

apexart

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Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

The Sounds of Nature, Transcribed and Composed

by [Allison Meier](#) on March 3, 2015



David Rothenberg, "In Svalbard, playing to whales" (2008) (photo by Andrea Galvani, courtesy apexart)

Sound maps of rivers and songs for cicadas are two examples of a new kind of music inspired by 19th-century German physicist [Hermann von Helmholtz](#). Inventing his own resonator, the scientist broke down the frequencies of tonal sounds, indirectly showing music as the gathering of disparate elements in space. [Foot Notes: On the Sensations of Tone](#), currently on view at apexart, takes Helmholtz as its patron saint of ecologically minded sound art, with nine practitioners presenting their own experiments with unconventional music.

While not an exhibition with much visual impact, *Foot Notes* celebrates art that's deeply linked to a curiosity about the soundscapes of our world and our interactions with them. Composer and New Zealander Annea Lockwood's "[A Sound Map of the Housatonic River](#)" (2010), part of her

ongoing exploration of the sonic profiles of waterways, is presented in its own room with a map plotting out 75 minutes of the gurgling, sloshing, and sometimes raging river that runs from the Berkshires in Massachusetts to the Long Island Sound in Connecticut. Similarly, Finnish artist Ed Osborn's [“Long Approach”](#) (2012) fixates on the mesmerizing and deceptively simple sound of moving water as it's pushed ahead of a schooner in the Arctic Circle; the noise is accompanied by an incredibly still black-and-white video of the hull against the icy shore.



Installation view of ‘Foot Notes,’ showing Ed Osborn’s “Long Approach” (2012) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



David Rothenberg serenading the cicadas

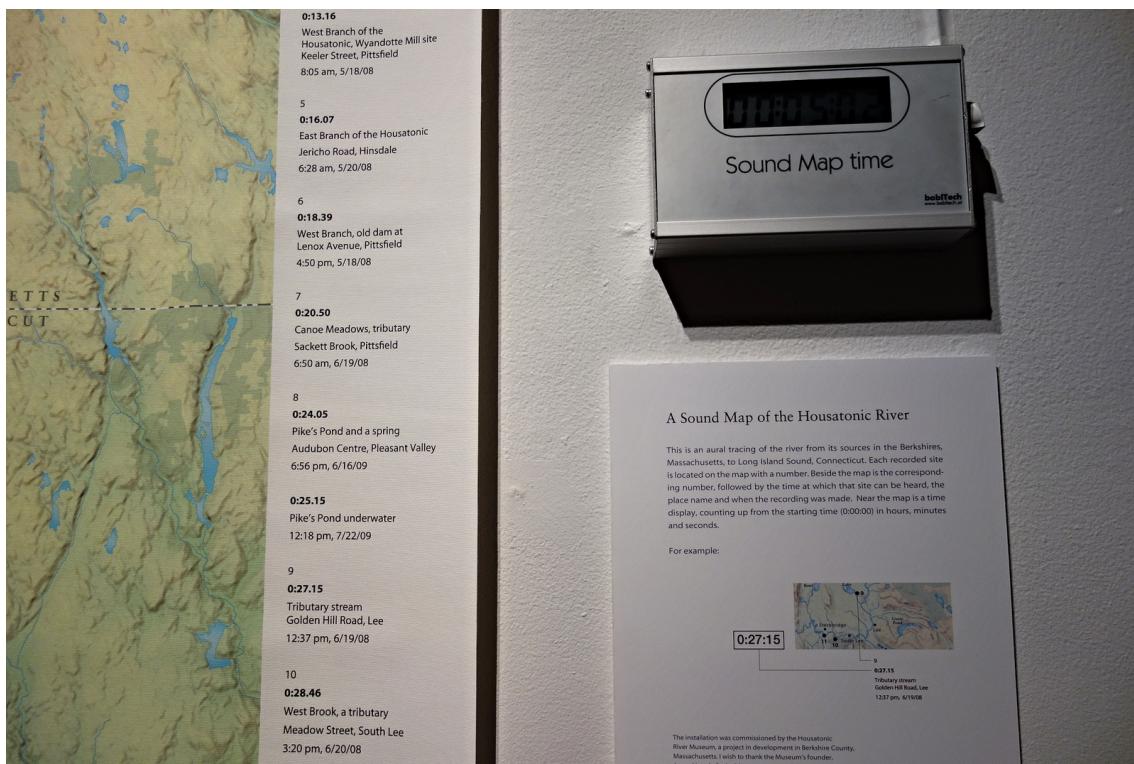
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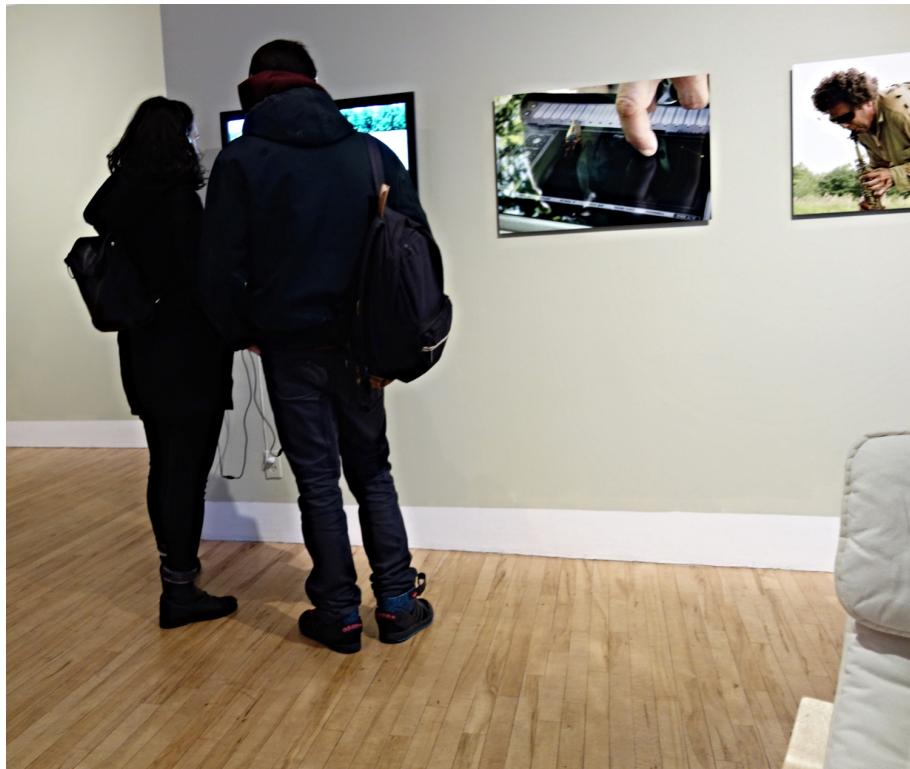


Annea Lockwood, "A Sound Map of the Housatonic River" (2010) (detail) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

While Osborn's and Lockwood's pieces plays freely into the gallery, headphones hang on the walls for the others. Una Lee in South Korea and Chris H. Lynn in the United States trade video recordings of their journeys through public spaces in "[Miniature Landscape Correspondences](#)" (2013), a reminder of the field-recording nature of a lot of our social sharing. On a small table the vinyl 12" LP "[The Sea Road](#)" (2012), by the British duo of field-recording artist Chris Watson and travel writer Robert Macfarlane, plays a narrative told from a fishing skiff heading to an island off the coast of Scotland for the [traditional guga hunt](#) of seabirds; the spoken dialogue evokes a nautical scene against its sounds.

Then there's David Rothenberg, the American musician and naturalist whose "Thousand Mile Song" (2008) initiated a call-and-response clarinet duet with humpback whales, and whose [Why Birds Sing](#) (2006) book and musical exploration centers on acoustic interactions with ecology. Photographs from these previous projects grace the apexart walls, but the video that's showing is Jennifer Berglund's 2013 short doc "[Bug Music: David Rothenberg's Insect Choir](#)," in which Rothenberg performs a song cycle meant to engage cicadas after their roughly 17 years of rest underground.

The artists are united by an interest in how we can connect with the nature around us through complex noise, and how technology can alter our perception of it, just like Helmholtz did with his resonator more than a century ago.



Viewing "Bug Music: David Rothenberg's Insect Choir" (2013) in 'Foot Notes' (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



Robert Mcfarland and Chris Watson, "The Sea Road" (2012), 12" vinyl (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



Installation view, 'Foot Notes' at apexart (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

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David Rothenberg, "Covered in cicadas at Lake Springfield" (2011) (photo by Charles Lindsay, courtesy apexart)

[**Foot Notes: On the Sensations of Tone**](#) continues at Apexart (291 Church Street, Tribeca, Manhattan) through March 7.

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