

# Naama Tsabar

SELECTED PRESS

## Activating the Void

A Conversation with Naama Tsabar

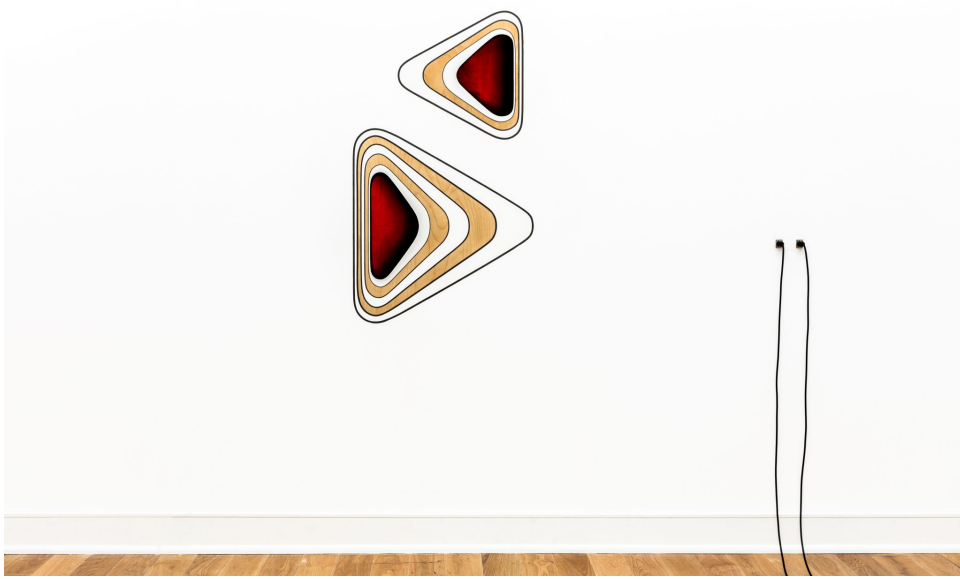
MAUREEN SULLIVAN  
APRIL 19, 2022



Performance with works from “Melody of Certain Damage,” 2021. Composed and performed by Ale Campos, Fielded, Gabriela Burdsall, Gabrielle Sheerer, Lee Muze, Naama Tsabar, Robbi Robsta, and Sarah Strauss. Photo: Michael Del Riego, Courtesy The Bass, Miami Beach

Naama Tsabar stands still, though not passive, in her signature black jeans, black shirt, and red lipstick, a participant in and creator of *Perimeters*, her latest performance project. She moves into action slowly and deliberately, approaching one of several variously shaped openings in the walls, outlined in laminated maple stripes and varnished a deep red on the inside—string instruments turned inside out. She bends back and inserts her head into the cavity, seemingly devoured by the architecture. Her actions generate ambiguous and slightly eerie sounds that combine with a range of other sounds produced by eight musicians and dancers who are also creating by fusing their bodies with physical space. Thrusting their arms into the openings, plucking and strumming hidden guitar, harp, banjo, and violin strings, and singing into an embedded wall microphone, together they create a choreographed composition.

*Perimeters*, which features 11 interactive “Inversions” spread across three rooms and hallways, will be performed by Tsabar and a Miami-based crew of female-identifying musicians and dancers intermittently throughout the run of her current exhibition (of the same name) at the Bass Museum of Art; at other times, visitors can engage with the “Inversions.” Everything is playable and connected—there is order, elegance, and chaos, and female power rules.



*Inversion #4*, 2021. Voice of Wolf Weston, sound of BroodX cicadas, wood, varnish, purfling, paint, infra-red sensors, Arduino, WAV trigger, wires, cable port, and cables; coding: Brian Oakes. Photo: Zaire Kaczmariski

I've followed Tsabar's work for over a decade, from Jerusalem to New York, to Miami. After seeing *Composition 24* at Art Focus, Jerusalem, in 2009, I helped present *Composition 8*, her first iteration of the performance project in New York, later that year with Artis at X Initiative. Numerous site-specific renditions followed, nationally and internationally, always featuring a range of local female-identifying and gender non-conforming musicians, performing in their own styles, each standing on an amplifier serving as both stage and art pedestal.

A tactile and sculptural shift followed, taking the form of Minimalist, Beuys-style, monochrome felt pieces, playable with a piano string, as well as sculptures of two melded guitars that demand collaboration and intimacy when performed. Black gaffer tape wall works from the mid-2000s—some outlining the wires of guitars and amps, and some smooth wall reliefs like *Twilight (Gaffer Wall)*—focused on labor and what is essential but unseen and unsung.

The Bass exhibition includes a re-creation of *Twilight (Gaffer Wall)*, as well as a surprising new sculpture consisting of a pair of Tsabar's shoes. The title, *October 13 2019—July 5 2021*, documents the time of their wearing. She jokes that "this is the sculpture that I worked on the most, almost two years of sculpting by moving through the object." The small sculpture, merged with a metronome ticking at the rate of a healthy heartbeat at rest, is displayed in its own room and serves as a monument to the body, time, and movement. "Perimeters," curated by Leilani Lynch, marks the culmination of Tsabar's projects since her first museum exhibition in 2006, tracing her ongoing investigation of performance as sculpture, the body in space, what is hidden yet present, intimacy and connection, and the endless cycles of destruction and creation.



*Untitled (Babies)*, 2014. Performance view at Auto Body, Miami Beach; performed by Alejandra Campos, Sally Gates, Carolina Souto, and Naama Tsabar. Photo: Monica McGivern, Courtesy Spinello Projects and the artist

**Maureen Sullivan:** Works from the “Melody of Certain Damage” series consist of pieces from broken guitars, connected by a network of musical strings and arranged precisely as they fell when you destroyed the guitars in your studio. These remains of violence remind me of an early performance in the Wynwood section of Miami, when you relentlessly smashed a guitar on a stage, taking on the macho rock and roll trope. The broken stage became the artwork.

**Naama Tsabar:** That was in 2010, when Rirkrit Tiravanija invited three artists to each do a solo project in a storefront space. A part of my show focused on the guitar series, and we performed *Untitled (Babies)*, which was initially a 2008 video work in Tel Aviv. I played “Babies” by the band Pulp with a group of female musicians, all from New York. At the height of the song, I took the guitar off and tried to smash it on stage, but it wouldn’t break. [It had been reinforced.] Then, eventually, the stage itself started breaking apart.

**MS:** Can you tell me more about the sounds in the “Inversions?” How are they activated, and how did you choose them? I was picking up guttural sounds, as well as static, before it shifted into melodic song performed by a female vocalist.

**NT:** This is the first time that I’ve brought motion sensors into the works, where the body enters into the cavity of the wall and starts a sound file, where the movement changes the sound. The sound is made of two components: one is like white noise or waves, but it’s actually cicadas from field recordings that I made in Maryland last year. Brood X cicadas are an interesting phenomenon, hibernating beneath the ground for 17 years, emerging and then disappearing again. When they emerge, they color everything with sound. I was thinking about the space behind walls, the things that are hidden there, visibility and invisibility coming together, and I found a connection with the cicadas’ cycle. A lot of the sound files start with their sound and then merge with the sound of a vocalist singing.



*Perimeters*, 2021. Performance; composed and performed by Ale Campos, Fielded, Gabriela Burdsall, Gabrielle Sheerer, Lee Muze, Naama Tsabar, Robbi Robsta, and Sarah Strauss. Photo: Michael Del Riego, Courtesy The Bass, Miami Beach

I'm very interested in the female voice as a place of disruption. The female melodic voice is an anomaly in Western culture. Historically, it's been the only place, for hundreds of years, where women could express themselves, under the cover of melody and beauty. So, beauty, in that sense, was like a Trojan horse—brought as a gift, but from there, a platform for expression and subversion. In the studio with the professional singers, I was looking for the place where the voice goes a bit off and just escapes the melodic; that's, of course, their signature. With every vocalist, there's a place where the beauty becomes something unique, the way that they express themselves. The idea is that you enter the unseen, the behind-the-wall, the cavity, and what comes out are strong female voices married with the cicada sounds. Your actions, going into the unknown, bring out something that is underestimated and forgotten. Movement inside these works changes certain parameters—in one, if you go deeper inside, the sound will rise in pitch; in another, it will pitch down; and in another one, it will change between the cicadas and singing, depending on where you are. There is a sonic reaction to your place and movement.

With the motion sensor "Inversions," you don't need to be a master of playing anything, you don't need to enjoy your voice or be confident in it to be part of the work and to insert yourself into the situation. All you need is courage, which is a thing in itself, to penetrate the wall.



*Closer*, 2014. Wood, metal, microphones, microphone stands, tuners, and guitar strings, 54.5 x 54.5 x 108 in. Photo: Kristopher McKay, Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

**MS:** The body has always been very present in your work. In the *Perimeters* performance, there seems to be a shift toward more dance-like, seductive movement along the wall and into the sound holes to play the instruments and create sound. Many of your previous works had an inherent fierceness, but this felt more fluid.

**NT:** It's the first time that I've worked with dancers, and it made a lot of sense to bring two dancers into the composition of eight, because these new works call on movement for activation rather than mastery of an instrument. There's a language of movement and sonic reaction to be learned, and it was a really interesting process and new experience for me to go through rehearsals. How do you bring in the movements in a precise way that is one with the work, rather than create theater around the work? I was trying to have the movements be essential to the sound and the relationship of the two women moving beside each other inside these holes.

**MS:** Your 2014 performance at the Guggenheim Museum was the first time that I noticed you merging the body with the architecture of the space. There was something very sexual about it, and I recall some reference to the glory hole.

**NT:** *Closer*, the Guggenheim work, was a freestanding corner with a set of holes containing string elements and another set of holes for singing; it was kind of like a singer/songwriter corner where you could merge your body into the wall and play it. That was the starting point for the "Inversions."

*Closer*, as well as photographs that I started taking in the studio in 2012 where I make holes in the wall and insert my body, is definitely linked to thinking about glory holes, thinking about the radicalized queer culture that men have in these clubs, and thinking about movement through space and movement through the world—gendered movement through the world. It blows my mind that men have the confidence to move their most vulnerable part through a

hole in the wall, without knowing who's the receiving part. To me, that is fascinating. I want to open that up to myself, and to the viewer—moving through the wall, through the holes, with that assurance, confident in your movement and existence through the wall, through the world, and into the unseen. That's embedded in these works, and sexualized, of course, for other reasons as well. But it's also about freedom of movement and confidence in movement.

**MS:** Performance art, which was marginalized when you started receiving invitations from museum and cultural spaces in 2004, has since become completely integrated into the art world, with galleries creating departments and hiring dedicated curators. You have several major galleries representing you, but have very little to sell.

**NT:** The sculptural works and objects can sell, but I don't sell my performances other than the "Composition" pieces. I find formats to make the work accessible, like vinyl or videography, because I don't want it to be a commodity reserved only for people who have the means.

I had moved to New York and was at Columbia doing my MFA when the market crashed in 2008, and the big conversation was that people weren't buying art anymore, especially not emerging and young artists. Galleries weren't looking for young artists. The focus was on how an artist could survive, and everyone was talking about residencies and performance, which obviously I'd been doing before. Shortly after, the Marina Abramović show at MoMA sent waves of performance, performance, performance; and Tino Sehgal came into full focus in those years. I feel like the shift toward performance has been a long process; and from my experience, its re-emergence, after the '70s and '80s, came from the 2008 crash when everything had to be re-thought and new models were put into place for support. It's now completely considered an art form and has entered the market sphere.

There's a misconception that performance is cheap to produce or easy to make—just do a performance. But a performance is the most expensive artwork you can make, and I find people are coming around to understanding the complexities of producing such a thing.

**MS:** The opening of "Perimeters" coincided perfectly with the excitement of finally gathering together after so much isolation. We crave the immediacy of experiencing a performance in real life.

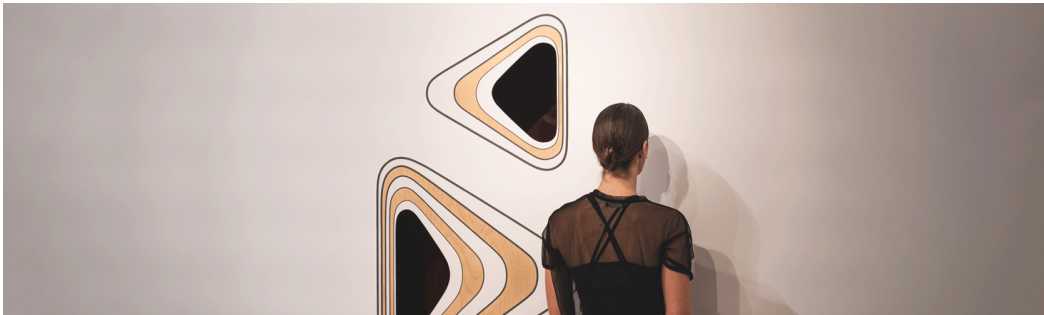
**NT:** And intimacy, too. It's a thing of bodies coming together. The pandemic is in the body; that's why we can't see each other with the virus surging through us. This affirms the importance of our presence and body as the thing to protect and value to move forward.

# FRIEZE

## Naama Tsabar's Soundscapes Cause A Glitch in the Patriarchy

The performance artist talks to Terence Trouillot about her new exhibition at The Bass Museum, Miami and letting her work exist within its own set of rules

TERENCE TROUILLOT  
DECEMBER 2, 2021



**Terence Trouillot:** I'm excited to talk to you about your upcoming exhibition 'Perimeters' at The Bass in Miami. It's essentially a huge installation inspired by your 'Inversion' series (2020–ongoing), which you first showed at Shulamit Nazarian in Los Angeles. That was your first time making instruments by cutting holes into gallery walls, right?

**Naama Tsabar:** Yes, but the Inversions are connected to an earlier work that I first showed at the Guggenheim in 2014 called Closer. It's a freestanding corner partition – two walls coming together and not supporting anything but themselves. And on one side there are these two microphones penetrating the walls and on the other side these holes: one has string elements inside of it and the other is a singing chamber. But the first Inversion at Shulamit Nazarian and the ones that are going to be in the Bass show differ from each other, although they're both installed in the wall of the gallery or museum. They're architectural in that sense.

So for this show, there's going to be a set of five Inversion works in the main space of the gallery – the largest in the museum. You're basically walking into an empty space and, of course, there's these holes in the wall. The first thing you see, in the hallway leading to the main space, is a Melody of Certain Damage (2018–ongoing), which is a broken-guitar piece. And then there's a room that's just full of other broken or deconstructed guitars. So, it's kind of a landscape of debris but everything is connected and playable; everything is on the floor.





Naama Tsabar, 2021. Courtesy: © The Bass Museum, Miami

**TT:** There's also a shoe piece if I remember correctly.

**NT:** Yeah, you walk further into the hallway and there's another space on your left, it's really small. And in there will be a new piece called *October 13 2019–July 5 2021* (2021), comprising my shoes and a metronome. And then in the big gallery you have this work that's called *Twilight (Gaffer Wall)* (2021), and it's this curved wall that we built that's – from floor to ceiling – just strips of gaffer tape. So, it's like this really tall transitional space that sort of plays with the lights. It's almost like a nocturnal veil that you walk through.

**TT:** How are these Inversions different from the ones you showed in Los Angeles?

**NT:** There are still string instruments that you could play with your hands inside the walls, but for the Bass show I incorporated purfling, which are these violin inlays: the things that you use on the edges of nicer violins as decoration. It's this kind of maple wood, and in the show it's inserted into the wall. And then there's one work that has sets of strings and also guitar necks inside, some with bass strings, and they're larger than the ones in Los Angeles. They're deeper, and some of them even call upon activation by two people if you wanted to. There's going to be a singing chamber, too, like a singing Inversion, which is actually the one you saw at Shulamit Nazarian, which was this confessional in the wall.



Naama Tsabar, Ale Campos, Fielded, Gabriela Burdsall, Gabrielle Sheerer, Lee

**TT:** Yes, I remember. That was cool.

**NT:** And then the three other Inversions are different completely in the sense that you don't have to have any mastery of an instrument or voice to activate them. The mere penetration into the wall, and the entry of the body into the wall activates a set of sensors that emits sound.

**TT:** Does it work like a Theremin?

**NT:** No. It's a set of infrared sensors that react to how close or far you are from them. But it is reminiscent. I always

Muze, Robbi Robsta, and Sarah Strauss in *Inversions*, 2021, performance view.  
Courtesy: © The Bass Museum, Miami; photograph: Michael Del Riego

thought about making a huge Theremin –  
that’s a dream work.

So, the sound coming off these movement *Inversions*, for me, is important as well. It’s an audio file that’s made from two things: one is a recording from a female vocalist that I work with a lot. The second are sounds from Brood X cicadas. I went down to Maryland and recorded them. This insect is always underneath us, only comes out once every 17 years. I thought that was pretty mind-blowing.

But I’ve been thinking of that as a parallel to these spaces behind the walls, but also the gendered place of women. It’s super-interesting for me, because it’s kind of like the melodic female voice throughout Western music history and culture has been almost like a glitch in the patriarchy. Because women were given a place to express, but only if it was under the cover of melody and beauty.



Naama Tsabar, Ale Campos, Fielded, Gabriela Burdsall, Gabrielle Sheerer, Lee Muze, Robbi Robsta, and Sarah Strauss in *Inversions*, 2021, performance view. Courtesy: © The Bass Museum, Miami; photograph: Michael Del Riego

**TT:** Can you tell me a little bit about the performance that will happen in that space as well? I’m interested in this idea of bringing in people from the local community to be part of the performance. I’m curious how that works.

**NT:** Yes, for sure. With my performances I almost always come with one or two core musicians that know my process. So, at The Bass I’m going to have two core musicians, and there’s going to be five local performers. And the performance is completely collaborative. It’s written through a set of seven rehearsals – we just explore. And through the exploration, usually what I do mostly in these rehearsals is just film and give extra sounds.

After three days of just complete play and exploration and explosions, I go back through hours of material and I find interesting places and then we all watch them together, and we start elaborating on those places, weaving things together. I should also say that I work only with female identifying, gender non-conforming people, so I’m looking for something very specific.



Naama Tsabar, Ale Campos, Fielded, Gabriela Burdsall, Gabrielle Sheerer, Lee Muze, Robbi Robsta, and Sarah Strauss in *Inversions*, 2021, performance view. Courtesy: © The Bass Museum, Miami; photograph: Michael Del Riego

**TT:** I'm fascinated by this idea of working with non-gendered musicians, and also thinking about your practice in that sense. There's this kind of queering of rock'n'roll, let's say, or just music in general. It makes me think of the Destroy All Monsters, Mike Kelley's band, and DISBAND, a band formed by Martha Wilson, Daile Kaplan and Barbara Ess.

**NT:** I'm trying to move away a bit from queering rock'n'roll. I feel like with these works, with the *Inversions*, with the *Felts* ('Work on Felt' series, 2012–ongoing), I'm trying to just push it further.

When you do something, you do it in relation to something, and that's fine – we're not in a void, right? So in relation to what it means to be in a band, a male band, the machismo, all these things. But trying to think about also creating things that are their own. And I think that, for me, with these works it's trying to let them exist within their own set of rules.

So just thinking about expanding, rather than just bouncing against something. I feel like I bounced a lot in contrast to all these things, rock'n'roll, but now I'm just trying to give these works and these musical moments and these collaborative performances their own existence. I feel like I'm going through a next stage for these.



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Naama Tsabar: ‘Shoes are kind of an underdog’

Footwear with metronomes and singing walls are all part of the fun at the artist’s new show

BENJAMIN SUTTON  
29 NOVEMBER 2021



Naam Tsabar: “There is play and fun within interactivity” © Ebru Yildiz

Visitors to the Bass Museum this winter can sit on the gallery floor strumming guitars or singing into its walls, all the while keeping to the beat of a metronome fused to a pair of worn-out shoes. These interactive, sculptural and sonic interventions by the Israel-born, New York-based conceptual artist Naama Tsabar are a continuation of her distinctive approach to institutional critique.

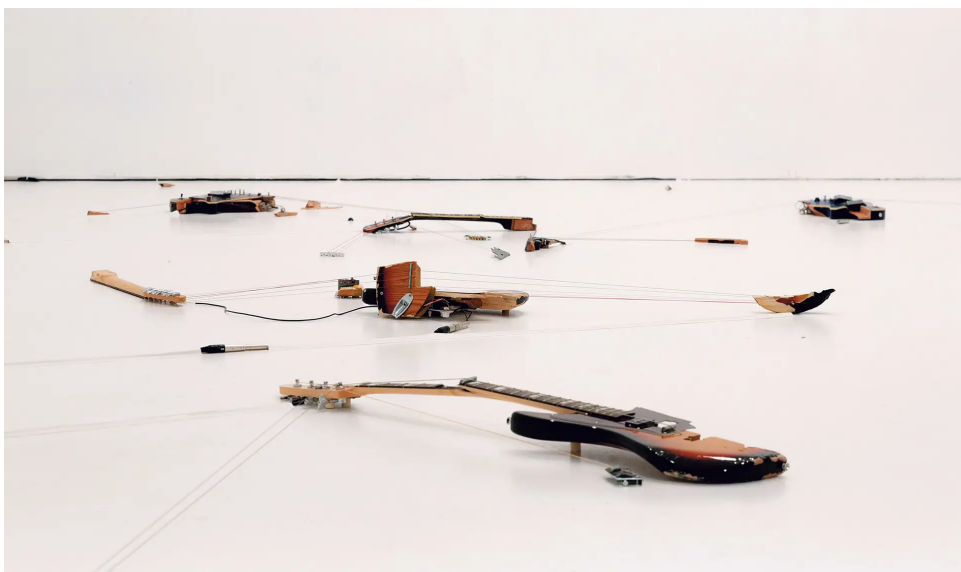
The artist is always seeking new ways to heighten awareness and curiosity in viewers so they begin to sense forces they would not normally perceive. By cutting into gallery walls and equipping them with sensors, microphones, strings and speakers, she upends the typical functioning of the white cube as a space for passive visual contemplation. For the artist, such interventions push at and expand the boundaries of how a work of art—and an art space—should function.

**The Art Newspaper:** Your new work for this show, *October 13 2019-July 5 2021*, features a pair of shoes you wore for nearly two years fused with a metronome. How did that piece evolve during Covid-19, when we all became acutely aware of the relentless, granular passage of time.

Naama Tsabar: I think of shoes, like clothes, as something that we walk around the world in and live our lives through. So often you have your shoes that you wear every day—it's one of those utilitarian, not-thought-about objects, and through the weight of our body, the way we move over time, we sculpt this object in a very specific way. The shoes are kind of an underdog, but they are so fundamental. That connects to a lot of the things that interest me, from the very early works with gaffer tape, this laboured material that is often hidden that I've tried to shine a light on, to resurface. I wanted to focus on shoes because I go through years of my life in one pair of shoes—they encompass so much of my being. It's a work that came about during the pandemic and it definitely has to do with the slowing of time and this moment of perspective on the time that has passed. Usually we can't really think about the movement of time, especially in a place like New York. But for a moment there we all had a lot of time to think about the movement of time. And the metronome is an object I've been really interested in since before the pandemic, when I was working on a project on the High Line [Park, New York] fusing a metronome and a stone plinth. The metronome is the keeper of time, so it was about fusing it with movement into an object that is a diary of a certain time and a certain body.

**There's a thread in your work of wanting to draw attention to things that are overlooked, like the silent labour of shoes, the edges of rooms or the spaces behind gallery walls. Is it important for you that viewers understand the political and institutional critiques implicit in those works as they interact with them?**

What viewers take away from it is never something I can fully control. So if the viewer finds themselves on the floor playing broken pieces that used to be a guitar and conforming their body to it, even if they don't realise it in a conceptual or intellectual way, they are already engaging in an action that is subverting traditional viewership and the place of art within a museum, or even just the place of an instrument within the history of rock 'n' roll. There is play and fun within interactivity, I think that's what lures us in and keeps our attention. But as someone who's taking part in the work, you're putting your body and your experience in a place that rethinks what the museum does, what its place is and what your place is, and the borders that are put around works. It's also related to the senses and the sensual experience being something that is so often just limited to the visual sense. So the experience will actually be closer to how we experience life, and I think that is political.



Visitors are invited to play the broken guitars in *Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)*, 2018, “subverting traditional viewership and the place of art”, Tsabar says  
Photo: Eyal Agivayev; courtesy of CCA Tel Aviv

## What will visitors to the Bass hear when they interact with the *Inversion* works?

There are five *Inversion* works in the show. One of them is an inverted string instrument, so you don't see the strings, but you can play them. Another is a singing chamber, almost like a confessional embedded in the wall that you can sing into and it picks up your voice and amplifies it through the space. The other three works in the series are activated through motion sensors. When you penetrate the wall there's a sound that comes out. It's a kind of vocabulary, and each work has its own voice. One of them is a recording I took over the summer when the Brood X cicadas came up. It's this sea of cicadas, these amazing animals that hover underground for 17 years then come up—something that's always there but you don't see until it resurfaces in a loop. And the other sound, the predominant sound of the pieces, is an edited file I recorded in a studio with three female vocalists. The melodic female voice has been almost like a Trojan horse historically. Throughout the history of music—not all music, but Western music certainly—some women were able to have this platform of expression under the blanket of beauty and melody, which is like a glitch in the patriarchal order. I'm really interested in that moment. So the sound that's coming out of the motion sensor *Inversions* is this marriage of the Brood X cicadas and these sculpted females voice singing.

## Naama Tsabar Wants Viewers to Challenge the Expected Museum Experience: ‘If You Push Your Own Boundaries You’re Rewarded’

TESSA SOLOMON  
NOVEMBER 29, 2021



Naama Tsabar, *Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)*, 2018, installation view, CCA Tel Aviv. PHOTO EYAL AGIVAYEV/COURTESY CCA TEL AVIV

Sound travels through mysterious channels in Naama Tsabar’s latest exhibition, “Perimeters,” on view at The Bass in Miami through April 16. For the show, the Israeli-born, New York–based artist will occupy the museum’s galleries with new, site-specific iterations of four bodies of work. Tsabar’s art occupies an intersection of sculpture, performance, and architecture that will transform the museum itself into a playable instrument. Taken together, Tsabar hopes the simultaneous singing and strumming, spread throughout several rooms from her multiple works, will create a symphony of sorts.

The first work on view is her *Melody of Certain Damage*, comprised of scattered fragments of a smashed guitar that has been restrung with piano and guitar wires. Viewers are invited to pluck the strings. A new work, *October 13 2019 – July 5 2021 (2021)*, is comprised of a well-worn pair of the artist’s shoes in which a metronome has been embedded. It ticks like a clock keeping time of her body’s movements over the 21 months during which she wore them. The site-

specific installation *Twilight (Gaffer Wall)* leads into a new presentation of her long-running “Inversions” series. In it, innocuous holes in the walls contain string elements and motion sensors activated by the viewer. For some, the viewer is invited to sing or speak into the hidden space, a subverted confessional that is then amplified throughout the museum.

The artist will also lead a choreographed performance of the artworks, which will later be pressed onto vinyl and available through the museum. Following a year in lockdown, the collaborative nature of “Perimeters” has been immensely fulfilling for Tsabar. “I came out of that year with the realization that presence of the body is so important,” she told *ARTnews*. “Then, our bodies were in danger and the danger. But intimacy is essential, I don’t want to retract from it, I want to fight for it.”

Ahead of the opening of her exhibition, *ARTnews* spoke with Naama Tsabar to learn more about her sonically inclined practice.

### **ARTnews: What’s it like breaking the guitars in your studio?**

**Naama Tsabar:** I think the breaking of the guitar—the myth of that—is a gendered one in rock & roll history. It’s rebroken and rebroken for this cliché of a catharsis. But the interesting thing with the origins of the smashing guitar, which goes back to Pete Townshend and The Who, is that the act was inspired by the philosophy and theories of Gustav Metzger, who was a visual artist and the teacher of all the bandmates. He was a Jew who went through World War II in Germany and after the war he coined the term “utter destructive art,” in which the destruction of the material *is* the making of the art. It propelled The Who to continue that philosophy into their performances but through the years, it’s been detached from its origins and became a different action. In a way I’m bringing it back to its origins. This is not about showing the way the guitar is broken, but rather that the work starts the moment the object breaks.

### **How did this new site-specific iteration of *Twilight (Gaffer Wall)* come about?**

I’ve been using gaffer tape as a material since 2006. I find it super interesting because it’s a material that’s used on stages and production to stabilize cords but is hidden, it’s meant to blend in. It represents the labor behind the experience. For this specific work, I’m thinking about surfacing the tape and making it the show itself, the thing that reflects light. I want to focus light on the labor that’s associated with the material that facilitates the experience, to make it the experience itself.

### **How will other pieces in the show activate the museum?**

For “Inversions,” you walk into a large empty space; the inversions are sound holes in the walls that activates the space. They are the performative spaces. Looking into one of the holes you see a lush shiny deep red that is finished like the exterior of an instrument that is inverted, outside in. Some have hidden string elements so if you penetrate the museum wall you can play them. One has a guitar neck built into it. Another is a singing cavity that you can’t insert a limb into, but you can sing into. It looks like a confessional, but any sound is amplified throughout the space. The newest inversions are activated by the mere motion of the body. Just putting your limb into the wall activates sensors that emit a sound. The space behind the wall became malleable to motion, which we all can do even if we can’t all play an instrument.

### **How do you think dislocating the sound will affect the viewer’s experience?**



These are interactive works. The sound is going through a system to a set of speakers. You can be in the last room where “Inversions” is, and someone in the room with the broken guitar can play a sound audible to you. You may not know the source of the sound or action, which creates a fragmented sense of viewing or experiencing a space. It creates mystery but also a space to discover the art more slowly through an experience that is not only visual but sonic and tactile. It was interesting for me to create an exhibition where the art doesn’t all show itself to you at once. You as the viewer need the urgency or courage to move your body through wall. If you push your own boundaries you’re rewarded, in a sense, with sound and activation. It calls upon complex relationships between works and viewership.

**It also breaks the boundaries between a viewer and gallery or museum space, which have their own power structures. These works don’t just hang on a wall, which invites a specific kind of interaction with the viewer.**

I’m playing with the structures that support the viewing of art, that breaks down the structure of support itself, which becomes fused with your body. It sets apart this show from a more traditional exhibition. Think about the empowerment of being able to “play” the museum. As a spectator to art, we are often passive viewers and in this show, and a lot of my others, I make a viewer an active viewer who can render the space different by their actions. That is out of my control; it’s in their control. That’s an empowering place but also one that holds responsibility and weight. That duality is an interesting tension. I try to break the museum apart and put it back together in a way that the viewer is part of the space.

**What do you mean by responsibility? Whose responsibility, the viewer or the artist?**

There’s a responsibility of being a performer, of someone that is in focus. The visibility is a place of responsibility. It’s not really mine. Think of someone looking at a show and touching something—with that act they shift from a passive viewer to a performer. You wonder, where is the sound coming from? Who made it? Every action becomes public.

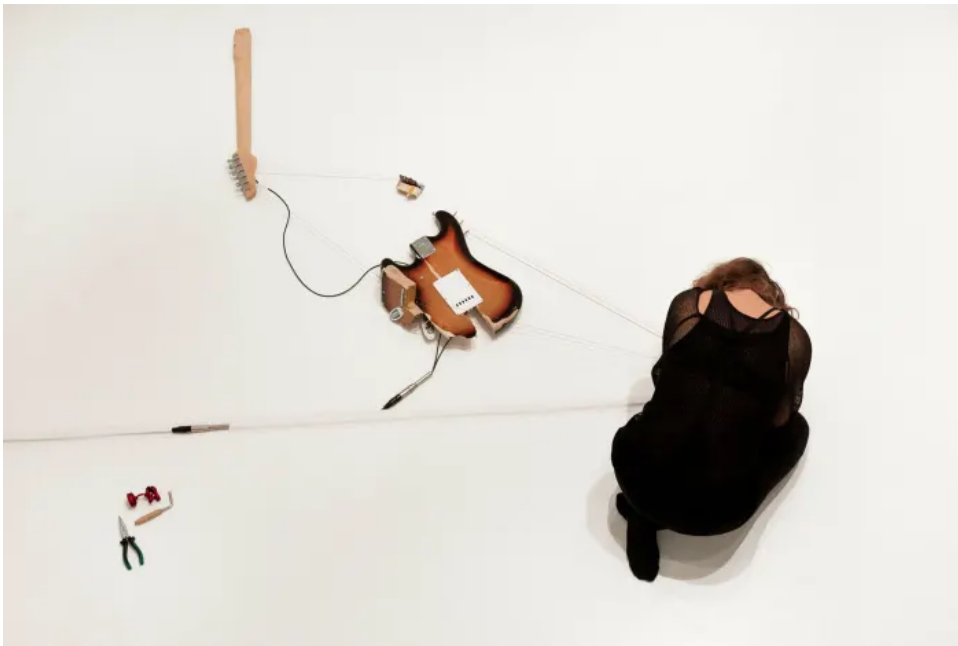
# Artist Naama Tsabar on destroying guitars and turning life into sculpture

The Israeli-born, New York-based artist probes the limits of sound and space in her show at The Bass in Miami

ANNY SHAW  
NOVEMBER 26 2021



Contrary to the long list of rock stars who have smashed up their guitars on stage in a fit of macho rage, the Israeli-born New York-based artist Naama Tsabar prefers to destroy hers in the privacy of her studio. “It’s such a clichéd rock ‘n’ roll act,” she says. “I like to take away from the action, its bravado and its legacy of violence. I put on goggles and some gloves and I bash it against the floor. Breaking a guitar is not easy. It takes a minute and a half — at least.” In Tsabar’s case, there’s a greater purpose to the wanton destruction. She maps where the fragments of guitar have fallen and reinstalls them in exactly the same positions to create works of art, joining the broken pieces together with strings salvaged from working pianos and guitars. Audiences are invited to play the newly imagined instruments, which form part of her “Melody of Certain Damage” series.



'Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)' (2018) by Naama Tsabar © Courtesy of CCA Tel Aviv. Photo: Eyal Agivayev

One such work features in Tsabar's solo exhibition at The Bass in Miami, where the artist is in the middle of intensive rehearsals when we speak over the phone. Her voice reverberates around the cavernous space — "a sonic reflection", as she puts it, of the architecture. *Perimeters*, which opens November 28, plays with the very borders of the museum's architecture, as well as probing the limits of sound and sculpture, gender roles and human interaction — something which has been painfully absent during the pandemic. "When we emerged from those 18 months, everyone was talking about how online platforms and Zoom were the new normal," Tsabar says. "But for me, it made me understand better how important our physicality is — that what makes us human is our personal interaction, those moments of intimacy, discovery and communication with other people."



'Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)' (2018) by Naama Tsabar © Courtesy of CCA Tel Aviv. Photo: Eyal Agivayev

Each of the 11 works on show invites the audience to activate them or navigate them in some way. In addition, Tsabar is collaborating with a group of female and non-binary musicians and dancers, most of them from Miami, to create a musical composition using her sculptures, which will be performed at various points throughout the exhibition and pressed as a vinyl recording to be sold with an exhibition catalogue. The main focus of the show is a series of “Inversions”, a new body of work Tsabar first presented in early 2020, just before the pandemic hit. Accessed via a curved wall covered in strips of black gaffer tape (think Richard Serra meets Eddie Van Halen), Tsabar has installed several Inversions directly into the existing architecture of the museum. Each recess is painted in the same glossy deep red varnish of string instruments, while the edges of the holes are bound with the kind of maple purfling found on violins. One cavity contains a set of strings that can be reached by hand and strummed, another contains a motion sensor which transforms movement into sound. A third, larger, hole has a microphone built in that museum visitors can talk or sing into, becoming a sort of confessional box. “The space behind the wall becomes performative; you are really sculpting sonic landscapes through your movement behind these walls,” Tsabar says.



‘Inversion #2’ (2019) by Naama Tsabar © Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian

Movement becomes sculpture in another work — “October 13 2019-July 5 2021”, which consists of a pair of Cole Haan shoes Tsabar wore for almost two years. Instead of throwing them away, the artist inserted a metronome into their soles which keeps ticking at 60bpm, the rate of a healthy resting heart. “My body moved in this pair of shoes for so long and really sculpted them just by the mundane act of walking,” she says. “I always say this is the sculpture I worked on the most, ever. Two years is a long time to sculpt something.” Monetising a practice largely rooted in performance and sound poses its own set of challenges. Nonetheless, Tsabar is represented by a committed cohort of galleries: Shulamit Nazarian in Los Angeles, Kasmin Gallery in New York, Tel Aviv’s Dvir Gallery, Spinello Projects in Miami and, most recently, Goodman Gallery, which has bases in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London. Two are presenting her work at Art Basel in Miami Beach. Kasmin Gallery is showing one of Tsabar’s felt pieces from 2019 (“Work on Felt (Variation 21) Dark Blue”, priced at \$34,000), which consists of a huge swatch of industrial felt that has been transformed into a modifiable stringed instrument. Influenced by Robert Morris’s felt works as well as Ellsworth Kelly’s flat planes of colour, the gallery’s senior director Mariska Nietzsche says they “riff on hard-edged minimalism but they’re incredibly tactile”.



'Work on Felt (Variation 21) Dark Blue' (2019) by Naama Tsabar © Christopher Stach. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery

“They’re a good entry point for Naama’s work, especially after seeing the performances at The Bass, which are key to understanding how she conceives of the works as both sculpture and as performance.” Shulamit Nazarian, meanwhile, is dedicating its entire booth to Tsabar — six works in total (prices range from around \$20,000-\$35,000). The gallery’s senior director, Seth Curcio, notes that Tsabar has a dedicated and sophisticated group of collectors in the US. Curcio says that her work has been acquired by numerous museums over the past 24 months, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, the Perez Art Museum Miami and The Bass. Such acquisitions have been boosted in part by a renewed commitment by museums to diversify their audiences and collections. As Curcio puts it: “Conceptually, Naama is addressing a lot of issues that relate to gender equality and labour, which is a conversation many museums are interested in having right now as it relates to representation.” Despite such evident success, Tsabar is clear-eyed about the barriers she still faces. In the 1990s, with the sounds of PJ Harvey, Björk, Tori Amos and Patti Smith echoing in her ears, she played in bands and performed in clubs. It feels as if there has been little progress since then. “As with any art form, the history of music was written by men, about men. Rock ‘n’ roll, classical music and jazz are all very gendered and masculine — instruments are created for men, not for other bodies,” Tsabar notes. “It’s an overarching theme across the arts. There’s still a way to go.”

## A Glitch In The Patriarchy: How Naama Tsabar Is Hacking The History Of Rock Music

Using smashed guitars and holes in the walls, the Israeli artist is turning Miami Beach's contemporary art museum into an extended musical instrument

ROB GOYANES



Naama Tsabar at The Bass, Miami Beach, November 2021.  
Photo by Peyton Fullford for Art Basel.

On February 6, 2021, indie rock musician Phoebe Bridgers performed on *Saturday Night Live*. The singer-songwriter finished the distorted crescendo of 'I Know the End' by banging her guitar against a monitor. The guitar didn't break and the sparks that sprayed from the monitor were stage magic – 'They made me a fake one to break,' Bridgers said later – and the internet lit up in response. The trolling included comments like, 'Guitar: 1, Phoebe: 0.'

For Naama Tsabar, an artist whose forthcoming show at The Bass Museum of Art in Miami, titled 'Perimeters', includes a body of work made from broken guitars, this ordeal brings to mind her 2008 durational performance *Untitled (Babies)*, for which the artist created an unbreakable, carbon-infused guitar. It was smashed repeatedly into a wooden stage until the stage splintered and was ultimately wrecked.

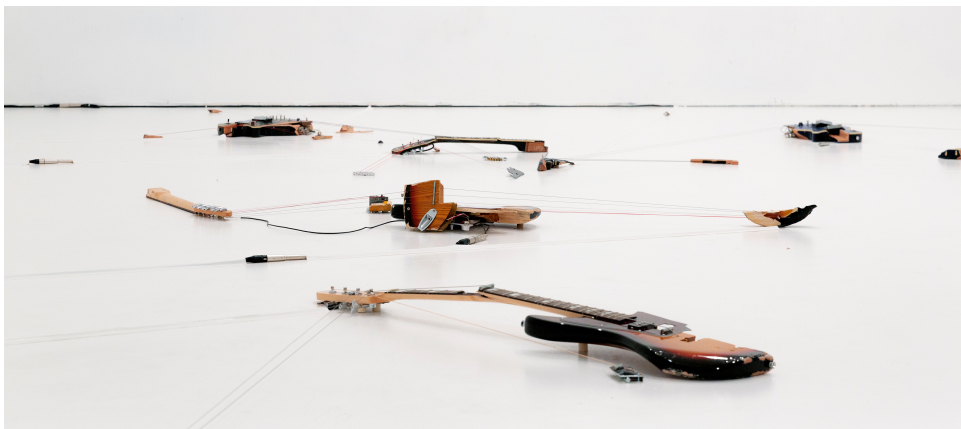
'When I started my research I couldn't find any images of a woman breaking a guitar,' Tsabar says. Then and now, as with Bridgers' performance, Tsabar's piece drew jeers from a mostly male crowd, commenting on her 'inability' to destroy the guitar. And yet, despite this parallel, Tsabar isn't all that excited by Bridgers' gesture. 'For me breaking a guitar is such a cliché act in rock'n'roll,' she says. 'It's interesting that [Bridgers] did it, but I'm not *into* it, necessarily. Maybe a woman needed to do that just to insert it into some sort of historic timeline.'



Naama Tsabar at The Bass, Miami Beach, November 2021. Photo by Peyton Fullford for Art Basel

Tsabar's exhibition at The Bass includes works from 'Melody of Certain Damage', an ongoing series. For these works, Tsabar smashed guitars in her studio, then mapped the spread of debris, and will have them fastened to the floor in exactly the same pattern. The broken pieces will be strung with guitar and piano strings in a nonstandard setup with nonstandard tuning. While showing me these works, Tsabar mentions how The Who's Pete Townshend, credited with being the first musician to break a guitar on stage, was inspired by Gustav Metzger, the German artist and activist who developed the practice of auto-destructive art in the 1960s. This little-known intersection of contemporary art and rock history fascinates Tsabar, who is more interested in what comes after the physical act of destroying the guitar than the act itself. 'I don't call them guitars anymore, so they kind of transition out of that instrument order into a new one that has its own set of rules,' she says.

Tsabar was born in Tel Aviv in 1982 and grew up listening to artists such as PJ Harvey, Patti Smith, The Breeders, Tori Amos, Björk, Sinéad O'Connor, and especially Diamanda Galás, a soprano and visual artist committed to Aids activism and other political causes. Tsabar started playing piano and guitar, and in high school had a teacher who, she says, 'opened my mind about how art can be a concept. You can think about it as a bigger system.' Around this time, Tsabar also started playing in bands and performing in clubs. In the 1990s, she says, 'a lot of bands were exploring noise within the structures of pop' – groups including The Prodigy. This drew her into 'more extreme work' by the likes of John Cage and Philip Glass.



Naama Tsabar, *Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)* (detail), 2018. Installation view, CCA Tel Aviv, 2018. Courtesy of CCA Tel Aviv. Photo by Eyal Agivayev.

In 2010, Tsabar received her MFA from Columbia University and was included in that year's 'Greater New York' show at MoMA PS1. Since then, her work has circulated around many of the world's top institutions and fairs. Tsabar's exhibition at The Bass also contains a piece titled *October 13 2019 – July 5 2021 [2021]*. A pair of Cole Haan shoes that the artist wore during the title's time period are fitted with a metronome that clicks away at about 60 bpm, the rate of a healthy human heart at rest. Further down the exhibition hall, a giant curved wall appears, which Tsabar refers to as a 'nocturnal veil.' Long thin strips of black on the wall produce a hypnotic, painterly effect – surprising, since it's simply rolls of gaffer tape. 'The material itself,' which is used in stage productions to bundle and secure cables and mark positions, 'is supposed to be hidden. It's the labor that you don't see when you see a show,' she says.

Another body of work in the show is a series of beautiful and ambitious pieces Tsabar calls 'Inversions'. Employing the concept of sound holes – the openings in instruments – Tsabar carved out cavities in the museum's walls. Delicate violin inlays in maple are embedded flush with the walls. When a visitor passes a hand into one of the inversions, the act triggers a sound piece consisting of cicada field recordings and vocals by Wolf Weston and Rose Blanshei; parameters are manipulated depending on the hand's movement. In another inversion, a fretboard with guitar and piano strings is installed behind the wall as a hidden instrument that can be played like a normal guitar, except you cannot move or see it.

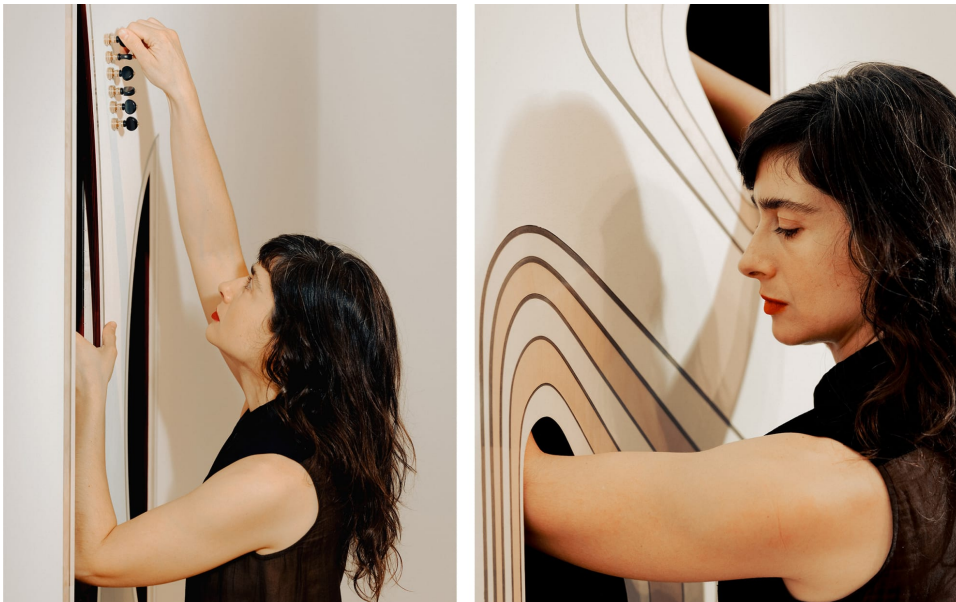


Naama Tsabar at The Bass, Miami Beach, November 2021. Photo by Peyton Fullford for Art Basel.



Tsabar's Minimalist works convert the museum into a giant, multipurpose instrument, turning the surrounding architecture into large-scale extensions of the works. Her interest in concealed labors and spaces – often employed to hide the true costs of aesthetic production and display – come from a personal sense of her position in society as a queer woman. 'I feel like these are places I can really relate to, where you're part of a structure. You're there but you're not seen or considered,' she says.

Rather than the spectacle of breaking a guitar – once a subversive act, now repeated ad nauseam by many a male musician – Tsabar is interested in exploring less-aggressive gestures. 'What do you do with the violence and the destruction, rather than just breaking another [guitar] and propagating it further?' she asks. At her exhibition at The Bass, Tsabar will try to answer this by allowing the audience to play her broken and reconstructed guitar works and the walls-turned-instruments. They will also be activated by a small group of local artists, all of whom are women or gender nonconforming, in a series of scheduled performances. The show's title references Tsabar's interest in power existing at the periphery of society, and one of the ways that power gets asserted is through sound. Female voices in particular, Tsabar says, have functioned as a sort of Trojan horse throughout history, one that can smuggle power to those on the outside. 'They were expressing themselves under the cover of melody and beauty,' she says, 'almost like a glitch in the patriarchy.'



Naama Tsabar at The Bass, Miami Beach, November 2021. Photo by Peyton Fullford for Art Basel.

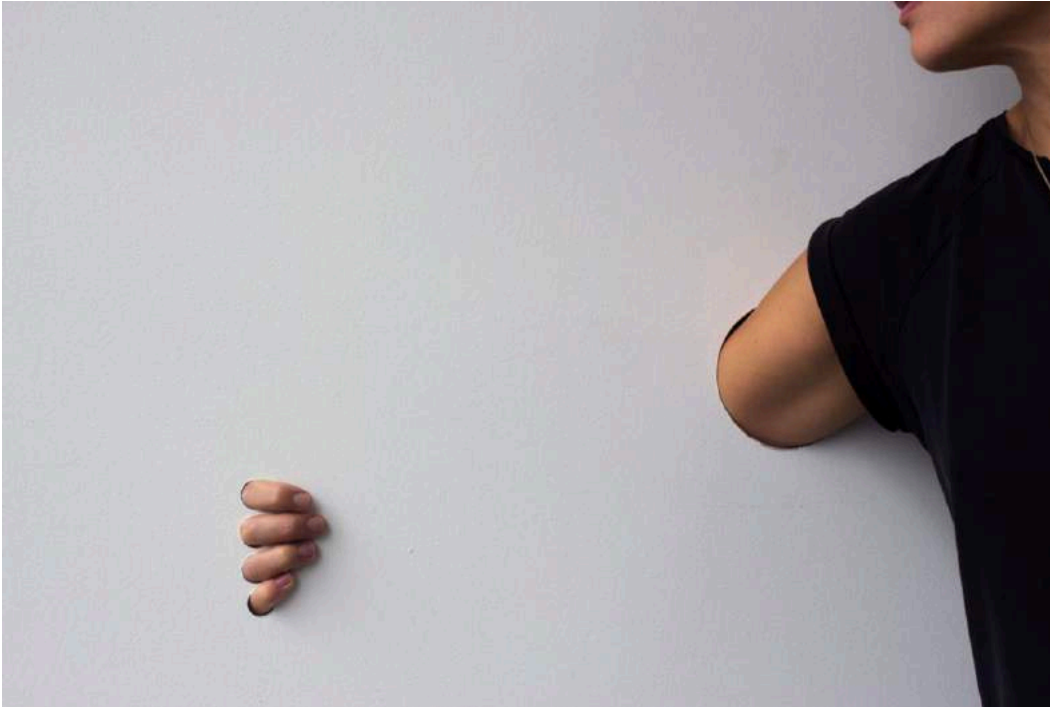
'Perimeters' is on view at The Bass Museum of Art from November 28, 2021 to April 15, 2022. Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, will present Tsabar's work in Art Basel Miami Beach's Nova section.

Naama Tsabar is represented by Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and London; Kasmin, New York City; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv and Brussels; and Spinello Projects, Miami.

# ARTNEWS

## 9 Art Events in New York: Jessi Reaves, Gary Indiana, Barthélémy Toguo, and More

MARCH 11, 2019



Naama Tsabar, *Untitled*, 2018, inkjet print on photo rag paper, wooden frame. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery.

[EXTRACT]

Opening: Naama Tsabar at Kasmin

With “Dedicated,” her latest solo outing, Naama Tsabar continues her examination of the role gender plays in music-making and performance. Bringing together three bodies of work, the show features a site-specific sculptural and sonic installation, works on canvas that function as amplifiers, and photographs set in the artist’s studio. The artist and a group of female musicians will stage a performance at the gallery in May, on the closing night of the exhibition.

# ARTFORUM

## NAAMA TSABAR

The Center for Contemporary Art (CCA)

2a Tsadok Hacoheh St. (Corner of Kalisher) The Rachel & Israel Pollak Gallery

December 20–February 9, Curated by Chen Tamir.

WENDY VOGEL

SEPTEMBER 14, 2018

The famous guitar smashers of history have traditionally been men: Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend, Kurt Cobain. Naama Tsabar first appropriated this macho gesture in a 2014 performance, during which she wielded her instrument like an ax to destroy the stage. Tsabar's recent sonic sculptures merge the visual language of Minimalism with raw acoustic power. Activated by female-identified performers and audiences, these works question the auratic untouchability of the art object and the gendered conventions of popular music. For "Melody of a Certain Damage" at CCA Tel Aviv—which is accompanied by the artist's first survey catalogue—Tsabar returns to her hometown with a room-size participatory string sculpture anchored by shattered guitar fragments. Continuing her investigation of intimacy and shifting perceptions of power, Tsabar will invite female musicians and, for the first time, choreographers to collaborate by playing the sculpture as it lies on the ground.

**KUNSTHAUSBASELLAND**

# Naama Tsabar Transitions #4

INES GOLDBACH

SUMMER 2018



Naama Tsabar, *Work On Felt (Variation 11)*, Dark Blue, 2016, installation view Kunsthaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.

New-York based artist Naama Tsabar adorns the spaces of the Kunsthaus Baselland with an installation comprised of three bodies of work – *Transition*, *Works On Felt* and *Barricade*. This grouping of works is in a constant shift between the visual and the sonic, the active and the passive. The exhibition at Kunsthaus Baselland is Naama Tsabar's first big institutional solo-exhibition in Europe.

At first, when one comes down the stairs to the lower floor, the *Transition* canvases appear to be large-scale paintings or drawings. But instead of pigment, Tsabar uses cables, buttons, connectors and parts from amplifiers and speakers in order to create her sensuous compositions. On the one hand, they are attached simply to the wall; on the other, they still function as amplifiers and speakers and emit sound once activated. Tsabar's description of choice is 'sculptural paintings that have the ability to output sound'.

*Barricade* consists of several microphones arranged in a triangle formation. The microphones' cables line the floor in a formal composition, reflecting the path of transmitted sound. The spatial arrangement of the microphone mounts act as both barrier and enabler as the performative space between the microphones is physically limited. The sound picked up within *Barricade* expands into the different exhibition rooms as each side of the microphone shape feeds directly through a separate *Transition* canvas located in the first room.

Dispersed in several locations are works from Tsabar's ongoing *Works On Felt* series. Much like the *Transition* canvases the *Felt* works are between the sculptural and the sonic. By the addition of carbon fiber, piano strings and guitar tuning pegs, the felt gains new features that contradict its natural characteristics. Through their visible materiality and size they engage the body, to be touched, activated, felt. One is immediately confronted with their minimal design and then given a chance to directly engage with the work itself by plucking the strings, creating sounds from them.



Naama Tsabar, *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.

For some time Naama Tsabar has been interested in the shift within a given physical space and field of reading that can happen through music and sound. When they are activated Tsabar's works' legibility changes, as does the distance between object and subject — when the viewer stops in their tracks to interact with the works and activate them, they breach the borders between their own body and the art object. At once constituting both an intimate and performative relationship with the works and space, Tsabar does not want to present her viewer with work that should be admired only for its visual formal qualities. "I don't like authority, to be framed — restricted," says the artist. "These works break the borders that were set for them. They do this by possessing the potential to expand to a different field of action; they are in constant states of transition."

Making reference to the gender roles and codes of behaviour implicit in the music and club world, in her works and performances Naama Tsabar both pulls into focus the aggressive gestures of rock'n'roll and their associations with masculinity and power and simultaneously undercuts them. Her works function like a filter for the decadence of urban nightlife with all its seductive and subversive facets. Through the energetic and sensory encounter with the works a choreography of movement and sound emerges, which draws in the visitor and extends the work across the whole exhibition space.



Naama Tsabar, *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.

**Ines Goldbach (IG):** Let us start our conversation about your works like *Transition* that you are showing here in Basel. At first sight they look similar to paintings and sometimes, from a certain distance, appear like drawings – but on the other hand they act like speakers or even, in their togetherness with the space and the architecture of the Kunsthau, like a big instrument per se. What is the difference for you installing them and seeing them in calm — without any sound — and on the other hand activated and functioning as instruments, filling the space with sound?

**Naama Tsabar (NT):** For each *Transition* canvas I took apart an amplifier or powered stage monitor. I took out all the internal and external components — the speaker, knobs, wires, circuit board, etc. I extended the existing wires that run in the circuit board using the same colour and gauge of wire. I used the wires and knobs like a painter's palette and made the visual compositions on the canvas. All the wires are puncturing through the canvas and connecting back to the circuit board and speaker at the back of the canvas; that way the amplifier gains a new formal visual existence while still retaining its prior functionality. It's a sculptural painting that has the ability to output sound. The *Works on Felt* actually double as instruments, when the string that sculpts them is plucked. I'm interested

in these in-between states of existence, when an object can change its reading and field of action by its activation; I feel this expands the existence for the objects, it brings them into a more complex sensual existence, one which is much more in tune with the way we experience life. I don't like authority, to be framed — restricted; these works break the borders that were set for them. They do this by possessing the potential to expand into a different field of action; they are in constant states of transition.



Naama Tsabar, *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.

**IG:** On the one hand you open your works to the public — viewers are invited to activate your works — nearly anybody that enters the space. On the other hand, if we are talking about your music-performance, only women are activating the works and filling the space with their bodies and the sound from the works. What is the difference for you in that?

**NT:** On a sensual level I am interested in all viewers having an intimate physical experience with the work, if they choose to cross this border between their bodies and the objects. When we perform the work there are rehearsals involved, learning how to play the pieces; this is a form of mastery, and with that in mind I am very aware of the gender imbalance in the cultural sphere. I am interested in inserting the works into a new gendered history, one which is not male-centric. I choose predominantly to work with women and gender non binary musicians and performers; a male musician needs to be really good and evolved and to meet our high standards to be considered as a performer.

**IG:** Saying that, let me go more into detail. If we talk about all the means that create an installation — speakers, amplifiers, piano strings, microphones, etc. — it sounds very technical. In the way you use them and activate them by women's bodies they become very poetic, fluid, soft, powerful. I wonder if this is a possibility to open certain means that belong in an idealistic way to people of all genders?

**NT:** Yes, it is a way to insert the works into a new gendered history, to give a stage and a voice to those who have been overlooked and underestimated.

**IG:** I think there is a certain issue trying to find the right notion regarding your work; it turns out to be quite difficult — there is sound, music, body, space, architecture, painting, objects, performance, gender. Are these multimedias a way to cross and somehow leave behind all the borders that we have built up within the last decades of art history?

**NT:** I view my practice like a stream, a natural river of sorts — having its own border while passing through those decided on and artificially put in by man.

**IG:** Thinking of the context in which the works might be embedded, and looking to your Works On Felt, there is a very strong visual connection to the felt works by Robert Morris from the 1960s and 1970s — although he very rarely, maybe never, used felts in colour and of course there was no possibility of activating them and playing them as instruments. There was as well never the possibility of touching them. How do you refer to this reference and is it a possibility of extending and open up this understanding of contemporary sculpture or objects?

**NT:** My first art historical references for the felt pieces were Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris; yes, you're right. Beuys for the performative qualities and the use of felt as a deadener of sound, and Morris for his formal gravity-sculpted felts. My Works On Felt are a move away from both predecessors — through the embedding of carbon fiber in the felt, the soft material gains the ability to retain high tension and hold a form. It now looks like felt but acts like another material. When the string is plucked the felt carbon fiber duo become the – sound chamber itself, and the tension of the string is that which sculpts and holds the form; in a way these are forms created by the resistance to gravity. In addition, with the interactiveness of the work there is a question of the place of the viewer — or rather, the viewer who shifts to the performer after activating the work. It constitutes at once both an intimate relationship between viewer and work and a public stage-like relationship between one viewer and the next. And of course there is the relationship between the art object and the sound wave, which also constitutes part of the sculpture — hence the viewer plucking a string also extends the borders of the work, sending a wave of sound to propagate through the exhibition space.

**IG:** It sounds to me as if your work opens up not only a new understanding as to how to use works of art but also, above all, how to generate a new relation to artworks that within the last maybe twenty years became, in a broad sense and on so many occasions, a fetish: something to be admired, to be marketed and sold and installed on private and public walls. Are your works an attempt to create a space for the viewer, to include him/her in a very sensual way and to activate him/her from a viewer to a participant?

**NT:** I hope my works offer a more intimate relationship and experience for their audience. The works don't offer that



relationship right away. At first they do appear to follow the same rules of sight and display put in place by years of art history and they can be installed on private and public walls. However, when they are activated and those borders are breached they can also offer a more specific and sensual experience and relationship between sculpture and body. For example, I have recently learned that one of my felt works that is in a private collection and on display in a house is also being played with regularly by the children of that collector — they're learning how to play with a big piece of felt!

Another aspect to this is that the work also gains a visual history through these interactions and through its use. When we perform on the works at times we leave marks of action on the felt, this is for me an exciting moment where the surface of the work responds back to our actions, and a mark is left of a movement that has taken place, it is now an integral part of the work.



Naama Tsabar, Performance on *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthau Baselland, photo: Carmen Wong Fisch.

**IG:** Mentioning Joseph Beuys, I wonder if artworks and exhibitions that include the viewer, with movement and being present in the space, bring us to the point that art is more about (sensual) experience and how we navigate through spaces, not only architectural-wise but also thematic-wise, regarding the crossing of (social) boundaries?

**NT:** Yes, I believe so. In a way I think it's also about a new understanding of space and a flow put in place in the 21st century by online platforms and new means of communicating. I am trying to bring those ideas back into the material form, back to our bodies.

The exhibition were generously supported by artist grant program, Ostrovsky family fund, Paramo Gallery, Paul Kasmin Gallery, Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim Stiftung, Isaac Dreyfus Bernheim Stiftung, Ruth und Paul Wallach

Stiftung, Dvir Gallery and Spinello Projects as well as the partners of Kunsthaus Baselland: kulturelles.bl, Gemeinde Muttenz, Migros Kulturprozent, burckhardtpartner, Anthony Vischer and werner sutter AG.

During Naama Tsabar's exhibition the two solo exhibitions by Rossella Biscotti and Rochelle Feinstein were also on display.



Naama Tsabar, *Barricade #2*, 2016, installation view Kunsthaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.



Naama Tsabar, *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.



Naama Tsabar, *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthhaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.



Naama Tsabar, *Work On Felt (Variation 7) Black*, 2015, installation view Kunsthhaus Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler.



Naama Tsabar, Performance on *Transitions #4*, installation view Kunsthaus Baselland, photo: Carmen Wong Fisch.

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

# *BOMB*

Sculpture and Sound:  
Naama Tsabar Interviewed by Naomi Lev  
Blending Objects with Performance

Naomi Lev

June 25, 2018



Naama Tsabar, *Work on Felt (Variation 20)*, 2018. Industrial felt, carbon fiber, epoxy, guitar tuner, piano string, amplifier. 56.6 x 29.1 x 29.7 inches. Courtesy of Páramo and the artist.

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# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

How do we move through the world? What drives us? What are our responsibilities as artists and as people? Naama Tsabar has been creating sculpture, installation, and performance work for the past two decades. She utilizes her musical background to visualize her utopian view of the world – a world where hierarchy and power are replaced with attentiveness, passion, and solidarity.

We began our conversation by discussing recent performances of *Closer* and *Work on Felt* at Páramo gallery in New York City.

**Naomi Lev** Can you describe the origins of *Closer* and *Work on Felt*?

**Naama Tsabar** I originally created *Closer* in 2014 for the performance series *Blood Makes Noise* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The installation consists of a freestanding corner wall that has an inverted instrument inside it and a singing chamber, while microphones penetrate from the other side picking up the sound and sending to amplification.

**NL** When and why did you start working with felt?

**NT** The idea of having a flat surface and marrying it with a string to create sound initially originated in paper form in 2012. Artis, an organization that promotes Israeli arts abroad, asked me to create work on paper for their NADA booth. I decided to sculpt the paper while giving it the ability to create sound. That was the first time I embedded carbon fiber, which is the material I embed in the soft felt to create tension and rigidity.



Naama Tsabar, *Work on Felt (Variation 19)*, 2018. Industrial felt, carbon fiber, epoxy, guitar tuner, piano string, amplifier.  
75 x 58.2 x 25.9 inches. Courtesy of Páramo and the artist.

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

NL How are these works created?

NT It's a laminating process where I combine sheets of carbon fiber with epoxy.

NL How did you realize this is the material you need?

NT I started using carbon fiber for *Untitled (Babies)* (2008), which began as a video in which I played a song with a female band on a stage. Toward the end of that video I bang the guitar on the stage—the guitar remains but the stage collapses.

The guitar was coated with carbon fiber and then refinished. Through this experience I realized that marrying carbon fiber with felt would work well. The first marriage was of paper and carbon fiber, and it was a relatively small piece.

NL I've never seen the small formats.

NT Yeah, I don't think I've ever exhibited them again.

NL Why is that?

NT I really love the body-object ratio, and I think they didn't establish that relationship. The first large-size felt I made was a big floor piece that resulted from a conversation with curator Hadas Maor about the history of felt in art. It was an interesting move because it defied both the place of felt in instruments as a silencer and became the chamber itself. I was thinking about Robert Morris's post-Minimalist gravity felt sculptures, and the deadening of sound in relation to Joseph Beuys's felt suit for a piano. My first two pieces were on the floor, and in late 2015 I moved up to the wall.

NL I often see musicians carrying their heavy musical instruments with such affection and responsibility, as if they were another body or their spouse. Are these performances a transmission of that relationship?

NT That's interesting. When you play the piano, it's a place you sit down and your body is conformed. I think the felt objects reflect that order—the one conforming to the other.

NL In the performance you are grasping and stroking the felt. It appears almost like a ceremony.

NT It's true, there is something ceremonial about it. When the performance starts I see the audience, but once I approach the felt and turn to it as a performer, I see nothing else. The performance doesn't start with activating the string—rather, with pushing the body against the object, touching. It's a spiritual experience.

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY



Naama Tsabar, *Closer*, 2014. Wood, metal, microphones, microphone stands, tuners, guitar strings. 54.5" x 54.5" x 9 inches.  
Courtesy of Páramo and the artist.

NL How do you choose your collaborators?

NT I choose the fabulous ones! I have a great community of musicians in many places in the world. I try to work mostly with women or gender nonconforming musicians. It's important to me in terms of visibility and considering the gendered history of the object, and where we want it to be now.

NL Do you find that other things are politically important to you when creating and performing?

NT There are aspects to the works that are philosophically related to power structures, which I'm very interested in rethinking, exposing, and fragmenting. For me the fragmented experience is very important.

NL What do you mean by fragmented?

NT That there is no one central point of power, it's dispersed. It's important to me to destabilize the power structure that our society is built on.

NL And formalistically the audience is immersed in your work so that there is no clear separation.

NT Exactly. *Closer* is one of the works I really love, particularly when it's performed in a big space, because you can't see the performance and hear its amplified outcome at the same time. Usually when



# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

we go to a show everything is outputted through a central PA system, and there's a perfect spot to stand in order to see and hear the show. All these terminologies reflect components of our society.

NL I want to talk about sexuality and sensuality. You mentioned that the microphone "penetrates" the wall. The performance also responds to this notion when the singer strokes her hands gently inside the wall. These are very sensual elements. In relation to female history and our role as women in contemporary society, what you are doing is sexual, but from a different angle.

NT We are all sexual beings. When Madonna came out with her Erotica album and Sex book, Prince was walking around with his ass bare and was not considered provocative to the same extent. Women's sexuality has always been read in the service of men, and that's preposterous!

I also seek to break apart and penetrate the power structure within the history of architecture. I'm interested in inverting and undermining heavy modernist patriarchal structures and perceptions with which we grew up. Closer does that very heads-on; it's not only that you penetrate it in order to play and activate it, but the entire inside of that cavity is lavish red. It's a new belief system.

NL You can't see it, but you feel it.

NT Yeah. We're all moving to that beat.



Naama Tsabar. Installation view. Páramo Gallery. Courtesy of Páramo and the artist.

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

NL We both grew up in a patriarchal neighborhood surrounded by military people. It's interesting for me to understand how that influenced what we talk about now, and how we bring it back to the forefront of our work.

NT Yes, we both were raised in Israel in a very patriarchal society. That being said, I grew up with a very strong woman in the house who helped shape me into the person I am today. Not to say that it was equal to the patriarchal forces, but strength was definitely there.

I think that as we become more technologically advanced and some things can be done much better by nonhumans, the place of women will become more significant. Not because women are not technically capable, but because it wasn't given to them for so many centuries as a way of putting them down. Women can spiritually bring something super important to our society.

NL So how do you take all this and proceed to your next projects?

NT One of my newest projects is titled *Melodies of Certain Damage* (2018), and it continues what I call the guitar series, where I investigate the place the guitar and gender have within music history. The starting point of my new projects is kind of the endpoint of the guitar in rock 'n' roll history, which is "the break." It is the climatic moment when the guitar breaks, but then no one talks about the guitar after that. As part of this project I get new guitars at my studio, and I break them. It's not a climatic act; there is no sound; and it's very technical and dry. As the guitar breaks I map out the pieces, so there is a Dadaist aspect to it: the way it breaks is the way it is. Then I reinsert the pieces into working order by putting new sets of strings on them. The guitar that used to be an object is now a place in which you insert your body. It is shattered on the floor. Then you're almost in a compromised position, because you are on the floor playing next to your instrument. I'm interested in seeing how movement into this position is derived from power rather than submission.

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY



## ‘Stream’ of sound: breaching borders with Naama Tsabar at Kunsthau Baselland

Megan Miller

June 7, 2018



Naama Tsabar, ‘Transition #4’, performance on 13 June 2018 at Kunsthau Baselland.  
Photo: Carmen Wong Fisch. Image courtesy Kunsthau Baselland.

There is a certain issue in summoning the words to describe sound art. Readers are typically left with a string of adjectives so tiresome as to render a piece static or dull. And when sound is accompanied by other media—rhythmic music, the human body, spatial reflection, architecture, painting, found objects, performance, gender studies—how is a viewer to contemplate material and method without losing sight of a work’s immediacy? Are these multimedia a way to cross or somehow deconstruct the hierarchical borders that we have built up within the last decades of art history?

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Israeli artist Naama Tsabar argues in favour of this deconstruction, her ongoing practice being a catalyst for the renegotiation of medium, concept and display. Between large swaths of felt, cages of microphones, dripping cables, bows and vocals, acts of performance are at once experiments in unexpected sound and boundary crossing. Her laboratory, Switzerland's Kunsthaus Baselland, has been invaded by three bodies of work – “Transition”, “Works On Felt” and Barricade – in the artist's first large-scale institutional solo exhibition titled “Transitions #4”. This grouping demonstrates the continuous flux between the visual and the sonic, “the active and the passive”; here, ‘instruments’ are given new sensuous drive and autonomous purpose.



Naama Tsabar, ‘Work On Felt (Variation 11) Dark Blue’, 2016, carbon fiber, epoxy, wood, felt, microphone, guitar amplifier, 206 x 165.5 x 52 cm. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Image courtesy Kunsthaus Baselland.

For all the comparisons between musical instruments and human bodies – particularly the guitar as a stand-in for a wasp-waisted woman – relatively few practitioners confront the gendered history of sound art and musical performance. Tsabar is an exception. In “Transitions #4”, a viewer first encounters a series of “Transition” canvases, initially appearing to be large-scale paintings or drawings. But in lieu of pigment, Tsabar uses cables, buttons, connectors, deconstructed amplifiers and speakers in order to create her sensuous, minimal compositions. Whilst performing as hanging sculptures, each piece offers itself as testament to traditional gallery display; each is an aesthetic triumph in the likes of Robert Morris or Joseph Beuys. However, Tsabar's static arrangements also function as amplified instruments and emit sound once ‘activated’ in performance.

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Naama Tsabar, “Transitions #4”, installation view at Kunsthhaus Baselland. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Image courtesy Kunsthhaus Baselland.

On the lower level of Kunsthhaus Baselland’s exhibition space, the “Transitions” appear more related to abstracted minimalist painting than to sound sculptures like Rebecca Horn’s Concert for Anarchy, a piano whose keys haphazardly burst with sound. They hang like treasured cultural artefacts, their full potential only realised in specific moments: it is only through direct interaction that the works come alive. Tsabar states:

For each Transition canvas I took apart an amplifier or powered stage monitor. I took out all the internal and external components – the speaker, knobs, wires, circuit board, etc. I extended the existing wires that run in the circuit board using the same colour and gauge of wire. I used the wires and knobs like a painter’s palette and made the visual compositions on the canvas. All the wires are puncturing through the canvas and connecting back to the circuit board and speaker at the back of the canvas; that way the amplifier gains a new formal visual existence while still retaining its prior functionality. It’s a sculptural painting that has the ability to output sound.

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Naama Tsabar, 'Transition', 2015, wood, canvas, electronics, cables, knobs, amplifier tubes, speakers, 75 x 113 x 10 cm (left) and 'Transition', 2016, wood, canvas, electronics, cables, knobs, amplifier tubes, speakers, 165 x 84 x 16.5 cm (right). Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Image courtesy Kunsthaus Baselland.

Like her “Transitions”, Tsabar’s series “Work on Felt” also hold potential in their resting states between performances. When summoned by their musician, however, the textile sculptures have a mesmerising effect. During the exhibition’s opening, several female musicians (including Tsabar, who used to be in a punk band) played a set composed especially for the sculptures, accompanied by Fielded (aka Lindsay Powell) on vocals. The felts, in their surprisingly dense timbre, stand equal to Powell’s full-throated voice, with an astounding range of subtleties and textures. The arrangements are stroked, struck or strummed, and hold the capacity to respond and resonate with movement that is as dynamic as the musicians themselves.

The “Work on Felt” iterations look like soft, malleable textiles, but act beyond their materiality. When played, the felt becomes the sound chamber, gallery visitors being audience members of an enclosed gallery symphony. Tsabar’s emphasis on interaction brings these viewers to the fore: it constitutes at once both an intimate relationship between viewer and work, and a public stage-like relationship between one viewer and the next.

Beyond this, there is the relationship between Tsabar’s objects and the sound waves they emit, which, despite their invisibility, are an equally existent extension of the sculptures. The artist explains:

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I'm interested in these in-between states of existence, when an object can change its reading and field of action by its activation; I feel this expands the existence for the objects, it brings them into a more complex sensual existence, one which is much more in tune with the way we experience life. I don't like authority, to be framed — restricted; these works break the borders that were set for them. They do this by possessing the potential to expand into a different field of action; they are in constant states of transition.



Naama Tsabar, "Transition #4" performance on 13 June 2018 at Kunsthaus Baselland. Photo: Carmen Wong Fisch. Image courtesy Kunsthaus Baselland.



Naama Tsabar, "Transitions #4", installation view at Kunsthaus Baselland. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Image courtesy Kunsthaus Baselland.

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The last segment of “Transitions #4” is a three-dimensional cage of standing microphones entitled Barricade. Arranged in a triangle, the microphones’ cables line the floor in a formal composition, reflecting the path of transmitted sound. Unlike the aforementioned projects, Barricade offers Tsabar’s orchestral audience a way to physically map threads of sound.

The elegant, geometric arrangement here stands as both an obstacle and enabler, directly referencing Tsabar’s interest in transmutable art practice and physical and systematic limitations in performance work. To combat this, any sound picked up within Barricade flows into the different exhibition rooms as each microphone input feeds directly through a disjointed “Transition” canvas.



Naama Tsabar, ‘Barricade #2’, 2016, 12 microphones and microphone stands with matching audio equipment (mixer, EQ etc.), dimensions variable. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler. Image courtesy Kunsthaus Baselland.

Such limitations, the artist suggests, are apparent in the “coded behavior” of music and club culture. As a former bartender and bandmate, Tsabar makes reference to the gender roles and expectations implicit in these industries. Her sculptures and performances thus highlight the “aggressive gestures” of rock ‘n’ roll and their associations with masculinity and power and destabilises them. In this undercutting, Tsabar creates charged spaces and multi-sensory zones where nightlife and its negative associations are considered through lenses of “freedom, excess and escape”. Her work treats the gallery itself as a system of control that enables the display of sexuality and bravado, but also, nonetheless, offers a sanctuary away from the realities of the world outside.



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Naama Tsabar, 'Transition #4', performance on 13 June 2018 at Kunsthau Baselland.  
Photo: Carmen Wong Fisch. Image courtesy Kunsthau Baselland.

Throughout her career, Tsabar has focused on constituting both an intimate and performative relationship with the works and her space; she does not strive to present work that should be admired only for its visual formal qualities, but for its imaginative potential to be something other. "I don't like authority, to be framed, restricted," she says. In conversation with writer and curator Ines Goldbach, Tsabar continues:

These works break the borders that were set for them. They do this by possessing the potential to expand to a different field of action; they are in constant states of transition.

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Naama Tsabar, 'Transition #4', performance on 13 June 2018 at Kunsthau Baselland.  
Photo: Carmen Wong Fisch. Image courtesy Kunsthau Baselland.

Once Tsabar's sculptures are 'activated', they offer a more specific and corporeal relationship between object and performer or spectator. They gain a visual history through these interactions and through their use. Once employed as instruments, the pieces absorb gesture and respond through sound, creating a sonic landscape that attests to a structural renegotiation of boundaries, be they art historical, gendered or otherwise. When asked about the varying dimensions of her work — her multitudinous material, message, performance and systematic rebellion — Tsabar simply states:

I view my practice like a stream, a natural river of sorts — having its own border while passing through those decided on and artificially put in by man.

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

# The Artsy Vanguard

Newly Established

Apr 30, 2018



Naama Tsabar by Daniel Dorsa for Artsy.

## [EXTRACT]

What does it take to officially break into the canon? Consult the latest accomplishments of these 10 members of The Artsy Vanguard—a new, annual list of the 50 most influential talents shaping the future of contemporary art practice. Each of these artists has recently reached a crucial tipping point in their career, whether by landing a major commission, a survey at a globally recognized museum, or a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Naama Tsabar is a former punk musician, so it's no surprise that her work fuses the disciplines of visual art and musical performance. "A very important component of Tsabar's work is the sensual," says Thomas Rom, a board member of the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv, where Tsabar is currently part of a group show through May 26th. "She tries to penetrate the borders between art and observer, creating a new field for perception and engagement."

Participation, rather than passive viewing, is central to the experience. At MARTE Contemporary in El Salvador, the artist's monumental installation *Propagation (Opus 3)* (2015) used speakers, amplifiers, and piano strings (among other audio equipment) to turn the very architecture of the museum into an

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instrument. Visitors could literally play the space by plucking its strings.

Tsabar's performances, like one at her recent solo show at New York's Paul Kasmin Gallery, involve activating her minimalist felt-and-wire sculptures as if they were bass guitars. A 2016 exhibition at Spinello Projects in Miami featured a performer singing into a tight, triangular configuration of microphones. After the opening, the mics remained live for the remainder of the exhibition, available for any visitor who wished to lend her voice.

For ambitious projects staged as part of Art Basel in Miami Beach's "Public" program in 2016 and for Prospect New Orleans 4 in 2017, Tsabar invited large groups of female-identifying and non-binary musicians to perform scores that blended various musical genres — turning the performers into a social sculpture in their own right. Tsabar's current solo show at Kunsthaus Baselland runs through July 16th and features three previous bodies of work, as well as an original performance created for the show in collaboration with local musicians.

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## CULTURED

### NAAMA TSABAR PAINTS AND SCULPTS WITH RHYTHM AND MELODY

OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN

FEBRUARY 23, 2018



NAAMA TSBAR. PORTRAIT BY EBRU YILDIZ

Multimedia artist Naama Tsabar orchestrates immersive sound installations, in which musical gadgets replace color palettes and melodies adorn paintings.

The New York-based artist's audible structures contain a nuanced resemblance to the body, and reclaim rituals of music-making as performance art. In her latest work from the guitar series, *Stranger*, two electric guitars attached together double the forms of their players, as the instruments are activated together. Their sudden harmony echoes the physical encounter between two strangers; the music they create fills the space in sudden chord. Tsabar's long-term relationship with music and stage performance is at the core of her interactive practice, which borrows cues from Minimalism, digital art and feminist theory. "This is a relationship piece," says Tsabar, referring to *Untitled (Double Face)*, 2010, in which she and another female artist play two adjoined guitars for 20 minutes. "The hands of two women negotiate movement and sound, and there, gentleness and violence coexist."

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Tsabar's 2015 installation *Propagation (Opus 3)*, at the Museum of Art and Design's group exhibition "Sonic Arcade: Shaping Space with Sound," addresses the movement of sound waves through material form. The wall-spanning installation includes speakers, amplifiers, piano strings and microphones a mammoth instrument to be operated by the audience. With each pull of strings, viewers take an active role in creating a sound transmitted into the museum space through inverted speakers.

"This installation conveys a romantic idea of what happens when viewers can interact with the architecture that surrounds them, through touching the artwork," explains Tsabar. "I am turning the museum wall into a giant instrument of 60 piano strings, which is not different than a painting or a sketch on a wall; however, here, everything is functional, meaning all the wires and cables are transmitting the sound."

Before moving from Tel Aviv to New York, where she earned her MFA from Columbia University in 2010, Tsabar played in a punk band. The experience has strongly influenced her art practice. She examines systems and objects embedded in music culture by stripping music-making from its mythic aura. In her installations, electric cords, speakers, and transmitters which are traditionally kept covert during stage performances curl and drape over gallery surfaces. Amplifiers are substituted for pedestals, and speakers recall the human form, with their voluptuous and rounded shapes.

"In a typical musical experience, all these objects are in play, but they are hidden within a constructed environment," she says. "I am interested in making them the environment itself." Her ongoing *Work on Felt* sculpture series challenges strict formal (and somewhat masculine) aesthetics of Minimalist art within a visually demure, yet sonically engaging strategy. Piano strings pierce through tactile flat surfaces attached to amplifiers. Activated by touching and rubbing their felt surfaces, the wall-hung sculptures translate caresses into musical pitches. She drew crowds on the opening night of Prospect.4 in New Orleans last fall with the performance piece *Composition 21*, in which 21 local musicians, mostly women, performed three commissioned songs atop amplifiers; her works on felt are being exhibited there through February 25.

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

# whitewall

September 5, 2017



## TO WATCH

# NAAMA TSABAR

BY KATY DONOGHUE

Naama Tsabar creates interactive installations and performances that engage the viewer, activate the space, and challenge our understanding of societal rules. She has created conceptual instruments that need to be touched and experimented with in real time in order to be played. Her work first appeals visually, then intrigues with touch and comes alive with sound. For example, for her piece *Closer* (2014), which was exhibited at the Guggenheim, Tsabar made a freestanding corner, behind which two heads of microphones on stands disappeared. Behind the walls were guitar strings that could be played only when a viewer reached inside the cavity. Not for the timid gallery-goer, her work requires participation and curiosity.

Tsabar has a solo show this July at Paul Kasmin Gallery, a newly commissioned performance for *Performa* this November, and a new work for *Prospect 4* in New Orleans this fall. *Whitewall* spoke with her about music, art, and why she collaborates mostly with women.

**WHITEWALL:** *You've said that music was the first creative output you were exposed to. How so?*

**NAAMA TSABAR:** My house was always full of a love of music. I played from an early age—piano, guitar—and my brother played music. It was really a space where I could expand. Art was always in the background in my family. It just took me a minute to channel that. My grandfather was a painter, and the house was always lined with my grandfather's paintings.

**WW:** *What then ultimately led you in that direction?*

**NT:** I was exposed throughout high school, I had

an amazing teacher for art, and she just brought on this freshness for thinking about art. She came from a conceptual art background and that totally intrigued me. Later, after I finished my undergrad, I exhibited quite a lot, started working with a gallery in Israel. And then in 2008 I came to study at Columbia, but by that time I already had a career—a path that I had chosen for my life.

**WW:** *For your undergrad thesis, you strung a guitar string around the gallery for viewers to pluck. It seems you were already making that connection between conceptual art, performance, and music.*

**NT:** The start of the 2000s for me was very important in this kind of way where I was still playing a lot of music. I was in a band and performing in a nightclub, bars—it was a very specific scene. At the same time, I attended art school and things just very organically started slipping into each other. That thesis work was where things clicked and connected.

**WW:** *You've previously emphasized how important it is for you that you work mostly with women. Why is that?*

**NT:** I feel so often there is this form of technical mastery in the arts and the musical field, and I think so many times women are made to feel like they don't know something or can't do something. All these inner worlds and creative worlds can include or exclude certain people, and I feel so often this gender exclusion. That's the worst thing that any creative field can do for the people who want to take part in it.

I know from my work there's this moment

where there are no rules—and the rules must be written in that moment of time. And I will explain. For example, when I do a performance, I invite musicians that know how to play sculptural instruments that I made that don't have these prior technical kind of written rules. And so those moments of getting to know the object, the instrument, the movement against it, are new. They're written in that place and time. And in that sense, anybody can activate my work. Anybody can walk into the work and be just as masterful as a very knowledgeable musician. That's a very important thing for me, to create a community that's not so hierarchal and doesn't exclude so many people.

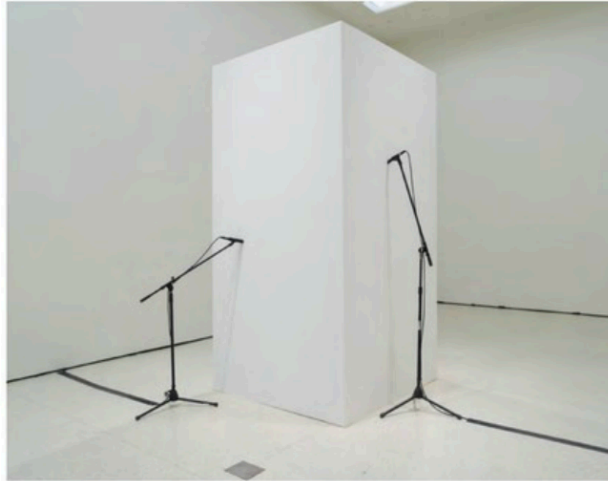
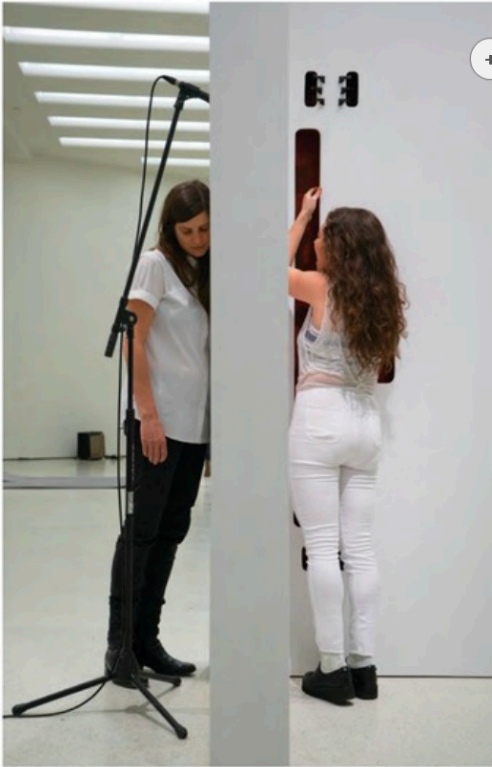
**WW:** *Do you find it difficult sometimes to get a viewer to cross that border? Is there a way you try to welcome that experience?*

**NT:** It depends on the country and even on the city that it's in and how strong those borders are written into the conscious mind in a specific space. Children, more than anything, activate the work without thinking twice. It's because they don't have all these rules written into their understanding in society of how one should act.

**WW:** *Thinking more about mastery and gender roles made me think of the installation you did in San Salvador, *Propagation* (Opus3) in 2015 at MARTE Contemporary. Covering the walls are wires and gear, and musical equipment that I think is often associated with male studio engineers.*

**NT:** For the longest time, because my name is not from here, artists that I would meet afterward at

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parties would be like, "Oh, I thought you were a man." Which was funny to me because in Israel, Naama is a girl's name. But I think in San Salvador, something happened where, as much as there were all these components, as much as there were all these technical abilities, it was also just like a painting on the wall. The first view when you would walk into the museum was in the main hall and you could see the work from afar. So you saw it as a composition on the wall, not all these speakers and cables. The thing to understand is that this whole thing has an actual function that is related to aesthetics.

There is a certain kind of community-related collaboration and participation within my work, and I find that with women it is easier to achieve things without anybody overpowering someone else. There is a lot of listening and a lot of patience, and that's really important to creation. It is not per se only a woman's quality, but I have found that there is sort of relaxation and a kind of safe zone for creating when I collaborate with women.

Clockwise from top left:  
*Transitions #3* (2016), photo by Diana Larrea,  
 Courtesy of Spinello Projects.  
*Closer* (2014), photo by Kristopher McKay,  
 courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.  
*Propagation (Opus 3)* (2015), photo by Rodrigo Dada.



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## ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Wendy Vogel

July 2017



View of "Naama Tsabar: Transboundary," 2017.

For all the comparisons between musical instruments and human bodies—especially the guitar as a stand-in for a wasp-waisted woman—relatively few sound artists confront the gendered history of musical performance. Naama Tsabar is an exception. In “Transboundary,” her first solo exhibition here, she shows four monochrome sculptures in felt, strung with piano wire and attached to amps. Like Robert Morris’s felt sculptures from the late 1960s, their scale evokes the body. But unlike Morris’s felts, which were arrayed in folds that often resembled the female form, Tsabar’s sculptures are pinned to the wall and stretched taut. At first glance, they appear more related to hard-edge painting than to sound sculptures, such as Rebecca Horn’s *Concert for Anarchy*, 1990, a piano whose keys “explode” outward every few minutes, with a loud bang.

Tsabar’s details slyly nod to formalism. *Work on Felt (Variation 18) Burgundy* (all works 2017) features diagonal slashes, à la Lucio Fontana. *Work on Felt (Variation 16)*

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and 17) Dark Blue and Burgundy, a diptych, feels like an Ellsworth Kelly, but groovier. When activated, Tsabar's sculptures have a unifying, transfixing effect. During the opening, several female musicians (including Tsabar, who used to be in a punk band) played a set composed especially for the sculptures, accompanied by Lindsay Powell (aka Fielded) on vocals. The felts stood up to Powell's full-throated voice, with a surprising range of dynamics and emotions. The pieces were stroked, struck, or played with a bow, and had the capacity to respond and resonate with movement as vivid and alive as the people playing them.

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## ARTFORUM

### Los Angeles

Andy Campbell



Carmen Argote, *Folding Structures (pool)*, 2016, papier-mâché, paint, acrylic plastic, dimensions variable.

Los Angeles

**“Escape Attempts”**

**SHULAMIT NAZARIAN**

**616 N. La Brea Avenue**

**February 18, 2017–April 8, 2017**

The 1973 Lucy Lippard essay from which this show takes its title offers an account of a certain slice of Conceptualism within the political ferment of New York in the 1960s. For Lippard, Minimalism served as an important foil for the doings of a group of artists who essentially sought to do “more with less.” The same is true for this group exhibition, which is not so much a counter to Minimalism as a reorientation of some of its key strategies—something that artists have been doing since that essay, perhaps most memorably Kirsten Justesen in her *Sculpture II*, 1968, which pictured a woman’s body inside a cube. Many of the works here riff on canonical Minimalist forms. Naama Tsabar’s *Work on Felt (Variation 9 & 10) Bordeaux and Black (Diptych)*, 2016, transforms large pieces of industrial felt (still closely associated with a node of Robert Morris’s production in the 1960s and 1970s) into single-string instruments. Because of the physicality of the sculptures, they activate the whole body of the person who plays them, invoking dance alongside sound. Some works directly address political conditions of labor, gender, and visibility, echoing the self-transformation Lippard describes in her original text. Carmen Argote’s four “Folding Structures,” 2016, are sculptures that reference, in form and dimension, Laundromat folding aides, but also look like distant cousins of Lygia Clark’s “*Bichos*” (Beasts), 1960–66, while Cindy Hinant’s “Makeup Paintings,” 2011, are abstract meditations on the accouterments and effects of whiteness. Together these artists continue a line of thought regarding the shape of art’s history.

<https://www.artforum.com/picks/id=67069>

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## BLOUINARTINFO

### Naama Tsabar at Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

August 3, 2017

Blouin ArtInfo



Paul Kasmin Gallery is hosting an exhibition, titled “Transboundary” by New York-based artist Naama Tsabar, marking her debut with the gallery. Known for her performances, installations and sculpture informed by aspects of music and nightlife, Tsabar focuses on the often hidden elements and materials that are at play in constructing physically immersive environments. A BFA from Hamidrasha School of Arts, Belt-Berl, Israel, in 2004, and MFA from Columbia University, New York in 2010, Tsabar has been featured in many solos and performances across continents and her recent performance includes at Palais de Tokyo in Paris this past March, and the Public Sector curated by Nicholas Baume at Art Basel Miami Beach 2016 with the commissioned piece, “Composition 18”. Her work was also part of the acclaimed feminist group exhibition, *Escape Attempts*, curated by Kathy Battista at Shulamit Nazarian Gallery in Los Angeles this spring.

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The exhibition presents four new sculptures by Naama Tsabar (1982, Israel), marking her debut with the gallery. Known for her performances, installations and sculpture informed by aspects of music and nightlife, Tsabar focuses on the often hidden elements and materials that are at play in constructing physically immersive environments. A BFA from Hamidrasha School of Arts, Belt-Berl, Israel, in 2004, and MFA from Columbia University, New York in 2010, Tsabar has been featured in many solos and performances across continents and her recent performance includes at Palais de Tokyo in Paris this past March, and the Public Sector curated by Nicholas Baume at Art Basel Miami Beach 2016 with the commissioned piece, "Composition 18". Her work was also part of the acclaimed feminist group exhibition, Escape Attempts, curated by Kathy Battista at Shulamit Nazarian Gallery in Los Angeles this spring.

The exhibition features four new sculptures, the most recent of her "Work on Felt" series. Made of industrial materials such as felt, carbon fiber and epoxy, applied in colors black, dark blue and burgundy, these works remind a number of formal qualities of Ellsworth Kelly's shaped canvases, John McCracken's leaning planks, and Robert Morris's 1960s felt works. Although, the hardwired austerity of material in Minimalism and its strict geometry has been softened in these sculptures by the felt and its curving slopes. The material appearance of the work is challenged by its ability to maintain a high degree of tension by a piano string and guitar-tuning peg held in a delicate balance on the wall, with felt- generally used to damper and absorb sound- has been designed at the front-and-center in these objects.

<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2414590/naama-tsabar-at-paul-kasmin-gallery-new-york>

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

## Flash Art

January/February 2017

### Naama Tsabar

Dvir, Tel Aviv

In this exhibition Israeli artist Naama Tsabar continues to pursue her interest in reconciling sound art with sculpture. In the past she has addressed this connection by presenting musical instruments, including the human voice, as objects of profound sculptural presence as well as organs of sound. Here her focus has evolved into something more ambitious and complex.

On the face of it, the show twists the visual alphabet of modern American art, from the color fields painter Kenneth Noland to the Minimalism of Robert Morris, whose playfulness and interactivity with the viewer — not to mention his use of felt — are once again bodied forth here. The walls are hung with monochromes that serve simultaneously as sound art to be activated. Some of these, for example *Transition* (2016), require plugging in, while others, such as *Work on Felt (Variation 11)* *Dark Blue* (2016), a wall work connected to an amplifier, encourage their strings to be plucked that they might be “played.”

By contrast, *Barricade #2* (2016) comprises three sets of four microphones on stands angled toward the center of the room. Linked by wires to speakers next to the walls, these ominous black fixtures — the wires are secured to the floor with black tape — radiate outward to form a massive in-the-round geometrical abstraction. The arrangement of microphones wills the spectator to the interior of the space, just as the extended trails of wire, carefully delineated on a floor of monochrome sienna, provoke in the viewer a feeling of the oceanic. *Work on Felt (Variation 12)* (2016), a kind of “soft painting” in burgundy, provides a vertical counterpoint that enhances the impression of a total installation. The space seems to exist as a sounding board whereby audio technology retains formal structure while remaining a tool for the most abstract art of all.



Naama Tsabar  
*Work On Felt (Variation 13),*  
*Grey (2016)*  
Curtsey of the Artist and Dvir  
Gallery, Tel Aviv/Brussels  
Photography by Elad Sarig

by Nicola Trezzi

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

## FRIEZE.COM

Naama Tsabar Páramo Gallery, Guadalajara, Mexico

March 26, 2016

Sophie J. Williamson



Naama Tsabar, *Barricade*, 2016, 16 microphones, microphone stands and matching audio equipment, dimensions variable. All images courtesy the artist and Paramo Gallery, Guadalajara; photographs: Cary Whittier

'More than colours and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies,' wrote economist and scholar Jacques Attali. 'With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion.' Artist Naama Tsabar uses sound to expose the various social and economic relationships at play in arts venues, the music industry and other cultural spheres. Her current exhibition at Páramo Gallery in Guadalajara, 'Transitions', uses interactive musical instruments to reflect on human sociality and behaviour.

In recent years, the increasing commercialization of music has been fervently criticized. However, it took centuries for music to become an exchangeable commodity: in the medieval and early modern periods, its circulation was dependent on the performances of itinerant minstrels. For her current exhibition, Tsabar ties the two ends of this economic history together, melding the performative body with the commodified art object. In *Transition* (2015), a new body of wall-based works from which the exhibition takes its title, the coloured wires from four deconstructed guitar amplifiers and stage monitors have been pulled across canvases to form abstract linear compositions, punctuated and rerouted by knobs and cable sockets. Cables extending from the blacks of the canvases draw out electrical circuits and blueprints for musical exchanges on the floor, where they also provide power to *Barricade* (2016), a quadrangular enclosure of 16 vocal microphones on stands, pointing inward expectantly. Heavy rectangular felt sheets hang on the adjacent walls, pulled upwards into elegant curves by taut piano strings tied to guitar tuning pegs. Although Tsabar provides no instructions for how to play these idiosyncratic instruments, they are designed to be strummed or stroked by viewers. When they reverberate against their felt backings, the strings produce unpredictable, irregular harmonies. Drawing on art-historical influences such as Joseph Beuys's felt sculptures or Robert Morris's cut-felt wall pieces, the material here subverts expectations: no longer the dampener of sound, but the resonating chamber itself. As the instruments are played, the body determines the texture of sound as much as a tuning peg or string. For the exhibition's opening, Tsabar invited four local musicians to play the sculptures while

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

Brooklyn-based vocal artist Fielded sang before *Barricade*'s cadre of microphones; as they performed, their bodies became an essential material in the exhibition. Together, these pieces orchestrate an ensemble of relationships, not just spatially and sonically, but socially as well, as viewers move through the gallery's acoustic landscape, free to play the works as they wish.



Naama Tsabar, 'Transitions', exhibition view. Courtesy the artist and Paramo Gallery, Guadalajara

On his now-famous visit to the anechoic chamber at Harvard University, John Cage heard two sounds in the vacuum – one high (his nervous system) and one low (his blood circulating) – leading him to proclaim that there is no such thing as truly silent space. Before they are played, the works' quiet stillness amplifies our anticipation. By encouraging visitors to defy gallery protocol by touching the art and inviting them to grapple with the embarrassment of performing in front of strangers, the exhibition highlights the awkward social dynamics of overly formal 'white cube' gallery spaces. Obscuring the distinctions between artist, gallerist, performer and visitor, Tsabar demonstrates the power of sound to bring people together.

<https://frieze.com/article/naama-tsabar>