

'Resonant Spaces' combines sound art with familiar settings

by Jordan McDonald

October 12, 2017

The first exhibition of its kind for the Hood Museum of Art, "Resonant Spaces: Sound Art at Dartmouth" introduces sound art from around the world to Hanover and the College. Running from September to December, the exhibition is comprised of presentations and showcases that invite listening and learning. The exhibition centers on the commissions of artists Bill Fontana, Christine Sun Kim, Jacob Kirkegaard, Alvin Lucier, Laura Maes, Jess Rowland and Julianne Swartz. The hope of the exhibit is to invite people to redefine what art can be and how sound makes up our lives.

"It's the first time that the Hood has exhibited sound art, and really the first time it's been exhibited in the Upper Valley," said Amelia Kahl '01, a co-curator of the Hood who has worked closely with "Resonant Spaces."

The exhibition includes an installation from each of the seven featured artists, located on or around the Dartmouth campus. The works are intended to transform familiar Hanover locations through the manipulation of sound, providing a new perspective on these sites.

"We have work in the Bema, in the Life Sciences [Center] or all the way in the Thayer School of Engineering," Kahl said. "That way, people are encountering what is really public art in their own spaces and being invited to listen."

"Resonant Spaces" is also an interactive art exhibit compared to other artistic showcases that have graced Dartmouth's campus. Kahl and music professor Spencer Topel, who co-curated the exhibit, have been hosting walking tours to highlight some of the installations. To encourage students to take advantage of this interactive component, the museum also created an online game called "In Search of Sound," Hood programming intern Ashley Dotson '18 said. The game asks students to answer questions related to each piece and offers a prize to high scorers.

Dotson especially values the interactive appeal of the exhibition, explaining in an email statement that her engineering-minded friends "try to figure out" Rowland's piece while English majors might be more drawn to Swartz's piece, which is located in the library.

"This exhibit shares a lot of connections with the Hopkins Center [for the Arts], the digital music program and the music department," Topel said. "Where it's radically different is that it engages with sound as a medium of art."

An exhibit like this requires significant time, expertise and passion, as demonstrated by the curators who dedicated their time to bringing the showcase to the Dartmouth community.

"It's been a multi-year process that's really culminated with a lot of work in the last year and a half," Topel said. "It's really been a process where we developed from the ground up. We didn't have a model, so we invented it."

The process of selecting artists also required a lot of thought on the part of curators. The final product of “Resonant Spaces” is informed by the intentionality of the curators as well as by the commissioned artists themselves.

“We thought a lot about what group of artists we wanted to participate,” Kahl said. “So we were looking for a wide range of artists. So in terms of their sound art practice, what sounds are they using? Are they engaging? How do they work with the visual? How do those sounds engage different kinds of spaces?”

Kahl explained that the curators also looked for demographic diversity when selecting the artists.

“This was important to us because a lot of the narratives that have been written around experimental music and art have been driven by white narratives and white male narratives,” Topel said. “So, we felt it was really important to balance our show with a pretty clear representation from all different types of groups to show that there is a plurality working with experimental sound and art.”

“Resonant Spaces” hopes to complicate our relationship with sound, and its curators believe that students could benefit from experiencing such an exhibit.

“For college students, it’s a really important thing for them to start to critically examine the things in their life, whether that’s visual information or political information, and sound is a part of that,” Kahl said.

The exhibition ends on Dec. 10.