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Marclay, Christian, *Locked / Imaginary Records*, 1997, pochette de disque, collage sur carton, 31,1 x 31,1 cm (Objektmass), Privatbesitz

Documentation level

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Name

Marclay, Christian

Dates of birth and death

* 11.1.1955 San Rafael

Municipality of origin (CH)

Versoix (GE)

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Plasticien de la musique explorant les liens entre sons et images, performeur expérimental, D.J., sculpteur, photographe et vidéaste

Fields of activity

sculpture, art vidéo, performance, objet, installation, action

Lexicon article

Born in California of a Swiss father and an American mother, Christian Marclay grew up in Geneva, where he began his art studies at the École Supérieure d'Art Visuel (1975–77). He continued his training at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, attending the sculpture class, and participated in the exchange program at the Cooper Union in New York, where he earned a Bachelor degree in Fine Arts in 1980. After spending many years in New York City, during which he kept close ties with Switzerland by exhibiting there regularly, he has been living in London since 2007.

Even though his studies destined him to visual art, music and

sound performances play an essential role in his life. Inspired by John Cage and by the energy of punk rock, he has been considered since the mid-1970s as one of the inventors of turntablism, the art of creating music by using turntables and vinyl records as instruments. The name of his first musical group, founded in 1979 and coined *The Bachelors*, even in homage to Marcel Duchamp and his *Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, recalls the idea of the ready-made: found objects, whether visual or aural, are indeed the core of his practice. Whether considered a visual artist of music or a musician of the visual arts, he endlessly mixes the tracks of creation in a fruitful blur of the pictorial and the audible, continuously exploring their connections while questioning the industrial culture system.

As a musician and D. J. whose «theatre of found sounds» – improvised performances – and turntable mixing result in the interweaving and superimposing of musical genres, Marclay has played at Franklin Furnace, The Knitting Factory, The Kitchen, CBGB or The Mudd Club in New York City, and since 1983, in numerous cultural spaces and American, European, and Swiss museums. He has collaborated with various musical groups such as Sonic Youth, Kronos Quartet, Otomo Yoshihide, Ikue Mori, John Zorn, and Arto Lindsay. He has inspired a generation of musicians and performers.

As a visual artist, he was invited to participate in group exhibitions from 1983 onwards, and since 1987, in solo exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic. Once the New Yorkers discovered him at the Clocktower Gallery in 1987, the *Whitney Biennial* included his work as of 1991. He exhibited at the Centre d'art contemporain Fri-Art in Fribourg in 1994 and represented Switzerland at the *Venice Biennale* in 1995 with *Amplification*, an installation that recalled a silent concert, composed of photographs of amateur musicians printed on translucent screens that were suspended in the San Stae church. Still in 1995, as the prize-winner of the Prix d'art contemporain de la Banque cantonale de Genève, he exhibited at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, and in 1997 at the Kunsthau Zürich, as a recipient of the Preis für Junge Schweizer Kunst der Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft. He has been represented by the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York City since 1999, and many museums have curated his work: the UCLA Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (2003), the Kunstmuseum Thun (2004), the Barbican Art Gallery in London (2005), the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2006), the Cité de la Musique in Paris and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne (2007–08), and the Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain (Mamco) in Geneva (2008). In 2010, his installation video *The Clock* was showed for the first time at the White Cube in London – a year later, this work earned him the Golden Lion for best artist at the 54th

Intersecting music and visual art, the work of Christian Marclay holds a unique position, singular and inventive: the eye listens, the ear sees, the sounds sharpen and generate one another. By renewing and including in his own way Duchamp's ready-made heritage, the interdisciplinarity of John Cage's sound art, and the iconoclasm of Fluxus, Marclay's work is an astonishing recreation of found elements. He recycles, appropriates, hijacks, mixes, pastes, and edits, thus calling forth all types of mind states and emotions: the humorous, the burlesque, the soul-stirring, the poetic, the odd, and the incongruous.

In his work, sculpture is born of sound. For example, *The Beatles* (1989) is a crocheted pillow filled with a magnetic tape of all the group's recordings. *Colonne sans fin* (1988) recalls Constantin Brancusi, yet the column here is a vertiginous stack of old 33 LPs. Among his impossible (because unplayable) musical instruments, the accordion of *Virtuoso* (2000) meanders along seven meters, while *Lip Lock* (2000) couples the mouth pieces of a tuba and a trumpet so seamlessly that both are silenced.

Through photography and with direct reference to the graphic trace of sound, he collects onomatopoeia found in comic books and Japanese mangas. With them he has created an original score on a roll of paper twenty meters long, entitled *Mangas Scroll* (2010), which can be interpreted by vocalists. The found sounds of the comic strip onomatopoeia have also inspired his paintings and drawings that present sound visualisations on a large scale. As for his *Cyanotypes*, they reiterate the old process of monochrome photography, done without a camera, but with objects laid directly on the photosensitive paper. Also known as blueprints, these abstract drawings are created by intertwining magnetic tapes (another obsolete material) in a graphic abundance à la Jackson Pollock.

Since 1995, cinema has also appeared in Marclay's prolific laboratory. *Telephones* inaugurated his filmic montages by assembling seven minutes of telephone calls sampled from movies, bursting with gestures and mimics. In 2005, *Video Quartet* offered a masterful summary of movie soundtracks. And in 2007, Marclay began the phenomenal undertaking of *The Clock*. In total, this video installation assembles several thousands of film excerpts that tell time: railway station clocks, bell tower dials, watches, alarm clocks, dashboards or ticking bombs summon all eras and cinematographic genres (hold-ups, car chases, fights or love scenes). The rhythm of the editing is panting, full of suspense, noise, and music. It lasts twenty-four hours and must absolutely be synchronised with the time at which it is projected, in order for the viewer to experience it live, minute by minute, independently of when the viewer is present or for how long. *The Clock* is a meditation on the flow of time, a kaleidoscope of a hundred years of cinema, and as The Museum of Modern Art in New York described it in January 2013, a real technical and visual «tour de force». As for the experience it offers, it is fittingly qualified as hypnotic and addictive.

Works: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); New York, Whitney Museum; Paris, Centre Pompidou; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Kunsthaus Zürich.

Françoise Jaunin, 2014
Translation: Sarah Burkhalter

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