



# 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 | November 29, 2021



Naama Tsabar, Courtesy of the artist.

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.

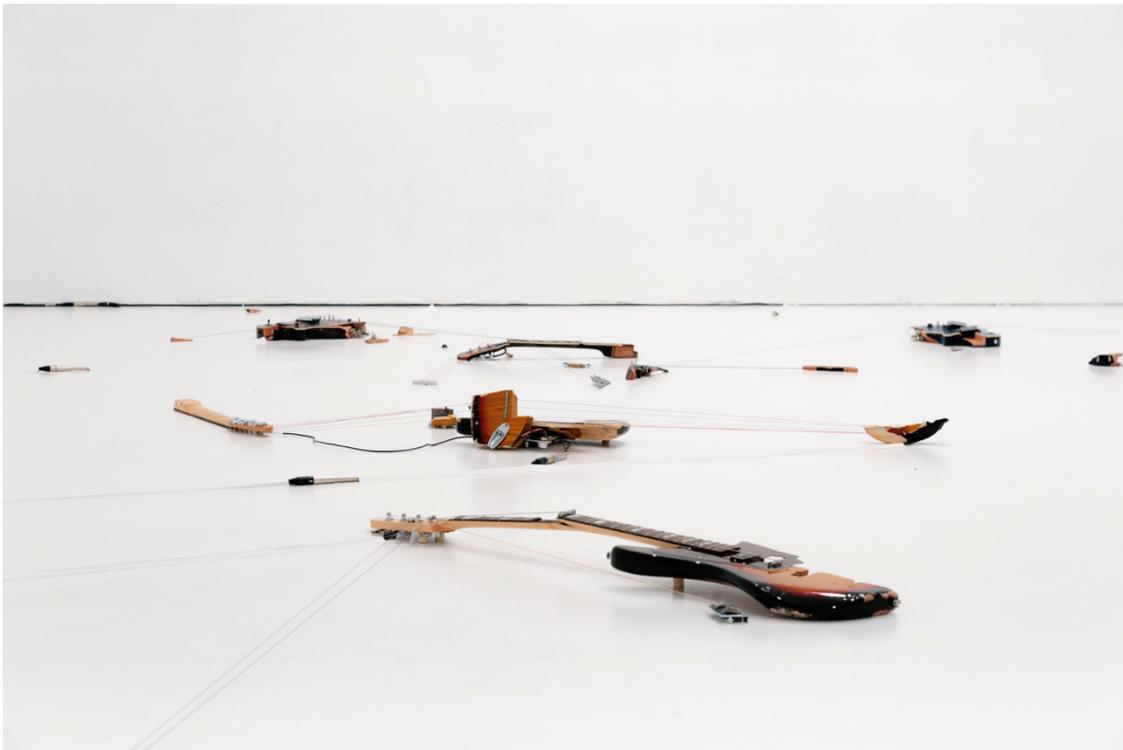
The artist is always seeking new ways to heighten awareness and curiosity in viewers so they begin to sense forces they would not normally perceive. By cutting into gallery walls and equipping them with sensors, microphones, strings and speakers, she upends the typical functioning of the white cube as 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.



Naama Tsabar, *Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 3)*, performance at Center for Contemporary Art Tel Aviv, 2018.  
Photo: Eyal Agavayev.

**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: Perimeters](#), *Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, until 17 April 2022*