

Los Angeles Times Review

admin

Los Angeles Times

DAVID PAGEL – November 6, 1993

The Sound of Art: Part electronics whiz and sneaky eavesdropper, Michael Oliveri is also a promising artist whose eight "Soundscapes" at Sherry Frumkin Gallery raise probing questions about the nature and identity of art.

His live, 24-hours-a-day transmissions of amplified sounds suggest that although art might pass through objects, it doesn't reside in them. For the 31-year-old student of the radical avant-garde, art exists primarily—and most powerfully—as a singular event or inimitable experience.

In Oliveri's auspicious debut exhibition, each viewer's (or listener's) capacity to interpret fragments of information, to project meaningful patterns upon random happenstance, and to make sense of slight, sensory stimulation's is as important as anything the artist has done.

Oliveri's installation consists of a series of enlarged maps of sections of Los Angeles and Santa Monica, to which he has attached a telephone, stereo receiver and speaker. Continuously emitted from each are the sounds picked up by microphones planted at unremarkable, everyday places, such as a bookstore, music center, yoga workshop, schoolyard, pet shop, dance academy and neighborhood home.

Oliveri has rigged up electronic connections—over ordinary phone lines—that constantly transmit to the gallery the audio portion of exactly what takes place at these locations. Walking around his show of invisible sound waves invites one to imagine what's happening around the Westside.

You find yourself putting your personal spin on the information delivered by his high-tech surveillance devices, allowing your memories and preconceptions to intermingle with the fragmented, ongoing noises of the present. Complete pictures of common scenarios can be created by each visitor, becoming, in the mind's eye, almost archetypal dramas.

A single piece puts a paradoxical spin on Oliveri's show. Titled "Silence From MOCA," this unplugged machine is dedicated to John Cage's memory and his current exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. It draws upon Cage's most famous composition, "4'33" " in which a piano was not played for that length of time and the, audience was invited to listen to existing, ambient sounds, such as their own breathing, the air-conditioning units, passing traffic and blowing breezes.

By denying Oliveri's request to place a mike at the Cage exhibition, the museum neatly follows his intentions and fulfills Oliveri's goals, demonstrating that art is everywhere, that finding it is only a matter of looking—or listening with the right kind of attention.