

SAMSON YOUNG

Furniture Music

September 8th – November 4th, 2017

Gallery Gisela Capitain is pleased to announce its first exhibition with Samson Young.

Samson Young (b. 1979 in Hong Kong) is a trained composer as well as a multimedia and sound artist. Drawing on his background as a composer, Young conceives sound works, installations, performances, videos, and drawings which entwine each other in a symphony of images and music. Sound, video, and graphical elements in Young's works form a unit with historical, cultural, and technological research. This diversity of formats is characteristic of Young's work. He channels recurring themes such as identity, war, and literature into innovative multimedia spaces of experience by taking his works to the formal limits of their respective media. Young produces peculiar scenarios which defy our everyday associations with objects, stories, and spaces.

Alongside precise scientific research, social and political contexts, links to his own biography inform his work as well as his emotional and intuitive approach. Although Young conceptualizes his works with a composer's precision and desire for structure, they also possess a certain irony and playful lightness.

The exhibition *Furniture Music* is a homage to Eric Satie's concept of *musique d'ameublement*. In five groups of work specifically developed for the exhibition, Young engages with Satie's experiment which gave rise to two of the central musical concepts of the 20th century: sound installation and ambient music. Satie proposed *musique d'ameublement* as a functional music: "...We urge you to take no notice of it and to behave during the intervals as if it did not exist. This music [...] claims to make a contribution to life in the same way as a private conversation, a painting in a gallery, or the chair on which you may or may not be seated." (Eric Satie, 1920)

Young adds his analysis of historiography as another layer to the presentation: How is history written, conveyed, heard, read, archived, celebrated? In various ways, be they formal, thematic, or compositional, these bodies of work both visually and acoustically lay out Young's multifaceted thoughts on these issues.

The Installation *Coffee table music (some other causes for celebration)* deals primarily with the possibility of visually representing *Furniture Music*. On view are five groups, each consisting of small coffee tables, carpets, and coffee table books arranged on the tables. Though they may initially seem to be decorative elements, the books' contents open up further layers of Young's examination and his structural approach:

- Young composed 40 pieces of music, one for each day of the exhibition. The duration of each piece of music corresponds to the gallery's opening hours on the respective day.
- This was achieved through 40 sets of computer generative procedures, programmed by Young. These procedures are not random: Young incorporated musical elements such as melodic motif, rhythmic characteristic, modality, and tempo into these procedures.
- The musical elements for each piece of music is inspired by the holiday that falls on the same date. On "Talk Like a Pirate Day," for example, Young used the melody of a children's song about pirates as the motif.
- The score for each day is recorded in a single book. Each book bears the title of the holiday which inspired the piece.
- Each day of the week has a specific book cover color which corresponds to it.

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In addition to the system that drove the production of the books of notation, a second system of color arrangement system forges a relationship between the 40 books and the coffee tables:

- Each of the tables' materials shapes have a corresponding color, which manifest themselves as color marks on the cover of the books.
- Young's personal feelings about each table are also coded with specific colors. "I love," for example, corresponds to the color black.
- Each cluster of coffee table exhibits a unique logic of color patterning and arrangement.

In addition to his analysis of music history, Young also examines the role chance plays in the writing of history: how arbitrary certain events may have seemed at the time they happened, yet in hindsight the same event may become one of the decisive moments of history. By setting the parameters for the digitally improvised pieces of music and recording them into musical notation, he decides what becomes history in the form of a book. At the same time, the book with its written notation that one can't hear is also an extension of Satie's idea of *musique d'amelement*.

A further aspect is Young's reflection about the ways in which history is felt, celebrated and given historic weight through annual cycles of celebration: how events such as fireworks re-articulate and reaffirms the impression of inevitability. Paradoxically, cycles of celebration may also have the opposite effect of trivializing events. Here, fireworks become a symbol for a kind of casual ambient music or, like another work in the exhibition, a kind of *Screen Saver*, which in turn is another background phenomenon in the sense of Satie's *Furniture Music*.

The process of preparing and realizing an exhibition or work, is for Young the opportunity to frame an entangled, interlocking complex of themes without allowing them to crystallize into a singular insight or position. "You end up with a kind of mind map with certain nodes, which don't want to be suspended in an intertextual net." (Samson Young in an interview with Jasmina Merz, 2016)