



STEPHEN VITIELLO

A Scuttering Across the Leaves, 2015

Sound installation in collaboration with Kasey Fowler-Finn

Cube, Moss Arts Center

September 3–13, 2015

Opening Reception

Thursday, September 3, 2015, 6–8 PM

Grand Lobby, Moss Arts Center

Free, refreshments and cash bar

Artist Talk

Thursday, September 3, 7 PM

Cube, Moss Arts Center

Free

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AT VIRGINIA TECH

A Scuttering Across

Drawing from both the worlds of visual art and music, sound art evolved in the 20th century with the experimental work of Italian Futurism (1909–1929), Dada (1915–1923), the Fluxus movement (1960s–1970s), as well as the pioneering accomplishments of the composer and artist John Cage, whose own practice crossed the borders between the aural and visual and served as a transmitter of not only historical ideas, but conceptual innovation for both visual and sonic artists. Artists of all types have since built on this groundbreaking heritage to develop entirely new possibilities of experiencing and engaging with art in the cross-pollination and convergence of the visual arts with experimental music, installation art, and performance art. Some of the most important and challenging art being produced today is by sound artists whose work traverses these lines—Laurie Anderson, Christian Marclay, and Janet Cardiff, among many others.



▲ Recording in progress of the sounds of the forest, Mountain Lake Biological Station, Virginia. Image courtesy of the artist.

Stephen Vitiello is internationally recognized as one of the leading artists in this fertile field. Originally a punk guitarist, Vitiello's artistic career has spanned a rich and eclectic terrain—from his initial interests in literature and film, composing electronic music, and scoring experimental film and videos, to his pivotal, long-time position as distributor and archivist at Electronic Arts Intermix at the Kitchen in New York City. Along the way he transitioned from the music world to the art world, establishing himself as a sound artist. In his work, Vitiello transforms sounds recorded from the environment into compositions or soundscapes that often take the form of art installations. Among his many exhibitions, installations, and public art works is a piece recorded during his 1999 artist residency at the World Trade Center, *World Trade Center Recordings: Winds After Hurricane Floyd*, which was created on the 91st floor of the World Trade Center; an installation for the exhibition *Yanomami: Spirit of the Forest* at the Cartier Foundation in Paris (2002), capturing in sound the life and culture of this remote village in the Brazilian Amazon; and, most recently, his outdoor sound installation in New York City's High Line of more than 59 bell recordings titled *A Bell For Every Minute* (2010–2011).

"Natural history—the scientific practice of observing, interpreting, and communicating about the natural world—lies at the heart of my research. Our project provides new perspective to this process, and an outlet to share the excitement of discovery with others."

—Kasey Fowler-Finn
July 4, 2015

▲ Vitiello captures nature's often imperceptible sounds. Image courtesy of the artist.

Front cover:

Sound wave imagery of *A Scuttering Across the Leaves*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

the Leaves



▲ Vitiello at the December 9, 2014, performance of *Light Readings*, an interactive media installation commissioned by the Baryshnikov Arts Center, Studio 6A, New York, December 8–18, 2014. Photo by Anna Lee Campbell. Image courtesy of the artist.

Flower-Finn captured sounds inaudible to the human ear using surface-based devices including an accelerometer, a laser, and a record needle, as well as standard professional quality microphones. They worked at different times of day and night and in all types of weather for a week to capture the sounds of insect movement on the stems and leaves of plants, rain crashing onto leaves, the sound of a caterpillar's dozen or more feet ambling at night, the sound of moth wings fluttering, bees thundering by flowers, ants attacking their microphone, and insects "singing like tiny whales" on plant stems.¹

Using the Cube's state-of-the-art sound capabilities, Vitiello then composed the work into a 13 minute long piece that sequences sounds in a trajectory from day into night. In a four day residency Vitiello worked with Tanner Upthegrove, ICAT's media engineer, to spatialize the sound, assigning individual sounds to specific sets of the CUBE's 138 speakers to "sculpt" a 3-dimensional, all enveloping, sonic environment. The results are a subtle, almost meditative, but rich aural experience that reveals a hidden sonic world that would otherwise be inaudible—an extraordinary inner world, largely undetected. Tanner Upthegrove aptly remarked that Vitiello uses sound like a microscope, enabling the listener to hear the world from the perspective of tiny insects and creatures—sounds that have never been heard before.

The culmination of combined efforts of faculty and resources from four universities—Virginia Tech, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Virginia, and Saint Louis University—this project is an example of the rich opportunities that collaboration and trans-disciplinary exploration can generate. Here, art/science, nature/technology, and biology/electronic and digital composition coalesce in a work of art and a unique sonic experience that offers new insights across and within traditional disciplines.

Margo Ann Crutchfield
Curator at Large

Notes

¹ Kasey Fowler-Finn quoted in email correspondence with the author, July 4, 2015.



“As an artist, I am first and foremost engaged with listening. With this project, using scientific technologies, we have the potential to listen to sounds that normally exist below the threshold of normal human hearing. The thrill is the ability to bring that sound world into a space of such extreme scale and quality.”

–Stephen Vitiello,
July 4, 2015

Acknowledgements

A Scattering Across the Leaves is presented by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech in partnership with the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT). The project is also supported in part by the University of Virginia's Mountain Lake Biological Station's ArtLab, a program directed by artist and University of Virginia painting professor, Megan Marlatt. Many thanks to Doug Witney, Center for the Arts Director of Production Services and his staff, and especially to Tanner Upthegrove, ICAT Media Engineer, for technical assistance and for his exceptional dedication to this project. Thanks also to Vitiello's student, Olivia LeClair, and Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Kinetic Imaging and Office of the Dean, School of the Arts for supporting LeClair's travel and lodging during this project. The participation of Fowler-Finn's students Downen Jocson and William Shoenberger was supported by a Summer Research Award in the Humanities from the College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Louis University. And of course, many thanks to Vitiello and Kasey-Fowler Finn for bringing this project to fruition.

About the Artist

Stephen Vitiello (born 1964, New York)

Vitiello is an electronic musician and sound artist, whose installations, performances, photographs, and drawings have been exhibited around the world in museums, galleries, and public spaces. Recent solo exhibitions include those at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2011-2016), and The High Line, New York (2010-2011). Among his extensive list of group exhibitions are *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); *September 11*, PS 1/MoMA, Long Island City, New York (2011-2012); the *15th Biennale of Sydney*, Australia (2006); the Cartier Foundation, Paris (2002); and the *2002 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2002). Vitiello has performed nationally and internationally at locations such as the Tate Modern, London; the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival; and The Kitchen, New York.

Vitiello's sound works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon. He lives in Richmond, Virginia, where he is an associate professor in the Kinetic Imaging Department at Virginia Commonwealth University.

About the Scientist

Kasey D. Fowler-Finn, Ph.D.

Kasey D. Fowler-Finn is an evolutionary biologist who uses a combined quantitative genetic, ecological, and behavioral approach to investigate the evolution of complex traits in insects and arachnids. A major goal of her research is to understand how organisms adapt to and are affected by changes in the environment. She approaches this goal by listening to the tiny songs of insects that we cannot hear with our ears because these songs travel as tiny vibrations through plant stems and leaves. Some of her major projects include studying the influence of temperature on song, the genetics of song, and how social interactions among insects influence song and other behaviors.

Fowler-Finn has published widely in her field and is the recipient of numerous National Science Foundation grants. She is currently an assistant professor at Saint Louis University, and worked as a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She received her Ph.D. in 2009 from the University of Nebraska.

About the Center for the Arts

The Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech is located in and operates the Moss Arts Center. The 147,000-square-foot, multi-purpose Moss Arts Center was designed by Snohetta (Olso/New York) and includes the Street and Davis Performance Hall, the 1,274-seat Anne and Ellen Fife Theatre, the four-story experimental Cube, visual arts galleries, and research spaces. The Center for the Arts presents renowned artists from around the globe and from close to home, with a special focus on experiences that cross disciplines, expand cultural awareness, and deepen understanding. Each year the Center for the Arts presents about 12 exhibitions that feature both established and emerging artists from artists' studios, galleries private collections, and museums.

About ICAT

Uniquely partnered with the Center for the Arts is the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT), a university-level research institute positioned at the nexus of art, design, engineering, and science. ICAT researchers forge pathways between transdisciplinary research and artistic output, scientific and commercial discovery, and educational innovation.

About the Cube

The Cube is the first of its kind, a four-story (50' w x 40' l x 32' h), state-of-the-art data exploration facility and experimental space for research, immersive environments, performances, and installations. It is an audio/visual laboratory with two tons of audio electronics, more than 150 loudspeakers, and 3D sound capability. The Cube is equipped for augmented reality (head-mounted display) and tablet interaction interfaces; wave field synthesis and holosonic sound display interaction; synchronized data capture, including IR motion capture, audio/video, physiological, and interaction signals; and real-time audio/video rendering systems.

About the University of Virginia's Mountain Lake Biological Center

The field station for University of Virginia's Department of Biology, located on 650 acres at 3,800 feet elevation in rural Pembroke, Virginia—roughly halfway between Blacksburg, Virginia and the West Virginia state line—is home to a community of scientists and students from around the country who conduct research in everything from ecology to evolutionary genetics.

Stephen Vitiello

A Scattering Across the Leaves, 2015

Continuing through September 13, 2015

3–8 PM, Tuesday–Friday

10 AM–4 PM, Saturday–Sunday

Admission free

Also on view

Philip Taaffe

September 3–November 15, 2015

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

Beyond Real: Still Life in the 21st Century

September 3–November 15, 2015

Gerry Bannan, Ori Gersht, David Halliday, Jennifer L. Hand,
Laura Letinsky, Tim O'Kane, Agniet Snoep

Miles C. Horton-Jr. Gallery

Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery

Odili Donald Odita: *Bridge*, 2014

Wall installation

Grand Lobby



Gallery Hours

Tuesday–Friday, 10 AM–6 PM

Saturday and Sunday, 10 AM–4 PM

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Cube

Moss Arts Center

September 3–13, 2015

Presented by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech

Curated by Margo Ann Crutchfield

Curator at Large



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