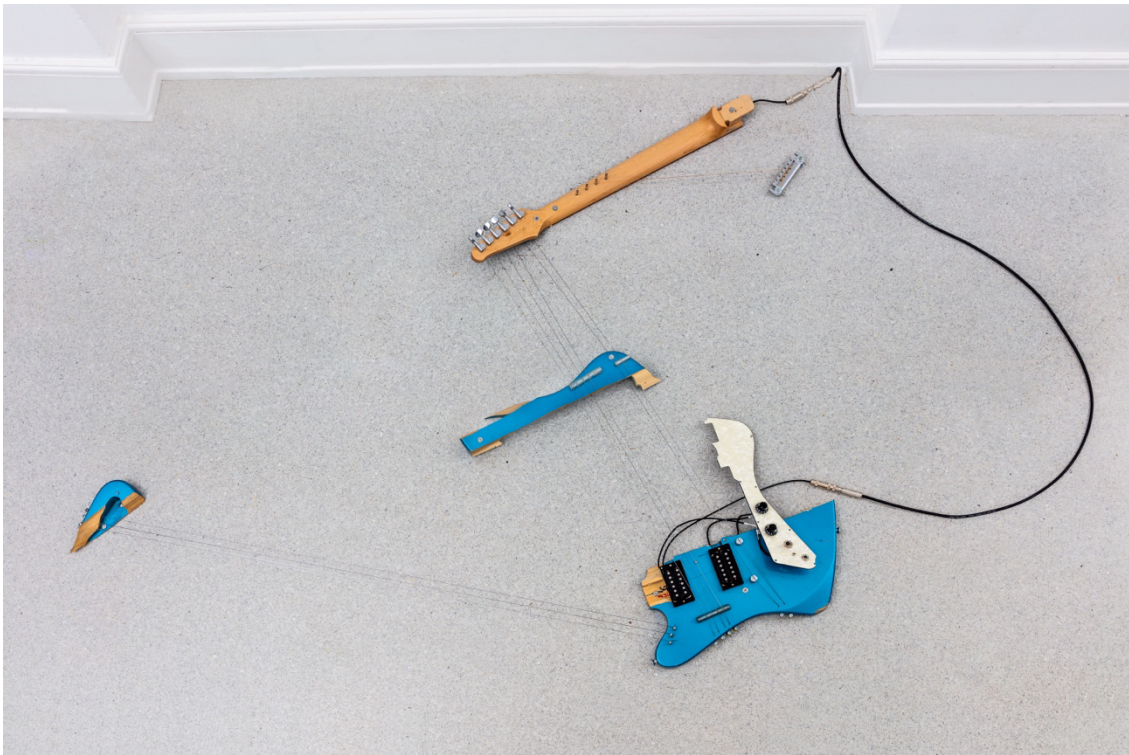


ARTnews

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, *Melody of Certain Damage #13*, 2021. Broken electric guitar, strings, microphone, screws and amplifier. 70 x 42 x 3 in. Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

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.



Installation view of Naama Tsabar at Art Basel: Miami Beach, Shulamit Nazarian, November 30 – December 4, 2021.
Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

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.