

Wired for Sound: Julianne Swartz at Josée Bienvenu

by Marjorie Welsh

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Installation shot of the exhibition under review, courtesy of Josée Bienvenu Gallery

With hanging nets so fine that seeing the wiring requires an intimate stance merely inches away, Julianne Swartz's *Void Weaves*, *Bone Scores* induces a close attention unusual for viewing full-sized sculpture. From there, the hand-made construction is interesting enough to induce even closer viewing: irregularities, slight in some works, approximately chaotic in others, make a point of their structural sophistication.

Just when this display of refined works seems merely exquisite, audible spasms and knocks change the nature of the lyricism completely.

Emitted from these complicated nets are sounds not corresponding to their refined visual nature. Then, too, abruptly violent visible movements manifest a similarly disjunctive state of affairs between the sculptural matter and the expressive manner.

Void Weaves, *Bone Scores* exists in the slipstream of sound sculpture by now well established, going back generationally, in a genealogical tree which includes not only Cagean capture of ambient sounds but also programmed machine noise as heard through *musique concrète*, and many avatars of Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine*.



Julianne Swartz, *Void Weave (tremor)*, 2017. Enameled copper wire, magnet, wood, electronics, 50 x 5 x 7 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Josée Bienvenu Gallery

So, in a certain way, Swartz has been the beneficiary of more radically innovative art prior to her own. But she has also brought the sound scores up-to-date, in digital recording of sounds from her life world. Here is her playlist for *Bone Score (Tangle)*, 2016: sounds of breathing, a Geiger counter, fireworks, electrical current, a windy night, a flock of birds. For *Bone Score (drum)*, 2016, a constructed concatenation of materials of which include unglazed porcelain, stainless steel, magnetic wire, magnets, abaca paper, and wood, the sounds entail breathing, swallowing, metal flexing, an MRI, rain on a metal roof, a Beatles song, a heart beating, and a man's last breaths on an oxygen machine. But these sound sources are not identifiable as such, having been digitally manipulated.

Within speakers, copper wire coiled around a magnet issues vibrations that, in turn, transmit along and throughout Swartz's wire sculptures, generating sound. But this is not program music, as the sounds captured do not mimic actuality, they are actuality itself. The sound samples, having been slowed or otherwise manipulated to the brink of abstraction, morph in passage in order to discourage literal identification: Hence the slight uncanniness in the sculptural presence. Fortunately, none of this is obvious or pedantic, owing to the timing for infrequent, not incessant, playing. Also, not all the wire sculptures are wired for sound.

What does emerge is a tactful and well-executed cluster of sculptural forms objectively programmed to be expressive of subjective states of affairs, as if inhabited by a very irritable Arachne. The intermittent perturbations in movement and sound are dissonant with respect to the loveliness of the visual elements as initially encountered. The pieces contribute a dissonant note also to Swartz's practice of the art of well-being, informed through Eastern meditation, to render being somewhat more complicated and interesting in its embodied world.