

KEVIN SCHMIDT

Public Address System

Kevin Schmidt offers a reflection on the environmental consequences of a society consumed with leisure and entertainment. By disrupting techniques associated with spectacle, he negotiates the parameters of the private and public spheres, including the notions of property and speculation. He transposes these notions into the knowledge economy by making artworks in the spirit of DIY, open source, and repurposing. The title of the exhibition, *Public Address System*, refers to sound systems used to make oneself heard in a public space. Do the promises made and actions taken with regard to different contemporary crises have the real impact that we infer upon them?

The acoustical environment in the gallery hosting the installation *DIY Hifi* (2014–18) is transformed thanks, among other things, to the addition of sound-diffusion panels made by Schmidt from waste materials (discarded furniture, residual lumber from industrial logging). In this audiophile listening room, a space that is typically domestic and reserved for the cognoscenti, we hear soundtracks of threatened natural and cultural environments. Shot in a clear-cut caused by industrial logging, the video *How to Make an Off-grid Hydroelectric Light Show* combines capitalist exploitation, cultural economy, and climate crisis.

Rooted in the Enlightenment and vastly expanded during the Victorian era, the ideas of private property and economic liberalism gave rise to exploitation capitalism and a valorization of individualism. By feeding into an artificial separation between nature and culture, this system smothers our environments – built and natural, personal and collective, private and public. The capitalist logic of extraction spares no sector, as it considers all resources to be infinite. Consumer society reduces all forms of art to entertainment and merchandise. The aura of historic painters, for example, is dimmed in blockbuster multimedia shows. In an image culture like ours, artists' lifestyles are eagerly seized upon. However, cultural actors, the victims of this system, often have no choice

but to participate in it. Ground-breaking, pioneering, and always in search of affordable spaces, artists unintentionally open the way to gentrification, which soon pushes them out of their living environments.

Schmidt's exhibition draws thought-provoking connections among art-making, private property, and real-estate speculation. Without claiming to provide answers, the project raises complex questions that concern us all, and it reminds us that each of us can intervene – first of all, by grabbing the microphone.

Jean-François Bélisle, Executive Director and Chief Curator
Charlotte Lalou Rousseau, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art

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Translation: Käthe Roth

KEVIN SCHMIDT

Ottawa, Ontario, 1972

1. *Excess Dispersion #0*

2018

Mixed Media (kitchen cabinet and countertop offcuts, waste mdf laminate)

186 x 203 x 17.5 cm

Private collection

2. *Excess Dispersion #1*

2018

43 modular panels, waste kitchen cabinet material

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

Schmidt built the sound-diffusion panels *Excess Dispersion #0* and *Excess Dispersion #1* from plans he found online, with trimmings of kitchen cabinet materials. *Excess Dispersion #4*, *#5*, *#6* and *#7* were made from furniture discarded on the sidewalk in Toronto. *Excess Dispersion #3* is composed of logs left behind from a clearcutting operation. Because their circumference is too small for commercial use, they are usually burned by industrial loggers. The capitalist instruments of extraction, destruction, planned obsolescence, and fashion produce waste that Schmidt here recycles and reuses in a way that is both aesthetic and functional.

3. *Excess Dispersion #3*

2022

Residual logs from industrial forestry operations

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

4. *DIY Hifi*

2014-2018

Lowther DX55 speakers, wood, canvas, IDY kit tube amplifier, record player

297.2 x 165.1 x 138.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

The installation *DIY Hifi* is intended to re-create the sound ambience of an audiophile listening room. The huge speakers were made from plans by Nelson Pass, a designer well known in the audiophile and DIY communities, and available online free of charge. The designs for the chairs were taken from a 1980s DIY manual. The speaker motors use rare-earth magnets that reproduce high and medium frequencies exceptionally well. Fully functional, the installation is also a sculpture on its own, with a post-minimalist aesthetic. In the spirit of democratization, the installation reproduces, in a public space (the museum), an environment that is usually private, set up in a domestic space (the listening room). However, tension is created by the fact that Schmidt made this private artwork (it belongs to him) thanks to knowledge contributed by the public domain. The intervention by museum visitors in the installation performs a second tension: by choosing to disrupt the soundtrack of the work Enclosures to play their own vinyl records, they appropriate the audio space of the gallery (and mute the sounds from endangered spaces) for their personal pleasure.

To play your own vinyl records on the turntable, visit the reception counter.

5. *How to Make an Off-grid Hydroelectric Light Show*

2018

Hydrogenerator sculpture made from an LG washer, 5 4K videos from YouTube, two-channel HD video

Variable dimensions; 4 min 28 s to 26 min 25 s; 52 min 16 s

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

Inspired by online videos promoting energy self-sufficiency, Kevin Schmidt converted a washing machine into a hydroelectric generator. Instead of keeping the lights on in a forest cottage, this one powered a sound and light show in the great outdoors, a performance put on for the enjoyment of Schmidt himself and for any animals that happened to be around. The two-channel video presents, synchronously, a picturesque, almost sublime scene and a subjective point of view. This juxtaposition amplifies the awkward gap between the representation of nature that is offered to us and how we experience it. The presence of a washing machine in the middle of a forest – and then in a gallery – appears strangely familiar, even quite funny. A domestic appliance in a natural space seems incongruous. And yet, at this very moment, aren't we building condo towers in wetlands? Is making an appliance into a source of energy more eco-responsible than plugging it into the wall? Does the search for energy self-sufficiency challenge the current paradigm based on resource extraction? Or does it, rather, reproduce a way of life based on consumption?

With the goal of restitution and contribution to an open knowledge economy, the process of creating the generator was filmed and then made available online free of charge in the form of tutorials. This material is still being edited, and the complete video series will eventually be available on Schmidt's YouTube channel.

6. *Excess Dispersion #6 and #4*

2022

Discarded furniture

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

7. *Excess Dispersion #5 and #7*

2022

Discarded furniture

426.7 x 731.5 x 243.8 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

8. *Enclosures*

2022

Glass cabinet, discarded furniture, console, reel-to-reel player, field recording

163 x 122 x 51 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

In medieval Europe, agriculture was a community activity. Land was used collectively, with people seeing to both their own needs and the local lord's. In the twelfth century, with England showing the way, the lords began to privatize this system by, among other things, dividing up the land into enclosures – that is, creating acreage parcels physically defined by walls or hedges – for which they began to charge rent. Some thinkers and historians consider this time to have been the inception of capitalism. In the work *Enclosures*, the self-service turntable from *DIY Hifi* is placed under lock and key for technical and conservation reasons. These constraints on its accessibility are reminiscent of the physical partitions used to soundproof rehearsal studios and audiophile listening rooms. They also evoke the security mechanisms and institutional obstacles that limit access to private property.

The piece being transmitted by the reel-to-reel tape recorder is composed of various field recordings made by Schmidt: a dry storm, birdsongs, and the ambience of a rehearsal studio. Each represents an environment threatened by different phenomena resulting from capitalism. The sound of the dry storm was recorded at Heffley Creek, in the mountains of British Columbia, where Schmidt's studio is located. Lightning strikes from a similar storm caused numerous forest fires when a heat wave and an unprecedented drought hit the province in 2021. The birdsongs were captured in a nesting area at the confluence of the Peace and Halfway rivers, in the northeastern part of the province. This zone is threatened with flooding by the Site C hydroelectric dam project, intended to supply power to natural-gas fracking projects. Schmidt recorded the audio ambience of rehearsal studios in a Toronto building imperilled by gentrification and real-estate speculation. We hear him playing a bass guitar in search of a melody.

Western ontology, based on a separation between nature and culture, contributes both to the destruction of what are called natural resources and to the alienation of our humanity. We then seek to close this gap with various representations of nature – representations that attract us with their illusion of control. The absurdity is manifest in popular activities today, such as trying to relax by listening to recordings of the roar of a waterfall, the whoosh of a windstorm, or the calm atmosphere of a forest. Enclosures issues something like a warning and launches a call to action. But do gestures with a “green” intention, such as recycling and DIY, truly meet their objective? Or do they reproduce, in a twisted way, a familiar dynamic – that of personal comfort and private property?

9. *Barricades*

2022

Discarded furniture

Variable dimensions

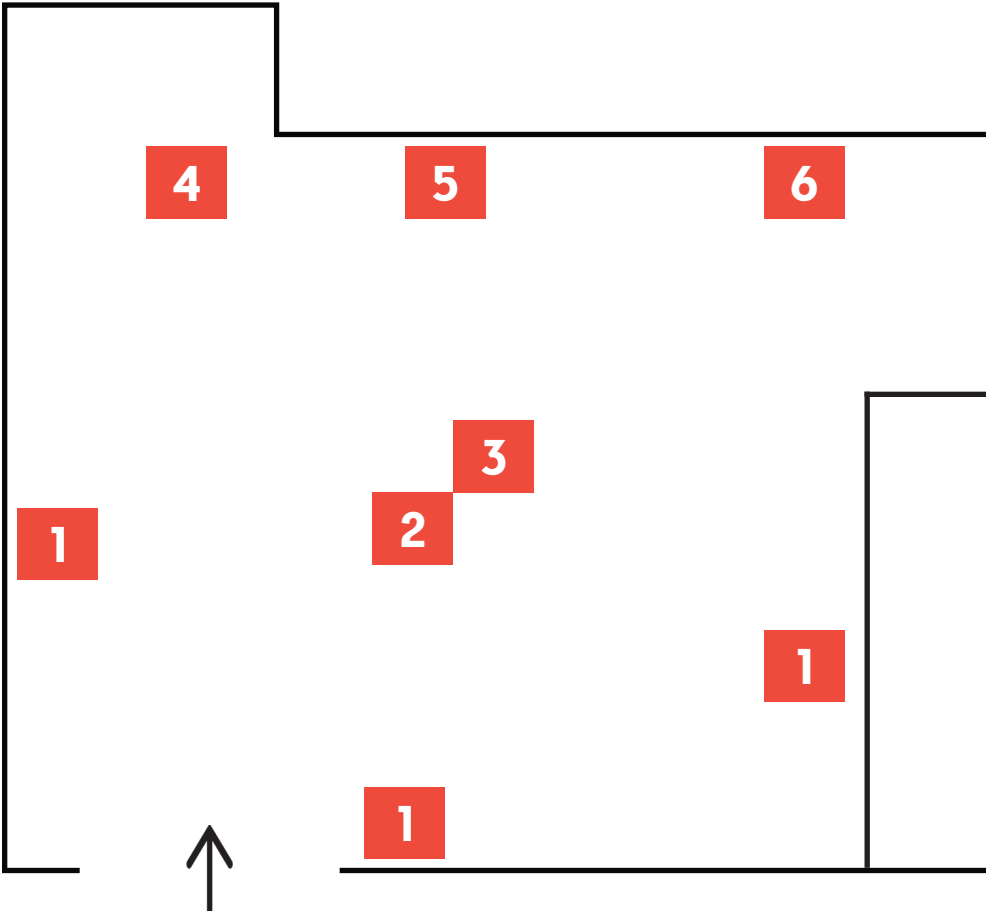
Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries

This new installation arose from a concrete need: to soundproof the different galleries that make up the exhibition’s scenography. Inspired by the aesthetic of amateur music rehearsal studios, Schmidt made this soundproofing with materials at hand: found carpets, curtains, and pieces of furniture. Like artists’ and artisans’ studios, rehearsal spaces are usually clustered in industrial buildings. The functional and decorative elements in these environments are often created with what happens to be around, creating an aesthetic that’s quite incongruous, frayed, clumsy, dilapidated. In many large cities, these precious spaces are threatened with elimination thanks to real-estate speculation and gentrification. Schmidt’s *Barricades* are, in a way, acts of resistance to the systemic forces that, by definition, absorb spaces of freedom and practices considered marginal.

FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle Després-Liard



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8

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