

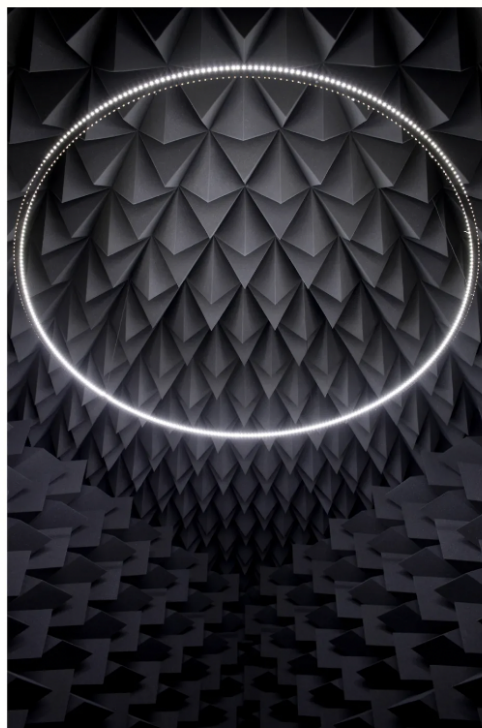
The Art Newspaper
8th February 2023



THE ART NEWSPAPER

A brush with... Haroon Mirza

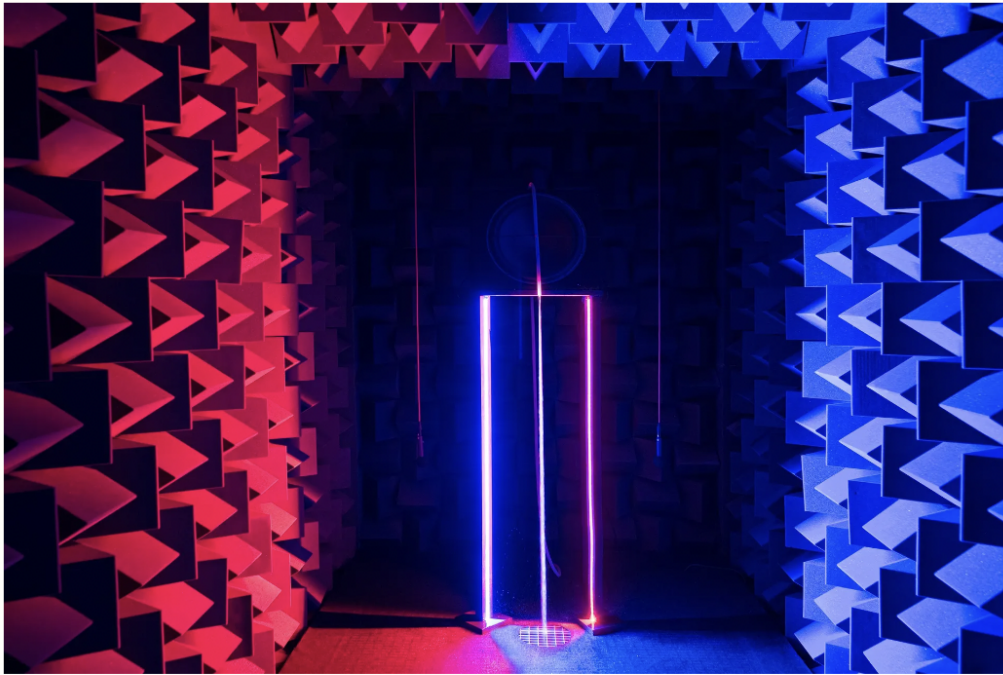
An in-depth interview with the artist on his cultural experiences and greatest influences, from Salvador Dalí to the Royal Academy's Sensation



Left to right: Haroon Mirza / Haroon Mirza's *The National Apavilion of Then and Now* (2011)

© David Bebbler 2021 / Courtesy of the artist

Ben Luke talks to Haroon Mirza about his influences—from writers to composers and musicians, film-makers and, of course, artists—and the cultural experiences that have shaped his life and work.



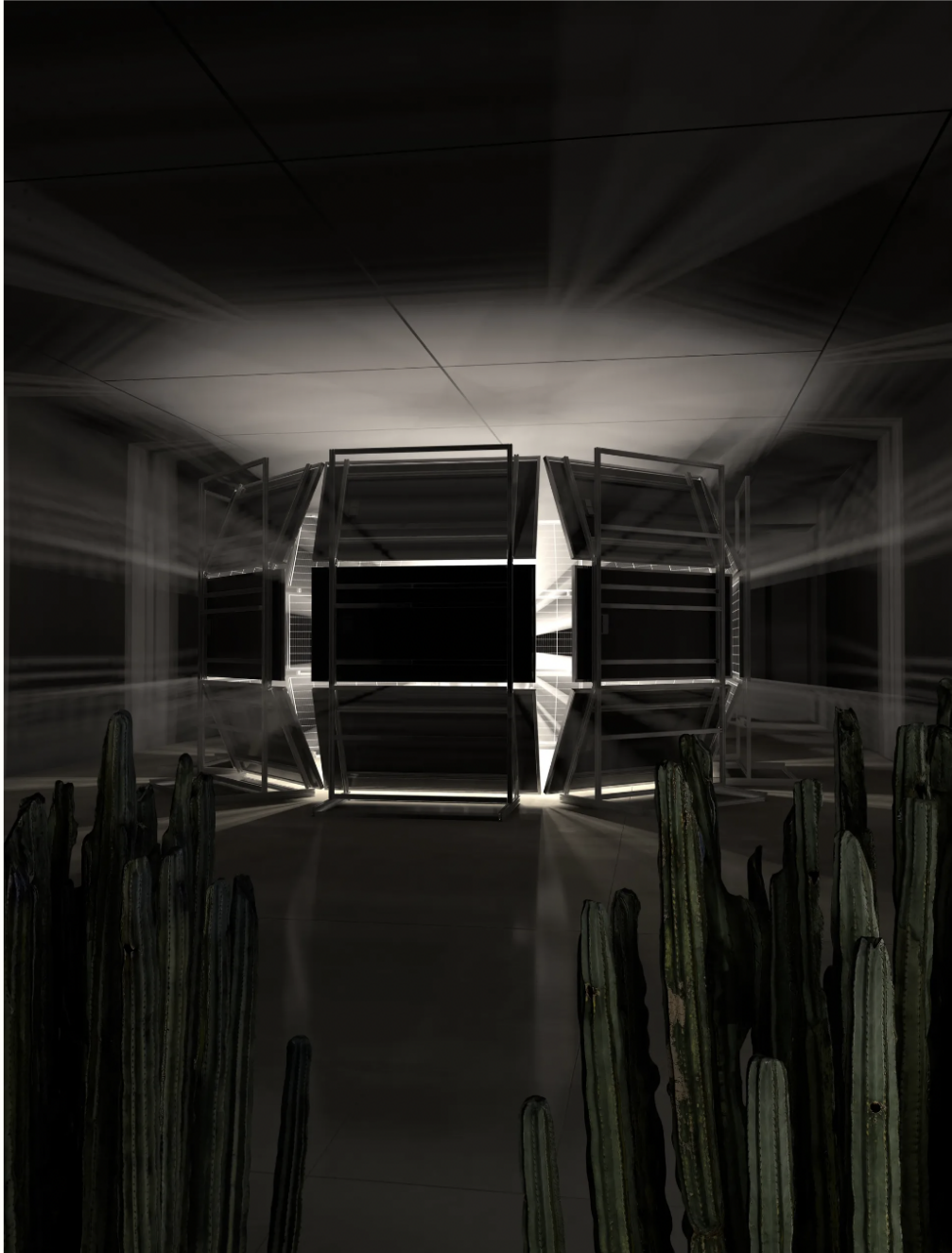
Haroon Mirza's /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ (Aquarius) (2017)
 Courtesy of the artist

Mirza, born in London in 1977, creates installations using sound, light, objects and video. These complex and evolving experiences immerse the viewer in varied sensory phenomena while building fascinating connections between their materials, formally and in the meanings they produce.



Haroon Mirza's /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ /\\\\ (Aquarius) (2017)

He reflects on his early interest in Salvador Dalí's sense of space and time; the impact of seeing the exhibition *Sensation* in 1997 at the Royal Academy in London; the relationship between science and science fiction; and the complex process of translating ideas from his head to a practical language. We gain insight into Mirza's studio life and daily rituals and he answers the ultimate question: what is art for?



Haroon Mirza's *Dyson Sphere For Schumann Resonances (Solar Symphony 13)* (2021/2022)
Courtesy of the artist

- [Haroon Mirza](#), Lisson Gallery, London, 24 February-8 April. You can listen to Haroon's Modular Opera EP at haroonmirza.bandcamp.com

Martin Cid Magazine
18th January 2023

MARTIN CID®
MAGAZINE



Haroon Mirza, Film Still © Haroon Mirza, Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

ART / EVENTS

HAROON MIRZA: |||. LISSON GALLERY LONDON

24 February – 8 April 2023 67 Lisson Street,
London



by Art Martin Cid Magazine · January 18, 2023

Haroon Mirza presents a solo exhibition of new works, entitled *|||*, forming a constellation of installations around the so-called ‘Holy’ or ‘Divine’ frequency of 111 Hz, which provides a sonic bathing experience that permeates the gallery spaces. Individual works incorporate light, moving image, sound and sculpture, while a living ecosystem deriving from one of Mirza’s solar-panel works ‘powers’ an ant colony and a fungus farm. This is his fifth solo show with the gallery and follows major museum and biennial presentations in 2022 such as the Lofoten International Art Festival in Norway and lille3000 in France, with a new commission also being unveiled during the first Islamic Art Biennale in Saudi Arabia that opens on 23 January.

In the main room at Lisson Gallery, Mirza presents a new video work in collaboration with filmmaker Helga Dóróthea Fannon, continuing his ongoing ‘modular opera’ – a malleable system of interconnected video and performance works – in which a tea ceremony is conducted using the active ingredient of the *amanita muscaria* mushroom. Also known as Fly Agaric, this deliriant strain of mushroom is associated with toxicity, dizziness and loss of coordination, rather than with the hallucinations of the psilocybin or magic mushroom. Its red-and-white, domed cap has a rich history and mythology, both in popular folklore associated with the poisonous toadstool that shrinks Alice in Wonderland and in its ritual usage by Saami and Siberian shamans, as a healing aid or a portal to another universe. Combining these themes of childhood make believe and mystic soothsaying, Mirza’s immersive installation intermixes vocals by soprano Sarah-Jane Lewis, a two-channel film featuring ingestion of the tea by a group of children (the artist’s included) on the night of Winter Solstice, alongside two tabla drums beating out a shamanic rhythm, representing another of the modular elements borrowed from previous bodies of work.

Sound acts as another connective thread, linking the entire show through the staging of an electro-acoustic ‘gong bath,’ for which Mirza has approximated the sonic frequency of 111 Hz using synthesizers and traditional instruments such as a Tibetan singing bowl and a bespoke harmonium from India known as a Shruti box. In addition to the meditative effect associated with vibrational group meditations, the 111 Hz frequency is said to have numerous therapeutic and healing effects, as noted in various medical studies. It also been discovered at prehistoric sites and ancient temples that once hosted spiritual events (for the Frieze Live programme in 2020, Mirza staged *MindFlip* during 111 hours of performance). This low, droning bass note continues in an LED floor work in the front gallery that flickers imperceptibly at the same frequency.

Upstairs, Mirza continues his series of *Solar Cell Circuit Compositions* that act as scripts to the film below, as well as another new work incorporating three glass chambers containing an ant colony and a fungal bed of organic matter for the leaf cutters to harvest themselves, while an array of halogen lamps provide heat and light to ensure the ecosystem’s survival and illuminate solar panels that activate sounds created by the ants’ movements. While our societies and social networks are meant to be horizontally structured, but are ultimately governed from the top down by the state, ants live and work in non-hierarchical colonies, with the queen as the solitary, benign figurehead. Rather than following her orders, ants are known to locate sustenance and organise mass movement using pheromone trails, much like the mycelial network that links plant life below the earth’s surface. These sentient paths have gone to influence optimisation algorithms, suggesting that the order found in the teeming chaos of natural systems may be driven by a heady combination of psychoactive substances and superorganisms, connecting divine and spiritual impulses of a collective consciousness with the rational and progressive urges of the technologically-networked individual.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Haroon Mirza has won international acclaim for installations that test the interplay and friction between sound and light waves and electric current. He devises complex sculptures, performances and interconnecting installations, such as *A Dyson Sphere for Schumann Resonances*, (2021-22) – an earthbound version of a hypothetical, off-world megastructure in which a sun-like central tungsten light powers a carapace of photovoltaic panels. An advocate of interference (in the sense of

electro-acoustic or radio disruption), he creates situations that purposefully cross wires. He describes his role as a composer, manipulating electricity, a live, invisible and volatile phenomenon, to make it dance to a different tune, calling on instruments as varied as household electronics, vinyl and turntables, LEDs, furniture, video footage and existing artworks to behave differently. Processes are left exposed and sounds occupy space in an unruly way, testing codes of conduct and charging the atmosphere. Mirza asks us to reconsider the perceptual distinctions between noise, sound and music, and draws into question the categorisation of cultural forms. “All music is organised sound or organised noise,” he says. “So as long as you’re organising acoustic material, it’s just the perception and the context that defines it as music or noise or sound or just a nuisance” (2013).

Haroon Mirza was born in 1977 in London where he lives and works. He has a BA in Painting from Winchester School of Art, an MA in Design Critical Practice and Theory from Goldsmiths College (2006) and an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design (2007). Recent solo exhibitions have been held at CCA Kitakyushu, Kitakyushu, Japan (2020);

John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK (2019); Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia (2019); Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China (2019); Ikon, Birmingham, UK (2018); Asian Art Museum, San Francisco,

CA, USA (2018); Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark (2018); Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK (2017); LiFE, Saint-Nazaire, France (2017); Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada (2017); Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil (2016); Nam June Paik Center, Seoul, South Korea (2015); Matadero, Madrid, Spain (2015); Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2015); Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland (2014); Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, Poissy,

France (2014); IMMA, Dublin, Ireland (2014); The Hepworth, Wakefield, UK (2013); MIMA, Middlesbrough, UK (2013);

The New Museum, New York, NY, USA (2012); University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, USA

(2012); Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2011) and A-Foundation, Liverpool, UK (2009). His work was included in the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale, China (2012) and the 54th Venice Biennale, Italy (2011), where he was awarded the Silver Lion. He was awarded the Northern Art Prize in 2011, the DAIWA Foundation Art Prize in 2012, the Zurich Art Prize in 2013, the Nam June Paik Prize in 2014, the Calder Art Prize in 2015 and the COLLIDE International Award in 2017 which included a two-month residency at CERN, Switzerland in 2018. In the same year, Mirza unveiled *Stone Circle*, a large-scale outdoor sculpture commissioned by Ballroom Marfa, Texas, which will remain in the landscape for five years. In 2021, Mirza's *The National Pavilion of Then and Now* (2011) was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

LISSEON GALLERY

Artforum

21 September 2022

ARTFORUM

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Agnieszka Gratzka at LIAF and the 2022 Bergen Assembly

September 21, 2022 • Bodø, Bergen



Visitors to LIAF gather around Haroon Mirza's *Message from a Star (Solar Symphony 12)*. Photo: LIAF.

LYING JUST NORTH of the Arctic Circle, Bodø is the gateway to the Lofoten peninsula. A regional hub, the town is gearing up for its stint as the European Capital of Culture in 2024. A two-and-a-half-hour layover at Bodø airport en route to Svolvær—the headquarters of the Lofoten International Art Festival (LIAF)—left me with enough time to take in the opening of Bodø Biennale, coinciding with LIAF's. The airport is, after all, only a fifteen-minute walk from the city center.

Curated by Elise Cosme Hoedemakers and Hilde Methi, who was the chief curator of LIAF's last edition, the inaugural Bodø Biennale, which is focused on visual art and dance, was set up with locals in mind, availing itself of public spaces dotted around Stormen Library on the waterfront. On opening night, I managed to catch a spectacular performance, by textile artist Malin Bülow, involving a dancer nestled at the bottom of a piece of taut opaque elastic fabric, drawn up high into the sky by a crane as part of *AER*—Greek for “wind,” a force to be reckoned with in these parts—commissioned for the biennial.



Artists Haroon Mirza and Jennifer West.



Artists Nolan Oswald Dennis, Raffaella Naldi Rossano, and Haroon Mirza.



Artists participating in LIAF.

ARTnews

Burning Man Opposes Geothermal Project, British Council Curator Freed by Iran, and More: Morning Links for January 14, 2022



BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS  January 14, 2022 8:14am



ZigZag, left, and Christ, kiss during a dust storm on the playa during the Burning Man festival near Gerlach, Nevada, on Aug. 30, 2008, at the Black Rock Desert.

AP PHOTO/BRAD HORN

The Headlines

NFT NEWS NOTICES. There always seems to be drama in the NFT space. **Quentin Tarantino** and **Miramax** are **feuding** over the director's plan to sell NFTs of *Pulp Fiction*—related material at auction, the *Wall Street Journal* **reports**. Miramax, which produced the 1994 classic, maintains that Tarantino does not have the right to mint the tokens. Meanwhile, former **First Lady Melania Trump** is **drawing criticism** for her plan to sell one of her hats, as well as **an NFT of a watercolor of herself**, *CNN* reports. "It's unseemly," an unnamed senior Trump White House official said. Lastly, **Wikipedia** editors have voted that, for now, NFTs should **not appear on the site's list** of the priciest art sales, with one voter noting the ongoing debate about their status as art, per *Artnet News*.

A FRIDAY ARTIST UPDATE. Sculptor **Hugh Hayden** is about to unveil **an ambitious new work** in **Madison Square Park** in New York, with 100 school desks sprouting branches. “My wood is like bone-in chicken, with the foot even—you’re still seeing this is a tree,” he told the *New York Times*. A bit west of the park, artist-composer **Haroon Mirza** just **opened a show** at **Lisson Gallery** that involves “a mini-sun made up of halogen lights that is surrounded by an array of solar panels,” he told the *Art Newspaper*. “These solar panels will be generating electricity which in turn powers an ecosystem of works” in the space. Mirza said that he is thinking about whether we are a “parasitic species” or “a species that is symbiotic with the rest of nature and the biosphere.”

The Digest

GOING PUBLIC. South Korea’s second-largest auction house, **K Auction**, **will be listed** on the nation’s **KOSDAQ** exchange later this month, the *Korea Herald* reported, and **Sotheby’s**, which went private in 2019, is said to be **exploring an initial public offering**, with **Goldman Sachs** and **Morgan Stanley** advising, *ARTnews* noted.

Aras Amiri, a curator for the **British Council** who was arrested on espionage charges in 2018 while visiting her grandmother in Iran and sentenced to 10 years in prison, is back in the United Kingdom after the nation’s Supreme Court ruled that her conviction was against Islamic law. [*The New York Times*]

The Americana collection of the late book dealer **William Reese** will be sold in a series of auctions at **Christie’s**, with a low estimate of \$12 million. The house is billing it as one of the most valuable single-owner book troves to ever come to auction. [*The New York Times*]

The **National Gallery of Art** in Washington, D.C., will close its East Building from the end of February until June for renovations related to accessibility and its atrium skylight. [*The Washington Post*]

The **Burning Man** organization has come out against a proposed geothermal project in Gerlach, Nevada, where it owns land, saying that it “would forever alter the environment, viewshed, and quality of life in the area.” [*Reno Gazette Journal*]

An original page of a 1984 *Spider-Man* comic that shows the superhero in a black costume for the first time sold for a crisp \$3.36 million at **Heritage Auctions**. [*Sky News*]

The Kicker

SKATING ON THICK ICE. For a three-day piece that runs through this weekend, performers are taking turns **dancing atop a 2.5-ton ice block** that has been suspended above the Sydney Harbor in Australia, the *Guardian* reports. Naturally, it will melt as they dance (for a total of nine hours each day). The work, titled *Thaw*, is the creation of **Joshua Thomson**, the artistic director of the theater group **Legs on the Wall**, who said he wanted “to push the conversation and the awareness around climate change.” Not exactly subtle! Also not exactly something you see every day. Thomson admitted that “yes, it has an element of spectacle.” [*The Guardian*]

LISSON GALLERY

The Art Newspaper

13 January 2022



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Haroon Mirza: ‘The question I’m asking is, what kind of species are we?’

As he opens a show in New York and looks forward to his participation in the Lille3000 festival, the artist-composer discusses his interest in energy and power in their many forms

Louisa Buck

13 January 2022



Haroon Mirza says he “got hooked on the sound of electricity as a teenager”; he thinks of his creations as compositions in a musical as well as artistic sense
Photo: David Bebber; © Haroon Mirza, Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Haroon Mirza works with sound, light and electricity to create kinetic sculptures, performances and immersive installations. These draw on myriad influences—scientific, historical, cultural—and respond to them with equivalent diversity. He won the Silver Lion for most promising young artist at the 2011 Venice Biennale with *The National Pavilion of Then and Now*, a triangular anechoic chamber (a space with no echo) lined with sound-absorbing foam and fitted with LEDs that generated a noise which intensified as their light brightened. It is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In response to a 2018 residency at CERN in Switzerland, the London-based artist co-produced a film and an opera incorporating music, poetry, incantation, archive and homemade electronic instruments, some built from discarded CERN laboratory equipment; in the same year his solar-powered *Stone Circle*, nine marble boulders fitted with speakers and LEDs, was permanently installed in the Texas desert following a commission from Ballroom Marfa. In *For A Dyson Sphere*, his second solo show at Lisson Gallery, New York, Mirza explores the technological pursuit of energy, a theme that will extend into a new commissioned work for Lille3000 in March.

The Art Newspaper: Can you explain the work you are showing at Lisson Gallery?

Haroon Mirza: I'm making a sculpture which is based on the concept of a Dyson sphere, a mega-structure that surrounds the sun or a star in order to harness the energy that a star produces. So in the gallery I'm creating a mini-sun made up of halogen lights that is surrounded by an array of solar panels. These solar panels will be generating electricity which in turn powers an ecosystem of works—sculptures that are both musical and of organic matter—that is “living” in the space.

What powers the central halogen sun?

The New York grid, basically. There was a plan to put solar panels on the High Line [park] above the gallery in order to have completely off-grid power, but it wasn't possible in the time we had. But the amount of power that we're actually using with the halogen lighting is pretty minor in relation to normal gallery shows.

What are you saying about the role of technology in the current climate crisis? While we seek technological solutions—of which the Dyson sphere is an extreme example—it's also our obsession with technological advancement that has got us into this current mess.

Yes, the pursuit of energy is also the pursuit of technological advancement, which is harnessed to the idea that technology will save us. But we have really strong evidence that technology doesn't necessarily save us but actually creates more extreme situations and more consumption. That's the dilemma. So the question I'm asking is, what kind of species are we? Are we a parasitic species that goes around absorbing all the resources of a planet until we've used them all up, and builds structures around stars, and then goes on to another star—is that our species? Or are we actually a species that is symbiotic with the rest of nature and the biosphere? For me this question seems to be at the forefront of many things in terms of the climate issue and the energy issue.

Although you could by no means be described as an eco-artist, this new body of work does seem to demonstrate a more direct addressing and interrogating of environmental issues.

Yes, I think so. Post-Covid, we've all had this massive wake-up call and the environment has become such a dominant thing right now. In a way, it's always been there as an undercurrent or a subtext in my work but now it's more overt. The thing is, it's everyone's problem, not just the environmentalists' problem. It's my problem, it's your problem and it's definitely our kids' problem, so we need to have a conversation about it. I'm not an environmental campaigner or an activist, and my work isn't about the environment per se; it's more about the biosphere. For me, the environment is a part of us anyway—we are what we do.

You are known as an artist who works with sound and light. But there seems to be a deeper and more enduring preoccupation with power and electricity that underpins everything you make.

It wasn't until a couple of years ago that I figured out that electricity is actually my main medium. Originally I got hooked on the sound of electricity as a teenager. I remember first encountering electronic music—Acid House music—whilst under the influence of LSD. It was then that my infatuation with the sound of electrical signals began. And that slowly evolved into two things: a love of music in general, as well as the sound of the electrical signals, and then that spawned a practice. But what's always going on underneath all that is a relationship to power, and to energy, and to the relationship between the two.

“

I'm very attracted to chaotic systems—waves, electricity, energy—that are present in nature

Can you elaborate on this multi-layered relationship?

Semantically they're different, but there's overlap between energy and power: you need energy to have power and electrical signals. The key for me is that it's a circuit: there's always a plus and a minus, which is conjoined to create the power. So the energy is like this twofold thing—it's a positive and a negative charge, or a ground and a positive charge, that comes together to create power. And conceptually and metaphorically and as an analogy, that's really interesting. Because in all of life and in the universe, ultimate power doesn't come from just one source, it's a combination of two or more things. Then philosophically this is interesting, because this negates monotheism. And then politically, those that have energy have power. There are just so many interesting things that can be extrapolated from this relationship.



Mirza's visualisation of his project *A Dyson Sphere*, with cacti present as "psychoactive flora"
© Haroon Mirza; Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

Electricity is a natural force: humans might generate electricity but it's natural and unpredictable. It's interesting that when you first started making art, this took the form of painted seascapes. Albeit in different forms, you still seem to be obsessed by waves and the unpredictability of nature.

Waves have been a preoccupation of mine since the beginning of my practice. There's a thread that's very clear, though I didn't realise it at the time. From ocean waves to soundwaves, from electromagnetic waves to brain waves, I'm very attracted to chaotic systems—waves, electricity, energy—that are present in nature, and how our perceptual apparatus engages with them. I started painting seascapes and some of my earliest works were computer-generated seascapes with soundwaves representing land masses; now brainwaves and various neuro-oscillations are a more recent interest.

What made you leave painting? You were a DJ for a while too, weren't you?

I still DJ from time to time—it's more of a fun thing to do because I just love music. I studied painting at Winchester School of Art and during my time there I ended up reading Marshall McLuhan and [Jean] Baudrillard, and McLuhan's essay on acoustic space. Then I started thinking about this sonic space that we don't see and how that also makes up a huge part of our reality and the perceptual distinctions between visual space and acoustic space. So I got interested in the pragmatics of acoustic space and then in visualising that.

At times you've described yourself as a composer, rather than an artist. Why?

When I started working with sound it was initially a by-product in my work. I started by asking myself, how can I make these objects that generate sound, but then also structure and layer that sound? And these became my goals in terms of my practice. Then I thought [that] what I'm doing is composition, simultaneously composing in time and space, both visually and acoustically. So the term "composer" just seemed a bit more appropriate—but now it's whatever works in the scenario. Artist is a blanket term but composer feels a bit more specific; a composer in a museum is different to a composer in a chamber, whereas a composer is an artist and so is someone who makes beautiful quilts.

Recently you were talking on a Gallery Climate Coalition panel about the role and impact of artistic problem-solving on the current status quo, in making people look at the world in a different way and finding significant solutions to existing situations. A case in point is the kickstarting of a wider awareness of solar energy in the oil state of Texas as a by-product of your collaboration with a solar power company on *Stone Circle*.

Yes, the starting point was: how do we power this thing in the desert? It wasn't: how do we get solar power into Texas where most of the energy comes from oil? But then the side-effect was amazing, it was, like: "Look, you can make energy from the sun!" And many [local] households switched to solar energy. And that's the powerful thing about art: artists being able to propose things that actually provide practical solutions to things or open up a new awareness of something, or open up a new way of thinking about something. Sometimes it happens as a very programmed part of the work, and all respect to those artists who make work that incites some sort of awareness. But the majority of the time it comes out of an accidental side-effect, and for me that's one of the most powerful things about being an artist.

Biography

Born: 1977 London

Lives: London

Education: 2007 MA Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art and Design; 2006 MA, Design Critical Practice and Theory, Goldsmiths College; 2002 BA, Painting, Winchester School of Art

Key shows: **2021** Liverpool Biennial; **2020** CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; **2019** John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing; **2018** Ikon, Birmingham; Ballroom Marfa sculpture commission; **2015** Museum Tinguely, Basel; **2014** Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, Poissy, France; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; **2013** The Hepworth, Wakefield; Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art; **2012** New Museum, New York; Camden Arts Centre, London; **2011** 54th Venice Biennale

Represented by: Lisson Gallery

• [For A Dyson Sphere](#) [↗](#), *Lisson Gallery, New York, 13 January-12 February; lille3000, Lille, France, 14 May-2 October*

LISSON GALLERY

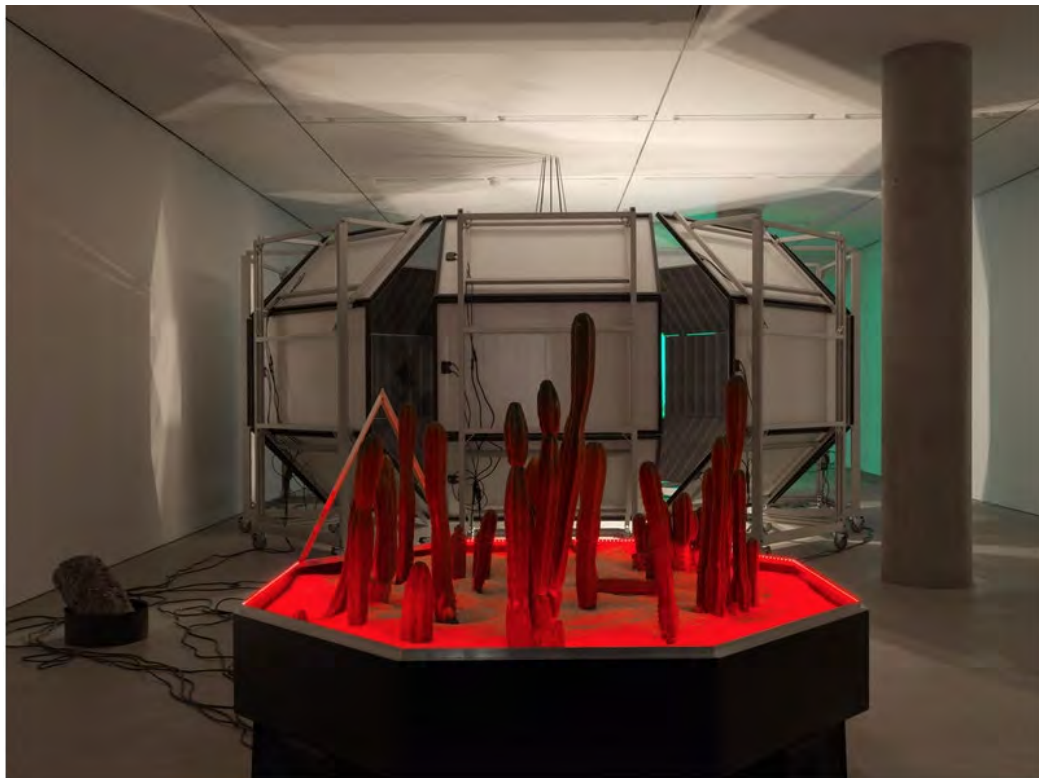
The Brooklyn Rail
February 2022

BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Haroon Mirza: *For a Dyson Sphere*

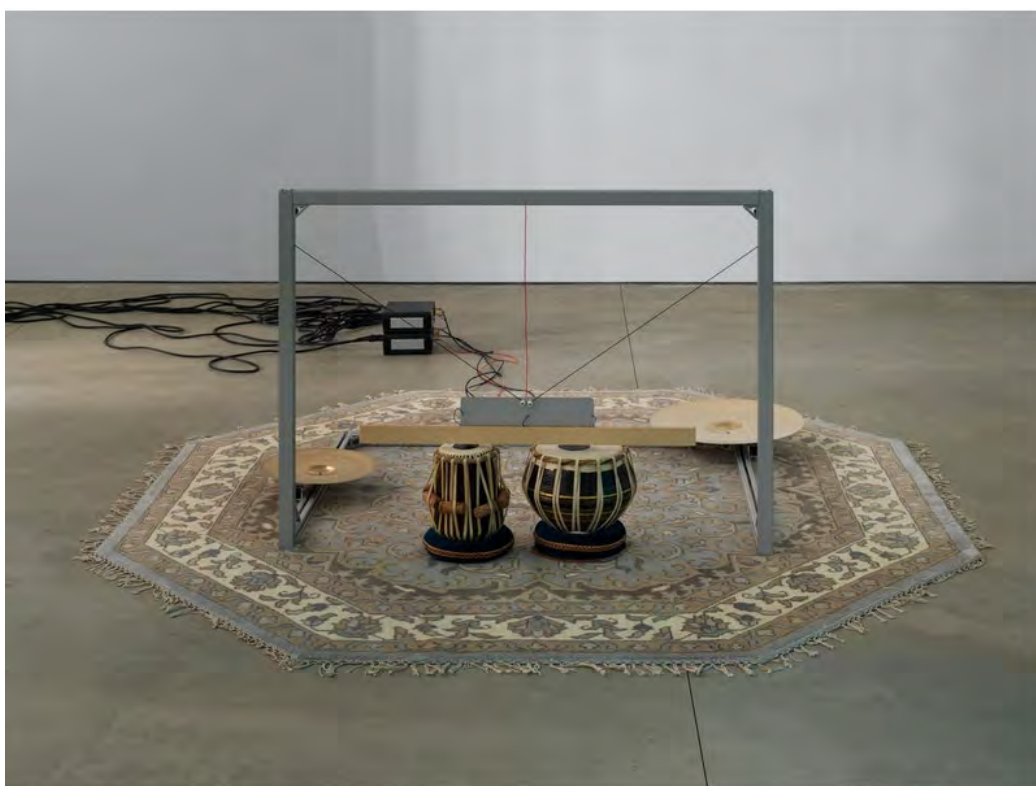
By [David Rhodes](#)



Installation view: *Haroon Mirza: For A Dyson Sphere*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2022. © Haroon Mirza. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Published in 1937, *Star Maker* is a science fiction novel by British author Olaf Stapledon. The titular Star Maker is the creator of the universe, and has an analogous relation to it comparable to an artist to her work. The novel features an orbital device for sourcing energy from the sun, later made more widely known by the English-American scientist Freeman Dyson in 1960, who also gave it its popular name. A reimagining of the Dyson sphere energy capture device by Haroon Mirza constitutes his Lisson Gallery installation and is the London-based artist's second solo exhibition in New York.

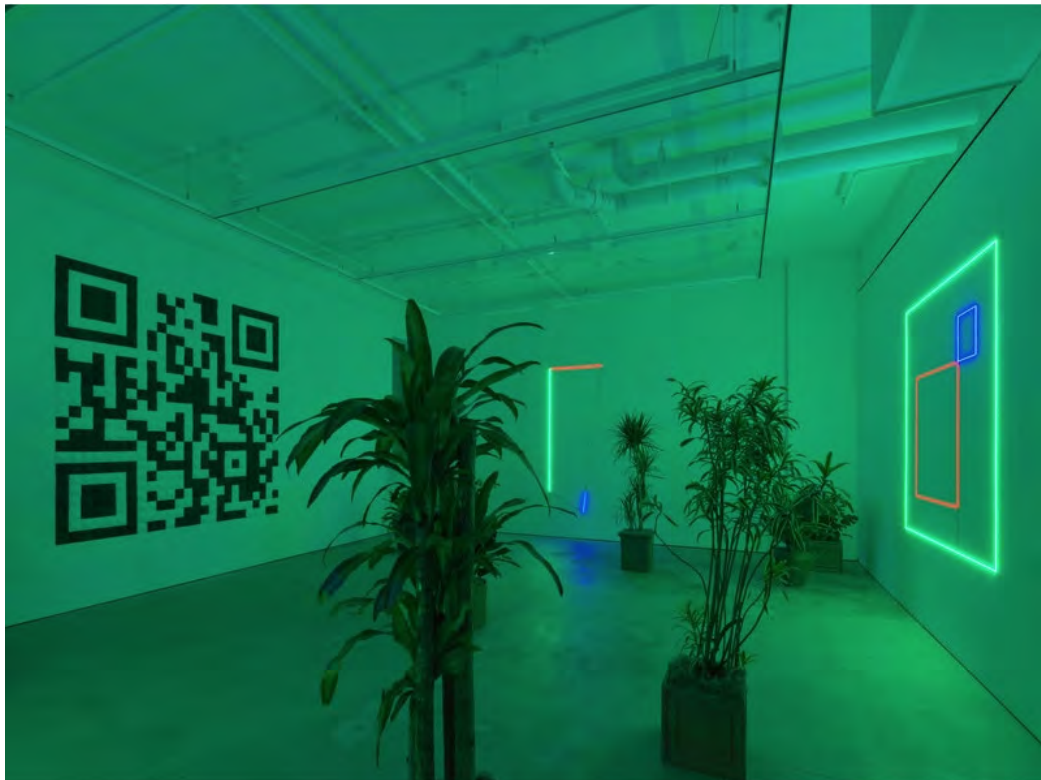
Mirza's immersive installations explore the relation between light and sound, using electrical current as a medium to act on a variety of devices that in the past have included musical instruments, household electronics, vinyl and turntables, pieces of furniture, video recordings and other existing artwork by other artists, for example works by Anish Kapoor and Channa Horwitz. The disruption of any assumptions about the nature of sound—noise or music; its structures or sources—are challenged on entering the installation. John Cage seems like a very distant precursor. Mirza has in fact described himself as a composer—the sounds are generated by his assemblage of sculptural objects using new and antiquated technologies, including energy-saving lights, LED lights, or old transistors.



Installation view: *Haroon Mirza: For A Dyson Sphere*, Lisson Gallery, New York. 2022. © Haroon Mirza. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

The central piece of this exhibition, the Dyson sphere itself, has at its core a number of intense tungsten lights surrounded at a short distance by a series of encircling solar panels. This is the energy center for a dependent network or solar system of other assembled sculptural objects. The sound systems and flora that constitute parts of these sculptures that are placed through the galleries, connected by electrical cables or the glow of LED lights, all rely on particular solar panels that are sequentially activated by receiving tungsten light; these subsequently and intermittently illuminate or issue sound. For example, two tabla drums on a traditional carpet are operated by a device

above the surface of the drums in response to variable electrical current: the percussive taps are mechanically produced, rather than by the blows of human fingers or hands. Another sculpture features hallucinogenic succulents and loudspeakers. In other places, plants stand independently and receive nourishing artificial light. This world, created in the galleries, therefore, includes an echo system sustained artificially and removed from any natural environment. Red, green, and white lights, together with movement and sound, are at once an organic and artificial hybridized context for the viewer.



Installation view: Haroon Mirza: *For A Dyson Sphere*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2022. © Haroon Mirza. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

So many questions are asked of our relationship to the planet on which we exist and the priorities for the technologies we choose to deploy. Are we going to create ever-new technologies to sustain life, or conserve the limited and dwindling resources that we already have? There is no labored pedagogy in Mirza's poetic approach; rather, the experience is playful, fun—it thoroughly involves and disorients the viewer, both sensually and intellectually. The disparate sounds, fluctuating colored light, and heterogeneous connected objects provoke sociological and philosophical thoughts—where are we in this fragile and changing environment we call the world? In previous installations, theological and political questions were asked, the looped sound and images sourced in regional conflicts. Considerations about the synthesis

of sound and light waves when merged as here, light converted to energy, wattage, then sound, add another complexity to our understanding of everyday experiences. It is understandable that there is so much interest in Mirza's work, his freshness, originality, and apparent joy in producing his installations (whilst also acknowledging that the collaboration necessary to realize them, including the skills of exhibition designers, technicians, and more recently live performers, is the work of a team of people) puts him in that position where we should look forward eagerly to his next works.

Fact Magazine
29 January 2021



Series, Audiovisual | By Henry Bruce-Jones

Haroon Mirza, Jack Jelfs and GAIKA conduct a shamanic ritual in The Wave Epoch

An audiovisual accompaniment to the concept album of the same name, set in a distant future in which the forgotten remains of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN have been rediscovered.

Back in 2018 artists Haroon Mirza and Jack Jelfs took part in a residency at CERN, the largest particle physics lab in the world and the home of the Large Hadron Collider. It was during their engagement with the ideas and technology involved in some of the most important scientific discoveries of contemporary times that they began to dream of the future, speculating on what civilizations thousands of years from now would make of the gigantic circular structure.

The Wave Epoch, a concept album, film and multimedia performance that has been presented at the Brighton Festival, Lisson Gallery in London and Ministry of Sound, is set in this distant future and imagines the kinds of rituals, practices and questions that would arise upon the machine's rediscovery. Enlisting the talents of GAIKA, Mirza and Jelfs incorporate music, poetry, incantation, archive material and original video footage into the piece, as well as DIY electronic instruments constructed from discarded scientific equipment gifted to the artists by CERN.

Arriving via OUTPUTS, a new experimental publishing imprint operated by hrm199, the studio of Mirza and Gaia Fugazza, and musician, synthesist and artist Nik Void, The Wave Epoch exists as a film and an album that is available digitally, as well as in the form of a limited edition physical version, which takes the form of a playable artwork made from machined card and foil by Haroon Mirza, housed in a 12" record sleeve.

The Wave Epoch is out now, on OUTPUTS. For more information about the label, you can visit the Bandcamp and follow the label on Instagram.

The Wave Epoch Credits:

Protagonists – Jessica Barter, GAIKA

Cameo – Jack Jelfs, Gaia Fugazza, Cheolwon Chang, Haroon Mirza

CERN Physicists – Sophia Borowka, Gain Francesco Giudice, Peter Jenni, Rolf Landua, Brenda Penante

God – Higgs Boson, Google

Spirit – N, N-Dimethyltryptamine

Director of Photography – David Bebbber

Camera – Gaia Fugazza, Haroon Mirza

Costume Designers – Jessica Au, Haroon Mirza

Electronics – Ben Barwise, Tom Mclean

Production Management – Matilde Cerruti-Quara, Stephanie Jong

Director & Editor – Haroon Mirza

Original Soundtrack – Jack Jelfs and Haroon Mirza

STIR World
30 October 2020



Haroon Mirza discusses *Stone Circle* at Ballroom Marfa, shares unheard anecdotes

In a contemporary take on the culture of stone circles, British artist Haroon Mirza creates a technology driven intervention in the landscape of Marfa, Texas.

by Shraddha Nair | Published on : Oct 30, 2020

"There's enough electricity for it to play 24 days continuously without stopping if it needed to. It's very unlikely that it doesn't play. Having said that, very strangely, on the night of its opening, it did not play. It never happened before and it never happened again. It didn't play and did this strange thing where it hummed. It was like it went on strike... There was a massive electrical storm that day, which wasn't normal for Texas that time of year, and there was hail and *Stone Circle* just did its own thing. It was disappointing for me because a lot of people had shown up. To this day no one has been able to figure it out, no engineers or physicists. It was very bizarre. The site looked the most beautiful I had ever seen it. You could see the sunset and the electrical storm in the distance. About half an hour before it was due to go off, a woman came up to me and she said her ancestors were the indigenous people from the area. She looked at me, held my arm, and asked, "Do you know what this land was used for? Time travel!" And she walked off. I remember thinking I don't know if this woman is completely crazy or if she's speaking some truth. It was very strange; I don't know who she was. And then the *Stone Circle* behaved the way it did. It was a very strange evening".

Currently on holiday in [Italy](#), Haroon Mirza's voice crackled through an unsteady phone line. When he shared this little anecdote, however, both of us burst into peals of laughter. Confused and curious, we began discussing theories on what this encounter could have possibly meant. Mirza is the kind of person who is casually funny and beguilingly intriguing all at the same time, jumping from theories on time travel to discussions about his recent work and contemplations about the structures of human culture and the universe which houses it.



Haroon Mirza's *Stone Circle* (2018) commissioned by Ballroom Marfa

Image: Rowdy Lee Dugan

An artist with myriad inspirations, from scientific, historical and cultural complexities to something as elemental as a piece of music or sound, Mirza's work reflects these influences with equal diversity. His oeuvre embodies dichotomies, sculpturally imposing while also being performative and invoking movement. His recent work, titled *Stone Circle*, mirrors these contrasts. A set of nine large black marble stones set into the desert soil of Texas, the installation is embedded into the landscape with an affirmingly permanent demeanor. Using solar panels to self-charge, *Stone Circle* comes to life every full moon with lights and sound. This audiovisual experience is in fact programmed electrical pulses. His fascination with electricity as a material is one which developed over the length of his practice, propagated by his interest in sound and music, which stems from years of working as a DJ. With little interest for the structural conventions of music, Mirza's attention eventually turned toward the democratic aesthetics of the contemporary art realm. In *Stone Circle*, this play between time and space creates a sense of transience and ephemerality, which starkly contrasts the Neolithic aesthetic of the installation, a marriage of human intervention and naturally driven technology.

Mirza shares, "Although the piece is highly technological with the solar panels and LEDs, it's also very much about the landscape, it's very much about nature. It deals with natural processes, the evolution of that stone starting from millions of years ago. The practice of placing stones in the landscape has been recorded at least for five thousand years, since the Stonehenge. As soon as humans started making tools from stone, they also started putting stones in the landscape, so it's a very ancient practice that I kind of wanted to continue and make it appropriate for today".



Stone Circle brings the ancient art into the 21st century
Image: Emma Rogers

Mirza continues, "I visited CERN for a residency and it struck me that what they do there, you could see as a ritual. They construct these magnificent, gigantic machines and the tunnel is 27 kilometre circumference, going through France, Switzerland and a little bit of Italy maybe and it's this incredible feat of engineering, the biggest machine ever made and it has these eight points in this gigantic circle where they have detectors. What they are trying to do is just figure out what's inside particles. You can think of that as a ritual, these people go there every day and collide these particles together, which is a really violent act just at a really small scale. The purpose is just trying to understand nature, pattern seeking. I think this is what early humans were doing with their stone circles".

As we continue to ponder the möbius-like nature of the relationship between culture, ritual and monuments, Mirza tells me how he hopes that *Stone Circle* eventually inspires a cult following of its own. He says, "Initially when I conceived it and started talking to Ballroom about it, I wanted to do it in secret and have no association to it whatsoever but for so many practical reasons we couldn't. I actually have this secret desire that it somehow gets forgotten and rediscovered accidentally. I am happy to remove the plaque".



Stone Circle is a manifestation of Mirza's affinity towards human driven cultures
Image: Emma Rogers

Stone Circle at Ballroom Marfa was originally inspired by a stone circle in Derbyshire, known as the 'Nine Ladies Stone Circle'. Legend says that nine ladies were dancing on the sabbath and hence were turned into stone. Mirza's nine marble stones are now embedded into the landscape of dry Texan expanses, making a mark not only in the space but in the larger history of human-made stone circles. "It's like Conway's Game of Life, it's like planting a seed. I did intentionally plant the seed but not knowing what the plant will look like," he concludes, in referencing cellular automata structure.

Although *Stone Circle* doesn't offer much in terms of visual engagement when not activated, it is precisely this unassuming nature which allows it to merge quietly with the ancient art of stone circle making. To experience the installation at its apogee, visit Ballroom Marfa on a full moon evening and wait until sunset for the self-contained, off-grid artwork to come alive.



Mirza posing for the camera

Image: Gaia Fugazza

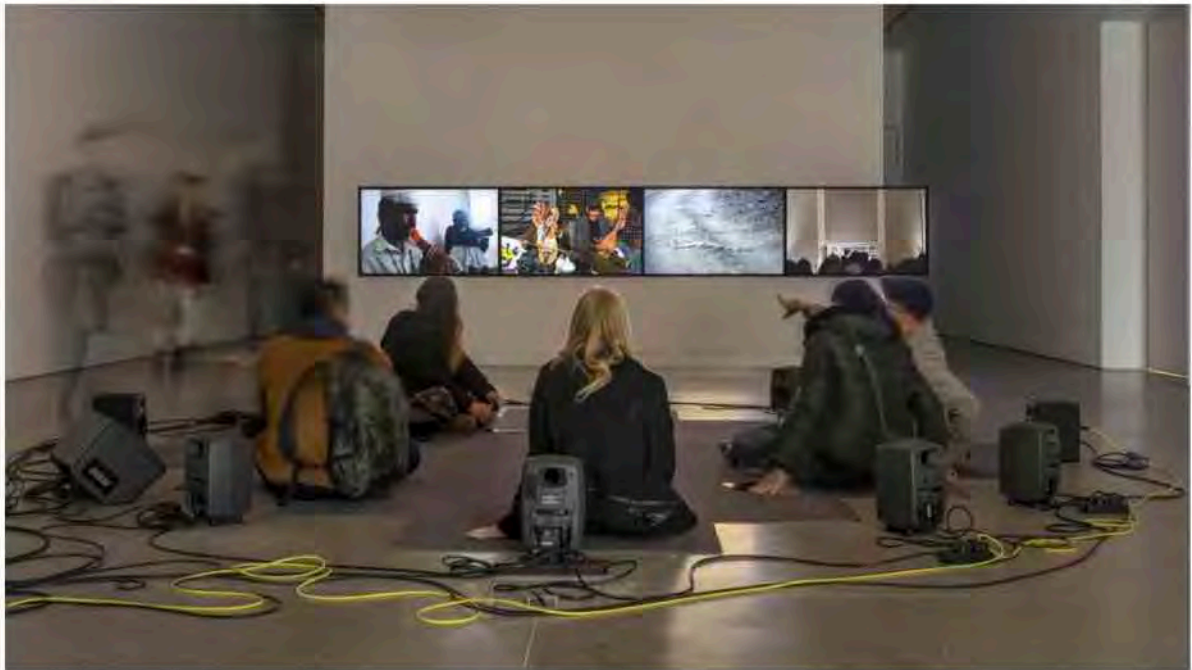
The Times

3 October 2020

THE  TIMES

Haroon Mirza: Waves and Forms at Aberdeen Art Gallery — a new wave of thinking

The installation artist Haroon Mirza's exhibition of four large-scale works is available to view virtually



Multiple TV screens form part of an exhibition by Haroon Mirza
THIERRY BAL/HAROON MIRZA/COURTESY JOHN HANSARD GALLERY, 2019

In the golden age of psychedelia and counter-culture, the author William S Burroughs, the artist Brion Gysin and the electronics engineer Ian Sommerville found a way to induce hallucinations without drugs. They created what they named the Dreamachine, a stroboscopic device made from a lightbulb surrounded by a spinning cylinder with holes cut in it to create a quick flickering motion. If you stood near it with your eyes closed, dreamlike images would form in your mind.

Fast-forward nearly 60 years and scientists have a solid understanding of the neurological reasons for these effects. The installation artist Haroon Mirza has created a fascinating work from them as part of *Waves and Forms*, a show inspired by various types of wave that is available to view virtually.

However, Dreamachine 2.0, which Mirza made in collaboration with the artist Siobhan Coen, in consultation with neuroscientists at Imperial College in London, is best experienced to its full effect when you're in the room with it. "Certain frequencies have certain effects, and they are related to neural oscillations, or brainwaves," Mirza says.

"We took certain frequencies and started working with them, and that unfolded into this piece. It has some very powerful visual and auditory effects. Some people don't like it because it can make them feel nauseous, and people see different things, but you do basically hallucinate things like geometric patterns, which scientists call entoptics."

The installation is one of four large-scale works. Another is *Pavilion for Optimisation*, which is effectively an echo chamber, or, more accurately, a reverberation chamber because there are no parallel surfaces, so sounds bounce around for longer than they would in a normal space. You find yourself in a white room that becomes darker and darker while white noise — the sound of a shower dripping water into a dustbin — increases in volume.

"It sounds like a powerful wave coming at you and then disappearing," Mirza says. "The inspiration comes from optimisation algorithms, which you might find in Google Maps and which find the fastest route from A to B. The programmers derive these algorithms from nature, such as in the way ants use pheromones to find a food source, and the quickest, most efficient route back to their nest."

A third installation, *Skip_loop*, is inspired by ocean waves and research showing that the average time spent in front of a painting in Parisian museums is six seconds. It is a high-resolution photorealistic animation of a wave rising and breaking on a loop, one of the intentions being to explore the relationship between seeing and looking.

The most complex piece in this exhibition is *Aquarius* (although technically it's called $\Lambda\Lambda$, the typographical symbol for the star sign). Its many elements include four television screens, each showing footage of important events relating to Britain's relationship with Europe, France's relationship with the rest of the world, and other scenes. Mirza is more interested in the astronomical realities of what happens when the Earth wobbles on its axis than in the astrological meanings some people derive from this, and is fascinated by the growing understanding of the events.

"It's a coincidence, perhaps, that now, as we move into this astrological era, scientifically we understand everything as waves," he says. "The way that we experience reality is a kind of wave function. That's the basis for the work."

Online at Aberdeen Art Gallery, until October 4; aagm.co.uk

LISSON GALLERY

The Sydney Morning Herald
13 September 2019

The Sydney Morning Herald

Sculpting sound and light: the unpredictability of electricity

By [Stephanie Bunbury](#)

September 13, 2019 —
12.00pm

Sometime during his time at Goldsmith's Art College in London, Haroon Mirza started working with electricity. You would have to say it's an elusive medium to choose.

You can't see it or touch it; it has to be tricked into buzzing or beeping with interference.

Mirza sets up sounds that trigger matching lights and lights that set off that clicking crackle in speakers; he will ramp up sound to the point of pain and then cut it completely, bringing darkness down with it.



British artist Haroon Mirza. GAIA FUGAZZA

His works can be spectacular or look no more exciting than a circuit board, but the experiences he creates can be unexpectedly visceral. "It's kind of like bringing an electrical signal to the forefront," he says, "in its fragility and its power."

We are sitting upstairs in his Hackney studio. A team works downstairs on a grid of screens, although I note they have resorted to writing Mirza's exhibition timetable on the front window where it can't be missed: an office planner, basically. Old school.

We are also surrounded by screens and wires, facing down a desktop Google gizmo that answers questions like the voice in Spike Jonze's film *Her*. "It's like one of these home things; they're really stupid," Mirza chuckles. "I mean, so stupid. OK Google! Are you absurd?" A young woman's well-modulated voice responds. "Me, mad? Nah!" Mirza shakes his head. "Ridiculous."

The Google toy features in *The Construction of an Act*, an immersive environment including live performances by dancers and musicians that Mirza has composed – the word he uses, comparing the experience to opera – as the centrepiece of his forthcoming exhibition at ACCA.

It is fascinating and baffling and I confess to being blindsided by a long account he gives of the murder of an Amazonian shaman that inspired the scenography, although he says viewers don't necessarily need to know anything about it.

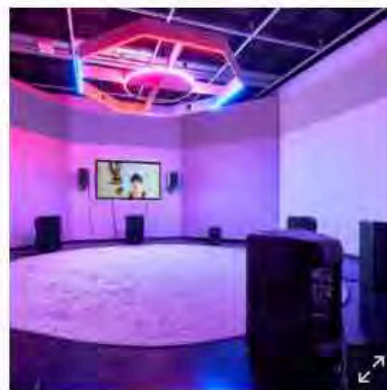
"Because the work itself is hopefully rich enough. But people can go there if they want. And I'm telling you about it because it's probably going to be more interesting than saying 'oh, there is sound coming from electricity', which is maybe interesting in itself but not what has compelled me to make the work."

The late shaman's ritualistic cures, involving psychedelic drug potions and singing, were marketed worldwide by a commercial organisation that put up images of her ceremonies on YouTube. Mirza was intrigued by her healing songs, which seemed to include predictions of her own death at the hands of a foreign visitor.

Some of the lyrics, which were translated into Spanish and then English, are included in a text he wrote that sets the stage for his own video and sound, the music that will be composed in situ by James Rushford and dance devised by Julie Cunningham. "I took each line and did my own interpretation of it, bringing it into a context of science," he says. "It's sort of sci-fi."

So many questions about the shaman's story intrigue him: how the Amerindians isolated the right plants to make psychotropic drugs; who is being exploited when foreigners are parachuted into a remote culture with the expectation of being magically healed; where to draw the line on cultural appropriation. If the shaman hadn't been promoted to suggestible Westerners, both she and her murderer would still be alive. "But this is the thing, because of this hysteria around cultural appropriation, it's paralysed the engagement with other cultures."

He is particularly alive to this question as a Londoner from a Pakistani family. "I'm 100 per cent guilty of cultural appropriation. Because I've had to assimilate a British culture." These are the ideas that are swimming behind *Construction of an Object*, he says, even if they are not explicit. "They inform the work, but then the work itself is this experiential thing, kind of like an opera."



Installation view of Mirza's Broken Symmetries. ROB BATTERSBY

And so we listen to two neurologists talk about the power of music, something the shaman harnessed; we hear and see Tibetan bells resonate; we hear a soprano singer push her voice around the scale in counterpoint to an increasingly complex rhythm of electronic beeps and blasts.

Mirza has had exhibitions of his high-tech son-et-lumiere installations all over the world; he has won numerous prizes, including the Silver Lion for most promising artist at the Venice Biennale. He has also been artist-in-residence at CERN in Switzerland, home of the Hubble telescope, where he had a marvellous time talking to physicists and raiding the recycling bins.

"There's probably things in this room they threw away. Like this sink I made from parts they threw out; you don't even need to rummage." But when he set off for art school, he says, he intended to become a painter. Seascapes were his thing; he painted them throughout his teens in photo-realistic detail. What happened?

"I don't know, it was something that happened accidentally," says Mirza, laughing sheepishly.

"There is something about the sound of electricity itself I find really incredible and I just got really enthusiastic about it one day. I'm not sure if this is the reason, but when I was a teenager I got into acid house, which was basically electronic music made with synthesisers. It's the same thing. And I got into that while I was doing LSD, so I think this combination of the psychedelic experience and the sound of electricity was probably forged back then!"

That was evidence of a misspent youth, of course. "But later on I remember messing around with toys and electronics and stuff and realising you could generate sounds from electronic things like fairy lights and LED lighting, meaning you could make the light and sound simultaneously from the same source. So now I compose with electricity, manifested in both light and sound."

And not as far from seascapes as you might think, he adds. "I was thinking about this recently because I'm doing this show about waves. Wave forms, sound waves, light waves, the electro-magnetic spectrum and brain waves but also the sea, you know. So there is something about waves I'm sort of obsessive about. Perhaps that's why I'm into quantum mechanics as well."

The idea of chained light and sound sounds schematic, but Mirza points out that even the electricity we get from the grid is slightly uneven. "It's never really 50 hertz; it sort of fluctuates between 48 and 52 just because of its chaotic nature. Electricity is just as organic as the sea, in a way.

"What we do with electricity is harness it and make use of it, but it's not actually that controllable – and I'm more interested in harnessing the unpredictability of it than the predictability."

"There's one sculpture in the show which is this lightbulb spinning around past a radio, which creates an interference. You hear this buzzing sound – you hear the electricity in it – but it's a really live, chaotic, unstructured sound."



Haroon Mirza's Pavilion for Optimisation, 2013. BETTINA MATTHIESSEN

Critics have described his work as beautiful. Some of it is, but some of the images I've seen are mostly wires. I wonder how this painter of oceans sees beauty now. "I have a bit of a love-hate relationship with beauty," he says.

"You can't define beauty, even if a lot of people have tried! There is a certain beauty to natural things and a certain beauty to real experience, you know, as opposed to mediated experience. I'm sure when you listen to this recording, it's not going to be anything like being here. So I think that's where beauty lies, in the experience rather than reproduction."



Mirza's work *Then and Now*, at the 2011 at Venice Biennale.

Similarly, for the artist it is all about the making of it. "I think this is the thing with paintings: beauty comes from knowing somebody made this canvas more than the image. I always look at the technical stuff as well. I always look at the image afterwards; sometimes I don't see the picture until I've worked out how it's made."

Although it isn't currently popular to say so, everything else comes down to the taste-makers. And who knows when or whether they're right? "All art is wearing the emperor's new clothes. To a certain degree it has to. I think it's important to accept that the emperor does have new clothes and they might be nothing. Because what can be more beautiful than the human body? That's the other side of that story."

***The Construction of An Act*, ACCA, September 14 - November 17.**

The Times
22 May 2019



ARTS

Five contemporary artists to watch: from Grace Wales Bonner to Oscar Murillo



Grace Wales Bonner
GUY BELL/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

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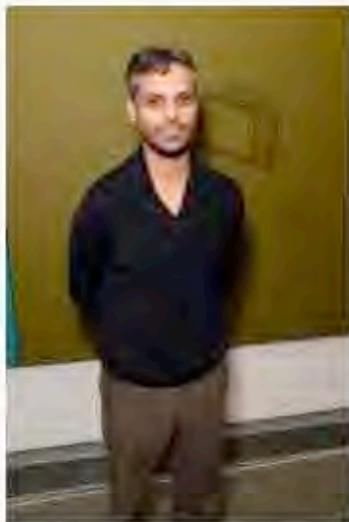


Save



Grace Wales Bonner

Don't look in all the old places, try the unexpected ones. The clothes designer Grace Wales Bonner, 28, is emerging as one of the art world's most fashionable names. Fashion is a way to explore ideas of identity and self-expression, she believes. Her artworks arise from the same cross-pollination of disciplines and cultures as her clothing designs.



Haroon Mirza
RICHARD YOUNG/GETTY IMAGES

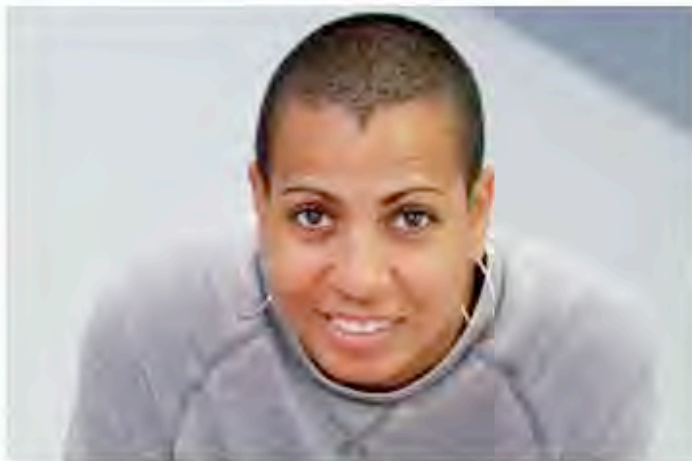
Haroon Mirza

Haroon Mirza, 42, has just had his most comprehensive show to date at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham. This Goldsmiths-trained conceptualist who makes fizzling and sizzling electricity his medium looks set to soar. Sound, light and electric current meet in kinetic sculptures, performances and immersive installations, but the messages are more subtle. Mirza sets up situations that deliberately cross wires.

Tom Hammick

A mid-career artist can suddenly take off. Over the course of 30 years Tom Hammick, 55, has earned a reputation as a colourist whose eerily

empty landscapes with their geodesic domes, anomic families and isolated houses conjured up a distinctive atmosphere at the same time as being safely decorative. Yet his most recent work shows him moving deeper and deeper into increasingly haunting territories. Think Peter Doig meets Edward Hopper. Dealers need artists like this not least because, even as they are quintessentially contemporary, they also produce work that can be hung on a wall.



Helen Cammock
MAGDA STAWARSKA-BEAVANIPA

Helen Cammock

Keep an eye on the art prizes. Helen Cammock, 49, draws from a wide range of sources — including blues music, the speeches of Enoch Powell and 1940s choreography — to look at how power relationships are discovered in even the smallest and most intimate details. She won the prestigious Max Mara prize last year and has since been on an Italian residency. What will she bring back to the Whitechapel Gallery in London for her show next month? You can be sure that lots of dealers will be looking.

Oscar Murillo

Reputations can go up or down. Five years ago Oscar Murillo, 33, exploded on to art markets that were looking for a modern-day answer to Jean-Michel Basquiat. His canvases, scratched, scraped and ripped and left crumpled on the floor, had plenty of visceral passion, but then he went a bit quiet. An exhibition at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge offers the opportunity for calmer reconsideration.

ArtReview

Haroon Mirza at Ikon, Birmingham

By **Daniel Wilson**



Ad_Infinato (detail), 2009, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Ikon, Birmingham

Haroon Mirza develops concepts of coherence, idea-transmissibility and cross-connectivity at their most lateral; being unable to scan the QR code for this exhibition's audio guide using my 2005 cell phone suggests that I might, in this respect, have to up my game. Mirza is known for tapping into LED lights to eavesdrop on their electrical workings; deprived of in-ear commentary, eavesdropping in the space seems the best alternative, which no doubt chimes with Mirza's interest in fostering acoustical primacy in a culture he has called 'ocularcentric'. An overheard rallying cry from students touring the show confirms Mirza's point: "wow, look!" brought a group to peer into the LED-lit depths of a watery dustbin straddled by a mangled, water-triggered Casio SA-21 keyboard – just one element of *An_Infinato* (2009).

That work – as well as its antecedent, *Taka Tak* (2008), also here – emerges from an era that saw the term ‘circuit-bending’ popularised through Reed Ghazala and Nicolas Collins’s instructional tomes advocating the hacking of commercial electronic audio hardware as a means of creating divergent new sounds. The influence is apparent in five silent lightworks, from the *LED Circuit Composition* series (2015–18), resembling waveguide antennae wired with Lecher lines, intermingling dielectric yantras: their deceptive audio cable ‘outputs’ are actually mains power cable inputs for the LEDs. The circuit-bending ethos serves as a springboard: Mirza ‘bends’ culture, notably in *Taka Tak*’s combination of tensions pertaining to Islamic strictures, street cookery and audiovisual technologies, and in *An_Infinato*’s ‘appropriations’, wherein a 1970s Guy Sherwin film projection electro-optically triggers the aforementioned dustbin-water-keyboard while also shredding the soundtrack accompanying the ‘flocking bats’ scene in Jeremy Deller’s 2003 film *Memory Bucket*, shown on a neighbouring screen. The elementariness of the appropriations makes them effective building blocks, collectively representing ideas of influence on the artist.

Influence, a recurring theme, is also apparent in the inclusion of Channa Horwitz’s scores. *A Chamber for Horwitz* (2015) draws on her partial *Sonakinatography I* (1969) score, realised by Mirza as a sequenced colour composition powered by the gallery’s lighting circuit, with the buzzy 50Hz harmonics of his trademark sonified LED components. These expressions of influence reach their acme with Mirza’s *Rules of Appropriation* series (and related 2018 pieces) addressing intellectual-property theft by incorporating fake Louis Vuitton accessories within solar-powered electronic melodramas, some paradoxically sporting both copyright and open-source logos. These works are almost conceptual short-circuits: self-referential nuggets born of Louis Vuitton’s own (unsanctioned) derivations of Mirza’s work in a recent window display installed by the Acierta design company. They raise the question: at what combinatory point do elemental natural principles become intellectual property? A solar-charged smartphone embedded in *Power to Instagram* (2018) provocatively displays Acierta’s Instagram posting of the suspect exhibit. The tensions in this room culminate in *Welcome to the Machine* (2018); onto the screen showing an Osman Yousefzada film, documenting Bangladeshi sweatshop machinations, Mirza has taped a soundmaking circuit, functioning as a soundtrack for the film and heard through wireless headphones.

Other engagingly referential works are shown, spanning ten years of artistic practice, but it’s interesting to find *The National Apavilion of Then and Now* exhibited. Originally a sitespecific piece for the 2011 Venice Biennale, it consists of a bright halo of LEDs suspended from the ceiling of a triangular anechoic dark room with a mesh grille floor (‘No high heels’ warns the entrance sign). The floor is presumably from where the sound emerges: a swelling, phased buzzy hum derived directly from the LEDs’ electricity. A casual viewer may overlook its essential associations with the Biennale, but its sheer audiovisual thwack remains stunning, approaching Op art as the viewer experiences persistence of vision when the O-ring shuts off, leaving silent darkness and visual disorientation, invariably prompting gallerygoers to vocalise its shape: “oh!”

Haroon Mirza: *reality is somehow what we expect it to be*, Ikon, Birmingham, 30 November – 24 February 2019

From the March 2019 issue of ArtReview

LISSON GALLERY

Financial Times
27 December 2018

FINANCIAL TIMES

Haroon Mirza at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham — a brilliantly coherent show

Sound, shamans and magic mushrooms appear throughout the artist's exhibition



Haroon Mirza's show features sound-based works such as this keyboard above a bucket that plays' when water splashes a metal ruler © Stuart Whipps

Jane Ure-Smith DECEMBER 27, 2018



In a dark triangular “padded cell”, Haroon Mirza plays games with our emotions. I stand with my back to one wall, a halo of white LED lights above my head, and submit to the place’s rhythm. The lights grow brighter, accompanied by a rising sonic buzz, and my spirits rise in tandem. Then boom! Light and sound cut out, and I’m enfolded for a time in a silent, inky blackness, before the cycle starts again.

“The National Apavilion of Then and Now”, which won the London-born Mirza the Silver Lion for Most Promising Artist at the 2011 Venice Biennale, is now the centrepiece of a fascinating survey of his work at Birmingham’s Ikon Gallery. For the artist, it was a way of talking about nations, borders and the art market, but for me the strength of the piece lies in its sheer visceral impact.

Sound and light have long been key to the artist’s oeuvre. Solar panels have become a leitmotif. But, really, his USP is his way of using electricity to make art.



Haroon Mirza's 'Taka Tak' © Stuart Whipps

Step outside the padded cell — an anechoic chamber, where neither light nor sound is reflected — and you're surrounded by more LED works, a series of wall-mounted "pictures" that highlight Mirza's minimalist aesthetic and his Duchampian love of found objects. Look closely at these works and you'll see a window frame, a turntable dust cover and some copper rings from Cern, the European nuclear research body where Mirza recently had a [residency](#).

And what's this? "Hibernal Solstice (LED Circuit Composition 27)" includes "*Amanita muscaria* spore prints on anodised aluminium", according to the notes. In what looks initially like an abstract work, Mirza has depicted Orion's Belt and Sirius in relation to the position of the rising sun at the winter solstice — and, off to the left, there is the faint outline of a magic mushroom.

The artist has picked up on a recent scholarly suggestion that the red-and-white-spotted hallucinogenic fungi used in shamanic rituals above the Arctic Circle might explain the origins of the Santa Claus story. ("[Santa Is a Psychedelic Mushroom](#)", ran the wonderful heading on a New York Times opinion piece last year.) The story clearly delights Mirza and, when we meet at the gallery, he regales me with details about female shamans in red-and-white costumes, stoned reindeers and the benefits of drinking reindeer urine.

“

**I've come to the conclusion
there's no such thing as
truth. There's only ever
belief**

The show is brilliantly coherent: a theme touched on in one piece will be echoed in another. The mushrooms, for example, which recur upstairs in a series of electro-etchings, are one of a number of works through which Mirza aims to raise questions about belief, not least in relation

to the Islamic faith he grew up with.

In "Taka Tak", the 2008 work that opens the show, he juxtaposes a video of a Pakistani street-food chef with a Sufi statuette spinning on a turntable to allude to the fact that music is, as he gently puts it, "sort of frowned on" by most strands of Islam. There's no place for dogma, religious or otherwise, in Mirza's universe. "I've come to the conclusion there's no such thing as truth," he says with a smile. "There's only ever belief. Truth is what you've understood to be true from your own experience — and you can never really prove or disprove that."

If themes and ideas bind the show, so too does sound. In “Taka Tak”, the metallic taka-tak of the man chopping his meat interacts with the burr of static from an old analogue radio alongside the Sufi statuette. Sound, in the form of a pulsing beat — can that really be bats’ wings? — brings unexpected harmony to “An_Infinato” (2009), a disparate, three-part work combining video footage from Jeremy Deller’s 2003 film of bats, offcuts from an experimental film by Guy Sherwin, and a keyboard above a bucket that “plays” when water splashes a metal ruler.

“A Chamber for Horwitz” (2015) uses sound as a shaping principle, but goes further in that it makes sound “visible”. As Mirza explains, Channa Horwitz, a Californian artist who struggled for recognition in the male-dominated art world of the 1960s, created “a cosmology around the number eight”. She assigned the numbers one to eight to colours, and on the basis of this plotted out highly complex abstract compositions on graph paper. For his tribute, which dominates the second floor, Mirza has transcribed several of her compositions and fed them into a computer to create an immersive “concert” of colour and light.

Much of the artist’s career has involved some form of collaboration. In this show, we see him build on Horwitz and borrow from Deller and Sherwin. A 2015 exhibition at Basel’s Tinguely Museum presented him as Haroon Mirza/hrm199 Ltd to highlight the involvement of his studio. And in the final room at Ikon, he returns to the theme, to make clear that there is both a right way and a wrong way to do it.

In five pieces from his “Rules of Appropriation” series, made this year, the artist combines his familiar solar panels with intentionally bad fakes of Louis Vuitton accessories. A levitating purse rotates slowly above a table. One handbag spins on a turn-table, while tucked into the pocket of another there’s a mobile phone displaying Louis Vuitton’s web page about “brand protection”.



The show includes pieces from Mirza's 'Rules of Appropriation' series © Stuart Whipps

The series is Mirza's ingenious response to window displays the French fashion house mounted earlier in the year in London, Milan, New York and elsewhere. Based on geometrically arranged solar panels, coloured cables, exposed electronics, objects spinning on turntables and LEDs, the displays, Mirza felt, were uncomfortably close to his own work. When he approached the company to discuss the matter, he says it refused to meet him. (Louis Vuitton has so far not responded to requests for comment.)

Whatever the outcome for him, the Louis Vuitton saga is to our gain in that Mirza has given us a room of clever pieces that prompt questions about intellectual property. Before we part, I ask him what has driven his work in recent years. "The desire to learn something," he says immediately. "The excitement of seeing a work develop and change and how it's all connected."

As a small boy, when given toys, he would always take them apart. In his quest for knowledge and enthusiasm for his art I can see that small boy today.

'Haroon Mirza: reality is somehow what we expect it to be', to February 24, ikon-gallery.org

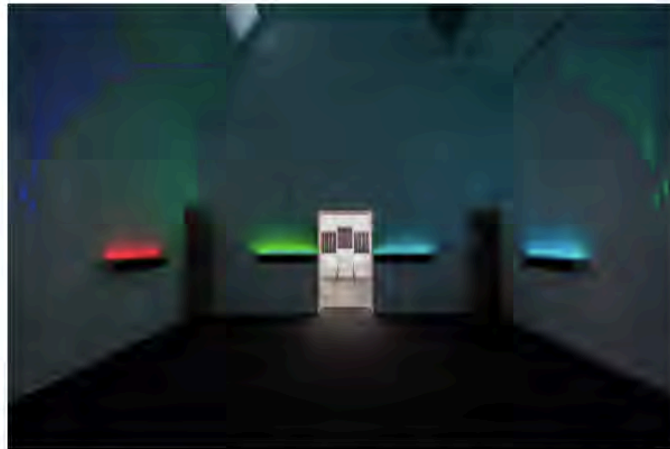
Elephant

06 December 2018

ELEPHANT

Haroon Mirza Gives the Gift of Sound and Vision

He had his work appropriated for the shop windows of Louis Vuitton, and came up with a suitably droll response at Frieze London. Now, Haroon Mirza is opening his biggest UK exhibition to date in Birmingham. Alice Bucknell meets the sound and light artist to talk fake handbags, naturally produced hallucogens and resistance to ocularcentrism.



Haroon Mirza, *Reality Is Somehow What We Expect It to Be*, 2018, Ikon. Courtesy the artist and Ikon. Photo by Handover Agency

British sound and light artist Haroon Mirza has had a busy year. With his monumental installation *Stone Circle* (2018) materializing like some alien creature within the barren desertscape of Marfa, Texas this May, Mirza has since shifted gears from trippy full-moon rituals into the murky territory of fast fashion and bootleg culture. Exhibited for the first time in Mirza's new exhibition at Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, *Rules of Appropriation* (2018) is a response to luxury fashion house LVMH's recent appropriation of Mirza's work under the guise of "tribute". In line with Mirza's continued interest in the mystical and the occult, fake Louis Vuitton bags appear to levitate off solar panels or twirl into oblivion atop record players, seemingly of their own volition.

At the launch of *Reality Is Somehow What We Expect It to Be*, Mirza's most comprehensive UK exhibition to date, I spoke to the artist about intellectual copyright, cosmic residue, the limits of our conscious understanding and the politics of sensory experience—even getting some psychedelic pro-tips in the process.



What does post-authorship and authenticity mean to you in your practice?

For a long time I've not been into the idea of copyright—for my own selfish purposes but also ideologically, economically and politically. I have always struggled with the idea of intellectual property—that an idea can be owned. I agree that for images, to copy an exact image, there is an unfairness there—but ownership begins to break down even when considering the subject matter. Does a landscape belong to you just because you photograph it? What about the camera, did you create that too? Of course not. Most of what we engage with is an act of collective labour and consciousness.

It's interesting to bring those questions into an art world context, like in your Louis Vuitton pieces, because it exposes how fragile the idea of intellectual property really is, particularly in today's post-copyright culture...

Absolutely—it was really important to me that two of those works went to Frieze before they came here. Because in the end, a piece of art is the ultimate luxury object, and the art fair is the ultimate luxury warehouse. If there is anything LVMH does, it's collecting luxury brands, in the same way that a collector might approach a fair. And when LVMH appropriates an artist's work it is really just an exercise of power that says, we can take this and use it however we want. And when the artist is like, "What the fuck?", they just offer to cover the cost of your next solo show and it's a done deal. It looks like a collaborative association on paper but in reality it's totally forced.

“It is really just an exercise of power that says, we can take this and use it however whatever we want”

These fashion houses have all the resources in place but they still don't know how to actually foster a collaboration, and that probably says more about the impact of globalization and massive corporations than it does about copyright or intellectual property.



Can you talk a little about the role of technology in your practice?

I use technology as a means of engaging with the unknowable, rather than being afraid of what you don't know. Not necessarily to know it, because that's impossible, but to be open and receptive to engaging with it—whatever that is.

Sometimes the process is very technical, like in the series of seven electro-etches and spore prints on copper that is included in *Reality Is Somehow What We Expect It to Be*. I took a bunch of different types of psychedelic mushroom caps and cacti and placed them on top of the copper plates. They release spores to reproduce, and leave what is essentially a fingerprint on the plates. For others, I shot a positive charge on the copper plate and a negative charge through the mushroom or cactus, and it started etching into the plate, oxidizing and literally melting into it.



And what about your collaborative relationship with other artists—particularly the late Channa Horwitz, whose drawings appear in this show?

Collaboration is a large part of my practice, and comes from a point of admiration; rather than trying to recreate a good idea in a modified way, I think it is much more interesting and fruitful to ask the artist to collaborate.

Since Horwitz passed away in 2013 I have worked with her Estate and Lisson Gallery to get an intimate look at her work. She produced these incredibly precise mathematical drawings, or systems, really. Her work was largely ignored while she was alive—no doubt because she was a woman artist working in the machismo California minimalist scene—but she was such a fascinating figure, always trying to be like a machine. If there was ever a mistake or slightest inconsistency in her work it would be scrapped.

One of her most significant works was the Sonakinatography series that worked around linear progressions using the figure eight. When I discovered Horwitz, I was working on a sound piece using 8-channel systems, so it really seemed like fate. A Chamber for Channa Horwitz (2015) responds directly to Sonakinatography Composition III (1996), effectively “playing” the composition through light as well as sound.

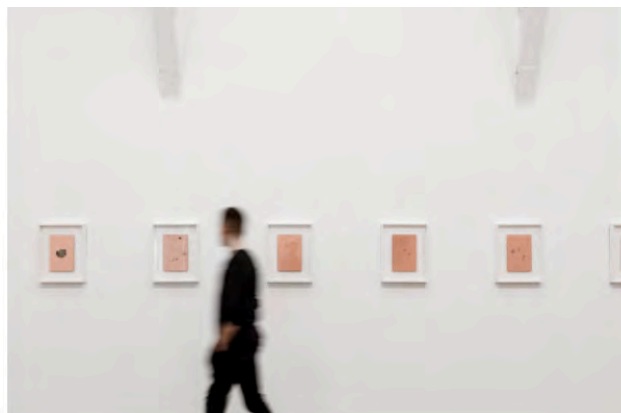


There has been a lot of recent engagement in the art world with multisensory experience, and a broader recognition that vision shouldn't be considered the master sense. What can sound do that optics cant?

Politically and ideologically, making things seen and heard simultaneously is a resistance to ocularcentrism—the idea of putting preference to what you see over the other senses. It is still quite a politicized thing to argue that the amount of weight given to what you see isn't necessary; of understanding vision is only one part of our experience of the world and what we perceive as reality.

A work that pushes back against ocularcentrism also resists documentation and selfie culture. You can't really reproduce a sound-based piece through imagery alone; the work is the experience you have in that place. So there is a resistance to digital reproduction and a little bit of social media as well—I mean, people are still gonna selfie, they'll always find a way around it. Actually, people have been trying to document my work with virtual reality and it doesn't really work—unless you have a total simulation with a surround sound system, you can't get close. But I think what would be way more interesting is to use VR to simulate a psychedelic experience.

“People are still gonna selfie, they’ll always find a way around it”



Finally, following your research into psychedelic rituals, what is your hallucinogen of choice, and preferred location?

I would say endogenous DMT, so DMT that is naturally produced within the body. I would take it around people I trust—I mean, a dramatic desert or forest would be good, but it's more important for me to be with friends—or by myself. I trust myself... I think.

Haroon Mirza: Reality Is Somehow What We Expect It to Be

Until 24 February 2019 at Ikon, Birmingham

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APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

Q & A

'Artistic disciplines are breaking down – and rightly so' Haroon Mirza

As he prepares for an exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham – his largest show in the UK to date – Haroon Mirza talks to *Gabrielle Schwarz* about 'composing' with light and sound, and his creative criticism of Louis Vuitton

1. Haroon Mirza (b. 1977)



How did you become interested in sound, light and electricity?

I've always been interested in sound and music. I've DJed from a very young age and been into various types of music – not making music, as I never had the patience for that, but thinking about how it's constructed, and the difference between visual space and acoustic space.

Then I started my Masters in design at Goldsmiths, and I remember we did a workshop with some architects, a hacking workshop. At this point I was becoming interested in creating autonomous systems

– systems that operate autonomously with electricity and natural processes. During the workshop I realised I could generate sound from LED lighting. Slowly it emerged that I could use sound as a compositional material. And then I found other things like energy-saving light bulbs, radio waves and other materials and technologies that I could play around with and use as sonic elements.

In the past you've described your role as that of a composer. Could you expand on that analogy?

Being an artist is quite a broad thing, so for me it was about trying to define what it is I do. And 'composition' is a word that's used in many disciplines, whether it's architecture, design, painting, sculpture, music. We live in a time in which those artistic disciplines are breaking down – and rightfully so. The only reason they have existed for the last few hundred years is because of the art market industry and economy.

The Enlightenment has a lot to answer for in terms of how it imposed the need for categorisation. That's why we have this thing called 'art', which is actually lots of



2. *Taka Tak*, 2008, Haroon Mirza (b. 1977), mixed media installation; duration 7:30 (loop), British Council Collection

things, but it's also none of them.

'Composer' is a word that I am comfortable with because I compose things – objects and materials and images in space, and sound in time.

The show at Ikon spans much of your career to date. Has it led you to think about how your work has evolved?

Yes, in a way all the works in the exhibition have been selected to show that evolution. Looking at them together has also really helped me to identify what you could call the 'signature' of my work.

There are a few things that have become apparent. One is the sound element – this process of generating sounds that are latent in everyday objects. Then there are all the electronics that control the work, also openly presented as part of the installation. Then there's the visual logic, which could be described as assemblage – of sound, objects and materials arranged in various ways. There are coloured cables, and objects on turntables, and in later work there are solar panels arranged in geometric forms that provide electricity to power other elements.

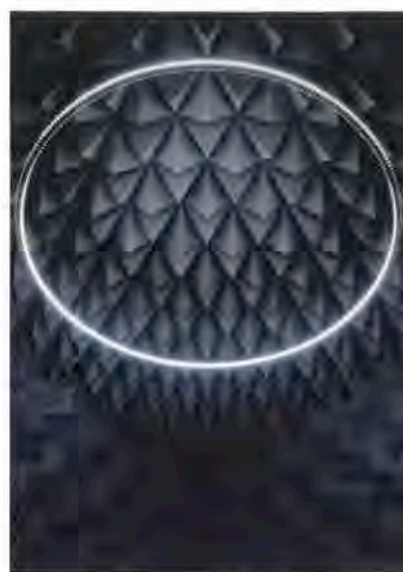
The newest works in the exhibition [collectively titled *Rules of Appropriation*] are these solar works that refer to, or are inspired by, a series of window displays that the fashion brand Louis Vuitton did, which were themselves very close to the work that I've been making over the last several years. There was no communication with the brand about this, they just did it.

What's your stance on appropriation?

It's always been a part of my work, whether I'm thinking about cultural appropriation, or appropriating materials like video or objects, or other artworks sometimes. I'm not personally into copyright and the protection of ideas – I think ideas are in the realm of knowledge and should be shared. But in the fashion industry it's all about brands and identity. Once in Venice, a long time ago, I saw a guy getting his arm broken by the police for selling counterfeit bags. At the same time brands think it's fine to appropriate things themselves. I don't think it's fair and correct that they do that. It's really worrying when something that you spend time and energy in developing for another purpose, for a more discursive reason, gets reduced to a gimmick and something that is used to sell objects, sell things.

How important to you is it that the ideas behind your work are communicated to the viewer?

It's not really important to me in the sense that that's what they need to get; I think there are layers of content that you can dig into if you wish. Some of my works are more experiential than others, which demand that you interrogate them a little more – works such as *Taka Tak* [2008; Fig. 2], which was named after a residency in Lahore in Pakistan and talks about the place of music in Islamic culture. And then there's something like *The National Apavilion of Then and Now* [2011; Fig. 3], which is a triangle-shaped anechoic



3. *The National Apavilion of Then and Now*, 2011, Haroon Mirza, mixed media installation (installation view at the Venice Biennale, 2011)

chamber – a room that absorbs all the reverberation in the space. It's also very dark so you lose a sense of where you are. There's a halo of light above your head and it gets brighter and brighter, and you hear the sound of the electricity that's driving it, and that gets louder and louder until it just cuts out. You're thrown back into darkness, you've got these dots in your eyes – phosphores on your retina – and you might sense a slight bit of tinnitus. It's kind of pure experience: it's a really minimal work, but so much happens in terms of your physiology and your psychological response.

Is minimalism an important reference point for you?

Yes, all the artists that are usually associated with minimalism, although they didn't really call themselves minimalists – people like Fred Sandback, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin – have a great influence on and relevance in my work, although their work really stops at light. Then you've got people who were doing the same kind of thing with sound, composers such as Philip Glass and Stockhausen and Steve Reich. So I guess the anechoic chamber was combining sound and light in a minimalist gesture – although that's just one way of defining it. **A**

Gabrielle Schwarz is web editor of *Apollo*.

'Haroon Mirza: Reality Is Somehow What We Expect It To Be' is at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, from 30 November–24 February 2019. (www.ikon-gallery.org).

The Guardian
29th May 2018

The Guardian

Stone Circle: the story behind Haroon Mirza's Texas Stonehenge



▲ Stone Circle by Haroon Mirza. Photograph: Ballroom Marfa

The solar powered project by the British artist brings light and music to the small town of Marfa, an unlikely destination for the art world

Ever since New York artist Donald Judd relocated to Marfa in 1979, this small Texas town has become an art destination.

It isn't exactly a place you'd expect to find a booming creative scene, but artists and galleries moved here in the 1980s to take advantage of empty spaces and cheap rents, while also paying tribute to Judd's legacy. The [Ayn Foundation](#) - which currently boasts Andy Warhol's *The Last Supper* - opened in Marfa in 1993, and art galleries like [Inde/Jacobs](#) and [Rule Gallery](#), as well as design boutique [Wrong Marfa](#), are all set up in Marfa. So is a landmark fake [Prada boutique](#) on the roadside, which is an artwork by

Just last year saw the small town of 2,000 people host Solange Knowles at a concert for Judd's Chianti Foundation.

Next up, Marfa will see a new solar powered Stonehenge project by British artist Haroon Mirza. The piece, entitled Stone Circle, is a set of black marble-like rocks in the Texas desert until 2023 (but potentially indefinitely). Every full moon, there will be a musical concert and light show in what Mirza calls "solar symphonies", with the first one held on 28 June.

"On full moons, the stones will start to play composed electrical signals, which will be quite musical," said Mirza over the phone from his London studio. "You will hear the electricity as sound."

The stone pieces stand in a circle, like the ancient Stonehenge or the famed Nine Ladies site in Derbyshire. Set in the high desert, eight chunks of marble will sit in a circle with the ninth as the "mother stone", charging the circle through a bank of batteries underground. "You see the electrical current as light and you hear it as sound," said Mirza.



The stones are made of marble shipped from Mexico, which light up at night. "During the day, they look like quartz crystals, but at night they glow with electricity," he said.

Mirza, who is the winner of the Silver Lion for Most Promising artist at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, has made solar-powered artworks in the past, like wall-works which generate sound from electricity, including Diet for a Duo (Solar Symphony 7) from 2015.

He recalls his first mystified experience with the Stonehenge as he drove past it decades ago: "I remember thinking it was an alien thing, like a UFO landing," he said. "It has an incredible aura to it, from a distance and up close."

It wasn't about replicating the Stonehenge, but presenting a new experience. "The feeling of being at the Stone Circle is a sense of commune with nature," said Mirza.



This artwork is more than just a journey out into the desert, as it also promotes solar power in

the south.

Freedom Solar, the Austin-based solar panel company, donated half of the solar panels for the project.

They're also offering a rebate for new solar customers referred through the gallery which is presenting this project, Ballroom Marfa. (Freedom Solar also offers local workshops for west Texans wanting to switch to solar power at home and at work.)

Surprisingly, it's working. "When I first visited Marfa, I didn't see one solar panel anywhere, which I thought was surprising because there is a lot of sun," said Mirza. "There is controversy around it, but there is potential for solar energy in that part of Texas and people have started installing solar panels, which is a positive move."

"It's a no brainer, actually," he adds. "If you live in a climate like that, it makes a massive difference."

The project was no easy feat, as Stone Circle took five years to materialize, and it didn't help that the marble was stuck at the Mexican border for nine months.

"I thought it was going to be easy, but it was complicated and expensive," said Mirza. "Sometimes it's better to be naive and have ambition and think big."

For the first full moon gathering, the marble 'stones' will light up and play sounds that call to mind electronic music. "I've composed the electrical signals," said Mirza. "It depends what you regard as music."

Even though the Stonehenge was used as a site for worship, there will be no sacrificial lambs. "People are perceiving and preaching it as a spiritual gathering, but I don't have an intention of it being a spiritual thing," said Mirza.

theguardian.com
22 May 2018

The Guardian

Installation

Tara Joshi

Tue 22 May 2018 12:44 EDT



729 210

The big bangers: grime smashes into the Hadron Collider



▲ Collision course ... Haroon Mirza, left, and Gaila at Cern; their work, called The Wave Epoch, will be at the Brighton festival. Photograph: Sophia Bennett/Cern

They rapped in its tunnels and played instruments made out of old science equipment. Could this be Cern's most amazing experiment yet?

'Anyone attending the performances," says Jack Jelfs, "will find themselves in a 12-dimensional quantum superposition." This superposition, adds the artist, will contain three overlaid elements: our mythic past, our scientific present and our unknown future. "So," concludes Jelfs, "you may wish to prepare appropriately."

Jelfs is talking about *The Wave Epoch*, a high-concept performance piece that is the result of four British artists spending time at Cern (the European Organisation for Nuclear Research), where particles are accelerated and bashed into each other to reveal the secrets of the universe. When it's described as "something between an installation, a music performance and a rave", *The Wave Epoch* might not sound like anything particularly new, but it all becomes a lot more original when you realise it was conceived 175 metres underneath the Franco-Swiss border in the presence of the Large Hadron Collider, the biggest single piece of machinery in existence.

For Jelfs, one of the artists who was in residence at Cern, the overlap between art and science has always been part of his work. He studied theoretical physics at Imperial College London before his full-time focus became sound, visual and sculptural work. Jelfs and fellow composer-cum-visual-artist Haroon Mirza (who considers electricity to be his main medium)

were the joint recipients of the 2017 Collide prize, awarded by Arts at Cern. Winners receive a two-month residency at the research site, tasked with bringing art and science into a collision of their own.



▲ The 1,000-year view ... Jacki Jelfs inspects some machinery.

While scientists at Cern deal with questions about the fundamental patterns of nature, the artists behind The Wave Epoch are interrogating the fundamental patterns of humanity: in this case, our inherent desire for gathering, ritual, music, performance and culture. The core question, says Jelfs, is this: "If the Large Hadron Collider was unearthed a few thousand years into the future, when its original purpose had been forgotten, how would people interpret it?"

To answer that question, Jelfs and Mirza enlisted the help of two other artists who joined them at Cern: electronic musician Gaika, whose work has previously included an imagined future, and (perhaps more surprisingly) Elijah, a DJ and promoter best known as co-founder of prolific grime label *Butterz*, who - since last year - has also been associate artistic director at Lighthouse, the Brighton-based art organisation behind The Wave Epoch.

"It's like the way people look at Stonehenge," says Elijah of the notion behind the project. "That could be like Cern 1,000 years in the future - maybe not even that far ahead. 'Why were people smashing particles together to work out how the universe started?' This is the biggest machine ever created, maybe nothing will ever be bigger. So it might be seen as a ritual site."

Describing how this concept will materialise as a performance seems a complicated prospect for the artists. Elijah says it is likely to change a lot over time, but does at least give some idea of what we might expect: "I was only at Cern for a couple of days, but you're struck by the scale, the amount of people working on it, the scientists. I couldn't imagine what would happen if you did film, art or music at that scale. That hasn't really happened before."

The Wave Epoch, he says, isn't an attempt to create something at that scale; it's more a reaction to the awe it creates. "What we're doing is somewhere between a screening, a gig and an installation, because that's all our practices together. We filmed inside the collider, which is kind of rare. Gaika did a rap and we filmed something that will resemble a music video."

The centre's idiosyncratic physicality is something Jelfs touches on, too. "Cern's been at the same site since it started in the 1950s," he says, "and there's a weird contrast between the often semi-dilapidated cold-war-era buildings and the incredible futuristic technology. The big, iconic experiments are deep underground, and can be visited only with special permission when the Large Hadron Collider isn't running. So a lot of our time was spent exploring old buildings, finding electronic and engineering waste, looking through archive material, making sound and video recordings."

All of this will feed into the live performance, along with music played on instruments built from hacked and repurposed objects that were used in experiments. There will also be clips of interviews with scientists. "We had some amazing conversations with the physicists," says Jelfs. "The open-source nature of the place is really refreshing. The scientists gave us much of their time and seemed genuinely interested in what we were up to."

“Scientists were asking me questions like: ‘Do you understand what we’re made of as humans?’

Elijah found these conversations hugely rewarding. "Scientists were asking me questions like, 'Do you understand what we're made of as humans?' I don't know all that stuff - and you don't have to. But it's just interesting that it doesn't need to be that far away from our work. If I'm thinking about making grime, there's overlap, even if it's not obvious."

The first performances of The Wave Epoch will take place at this year's Brighton festival, followed by further shows at FACT Liverpool. Young DJ collectives Shook and Off-Peak will be part of the initial performance, helping to realise this unique project that bridges art and music with incantation, anthropology, cognitive science, maths and neurobiology.

While the specifics of this rave-meets-installation-meets-particle-physics remain to be seen, for the artists it has already been an unforgettable experience. "At Cern," says Elijah, "I was questioning everything I know about everything I think I know about the world. The experience will affect my work for ever."

Flash Art
October 2017

Flash Art

Haroon Mirza

LiFE / Saint-Nazaire

In the leviathan body of an old submarine factory resonates the unsettling pulsations of "\\\\/\\\/\\\/", the reticular exhibition of Haroon Mirza in collaboration with architect Francesca Fornasari and musicians Nik Void and Tim Burgess. Replicating the thick envelope of the massive architecture of LiFE, an anechoic chamber encapsulates a scintillating fountain composed of two interlaced helixes of water, evoking the structure of DNA as well as the astrological symbol for Aquarius. Through an immersive experience, Mirza convokes different physical phenomena, draws unexpected bridges from micro to macro and gives life to a vertiginous network. Indeed, here sound creates spatial forms as a way to represent the fabric of reality, a reality in which everything can be modeled as waves. Superposing different aspects of truth (physical and spiritual), Mirza seems to challenge our capacity for apprehending the world around us through interconnected works and media. As Lavoisier once said: "Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed," a mantra that is reified throughout the exhibition, especially via four large screens displaying multiple video sources (Ayahuasca rituals, the historical match in which AI AlphaGo beat professional Go player Lee Sedol, etc.).

Mirza concludes the show by reproducing the geodesic device situated at the top of the LiFE building. Within it, interstitial sounds from the above-mentioned videos are rebroadcast and transposed as erratic flashing lights. While this complex system is stimulating on a sensual level, it also draws multiple arcs between avant-garde sound pioneers (Alvin Lucier), Pictures Generation practitioners (Jenny Holzer, Gretchen Bender), cybernetic visionaries (Nicolas Schöffer) and various media theories. Borrowing from various fields of knowledge and transforming the result with a vast interdependent machinery, "\\\\/\\\/\\\/\\\/" is an arduous proposition, spectacular in scale and palatial in its multilayered scope — a kind of Rauschenbergian *Oracle* (1962–65) for the age of artificial intelligence and new cosmological paradigms.

The Quietus
25 June 2017

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Craft/Work

Electric Dreams: An Interview With Haroon Mirza

—Robert Barry, June 25th, 2017 13:58

British sound artist Haroon Mirza takes over a former U-Boat base on the French Atlantic coast



*hrm199 : Haroon Mirza & Francesca Fornasari, feat. Nik Void & Tim Burgess, Vue de l'exposition
\\\\\\\\ Production LiFE – Ville de Saint-Nazaire, programmation hors les murs du Grand Café –
centre d'art contemporain, Saint-Nazaire, 2017, Photographe Marc Damage*

I'm standing in a geodesic dome, snapping my fingers. The clicking sound, of tension pent up and released between finger and thumb, multiplies instantly as the vibratory waves ricochet wildly around the dome. It sounds distinctly inorganic, processed, unnatural, like a ProTools plugin ramped way beyond any believable simulation, or a dense choir of geiger counters cosying up to an atomic pile.

Geodesic domes like this once promised the dream of a better world. For Buckminster Fuller, the form represented his vision of 'spaceship earth', a holistic system hurtling through space, every aspect designed to minimise waste and contribute to the harmonic functioning of the whole system – just like the design of the Apollo spacecraft that were being launched as Fuller wrote and lectured, spreading his ideas across a newly switched-on America. But in the hands of the cold warriors of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, these structures became something else entirely. They became the material embodiment of the East-West detente as a war fought, to a significant degree, acoustically.

At the top of Teufelsberg, there still stands a dome, now occupied by neo-hippy squatters who will charge tourists a small fee for a guided tour through the now-graffiti-covered concrete. But once upon a time, these great white spheres towering above the Grönwald forest made up of the US military's most important listening stations, a kind of vast receiver for picking up signals from the

The dome I am standing in now was once the twin of the Teufelsberg domes. From 1983 to 2003, it stood atop a high tower at Tempelhof airport, functioning as a radome full of long-range surveillance radar. And then, by way of gift from one neighbour to another, it was taken and transported from Berlin to Saint-Nazaire, where it now stands, and where I now stand, clicking my fingers and marvelling at the weird acoustic effects.

Three years ago, in early 2014, Haroon Mirza was standing here, too, in exactly the same place, doing exactly the same thing, equally bewitched by the sound. He filmed himself snapping his fingers on his phone, the rich yellow sunlight of the French Atlantic coast filtering through the mildewed white panels of the dome just as it does today.

Downstairs, in a structure just as awe-inspiring, and almost as acoustically weird, as the dome itself, that video is now playing, mixed up and collaged into a dense skein of other images, from the famous victory earlier this year of Google's AlphaGo software against nineteen year-old Chinese champion Ke Jie, to the 1992 Sega Genesis game, Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf, to the two teams of Channel tunnellers meeting and shaking hands in the middle, to Marine Le Pen interviewed on TV. Each of these images, in ways more or less oblique, relate somehow to the twin narratives of the dome: as harmonious total system or weapon of acoustic warfare.

"It's pretty incredible," Mirza says to me, recalling the first time he came to the LiFE, a giant space for contemporary culture housed in a former submarine base in Saint-Nazaire, on the French west coast, "just the sheer scale of it." I, too, recall my eyes opening a little wider, my jaw dropping slightly, as my taxi pulled up by the side of this great mass of a thing, like a football stadium designed by Smithsons, 300 metres long, 130 metres wide, and 18 metres high. Concrete as far as the eye can see.

It was built by occupying German forces in the first half of 1941 as a u-boat port, specially selected for the role by Organisation Todt. In 1942, it was the target of a British commando raid, Operation Chariot. The dry dock next door was successfully destroyed. But the submarine base survived. Today, it houses a museum, a restaurant, a cafe, and a rolling programme of cultural events and exhibitions – including, at this precise point in time, an installation by the British artist Haroon Mirza.

It was the acoustics of the building that impressed Mirza, the first time he visited. "When I went it was quite dark," he recalls. He was in town to do a show at Le Grand Cafe down the road, had no idea that several years later, he would be invited to take over the interior of the LiFE itself. With the lights off inside, the scale of the thing was hard to get a handle on. "But there's really incredible acoustics in there." Odd then, perhaps, that the first thing you encounter there as a visitor today is another military technology, designed precisely to neutralise sound altogether.

"I studied at the art school in Winchester," Mirza says when we meet up at his studio a few days after my return from Saint-Nazaire. "And at the University of Southampton, which Winchester is part of, they've got this research facility called the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research. Something like that. I used to go there and hang out in the anechoic chamber."

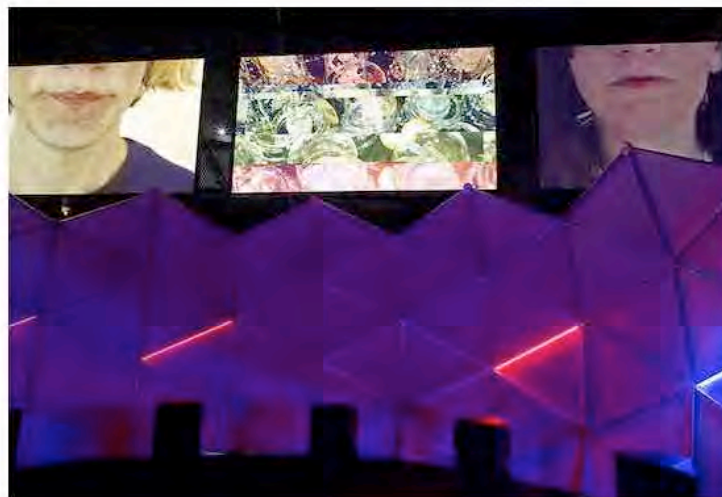
Anechoic chambers were first developed at Harvard during World War Two, part of a massive psychoacoustics research effort made by the American military intended to help soldiers cope with the increasingly noisy, quasi-cybernetic environments inside what were then newly-hi-tech aeroplanes, tanks, and other war machines. Covered throughout their interior with jutting foam cones, they were intended to absolutely reduce all acoustic reflections, to create a totally silent, 'dead' space. But they became famous in the 1950s after John Cage stepped inside the anechoic room at Harvard and discovered he could still hear two distinct sounds, leading him to conclude that there is no such thing as silence. Later, the appearance of the anechoic chamber became the model for the interior of Thomas Jerome Newton's space ship in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

Recent studies, have suggested that even just a few minutes spent in the total sensory deprivation of an anechoic chamber can lead to hallucinations and the creeping onset of panic. Haroon Mirza used to just “hang out” in one in the University of Southampton in the late 90s.

“I was a guinea pig for one of the researchers,” he says. “We had this exchange. I’d go in and be a guinea pig for him – he was a PhD student – and in return he’d give me time in the chamber to mess around, do recordings and things.” He still recalls sitting in that coned room listening to recordings of a bee buzz around his head, or scissors snip away around him, as if at the hairdressers. “It was quite realistic,” he says. “But you always knew it was a recording.”

At the LiFE, after walking into the great hall of the submarine base itself, you soon come across a room within a room. Stepping into that room, you find yourself in a corridor covered on the inside with the distinctive jutting cones of the anechoic chamber. As you walk down this corridor, there is a certain point where, by turning your head one way or the other, you can more or less choose – to hear the booming reverberating sounds of the exterior, or the subtler sounds inside. For in the very centre of this mini-labyrinth, there is no minotaur – just a stream. A suspended tube, lets flow a constant stream of water into a pool beneath a grate under your feet. On either side of the stream there are two sets of LED strip lights, one red and one blue, such that, when viewed from the side, you see the water current as an entwined red-blue double-helix in constant motion, like two waves flowing up and down.

This double spiral figure recurs throughout Mirza’s exhibition: in the spotlight bright yellow cables teeming down the side of the wall to the side and snaking across the floor towards the other exhibit, and in several of the clips that make up the big four screen installation that comprise the show’s main attraction, snakes entwined, bewitched the charmer’s pipe, the double helix of the DNA code. In one clip, we see a diagram of two soundwaves, equal but out of phase, cancelling each other out to produce total silence. As a man explains in another of the videos, we can conceptualise zero as not just an emptiness, but as the sum of all possible positive and negative numbers, as an “infinite whole.” Just a sidelong glance separating total noise from total silence.



It was his dad’s eclectic taste that first got Mirza excited by music. He recalls mixtapes in the car that would stretch from “80s pop music, to qawwali, or Jean-Michel Jarre.” At school, he would stay behind after class to mess about with the electronic keyboards in the music room. “In the holidays, I’d take one home,” he says. “Once I blew one up.”

“I didn’t have the power adapter for it,” he explains, “and, being really bright, I thought you could just put a cable in the plug socket and just stick it in the other side and turn it on and it would just work.” He starts giggling at the memory, at his own youthful naivete. “I set the carpet on fire. Because the whole wire just went whooosh all the way to the keyboard. I had to stamp it out. It was pretty bad.”

Did it make a sound as it blew up? I ask.

"Yeah," he says uncertainly. "it made a... sound." I'm curious whether this was the start of Mirza's interest in electrical sounds, the buzzes and crackles that still make a significant portion of his distinctive sonic aesthetic.

In the 00s, Mirza became well-known for sculptural assemblages that marshalled synchronised light and sound and a sometimes bizarre assortment of physical objects to create sounding sculptures, often animated by electrical signals and sounds, by buzz, hum, hiss, and crackle. It's practice he started during a design MA at Goldsmiths spent "trying to look at novel ways to engage with or create music," he says. "They just ended up being these sort of weird sound-making objects. And then, to be honest, from that point onwards, it's just been a development of that. The basic principles are the same."

At the end of the hangar, at LiFE, there is another dome, a geodesic dome like the one on the roof, only a little smaller, and incomplete. It has no roof, as if only half-built. All the signals from throughout the exhibition end up here: the buzz of electricity, the trickle of water, the sounds from the many videos on display, ending up in a circle of twelve speakers that you can stand inside and walk around in.

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Chatting in his studio in Camden, I suggest to Mirza that the half-built dome, the videos detailing psychedelic experiences, AI bots, European unification and scission, all point to some idea of the 1960s as an incomplete project. This is the legacy of the counterculture, I suggest, and where those dreams have ended up: in Silicon Valley capitalism and the Californian ideology, in a Europe first united and now divided, in computer games simulating war.

"It's interesting that you got that," he says. "I wouldn't have put that together with the parts of the puzzle that you just put that together with, but I *would* say the same thing. The work itself isn't trying to be didactic. I hope it's not didactic. But if I were to talk about my own ideology, in reference to what you were just saying, it seems like it's a moment for a sort of revival of that counterculture movement."

"I'm not a revolutionary," he insists continuing on the same thread. "But I wonder if it's possible. Can you have a counterculture which is responsible, which is not just about getting high? Because if there's a moment for it, it's now?"

Haroon Mirza's installation is at the LiFE, Saint-Nazaire until 24 September 2017. From 21 July, he will be exhibiting at the Pérez Art Museum, Miami. From 28 September, he will be exhibiting at the Zabludowicz Collection in London

LISSON GALLERY

The New Yorker

04 April 2017

THE NEW YORKER

AN ARTWORK FOR AN AGE OF ANXIETY AND AYAHUASCA



Haroon Mirza's installation "āāā—Fear of the Unknown remix" provides a psychedelic onslaught of images that channel the uncertainties of our tumultuous present.

© HAROON MIRZA / LISSON GALLERY

The forty-year-old London-based artist Haroon Mirza has made a name for himself as a brainy manipulator of sound and light, which he marshals to produce installations and elegantly jury-rigged sculptures. His works bristle with recondite influences and ideas: chaos theory, Minimalist art, nineteen-seventies club culture, experimental music composition, and all manner of electrical and

auditory geekery, which spring from his background as both a d.j. and a designer. Often, his works seem to be the product of a hyper-intellectual tinkerer, who relishes his time at the soldering bench as much as he enjoys producing unexpected conceptual and auditory resonances.

Recently, Mirza has added a new item to his tool chest: psychedelic drugs. In 2015, he made a collection of electro-etchings (produced by running a strong electrical current through an object placed on a copper plate, creating a shadow image that recalls pseudo-scientific Kirlian photography of “auras”) featuring an array of psychedelic plants and fungi. Last year, he made sculptures that double as grow boxes for psychoactive sacraments such as the peyote cactus, which is used in the ceremonies of certain Native American tribes. For his newest and most ambitious psychedelic project, “ããã—Fear of the Unknown remix,” which is currently on view in Lisson Gallery’s new Tenth Avenue project space, Mirza has focussed his attention specifically on ayahuasca, the hallucinogenic brew that has been used for divination by indigenous tribes in the Amazon basin since time immemorial, and now attracts spiritual seekers the world over. (Ariel Levy reported on [the ayahuasca craze](#) for *The New Yorker* last year.)

Mirza had his first encounter with ayahuasca while on a two-month artist’s residency in Brazil, and he cooked up the initial iteration of “ããã” for the São Paulo nonprofit art space Pivô, in the summer of 2016. The work’s current iteration, a scaled-down “remix” of the original, consists of four flat-screen monitors facing an array of speakers, which are wired to a pulsating, blue-and-red L.E.D. array on a planter containing a small specimen of *Psychotria viridis*, one of the two principal plants used in the preparation of ayahuasca. The bass-heavy sound that pumps out of the speakers is produced by the electrical impulses used to power the L.E.D.s, which have been calibrated to provide the plant with optimal lighting conditions for its growth, creating an enveloping, rave-like atmosphere.

One of ayahuasca's main effects is to untether thoughts from their normal, linear flow. Instead, consciousness skitters in all directions at once, like a glob of mercury hit by a hammer, producing unorthodox connections that nevertheless seem to have self-evident significance to the person experiencing them. Alternatively, it can seem to transform the brain into an antenna, tuned to receive huge downloads of information from the cosmos. The footage on the installation's video monitors plays at replicating these altered states of consciousness. Video clips, many of which have been pulled from the Internet, fly by at a dizzying pace, seemingly beamed in from the heart of our tumultuous present: video lectures on theoretical physics; anti-Brexit satire; game play from Grand Theft Auto; YouTube clips made by fringe-science cranks; news footage of the New York Stock

Exchange during the financial crisis; a computer simulation of 9/11; press briefings during the impeachment of former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff; planets spinning in the vast vacuum of space; and, of course, a photograph of Donald Trump, angrily stabbing his finger in the air. To make matters even more psychedelic, many of these images and videos have been post-processed through Google's DeepDream, a program that spits out visualizations of the "dream" images created when it attempts to identify the content of images that are fed into it. These images have been likened to the hallucinations experienced by humans under the influence of drugs like ayahuasca, and, in a fittingly trippy associative leap, have led computer scientists to speculate that the artificial neural network that runs DeepDream may mirror the structure of the human visual cortex.



A specimen of Psychotria viridis, one of the two principal plants used in the preparation of ayahuasca.

© HAROON MIRZA / LISSON GALLERY

Though “*—Fear of the Unknown remix*” is deeply rooted in our present moment—Mirza has said that he remixed the video footage as a response to the election of Trump—it is equally concerned with our future, and the agents of both order and chaos that are straining to reshape the world. The forces of chaos are evoked in the video with anxiety-producing force: runaway technological growth, global political corruption, the gathering storm of political and religious extremism, and a media landscape littered with a motley array of conspiracy-peddling crackpots, snake-oil salesmen, and boot-licking spin doctors. Mirza also deploys allusive juxtapositions to suggest that there are additional forces of order at work that are subtle, and perhaps not fully of this world. In one particularly telling sequence, he has overlaid a rotating view of Earth from the International Space Station with a mandala-like representation of an unimaginably complex eight-dimensional structure known as E8, which has been theorized by the theoretical physicist Garrett Lisi, among others, to be the fundamental mathematical structure of the universe. As a voice explains Lisi’s theory, another monitor plays a clip of a Shipibo shaman performing a holy song that is sung during ayahuasca ceremonies, in front a traditional fractal-patterned textile woven to reflect the geometric visions seen under the influence of ayahuasca.

It is a common adage among scientists that the more one learns about the universe, the greater its mysteries become. Similarly, the altered states experienced through the ingestion of psychedelics provide far more questions about the nature of consciousness, and about the nature of reality itself, than it does answers. (Those who assert otherwise are most likely selling something.) Instead of providing some kind of certitude—about reality, about politics, about our individual and collective fates—Mirza leaves us teetering on the precipice of the unknown. In the face of this howling abyss, he asks us, do we cower in fear? Or do we make peace with our ignorance, expand our minds, and soldier forth all the same?

LISSON GALLERY

Art in America

09 March 2017

Art in America



Haroon Mirza

at Lisson Gallery

through Apr. 1

136 Tenth Avenue

Google's DeepDream is a pattern-recognition program that trains artificially intelligent machines to see faces and objects. Images processed by DeepDream have iridescent scales shimmering and swirling over their surfaces, as doglike eyes and snouts cluster at points of attention. While Google promoted the program as a way to make art, the computer-generated images leaves little room for human creativity. But Haroon Mirza has bent it to his own ends, incorporating DeepDream's distortions in *— Fear of the Unknown remix* (2017), a hypnotic, eighteen-minute audiovisual installation. Still and moving images flicker across four broad, flat monitors, as a trippy beat generated by a pulsating electrical signal rasps through eight speakers, arranged in a witchy semicircle. In his visuals, Mirza aligns DeepDream with the psychotropic plant Ayahuasca: shamans chant, and one in swim trunks spits coconut juice on a tourist. A live plant sits in a pot to the left of the monitor. In one of the work's funnier moments, snapshots of street-side sewer drains alternate across the monitors. The indentations in the sidewalk look like eyes, the drain itself a yawning mouth. Their appearances onscreen are accompanied by an audible drone, as if they're moaning. The human mind, like computers, has its own mechanisms for seeking out familiar patterns; Mirza has us thinking of art as a drug, heightening and intensifying that effect through his own brand of ritual mumbo-jumbo. — *Brian Droitcour*

Ocula
3 February 2017

O C U L A



Haroon Mirza, 2011. Photo: Simon Pollock.

Haroon Mirza experiments with light, sound, electricity and other natural elements to create otherworldly compositions that manifest as kinetic sculptures encompassing installations, and mutable performances. Though Mirza earned his BFA in Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and BA in Fine Art Painting at the Winchester School of Art in 2002, an inclination for music and understanding the pragmatics of acoustic space led him to pursue a masters in Design Critical Practice and Theory at Goldsmiths College in London. He soon became fascinated with prototyping and self-governing systems, which in turn took him toward DIY engineering. This journey was one of trial and error filled with electrical shocks and minor explosions, resulting in smooth integrations of LED lights with vintage speakers, wires and bare cords, exposing the intimate connections between seemingly discrete objects. Several works incorporate copper, the raw material of printed circuit boards. *Five Liberty Caps (Solar Powered LED Circuit Composition 25)* (2015) and *Liberty*

Cap (Solar Powered LED Circuit Composition 27) (2015), for example, run solar energy through liberty cap mushrooms printed on circuit boards, creating reliefs. In recent years Mirza's work has garnered commendations, such as the Calder Prize in 2015, and the Nam June Paik Art Center Prize in 2014.

Most recently, Mirza has been working on a large-scale public sculpture for Ballroom Marfa, which will be unveiled in a group exhibition in March 2017. The semi-permanent commission, *The Stone Circle*, references man-made historical monuments and their connections with the earth. Through a combination of black marble, solar panels, and generated sound and light waves, the work encapsulates his interests in physical interference and cosmological consciousness. The London-based artist has also been preparing for his first solo show in Canada at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery, titled *Entheogens* (13 January - 19 March 2017), which means: 'generating the divine from within'. The exhibition will present new commissions as well as *ããã*, an eight-channel installation produced at São Paulo's PIVÔ residency in 2016. The show also introduces psychotropic plants to Mirza's oeuvre, lending an air of intangible possibility to the materially grounded work.

Ocula talked with Mirza about his upcoming show, and the connections between his compositions and the cosmos.

Entheogens features an array of psychotropics, like magic mushrooms, peyote, and the San Pedro cactus. What first drew you to these organic materials?

I've worked with organic materials before quite a lot, mainly water and ants. I've also worked with plants before, but not in any great detail. I've always been interested in organic matter, material, and organisms because of their chaotic, unpredictable and autonomous nature, and also as a metaphor for other things - water and the sound of water is quite interesting because it produces white noise. Ants are chaotic systems, so you can create truly chaotic systems from using natural material. But then, on top of that, I've used a natural material constantly in my work over the last 10 years: electricity. Electricity is also a natural phenomenon, which we kind of think we control but we don't really.



Haroon Mirza, *Entheogens* (2017), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 13 to March 19, 2017. Photograph SITE photography.

There's an interesting tension between the chaotic and the controlled. Your work with ants seems to embody this, as they represent elements that are both uncontrollable and quite orderly.

The most recent piece I developed with ants was called *Pavilion for Optimisation* (2013). To talk about the ants in the work, the term 'optimisation' is a mathematical reference to a kind of logic. So for instance, satellite navigation systems use optimisation algorithms, which they derive from ants. Ants find a food source and use pheromones to communicate where that source is in relation to their nest, and then find the shortest route from the nest to the food and communicate that. That method of communication and of finding the shortest route is also how navigation systems work. And it's similar with water. If you think of a window when it's raining, you get the little droplets of water coming down a window. The water works as a whole to create the shortest routes, and then other particles of water can join and follow the same route. It's partly to do with gravity as well, but there is sort of this optimisation logic that takes place, which is chaotic but controlled. So there is that tension in nature. Chaos theory itself is about those sorts of structures and logic in chaotic systems, like patterns, recognition, and microcosms. These are really exemplified by fractals, like in geometry. Fractals kind of work their way back round to psychedelics and entheogens, because they're a part of what's more commonly known as entoptic phenomenon, which is commonly what's seen when you ingest psychedelics or you have endogenous-altered states of consciousness. Whether it's induced by psychedelics or by other natural means - stress to the body, for instance - that's the first stage of psychedelic experience: images of geometric patterns and fractals.



Haroon Mirza, *Entheogens* (2017), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 13 to March 19, 2017. Photograph SITE photography.

Would you say that it was the idea of fractals that led you to psychedelics?

The first thing that led me to psychedelics was just being a teenager and doing LSD. Taking acid as a kid, that was my first interaction with psychedelics. Then it kind of went away and I sort of made sure to not really take drugs and concentrate on other things. But I know full well those kinds of experiences have had a profound influence on my aesthetic and theoretical taste, specifically the aesthetics of audio or the timbre of sound that I adopt in my work. It predates going to Brazil, but that trip did lead me to ayahuasca.

My interests lie in consciousness, and how consciousness relates to scientific endeavours: what we know about the physical world and universe, and how that doesn't make sense in terms of metaphysics and consciousness, because we don't understand consciousness in scientific terms. But we claim to understand it through either religion or other forms of spiritual engagement, whether it's yoga, Vedic traditions or more westernised traditions of spiritual practice, or these mind-altering substances or practices that do the same thing. It's the same effect. It's not a proven thing, but it could be argued that a high-level effect of yoga is DMT releasing in the mind, which is the same as meditating or other spiritual experiences. It's linking these metaphysical and physical things, which are what we know about the world and the universe. But what joins these two together is consciousness, and that's the crux of my interest.



Haroon Mirza, *Entheogens* (2017), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 13 to March 19, 2017. Photograph SITE photography.

That takes me back to 'entheogen,' a word that means 'generating the divine from within'. This seems to frame an exploration of connections between the sacred and the spiritual, and there's certainly a long engagement in your work with religious traditions. In particular, I'm reminded of your installation *Adam, Eve, others and a UFO* (2013), in which a selection of speakers are placed in the round to create a chamber of electric currents that are translated to sound.

That's a funny one, because those words literally refer to objects that are in the piece. There's a speaker that's branded an 'Adam' speaker and there's another that's branded 'Eve' - they're kind of similar marketing schemes. Then there's a little LED device that is called a UFO. So 'the others' are just the other speakers in the installation, but at the same time they set up this sort of narrative that has all these references. It's a two-fold thing. It's about the real, everyday reality of the physical, reductionist, materialist world that we live in, which we sort of have to accept somehow to come to consensus. But then it also refers to this metaphysical, spiritual world that we don't really have any access to. We're not allowed legally to take a plant out of the ground and ingest it; we literally don't have access to this other world, or other level of consciousness.



Haroon Mirza, *Entheogens* (2017), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 13 to March 19, 2017. Photograph SITE photography.

Copper features as much as psychotropics in the exhibition. Could you explain the production behind some of the copper works?

There are various processes that are going on. The caps of the mushrooms are placed onto the copper and release spores to reproduce, so you get prints that are the fingerprint of the mushroom. Some are done like that, some are electro-etched. Through the mushroom you run a negative charge, and you complete the circuit with a positive charge on the copper so the moisture in the mushroom will actually oxidise on the copper itself. That can be quite beautiful, and specifically beautiful with the peyote cactus and the San Pedro cacti. A lot of the titles refer to what they look like, so there's one that looks like a cosmological nebula, and one that looks like a comet. Sometimes the titles are just descriptive of what they are - some of the mushrooms refer to constellations.



Haroon Mirza, *Entheogens* (2017), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 13 to March 19, 2017. Photograph SITE photography.

All very tied to cosmological terminology.

Yes, there's a sort of cosmological narrative in there - this relationship with cosmology, ritual, and psychedelic experience that kind of collapses. That's identified mostly in *Dec 21* [a work included in the Contemporary Art Gallery show], which is a representation of an astrotheological idea.

Astrotheologists are a group of people who believe that many religions are tied to celestial events. One of the most famous is the astronomical event happens every 21 December: Winter Solstice. If you look up at the sky on 21 December, you will see Orion. Orion's Belt has been known throughout history as the Three Kings, and also referred to as the Three Wise Men. Southwest of that is a very bright star called Sirius, which is in the Canis Major constellation. If you make a line from the three stars of Orion's Belt to Sirius and continue that line to the horizon, on that point is where Virgo and the sun both rise. Astrotheologists believe it was the personification of this event that led to lots of religious ideas. Nativity, for example, is apparently based on this: the Three Kings in the story follow the brightest star in the sky, and then the Virgin Mary gives birth to the Son. When you personify these celestial objects, the story and the myth grows.



I wanted to ask about your titles, as they often play with language and linguistic systems. I'm thinking of the 2014 exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, *Are jee be?* (8 March - 8 June 2014), and */o/o/o/o/* at Lisson Gallery (17 May - 29 June 2013). Could you describe your constructions and, in particular, how you pronounce the title of the work *ããã*?

It's pronounced 'ahh,' like you're thinking about something. It's a funny one, because it's playing with typography. This has more to do about typography and syntax, typography and its relation to sound and linguistics. It comes from, in a convoluted way, McLuhan's idea of acoustics in visual space. He talks about how pre-linguistic man perceived visual space and acoustic space as one form of perception. It was only with language and the advent of syntax and spoken word that we started abstracting the thing itself. -[O]

FINANCIAL TIMES

Wheeldon/McGregor/Bausch, Paris Opera Ballet, Palais Garnier, Paris — review

Laura Cappelle



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The Christmas mixed bill was designed as a tribute to Pierre Boulez



©Julien Benhamou

Paris Opera Ballet performs Pina Bausch's 'Rite of Spring'

Music has been at the heart of Benjamin Millepied's vision since he took over the Paris Opera Ballet, and it is starting to pay dividends. This Christmas mixed bill was designed as a tribute to Pierre Boulez, who turned 90 this year, and the French composer is joined on the programme by György Ligeti and Igor Stravinsky, whose works he often conducted. The trio didn't always see eye to eye, but they make for a stimulating combination.

The inclusion of Maurice Béjart, a choreographer long associated with Boulez and the Paris Opera, would have been warranted, but Millepied brought two British choreographers instead. *Polyphonia* marks Christopher Wheeldon's belated Paris Opera debut. The 2001 work was an important statement for post-Balanchine abstract ballet, both indebted to the master's leotard ballets (*Agon* especially) and original in its response to complex Ligeti piano pieces.

Polyphonia is also a fine training ground, and an opportunity for the Paris cast to shed their reserve and engage with a style that doesn't come easily to them. While some sections still felt like school exercises, others made deeper musical connections. Amandine Albisson lent the leggy main pas de deux appropriate texture, and Léonore Baulac, a rising star, captured the sense of loss and vulnerability in the "Hopp ide tisztán" section, the wistful heart of the ballet.

Wayne McGregor, no stranger to the Paris Opera, returned with *Alea Sands*, set to Boulez's *Anthèmes 2*. Designer Haroon Mirza has crafted a disorienting introduction: the lights around Palais Garnier's Chagall ceiling flicker menacingly as an additional electronic score cracks and booms like a siren.

The first couple onstage, the androgynous Marie-Agnès Gillot and Audric Bezard, emulated that disjointed, disquieting atmosphere. Both music and choreography seemed to tune themselves progressively when *Anthèmes 2* started: McGregor's bursts of postmodern hyper-articulation have a clear affinity with Boulez's, and violinist Michael Barenboim led the dancers' fits and starts, setting them in motion only to screech to a halt.

The evening ended with Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring* — a welcome contrast. Here were dancers, many on the older side, as human beings rather than extraordinary bodies, literally getting dirty on the earth-covered stage; choreography so primal that Eleonora Abbagnato's harrowed Chosen One barely seemed to be dancing as she staggered to her death. If you only see one *Rite* in your life, make it this one.



operadeparis.fr

Photograph: Julien Benhamou

Forbes / Lifestyle

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Artist Haroon Mirza Manipulates Electronic Sounds, Light Effects And Readymades Like A Mad Scientist



Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle
CONTRIBUTOR

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It was an odd first encounter. Blindfolded with cotton patches covering his eyes and guided by his friend, I met **Haroon Mirza** at the doorway of the world-famous *Villa Savoye* in Poissy, France, with its easily-recognizable ground-level pilotis. This emblem of formal simplicity that was a manifesto for Modernist architecture from the interwar period was where he had staged his exhibition, *The Light Hours*, in 2014. Having first visited the villa blindfolded about a year prior to the show, he then produced the work in his London studio. So why the eye patches, I ask? Mirza relates that it was a scary, nerve-wrecking yet fascinating experience to do a show blindfolded, the idea being to feel everything while seeing nothing, relying on all his senses except sight, as he was interested in what something looked like when you didn't use your eyes to address it. He describes why his works often seek to engage different senses, "Because everything in Western civilization, certainly in the last few hundred years, has become ocular-centric. The visual field is more important than any other sense, and the human body isn't really designed like that. It might be evolving like that because of ocular-centrism and media technologies, but now media technologies have changed so much that they're actually multi-sensual. So I think it's changing again and it's important to understand all the senses within a creative activity rather than just one."



Haroon Mirza used solar panels to power his work for the first time in The Light Hours exhibition at the Villa Savoye in 2014 (Photo Martin Argyroglo © CMN / FLC-ADAGP)

The Light Hours marked the second chapter of an initiative launched by Lab'Bel, the artistic laboratory of the French Bel Group, in 2011, in partnership with the Centre des Monuments Nationaux (France's largest cultural heritage network overseeing monuments, parks and gardens), aimed at bringing into resonance the work of contemporary artists with icons of Modernist architecture. Thus, Mirza took over the Villa Savoye, built by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier between 1928 and 1931, by creating a vast sound and light installation – sound and light being two immaterial elements of the meeting between art and architecture – which proved to be a dialogue between the first half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Formerly the weekend retreat of Pierre and Eugénie Savoye and today a historic monument, the villa – originally built as a “machine for living”, given the adaptability and flexibility of the interiors in terms of function, and a machine to “move” or inspire, given the harmony of shapes and the play of light – was brought under the control of the senses: Mirza revisited Le Corbusier's masterpiece by feeling his way around, with his senses and perceptions of the space shaken up by his blindness.

He explains that he will only visit the villa blindfolded to keep his experience of the house intact and as a resistance to the ocular-centric idea that you must see something to experience it: "There are two main reasons for doing this: one is artistic and the other political. The former is an attempt to understand the space acoustically rather than visually. I want to limit the sensorial information I receive from the space so that the remaining (and less dominant) senses are heightened and receive more information. Thus the experience of the space changes and I am able to work completely based on the sound rather than on the visual. This kind of clues leads us to the political intentions. Contemporary culture demands that we look. The acquisition of cultural capital is overwhelmingly based on seeing things. It is the same with monuments and architecture and, of course, Le Corbusier's house is a kind of extreme of this type of twist. Without having visited it, I was already familiar with the house. I saw it in books, on the Internet and I've recently been given the floor plans. Now that I've experienced the house blindfolded, I can develop a different relationship to it and also question the value of cultural capitalism. The idea is that I'll never see the house with my own eyes, but I have installed and presented a work there."



The Light Hours exhibition at the Villa Savoye in 2014 (Photo Martin Argyroglo © CMN / FLC-ADAGP)

Although Mirza deprived himself of actually seeing the villa and experiencing the way natural light enters and illuminates it, given that light is one of the *raisons d'être* of its design, he decided to use materials that would somehow give him information about the light. Thus the use of solar panels to power his work for the first time, assembled on geometrical structures, equipped with LEDs and emitting sound in reaction to the ambient light. Basically, the light generated sounds that changed throughout the day, getting louder or quieter, depending on its intensity and shadows cast by visitors. No light, no sound. Turning light into an experience that he converted into sound, he also proposed that the light in the house determined the functionality of the work. As his assistant took detailed lux readings of each space and the manner in which light hits the building is well documented in books and online in text, 2D and 3D formats, he relied greatly on mediated representations of the house to decide on the positioning of the objects, lights and sounds in the different rooms, whose installation happened without his presence. After his assistant and the exhibition curator physically placed them, he came again blindfolded and made some changes based solely on acoustics in relation to the light activating them, as the works themselves allowed him to hear the light. Therefore, even without seeing, he was able to work just as much with the light. He says, "In a way, I've engaged with the house more than I would have done if I was (a) able to see the house and (b) able to work with the architecture, like making holes in the walls."



Digital Switchover, 2012, control box, four active speakers, relay, DVD player, TFT monitor, LEDs, foam, variable dimensions (Photo courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London)

Basing his creation on the history and functional evolutions of the Villa Savoye, Mirza organized a vast network of acoustic vibrations, turning what Le Corbusier had dubbed the “unspeakable space” into a sound space. He notes, “The space in which a sound is presented is always imperative to how that sound is perceived. The acoustic space is very different from the visual space; it is a sphere devoid of matter, whereas the spaces we inhabit are usually solid and made up of flat surfaces, which means that sound is more malleable than any other material. Increasingly, I tend to incorporate architecture as any other readymade or existing material in my work. It momentarily becomes part of the work, which is slightly different to the idea of site specificity. The work I developed for the Villa Savoye is somehow both. But I guess that both the space and the sound generated by the work are inextricably intertwined with one another.”



Digital Switchover, 2012, control box, four active speakers, relay, DVD player, TFT monitor, LEDs, foam, variable dimensions (Photo courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London)

The 38-year-old London-born artist, who holds a MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design and a MA in Critical Practice and Theory from Goldsmiths, University of London, describes how he came to art, “I always think that everyone is an artist somehow, and it’s one of those things that you either choose to go along with or you don’t because everyone likes to make things and be creative. We all do it as children; we do it as adults all the time as well. We’re always creating as adults but we don’t choose to go with it; we choose to do other things. I’m just one of those people who chose to go with it. In terms of my work now, one thing in childhood that is relevant is the fact that I always used to take things apart and not necessarily put them back together again the way they’re supposed to be, but the way they’re not supposed to be, which is something that I do now. Another thing is being interested in how sound and light come into synchronization or things that mirror each other in some way. Otherwise, I went through the whole art school system which, in a way, gets rid of all that stuff until you find it again. It’s a strange process.”



British artist Haroon Mirza (Photo Simon Pollock)

At the heart of Mirza's practice is the interplay of sound and light waves with electric current and found objects in the construction of kinetic sculptures, performances and immersive installations, where the visual and the acoustic hold equal importance. For example, *The National Apavilion of Then and Now* is an anechoic chamber with a halo of light that grows brighter in response to increasing noise and completely dark when there is silence. In his world, things are turned upside-down: a radio buzzes with static as it spins on a turntable towards and away from a single exposed light bulb, a jet of water plays an electronic keyboard, a machine turns water into mist, a record player plays cardboard discs and old cabinets come to life. Something of an amateur scientist, he learned to concoct gadgets through a process of trial and error, with professional electricians telling him he was doing things wrong, yet he's obviously making all the right moves. Nature interests him greatly as it is a chaotic system, and the electricity – a live, invisible and volatile element – that he uses constantly is the most natural of elements. "In a way, my work has always been about nature because electricity is also nature," he remarks. "It's more about the beauty of nature and the fact that we can't control it."



A Sleek Dry Yell featuring Richard "Kid" Strange, 2008, mixed media (Photo courtesy of Lisson Gallery)

A technical wizard, Mirza manipulates electricity and instructs a variety of instruments like household electronics, LEDs, secondhand furniture, video footage and existing artworks to perform in a specific way, differently than initially intended. Disruption and order are key words: he makes the defunct functional and removes the function from things that work. Some of his shows are almost symphonic and others not so easy to experience with hisses and buzzing, but all rhythmically-driven. In doing so, he breaks down distinctions between noise, sound and music, and subverts the utility and meaning of everyday objects and socio-cultural constructs. He believes that music is organized sound or organized noise; it's just one's perception and the context that defines it as music, noise, sound or just a nuisance. Nonetheless, there is method to his madness. He says, "There is a methodology, but there's no fixed starting point. Sometimes it's the context, sometimes it's a sound, sometimes it's a technology or media, a video, film, artist, another work. And then I add something, take something out or edit something. It just starts growing and then turns into whatever it turns into. Sometimes I have an idea of what it might end up like, but usually it never ends up like anything I imagined."



Preoccupied Waveforms exhibition at the New Museum in New York City in 2012 (Photo Jesse Untracht Oakner)

Propelled into the international spotlight when he participated in the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), where he won the Silver Lion, Mirza's other awards include the 2010 Northern Art Prize, the 2012 DAIWA Foundation Art Prize and recently the 2014 Zurich Art Prize for which he will create a whole new body of work. Incredibly versatile, last year, he performed a new work in collaboration with composer Shiva Feshareki and the London Sinfonietta orchestra, and was tasked with co-curating "Forget Amnesia", the fourth edition of the Fiorucci Art Trust's annual contemporary art festival held on the volcanic island of Stromboli in Sicily. His aim at the end of the day is "to keep pushing forward and to keep discovering something" and to create "a unique synesthetic experience in time and space, which transforms in one's memory with the passing of time". He has succeeded in making us do just that: to listen to what we'd normally just limit ourselves to looking at and to see what we'd ordinarily just listen to.