

+ THE
DESLAMENT
OF THE
USUAL



ENGLISH



BUNEFANTEN





Paul Devens
Heba Y. Amin
Lis Rhodes

The Derailment of the Usual

Paul Devens (1965, Maastricht) is a pioneer in the field of sound art. He has put the medium of sound on the map in the Maastricht region and beyond. His practice covers a wide range of activities, including sound art works, architectonic interventions, performances and CD and vinyl releases. Whichever form Devens chooses, his work always relates to the social, political or historical situation of a place. He exhibits internationally and gives lectures and concerts. He is also a teacher at the art academy in Maastricht, from which he graduated himself in 1989.

In the exhibition *The Derailment of the Usual*, Devens appears as an artist, but also as a curator, teacher and performer. His own work is shown in the long side rooms, and includes a new production developed especially for this exhibition. For the other rooms, he and co-curator Eline Kersten (1994, Maastricht) invited two artists with whom Devens feels an affinity and whose work has much in common with his own. Lis Rhodes (1942, United Kingdom) is an artist and activist who has engaged with politics throughout her working

Cover: Folly / *The derailment of the usual* (2021) detail, Paul Devens

Previous page: *Project Speak2Tweet/ I'm the Son of the Nile*, 2013, Heba Y. Amin. Video still, 6'18" Courtesy of the artist

life, using cinema and sound in doing so. The Egyptian artist Heba Y. Amin (1980) creates political and activist work concerning historical events. Together, they represent several generations of artists from different parts of the world who work with sound. The artworks exhibited here enter into a dialogue based on the view that sound is anchored in a social, activist and political reality.

The medium of sound art has only recently been presented and collected by museums. For a long time, sound art remained on the fringes of the art world and relatively little art-historical research was done into it. For the Bonnefanten, too, the medium is under-represented in the collection. In this exhibition, Devens draws on his knowledge and the network he has built up over the years, in order to bring the medium of sound art into the limelight. He is doing so in concerts and a symposium that support the exhibition. He will also be giving performances with his band and artists' collective Otomax.

As the title suggests, *The Derailment of the Usual* aims to destabilise normality. The exhibition's goal is to make us aware of the ways in which architecture and sound

influence our experiences and perceptions. The artworks also challenge us to look and listen with an open mind to the things we usually take no notice of and take for granted. In this exhibition, artists deploy sound as a medium for understanding society and bringing it up for discussion. Deregulation and disruption are used to make the reality behind the façade audible.

Originally, the museum invited Paul Devens to realise a project about a subject that has occupied him for years as someone born and bred in Maastricht: how the industrial past of the city has left its mark on life today, and the role played in that by architecture and sound. His interest in this field of research is partly motivated by the exploitative practices in the local historic manufacturing industry, which has become faded and forgotten with time. His attention was drawn in particular to the social context and the appalling living conditions of the workers in the local ceramics factory, who lived in a tenement block. In his new sound artwork, *Folly / The Derailment of the Usual*, he breathes new life into this building. It seems as if sounds from the past are audible again.

Devens eventually turned the invitation for a solo exhibition into a group exhibition, accompanied by a symposium and a concert. This attitude testifies to the urgency for drawing attention to sound art, prioritising collaboration and exchanging knowledge.

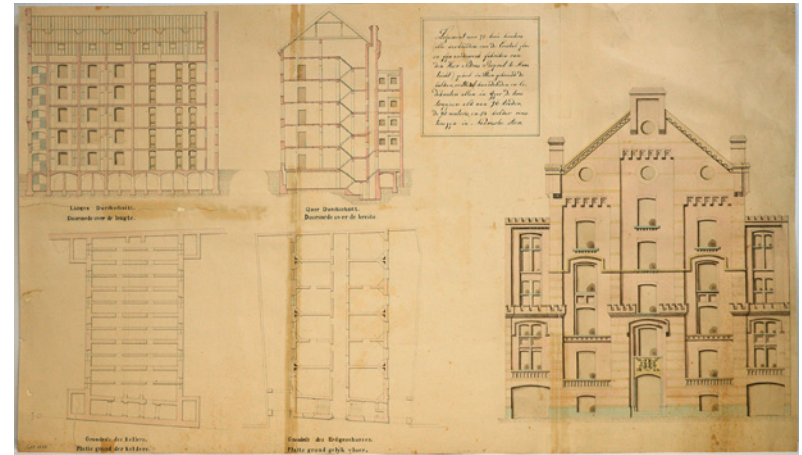
Room 1

Paul Devens (1965, Maastricht)

The work of Paul Devens revolves around the interaction between sound and architecture, and the influence of this interaction on the social environment. Architecture and social context determine how we interact with others and how we move and feel. For instance, a café is more conducive to making noise than a library, and a cathedral is designed for sound in a fundamentally different way than an auditorium. Devens researches these sound behaviours, both on location and in texts and articles. In his new sound production *Folly / The Derailment of the Usual*, he delves into local history, in order to find out more about the manufacturing industry in Maastricht.

The city of Maastricht likes to show off its ceramics heritage, which was progressive at the time, while often disregarding the negative aspects. The degrading conditions in which factory workers and their families had to live have received little attention. *Folly / The Derailment of the Usual* presents a sonic reproduction of the first industrial tenement block in Maastricht.

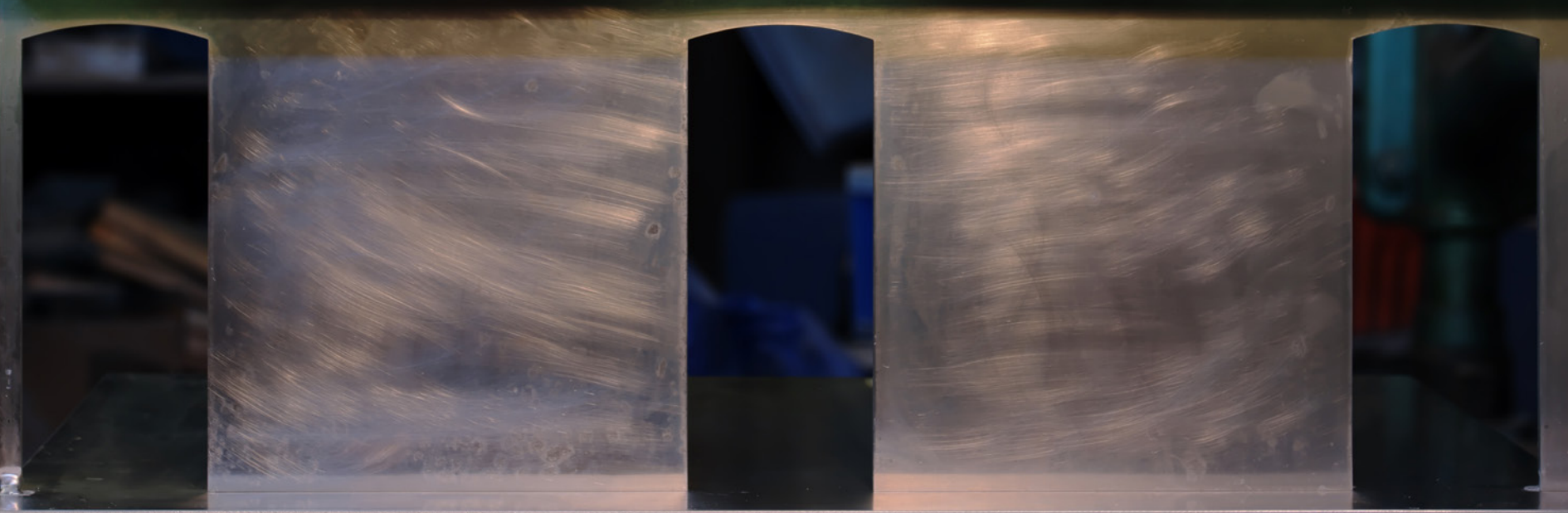
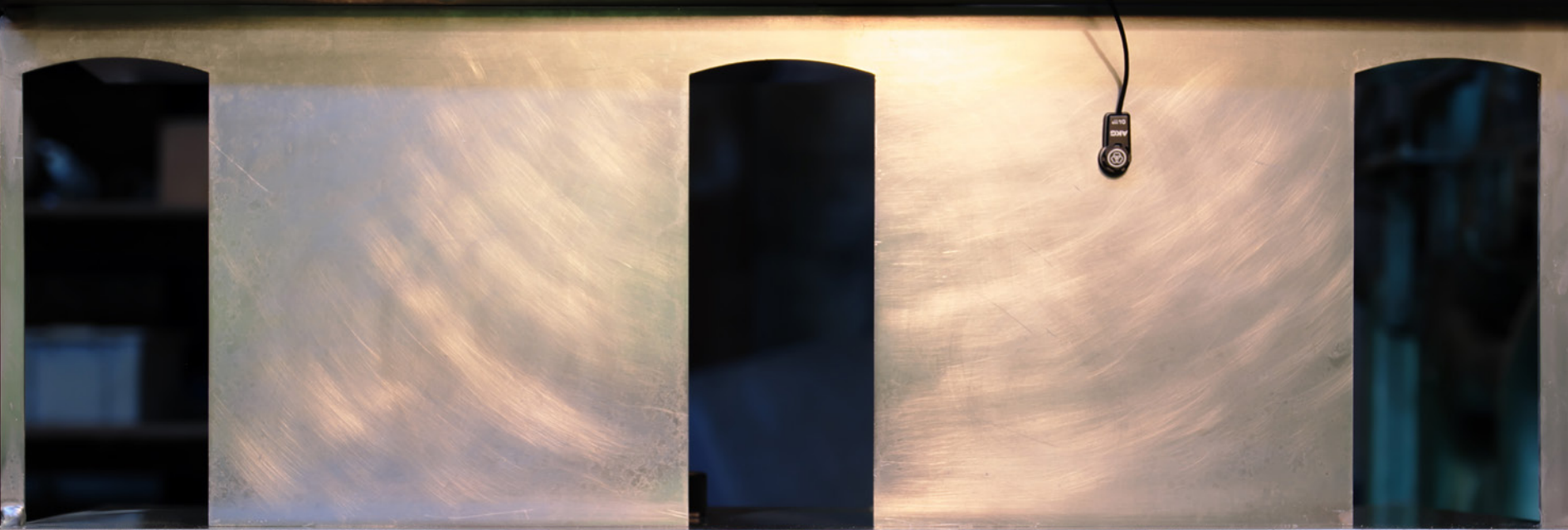
The ceramics factory 'Petrus Regout en Co' (later 'NV De Sphinx') was one of the first successful businesses of the industrial revolution in the Netherlands. In 1863-64, in order to streamline production logistics, Regout had a tenement block built to house his factory workers, calling it 'Cité Ouvrière'. The living conditions there were wretched. Whole families lived in a single room and there was even a 'mortuary room' on each floor. Of course, this did more harm than good to the fight against epidemics. The building was nicknamed the "Menschenpakhuis"

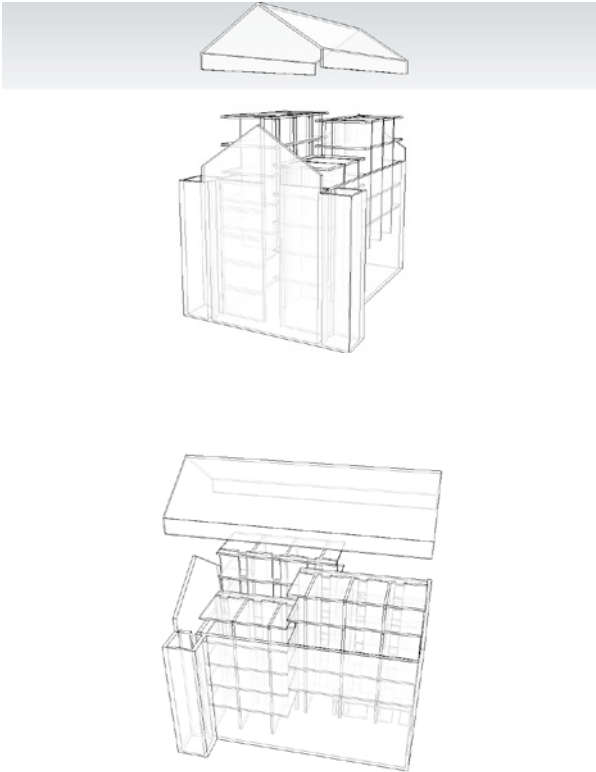


This page: 'Logement voor 72 huishoudens'. Architectural drawing 1863

Next page: *Folly / The derailment of the usual* (2021), Variable Measures.
Photo: Paul Devens







(people warehouse). Regout's need to have total control of his workers through this tenement block has a contemporary counterpart. This is expressed in the many digital technologies for controlling the behaviour of citizens, consumers and employees, such as the CCTV on the streets or the cookies that track our purchasing and surfing behaviour.

The scaled-down tenement Cité Ouvrière is shown here. Devens deconstructed the separate parts of the building and filled them partly with water. The floors and inner walls of the scale model are pulled slowly up and down in this by a small electric hoist. It is all connected up to microphones that record the sound of the aluminium floors of the model, turning the miniature into a reverberation room. The echo of the material changes due to the muffling of the water, like a pan can sound different when submerged in water. Microphones are spread out over the museum, both inside and outside. The sound they record is then 'projected' through a loudspeaker onto the vibrating metal of the model. The echoing sound becomes a soundscape that links past to present.

Room 2

Lis Rhodes (1942, United Kingdom)

Lis Rhodes is a celebrated feminist artist, filmmaker and activist. Through her work, she broke with the traditional view of cinema. For Rhodes, film is so much more than a Hollywood production on the silver screen. It is also a means of communication that defines our view of moving images, sounds and language. The works in her extensive oeuvre testify to her quest for new ways of making cinema visible. She does so through radical artworks, manifestations and her teaching. The distinction between the various activities in her life is not so important to her. Rhodes' work has many interconnections, and she wants to make us aware of the information streams entering our lives and influencing us.

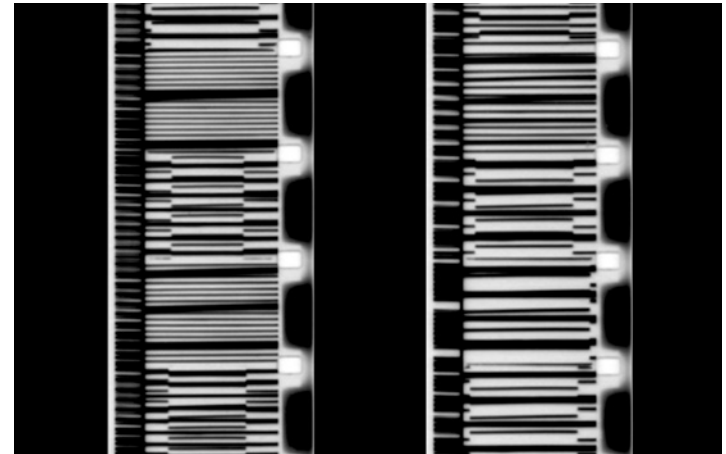
A key work in her oeuvre is the installation *Light Music* from 1975-76. This audiovisual production has been acclaimed for decades already as an early example of participatory cinema, in which the viewer plays an active role. In recent years, Lis Rhodes has exhibited the work twice at the Tate Modern in London, among other places. *Light Music* was motivated by the scant attention being paid to women composers in the European tradition of classical music. It began as a composition in drawings that were then filmed using a rostrum camera. The movement of the camera lens towards or away from the drawings is heard as the intervals between the lines narrow or widen, so that the pitch of the sound rises or falls. The image printed on the optical track of the film print produces sound: the sound is the image, and the image the sound. *Light Music* consists of two 16-millimetre film projections

that project black-and-white geometric shapes and horizontal stripes on the wall. The loud staccato buzzes and bleeps are linked to the rapidly changing drawings and shapes of the film projection. In an almost physical way, people's bodies and minds are immersed in the medium of sound. Rhodes does not regard watching film as a passive affair. She wants to provoke a physical reaction and prompt people to participate. *Light Music* invites the audience to walk around the space. Standing between the projector and the image creates shadows in the projection on the wall, thus turning the passive viewer into an active participant. Sound, too, becomes autonomous in *Light Music* and no longer plays a subordinate or subservient role. Image and sound are completely equal.

This installation will be activated at set times.

LIGHT MUSIC 1975, 16 mm film strips with optical tracks- note 26 frames adjustment - in relation to the optical sound track which has been slipped to counter for spacing of the optical sound head on the projector from the lens Lis Rhodes

Next page: *LIGHT MUSIC 1975*, Setting up *Light Music* in the Tanks Tate Modern 2009





Floorplan

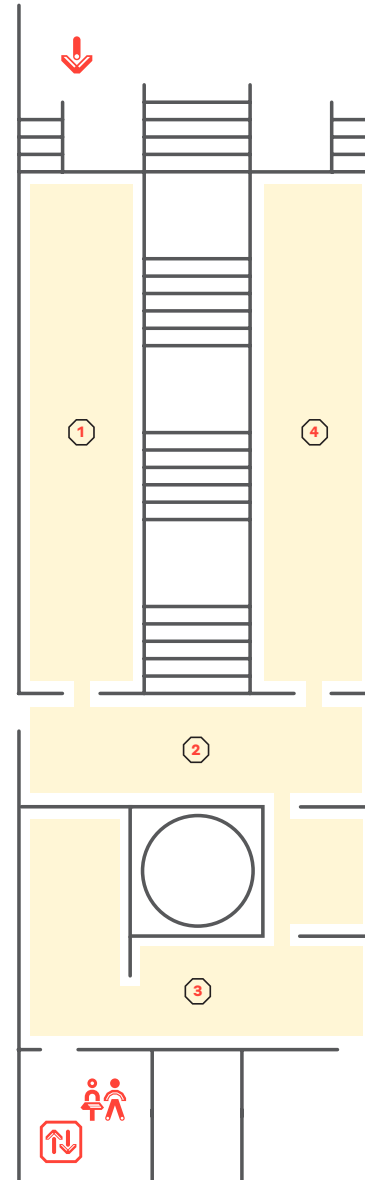
← Exhibition starts here

- 1 Paul Devens
- 2 Lis Rhodes
- 3 Heba Y. Amin
- 4 Paul Devens

↕ Elevator to other floors

↗ Stairs to other floors

🚻 Toilets



Room 3

Heba Y. Amin (1980, Egypt)

Heba Y. Amin engages with political themes, utilizing subversive methods. Through archives and various media - including film, photography and installations - she criticises the narration of events in recent history. History, as we know it from books in Europe, is not a conclusive fact. Her works foreground alternative perspectives and parallel historiographies against dominant narratives. In her artworks, she links events from the Middle East to similar global issues. In this way, she broaches global issues through her personal background and, more specifically, in relation to the role of media and technology in the political landscape. Amin also works as a professor and curator.

In the *Bonnefanten*, Amin is exhibiting her ongoing work *Project Speak2Tweet*, which she created during the start of the Egyptian revolution and wave of uprisings in the region. The work is now coming to the Netherlands for the first time. The eight video screens of the installation *Project Speak2Tweet* show black-and-white images of local excavations and skeletons of buildings. You hear Arabic testimonies and personal messages that are subtitled in English. The work arose in early 2011, when during the mass protests against President Mubarak, the government disconnected the country from the internet and eliminated any form of online communication. A group of programmers set up a subversive platform called 'Speak2Tweet', which enabled spoken phone recordings to be posted directly on Twitter. In this way, they evaded the barricades erected around the internet and enabled

the local population to speak directly to the world. In this work, she combines the audio messages with video footage of dilapidated architecture representing the visual legacy of Mubarak's corrupt regime, which left the country in a state of near collapse.

The tone of the voicemail messages was not only political in character, but also filled with emotion, pain and hope. Heba Y. Amin followed the platform closely and documented the messages in real time. Today, she is still working on preserving these personal accounts as a window into this historic moment in Egyptian and world history.



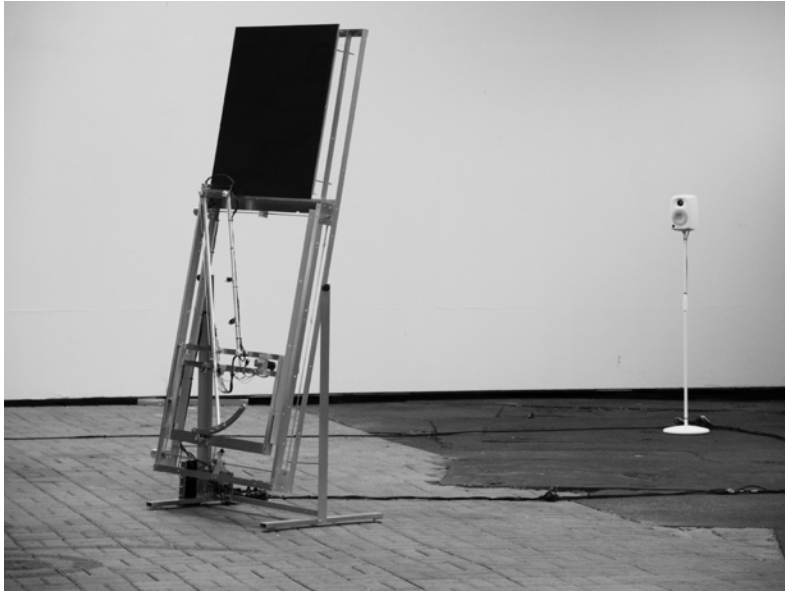
Project Speak2Tweet/ My love for you, Egypt, increases by the day, 2011, Heba Y. Amin.
Video still, 6'18" Courtesy of the artist





Installation View, *When I see the future, I close my eyes*, The Mosaic Rooms, London, 2016
Courtesy: Heba Y. Amin, Zilberman Gallery and The Mosaic Rooms





Room4

Paul Devens (1965, Maastricht)

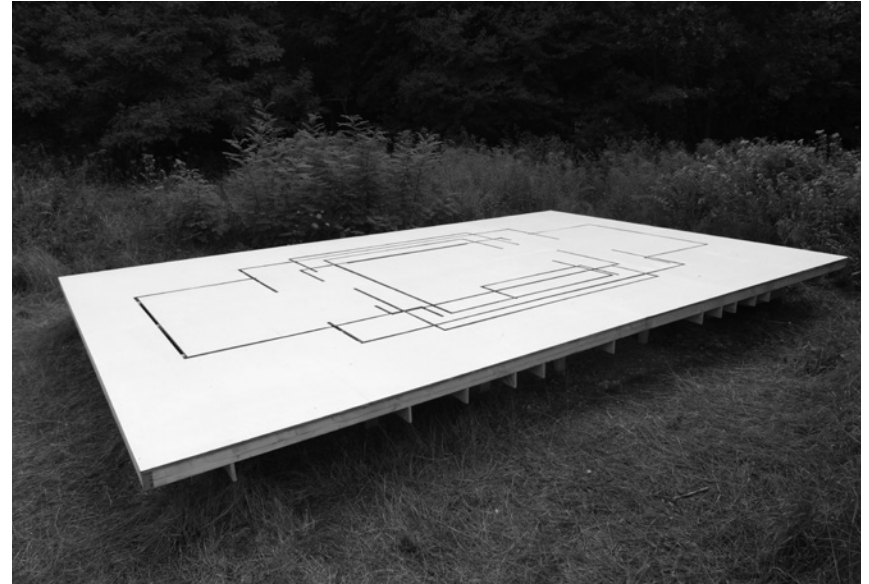
Talking Machine is a sound work created by Paul Devens in 2017. Following a random pattern, the talking machine itself determines what you see and hear. The fragments of text come from an untranslated historical essay *Die Sprechmaschine. Ein technisch-aesthetischer Versuch* by Rudolph Lothar, in which the author wonders what would happen if you put a talking machine on the stage instead of an actor. Would the audience accept it?

Devens had this essay spoken by a computer-generated male and female voice, which was then recorded on an analogue tape recorder. The work on the wall moves an audio head randomly over the audiotape strands of text on the board. The voices are played back in the wrong order, at different speeds, back to front or diagonally. This action means that the essay itself is mechanised and robotised, although the programmed chance factors make it seem as if the machine has a will of its own.

Talking Machine makes a link between past and present: the old analogue technology of tape is used here to give a commentary on current affairs. Lothar wrote the essay in 1924, but it is now more relevant than ever. The work criticises today's media society, in which we are increasingly dependent on information and communication technology, and where the boundary between human and machine is becoming blurred.

At the back of the room is *Platform*, an interactive artwork from 2013. Paul Devens invites the audience to spend some time on this wooden platform. The milled lines in the surface suggest floorplans of various social rooms. They refer to standard regulatory measurements set by the government for social housing and for various prison cells. Rooms that people are condemned to live in or forced to live in because of poverty or lack of money, for example. The milled grid represents the dimensions of various rooms: 1) a prison cell according to government laws on penitentiary institutions; 2) a bedroom from the Social Housing Act of 2013 according to the Royal Netherlands Standardization Institute (NEN); 3) a prison cell from Guantanamo Bay; 4) a specially built RAF (Rote Armee Fraction) cell, and 5) a bedroom in a 'woonschool' (accommodation for the re-socialisation of problem families) in Maastricht, in 1953. Spending some time on *Platform* gives the experience of what it is like to live in one of these rooms against your will. How big is an average bedroom in the Netherlands compared to a prison cell?

Through the milled lines comes a sound composition that reproduces the acoustics of each room in turn. The composition consists of sounds recorded in transition rooms, like those at airports, train stations and bus stations; rooms that are designed not for staying in, but just for passing through on your way to somewhere else. The work thus juxtaposes restriction of freedom and liberty, anonymity and identity, and private and public.



Platform (2013), Paul Devens



The Derailment of the Usual

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