, and composers who recognize the artistic potential of things we see and hear every day but usually take for granted.

John Zorn, *Cobra*

The compositions of John Zorn embrace a variety of genres including jazz, rock, hardcore punk, classical, klezmer, cartoon, popular, and improvised music. Not a composition in the traditional sense, *Cobra* is a game with elaborate rules developed over the course of years of ensemble improvisations. The ensemble members request ("call") specific game signals, which the prompter may communicate to the entire group using placards with symbols on them. Some of these game signals include "cartoon trades," "duos," and material and group changes. The performers may also seek to break the game rules, even recruiting others to join them in a "guerrilla squad" – but they have to be on the lookout for "spies" trying to stop them.

Sounds Modern

The most up-to-the-minute and least predictable concert music series in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Sounds Modern has been exploring links between contemporary music and visual arts for over a decade. Conceived and directed by virtuoso flutist Elizabeth McNutt in collaboration with The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Sounds Modern adds a sonic dimension to the ideas represented in the galleries, and brings the artwork to life in the concert hall. 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.

Acknowledgments

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Upcoming events: Sounds Modern will be playing a night of *Cobra* at the Six Foot Love Series at Wild Detectives, April 21, 7:30 pm, 314 W Eighth Street, Dallas. Our next concert at The Modern will be September 3, 2022, 2 pm.