

Sshh ... you're listening to the peculiar sound of art

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Klangkunst's display contains nine aural experiences – including the plastic pipe in the bucket (far right).

Photo: Safran Lecuivre/SCMP

A series of unique installations will have you up to your ears in a very abstract world

By Barry C Chung

Don't fret if you've never heard of *Klangkunst*, German for sound art. Chances are you've experienced some form of it before.

“If you listen to a city – to all the traffic, the people passing by, [people] talking, the sound of their steps, the echoes, the resonance and reverberations – then you're already in a sound-art situation,” explains Johannes Sistermanns, former German Association for Electroacoustic Music vice-president and sound-art artist.

Klangkunst is also the name of a travelling exhibition showing leading German sound artists' work, melding the visual with the manipulation of sound. Very often, everyday objects or natural environmental sounds are used to create installations unique to the space in which they are heard.

The exhibition made its way to the Goethe-Institut Hong Kong last week for a 12-day stay. It takes up roughly three metres by three metres and holds nine works by 11 Klangkunst artists. Although self-contained, the installations also work in combination with each other and can be experienced as an entire unit.

Make no mistake about it: sound art is not for everyone. It's such an abstract form of expression that few can fully grasp the subtle artistry involved. Observers, as recommended by *Klangkunst* curator Sistermanns, need to free their inhibitions. "The best thing is to come with an open mind," he adds. "Leave behind your prejudices. Do not judge too quickly what you see and hear and what you do not see and hear."

As a whole, the exhibition resembles a workstation equipped with a stool, bench, table and bookshelf. On the far end lies a plastic pipe jutting out of a bucket covered with pieces of white cloth (called *Syphon* and created by Franz Martin Olbrisch). Plugging your ear with the pipe creates a seashell effect, which is enhanced by chirping, squeaking-like sounds.

Other works include a bookshelf clamped with a dish-sized speaker, a reading lamp with the light bulb replaced by a speaker, and a sound box that alters its pitch with the opening and closing of the lid. Many of the sounds emitted cannot be explained. There are looped noises that sound like a gong or typewriter clicks and clacks. On the floor, a work called *Triple Bags* by Ulrich Eller marks out the exhibition space. The white paper bags have false bottoms which conceal speakers projecting sounds of rippling water.

Perhaps, the most intriguing is *Klangsurfer (Sound Surfer)*, by Frauke Eckhardt, a bench with a pair of headphones attached to it. Participants sit and by swaying left to right, the shifting sound of beads moves from one headphone to the other. Eckhardt compares her work to do-it-yourself music.

Sound art is alive and thriving in many parts of the world today. "Every culture has their own approach to *Klangkunst*," explains Sistermanns. "They have different sensibilities and different reasons to make *Klangkunst*."

***Klangkunst* is at the Goethe-Institut at Hong Kong Arts Centre until Nov.14**