



DENIS FARLEY

Catherine Béchard (right) holds a noise-making box from Babbling/Sounding/Noising Cubes at Oboro.

Pick up the cubes – that's the idea

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The season of boxes and their hidden gifts is now upon us. Local artists Catherine Béchard and Sabin Hudon have prepared eight special boxes for you to explore in their exhibition Babbling/Sounding/Noising Cubes. I first stumbled across this duo's work in 2003. Their clever sound sculptures at that time sparked in me an immediate reaction of joy and intrigue. This latest installation is no different. Subtle, engaging, playful – I encourage you to get your hands on this work before the exhibition closes. I had the opportunity to speak with Catherine Béchard at Oboro's gallery last week.

How did you start working with Sabin?

Ten years ago, I wanted to make a sound installation with animated objects. My background was in visual arts, but I didn't know anything about movement or electronic devices. I tried to find someone to help me build these and I met Sabin. After two or three months of working together, I realized that Sabin was more than a (one-time) collaborator; we became a duo in our first show and we've gone on and on from there. Sometimes you find someone you can work with forever; our knowledge and vision was so close.

Is this the first time you've shown the cubes?

It is the first show of this version in Montreal, but it has been shown all over. It is an easy project to travel with, people just like the fact that you can touch the objects, which is not normal in a gallery. If you want

this installation to come alive, you must pick up a cube and start moving it. We started this project four years ago. The technology is very complicated inside the cubes, so we hired a bunch of people to work on it and have had many versions. It takes a long time to develop a box that you can pick up in your hands, move, trigger sounds and then mix the sounds. It looks really simple from the outside, but the inside was (laughs) a nightmare.

Did you do an artist's residency here at Oboro?

We worked here from May to October. We used Oboro's studio to record sound. It was just a fantastic way to finish this project. This is the final version. It is a lot about memories. Memories that we forget and we remember, but also memories that we invent. A lot of these sounds are daily sounds that we hear in our lives that we just don't really notice. But once you transfer this sound and you extract the visual element, then you start to invent, because your memory doesn't work the same way if the visual clues are missing. The visual side is so strong in our lives. We tend to turn our head when we hear a sound, but we don't need to. We look at sounds.

What inspired the cubes?

The origin of this project was, you know those small boxes that you turn over and you hear the cow? Here, the sounds are in the box, and when you move the box, different sounds are triggered. And when you move them alone it is one thing, but when there are a lot of other people, then you are really creating an environment. This project is also about listening. And when you listen,

where do you look? How do you stand? It is very interesting, you are not only aware of the sounds, but also the people. Because when they move with the object, they become the performer.

One of my favourite parts of Janet Cardiff's Forty Part Motet was watching the people listening to the music, actually your installation and hers are very similar.

The presentation came at the end. We wanted to have it like this, because it was so simple. We wanted to only have the object there, floating in the space. Janet Cardiff, we love her work, but we didn't think about it when we made this. Another thing that is different is that in Janet Cardiff's work, you explore the sound in the environment around you. This project, we don't know any projects like this, you hold the sounds in your hand and you surround the sound.

What are the sounds?

Each cube is different. One is whispering, one is sounds of eating, another sounds of winter, another of rubbing. They will play for two minutes once you move them, so there are many levels of how you can move and manipulate the cubes. They are all fragments of life, so they become a fiction of life. Concrete sounds that change into digital, modulated sound. It is a bit like moving from reality to a dream.

Babbling/Sounding/Noising Cubes continues until Dec. 13 at Oboro, 4001 Berri St., Suite 301. For more information call 514-844-3250 or visit www.oboro.net.

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