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Solomon Yu: Silent Waves

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Hannah Hodson talks to Solomon Yu about his role curating **Silent Waves**, an exhibition of sound held exclusively online

Joseph Turner's oil paintings and watercolours are some of the 19th century's artistic masterpieces. Though he painted long before the era of recorded sound, for upcoming sound exhibition *Silent Waves*, the Romanticist was still inspirational. "They evoke a sense of drama, you can almost hear the crashing waves and the sails whipping back and forth." These are the musings of Solomon Yu, a multidisciplinary artist who studied visual arts at Chinese University of Hong Kong. In much the same way that a word can be onomatopoeic, visual art, for Yu, holds the capacity to exude a powerful, audible dimension. Turner's seminal painting *The Battle of Trafalgar* was a focal point of inspiration for *Silent Waves*, an online exhibition that is available for public viewing from June 28, and for which Yu serves as both artist and curator.

Silent Waves launches on The Library, a new online platform set up by [soundpocket.org.hk](#), a not-for-profit organisation promoting and facilitating art, music and theatre. Its mission: 'to create a community of active listeners who are curious about listening as a way of knowing ourselves and each other'. The Library is a public resource hosting a collection of sounds, and it is this that provided the starting point for the exhibition

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where Yu and eight other artists present works. “We want to reflect the other side of an image; a hearing experience, rather than a visual one,” explains Yu. He continues, “we are looking at the correlation between images and sounds, and the images we create in our minds from hearing sounds.”



White Noise by Stephanie Sin

Set to strike a chord with audiences, the exhibition brings together a collection of personal experiences, but also provides an analysis of our reactions to sounds. Yu explains, “Stephanie Sin, one of the artists, is creating her own white noise in *The White Noise – A Symphony of Electrical Households*, whilst Tam Kar-wing, who suffers from tinnitus, is trying to recreate the ringing noise that he constantly hears.” Online visitors will also be able to gain insight into the lives of those who experience senses differently, with Kong Yiu-wing’s *Synaesthesia Learning Project*. His piece merges art with science. By taking a medical condition and putting a creative twist on it, one can experience the colours seen in relation to certain sounds. Yu’s own piece shifts the lens toward an internal investigation. *Worlds Between our Eardrums* records people’s reactions to an abstract soundbite he picked from the library. “The clips are then edited into a silent video, only showing these participants deep in thought – their facial expressions, lip movements and body language.” Unlike the other artists, Yu sought to capture visual reactions to sound, rather than sound itself. He has therefore combined both visual and sound art, but places precedence on the audial aspect, in contrast to most modern art.

Sound exhibitions, while rare in Hong Kong, are not uncommon. Just last month, *Beyond the Sound* opened, an exhibition curated by Anne-Laure Chamboissier that was designed to encourage people to consciously listen in a city oftentimes overwhelmed with noise. Sound art has recently been included in City University and Baptist University’s arts programmes as a separate medium to explore. Despite being in its infancy in Hong Kong, the art form is receiving growing recognition.

Despite having a background in the visual arts, Yu now cites sound as his preferred artistic medium. “I was initially inspired to go down this route in 2013 when I learned about audio description, the tool used to aid blind people.” This inspired Yu’s first sound-based exhibition, *The Sound of Image*, which could be described as an

invisible exhibition. He elaborates, “We exhibited works that weren’t there. The artists wrote their scripts and people had to imagine the work, much in the same way that the sight impaired have to,” says Yu.



Sor jail! Gum ying jan? by Thomas Yuen

Silent Waves takes this one step further, removing the physical dimension altogether. With the exception of the opening ceremony (which introduces the new online platform and displays the tools used in the artists’ creative processes), the entire exhibition is held online. Large-scale panel works and installations have become regular fixtures in galleries of late, so this is an uncommon path to tread. Then again, it is also a rather unusual theme, and Yu is certainly not one to shy away from the unconventional.

“It’s not a visual exhibition, and given that most of us listen to sounds with headphones, it is a very personal experience,” believes Yu. He continues, “We didn’t feel that we needed a [physical], White Cube sort of space to present. We want people to take their time to listen in their own environments.” With an online platform comes a sense of limitlessness. “There are no opening hours, and our contents can be shared across other social media platforms,” explains Yu.

This seems incredibly in keeping with the 24/7 nature of Hong Kong. With new and exciting visuals perpetually at the end of our fingertips, no more than a click away, why not add sound to that?

Silent Waves Opens Sun Jun 28;
thelibrarybysoundpocket.org.hk.

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