

Research > MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

MEMORABILIA. Collecting Sounds with... is a series that seeks to break through to unearth and reveal private collections of music and sound *memorabilia*. This documentary series is a historiography of sound collecting that reveals the unseen and passionate work of the amateur collector while reconstructing multiple parallel histories such as the evolution of recording formats, archival issues, the sound collecting market and the evolution of musical styles beyond the marketplace.

Ed Veenstra was invited to the **MEMORABILIA. Collecting Sounds with...** to give a lecture on his sound collection, which took place on April 15, 2011 at the MACBA.

PDF Contents:

- 01. Broken Music, anti-records and object records
- 02. Related links
- 03. Credits

Dutch collector Ed Veenstra collects all kinds of music-objects by plastic artists (a total of around 3,500) who have worked with sound at some point in their careers. Records, but also what he calls 'anti-records', strange, impossible and unclassifiable formats that approach the object from a radically different perspective and exceed the traditional functions of the medium. His thorough and detailed collection and classification work sheds light on the art world's fascination with sound and music.

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

Ed Veenstra's lecture transcript

01. Broken Music, anti-records and object records

I'm sincerely honoured to be invited to have a little talk about my collection. I am a sound collector and the main part of my collection is vinyl records. I do not condone other formats but as long as these formats can't live up to their promise – to sound better than their vinyl counterparts – I don't care for them. I do have CDs but I consider them collateral damage. I don't do files.

My collection can be divided into four parts and each part is equally dear to me. The first part is music as we all know it: pop, rock, psychedelica but that's not what you came here for. I want to talk about the remaining three parts which are all connected to each other.

Serious collecting started with the Mothers of Invention and especially Frank Zappa's side projects in the sixties which covered anything from rhythm & blues to surf music, doo-wop and novelty recordings. You might have heard about Brian Lord & The Midnighters, Ned & Nelda, The Heavies or The Rotations. Some of these were pressed on poor quality vinyl and literally crumbled in your hand when handled too rough. He adored B-movies so it was no surprise that he also recorded with people like Bob Guy, an early sixties local TV host for B-movies and Burt Ward, better known as Robin, The Boy Wonder from the Batman series. The Bob Guy and Burt Ward records have two things in common: both are fabulous recordings and both were performed by non-musicians. Because these recordings were so good I wanted more.

I began to collect records by non-musicians. Records by actors, real witches and warlocks, records by movie stars from the silent film era, transsexuals and transvestites, records by criminals, bakers, butchers, side show attractions, UFO watchers, mad evangelists, politicians, midgets, dogs, writers, cats, you name it. Of course most of it was trash but sometimes you found a real gem that made it all worthwhile. Some of these could be heard in the teaser for this program like Barbara, The Gray Witch and a wonderful recording of Winnie The Pooh creator A. A. Milne's son Christopher Robin recorded in 1929.

[Bigfoot, 'Untitled', 1996]

[Florence Marley, 'Space Boy', 1966]

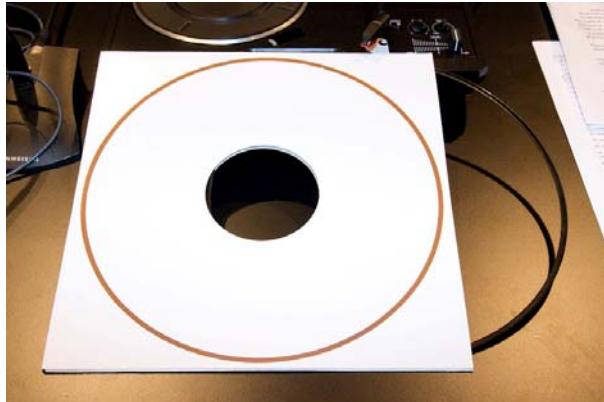
[McLaren Welschriesling & Muskat Ottonel & Pinot Gris & McLaren Sämling, 'Quartet', 1996]

And how about this one from 1964:

[The Whippets, 'I Want to Talk to You', 1964]

The music is not very interesting but the performers are. We know nothing about Charlotte Rosenthal but the other two were Jack Kerouac's daughter Janet and Fluxus artist Al Hansen's daughter and future mother of Beck, Bibbe Hansen. Bibbe was only twelve years old when she recorded this song. One year later she played together with Edie Sedgwick in Andy Warhol's short film *Restaurant*. The writer of the song is Neil Levinson who also composed *Denis*, covered by Blondie.

So far so good, but in 1984 VPRO got airtime on Dutch national radio. It was the first time I heard bands like Swans, The Birthday Party, No Trend and Einstürzende Neubauten. I entered a different world. Records like this were easy to find but if you were looking for Whitehouse, Zoviet France or the very obscure there was only one place to go: Staalplaat in Amsterdam. Staalplaat was co-founded by Frans de Waard, one of the key figures of Dutch cassette culture.



[Anti-record]

Staalplaat catered for everyone with an interest in anything too obscure for the alternative scene. They distributed experiments with packaging and sound.

Packaging with the intention to cause physical harm like records or tapes wrapped in barbed wire or with hidden razor blades. Records shattered to pieces. Do-it-yourself records consisting of a single blob of vinyl. Music not always intended to be listened to but to be looked at. Tapes hidden inside blocks of concrete, wax or roadkill (cadavers). Releases in which packaging and creativity were more important than sound itself. I began to wonder about the possibilities and limits. I became a hardcore collector of what is generally known as anti-records and object records.

The definition of an object record is fairly simple because it is exactly what the term implies: a combination of an object and a record. Like the one in this cakebox:

[Demonstrate Vegetarian Bavarian In Exile record]

Anti-records are in fact object records that can't be played. The Wikipage for anti-records defines it as a record treated in such a way that the only sound left is noise but for me an anti-record is an object meant to produce no sound at all. This means that basically anything can be an anti-record and consequently that an object is only an anti-record when the maker calls it an anti-record.

**[Christof Migone, 'Rimmed Record', 2008]
[JP Munro, 'Great White Dead', 2002]**

For me this is an anti-record too. It produces sound but the catch is that it was never meant to be played. It's an exhibition piece by the American visual artist JP Munro. It's also vintage work of art. A painting on vinyl instead of canvas and only meant to be looked at.

And then bodily fluids entered the scene. Human excrements, dog shit, urine, rotting meat were incorporated in objects or directly smeared onto the vinyl. One percent made sense. The rest was clearly made to shock. Collecting became a bit unpleasant. Especially on hot summer days. The results of musicians experimenting with visuals were sometimes staggering but in many more cases it was basically a load of trash. It was time to move on. I was looking for a more sophisticated approach.

One day I found an album with electronic music by the famous Dutch painter Karel Appel. It's one of the rarest Dutch albums ever mainly because it included an original painting. I switched from musicians working with visuals to visual artists working with sound and it didn't disappoint me. Records by visual artists are now the main part of my collection and I've been busy collecting and documenting these records for almost twenty years. I compiled a discography containing the efforts of about 3,500 visual artists which will be published in the next couple of months.

Most collectors of artist records started with the famous *Broken Music* catalogue from 1989. It contains theory and a discography. It's not the first book of its kind and it is far from complete. No problem, because it wasn't meant to be complete but it also lists records that don't exist. Still, with all its flaws it is by far the best introduction to this particular field.

Collecting art records also means that you need people to guide you. People that are able to introduce you to the artists themselves. People who know how to deal with the real art world. Hunting for rarities does not take place in record shops or flea markets but in antique book stores, in museums or auctions. You're dealing with people and galleries representing artists. You have to find a way to get passed them because their main interest is selling 'real' art and if you can't afford buying an original painting they consider it a waste of time.

Let's return to the subject. Many art records function as documentation. It can be a reading or a recording of a performance. However, the best art records are records that are artworks in their own right. Like this one:



[Object record]

[Nam June Paik, 'My Jubilee Ist Unverhemmet', 1977]

This is a sample from Nam June Paik's 'My Jubilee Ist Unverhemmet' from 1977 on which he played a 78 RPM record by Schönberg on 16 RPM speed. The B-side of the record is a silk screen.

And here's another example by visual artist Alex Decarli. I have no idea what it sounds like because it's made of glue and the sound depends on the temperature in the room. It also plays inside out.

[Alex Decarli, 'Glue', 2009]

It's more than twenty years since the publication of *Broken Music*. Records such as the ones you just heard, records that are works of art for their own sake, are getting scarce. Many of the artists of today are into sound but fail to connect it to their visual work. But maybe that's not what they are striving for. Maybe they can't choose. Maybe they just want to have fun. So be it.

We've come to the fourth and final segment of my collection: children's records from the fifties, the sixties or earlier. It seems a completely different game which is true but many of the visual tricks and concepts applied to object and art records can be traced back to records made for children. It's an amazing genre. Records made of chocolate, talking books, scratch & sniff records, records that fold into board games or record players, moving images.

By saying that many concepts originate from children's records I'm not implying that musicians and visual artists are copycats. What I'm trying to say is that creativity is not a talent copyrighted by visual artists alone. People from various disciplines can come to the same conclusion if the starting point is the same: sound.

I would like to end this evening by demonstrating three samples from my collection.

The first one is a so-called Red Raven record. It combines sound and moving images.

[Red Raven record demo]

The second one is a children's record of which the sleeve folds into a hand-driven record player. The same principle was used by missionaries working in places with no access to electricity.

[Hansel and Gretel record demo]

The final one is quite unique. It's the only example of a record using the stylus of a record player to visualize what's been explained on the record.

[Out of this World record demo]

03. Related links

Ed Veenstra at Ràdio Web MACBA
rwm.macba.cat/en/ed_veenstra_tag

Conversation with Ed Veenstra on his sound collection
rwm.macba.cat/en/extra/memorabilia_ed_veenstra_conversation/capsula

Ed Veenstra's audio teaser for the *MEMORABILIA. Collecting sounds with...* lecture series
rwm.macba.cat/en/extra/teaser_memorabilia_ed_veenstra/capsula



[Object record]

MEMORABILIA. Collecting sounds with... series at Ràdio Web MACBA
rwm.macba.cat/en/memorabilia_tag/

04. Credits

This lecture took place on April 15, 2011.
www.macba.cat/en/lecture-memorabilia

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