

Artists Space

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Sound Ideas

By Peter Frank

If, as I observed recently, artists' books are this year's fad, it looks like artists' soundworks—cassettes, reel-to-reel tapes, records, and radio broadcasts—are next year's. Audio-format art comes directly out of artists' increasing use of sound in their environmental pieces; in the last several years especially, installation-makers like Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim have augmented their rooms with spoken and musical soundtracks—to the point where the tracks have become even more important than the spaces. But audio art also comes from visual artists' growing involvement with music, from punk to electronic; with poetry and oral literature;

and with a merging of media in general. Audio art precedents date as far back as Kurt Schwitters, who, in the 1920s, created a *Sonate in Uurlauten* (*Sonata in Primal Speech*), which combined aspects of poetry and traditional classical music; futurist Luigi Russolo, who invented his *intonarumori* (noisemaking machines including "roarers," "howlers," "whistlers," etc.) around the time of the First World War; and even before.

The past is necessarily neglected, and the present lightly but revealingly skimmed, in a continuously absorbing show of **AUDIO WORKS** at Artists' Space (105 Hudson Street, to February 25). I confess I'm cheating by calling the show "continuously" absorbing, as the rotating program of works on tape and cassette that is broadcast into the otherwise empty main gallery lasts all day. For those with less time or patience, or with more directed curiosity, there are several intimate listening situations, including a phonograph and cassette playbacks with headsets. There are also

three situational installations based on sound. Beth B's "House," heard over two telephones, presents the smoky conversations between a whorehouse receptionist (sic) and potential johns; hearing them over the phone makes the listener, by implication, a hooker, a john, or an eavesdropper—all compromised positions. For repurification there is Rhys Chatham's, "Ear Ringing," a room papered in white with a high-pitched but pleasant ambient tone that clears the head without pressuring the ears. Way in the back is Scott Johnson's "What Happened," an odd sound-and-object environment that plays ominously on the fact that the room it occupies was once a business office. A quasi-installation by Bill Beirne in another part of the gallery consists of four piles of recording tape containing incriminating admissions with regard to the artist's personal life; the tapes are not to be played.

There are plenty of tapes and cassettes one can listen to, either according to the

rotating program or by request, by such artists and artist-musicians as Charlemagne Palestine, Stuart Sherman, Christopher Knowles, Jill Kroesen, Liza Bear, Les Levine, Robert Barry and Constance de Jong. Augmenting these are records by Laurie Anderson, Lawrence Weiner, Christian Boltanski, Keith Sonnier, Art & Language, Bernar Venet, Jack Goldstein, and others. (Goldstein, perhaps the most complex and prolific record-maker in the art world, is having a show of records and films at the Kitchen, through February 18.) One highly recommended disc is *Airwaves*, a "group show" of soundworks (by, among others, Meredith Monk, Dennis Oppenheim, Jacki Apple, Vito Acconci, Diego Cortez, Julia Heyward and Terry Fox) issued by One Ten Records. Readily available in many record shops—or at least in art-publication emporia like Printed Matter and Jaap Rietman—*Airwaves* is the perfect record with which to start—or, if you must finish—one's collection of artists' audioworks. ■