

1. Where the Beginning Meets the End

One of my favorite t-shirts is emblazoned, in an art deco font, with the phrase “Circular Energy Is Real.” It was made by Chris Johanson, an artist whose work often concerns a barometer of mood and tones of interpersonal interaction. The sentiment has always seemed elliptically karmic—a straightforward what-goes-around, comes-around type of thing— but it is perhaps fitting that when I wear it, people always ask me what it *really* means.

You could consider the form of Terry Berlier's *Where the Beginning Meets the End* as a musical, sculptural iteration of that t-shirt slogan. It's a round table that has the capacity to foster togetherness and broadcast circular energy. Engaging with this object, alone or with others, is something that involves movement along its perimeter. Unlike a square table with sharp corners, curves invite more active engagement, the boundaries are more gently delineated. You want to cling to and follow its contours, and in the process make a joyfully atonal noise.

The piece is constructed with a whole range of scavenged material, not the least of which being the keyboards of a piano, which is reconfigured into a starburst arrangement. Along with it being an instrument, it also implies the circularity of recycling. Berlier made the piece while an artist-in-residence at Recology, the San Francisco dump's impressive art program. The materials she has scavenged have gone through the cycle of those green arrows, 'upcycling' into something new and wonderful.

The apparatus is exposed. You can see the armatures of piano mechanisms, and the operative wires amassing into a red, Christmasy tangle. It's a mixture of funky analog materials-- the wood seems friendly in its lack of varnish—and the slickness of digital technology—the sounds of piano notes are recreations that

emanate from speakers somewhere in the room. An impressive degree of computer programming must be in effect to make the sounds work properly. But above all, there is a keen sense of social dynamics. The piece's masterful circularity is an invitation to engage and play a tune that is best made in concert with others.

2. **Acoustic Locator**

The act of grafting and merging object, sound, and motion are literal and figurative features of Berlier's work. The form of this piece resembles a cannon crossbred with the horn of an old Victrola. It suggests the boom of a weapon, yet the sculpture remains silent and still. The possibility of movement is implied by its large spoke wheels (imagine it barreling down a grassy hillside in battle). It is in fact based on an actual sound-locating device that predates the invention of radar. During World War II, the Japanese military used locators that resembled giant tubas on wheels.

Berlier manages a hybrid between weapon, a musical instrument and bodily enhancement. *Acoustic Locator* is an object that we want to engage with, or at least imagine getting closer to-- using it like a hearing trumpet (think Leonora Carrington and her surrealistically inclined novel). In that regard, Berlier's piece can be read as a tool, an extension of the body, a means of rendering it super human-- the Six Million Dollar Man or Woman, antique cyborgs who can blast a message out to the world.

Here Berlier also engages a dialog with the work of Allora and Calzadilla, an artist team who so often explore uses of sound and its relation to the military. As noted above, *Acoustic Locator* first resembles a weapon. It's like a piece of American history, an object that looks like it heard its share of encroaching troops during the Civil War, the sounds perhaps absorbed into the wood surfaces of the horn, and traveling through the carved column. But what happens when such a thing is set in an interior space, in a sense decommissioned from military use?

Might it be observing, engaging an auditory surveillance of our presence in the gallery? Do the lily-like curves of the horn capable of hearing a viewer's growling stomach or a whispered comment? This is a static object that implies a sense of action. It is a collector of abstract noise as well as intended speech. It hears the building creak and quietly groan. These are sounds that are benign unless someone chooses to interpret them as evidence or language, as indeed we invariably do.

3. When Comes the Sun

In times of global warming, the role of sunshine is ever more complex and multifaceted. It warms us, makes us healthy (Vitamin D!) and gives us a rosy glow, though it can also damage with those darn UV rays. Ultimately, it is a source of power and energy. Here Berlier uses the sun to generate sound— a music box-like version of a classic Beatles' song, *Here Comes The Sun*. The title of the sculpture, with the shift to the word *when*, speaks to a less certain condition. It's a piece that changes through atmosphere. It was, fittingly, first created in Norway, on a residency where the weather was blustery and turbulent. It was conceived in a place where gray skies are common and the warming rays were far and few between. When, indeed, would the sun come out?

Berlier was interested in harnessing the power of natural light, to make that electricity apparent visually and aurally. A solar panel collected energy to activate this mandala-like work, a circular motion that expressed the rhythm of the weather, which there was usually slow and perhaps a little moody. , When enough rays were present, the zithery sound of taut guitar strings strummed with a little piece of a plastic water bottle would be activated. Installing the piece in Palo Alto, in the California sun, generates a very different vibe. The rays are abundant here, and while perhaps a reflection of drought, the condition imparts an almost manic exuberance to the project. The song pings with energy, moves quickly, with a kind of optimism. The sound sculpture brings the outside in, suggests the sentiments that we attach to the atmosphere. It even urges

consideration of the room: we look up to see the skylight in the stately gallery space, while the object itself is low to the floor. It spins with a sense of melody, though at the quickened pace it's difficult to hear George Harrison's voice in the mix. We sharpen our focus to hear a familiar tune, and link it to technology and sunlight, ingredients in abundance in this location.

4. This Side Up, Handle With Care

This house is a mirror of itself, and a skeleton. Its beams are exposed, and it seems to balance on points. The roofline of an A-frame seems awfully pointy and seemingly unstable, teetering on a rooftop. At the same time, the tension of piano wires does something to instill a sense of engineered sturdiness, like an experimental suspension bridge from one idea of domesticity to another. The thin wires are lines that make that powerful sense of strain productive. The artist, it so happens, made this into a feat of engineering, signed off by professionals in architectural fields.

The piece was created for this particular gallery, and its scale escalates, reaches upward into the church-scaled interior (though it's interesting how it can exist elsewhere, in the open air, perhaps). It angles upward, its framed walls resembling cookie cutters in the contours of domestic geometry. There are three footprints incorporated into this structure, an abode that perhaps speaks to the residents of a home, a family whose lives merge.

This house is a large musical instrument. It generates sounds that fit in an experimental genre. With violin bows, you can coax strange melodies from the structure. It's more industrial than homey, as it is music that emerges from tension. These are subtle shrieks, moody sighs, and higher pitched expressions. At one point while I tried my hand at it, the coarse hairs of the bow began to shred, a residue of the exertion and unforgiving wires. This is an active interaction, and can be a lot of fun to create this strange music, putting your whole body into it. You have to reach and climb a bit to get to the upper levels,

where the sound is mellower. (Usually sounds become deeper the closer to the ground, but here that equation is reversed.) There's a roughness to the sound possibilities, and professional musicians can play it, pluck it, run a bow across it, violin style.

Every house creaks and sighs, here the situation is enhanced. Berlier is not interested in specific notes. This is more about house tone. This one resonates.

5. Homespun

Wood elements were turned on a lathe— someone tried their hands in woodshop. Applying a sharp tool to that spinning wood is an incredibly satisfying activity. The chips fly. *Homespun* is like a massive, amorphous corkscrew. It's an anthropomorphized piece of furniture gone wild. The elements that compose this sculpture are fused together from banisters and legs from old bed frames, tables, and chairs. It's reclaimed wood from places that have been demolished or at least remodeled. It comes from furniture that has gone out of style, its cushions squeezed out of life, their bodies gone to landfill. The piece extends from the wall, a conglomeration of firm objects that appear to be sinuous and curving. These lengths of lathed forms create innards snaking out from the wall and onto the floor, reveling in a slinky spinal shape as it rests on the carpet. Something like this could be an aberration--- an effect of toxic chemicals in spray-one furniture polish. In this configuration, however, they appear to be sturdy and full of life. Berlier enjoys working with old wood as much for the satisfaction of reuse as for the evocative history that has been soaked up by the material. She collects piles of similar things-- the Recology residency perhaps a perfect spot to engage that activity. The idea that there is still life in these materials is but one appealing aspect. This is like a spirit unleashed, an escaped reptile, from the house framing that's also here in the gallery. It's enjoying its freedom, the ability to dance through plaster walls and carpet covered concrete floors. The possibility of inhabiting various places at once is an enviable position.

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