

MONA RUIJS

> SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE

LIN
DEN. NEW
ART



Our lives are layered by sound, from the distant drone of traffic that forms the backdrop of our urban lives to the cacophony of voices that surround us, each competing for our attention. And we each respond to sound very differently – be it level, the pitch, the type or quality of the sound. For some, the backdrop hum of hold music can drive them to a furious distraction and for others it is a rejection of a particular musical style.

INTRODUCTION

We have a complex relationship with our sound preferences.

And then you enter a gallery space as a visitor and are forced into a position of active listening rather than relying on active looking. Sound art challenges our way of seeing art and this is precisely why Linden is interested in this conversation – of testing the limits of the gallery experience and sparking a curiosity for a new type of art experience.

Sympathetic Resonance provides for an unusual gallery experience. The artist Mona Ruijs creates layered opportunities to experience the vibration of sound. For Ruijs, sound becomes a tool that is used to create a connection to a mediative state that allows for a space of quiet contemplation. As viewers, Ruijs asks us to share her journey and participate in a sound experience, to quieten and even to heal.

Sound here becomes a therapeutic tool as an antidote to hectic lives.

MELINDA MARTIN
Director
June 2019

What is a sound bath and what can people expect from this experience?

The term 'bath' when used within this context implies that you are bathed in the sound waves of gongs and other instruments. There is no water involved and you are not required to remove any clothing. You simply lie down on a mat, wrap yourself in a blanket and relax as you are cocooned in live sounds; an immersive deep listening experience. A sound bath may be a fascinating journey for those who may be interested in experiencing sound for the purposes of deep relaxation, meditation, contemplation and altered states of awareness. These sound sessions are open to all, with no previous experience of sound or meditation being necessary.

MONA RUIJS

**> IN CONVERSATION WITH
CURATOR JULIETTE HANSON**

You are a highly trained gong practitioner and you have also written a dissertation about gongs and their use in sound

therapy. When did you first experience the sound of a gong and what was it that inspired you so much about this instrument?

I was living in London when I attended my first sound bath and experienced gongs live. I found the whole thing to be an illuminating experience into sensory awareness and a marvellous opportunity to develop my deep listening skills. I was stimulated by the gong's mystery and suspense and I immediately became gong obsessed, 'gong with the wind' one could say.

I'm interested in using sound as a tool to induce altered states of awareness, and to produce a relaxation response in the listener. I found that in a sound bath I was able to disengage from what we commonly refer to as time and experience no time. I found myself in a state of suspension, neither here, nor there. By using rhythm and frequency it appeared to become possible to down shift my normal beta state (normal waking consciousness) to alpha (relaxed consciousness), and even reach theta (meditative states) and delta (sleep; where internal healing may occur).

On an artistic level, the gong enabled me to have a playful exploration of sound and our auditory senses, and to embark on projects and collaborations that address the radical possibilities of hearing.

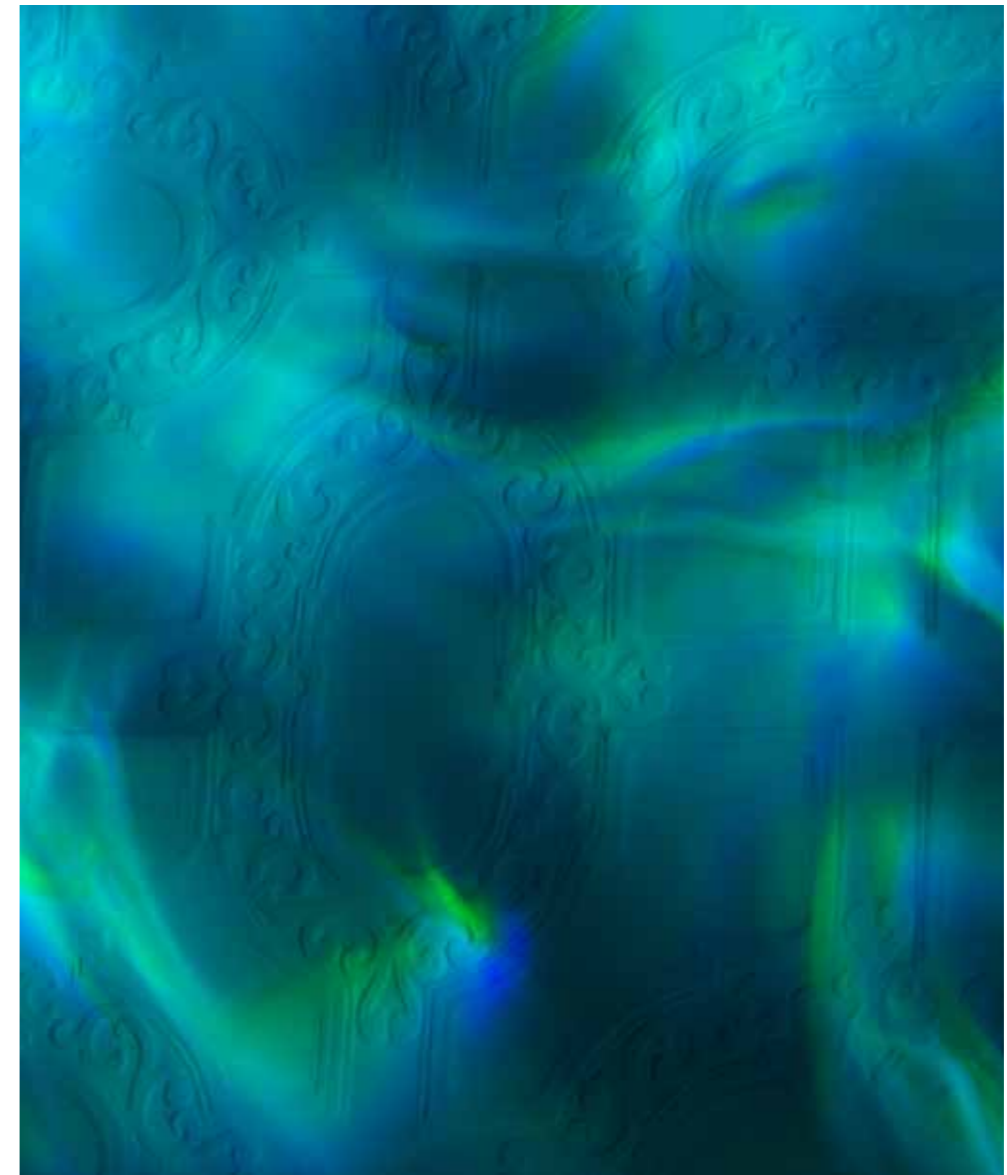


IMAGE > Mona Ruijs, *Sympathetic Resonance* [installation view], 2019.
Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



IMAGE > Mona Ruijs, *Sympathetic Resonance* [installation view], 2019.
Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

How have you developed your skills as a gong practitioner and what does your current practice entail?

There is a thriving gong scene in the U.K and Europe and I completed a one-year Gong Practitioner Training Course at The College of Sound Healing in Devon, U.K. In this course I extensively trained with high quality gongs and instruments, completed case studies, gained an understanding of sound practices and codes of conduct, and gained rudimentary knowledge of anatomy and physiology. In 2014, I studied with Grand Gong Master Don Conreaux and trained with student sound practitioners at The Northern School of Soundsmiths in Manchester. I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the London Metropolitan University and completed a dissertation with the Music Department entitled *Resonating Gongs*. In 2015, I became the resident Gong Practitioner at a London yoga studio and facilitated two gong meditation sessions each week.

In 2018, I was delighted to have returned to my hometown Melbourne to share my practice of facilitating sound baths, gong meditations, deep listening events and sound journeys. My main sound tools consist of gongs, quartz crystal bowls, Himalayan singing bowls and drone producing instruments. My practice merges boundaries between sound, noise and music and is an opportunity for people to lie down, close their eyes and open their ears, as one may journey into sound and the senses. It is an invitation to explore ways of listening and responding, as the ear hears, the brain listens and the body senses vibrations.

Besides sound baths, I also compose gong soundscapes for sound meditation multi-channel installations, electro-acoustic projects, and collaborations with other artists, such as Butoh and dance collectives.

Could you tell me a little bit more about the history of gongs and especially how they have been used for healing?

Sound baths have evolved from the knowledge and practices of ancient civilisations belonging to Egypt, Greece, Italy, Persia, Nepal, Mongolia, Tibet, and China, that explored the possibilities of sound and its potential to be used as a form of self-healing.

I integrate gongs into my sound practise because they have vibrating bodies made of thick, solid, materials that can absorb and then release a great amount of energy. It is believed that when the gong vibrates you may sense reverberations within the cells of your body, and the body experiences a sound

field known as a 'sound-envelope'. As the sound vibrations travel through the nerve endings and meridian channels in one's body different sensations may be felt. It is here that it is possible to use sound as a stimulus to induce positive physiological changes in a human body, as we know that sound also affects glass, concrete, brain waves, motor response, and organic cells.

The human body, with bones that are solid, blood that is liquid, and organs that contain gases, may reflect, refract (or bend), and absorb the sound waves, depending on the elasticity of each human body. Depending on how receptive one is to sound, and this is very subjective, sound may impact our body and resonate within. Sound may function as an external rhythm to the human body, which is purported to affect and entrain the internal mechanisms of the body. The human body has various rhythms which may be entrained through sound, including a heart that beats between 60 and 75 beats per minute, a breathing cycle of 14 to 16 breathes per minute, a stomach that contracts every three minutes and brain waves with 18-22 cycles per second in a waking state. Subsequently, it is understood that, for example, the heart rate, respiration and brain wave activity of a body will be entrained because two objects vibrating at similar frequencies will cause mutual sympathetic resonance. It is here that a possibility of inducing a relaxation response in the listener exists also.

Have gong practitioners traditionally been male and have you encountered any resistance to you undertaking this practice as a female?

I know more female gong practitioners than males, within the context of facilitating sound baths. I feel that female sound bath practitioners experience less resistance and discrimination than females in the music industry. Having said this, more males than females I know identify as 'gong masters'. This is a whole other story. I appreciate this question because the music industry is in a constant and infuriating battle for gender equality.

In 2018, you presented your work in an exhibition at Warrnambool Art Gallery, which I understand is the first time that you have presented your work in a gallery context. I think that in some ways your work expands the boundaries of what would usually be considered an artwork, in that its function is primarily health related, yet we are increasingly aware of the therapeutic possibilities of engaging even with more traditional forms of artwork. How do you feel about presenting your work in a gallery?



IMAGE > Visitors participating in Mona Ruijs' *Sympathetic Resonance* [installation view], 2019. Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



Image: Mona Ruijs, performance documentation, London, 2017.
Image courtesy of the artist.

A big part of this project is attempting to reshape how people may experience a gallery space. Rather than standing with eyes open in a lit room, I am inviting people to lie down (or sit) with closed eyes in a darker room, and be in a state of non-doing. As one may immerse themselves in a 45-minute soundscape that washes over them, it is my intention that it offers space for people to go inwards and connect with themselves, and explore different brain states through sound. With closed eyes alpha and theta brainwaves may be produced which induces wakeful relaxation and can be otherwise associated with 'right brain' activity. The work is designed for one to access a meditative experience in the gallery, where you don't have to do meditation but you can become meditative. This is a great exploration of how sound resonates within the Linden gallery space.

How do you begin to create your compositions? Do you begin with a certain instrument or rhythm? What do you take as inspiration and how does the sound develop?

I compose sound baths with similar techniques to that of telling a story. In my mind I have a visual sonic map with lines that connect exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and some kind of resolution. I think a lot about vibrations in the process. I want people to feel. When sound waves reach a certain depth, we don't hear them as sound; we feel them as vibrations in our bodies.

My compositions usually begin and end with melodies, for softer entrances and exits into the sound bath. Creating melodic patterns over a single sustained or repeated note can have a transcendent, hypnotic quality that under the right conditions and headspace can elicit a meditative response. I then begin to integrate acoustic drone soundscapes, the use of sustained notes or tone clusters, pure sine tones, very slow or still rhythms, specific harmonics and overtones, all of which are intertwined with the gongs.

I listen. I can't always predict the sounds of the gongs, as they can at times be rather wild. Hence, another compositional technique is simply deep listening and call and response. The acoustics of the space also determine how I play.

For this exhibition, you have made a vibroacoustic bed. Could you explain what this does and how it can enhance the experience of your work?

The vibroacoustic bed is designed for people to physically feel sound and to also provide access to deaf or hard of hearing communities. A bed becomes a vibrotactile device that transmits sound as vibration to the

body. Oscillating low frequency sound pressures are transmitted through subwoofer speakers built into a bed, in which the listener lies, usually supine. This artwork facilitates the composition and perception of intricate, spatio-temporal patterns of vibration on the surface of the body. Again, it is another offering to not be vertical in the gallery space, as one lays down to experience whole-body acoustic stimulation.

I am fascinated by receptive listening experience that employs the physical properties of sound and vibration, and is based on the physics principle of sympathetic resonance. An important feature of a vibroracoustic bed is that it uses frequencies within the hearing range, but also at a pitch where the vibration effect of the tone can most effectively be felt as sensing vibrations in the body. The movement may be felt as waves of vibrations that move through the cavities of the body, and you may, for example, be able to hear from your legs.

Do you consider a sound bath to be music? Do you know if listening to any other kinds of music would have any similar benefits?

In thinking about the effect of sound and music, music may more specifically evoke specific associations and memories, whereas sound may help to detach from an analytical mind. Music works by engaging our brain's sequence recognition circuitry, your brain weaves together different sounds separated by time. Sound operates on a simpler, more primal level that does not always excite the intellect.

In regards to other kinds of music that may have similar benefits, Pauline Oliveros believed that music has an enormous potential to be restorative, and that deep listening provides one with a psychological space where one may repair at anyplace and anytime. She defines deep listening as a practice that is intended to heighten and expand consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and attentional dynamics as humanly possible. Ambient music and drone soundscapes where there are juxtapositions of pleasing and challenging sounds, of tension and relaxation, may do so also. I also think that if one decides to close their eyes, or lay, whilst listening to their music of choice this can also be a DIY sound bath. People can guide themselves through their own techniques and it's all very subjective.

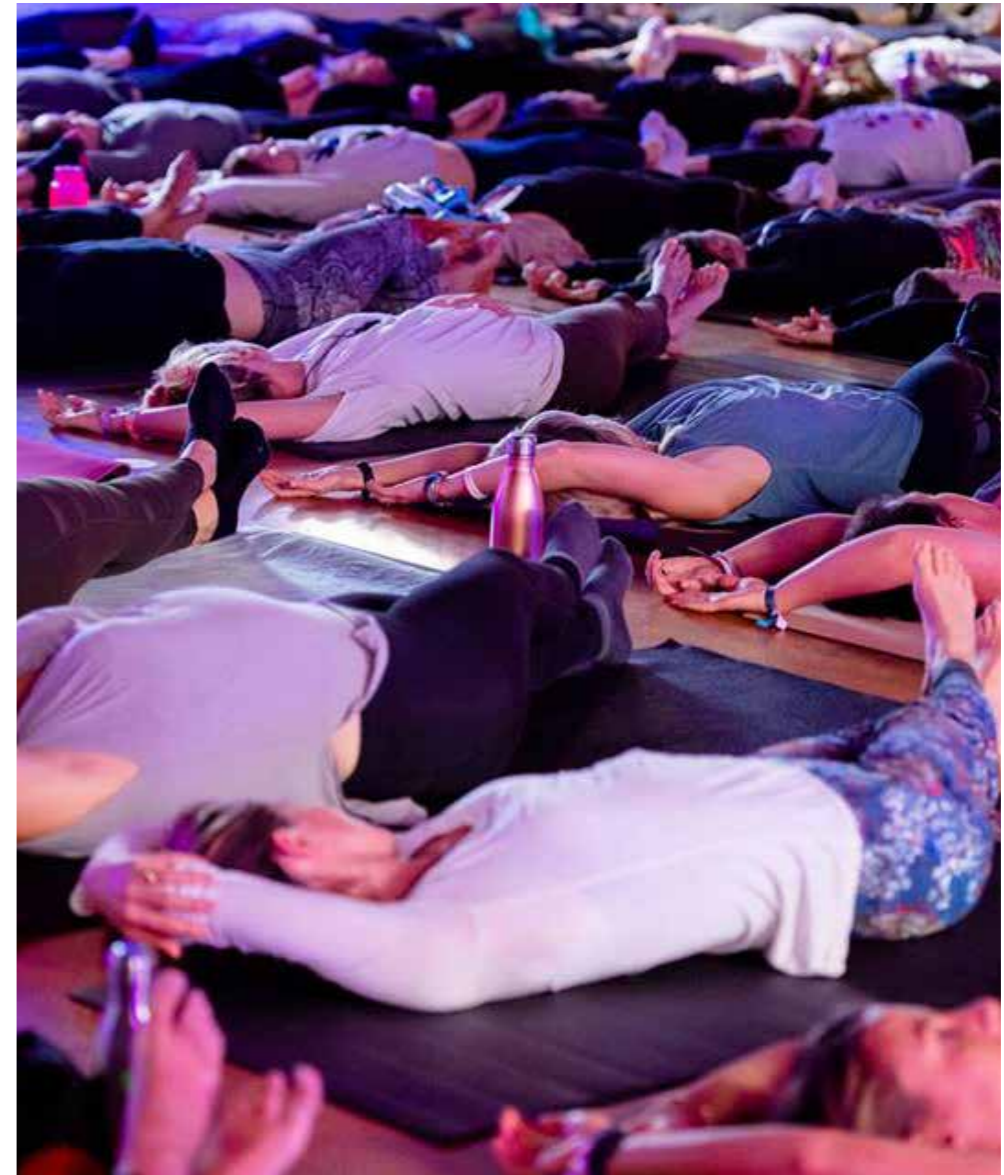


IMAGE > Performance documentation of sound meditation with Mona Ruijs. Image courtesy of the artist.



IMAGE > Performance documentation of sound meditation with Mona Ruijs.
Image courtesy of the artist.

When you are not studying or performing, what other kinds of music do you enjoy?

I listen to drone music, ambient, 80's, minimalism, modular synthesizers, industrial, new wave, cold wave, field recordings, and silence (or the search for). This includes artists such as Phill Niblock, Julianna Barwick, Meredith Monk, John Cage, Coil, Alvin Lucier, William Basinski, Grouper, Portishead, Biosphere, Loscil, Brian Eno, Stars of the Lid, Philip Glass, Sarah Davachi, and HTRK. I am always hunting down sound baths to attend myself, as I crave to be that listening person and to re-remember the experience.

Mona is a gong practitioner trained in Devon, UK. Inviting participants to close their eyes and open their ears, she curates a unique experience into sound and the senses, and an exploration of 'the listening body'. Mona spent 12 years abroad in Berlin and London where she developed her craft, and facilitated sound baths, gong concerts and deep listening events. She has completed a dissertation *Resonating Gongs: The Integration of Gongs into Sound Therapy* with the Music faculty at the London Metropolitan University and two Post Graduate Film & Television degrees at The Victorian College of The Arts; Visual Effects & Documentary. In

2018 she is delighted to have returned to Australia to share her sound practice, where she has presented her work at Melbourne Music Week and ABC National Radio. Mona is continually exploring how the ear hears, the brain listens and the body senses vibrations.

MONA RUIJS

www.soundinterventions.com.au



IMAGE > Portrait of Mona Ruijs. Image courtesy of the artist.

MONA RUIJS

Sound Meditation Multi-Channel Installation, 2019

speakers, subwoofer, DVD, DVD player, amplifier, LED projector, wooden chairs, rubber mats, cushions

duration: 44:50 minutes

NFS

LIST OF WORKS

Vibroacoustic Sound Bed, 2019

pine, MDF, structural ply, wire mesh, foam, adhesive, velcro, velvet, polyester, cotton, subwoofers, amplifier, DVD, DVD player

duration: 6:44 minutes with 30 second intervals

NFS

Sympathetic Resonance Sound Meditation Track (45-minutes, stereo mix), 2019

wav, mp3, jpg on walnut USB flash drive

\$35 each

EVENTS

MEET THE CURATOR
> UNDERSCORING SOUND
26.07.19 > FREE

Join Linden for a special curator-led tour of exhibitions **Cat Hope** > *Sub Decorative Sequences*, **Lucrecia Quintanilla** > *A Ripple and an Echo* and **Mona Ruijs** > *Sympathetic Resonance* with Linden Curator **Juliette Hanson**.

IN CONVERSATION > CAT HOPE, LUCRECCIA
QUINTANILLA & MONA RUIJS > 16.08.19 > \$11

Artists **Cat Hope**, **Lucrecia Quintanilla** and **Mona Ruijs** are coming together to talk about the experimental world of sound art.

CRAFTERNOON FOR ADULTS
> GENERATIVE PATTERNS WITH SOUND & CODE
17.08.19 > \$44

Code your own sound visualisation. Suitable for any skill level and with no prerequisites, participants learn coding fundamentals from scratch in Processing, a programming language made for visual artists.

CRAFTERNOON FOR KIDS
> SOUND COLLAGE
18.08.19 > \$15

We know you don't hear it often but – the louder the better! Join sound artists **Dale Gorfinkel** and **Bryan Phillips** for a special sound workshop. Using recycled materials, organic or kitchen objects to create sound sculptures, kids will bang, clash and make a collective music composition. Kids will be able to record their sounds and use digital manipulation to create experimental sound collages.

PERFORMANCE > SOUND BATH WITH MONA
RUIJS > 27.08.19 > \$35

Artist **Mona Ruijs** will facilitate a sound immersive experience with gongs, quartz crystal bowls, Himalayan singing bowls and various other sound tools that are designed to induce profound physical relaxation, and contemplative states. Lying down on mats you will be saturated and cocooned in the live sounds as you enter inside the wonderful world of the sound bath.

For their generous support in sponsoring this exhibition we would like to give a big thank you to Premium Sound, St Kilda.

We would like to acknowledge the expertise and assistance of Edwina Stevens, Carly Fischer, Mark Cedro, Nikki Jones and Adrian Bankart in producing the vibroacoustic bed. For recording and mixing the Sound Meditation composition, we would like to thank James Cecil at Super Melody World.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VIBROACOUSTIC SOUND BED

Produced by: Mona Ruijs
Sound Design by: Mona Ruijs
Sound technician & audio engineering: Edwina Stevens
Construction Assistance by: Carly Fischer & Mark Cedro
Head tailor: Nikki Jones
Engineering consultant: Adrian Bankart
Speaker sponsorship provided by Premium Sound

SOUND MEDITATION MULTI-CHANNEL INSTALLATION

Produced by: Mona Ruijs
Sound Design by: Mona Ruijs
Recorded and mixed by James Cecil at Super Melody World.

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GALLERY ADMINISTRATOR: HANA VASAK & SEBASTIAN HAEUSLER
VOLUNTEER OFFICER: CHLOÉ HAZELWOOD

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