## Her Noise:
## Feminisms and the Sonic
## Film and Performance:
## The Voice Is A Language
Friday 4 May 2012
19:00-21:00
Tate Modern, Starr Auditorium



Image: Meredith Monk, *16 Millimeter Earrings* 1966
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## Programme

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| 19:00-19:05 | **Welcome and Introduction: Madeleine Keep**, Curator, Adult Programmes |
| 19:05-19:15 | **Performance:**<br>**Cara Tolmie**, *The end is a tumultuous noise*, 2010/2012 |
| 19:15-20:30 | **Film Screenings:**<br>**Meredith Monk**, *16mm Earrings*, 1966/77<br>performance recorded on 16mm, transferred to video, 24m22s<br>Courtesy the House Foundation<br><br>**Sophie Macpherson**, *Deep Dancing*, 2010<br>video, 6m4s<br>Courtesy the artist<br><br>**Meredith Monk**, *Turtle Dreams*, 1984<br>video, 27m29s<br>Courtesy the House Foundation<br><br>**James Richards**, *Looking So Hard At Something It Distorts Or Becomes Obscured. (Not Blacking Out, Just Turning The Lights Off)*, 2012<br>video, 16m10s<br>Courtesy Rodeo. Commission by Chisenhale, London |
| 20:30-20:45 | **Performance:**<br>**Sue Tompkins**, *My Dataday*, 2010/2012<br>Courtesy Modern Institute |
| 20:45-20:50 | **Response: Isla Leaver-Yap** |
| 20:50-21:00 | Q&A |

*The Voice Is A Language* is a performance and screening project that orbits the legacy of avant-garde pioneer Meredith Monk. The project casts Monk not as a direct influence upon, but an active player within a range of dynamic contemporary practices.

Exploring the dispersal of the voice and its relationship to image by assembling a collage of performance, music, video and spoken word *The Voice Is A Language* traces sympathetic lines of working between the practices of four contemporary artists:

Sophie Macpherson, James Richards, Cara Tolmie, Sue Tompkins. The programme includes rarely seen film and video by Meredith Monk as a touchstone to the other artists' work.

From Tolmie and Macpherson's exploration of gesture and archetype, to Richards and Tompkins' disarming approaches to balancing rhythm and context *The Voice Is A Language* seeks to displace the primacy of the linguistic in favor of a synthetic language.

This project was first conceived as part of Glasgow International 2010, at Tramway, Glasgow. In collaboration with Electra a reconfigured programme has been produced for *Her Noise: Feminisms and the Sonic*. An online reader for the project, which includes essays, sound clips, documentation and other information, can be found at: voiceisalanguage.wordpress.com

*The Voice Is A Language* is a project by Isla Leaver-Yap.

### Biographies:

**Meredith Monk** is a composer, singer and choreographer of opera, theatre, films and installation. A pioneer of 'extended vocal technique' and interdisciplinary performance, Monk makes work at the intersection of music and movement. Her career spans over 40 years and she continues to teach, perform and compose. Monk is based in New York.

*16mm Earrings* is an early performance originally conceived for the Judson Church, New York, in 1966, a couple of years after Monk graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. The film is a re-performance of the original work, filmed by Bill Withers in 1977. A collage of sound, film, dance and voice, *16mm Earrings* comprises fragments and fictional scenarios, including a reading of Wilhelm Reich's controversial essay *The Function of Orgasm* (1940); a series of 16mm films projected onto Monk's body and onto customised screens; a rendition of *Greensleeves*, slowed, looped and expanded; and a paper effigy of Monk that burns at the climax of work. *16mm Earrings* is an eccentric and personal syntax of gesture and image, where the former attempts to physicalise the latter.

*Turtle Dreams*, meanwhile, is an incongruous synthesis of chamber music, uniform movement and anti-narrative performance. Using the form of cabaret as a means to evoke urban culture in a satirical tone, *Turtle Dreams* emerged from a specifically New York context – a country one year into the new Reagan era, a capital in the shadow of nuclear threat and entrenched in Cold War paranoia. Monk describes the work as possessing, "a very Cassandra-like quality, like the prophet or the warning of disaster before the bomb. It's before the disaster and post disaster".

**Sophie Macpherson**, based in Glasgow, employs sculpture, photography, performance and drawing building scenarios that are invested both in an abstracted personal mythology and an exploration of the non-verbal or mute qualities of symbols. Theatrical objects and stylised costumes are recurring motifs in Macpherson's practice, which blends the mise-en-scene of medieval mystery plays, the perfomativity of Brechtian cabaret, and the psychic landscape of Surrealism.

Commissioned for *The Voice Is A Language*, Macpherson presents *Deep Dancing* (2010), a video that combines a series of abstract theatrical sketches that slip between a rehearsal of gesture and its exhibition. The artist and her friends present themselves

to the camera not as psychological entities but as performing bodies put to the service of an unconsummated ritual.

**James Richards** takes material culled from home videos, books, records, CDs, and combines them with the his personal archive to make moving image and installation work. Tracing unlikely rhythmic or gestural connections between heterogeneous materials, Richards saturates his work with a lingering emotional psyche. Often reworking material from previous installations and videos to reroute their initial use in ever-evolving scenarios, Richards' work examines subjects in relation to affective imagery. Overlooked moments caught on record, the half-glances of the camera, physical demonstrations and abstracted vocal melodies coalesce to form unlikely lyrical encounter.

For *The Voice Is A Language*, Richards presents *Looking So Hard At Something It Distorts Or Becomes Obscured (Not Blacking Out, Just Turning The Lights Off)*, a single-channel video that examines the role of intimacy in relation to desire and physical proximity. Presenting images and sounds that are surrogates for the liquidity or porosity of the body, of being inside and outside, *Looking So Hard At Something…* slips between the sensual image and its abstraction.

**Cara Tolmie** works with sound, performance, text and video to construct scenarios that probe the intersection between personal and philosophical knowledge. Tolmie's performances move between the voice and the word, the abstract gesture and its relationship in the making of meaning. Often using repetition and refrain, Tolmie uses the space of performance to generate temporary architectures, episodes and sequences, in which actions can be played out according to the autonomous logic of the work as it unfolds.

Commissioned for *The Voice Is A Language*, Tolmie presents *The end is tumultuous noise*, a text and performance work. The complexity of Tolmie's fictive writing colludes with the moment of present action, where language is transformed from encounter to performance, and slips between meaning and incantation.

**Sue Tompkins**, based in Glasgow, uses both the spoken and the written word to create work that is lyrical, personal and provocative. Tompkins' language resembles half-caught slogans, incidental phrases and intimate commentary. In its written form, her work appears as concrete poetry, while the performed text is delivered as a rhythmic set of utterances, looping scenarios that hover between associative play and syncopated vocalisation.

For *The Voice Is A Language*, Tompkins presents *My Dataday*, (2010/12). Originally conceived as a sound work, Tompkins has transposed the piece into a performance work on the occasion of TVL's presentation at Electra's *Feminisms and the Sonic*.

**Isla Leaver-Yap** writes about and organises projects with artists. She was an editor of *MAP* magazine for four years and is a contributor to periodicals including *Afterall* and *Mousse*. At the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, she co-organised *Nought to Sixty*, and founded the on-going series Artists Film Club. She recently organised the exhibition series *Short Stories* at Sculpture Center, New York. In May 2012, she will participate in Banff Centre's visual arts faculty, as part of LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL STOP PLEASE ALLOW FEATURES ASSUME EXPRESSION INDICATIVE OF AMUSEMENT JOY PLEASURE BENEVOLENCE STOP. She lives in New York.

## About *Her Noise* and the Archive

This three-day event investigates feminist discourses in sound and music through a programme of talks, performances, discussions and film screenings. The programme brings together performances and a talk by Pauline Oliveros; an evening orbiting the legacy of Meredith Monk; and a day of talks and discussions with contributions from artists, musicians, curators, writers and academics. The events are realised as a collaboration between CRiSAP, Electra and Tate.

The events build on a long running research project, initiated in 2001 by Lina Džuverovic and Anne Hilde Neset. From its inception, the ambition of *Her Noise* was to investigate music and sound histories in relation to gender, and to establish and maintain a lasting resource in this area through building up an archive. In 2005 Lina and Anne co-curated *Her Noise*, an exhibition building on their research, which took place at South London Gallery, Tate Modern and Goethe Institut and gathered international artists who use sound to investigate social relations, inspire action or uncover hidden soundscapes. The exhibition included newly commissioned works by Kim Gordon & Jutta Koether, Emma Hedditch, Christina Kubisch, Kaffe Matthews, Hayley Newman and Marina Rosenfeld, as well as a series of talks and performances.

The *Her Noise Archive*, as it became called, formed the backbone of *Her Noise* and was developed by the curators, in collaboration with Emma Hedditch and Irene Revell. The archive contains the collected research materials, interview and performance footage and includes books, fanzines, records, CDs, catalogues and other ephemera. This material includes a growing number of on camera interviews with artists including Pauline Oliveros, Maryanne Amacher, Diamanda Galas, Else Marie Pade, Jutta Koether, Marina Rosenfeld, Thurston Moore, Jim O'Rourke, Kevin Blechdom, Kembra Pfahler, Kim Gordon, Lydia Lunch, Peaches and others.

After international touring throughout 2006 to 2008, the *Her Noise Archive* was donated to CRiSAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice), London College of Communication. The archive now finds its permanent home in the University of the Arts, London Archives and Special Collections at London College of Communication, following a period of cataloguing by researcher Holly Ingleton, in collaboration with Cathy Lane (CRiSAP) and Irene Revell (Electra).

This donation marks a move to actualise the initial desire of *Her Noise*, to 'create a lasting resource', that also operates as a starting point for new investigations. *Her Noise: Feminisms and the Sonic* is both a marking of the *Her Noise Archive*'s new permanent publicly accessible home, but equally an opportunity to further explore and expand the initial impetus of the project, opening a new chapter in these feminist investigations in sound.

www.hernoise.org
www.crisap.org
www.electra-productions.com

All events organised by:
CRiSAP (Cathy Lane)
Electra (Fatima Hellberg and
Irene Revell)
Holly Ingleton, City University
Tate Modern (Madeleine Keep and
Marianne Mulvey)

*The Voice Is A Language* is curated by Isla Leaver-Yapp
Special thanks to: Anne Hilde Neset, Lina Džuverovic, Evelyn Wilson, Jennifer Tomomitsu, Stuart Comer, Marko Daniel, Salomé Voegelin, Ciaran Harte, Ione, Cosey Fanni Tutti

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## About CRiSAP

CRiSAP (Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice) is a Research Centre, based at the University of the Arts London, dedicated to the exploration of the rich complexities of sound as an artistic practice. Their main aim is to extend the development of the emerging disciplinary field of sound arts and to encourage the broadening and deepening of the discursive context in which sound arts is practiced.

CRiSAP's current activities are focused in a number of areas including:
* Sound and the Environment
* Sound, Word & Voice
* Improvisation, Composition & Performance
* Sound Installation & Diffusion
* Curating & Experimental Archiving
* Gender & Sound Arts Practice
* Listening Practice
* Writing Sound
* Sound as Documentary Practice

## About Electra

Electra is a London based contemporary art organisation which curates, commissions and produces projects by artists working across sound, moving image, performance and the visual arts. Through close dialogue with a range of venues and collaborators, they present projects across the UK and internationally. At the heart of their practice is a process-based relationship between artist, curator and audiences, which seeks to give the projects space to find their own rhythm, public outputs, and discourse. Electra's core aim is to foster a dialogue between a range of disciplines of contemporary artistic practice, to provide a platform for debate and engaged, dynamic investigations of urgent social, political and cultural questions.

Recent projects produced and curated by Electra to date include, *Her Noise: Feminisms and the Sonic* (Tate Modern, 2012), *Toxic* (Les Laboratoires D'Aubervilliers and Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012), *The Right to Silence* (The Showroom, 2012), *Dirty Literature* (National Portrait Gallery, 2011), *27 Senses* (Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2010), *Offer and Exchange* (Thomas Dane Gallery, Hiscox, Frieze Art Fair, Christie's, 2008-2010), *Favoured Nations* (5th Nordic Biennale, Momentum, Moss, Norway, 2009), group exhibition *Sound Escapes* (SPACE, London, 2009)

In parallel, Electra runs a steady programme of lectures, workshops and film screenings in its project space, including an ongoing collaborative series of events with OTOProjects.