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Laminated PAINT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Richmond, Virginia
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Abstract

LAMINATED PAINT

By Travis Austin, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Major Director: Stephen Vitiello, Professor, Graduate Program Director, Department of Kinetic Imaging

Though we may not perceive it, we are surrounded by material-in-flux. Inert materials degrade and the events that comprise our natural and social environments causally thread into a duration that unifies us in our incomprehension. Sounds reveal ever-present vibrations of the landscape: expressions of the flexuous ground on which we stand.

These works, musings, and theoretical inquiries provide the background for *Laminated PAINT*.

Playback is past juxtaposed with the present

Box with No Sound and Interior Volume (after Robert Morris)

If he had never lived, the shape of art history since 1960 would be little different...

Peter Schjeldahl on Robert Morris, *The Village Voice*; March 1, 1994

I think that today art is a form of art history.

Robert Morris, letter to Henry Flynt; August 13, 1962

Robert Morris' *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* is a walnut box containing a speaker that plays back the sound of its own construction. In his book, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*, Seth Kim-Cohen writes that Morris' *Box* "is a very early, if not *the* earliest, example of a work existing simultaneously, equally, as sculpture and as sound work. As such, Morris' box also provides the earliest example of how such work might constitute its ontology. *Box* indicates where an expanded sonic practice might locate its values and how it might organize its relationships to and between process and product, the space of production versus the space of reception, and the time of making relative to the time of beholding."¹



Robert Morris, *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*, 1961

There Will Never Be Silence: exhibition curated by David Platzker
Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 12, 2013–June 22, 2014

1. Kim-Cohen, Seth. "In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art." New York, NY ; London ; New Delhi ; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print. p. 47

To fully experience *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* is to listen through a three-and-a-half-hour recording of the box's construction. There are two distinct components: sound and unitary form. The duration of the sound is determined by the artist, while the cube is perceived in space temporally at the viewer's discretion.

In keeping with event and word scores of the time that interwove process and product, Kim-Cohen proposes that the sound in Morris' *Box* serves as instructions to build a copy.² When I came across Kim-Cohen's passage on Morris, I had been recording different material activations (sledgehammering a brick, kneading wet clay, twisting bundles of straw...) and presenting the recordings along side the resultant states of the materials. I was thinking about holistic relationships between material and sound, and the idea of "covering" a precursive work appealed to my musical background. *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* struck a chord with me because of the non-hierarchical relationship between its retinal and sound components. I set out to unify the separate components of Morris' *Box* by bringing them together in the activity of the present.



My replica of Morris' *Box*

I constructed a replica of the box and recorded the sound of shredding it with a miter saw. The remains would be placed in a speaker cone and activated by playing back the recording. I would loop the playback, continuously animating the material. This activity would be seen inside an open plinth through a plexiglass cube with the same dimensions as the original box. The experiential divide between the cube and the sound in Morris' piece would be dissolved.

2. Kim-Cohen, Seth. "In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art." New York, NY ; London ; New Delhi ; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print. p. 49

Upon constructing the piece and turning on the sound, the speaker cone kicked the finer sawdust particles up and out of the plinth, tracing the volume of the former box along the inner surface of the plexiglass. Through the ghostly form, the viewer's attention is directed to the amalgamation within the plinth.



Interior Volume



Box with No Sound

I commemorated my replica with a painting. Within the historical context of Morris' *Box*, representational painting was considered a discipline of the past, an appropriate tense for the late state of my replica. The illusory space within *Box with No Sound* denies the temporal and spatial conditions required for sound. Thus, the painting reconciles the temporal differences within Morris' *Box* by excluding object and sound from the intention of the work altogether. The visual of the box is admittedly strange, and I'm amused at myself explaining the significance of the painting: "...but it's a sound art painting..." Sound, an essential component of the work, can only be imagined within its illusory plane.

Interior Volume and *Box with No Sound* present unified aural and perceptual activities within their respective realms. The essential conditions for sound are presented in relation to two distinct representations of the subject: one spatial and one illusory. They differentiate from the stylistically subjective, abstract representationalism of visual music, and the conceptual objectification of sound in *musique concrete*.

If we are to anthropomorphize the box, we can relate it to Morris' *Untitled (Box for Standing)*, an upright wooden box in which Morris performatively stood (as he will one day not be able to), and *Column*, a hollow rectangular column in which Morris stood and toppled over, landing him in the emergency room. When Morris performed in his work, he was demonstrating linkages between his objects and his body. Morris is well known for his essay *Notes on Sculpture*. In *Notes*, Morris discusses the nature of unitary form characteristic of Minimalism in the 1960's:

“Characteristic of a gestalt³ is that once it is established, all the information about it, qua gestalt, is exhausted. (One does not, for example, seek the gestalt of a gestalt.) Furthermore, once it is established, it does not disintegrate.” He elaborates that “simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships.”⁴

It's not so well known that *Notes on Sculpture* began as a parody.⁵ Although it was refashioned into a more serious text at the request of his editor, some passages retain a parodical self-satisfied tone. Like the rationale within *Notes on Sculpture*, *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* toys with the rigidity of reductive discourse, and it's evident that Morris intended the three-and-a-half-hour recording to be more impassive than revelatory. In a letter dated August 8, 1960, Morris writes to John Cage about his work, *Wind Ensemble*: “Yes, I wanted a death of process here... a kind of duration of idea only. I don't think the work goes very far toward changing the Focus from expressing or watching, which I want to do.”⁶ Soon after this letter to Cage, Morris produced his *Box* (among several other works) and invited Cage to his studio. “When Cage came, I turned [*Box*] on... and he wouldn't listen to me. He sat and listened to it for three hours and that was really impressive to me. He just sat there.”⁷ It's clear that a concept was more important to Morris than the totality of the sound content. Cage's full attention demonstrated to Morris that this work ceases to be conceptual once entirely listened to.

A few years after Cage's studio visit, Morris choreographed and produced *Site*, which includes the clamor of a jackhammer. I suspect that *Site* was influenced by Cage's visit: it interlinked ‘construction’ sounds with live performance. Morris continued producing minimalist forms, albeit without sound. Prior to writing *Notes on Sculpture* he exhibited what he termed ‘unitary forms,’ describing them as both liberated and bound by their simplicity. They recall Constantin Brancusi, upon whom Morris wrote his MA thesis. Brancusi promoted the column from pedestal to object with *Endless Column*, a title that is poetic as it is prescient. *Endless Column* is said to have given birth to modern sculpture.⁸

3. I understand the word gestalt here to be synonymous with shape.

4. Morris, Robert. “Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris.” Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993. Print. pp. 7-8

5. Meyer, James. “Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties.” New Haven, CT ; Yale University Press, 2001. Print. p. 153

6. Morris, Robert. “Letters to John Cage.” *October* 81, 1997 : p. 70

7. Ng, Tracee. “Robert Morris Artist Overview and Analysis.” *The Art Story* Retrieved from <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-morris-robert-artworks.htm> ; accessed March 2018

8. Lanchner, Carolyn. “Constantin Brancusi.” New York, NY ; The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. Print. pp. 16-18

Given Morris' personal interest in Brancusi, I don't think that Morris felt his own box on a pedestal to be *sculpture*,⁹ but he strategically framed his practice as such in order to antagonize the criticism that was driving the market from within its own logic. After all, Morris is discussed more as a Postminimalist than a sculptor. "As Annette Michelson and Rosalind Krauss have established, Morris' investigations operated through the dynamic of the ideally grasped Gestalt of the minimalist shape and the transgressive subversion of that cognitive certainty by the viewers' temporally and spatially unfolding experience of differences in the objects actual experience."¹⁰ Morris' Minimalism, the "new limit and freedom for sculpture,"¹¹ feels explicitly Cagean and Brancusian, and both are especially resonant in the work and writings he produced in the mid to late sixties.

Donald Judd wasn't enamored: "Morris' work implies that everything exists in the same way through existing in the most minimal way, but by clearly being art, purposefully built, useless and unidentifiable. It sets a lowest common denominator; it is art, which is supposed to exist most clearly and importantly, but it barely exists."¹² Cage's critics had similar complaints about *4'33"*. It appears that Morris, like Cage, effectively nailed the authoritative rigidity of his target audience. As these simple forms accrue complexity through the temporal, spatial act of perception, they read as springboards from which to investigate the phenomenological conditions of subjectivity. It is from here that Morris begins to diverge from Cage.¹³ I can also differentiate myself from Cage, because I find importance in aesthetic and subjective investigations. As long as there is human civilization, art will be produced, and subjective voices are essential to conversation.



Some of Robert Morris' Untitled pieces, 1964, at Dia:Beacon, Beacon, NY

9. In this 2011 *New York Times* interview, Robert Morris refers to his *Box* as an object: Tuchman, Phyllis. "Odd Man in: The Sculptor Robert Morris, at 86, Is Still Blazing Trails." (2017, Mar 19). *New York Times* Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/19/arts/design/odd-man-in-the-sculptor-robert-morris-at-86-is-still-blazing-trails.html> ; accessed March 2018

10. Joseph, Branden. "Robert Morris and John Cage: Reconstructing a Dialogue." *October* 81, 1997. Print. p. 64

11. The closing line of *Notes on Sculpture* frames the situation of Minimalism: "The magnification of this single most important sculptural value, shape, together with greater unification and integration of every other essential sculptural value makes on the one hand, the multipart, inflected formats of past sculpture extraneous, and on the other, establishes both a new limit and a new freedom for sculpture. Morris, Robert. "Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris." Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993. Print. p. 8

12. Judd, Donald. "Complete Writings 1959-1975." New York, NY ; Judd Foundation, 1975. Print. p. 165

13. Joseph, Branden. "Robert Morris and John Cage: Reconstructing a Dialogue." *October* 81, 1997. Print. p. 63 Joseph writes: "the end result of the Cagean program should primarily viewed in terms of the de-aestheticization of nature..."

Morris had rendered his walnut box a speaker cabinet: a gestalt that phenomenologically activates its audience. Where Morris' was displayed upon a plinth, *Interior Volume*'s speaker cabinet is the plinth, further integrating the components of the work and the display.



Interior Volume



A Marshall cabinet¹⁴

I carried out *Interior Volume* not in the flippant spirit of Duchamp, but with Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*) in mind. (*Nostalgia*) shows a series of photographs that burn on a hotplate. Each photograph is accompanied by commentary for the next photograph in the series, and so the audience is presented with simultaneous past and present elements. What may seem to be destructive acts are transformative moments from documents into animated events.



Still from Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*), 1971

14. In the context of this discussion, the "Marshall" logo shifts the cabinet into pop art.

I was invited to present my work at the *SOUND-IMAGE* Colloquium at the University of Greenwich in November of 2017. There I met Mark Harris, a professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, and a former VCUarts faculty member. He said that I was too kind to Morris and his contemporaries. His advice was to exploit a shortcoming in the historical analysis of Morris' work in order to open things up moving forward. Perhaps I had referenced him in a way that mostly leads my audience to back to Morris. Morris himself is criticized for riding upon the ideas of others. In *The Village Voice* Peter Schjeldahl writes that "Morris was an extrapolator, a sort of action critic whose game consisted in beating other artists at what could be seen, cynically, as their games."¹⁵ And in *Artforum* Dena Shottenkirk writes in a slightly warmer review that over three decades his work typically fell "in sync with the tempo of the moment."¹⁶ But you can't say Morris doesn't keep moving. In a letter he wrote to Henry Flynt, I get a good feel for his sensibilities: "Once one is committed to attempt [to effect changes in the structures of art forms] and tries it for a while- one becomes aware that if one wants "experience" one must repeat himself until other new things occur: a position difficult if not impossible to accept with large "idea" ambitions. So one remains idle, repeats things, or finds some form of concentration and duration outside the art- jazz, chess, whatever. I think that today art is a form of art history."¹⁷

15. Schjeldahl, Peter. "The Smartass Problem." (1994, Mar 01). *The Village Voice* Retrieved from <http://proxy.library.vcu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/docview/232217039?accountid=14780> ; accessed March 2018

16. Shottenkirk, Dena. "Robert Morris." *Artforum*, October 1990, Vol. 29, No. 2. Print.

17. Morris, Robert. "Letter from Bob Morris to Henry Flynt, dated 8/13/62," in Henry Flynt, *Down with Art* (Fluxus Press: New York, 1968), n.p.

At once

Continuously

Unchanging and ever-changing

PAINT

PAINT is a work in which I paint directly onto the surface of a video projection. The video depicts me painting myself into the corner of a room. The layered activity presents illusory space in temporal accordance with reality. Wet paint doubles as a projection surface, and dries at the same rate as the paint depicted within the projection. A description of the documented activities within *PAINT* could also serve as instructions:

- The corner of a room is masked with painter's tape
- A layer of black paint is applied to the corner and the paint begins to dry
- The painter's tape is removed
- The layer of black paint dries
- A layer of white paint is applied to the corner with the exception of where the painter stands
- The painter stands in the corner until the white layer of paint becomes dry to the touch
- The painter walks away

These activities are metaphorical:

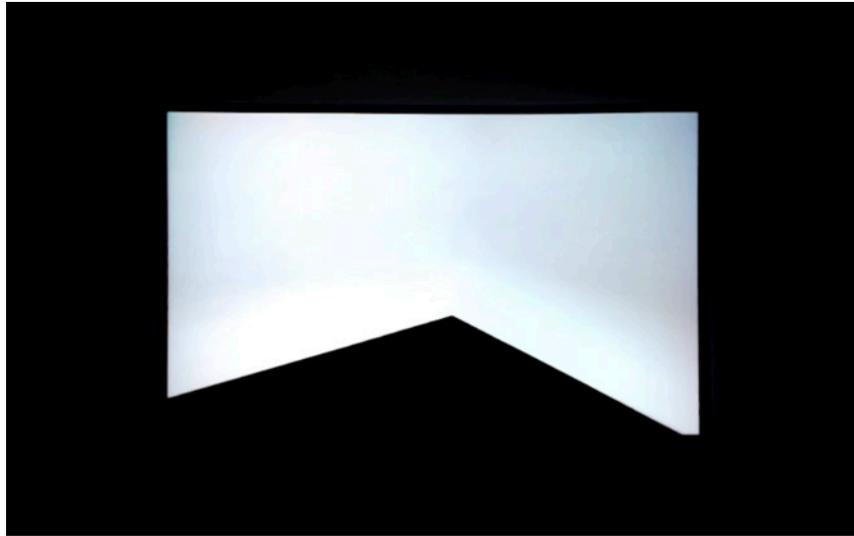
- Reduction may lead to a distinctive mark
- Reduction may limit one's options
- Reduction is akin to painting oneself into a corner
- Beholding experience is akin to watching paint dry

By performing the activities I would actualize the metaphors. The gallery in which I was to perform wouldn't allow paint on the floor, so I settled for video documentation. This afforded me more clarity of thought in carrying out the activities alone. I didn't place any sort of entertainment device out of frame while videotaping so that I could give the situation my full attention. Feet planted amidst drying paint, my thoughts came to the forefront of my experience. I meditated on the appearance of the paint, noticing it change from glossy wet to matte dry. The textural transition indicated activity over a long duration, and in time I came to perceive the liveness of my immediate environment. With a trance-induced awareness of material activity, I looked to my jacket draped on a chair. *The paint around me will be in a changed state once I'm able to walk on the dry surface, but I'll interact with my jacket same as before.* Despite its relative stability, I knew the material makeup of my jacket was degrading and transforming, albeit at a rate comprehensible only in my imagination. Drying paint had expanded my awareness of unseen material transformation by way of direct experience.

Every day of the gallery exhibition of *PAINT*, I painted along with my likeness in the video projection directly onto the projection surface. 'Live' paint was the site of perception for both material and representational aspects of the piece, and I could be seen simultaneously in both realms.

I documented a day's gallery activity and made it available as a DVD edition. This lands as a punch line because the 5-and-a-half hour film lacks the essential live qualities of the work. I never *wanted* to watch *PAINT* in its entirety, but I came to find several points of interest in recording my subjective durational experience. These points of interest (*and more!*) are given dutiful consideration within my five-plus hours of directors commentary.

I did little to prepare for the recording session. I hoped to capture thought in the making, and improvisation would complement the temporal dynamics of the piece. The generative process would double as the product. My simple plan was to respond to the action on the screen, beginning with the application of painter's tape and black paint. I expected that I would run out of insight somewhere within the first hour, and that I would respond to the mundanity on screen for the majority of the time. My expectations were mostly met, but mundanity led to the more fruitful moments. These were the departures from conceptual or anecdotal material toward observations of the materiality of the moving image and the screen.



Still from *PAINT*

Over time, my commentary became as reduced and static as the image I was attending to, but all the while I trusted that I was looking at a progression of images. This sensitized me to the passage of time to the point that I was able to process little else. With nothing perceivably changing on screen for four consecutive hours, my experience intensified. I eased the tension through an objective lens. *I know this problem will work itself out because that is the way I designed it.* I found assurance in knowing that I was subject to self-prescribed conditions.

Five hours in, my eyes and stomach began to ache. This was largely due to the layer of white paint introduced towards the end, turning on the majority of the pixel-lights at which I was staring. I displaced the physiological discomfort with tangential thought, tussling with myself through the home stretch until my likenesses relieved me by walking out of frame.



Stills from *PAINT*

Vito Acconci's prompt below cued me to record director's commentary for *PAINT*. It came from his Fall 2015 class, *Aesthetics of Information*. The prompt encourages me to pit my work against itself, but I view the commentary track as a complementary layer, or a ripple, in temporal harmony with both the video and the initial activities of *PAINT*. The layered activity/video/commentary inspired the text for *Laminated PAINT*.

Do something that exists in time, that takes time (a piece of writing, a piece of music/sound, a video/animation, etc). Whatever is is you're doing, put it *down* somewhere, in space (on paper, e.g. or on video, etc) - actually, instead of putting it *down*, you might just as well be putting it *up*, or *across*, or *over*, or *through*, or *inside*, or *inside-out*...

Use J.G. Ballard as a model: the way Ballard annotates *The Atrocity Exhibition*, more than 20 years later... Yes, he's commenting, explaining, informing, correcting, changing, adding or subtracting, etc; but, just as much, he's *re-writing* his novel, or writing a sequel, or writing a whole new novel altogether, next to the 1st one.

Do what Ballard did, at least for the time being: whatever piece/project you've done, or whatever piece/project you might be doing (after all, you might still be doing it) - whatever it is, now put something else next to it (or, if you want, on *top of* it, or *under* it, or *inside* it, etc. Now stand back & consider:

Can what you did 1st stand up to what you did later? Or does the 2nd take over? Could it be a draw? Are you prejudiced: if you want your 1st version to win, does that imply you're a traditionalist (are you living in the past?) - or, if you want your 2nd version to win, does that mean you always want a 2nd chance (do you believe you always *deserve* a 2nd chance? do you always do better if you have a model to play off of? or do you always need something to overturn, do you always want to start revolutions...)

READING 5:

Marshall McLuhan/Quentin Fiore, from *The Medium Is The Massage (An Inventory Of Effects)* – eye versus ear, & vice versa/hearing versus seeing, & vice versa/public versus mass, & vice versa/public versus private, & vice versa/public versus individual, & vice versa/single versus many, & vice versa.....

EXERCISE 5:

A. Do a project on paper – it could be on paper the size of a newspaper, like the NY Times, it could be on paper the size of a book-page, it could be the traditional/normal/standard 8½x11 piece of paper... Put text next to image next to different-looking-text next to drawing next to still-different-looking-text next to advertisement next to again-different-looking-text next to public-notice, etc... Put right-side-up text next to upside-down text next to on-its-side text next to image whether right-side-up or upside-down or on-its-side... Whatever you do, how do you continue from page to page, how do you go from page to page, how do you flow or do you even think of flow, do you think instead of 'flee,' or 'fly,' or 'flit,' etc...

B. Now do the same project, or something like the same project, on a computer-screen: you can't go from page to page on a computer, there aren't any pages – you can go from 1 image to another, 1 image after another, but that might be cheating, that's not using the medium for what it can or might be able to do... Instead, go *inside* 1 thing into another, go *through* 1 thing into another... Or go *outside* 1 thing into *another* thing outside it, into yet *still another* thing outside that, into *still another*, etc...

READING 6:

J.G. Ballard, from *The Atrocity Exhibition*, 1967-69, annotated by Ballard 1990

EXERCISE 6:

Do something that exists in time, that takes time (a piece of writing, a piece of music/sound, a video/animation, etc). Whatever it is you're doing, put it *down* somewhere, in space (on paper, e.g., or on video, etc) – actually, instead of putting it *down*, you might just as well be putting it *up*, or *across*, or *over*, or *through*, or *inside*, or *inside-out*...

Use J.G. Ballard as a model: the way Ballard annotates *The Atrocity Exhibition*, more than 20 years later... Yes, he's commenting, explaining, informing, correcting, changing, adding or

subtracting, etc; but, just as much, he's *re-writing* his novel, or writing a sequel, or writing a whole new novel altogether, next to the 1st one.

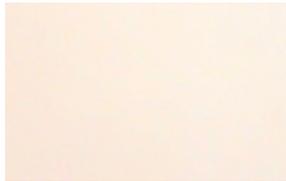
Do what Ballard did, at least for the time being: whatever piece/project you've done, or whatever piece/project you might be doing (after all, you might still be doing it) – whatever it is, now put something else next to it (or, if you want, *on top of* it, or *under* it, or *inside* it, etNow stand back & consider:

Can what you did 1st stand up to what you did later? Or does the 2nd take over? Could it be a draw? Are you prejudiced: if you want your 1st version to win, does that imply you're a traditionalist (are you living in the past?) – or, if you want your 2nd version to win, does that mean you always want a 2nd chance (do you believe you always *deserve* a 2nd chance? do you always do better if you have a model to play off of? or do you always need something to overturn, do you always want to start revolutions...)

Stills

Oil on canvas

(each) 13 x 18 in



00:00:13:27



00:02:42:06



00:07:38:23



00:09:29:29



00:12:58:15



02:09:27:15



03:07:45:13



04:07:46:07



04:14:54:24



04:15:35:12



04:16:46:20



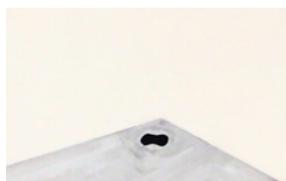
04:18:58:29



04:20:51:01



04:21:13:13



04:22:28:18



05:33:17:22

Laminated PAINT (transcript)

The corner of a room is masked with painter's tape

00;01;19;11 Watching paint dry
00;01;41;17 Composing and listening
00;01;53;13 The essential fabric
00;02;25;06 An instruction

A layer of black paint is applied to the corner and the paint begins to dry

00;03;48;10 To paint on the floor
00;04;02;06 To watch a screen
00;05;00;16 To stand alive
00;05;41;12 Lost on the audience
00;06;16;04 On a wall
00;07;06;09 On wet paint
00;07;17;09 On whatever you see
00;07;55;13 To layer attention
00;08;19;01 In accordance with time
00;11;38;20 To trap myself

The painter's tape is removed

00;12;09;15 Until the paint dries
00;12;49;14 So it won't follow
00;13;04;09 My steps
00;14;24;16 My position
00;17;25;18 Knowing activity
00;17;50;25 Knowing half-life
00;18;07;08 Knowing duration
00;18;17;00 Beyond knowing
00;18;55;17 Beyond grasp
00;20;23;16 Pinning a particle
00;20;50;04 Affected by attention
00;22;03;20 To speak of music
00;22;54;12 Of human origin
00;23;16;22 Of speech
00;23;29;23 Of music

00;24;10;06 Of a black wedge
00;25;18;10 Of flux
00;26;55;00 Of a figure
00;27;44;16 Of movement
00;28;57;18 Of expanse
00;30;38;19 Of red, yellow and blue
00;31;17;07 Of an after image
00;31;20;27 Of sight
00;32;01;09 Of paint drying
00;35;07;03 Of completion
00;37;51;22 Myself in reflection
00;37;59;00 Myself in the black
00;38;29;20 Yourself in the screen
00;39;58;07 The suspended space
00;41;18;29 The flat reflection
00;44;42;06 The loss of property
00;45;18;27 In the wet paint
00;45;21;18 In the transformation
00;45;41;20 Outside of myself
00;47;15;15 A shared experience
00;47;42;14 A jogging partner
00;48;33;24 A drone duet
00;50;18;03 A video of paint
00;51;02;06 Drying in tempo
00;51;52;01 Imaginary music
00;56;43;15 Neither static nor image
00;58;41;18 Still black
00;58;52;00 Reflection
00;59;49;28 Composing and listening
01;01;44;23 Instructing
01;02;48;19 Over explaining
01;03;26;11 Thoughts onto the viewer
01;04;00;05 Documenting action
01;04;21;17 In accordance with the action
01;05;22;23 Care taking
01;06;45;19 In real time
01;07;37;04 A causal chain
01;13;23;20 A video of paint drying
01;15;31;03 Differentiated from the room
01;19;17;29 One and the same
01;20;36;11 The artist and viewer

01;21;22;25 The fateful measure	02;34;43;13 Achieving the product
01;21;22;25 The constant idea	02;36;13;05 Achieving passage
01;23;03;11 The only reduction	02;38;43;13 The only progress
01;23;36;20 The limit of notation	02;39;44;15 The only sight
01;25;05;13 The limit of perfection	02;41;15;15 In representative form
01;27;47;17 The omnipresent flux	02;41;28;13 In due time
01;29;30;10 The material essence	02;41;48;15 Seeing my reflection
01;29;59;02 The inability to represent	02;44;07;16 In the black
01;32;56;06 The inability of paint	02;44;40;14 Intensely static
01;33;40;18 The spectrum foregrounded	02;47;51;16 Seeing the plane
01;35;57;27 The still figure	02;52;32;23 And not a window
01;36;23;04 On flexuous ground	02;56;09;19 Much like before
01;37;04;27 Unchanged	02;56;47;19 Reassured by repetition
01;37;40;01 A video of paint drying	02;57;38;02 Retracing experience
01;39;44;09 An illusory document	02;58;52;04 Through the image
01;42;32;10 Within a projection	02;59;09;10 Knowing it moves
01;43;26;17 Dust and reflection	03;01;06;23 This one time
01;44;40;15 The vibrating white	03;02;13;00 With nothing changing
01;45;23;18 On black ground	03;02;47;07 For the sake of myself
01;45;59;26 Folded in a void	03;03;11;25 Turning to the sound
01;50;15;29 Displayed on the screen	03;04;02;02 In anechoic space
01;50;40;06 Each pixel a spotlight	03;05;46;28 To the durational still
01;52;18;03 Each pixel the same	03;06;41;29 To the image
01;53;44;03 In a co-opted form	03;06;59;21 To the static motion
01;59;08;21 In a bed of noise	03;07;16;03 To be engaged
02;02;21;23 With eyes closed	03;07;56;17 To no further interest
02;04;18;04 Perceiving motion	03;09;16;14 To no further change
02;05;17;28 And accruing flux	03;09;53;01 An artificial place
02;06;39;25 Through meandering vessels	03;10;43;22 Sealed from the light
02;09;19;13 Straddling pixels	03;10;54;15 As the bird knows light
02;09;40;24 Straddling motion	03;11;42;24 Promised by technology
02;12;06;13 Straddling a gradient	03;12;31;04 To find a new thread
02;13;38;25 Straddling material	03;14;17;13 In regard to the present
02;14;59;29 Black wedge, white space	03;14;45;28 An advantage
02;15;13;00 Video noise, color spectrum	03;15;14;13 A skewed image
02;16;33;20 Video noise, black wedge	03;15;22;03 A dusty surface
02;17;07;26 The figure wall	03;16;12;06 A broken window
02;20;20;29 The dust on the surface	03;16;28;26 Against the instruction
02;20;36;23 Straddling illusion	03;16;31;02 Of the frontal plane
02;21;59;04 Time rewind	03;19;31;11 That divides our instincts
02;22;52;10 Time passed	03;19;52;19 On behalf of our predators
02;28;39;29 Tape removed	03;19;57;04 Engaging boredom
02;30;43;12 Over and over	03;20;02;00 To keep us moving
02;33;27;14 In sync with the image	03;20;21;04 And summit the chain
02;33;43;06 Returning and departing	03;20;27;25 For the privilege of staring

03;25;34;22 Beyond all interest
03;29;10;22 To nowhere
03;29;49;11 With nothing to say
03;32;27;27 Based on my interest
03;33;00;21 In a finite form
03;33;15;07 Made impossible
03;35;00;17 By other eyes
03;36;44;25 By other diversions
03;36;52;12 From a self-solving problem
03;40;27;20 Kept in order
03;41;07;22 However bright
03;43;34;00 And liquid light
03;44;02;21 A solution
03;44;52;21 In a lava lamp
03;45;58;19 Layered
03;47;00;21 For two weeks straight
03;47;23;17 Forty layers of paint
03;47;32;27 For quite a relief
03;51;29;11 A thing of less interest
03;52;53;20 A timeless lie
03;53;47;20 To be melted down
03;54;19;13 Repurposed
03;58;26;20 Remembered
03;58;39;01 And forgotten
04;06;40;17 In the lines of the form
04;06;53;03 And the motion
04;07;17;13 Fading into black
04;07;39;20 Around the lines
04;07;58;28 Between white and black
04;08;30;08 A band of shades
04;08;34;17 In an after image

The layer of black paint dries

04;11;56;28 Ever the same
04;11;58;10 And gone too soon
04;12;53;13 In pixels and dust
04;13;44;06 The figure ground

A layer of white paint is applied to the corner with the exception of where the painter stands

04;16;16;10 Fading in
04;16;55;04 Painting
04;18;04;07 Still from the action
04;18;38;28 My shirt a screen
04;20;55;10 Laminated tape
04;21;21;13 In temporal accordance
04;21;44;29 With unseen motion
04;21;57;05 With the standard of boredom
04;22;44;20 Painting along
04;22;53;15 A long day
04;23;14;01 Started over
04;23;23;04 In succession
04;23;26;01 Having just seen
04;23;28;20 What I am seeing
04;23;30;08 In the projection
04;23;34;20 Performing an action
04;23;36;22 I'd just performed
04;23;38;09 Mimicking
04;24;00;21 In succession
04;24;06;27 When I was painting
04;24;13;14 When I was done
04;24;22;10 When I was content
04;25;06;19 With fewer options
04;25;14;25 Means to an end
04;25;43;26 Means of reduction
04;25;49;25 Means to a mark
04;27;14;19 Of the composer
04;27;16;22 Of the audience

The painter stands in the corner until the white layer of paint becomes dry to the touch

04;29;19;04 To see
04;29;23;19 An image
04;29;36;12 To see oneself
04;30;09;21 To see a figure
04;30;48;07 Seeing being seen
04;31;19;05 Subjectively looking
04;31;28;22 Objectively acting
04;32;18;04 A pyramid scheme
04;32;41;10 For a new foundation
04;32;44;12 Absent the black wedge
04;33;03;01 With tired arms

04;33;59;07 As before	04;51;45;14 Of normality
04;34;07;04 Repeating myself	04;52;01;22 Of comfort
04;34;31;05 Shadowing myself	04;52;12;06 Of care
04;34;46;25 In the center	04;52;38;01 Of empathy
04;35;15;01 With foregrounded feet	04;53;10;04 Of disembodiment
04;36;11;06 That suck the light	04;53;34;16 Of seeing
04;37;00;26 Statue-still	04;53;41;18 A person
04;37;23;01 Shifting around	04;53;42;07 In a corner
04;37;49;03 Visibly fatigued	04;53;52;07 Laminated
04;38;15;16 Fresh faced	04;54;20;22 Into absurdity
04;39;16;10 Juxtaposed	04;55;33;23 Reflected in the screen
04;40;12;08 To help the listener	04;56;49;25 A transcript
04;40;16;20 Paint a picture	04;57;46;14 A probability
04;40;18;26 Of subjective sight	04;57;55;02 A causal chain
04;41;08;09 A roller and paint	04;58;19;28 A recording
04;41;32;01 A prize	04;58;20;21 A book
04;41;50;06 An assessment	04;58;22;28 A video
04;42;26;05 Of tolerance	04;58;26;08 A performance
04;42;51;17 Of a piece of work	04;58;27;27 A painting
04;43;04;29 Of waiting	05;00;05;12 A construct
04;43;11;17 Of laboring	05;01;25;29 To reinstate
04;43;23;24 Of investment	05;03;13;03 To acknowledge
04;43;41;16 Of spectacle	05;03;26;19 To tolerate
04;43;56;04 Of stereotype	05;03;44;07 Auxiliary sound
04;44;12;25 Of normality	05;04;10;25 Shifting around
04;44;51;18 To witness a change	05;04;52;28 Into the hours
04;45;54;13 To see the unseen	05;05;47;13 Fidgeting
04;46;03;02 To follow through	05;07;05;13 Watching
04;46;09;28 To get home	05;07;17;14 With reason
04;46;36;05 Discomfort	05;07;58;18 With painted clothes
04;46;48;25 Objectification	05;09;35;00 Wearing the residue
04;47;20;01 Reality TV	05;10;01;11 Of an act
04;47;45;24 The world has never seen	05;11;11;05 Fatigued
04;48;56;29 Knowing that	05;11;41;06 And looking forward
04;49;13;17 Or believing	05;11;42;07 To moving about
04;49;29;03 This is the one time	05;11;47;16 Away from the screen
04;49;48;01 And missing it	05;12;44;20 Walking
04;49;52;15 Before it's over	05;14;20;18 And looking back
04;49;57;16 Lamenting the end	05;16;36;00 On behalf of the eyes
04;50;00;09 But finally relieved	05;17;31;26 Knowing it's over
04;50;08;08 What more do you have?	05;17;51;25 Knowing fulfillment
04;50;19;18 A recorder	05;18;56;24 Knowing the screen
04;51;00;27 An answer	05;19;02;25 Knowing a space
04;51;24;24 A limit	05;20;49;28 Seeing what is seen
04;51;36;08 A realization	05;21;28;00 Transcribing sight

05;21;50;29 Laminating time
05;22;39;07 Out of accordance
05;23;56;27 Without instruction
05;24;22;13 Like a description
05;24;32;08 Of an image in braille
05;25;35;05 Molten down
05;25;44;29 And cast in new form
05;28;19;19 In director's comments
05;30;10;21 Conflated with film

05;32;20;21 Tasked with words
05;35;33;03 And taking time
05;36;21;16 From the enduring image

The painter walks away

Impermanence is flux



Fingerprints and dust cover Donald Judd's *Meter Boxes* at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art

Sound is a projection surface for subjectivity

Experience as figure

Flux as ground

Subjectivity is a projection surface for sound

Experience as ground

Flux as figure



View of *Laminated PAINT*, The Anderson, Richmond, Virginia, 2018
Photo by Patrick Harkin

Laminated PAINT

Laminated PAINT is a mixed-media installation consisting of glossy white walls, wall text and a speaker cabinet that projects a turbulent field of sound. The sound and installation designs foreground direct experience while alluding to my own precursive work and theoretical courses of inquiry.

Acousmatic sound describes sound apart from its origins. It consists of the material and textural qualities that emanate from what Pierre Schaeffer called *sonorous objects*. Schaeffer derived the term from *akousmatikoi*: followers of the teachings of Pythagoras. Pythagoras would deliver his lectures from behind a curtain so that his disciples would focus on the lecture and not the lecturer. We experience *acousmatic sound* through the veil of a speaker, disassociated from its source.¹⁸ The design of my speaker cabinet alludes to Pythagoras the lecturer. It stands at my height of 6'2", and my boots are displayed in the open space of the base, visualizing my dual presence and absence. I had put forward a similar composer/cabinet relationship with *Suspended Umbrella*, in which I substituted myself with an amplifier in the reception of rain-sound under an umbrella. Presenting the material cause-and-effect chain comprised of its components, it is a program for live sound that exhibits the absence of the programmer.



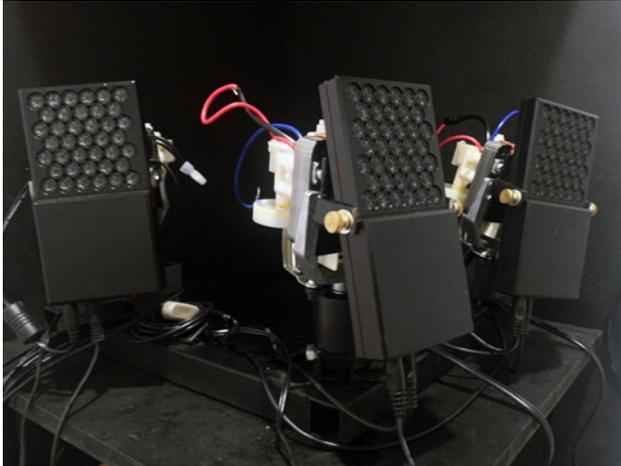
Laminated PAINT (cabinet)
Photo by Patrick Harkin



In *Suspended Umbrella*, contact mics relay the surface activity of water droplets on an umbrella to an amplifier.

18. Schaeffer, Pierre, Christine North, and John Dack. "Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines." Oakland, CA: U of California, 2017. Print. p. 91

The cabinet in *Laminated PAINT* veils three *Soundlazer* speakers. I first came across the *Soundlazer* while searching for directional speakers with which to translate some of my virtual reality sound pieces into physical space.¹⁹ A *Soundlazer* speaker pointed at a wall behaves like a laser pointer on a mirror. It gives the impression of sound emanating from whatever point is ‘illuminated’ by its sound beam.²⁰ I’ve mounted mine to electronic oscillating bases.

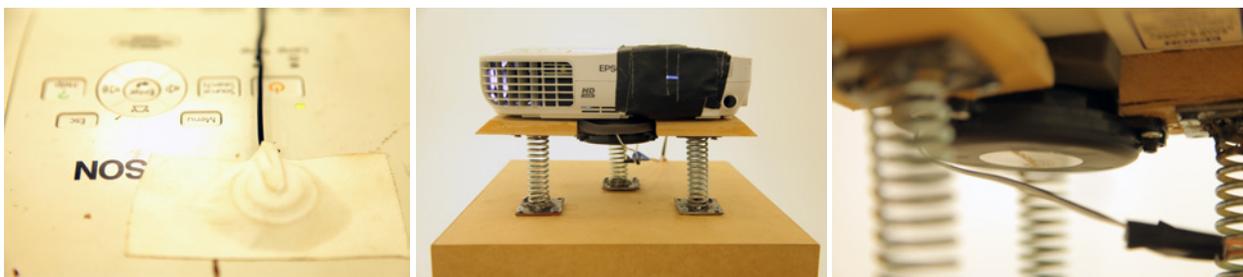


Oscillating *Soundlazer* speakers unveiled



A *Laminated PAINT* audience member looks for hidden sound sources in the walls
Photo by Sarah Midkiff

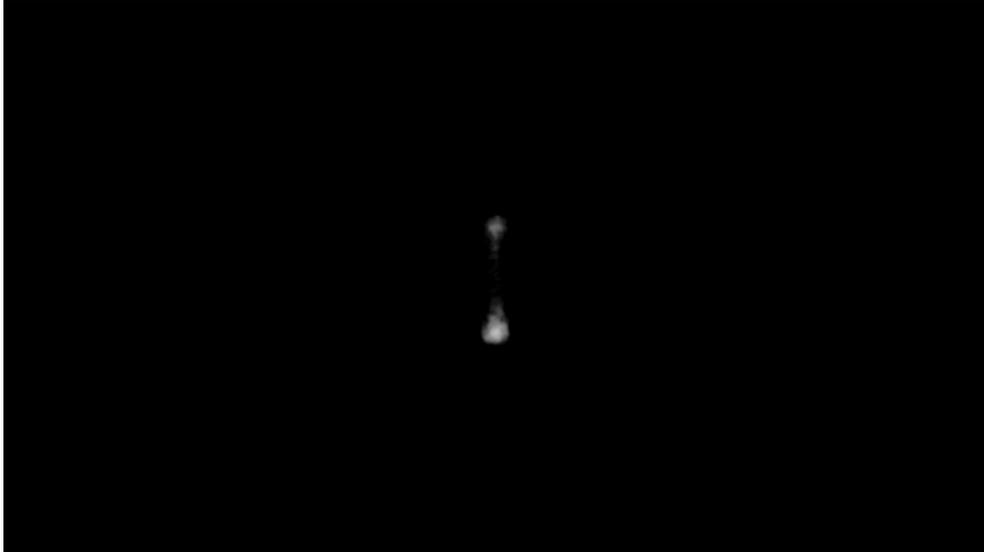
Like the filmmaker Michael Snow, I’m bringing out latent possibilities of my hardware through mechanized movement. While Snow’s camera serves as a surrogate eye for the viewer, *Laminated PAINT* directs the audience’s subjective eye to investigate the immediate environment. The shifting sounds seem to come from the walls themselves. This direct experience of motion recalls another project of mine, *Monad*, which involves a vibrating projector that agitates a still image, visually amplifying the minute vibrations of a tactile transducer.



Monad: A contact mic is affixed to a spring-mounted projector. An agitative transducer, mounted to the body of the projector, receives its signal from the contact mic. Upon activation, the still projection of a single white pixel becomes a moving image.

19. As an audio composer, the x-y-z spatial plane of virtual reality sound design was naturally appealing. I’m interested in relationships between virtual and material environments, and I’ve felt an artist/audience divide in many live electronic music performances. A laptop-anchored performer is visually uninteresting and often disconnected from the audience, but the stage dynamic is illuminating. With live music, this divide is typically addressed by way of spectacle.

20. The first device of this kind was invented by F. Joseph Pompei, which he called the ‘audio-spotlight.’ Lee, Jennifer. “An Audio Spotlight Creates a Personal Wall of Sound.” (2001, May 15). *New York Times* Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/15/science/an-audio-spotlight-creates-a-personal-wall-of-sound.html> ; accessed March 2018



Still from *Monad*

Paul Chan writes that Paul Sharits and his contemporaries (including Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton) were “among a generation of film artists in the 1960’s who developed a practice and a mode of thinking that rejected the representational conventions of cinema in favor of building moving images that reimagined and recombined the fundamental units of film into dazzling and sometimes disorienting effect... It was the birth of spectral materialism. And the property of time was no exception.”²¹ The property of sound was no exception either. Artists of this era were reckoning with a post-Cagean landscape through subjective, multi-disciplinary investigations of time-based media. I’ve followed suit. Leading up to *Laminated PAINT*, I’ve given particular attention to the spectral materialists and the Postminimalist investigations of Robert Morris. For now, and perhaps the long run, I’ll happily frame my practice as post-minimal, harmonious with Christoph Cox’s materialist sound theory.

“... For the most part, contemporary sound artists and their curators have been interested in negotiating the visual, rather than rejecting it wholesale. In fact, the very tension of such negotiation is what animates this uncertain art form operating between music and visual art, medium specificity and a postmedium condition.”²² Cox also writes that “For Nietzsche, matter itself is creative and transformative without external agency, a ceaseless becoming and overcoming that temporarily congeals into forms and beings only to dissolve them back into the natural flux, an ‘eternal self-creating’ and ‘eternal self-destroying... monster of force, without beginning, without end.’ Nietzsche’s name for this flux is ‘will to power’...”

21. Chan, Paul. “Paul Chan: Selected Writings 2000-2014.” New York, NY ; Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, and Badlands Unlimited, 2014. Print. p. 307

22. Cox, Christoph. “Lost in Translation: Sound in the Discourse of Synaesthesia.” *Artforum*, October 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2, Retrieved from <https://www.artforum.com/print/200508/lost-in-translation-sound-in-the-discourse-of-synaesthesia-9502> ; accessed March 2018

Cox discusses the nature of sound in accordance with Nietzsche's flux of becoming that "forms empirical individuals – dramatic poems, the figure of the hero on stage, the stage itself, we spectators – and equally dissolves them back into its cauldron of forces and intensities... Music makes audible the dynamic, differential, discordant flux of becoming that precedes and exceeds empirical individuals... Representing and symbolizing nothing, it presents a play of sonic forces and intensities."²³ The medium of sound evades disciplinary constriction. This is why I find the term *sound art* problematic: It feels like a disciplinary constriction.

The postmedium condition of sound is readily apparent in *Boomerang*, a video directed by Richard Serra in which Nancy Holt is disoriented by delayed playback of her speech: "I have a double take on myself. I am once removed from myself... we are hearing and seeing a world of double reflections and double refractions."²⁴ This is disembodied self-perception, and sound as disorientation in space. *Boomerang* captures sound's defiance of singularity. As discussed in the relational sound theory of Lawrence English, listening is inherently subjective, thus an idealist or materialist reduction of sound is impossible. To speak objectively of sound is to assume a degree of insularity. Schaeffer, after all, abandoned his own concept of the sonorous object. Perhaps he found that his descriptors for non-significant sound were inadequate to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.²⁵ The label *musique concrete* is problematic as any musical genre, but Schaeffer helped give language to a phenomenological condition. *Acousmatic sound* is ripe for dialog with twentieth century sculptural theory concerning the behavioral space of the viewer.

The form of the cabinet is decidedly minimal in *Laminated PAINT*, but it's not idealistic or singular. The cabinet-figure against the room-ground phenomenologically activates the beholder's experience retinally *and* aurally. The anthropomorphized gestalt faces away from a back corner. It may come to be seen as a fellow observer as the audience investigates the room at their own discretion.

Engagement with art is a matter of attention which can be limited by disinterest. Michael Baxandall's study of Renaissance Art, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, argues that early Renaissance masters assumed and advanced the quotidian talents of their viewers. Baxandall has a great definition of taste: "Much of what we call 'taste' lies in the conformity between discriminations demanded by a painting and skills of discrimination possessed by the

23. Cox, Christoph. "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism." *Journal of Visual Culture*. Vol 10, Issue 2, pp. 151 - 153

24. Serra, Richard and Holt, Nancy. "Boomerang." (1974). *Ubuweb*. Retrieved from http://www.ubu.com/film/serra_boomerang.html ; accessed March 2018

25. "Schaeffer was attracted to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, founder of 'phenomenology.' Phenomenology disregards the traditional philosophical distinctions between 'subject' and 'object,' 'appearance' and 'reality' and instead attempts simply to describe the contents of experience without reference to its source or subjective mode... In the case of sound...phenomenology attempts to 'reduce' (separate or distill) signal from source, and to restrict itself to describing the differences among sounds themselves." Cox, Christoph and Warner, Daniel, ed. "Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music." New York, NY ; Bloomsbury, 2004. Print. p. 76

beholder. We enjoy our own exercise of skill, and we particularly enjoy the playful exercise of skills which we use in normal life very earnestly.”²⁶

I encourage my audience to exercise relational, *multi-disciplinary* skills. *Soundlazer* speakers are marketed as music listening devices, which I find to be a disservice to their target market. I have instead used their shrill sound quality and radical spatialization to associate the experience of movement with the ‘wet paint’ walls. The presentation delivers direct experience of material flux in an instant, inspired by the transformative activities of *PAINT*.



Paint splattered floor



Paint splattered boots
Photo by Patrick Harkin

I’ve painted the walls of the gallery space glossy white, creating the illusion of wet paint. The viewer also encounters a large body of text composed of graphite directly on the wall. It is a poetic transcription of my commentary for the DVD set of *PAINT*. The poem orients the reader within the multi-layered experience of the author. It includes contemplations of site, material, multitrack recording, performance, composition, and perception: fruits of the precursive activities of *PAINT*. With a production time of eighteen hours, the graphite text on the wall continues a thread from *PAINT* by including the gallery as a site of the work.

The speaker cabinet design in *Laminated PAINT* also continues a thread from *Interior Volume* and *Box with No Sound* by representing a figure while foregrounding its absence. This kind of juxtaposition has been a running theme in much of my work. Like *Interior Volume*, *Laminated PAINT* presents its subject within a transformative moment. Where *Interior Volume* directs the viewer’s attention into an underworld within the plinth, *Laminated PAINT* directs attention around, rather than in or on, the plinth.

26. Baxandall, Michael. “Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy.” New York, NY ; Oxford University Press, 1988. Print. p. 34

While the rigidity of the speaker cabinet noticeably contrasts the field of sound, *Laminated PAINT*'s components share the stage democratically. The pairing of minimal form and sound was influenced by Robert Morris' *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*. I've found such a form/sound juxtaposition to have two essential reductions: idea and movement.

By alluding to past works of mine, *Laminated PAINT* collapses the timeline of my recent personal trajectory. In effect and concept it recalls the sculptural reduction of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the monolith: a mysterious, sound-emitting beacon of universal consciousness. It came to mind as soon as I decided to vertically orient the cabinet. *2001* depicts a technology that could leave us for dead en route to its programmed destination. The film concludes with collapsed time and space, which resonates with the reductive investigations of Minimalism.

Because of the cold disinterest in its human characters, the first thing I did upon finishing Michael Snow's *Wavelength* was to look up its release date. I wanted to see if it preceded *2001*. It did by a year. Where we view *2001* as fellow humans, *Wavelength* asks us to inhabit the singular eye of a machine, its forward advancement undeterred by the murder of a character played by none other than Hollis Frampton. In a reverse-(*nostalgia*) move, Snow halts *Wavelength* conclusively, inconclusively, upon a still image: as good as any way to wrap a thing up.

