

# On Site

## Exhibitions, installations, etc

### *Your Ears Later Will Know To Listen*

Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, UK  
Caruso St John's architectural design of Nottingham Contemporary offers something to long durational shows such as *Your Ears Later Will Know To Listen*. Because the building's rooms lead into one another but also back into a central space, the typical single file gallery experience is replaced with an ability to come and go, skip and return. This multi-hour show is curated by Andrea Zarza Canova.

Zarza Canova's curation is focused yet broad. The works stand alone, but also constellate into a larger shifting whole. In one room, Yee I-Lann's film *Oh My Darling* (2022) is experienced on a mat woven from plastic washed up on Omadal Island in Malaysia. This is next to three tapestries by Hellen Ascoli that transpose the question "How is your heart?" into both Maya Kaqchikel and Spanish, next to Simnikiwe Buhlungu's *Same-ing the same Sames* (2023), which trails cassette tape across the gallery walls: the woven materials of history, desire and technology.

This room leads into a corner gallery in which Hong-Kai Wang stages a reconstruction of a lost 1925 Taiwanese "Sugarcane Song" with current workers in Dongshi province. From the past the workers sing to the present, "caught in the gates of hell", yet fight on, shoulder to shoulder. On the other side of the building is another work devoted to sound recovered. There, eight large canvases by Satch Hoyt are strapped to temporary hessian walls, from which a 16-point ambisonic system plays the sounds of musical instruments normally enclosed in ethnographic museums, which Hoyt "unmuted" at various points.

From behind a curtain Raheel Khan's work emerges: one wall mounted with shopfront shutters in the shape of a pine tree, another with a shopfront sign with its graphic layer removed, leaving only strip lighting, electrical leads and bare metal. To the side are two canvases: one yellow, upon which is glued the parts of a disassembled clock, the other teal and grey, a pattern of the Mangla Dam in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, repeated in the style of a bank note not yet cut to size. On the other wall are strapped three tannoy's playing disaster warnings looped by the artist. Sound is here a warning – heard out of sync.

The exhibition name *Your Ears Later Will Know To Listen* is taken from the show's longest work, Nguyễn Trinh Thi's *How To Improve The World* (2021), where air is blown through a pipe into the ears of a newborn baby and that sentence is uttered. In the sentence's standard syntax, there is a sense of perfunctory waiting, heard by the single child awaiting its future. In its non-standard form, epistemic and auricular transformation combine, as promise or prophecy.

As I left the gallery into 30 degree heat, I felt transformed. I had seen and heard things in new ways. In some sense, however, the exhibition's title is surpassed by the contents of the show – warnings from multiple material histories of environmental devastation, worker exploitation and colonial violence.

Sam Dolbear

### *In Pursuit Of Repetitive Beats*

Barbican, London, UK

"Let me just insert your wire" is not what you expect to hear before going to a rave. Except I'm not at a rave, I'm standing awkwardly in a blacked out theatre in the Barbican, wearing a VR haptic suit, headset, and carrying little remote controls in each hand. Once the wire is inserted, a virtual world flickers into life in front of my eyes. I'm in a bedroom plastered with rave flyers: smiley faces, DJs and MCs grin at me from the walls. A spooky NPC smokes a cigarette on the sofa opposite. Another is watching the telly, which is showing a news report of some police trying to crack down on illegal raves. The year is 1989 and I am, in some senses, there for it.

There are four real people with me in my virtual experience, and their bodies show up in the world like human-shaped dot constellations. The architecture of the story leads us, narratively, emotionally and, to a much lesser extent, physically, through various mise-en-scènes typical of the build-up to an acid house rave: someone's bedroom, a motorway service station, the interior of a shabby little car, and we even get a glimpse into a police station where a team is trying to identify the party's location in order to shut it down. We use our remote controls to pick up objects like flyers and lighters that highlight themselves, video game style, then trigger bits of documentary-style speech about the period. Eventually we arrive at an old warehouse,

following a bizarre space animation where we're floating in a sea-sky of stars, summoning a swirling vortex with our fake laser-beam hands. There is, interestingly, no explicit mention of drugs, and I wonder if these zanier animations are an attempt to imply some kind of altered consciousness.

The rave itself is very short, less than five minutes. I am surrounded by jerking NPCs while Joey Beltram's "Energy Flash" thumps away, the bass simulated in my haptic suit's vibrations. It's bizarre to not have anything to do with my body other than stand around trying not to look moronic to whoever in the room isn't wearing a headset, but this self-consciousness does not extend to some of my fellow VR-nauts, whose spot-bodies wave their arms around without inhibition.

With the first blinks back into the real world, I feel a kind of euphoria, as though I've really been somewhere and experienced something intense. But even as I cycle off the memories curdle. My emotional response, some heady mix of nostalgia (for a year I wasn't alive for), excitement (at the music) and awe (at the mind-boggling technology), dissolves quickly, proving as ephemeral and synthetic as the experience I have just had. Reflecting on this later, I am reminded of something a friend said to me once: a person will begin to salivate when they bite into an apple as an automatic response to eating. When that apple turns out to be mouldy, the saliva might still be there, but it doesn't mean they're still enjoying the apple.

Who is this kind of thing for? It doesn't feel like it's for people who were alive for the Second Summer of Love. I guess it's for people like me, born years later, who grew up reading about it in books and cheerfully taking whatever pills the British rave imaginary will sell. It leaves a bitter taste in the mouth that no VR headset can simulate.

Lucy Thraves

Satch Hoyt, *Your Ears Later Will Know To Listen* installation view, Nottingham Contemporary (2025)



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