

kristen Roos  
Underground  
Open Sound 2012:  
On Air – Making the Inaudible Audible

/ Curated by  
Ross Birdwise

/ January 14 – April 15, 2012



Kristen Roos

# Underground

## / Introduction to Open Sound 2012

The hidden, the repressed, the lost, the invisible, and the inaudible are explored in Surrey Art Gallery's exhibition Open Sound 2012: *On Air – Making The Inaudible Audible*. Three audio-based works will be presented at intervals during the year, each artwork giving expression to voiceless and sometimes intangible things. The artists (in order of appearance) are Kristen Roos, Alex Grunenfelder, and Christina Kubisch. This multi-phased project is organized by guest curator Ross Birdwise. The lead-off project Kristen Roos' site-specific sound piece titled *Underground* uses found sounds and existing furnishings from the Surrey Arts Centre to create a resonant aural and tactile experience. This sound installation will continue to April 15.

## / Surfacing Forgotten Spaces

By Ross Birdwise

In 1917, the French composer Erik Satie composed his first piece of *musique d'ameublement* (furniture music), which had been intended for unfocussed listening in casual settings. Kristen Roos' new work *Underground* operates in the foyer of the Surrey Arts Centre with this history of lobby-oriented music in mind. The work is integrated into two existing arts centre sofas that are hard-wired to emit ambient musical compositions in a way the listener can both feel and hear. The artist has installed speakers and tactile transducers into the furnishings so that they vibrate and generate low-level sound that is almost only sensible to the sitter. The sound is derived from recordings made in the basement of the Surrey Arts Centre, in the electrical room and the mechanical room.

According to Roos' these droning mechanical noises often either go unnoticed in the background, or are hidden away in underground chambers and near janitor's quarters, spaces strongly associated with blue collar labour. The automated machinery and manual labour contribute to the functionality and comfort of the building and its inhabitants, including staff and visitors. It helps to create a pleasant ambiance. A simple piece of furniture such as a couch also contributes to that atmosphere. Unlike Satie's furniture music, which was intended to fade into the background, *Underground* utilizes furniture to foreground a hidden ambience.



# Kristen Roos

## Underground

Roos' states "underground in today's terms, is the space of the janitor, and the electric machines that power the building to bring air and heat. This is an automated space, a kind of robot that for the most part relinquishes us from having to have someone shovel coal and mind the switches, but has not stopped us from using the space to house the tools of the custodian. Interestingly enough, the word robot was coined by Carel Capek, a Czech writer in the play *Rossums Universal Robots* (R.U.R.), and robot, or *rabota* in Czech, simply means worker."

For Roos, these sounds also represent the spectres of Surrey's past. Audible and tactile, yet invisible, these sounds have the absent presence of ghosts. They refer to past histories of urbanization and industrialization in the region, as well as the natural spaces that once existed prior to Surrey's development. Furthermore, these physical, droning, noise-based sounds also signify the underground experimental music scene of Vancouver. This scene includes a variety of noise musicians. Some of these musicians link noise music to machinery and to the human body, and often choose to remain underground (and perform in 'underground' and illegal spaces) out of a kind of pride, and also due to economics, lack of affordable spaces, and the archaic licensing bylaws in Metro Vancouver.

Roos' exploration of the notion of the underground, low frequency and electromechanical sounds is

a prominent feature of his other work, including his site-specific installation *Ghost Station* (2007), which utilized an unused Toronto subway station and subway sounds and a recent soundwalk he led through underground parking garages.

Additionally, Roos has been interested in tactile, droning electromechanical sounds since he was a toddler, when he would enjoy pressing his head up against washing machines and dishwashers. Roos speculates that these sounds might also relate to the audiotactile experience of the human fetus experience in the mother's womb. The muted sounds and tactile vibrations of Underground implicitly suggest this association.



## / About the Artist

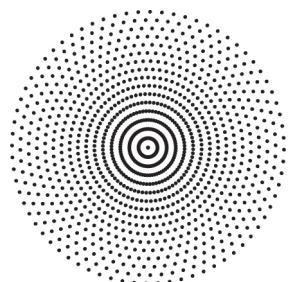
Kristen Roos is a Vancouver based artist and musician whose practice includes sound design for dance, live performance, electronic music, soundwalks, site-specific installations, and stand alone pieces. The exploration of the underground, the low frequency, and the hidden is present in many of his works. This includes his 2007 piece *Ghost Train*, which was installed in an unused Toronto subway station and used recordings derived from subwoofers and subway trains. As part of a recent Vancouver New Music Soundwalk called *Below the Surface*, Roos guided participants through the soundscape that lies deep beneath the city in the reverberating cement caverns known as parking lots. Roos' work can be seen at [www.kristenroos.com](http://www.kristenroos.com).

Open Sound

## / About Open Sound

*On Air – Making The Inaudible Audible* is part of the Surrey Art Gallery's Open Sound program. Open Sound is an exhibition program developed in 2008 to support the production and presentation of audio art forms as part of contemporary art practice.

Open Sound seeks to feature the leading edge of audio art, and has included site specific installation, radio experiments, ecological practices, and other investigations into the limits of sound today.



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