

This Season, Art Gets Noisy

Exhibitions from Florida to Cleveland this winter are asking visitors to consider the affinities between sound and visual art — and the way we see (and hear) artwork.



Christopher Le Brun's "Composer," 2016. CREDIT COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE GALLERY AT WINDSOR

This season, both the [Gallery at Windsor](#) in Vero Beach, Florida and [Albertz Benda Gallery](#) in New York are mounting work by **Christopher Le Brun**, a British artist and the president of the Royal Academy of Arts. Both called "Composer," the exhibitions immediately introduce the connection between paintings and musical compositions, with work titles like "Score," "Symphony" and "Middle C." "It's particularly early 20th-century music that interested me," he says, "where you're seeing a battle between tonality and atonality. The spaces that it makes you think of are complicated and speculative and very rich." Concepts shared by art and music, like texture and tone,

impact the way he layers oil on his canvases. And the relationship works in both directions: Le Brun's painting "Cloud" inspired a piano composition by the composer Richard Birchall. For more evidence of artist-musician collaboration, stop by the [New Museum's](#) **Raymond Pettibon** retrospective in New York — record covers for bands such as Sonic Youth and Black Flag feature the American artist's subversive drawings.



Cohen, Alina. "This Season, Art Gets Noisy," T Magazine. February 16, 2017.

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Rudolf Bauer's "Symphony," 1919-23. © RUDOLF BAUER ESTATE AND ARCHIVE, SAN FRANCISCO

Another “Symphony” hangs at New York’s [Leila Heller Gallery](#) as part of an exhibition that celebrates the birth of the Guggenheim Museum. This early 20th-century painting, by the German artist **Rudolf Bauer**, similarly connects principles of musical arrangement with the organization of bright, exuberant shapes on his canvas. “The idea of composition is a double entendre,” affirms curator Brooke McGowan Herzog. She points out that concepts such as balance and rhythm also structure an abstract painting. In 1939, Solomon Guggenheim opened his Museum of Non-Objective Painting on Manhattan’s West 54th Street. According to Herzog, the curator and artist Hilla Rebay ensured that both Bach and Beethoven played in the space, creating a

contemplative atmosphere. The Leila Heller exhibition includes works from artists who impacted the Guggenheim Foundation collection at its incipient stages, including the famed synesthete **Wassily Kandinsky** (who heard color and saw sound). The art invites visitors to imagine the days before the Frank Lloyd Wright space opened and classical music stopped flowing through the galleries.



Over at the [Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland](#), different kinds of sound — gospel music and speech — inform the American artist **Adam Pendleton**’s exhibition “Becoming Imperceptible.” The voice of David Hilliard, the former founding chief of staff of the Black Panther Party, emanates from a three-screen film installation Pendleton created as a kind of portrait of the activist. “He’s always there giving voice to the objects,” Pendleton says. Paired with Hilliard’s words, the large-scale vinyl wall work “Black Lives Matter #3” conveys a continuum of conflict and activism in American culture. In another video work, “Just Back From Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer” (making its museum premiere at MOCA), the renowned choreographer and dancer reads from a list of recent victims of police brutality while sitting across a table from Pendleton himself. At the end of the film, Pendleton juxtaposes gospel music and shots of Rainer dancing. The sound, he says, “gives a different kind of attention the gestures Yvonne makes.”

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An installation view of Jaume Plensa's "Silence." © JAUME PLENSA, COURTESY OF GALERIE LELONG, NEW YORK

Finally, the Spanish sculptor **Jaume Plensa** offers an alternative to all this noise with his exhibition "Silence," on view at New York's [Galerie Lelong](#). His installation includes a series of bronze busts of women's heads. Disembodied bronze hands cover their eyes and ears or make a hushing gesture, as though urging the viewer's silence. On

benches arranged throughout the gallery, Plensa has placed larger wooden busts of women's heads with closed eyes and calm demeanors that indicate quiet, meditative states. "I'm working on the concept of silences almost always in my work," Plensa says. In the past, he's recorded the sound of his bloodstream and incorporated instruments into his exhibitions to present a contrast: "Our body is so noisy we cannot listen or feel the silence." Silence, he asserts, has some major benefits: "Words, many times, could not express exactly the things that we want to say," he says. "Just to look into the eyes of somebody else or feeling the vibrations of the other people, many times, you communicate much more or you understand much better the messages of others."

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