



**SOUNDPOOL:
THE MANUFACTURING
OF SILENCE**

STEVEN R. HEIMBECKER

SOUNDPOOL:

THE MANUFACTURING OF SILENCE

STEVEN R. HEIMBECKER

February 29 - March 23, 1996

This exhibition was organized by the Illingworth Kerr Gallery and curated by Richard Gordon. Financial support for the Illingworth Kerr Gallery is provided by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and The Canada Council exhibition assistance programme. The Alberta College of Art & Design gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Alberta.

Illingworth Kerr Gallery

Technician: Mark Dicey

Acting Director/Curator: Richard Gordon

Director/Curator (on sabbatical, September, 1995 - September 1996): Ron Moppett

Catalogue Production

Text: Paul Woodrow

Editing: Amy Gogarty

Design/Typography: Charles Cousins

Catalogue preparation Assistant: Pamela Morasch

Photography: John Dean & Steven Heimbecker

Printing: Sundog Printing Limited

© 1996, Illingworth Kerr Gallery

Alberta College of Art & Design

1407 - 14 Avenue N.W.

Calgary, Alberta

T2N 4R3

Printed in Canada

ISBN: 1-895086-42-6

front cover: *The Forum for the Alienation of Art*, 1995, mixed media.

back cover: *The Acoustic Field Intensifier*, 1993-1994, galvanized 10L fuel funnel, 21 galvanized 1L funnels, galvanized 2L pail, rope, 61 x 61 x 51 cm.

The artist would like to express his heartfelt gratitude to the following list of supporters who have contributed significantly to the success of this 2 1/2 year project.

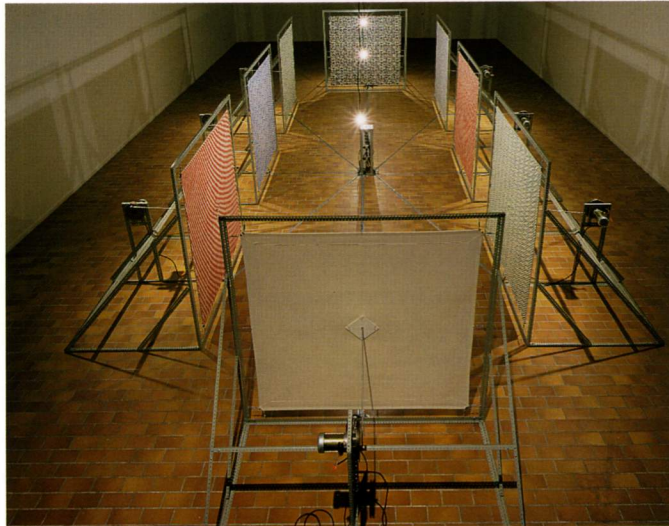
Institutional

- Canada Council: Media Arts, Audio Production Grant
- A.E. Cross Junior High School - Artist Residence in Schools, Calgary Board of Education: "Calgary Arts and Education Network."
- La Chambre Blanche, Québec, QC
- The New Gallery, Calgary, AB
- The World Forum for Acoustic Ecology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC

Individual

Rick Caulkins, Charles Cousins, Mark Dicey, Richard Gordon, Geoff Hunter, Colleen Kerr, Steve Nunoda, Mireille Perron, Shawn Pinchbeck, Jocelyn Robert, Brigitte Rondeau, Wright Simmonds, Rod Stewart, Paul Woodrow

**SOUNDPOOL:
THE MANUFACTURING
OF SILENCE**



STEVEN R. HEIMBECKER

February 29 - March 23, 1996

Illingworth Kerr Gallery

Alberta College of Art & Design

Soundpool:

The Manufacturing of Silence

some thoughts on the work of
Steven R. Heimbecker

...the modern soundscape...divides itself into two domains. It divides itself into the domain that we traditionally associate with silence, the enabling condition in which unprogrammed and unprogrammable events can take place. That is the silence of contemplation; that is the silence where people can get in touch with themselves. ...

Ursula Franklin.

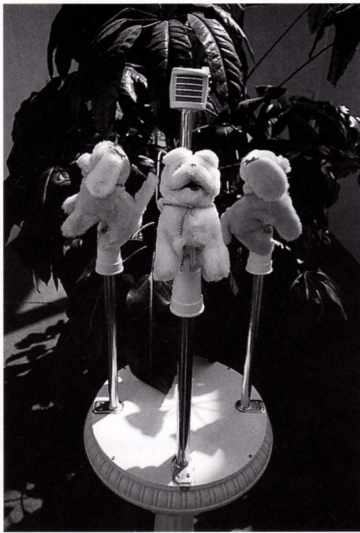
Within the context of Modernist and Post-Modernist art practice in the twentieth century, the use of sound by visual artists and multimedia artists has a very distinct and complex history. The introduction of sound as a significant element in works of art has been viewed as part of the critique of traditional art activity or as a vital component in an utopian program. The representation of sound has also been perceived as a necessary tool for social and political transformation or principally as an avant-garde activity. Within the context of the Fine Arts, the definition of sound as a musical phenomenon to be experienced or appreciated in its own right—autonomous, temporal and immaterial—has yet to be accepted. For the past fifty years, particularly within the boundaries of popular culture, the representation of sound has co-existed with image in the form of movies, television, and computer technology. The abstraction and liberation of sound from the confines of music is manifested in the work of many of the more prominent visual artists of this century. The list of artists and legitimate composers who have used sound as a component of individual works or as a focal point of larger endeavors is comprehensive.

Beginning with Futurist Luigi Russolo, here are some of the artists who can be cited: Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, the Dadaists, John Cage, Edgard Varese, Takehisa

Kosugi, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Alvin Lucier, Jean Tinguely, Allan Kaprow, The Fluxus artists George Macunias, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik and Al Hansen; Joseph Beuys, Robert Ashley, Bruce Nauman, Max Neuhaus and Laurie Anderson. Within our own borders, names that spring to mind are R. Murray Schafer, Hildegard WesterKamp, Ian Carr-Harris, Michael Snow, Rita McKeough, Micah Lexier, Dan Lander, and the unforgettable Robin Page, whose "second block guitar piece" consisted of kicking a guitar down the stairs from the Hardware Poet's Playhouse, past the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum and back up the stairs during the Yam Festival, in New York in May, 1965.

It is over three decades since the publication of *Silence*, by John Cage (1961). The collection of lectures, essays, articles and anecdotes has had a profound effect on many artists and musicians. By redefining the nature of silence and making it the material of music, Cage completely reversed traditional (European) thinking. Cage's notion of silence is not constructed in the fissure or pause between musical notes. Silence refers to the world of ambient sound that surrounds musical performance - that is, life itself. Like many of the artists associated with the Fluxus movement, Cage attempted to narrow the gap between art and life. Retrospectively, Cage's position can be seen as a critique of Modernist art practice, which had encouraged the separation of art and life through the endorsement of the autonomous art object.

Since the sixties, artistic exploration of sound has resulted in an abundance of activity. Artists' boundaries have been extended aesthetically, socially and politically. We have witnessed, for example, the formation of E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology) as well as the foundation of the World Soundscape Project, an on-going project that studies the relationship between living organisms and their sonic environments. We have seen a significant rise in the production of sonic work, including sound poetry, audio work, texts, book work,



(left) **Home Security**, 1993.

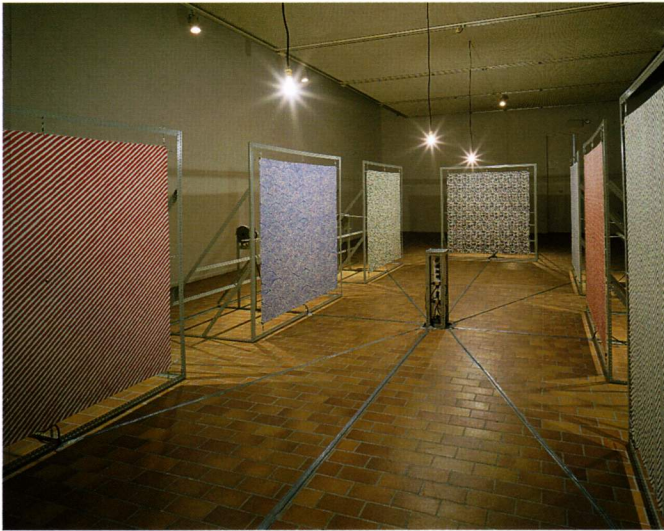
mechanical toy puppies, infrared motion detectors, bird baths, miscellaneous consumer/household hardware, 38 square metres.

sound performance, interactive sculpture, ambitious projects like the Banff Centre's Radio Rethink, the use of digital technology, the establishment of sound archives and the growth in numbers of groups and individuals who are interested in the preservation and conservation of sound. During the last decade or so, we have been in the midst of a sonic boom!

Today it is not unusual to think of the artist as a multi-media practitioner, involved in a diversity of activities ranging from conventional sculpture to installation to production of electro-acoustic environments. Steve Heimbecker exemplifies such an approach to contemporary art making. During the past few years, Heimbecker has completed several pieces that address sound issues such as questioning architectural spaces or investigating problems concerning mediation of the body image. In general, Heimbecker's work covers a wide spectrum of activity including object-making, performance, sound and music concerts, collaborative works and the production of audio cassette tapes. Rather than employing analytical or theoretical models to underscore his work, Heimbecker uses intuition, experimentation and response to events and experiences in everyday life. His work often combines elements and approaches derived from past styles, yet it nevertheless conveys freshness, spontaneity and charm.

The Acoustic Field Intensifier (1994), which was exhibited at Memorial University Art Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland, as part of Sound Symposium 7 *Lend me your ears: Sound City Spaces*, functions by separating the sounds in a sonic field. The piece is fabricated as an apparatus to be worn while engaged in the activity of listening. It is, more or less, a performance costume. Made from recontextualized fuel funnels, its theatrical and whimsical appearance is reminiscent of Futurist sculptural megaphones and other contraptions associated with the Dadaists.

Home Security (1993) is another whimsical yet critical installation that uses a variety of found materials and technological devices: mechanical toy puppies, infrared motion detectors, bird-baths, a plant and miscellaneous household hardware. *Home Security* consists of a series of automated sculptures triggered independently by each unit's motion detector. The sculptural components have been constructed from colorful mechanical puppies perched on posts (recycled closet rods), which are embedded in bird baths. An infrared motion detector is placed immediately behind the soft fuzzy toys. The slightest detection of motion sets off the barking dogs. The installation's ironic stance reveals society's fixation with insecurity and possessive behaviors. The absence of idealization and preciousness (aesthetization) in this



Soundpool: The Manufacturing of

Silence, 1996, mixed media,

253 square metres.

particular piece prevents the viewer from experiencing comfort and reassurance. The mechanical barking dogs become a source of irritation. Heimbecker's use of banal materials reveals both the absurdity and pathos of a society governed by fear of attack from violent external forces. In our society, pets sometimes double as guard dogs!

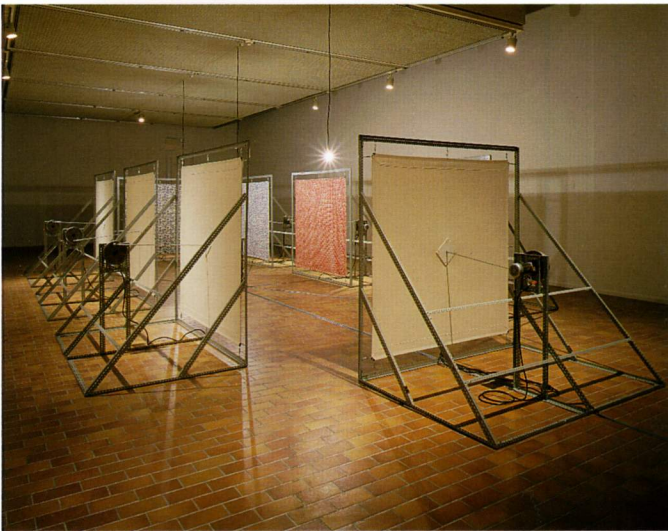
Metaphenophone (It's all Greek to Me) (1994), a site-specific installation, was shown as part of the exhibition *The End of Modernity*, curated by Annette Hurtig at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. She says of the artists in the exhibition, "Employing the new technologies and the detritus of our material culture, they investigate and illustrate the dissolution of conventional categories and canons, and the abjection, dystopia, and vast potential of our times." Heimbecker's installation employs numerous optical and sonic devices such as closed circuit T.V., an audio surveillance system, amber-colored mirrored tiles, and spotlights, arranged as an interactive audio-visual feed-back loop. *Metaphenophone* allows the observer to experience the act of viewing. This experience is reinforced when we discover the presence of amber mirrors placed amidst the various spaces and collections throughout the museum. We see ourselves as viewers engaged in an act of recognition. The gallery thus

becomes a context for self-examination.

Heimbecker uses technology for the purpose of making the viewer more self-conscious. As with all systems of communication, the possibility of developing self-consciousness is always mediated by the way in which the subject is represented in language. In the visual arts, for example, the structure of the image plays a large part in the construction of identity. The system of electronic reproduction in Heimbecker's installation has the effect of distancing the viewer even further from his or her desires.

Metaphenophone transforms the viewer into a semiotic ghost trapped within the self-perpetuating process of technological reproduction. The viewer's image becomes suspended, fluctuating between the inherent naturalism of the mirror and the disembodied product of the machine (television).

Heimbecker's earlier works have included the fabrication of a number of objects. *Density No. 2* (1990), consists of twenty-six "Ariel Harps," or stringed sculptures. Eight of these are free-standing while the remainder are wall-mounted. Individual "harps" can be activated by a modified computer keyboard. Sound is generated by tuning sound sources into real time. Each "Ariel Harp" acts as an antenna. As part of the international exhibition *Tuning of*



Soundpool: The Manufacturing of

Silence, 1996, mixed media,

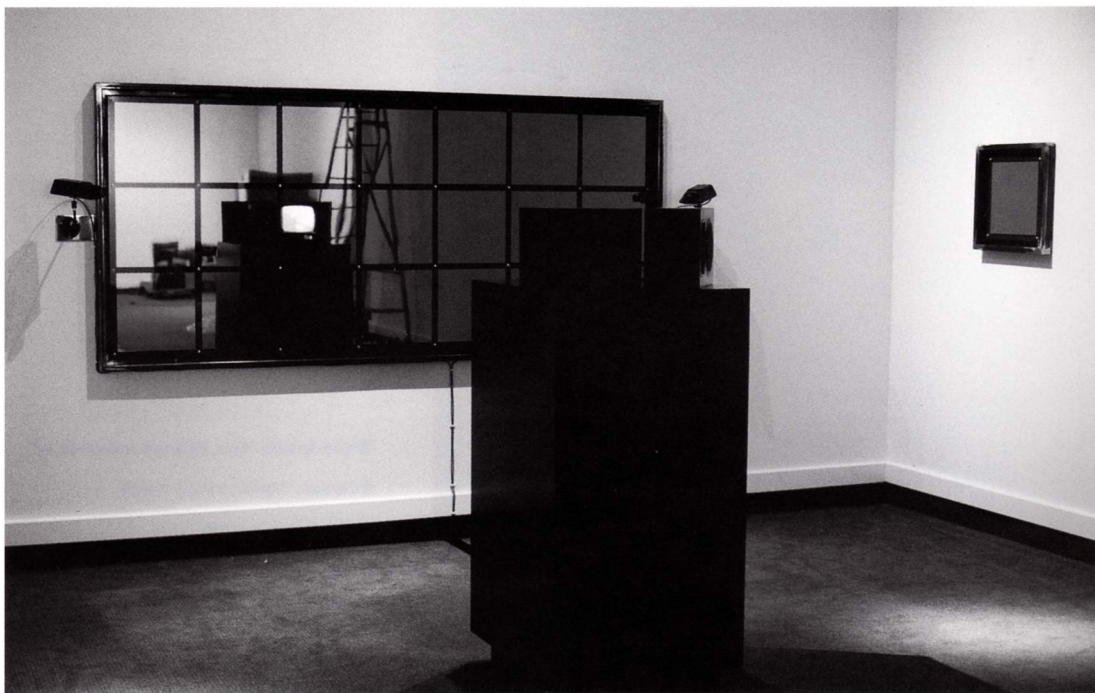
253 square metres.

the World (1993), Heimbecker constructed eight sculptural structures containing discrete speaker systems which were suspended from the gallery ceiling at the University of Calgary's Nickle Arts Museum. The work is entitled *The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens*. The installation reproduces the sound recorded simultaneously from eight sites located along a linear mile. One of the more interesting notions the work plays upon is how the compression of time affects the articulation of space and vice versa. In a world in which time appears to speed up, space appears to shrink, resulting in a miniaturized version of the world.

The subject of Heimbecker's latest project, *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence* (1996), takes the form of a multi-media installation. It combines many of the features of Heimbecker's previous work in a larger and more ambitious format. The piece consists of eight similar sculptural objects, which Heimbecker refers to as "Axis Speakers," built to produce a sub-sonic effect for its audience. As in former pieces, Heimbecker's work utilizes an interactive component. In the construction of each sculptural unit, Heimbecker makes use of recycled hardware materials such as industrial storage shelving. Canvas awning, which acts as a membrane, is attached to large, square metal frames. The

surface of the canvas is decorated with designs appropriated from the inside of paper envelopes, where they function to block out light and prevent inquisitive eyes from recognizing or reading the enclosed contents. In the case of each sculptural unit, sound is produced by the motion of the electrical motor. This in turn activates the painted canvasses and causes a noticeable movement of air as well as a mechanically produced visual vibration. Heimbecker states that "whatever final results occur, this installation will produce a significant physical, visual and sonic effect, which is intended to bring the audience to the name of silence."

Like many of Heimbecker's previous works, humor and parody play a vital role in the construction of meaning. They are also essential factors to consider in the light of interpretation. The work appears to be formulated as a paradox. Silence is not manufactured by this assortment of disparate hardware. Even the optical vibrations of the canvasses do little to appease our anxieties and offer the peace and quiet of meditation. Heimbecker's installation mimics the industrial and its promise of salvation. In a gallery setting, the sonic sculptures appear like props in a scene from the theatre of the absurd, remnants of a past ritual, bizarre yet intriguing.



Metaphenophone (it's all Greek to Me), 1994, mirrored tile, steel, plastic, wood, closed circuit t.v., audio surveillance system, signal processor, 125 square metres.

When looking at Heimbecker's work in general, I am reminded of two artists from the sixties - a decade with which I am familiar. The artists in question are Jean Tinguely and Walter De Maria. Tinguely was noted for his huge self-destructing machines, such as the piece constructed in the Nevada desert in 1962, *Study for an End of the World*. After the early auto-destructive work, Tinguely went on to fabricate many non-functional machines from recycled industrial materials. Like Tinguely's work, Heimbecker's works are always playful, and they possess a strong sense of humor. The piece I would like to make reference to by Walter De Maria was contained within a small collection entitled *An Anthology*, edited by George Macunias and Jackson MacLow. *Meaningless Work* consists of a paragraph which outlines De Maria's approach to art making. In the true spirit of Fluxus, he outlines a performance piece that consists only of moving information from one file to another, then transferring it back

again *ad infinitum*. Heimbecker's work can be viewed as a continuation of the tradition from which these works spring.

In conclusion, Heimbecker's work is the result of a variety of methodological approaches, which are in fact quite dissimilar. The earlier work appears to be a manifestation of an anti-aesthetic and non-precious approach to materials and forms. How things sound and how things look are of course important to each work. The overall effect of the pieces takes precedence. Since many of the pieces are designed to engage an audience, they appear like works of the theatre or even theatrical machines, whose purpose is to produce effects. As objects to be experienced, the pieces sometimes leave the viewer in a state of ambivalence, especially when the viewer is faced with ambiguity. On the other hand, Heimbecker's public performances and concerts tend to take a more refined and focused approach to music-making. The construction of acoustic spaces seems to be



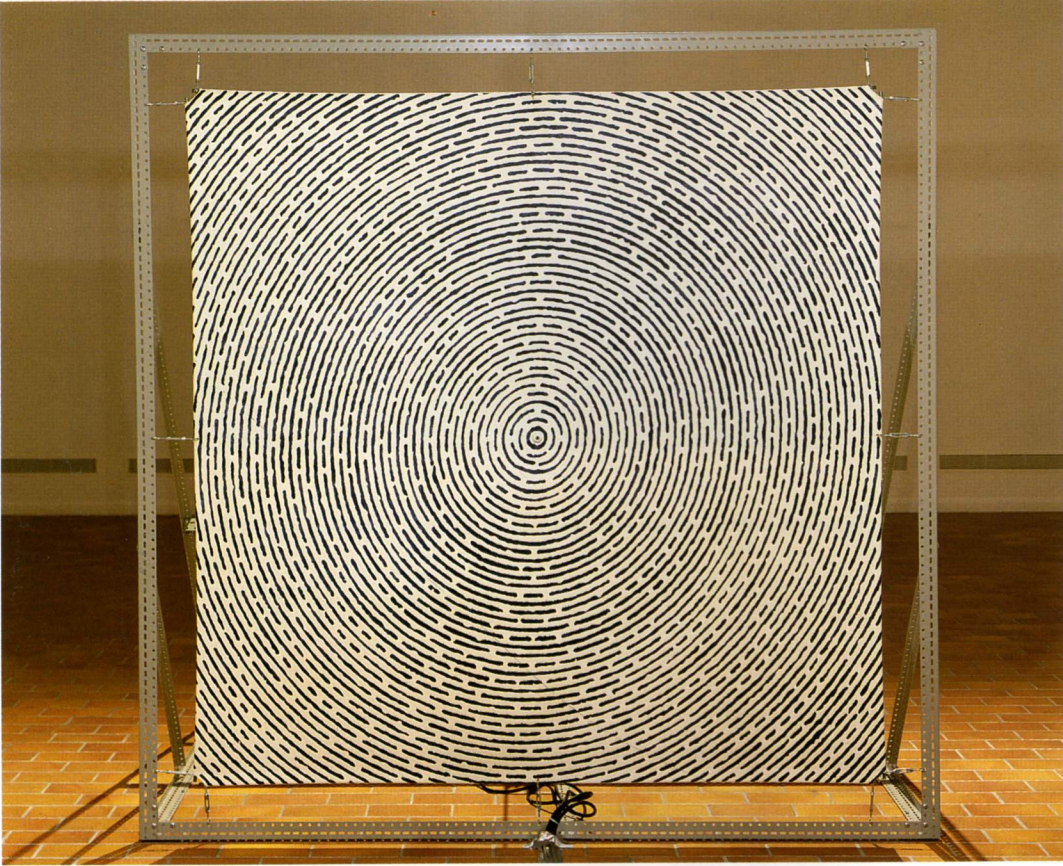
The Acoustic Line as the Crow Listens, 1993, wooden structure, sound speakers, sound amplifiers, 8-track tape player, 250 square metres.

a serious preoccupation. I am not suggesting, however, that the playful and the serious can not or should not exist together in the same space. I am, in fact, an advocate of entertainment. In the final analysis, Heimbecker's work is a consequence of his own particular quest for silence, which incorporates a more inclusive and diverse approach to the fabrication of sound sculpture.

Paul Woodrow

References

- Franklin, Ursula. "Silence and the Notion of the Commons." **Soundscape Newsletter**. Number Seven (January 1994): (6-7).
- Heimbecker, Steven R., (The Qube Assemblage Company: For Art, Science, and Music), Notes provided to author, 1995.
- Hurtig, Annette. "End of Modernity." [Broadsheet] Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1994.



Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence, 1996 (detail),
mixed media, 253 square metres.

Biography

Born 1959, Springwater, Saskatchewan
Lives and works in Calgary, Alberta

Education

1977-80 The Alberta College of Art

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1996** *Soundpool: The Manufacturing of Silence*, The Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta College of Art & Design
- 1995** *Improvisations in Octaphonics*, La Chambre Blanche, Artist in Residence, Québec City, Québec
- Compositions / Improvisations in Octaphonics*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta; Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan; La Chambre Blanche (two), Québec City; Inter Access / The Music Gallery, Toronto, Ontario; St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Calgary Society of Independent Film Makers / Quickdraw Animation Society / Em/Media, Calgary, Alberta
- 1994** *Tic Talk St. Norbert*, Music and Words '94, Concert Series - St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1990** *Density #2, Ariel Harp*, The New Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
- 1985** *Zeitgeist*, 2nd Story Gallery, Calgary, Alberta

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1995** *The Forum for the Alienation of Art*, Deuxieme Manifestation Internationale Video et Art Electronique, Champ Libre, Montréal, Québec
- Radio Unbound, Human Transistors 2*, Festival of Audio and Radio Art, The Timms Centre for the Arts, Boreal Electroacoustic Music Society / CJSR FM 88, Edmonton, Alberta
- 1994** *Lend me your ears: Sound City Spaces*, Sound Symposium 7, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland
- End of Modernity*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta
- Perf' 94*, International Performance Art Symposium, St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1993** *The Tuning of the World*, Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary, Alberta
- Passage*, Sculpture '93, Triangle Gallery and Visual Arts Society, Calgary
- 1991** *Feed Back and Forth: life is strange! more to follow...*, International collaborative performance project: Helmhaus Gallerie, Zurich, Switzerland; Kultursagi, Winterthur, Switzerland; Radio Lora FM, Zurich; Schedhalle Gallerie, Zurich; Gallerie Theuretzbacher, Vienna, Austria; Kunstverein Gallerie, Horn, Austria
- 1990** *Between Edges*, ACTS, The Works, Edmonton, Alberta
- 1989** *Alliance Showcase '89*, Independent Film and Video Alliance, National Film Board Theatre, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- The Au*, Media Blitz II, The New Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
- 1987** *Soundscape: National Sound Sculpture Exhibition*, C.C.M.C. Music Gallery, Toronto, Ontario

Selected Collections

University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta
Foothills Hospital Foundation, Calgary, Alberta
Private collections

Selected Bibliography

- A Second Look at Calgary's Public Art*, compiled by Barbara Kwasney and Elaine Peake, City of Calgary Parks and Recreation, 1992.
- Brayshaw, Christopher. "The End of Modernity," *Artichoke*, 6.3, (Fall/Winter 1994):64-65.
- Clark, Kerry. "All Audio II," *Vox Magazine*, (December 1989):5.
- Deuxieme Manifestation Internationale Video et Art Electronique*, (Festival Catalogue), Champ Libre, Montréal, Québec, (1995).
- Everett-Green, Robert. "Noisy sculpture heard in Toronto parks," *The Globe and Mail*, (12 Aug. 1987):C5.
- Faust, Robert. "The Eight Phases of Heimbecker," *Vox Magazine*, 140, (October 1995):11.
- Heintz, John Link. "Passages, A Show of Differences," *Artichoke*, 5.3, (Fall 1993):59-61.
- Hill, Lee. "The Edible Pumpkin - Dance for Arts Sake," *Vox Magazine*, (October 1990):4.
- Hurtig, Annette. "The End of Modernity," Curator's Broadsheet, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB, (1994).
- Jackson, Rosa. "Web's new acts entertaining," *The Edmonton Journal*, (26 June 1990):C11.
- Media Blitz II*, The New Gallery, Calgary, AB.
- Lachance, Marie. "Improvisations in Octaphonics," *Voir Magazine*: 14.27, (1995):30.
- Lavolette, Mary Beth & Katherin Ylitalo. "Diversity in the Arts - Ten Artists," *Alberta Art Foundation Newsletter Magazine*, (January 1990):6.
- Liverant, Bettina. "The Arts; Polemics, not Peonies," *The Globe and Mail*, (13 Aug. 1991).
- Alain-Martin, Richard & Clive Robertson. *Performance au-in Canada*, Editions Intervention / Coach House Press Publishers, 1991.
- Muretich, James. "Beat Apostles Blend Art With Rock," *Calgary Herald*, (18 Dec. 1988):
- "Performances in Zurich und Winterthur: Aktive Seltsamkeiten," *Wochenthemen*, Zurich, Switzerland, (15 July 1991):24.
- "Sound Sculpture and Sound Art," *Proceedings of The Tuning of the World, Volume One*. Banff: The Banff Centre, (August 1993).
- Tinker, Susan. "Sound and Visual Form come together in Nirvana," *Catalyst Magazine*, University of Calgary, (January 1990):13-14.
- Tousley, Nancy. "Sound Art Tunes in the World," *Calgary Herald*, (14 Aug. 1993): D2.
- _____. "Achieving nirvana," *Calgary Herald*, (30 Sept. 1989):C4.
- _____. "Presentation proves sound can be packaged as Art," *Calgary Herald*, (27 Aug. 1987):C2.
- _____. "Rooms transformed into environments," *Calgary Herald*, (1 Jan. 1987):E1.
- _____. "Artists bid for success with unusual sales pitch," *Calgary Herald*, (15 Jan. 1984):E2.

