

Josiah McElheny

Instrument Object

Teaching Guide to The Kitchen's exhibition Josiah McElheny's
Instrument Object

What is *Instrument Object*?

Instrument Object, an exhibition by artist Josiah McElheny pays homage to visionary musicians and composers from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In works of sculpture, painting, installation, and drawing, ranging from 2014 to 2026 and never before exhibited in New York City, McElheny translates the work of ten musical artists into visual form. The exhibition is an experiment in animating the inanimate through sound and movement: transforming The Kitchen's loft space into an installation of image, sound, motion, and light, where works unpredictably activate, hum with the sound of motor gears, or encourage visitors to imagine an invisible music. [Read more here.](#)

Before You Visit

Think about:

1. How do you visualize sound? When you hear music or sound, do you picture anything in your mind? Do you see color or words or memories?
2. What is your personal music history? What did you grow up listening to? How have your tastes changed and shifted throughout your life?
3. Can you imagine what outer space sounds like? Can you count all the different sounds that glass makes? What is your favorite sound that is not music?
4. What is the relationship between your body and sound? What happens to your body when you hear loud music? Quiet? Up-tempo?

Important Words and Terms to Define

Below are some key terms used in the exhibition. Some of these terms are subjective and depend on different historical connotations. Read the below definitions and use your own research to expand upon them. Maybe you have your own definitions of them.

1. **Homage:** a work or act that pays respect or honor to a person or past work; a tribute

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2. **Kinetic:** related to motion
3. **Pauline Oliveros' "deep listening":** Deep listening explores the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the conscious nature of listening. The practice includes bodywork, sonic meditations, and interactive performance, as well as listening to the sounds of daily life, nature, one's own thoughts, imagination, and dreams. To learn more visit: [Center for Deep Listening](#).
4. **Synthesizer:** an electronic musical instrument that creates sounds by generating waveforms.
5. **Metronomic:** mechanically regular rhythm
6. **Swing Time:** a rhythm that divides the beat into a long-short pattern, similar to a triplet, instead of splitting it into two even halves

During Your Visit:

Grab an exhibition pamphlet at the welcome table (or see [link](#)) to see further details and context for each work in the exhibition.

Practice Deep Listening

1. Stand in the middle of the gallery and listen to all the sounds and music of the sculptures, the street outside, and any other noise.
2. Isolate each sound, can you listen to each sculpture? Can you just listen to the street?
3. After isolating each sound, zoom back out and listen to the gallery as a whole again.
4. Bring this isolation of listening into your daily life.

After you visit

Reflection

1. After seeing through Josiah's eyes, can you visualize music and sound in a new way? What does it look like now?
2. Practice deep listening outside of the gallery. What can you hear that you wouldn't typically hear?
3. When you looked at *Cosmic Trumpet* and *Ladder Harp* what sounds did you imagine them making?
4. The sound paintings each have a specific spectrum of color. There is no green, no purple, no white. Do you think this spectrum pairs well with the musical composition? How would your listening experience change if the visual was different? What spectrum would you use?

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Art-Making Activity

Creative Kaleidoscopes

Materials:

1. Craft tube, toilet paper roll, or paper towel roll cut in half
2. Colorful paper
3. Paper straw
4. Tape
5. Coloring utensils
6. Scissors
7. Cardstock paper
8. Mirrored paper

Instructions:

1. **Step 1:** Decorate your kaleidoscope
 - a. Decorate a sheet of colorful paper.
 - b. Cut out a **circle** from your card stock (it should be about twice as large as the end of your toilet paper roll) and color it with your favorite shapes and colors.
 - c. Poke hole in the center of your circle, large enough to fit your straw.
 - d. Cover the toilet roll with your sheet of colorful paper.
 - e. Insert a straw through the hole in the circle.
2. **Step 2:** Make it work
 - a. Cut your **mirrored paper** to be as long as your toilet paper roll.
 - b. Fold your mirrored paper into a triangle with the mirror side facing inward.
 - c. Slip the mirrored card into the tube.
 - d. **Attach your circle with straw to the outside of your tube. Tape the straw to your tube.**
3. **Step 3:** Observe!
 - a. Look through the open end and turn the circle and spin the circle around your straw. What do you see? What do you hear?