

Pictures Meet Sound

by BRIAN SLATTERY | Jun 21, 2016 7:16 am

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COURTESY ARTSPACE

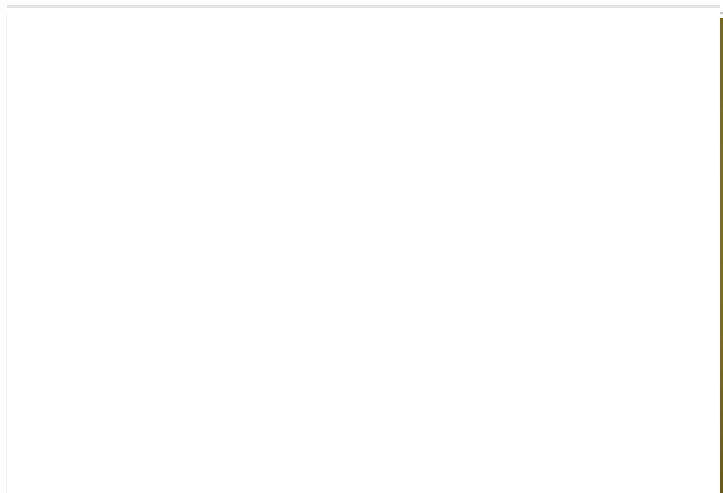
There's a green box, flattened, framed, and hanging on the wall. Next to it is an enormous wad of crumpled yellow paper, also flattened and framed. Not far away, another flattened box has the word *India* printed on it.

What is the intention of the artist? How do I, who know little about visual art, begin to approach it?

From an audio speaker nearby, Laurie Anderson's unlikely 1982 hit "[O Superman](#)" starts. And suddenly it's as though some conceptual and emotional door has opened to Linda Lindroth's art — whose works these are — and I walk through it.

"I Like the Sound of That," the current exhibit at [Artspace](#) on Orange Street, where it runs through July 1, is unified by the idea of pairing six artists' visual work — that of Delano Dunn, Peter Halley, Linda Lindroth, Lindsay Packer, Joseph Saccio, and Ian Trask — with soundtracks of the artists' choosing that reflects the work environments in their studios, so that viewers hear a little bit what their studios sound like as they're creating the art. On paper, this could sound gimmicky, or even

manipulative (I have a special resentment for movie soundtracks that tell me how I'm supposed to feel at every moment). Instead, it's both mesmerizing and thought-provoking, making for the most satisfying exhibit I've seen in town this year.



Peter Halley, "Network."

BRIAN SLATTERY PHOTO

Peter Halley's *Network* consists of a digital montage of pages from the artist's notebooks from the early 1980s. The images themselves are quick sketches of houses, streets, and parking lots. With their square shapes and bars over the windows, the houses are rendered to look like little prisons. Sub-division, one label reads. What ideas was the artist working on? What emotion was he trying to convey? The music perhaps makes it obvious, but also fitting.

[Talking Heads](#), [Joy Division](#), and [Brian Eno and David Byrne](#) were part of the soundtrack of suburban anxiety and despair at the time, and

hearing them now, not as a part of the continuum of popular music history, but tagged to an artifact from the same period, turns out to be a stirring reminder of just how unsettling the suburbs could feel for the kids of the kids who grew up in them, when their fresh postwar veneer was long gone, and their future more uncertain than anyone seemed to want to admit.



Delano Dunn, "The Fire Next Time."

The [alternating sunny jazz](#) and [moody hip hop](#) in Delano Dunn's selected soundtrack are a little like seeing the works in two different lights. It helped this viewer to see both the playfulness and menace in Dunn's work more easily. In *The Fire Next Time*, an African-American couple falls back joyously into a bed of flowers that seem to be exploding with happiness all around them. They don't seem to

notice that the flowers end not far from their heads; there's only darkness beyond, and there a demon with the head of a horse is lying in wait, or maybe even rising up to catch them if they get too close. The jazz connected me with the couple. The hip hop connected me with the demon.

Dunn achieves a similar effect with *Benediction 21242*, which features the faces of figures from the civil rights movement placed inside astronaut helmets. Under the influence of the happier music, the piece suggested that the people in the helmets were every bit the pioneers that the astronauts were. When the moodier music kicked in, the figures in the helmets seemed trapped, and the piece aligned itself with Gil Scott-Heron and Marvin Gaye. Why did we spend all that money to send someone to the moon when so many people were in need at home? Dunn's art supports both readings, both lines of questions, and the music helped me get there.

Joseph Saccio's choice of music underlines the fundamental aspects of his art, not only in the repertoire of classical music, but in the sound of the music itself. Deep and sonorous, the music seemed subterranean, or submarine, a good match for the materials of shells and wood that Saccio uses to make his pieces. The music was also an avenue to guide me in slipping into a longer view of things, long enough to see something of the arc of the movement of civilization in the *Quiver for St. Sebastian*, or to think in terms of the lives of trees, in *From Such Destruction Can Solace Arise?* It isn't always easy to see the heartbreak in things that take a long time to happen. It's there in Saccio's work, and the music allowed me to tap into that emotional core faster.

Delano Dunn, "Candidate 21242."

The music also tied the show together more strongly, as the soundtracks blended in the air as I moved from one artist's work to the next, sometimes creating moments of soothing harmony and sometimes creating cacophony, in a way that [Charles Ives would have probably appreciated](#). The audio tracks also included the sounds of the artists at work, from footsteps and scrapes to the whine of a drill. Putting me in the studio with the artist, and encouraging me to connect with the physical and emotional process of making art, raised the interesting possibility that maybe the acts of making and viewing art are more similar than I'd given them credit for. They were both reactions to a piece of art, with the (crucial) difference being that viewers got a finished product, while the artist was allowed to make

Joseph Saccio, "Quiver for St. Sebastian."

changes. The blending of music, visual art, and work through the gallery's space also encouraged the idea that all the artists in the exhibition, regardless of what issues they engaged with or the media they chose, were in some essential way after the same thing — something too big for language to express, but which art and music alike allow us to feel.

Maybe it's because I'm a musician myself, but I found the pairing of art and music so effective that I wondered why museums didn't do it more often. It connected me to the art more, and the artists' works to one another more intimately. It also connected the entire exhibition to the greater city around it. On stepping outside of Artspace, I heard the soundtrack in the air change, and I reflexively looked behind me, thinking that some music had been piped outside, and that there was more to see in the building's entryway. But no. The music was coming from the car waiting at the light on Orange and Crown. The incidental sounds were people walking by, the whisper of traffic from State Street, the clanky wheel of a cart being pushed on the other side of the street. The visual art was the city itself.

Hear Betsy Kim speak with curator Sarah Fritchey, sound designer Joel Abbott, and artist Delano Dunn about "I Like the Sound of That" on WNHH.

Joseph Saccio, "From Such Destruction Can Solace Arise?"



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