

# Hear ye, hear ye: Speakers transform VAG space into audiophile's dream

Kevin Schmidt is a visual/installation artist who grew up in Langley, went to Emily Carr while living in Vancouver for 10 years, moved to Berlin for four years and now lives in Kelowna. The Vancouver Art Gallery is currently showing three of his pieces.

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B.C.-based artist Kevin Schmidt has created an audiophile's dream with DIY Hifi at the Vancouver Art Gallery, which is on display until Oct. 28. RACHEL TOPHAM / CONTRIBUTED

## Kevin Schmidt: We Are the Robots

**When:** Until Oct. 28

**Where:** Vancouver Art Gallery

**Info:** [vanartgallery.bc.ca](http://vanartgallery.bc.ca)

Kevin Schmidt is a visual/installation artist who grew up in Langley, went to Emily Carr while living in Vancouver for 10 years, moved to Berlin for four years and now lives in Kelowna.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is currently showing three of his pieces. These include:

- RGB Beg Cycle (2018), which is represented by fluorescent LED light strips on the VAG's exterior that change hue in response to notes played on electronic keyboards in the gallery;
- How to Make an Off-Grid Hydro-Electric Light Show (2018), a mini-rave system constructed out of a washing machine, a synthesizer and nightclub lights;
- DIY Hifi (2014), an audiophile room making its Canadian gallery debut.

We talked to the 46-year-old Schmidt about his intriguing work:

**Q: Was Berlin an influence in a major way, or were most of your ideas already set?**

**A:** I'd already been practising as a visual artist for over a decade. So I would say my ideas were set. I don't think it changed what I was doing very much. There was a lot more to look at, and maybe how I think about the presentation of work changed a little. But my interests have stayed the same.

**Q: How would you describe those interests?**

**A:** I'm interested in spaces and experiences that are mesmerizing or enveloping in a way. I find those spaces and experiences are often, for me, in listening to music or being in landscapes. And also, lighting. That gets translated into asking questions about what visual art can do that entertainment or spectacle in general cannot.

**Q: So you have two recent pieces in this show, but DIY Hifi goes back four years. Is that right?**

**A:** DIY Hifi is ongoing. I've made, continue to make, an audiophile room that I then invite the public to bring records to play what they want to play on this refined listening system that I've built. I made the original speakers just outside of and in Berlin. For this presentation, I've also created sound-diffusers to make the room sound good.

**Q: Should Harmon Kardon (makers of high-end stereo equipment) be worried?**

**A:** No. (laughs) I don't think they should be worried. The stuff I've made isn't very efficient to make. Let's just say, they're always going to have their market and I'll have mine.

**Q: But DIY Hifi isn't about how good the speakers are, or is it? It's about listening to one's favourite music in a gallery setting.**

**A:** No, it's about how good the speakers are, too. I tried as hard as I could to make something that would stack up in audiophile circles. My experience is that they (the speakers) are incredibly precise with middle and high frequencies. You don't hear more, you hear more clearly.

**Q: You must be curious as to how people are using it.**

**A:** Yeah, it's interesting. At the opening, and for the few days after when I was there (in Vancouver), I heard about people bringing in a range of stuff, from avant-garde jazz like Al Neil all the way to ABBA. It's not necessarily what I would

play or my tastes, it's up to the person bringing the record in to listen to what they want to.

I should also say that there's an important part of DIY Hifi as it's presented in Vancouver: a reel-to-reel tape machine playing a field recording I made on the Peace River of the dawn chorus in a place that will be flooded once the Site C dam is finished.

So anyone who wants to play a record has to turn off the birdsong playing from this field recording first!