

Sergei Tcherepnin

Aviary Clones, 2018

quadraphonic sound installation, UV prints on synthetic silk, copper & brass sculptures, motion activated LEDs, motion activated sound, aviary netting, inkjet print dimensions variable

Aviary Clones comprises two distinct compositions. The kōkako, an endangered forest bird prized for its varied and beautiful song, features strongly in both. Long studied for its many peculiarities, kōkako songs are formally very long and slow, very low in pitch and extremely loud. Their songs are always sung in pairs, with each pair having their own unique song. Kōkako pairs can be male-female or same-sex; their duet serving not only to mark and defend a territory, but to form and maintain partnerships.

The first composition is played through a network of four full range PA speakers. The 30 minute composition was created using two distinct methods and makes extensive use of archival kōkako recordings from the 1990s, recorded by Jeff McLeod as part of his research into the differences between songs of male-male pairs and male-female pairs. The first, 'artificial mimicry,' is a method in which the artist – using the Serge Modular Synthesiser developed in 1974 by the artist's uncle, Sergei Tcherepnin – recreated an entire song of the same-sex kōkako pair called 'Jimmy and Bo' recorded in Rotoehu. Using a special tuning he created on the synthesiser, Tcherepnin composed several layers of arpeggiated patterns using a special tuning he created on the synthesiser which come in and out of this synthesised kōkako song. The original recording can be heard, creating a dialogue between synthetic and real kōkako voices.

For the second method, Tcherepnin synthesised kōkako recordings using a Kaivo software synthesizer which enabled him to use samples of different recordings to create virtual instruments. The original archival recordings become like the touch of the instrument, 'plucking' virtual strings and 'striking' virtual gongs which are themselves tuned to the kōkako voices. The second musical composition occurs on a different timescale. Three sculptures – two biomorphic globes

and one windpipe based on the extinct moa's trachea – are equipped with Sonar, a sensor able to detect movement. Depending on the viewer's distance from the sculpture, sound of varying intensities is emitted – the closer the viewer to the sculpture, the louder the sound. The composition incorporates archival recordings and synthesised voices of three birds indigenous to New Zealand – the kōkako, kakapo and moa – each the subject of extensive recovery, genetic rescue and de-extinction projects. Inspired by a robotic kakapo and a helmet used (unsuccessfully) to entice male birds to mate for captive breeding programs (held in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington), the sculptures here act as 'strange attractors' to draw in the viewer, but then at the same time, the sound emitted deters the viewer from getting too close. This pushing and pulling of the viewer through sound is integral to the artist's conception of the unique spatialisation of this composition.

Aviary Clones exists in a space between the musical and the documentary, the imaginary and the real, to create 'a musical fantasy'. The installation emerges as an analogy for extinction and the Anthropocene, the name given to the current period of geological time, in which what is to come will not be like what came before.

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