

Portfolio

Tomoko Sauvage

Waterbowls

Performances, compositions, 2007-

Water, porcelain bowls, hydrophones (underwater microphones), electronics



Performance view at WOS Festival, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2018 / Photo : Leo Lopez

Over the past decade, Tomoko Sauvage (JP/FR) has been developing her unique electro-acoustic instrument, waterbowls – combining water, hydrophones (underwater microphones) and porcelain and glass bowls. Random percussion with water drops, hydrophonic feedback controlled by hand-undulated water waves and porous terracotta emitting singing bubbles in the liquid are some of her techniques that generate sculptural and fluid timbres. Her musical experimentation is grounded in a live-performance-based practice that investigates improvisation and interaction with environment. Through primordial elements augmented by technology, enlivened by ritualistic yet playful gestures, Sauvage's work contemplates, tunes and connects with both the material and the immaterial in keeping a fragile balance between hazard and mastery.

The porcelain bowls were made at CRAFT, ceramic research center in Limoges, recycling the molds used to make ceramic bells. The underwater microphones, hydrophones, are usually used to capture the sound of sea animals.

Selected videos : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9EcTzGFZI> <https://o-o-o-o.org/about/>



At La Ferme Du Buisson, Paris, 2018



Performance view at FON Festival in Barrow In Furness, UK, 2018 / Photo : Stephen Harvey

In Curved Water

Installation, 2010

ice, porcelain bowls, water, ropes, hydrophones and sound system



Installation view Temporäre Galerie in der Quartiershalle Campus Rütli - CR², 2014 / Photo : Jens Ziehe



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In Curved Water was created in 2010 as a sound installation using one of Sauvage's musical techniques - water drops playing a random percussion. Crystal ice blocks, tied with knots, suspended in the air, ceaselessly fall water drops, as they melt, into twelve porcelain bowls of water. Hit by each droplet, the bowls and the water surface resonate, some of whose attacks are amplified and the others ring acoustically, creating a trompe-l'oreille effect blurring the auditory perception in the mixture of amplified and acoustic sound. As the tonality is defined by the quantity of water in the bowls, the melodies and harmonies gradually shift with the notes descending drop by drop and ascending by evaporation. The light penetrates and shines the mass of frozen water, resulting in a contemplative, lively and ever-flowing crystal shadow play.



Installation view at Gaîté Lyrique, Paris, 2013 / Photo : Patrick Rimond

Buloklok

Installation - blown glass, water, air pumps, tubes, hydrophones, sound system
2022, commissioned by Sonic Acts, Amsterdam



Buloklok is a sonorous timepiece assembled with underwater glass sculptures that emit ringing air bubbles. Drawing from the cowrie shells that Sauvage has been playing as instruments to produce bubble sound in the water, each sculpture is blown by a glassblower into an organic form with a hollow space inside.

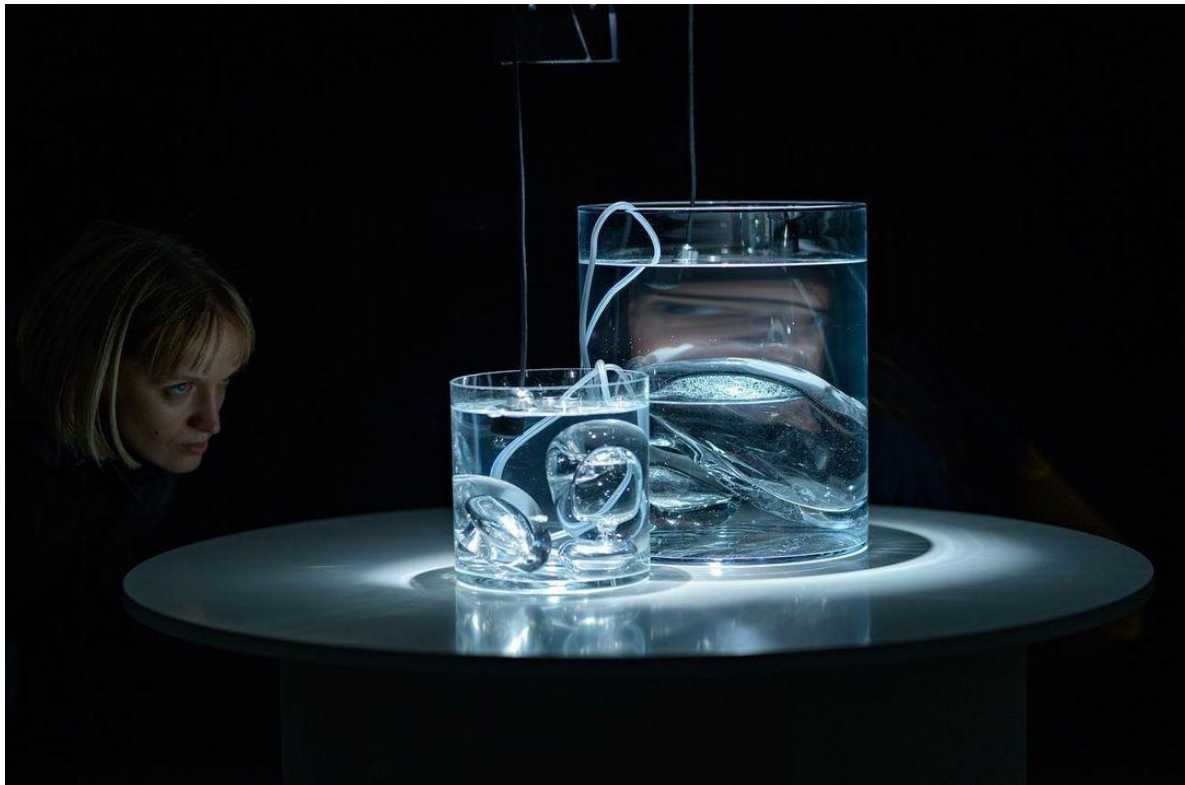
The sculptures bring out bubbles from their “mouths” each time the upper part of their cavities are filled with air, generating varied notes depending on the size of their cavities and the air pressure. As living bodies of different sizes have different breathing patterns and speeds, these bubbles give multiple pulsations.

Buloklok joins Sauvage’s longtime motif, clepsydra - water clock, that is considered to be the oldest time-keeping instrument, from the time when astrology was more important than horology, with its early form using water drops falling from a small hole of a vessel and with its most complex one employing various water chambers and automatically sounding objects such as discs, spheres and bells.

The study of clock history shows that, until relatively recently, time was defined by observing celestial bodies with seasonal and geographical variations. Time used to be elastic before the invention of arbitrary intervals called hours and minutes.

Buloklok is imagined as a metronome for poly-pulsating music. Complex and rather absurd music conducted by bubbles. It proposes an immersive journey of animated spheres being formed and transformed by myriad breaths and floating until they vanish one by one.

Glass sculptures are blown by Takashi Hamada and Silicybine.



For standing bells and amplified lake

Workshop / performance, 2022

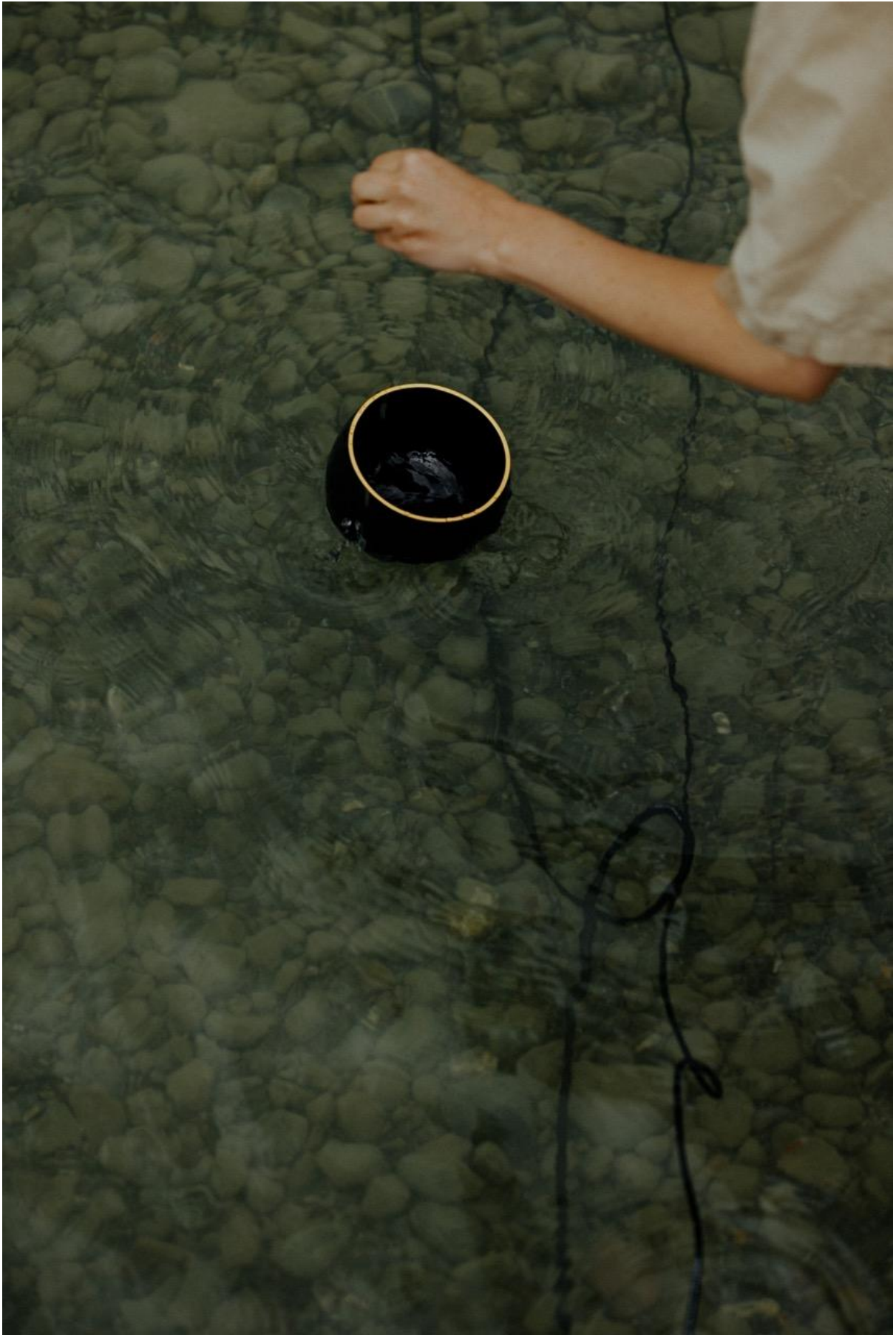


Often reduced to be presented as “tibetan” “singing” bowls commercialized in the context of the New-Age culture since the 1970s, standing bells are bowl-shaped inverted bells that originate in ancient China and are widely used in Buddhist music and rituals in Asia (rin or kin in Japan, qing in China...). In the workshop / performance, a collection of standing bells from different regions of Asia are played afloat on lake water and amplified by hydrophones set on the lake floor.

Commissioned by Sonic Topologies, the piece is to be performed in the shallow water near the shore of the Saffa Insel, the small artificial island on the Lake of Zurich, which was made by a group of women as part of a feminist exhibition in 1958.

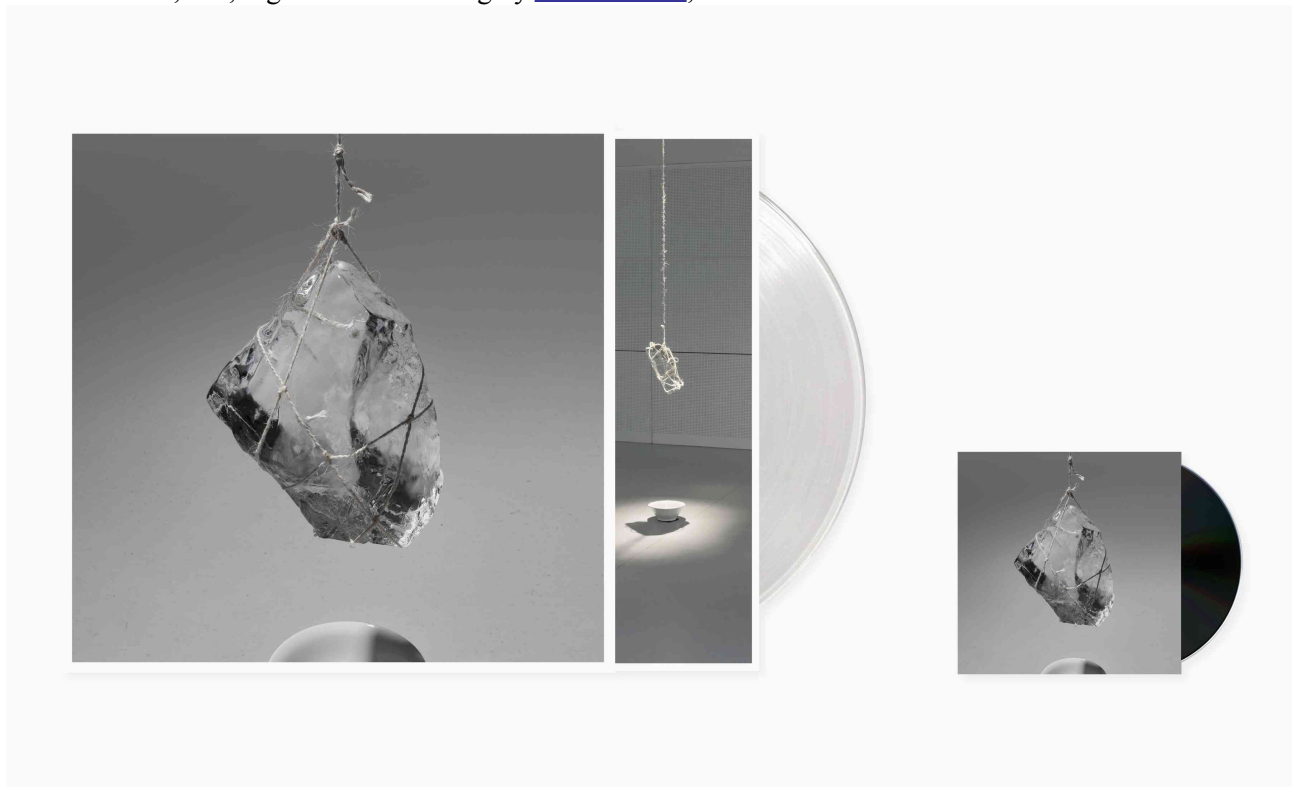
The workshop is intended to be an experimental process to collectively shape a composition from a sketch proposed by the artist. Participants will explore different configurations of listening systems using several types of microphones and diffusion / monitoring devices, as well as methods of performing, between improvised and composed, focusing on fluid movements of materials and environmental situations.





Musique Hydromantique

released as LP, CD, digital and streaming by [Shelter Press](#), 2017



Musique Hydromantique is the second solo album by Tomoko Sauvage archiving many years of her performance-based practice on the waterbowls – the natural synthesizer of her invention, composed with porcelain bowls filled with water and amplified via hydrophones (underwater microphones). While her first album *Ombrophilia* (released on and/OAR in 2009) was studio-recorded /composed work, *Musique Hydromantique* is about experimentation and improvisation with the environment – acoustics affected by the architecture, temperature, humidity and the human presence.

For more than ten years, Sauvage has been investigating the sound and visual properties of water in different states, as well as those of ceramics, combined with electronics. Water drops, waves and bubbles are some of the elements she has been playing with to generate the fluid timbre. Since around 2010, hydrophonic feedback has been an obsession for the musician – an acoustic phenomenon that requires fine tuning depending on the amount of water, a subtle volume control and interaction with the acoustic space.

Calligraphy was recorded in a genuine echo chamber, with about 10 second reverbs, situated in a former textile factory. Like an endless exercise to draw perfect curves and forms floating in the air, the subaquatic feedback frequencies are pitch-bended with the mass of water sculpted by a hand changing its quantity. *Fortune Biscuit* is about the singing bubbles emitted from the pieces of ‘biscuit’ (porous terra-cotta). Depending on the texture of the surface, each biscuit makes different sound : insect and animal voices in a forest, motors, crying babies changing pitches and rhythms while absorbing the water... *Clepsydra* (meaning water clock) features Sauvage’s classical technique, a random percussion with dripping water. She tunes the waterbowls by adding and removing water, making flowing glissando, to find the balance point in ever-changing tonalities.

Just as the flow of water is subject to a number of variables such as temperature and pressure, water clocks mark a time that is shifting and relative. However, slowness dominates throughout the album as a result of favoring the full resonance of the instrument, leading to a path to experiencing timelessness.

Hydromancy is a method of divination by means of water. Unpredictable bubbles and water ripples become oracles. Evaporation and acoustic space constantly play a chance operation. Through primordial materials and ritualistic yet playful gestures, *Musique Hydromantique* questions contemporary divination.

All the tracks are live-recorded without electronic effects or editing. They were recorded during the night or very early in the morning and the whole album is to be listened to during that period of a day.

Fischgeist

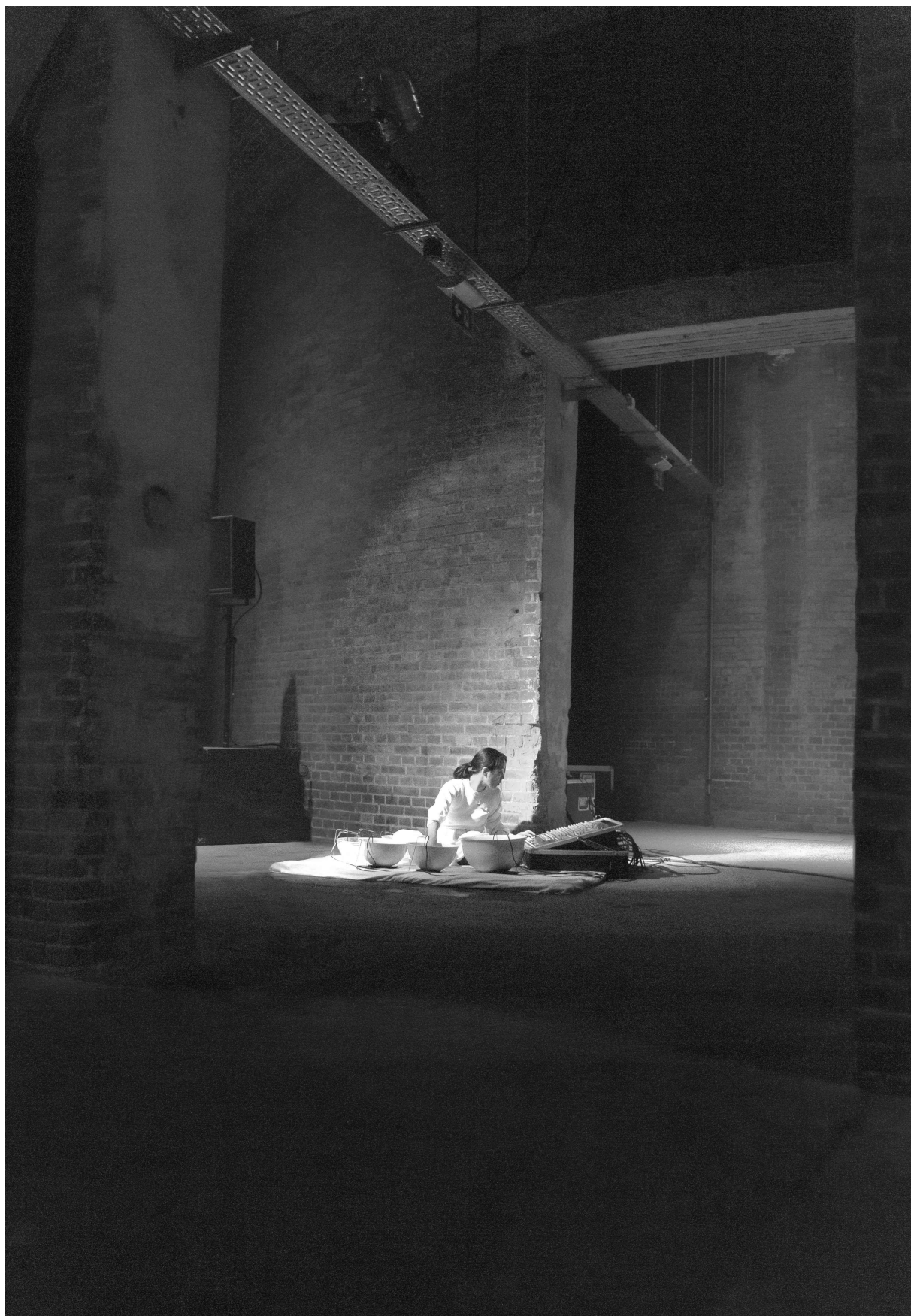
Edited on vinyl, digital by bohemian drips, 2020 Listen to the album on [WIRE magazine](#)

Fischgeist was recorded in a former water tank in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg in August 2019. The nineteenth-century brick building consists of five layered circles, with a spiral staircase in the middle leading up to an exit to a hilltop. Inside, it's humid and cold, the temperature always around 8–10 °C. The building's acoustics produce a long reverberation that lasts up to 20 seconds.

‘One day between recording sessions, a man, a passerby, wanted to look inside the building. He told me that it used to be full of fish. For a second I imagined a huge round aquarium with loads of fish swimming around in circles. Then I realized that he meant dead fish were kept there, to be sold on markets during the GDR era. But the image of fish swimming in the space stayed with me.’

Animated by formless matter – water, electricity, sound – Fischgeist celebrates a phantasmagoric journey, as the souls of aquatic lifeforms find their way out of the labyrinth of the water tank.





Pierres Animées - Singing Bubble Observatory

Video, sound, water, pigment, aquarium, 2019



Installation view at STATE Studio, Berlin, 2019

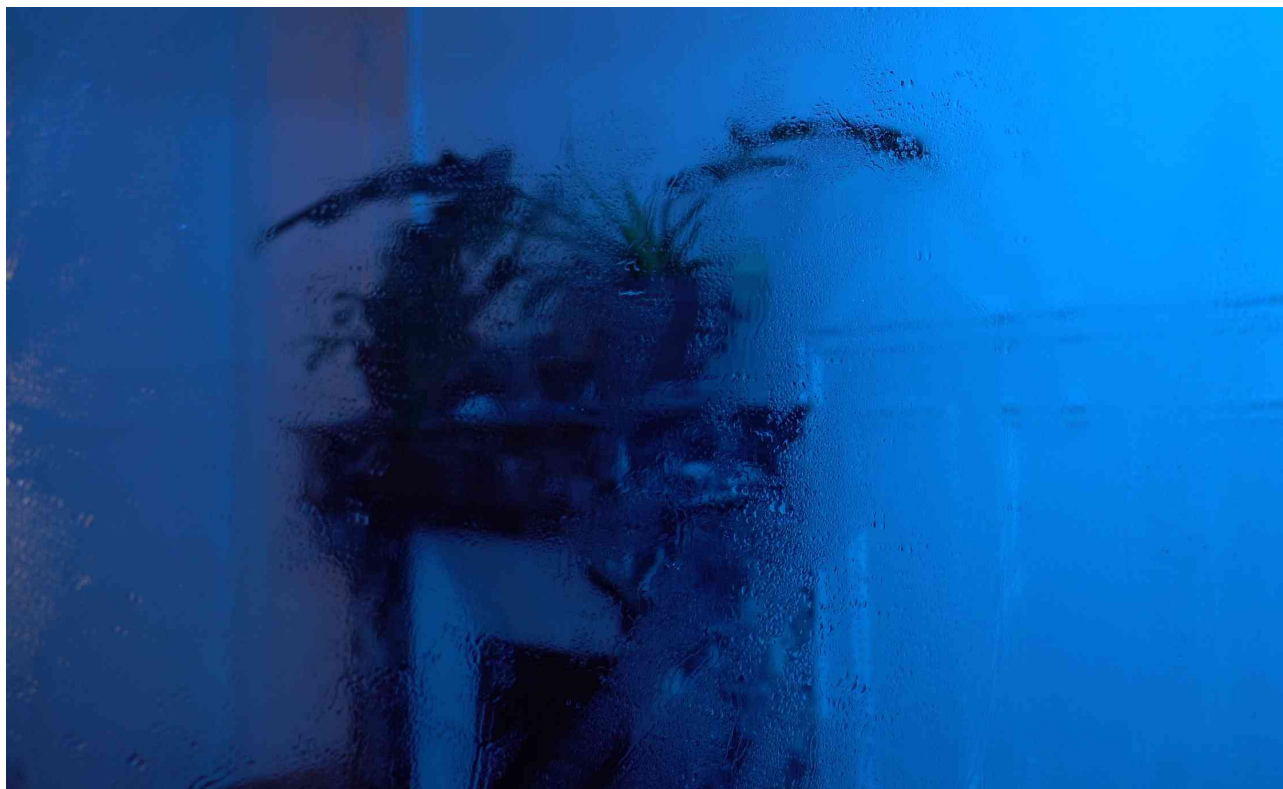
Drawing on her long-time musical practice of amplifying tiny sound of bubbles with hydrophones, Sauvage captured images of the bubbles emitted by stone-shaped porous terra cotta using a macro lens. The work is commissioned for an exhibition POWER CAGE, dedicated to Jeanne Villepreux-Power (1794 - 1871), a French self-taught marine biologist and inventor of the aquarium, and is inspired by her essay "Observations sur l'origine des corps météoriques, aérolithes, bolides - ou pierres qu'on dit tombées du ciel", on her repeated experience of witnessing falling meteors in Sicily.

Barrissando

Video, sound, 2020

Commissioned by Japan House, Sao Paulo

<https://vimeo.com/502330282>



Cartography of vibrational patterns

Video, sound, 2020

Commissioned by Japan House, Sao Paulo

<https://vimeo.com/505851380>



Performance for Noguchi

Performance commissioned for the exhibition Noguchi, Barbican Centre, 2021

Video documentation : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ODMoTZKm1M>

Inspired by Noguchi's interest in both classical Japanese *Gagaku* and the emergence of electronic instruments such as the Theremin, Sauvage performs an electro-acoustic response to the Noguchi exhibition using two of the sculptures themselves - *Tsukubai* and *Mountains Forming* - as well as her ceramic waterbowl instruments to generate a soundscape accompanying the exhibition.



