

SAMSON YOUNG

Mastery of Language Affords Remarkable Power

August 20 – October 29, 2016

PRESS RELEASE

Experimenter presents *Mastery of Language Affords Remarkable Power*, Samson Young's first solo in India. The exhibition opens on Saturday August 20 and will continue until October 29 2016.

Young is a trained composer and practicing sound artist. While his output is multi-disciplinary, he still maintains an active practice as a composer of concert hall music. Young's work contextualizes political and communal structure and questions, among other crucial positions in today's globalized world, what it means to reproduce the institutions of classical music outside of the West? When an Asian composer writes an "opera," a "symphony," or a "bagatelle" – how does one gain admission into this very specific history of music making, and at what cost? In the backdrop of transnationalism that ignores the rich contradictions that activate the act of border crossing and dangerously suppresses individual voices, how does one allow marginalized groups to temporarily reclaim cultural spaces in a very privileged site within an already canonized and dominant culture itself? Young's work in *Mastery of Language Affords Remarkable Power* comprises of a series of works on paper, videos and a durational performance spanning the course of the exhibition.

Using a seemingly simple construct, Young questions the very nature of reading and understanding visual and aural stimuli, in a politically potent series of works. The title of the exhibition alludes to a quote by the Martinique Afro-Caribbean philosopher, writer and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, who in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* questions and positions orality as a function of both domination and resistance. The works on paper, *To Fanon* (2015–ongoing) refer to Fanon's work, who's thinking on the pivotal role of language in cultural, racial and political domination, comment on how language and the mastery of it wields immense power. Young re-appropriates, re-cycles and "vandalizes" the hand-written manuscripts of his original musical compositions, created between 2005 - 2015. He draws, stamps, colors, prints over them, and covers them with mixed media elements, destroying their original function and renders them unreadable as music scores. By inserting, splicing and making certain sections of the original musical scores undecipherable, Young offers a new lens into an appropriated reading of the visual and aural language represented by the altered drawings.

The compositions have all previously received public performances, and sound recordings of these performances exist, but Young did not make copies of these manuscripts before vandalizing them and therefore makes them unusable for future performances. The act of erasure and enabling a re-entry into the pieces is what interests Young and *To Fanon* establishes the notion of power and language, a tool often used to establish a cultural and political hegemony. The performative nature of musical signs and languages, also the power that comes with an awareness of such a quality in musical signs and languages (and therefore, the possibility to manipulate them), seems to underscore the works. Layered on these original manuscripts are images, texts, musical signs and objects that to Young have a "performative" power in the sense

In a section of the gallery, two videos from Young's *Muted Situation* series face each other. In these videos, one sees a lion dancing troupe and a string quartet in performance, yet the sonic qualities of these performances sound strangely unfamiliar: the "sonic foreground" of such situations had been consciously suppressed. As a result, the less-commonly-noticed layers are revealed: from the lion dancers' stomping of the feet, to the subtle yet perfectly coordinated breathing of the members of the string quartet. This act of "muting" constitutes an intensely focused re-imagination and re-construction of the auditory. It involves the conscious suppression of dominant voices, as a way to uncover the unheard and the marginalised, or to make apparent assumptions about hearing and sounding.

Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* refers to "creative misreading" – a way by which a poet clears imaginative space for oneself through deliberately and creatively misreading a precursor. For example, to declare a work an "opera" is to acknowledge an art form and its contradicting set of histories, conventions and assumptions, to give opera a "nod." But it is also to give oneself permission to misread, misinterpret and reinterpret, and by doing so, reclaim opera as one's own. The act of composing for Young therefore, maybe understood as "cross-cultural free play." – gestures of appropriations that are detached from the origin to which they refer, becoming acts of reconfiguration and misconfiguration. Through these creative misreadings, Young re-imagines marginality and centrality, albeit temporarily in *Mastery of Language Affords Remarkable Power*.

Artist and composer Samson Young (b.1979) studied music, philosophy and gender studies at the University of Sydney and holds a Ph.D. in Music Composition from Princeton University. Young's diverse practice draws from the avant-garde compositional traditions of aleatoric music, musique concrète, and graphical notation. Behind each project is an extensive process of research, involving a mapping of the process through a series of "sound sketches" and audio recordings. His drawings, radio broadcasts, performances and compositions touch upon the recurring topics of conflict, war, and political frontiers.

Young was the inaugural winner of the BMW Art Journey Award at the Art Basel Hong Kong 2015. He has participated in group exhibitions at venues including 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney; Asia Triennial, Manchester; Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle; Arko Art Center, Seoul; Kunsthalle Winterthur, Switzerland; the Moscow Biennale of Young Art, Moscow; Amos Anderson Museum, Helsinki; Today Art Museum, Beijing; and Taipei Contemporary Art Museum, Taiwan. Recent and upcoming solo projects include Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan (2015); Team Gallery, New York (2015); Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); Experimenter, India (August 2016); and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany (December 2016). In 2017, Young will represent his native Hong Kong at the 2017 edition of Venice Biennale.

As a practicing musician, Young is the member of multiple bands and has collaborated with ensembles and orchestras worldwide. He has participated in international music and performing art festivals including Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt; Fusebox Festival, Austin; New York Electronic Art Festival, New York; Tonlagen Festival, Dresden; Transart Festival, Bolzano; and MONA FOMA Festival of Music and Art.

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