

# [EDDY] II

DEBORAH CROWE / ELDON BOOTH

5.1 surround sound installation

27 November – 20 December 2012

Mezzanine Space, Artspace, 300 Karangahape Rd, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

## The Apparatus

Coming up the Artspace stairwell, viewers are transformed into listeners. A low rumble might be the sound of distant warfare or seismic unrest. Equally, it could be the sea, with its brooding, inexorable power, as it ebbs, flows, and eddies out of the Mezzanine trapdoor. [Eddy] II is named after the movement of waves, in this case, sound and radio waves. The punning personification is deliberate, for [Eddy] II is an entity, part animal, part machine, prowling the confines of the Mezzanine.

This is no “soundscape” serving the same purpose for the ears as “landscape” does for the eyes: soothing the frayed nerves of the urbanite. Rather, [Eddy] II endeavours to fray the nerves, or literally, to image frayed nerves through magnetic resonance imaging. Sounds escaping the trapdoor have been sourced from field recordings from an MRI scanner. A jarring pluck, a persistent vibration, negates the calm of the low rumble. The vibrato intensifies, feeds back, until it feels like a spaceship landing in your frontal lobe. At times, it sounds like a cello bowed furiously by a giant, angry insect, but the keening is interrupted by aural assaults like machine gun fire. The low rumble and the jarring mechanical sounds coexist in counterpoint. Perhaps they need each other? John Cage famously recounted his experience in an anechoic chamber; instead of silence, two insistent sounds emerged, one low, and one high. The high frequency was his nervous system, the low frequency his blood circulating through his body.

Gingerly ascending the Mezzanine ladder, visitors may attempt to find the source of these oppositional, jarring noises. Is it some kind of contraption? Or the soundtrack to a video? What images might possibly accompany such sounds? Like the infamous Smoke Monster in the cult TV series *Lost*, there is ultimately nothing to be seen. The viewer’s eyes become the MRI, scanning the empty space, while the brain is involved in a process of imaging. Just as the MRI uses radio waves to image the body, so the sounds of [Eddy] II work on the listener’s body and produce mental imagery and aural hallucinations. I hear a horse in death throes, or heavy chains being scraped on concrete.

[Eddy] II is living proof that there is a ghost in the machine. Ghost hunters use technological tools to record and enhance audio tracks taken at supposedly haunted sites. Subsonic frequencies are interpreted as supernatural messages. [Eddy] II may be a product of medical science but I imagined groans and cries underneath the harsh, clinical sounds, like those in Lars von Trier’s haunted hospital, *The Kingdom*.

[Eddy] II remains as mysterious in the Mezzanine as in the stairwell, though significantly more visceral in proximity. The jarring noise becomes skull-splitting, like a bandsaw outside your bedroom window when you’ve got a hangover. The lower, seismic heartbeat, rumbles around the room. Like thunder, it always seems to be somewhere else.

The sonic torture purveyed by [Eddy] II suits the concrete bunker of the Mezzanine space. [Eddy] debuted at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin, a basement with dungeon-like overtones. At Artspace, the sonic spectre has been banished to the attic. Both spaces lend themselves to notions of estrangement and confinement – what society does with unruly or unsavory elements. The madwoman in the attic is a classic figure of Western literature, exemplified by Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* in which Rochester keeps his supposedly insane wife locked in an attic. Jean Rhys wrote a postcolonial prequel called *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which she recreated the world from the point of view of this “madwoman in the attic,” outlining the circumstances which led to her fateful incarceration. It is a book dripping with claustrophobia, hysteria, and paranoia.

Another literary precedent comes to mind when listening to [Eddy] II’s excruciating screeches: Franz Kafka’s *The Penal Colony*, in which a hapless explorer witnesses an execution performed by an “apparatus” with three parts, the “Bed,” the “Designer” and the “Harrow”. Kafka’s ingeniously inhumane device delivers sentence, torture, reform and execution in one evil package. Strapped into the vibrating “apparatus,” the crime is tattooed onto the body of the prisoner, but with so many embellishments and flourishes that eventually the prisoner dies from loss of blood.

Kafka was writing in 1914, at the dawn of a senseless war. Today we have tattoo conventions for fun and magnetic resonance imaging to help us live longer. But we are more familiar than ever with insidious, endlessly creative modes of torture, which are tolerated and even encouraged as a way to maintain global hegemonies, see the headlines around Abu Ghraib or the inhumane practice of waterboarding. [Eddy] II might have originated from medical science, from the privilege of Western access to state-of-the-art technology, but here the “apparatus” has transmogrified into something else entirely. [Eddy] II still performs a scanning function, but it is a sonic brain scan, revealing images of fundamental fears and frustrations we didn’t even know we had.

### **Tessa Laird**

Tessa Laird is an artist, writer and lecturer living in Auckland. She recently completed her Doctorate of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, looking at the Revolutionary Power of Colour. She is a frequent contributor to Art and Australia, Eyeline, Circuit.org and various other art publications and catalogues.



Photo: Jason Crane

[Eddy] II emerges from investigations of spatial perception and psychological responses to containment. Sound is treated as relational sculptural matter: activated and affected by physical characteristics, building an aural architecture and entity. Raw materials and site test occupants’ tolerance, at times, proffering pleasure from being snared in an intermittently hostile environment.

### **Deborah Crowe and Eldon Booth**

Crowe and Booth are Auckland-based artists who have worked collaboratively making objects, moving image and installations since 2005. Deborah Crowe, a graduate of Glasgow School of Art, has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1986. Her work is in various publications and in collections in Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK. Eldon Booth is a filmmaker with a Bachelor of Visual Arts who has exhibited moving image works since 2001.

This project has received support from Manukau Institute of Technology’s Research, Development and Technology Transfer Fund.