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Rythm Kesselring

*Sonic Textiles* (2018)

*The warmest technology*

*Sonic Textiles* is an interactive installation involving sound and textiles by Swiss-born artist Rythm Kesselring. It is composed of four speakers, embroidered on dark gray columns and linked to two microphones in the middle. The speakers are also equipped with light sensors that trigger the viewer's presence and modulate the sounds recorded by the microphones. The viewer can then interact with the piece in two different ways; their voice and/or their shadow.

As sewing was originally something seen as a utilitarian craft (for example, the necessity and functionality of making clothes), it has been reinvented to exploit its unlimited aesthetics and artistic possibilities. In the spirit of questioning the realm of sewing and its association to the female genre, to craft, and functionality, Kesselring creates an artistic piece using textile while giving it a new modernized function of producing and conducting sound.

The speakers surround the installation and diffuse the sonic material recorded by the microphones, standing like an altar at the front of the installation. The speaker-microphone relationship creates a question-answer relationship. The material is redistributed, modified through complex audio processes, and given back to the viewer as food for thought, or a manifestation of memory.

The piece aims to revisit tradition - The tradition of sewing while singing— by manipulating the sounds of the past and bringing them to the present. Sound waves are compiled and looped to create sonic memories embodying the passing of sewing. The embroidery is made with silver thread that conducts electricity and is channelled by a

magnet that produces audible sound waves. Kesselring customised effects are applied to the samples recorded by the public in order to re-dimensionalize their voice.

The textile speakers could be seen as living objects; their softness and composition render a handmade quality to an otherwise digital object, symbol of modern and industrial technology (their softness is emphasized by the light sensors). The sensors capture the presence of the viewer which modifies the sound, generating surprise and awareness. The space they occupy becomes a tangible element in the composition of the sound. The public is invited to be aware of the space they occupy within the installation and to create a choreography with the artwork.

The artist chose to juxtapose sewing, anciently ascribed as “women’s craft”, with technology and engineering, which are stereotypically defined as masculine fields of study, challenges conceptions while creating a new space for these worlds to coexist. Inevitably, textiles were already introduced to technology during the Industrial Revolution, where they became more accessible, making space for both mass-production standards and experimentation. However, they remained associated with femininity and so denied from the fine arts milieu. It wasn’t until the 1960s and the 1970s that those stereotypes were addressed by artists such as Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago. Recently, we have seen the arrival of new concepts such as smart textiles and fashionable technology. The integration of technology in art and textiles appears as a bridge between different ideologies and eras. With her artistic ideas and her ingenious thinking, Kesselring sees possibilities in the realm of the impossible.

Before her interest in textiles, Kesselring worked primarily with painting. She noticed a change in people’s connection to her pieces when she started to integrate textiles as appliqués on canvas. Noticing the infinite potential in textiles, including hybridizing textile and sound. The artist completed a BFA in Fibers at Concordia in 2020, working alongside Barbara Layne at Studio SubTela, which develops intelligent cloth structures. Their research is focused on creating artistic pieces that are receptive and responsive with an interest in textile’s social dimensions and human interaction.