

Turf Boon



Over the last decade, Turf Boon has created more than 40 sound installations, scores, and sculptural instruments, focusing on building innovative, spatially and sonically provocative pieces from found and recycled items. He is concerned with turning the detritus of society into sustainable artistic practice, and in bringing to everything he does a global and local attention to the textures and sounds of what we throw away. His “freegan” approach is rigorous and all-encompassing: “I don’t buy materials if I can avoid it. When I do buy materials they come from charity shops or jumble sales, places where my money will be recycled into the system in a humane way. I want to use what’s there.” This involvement with charity shops informs many of Boon’s most notable works—in addition to side-stepping capitalism as much as possible and reformulating the twentieth-century artistic practice of using found objects, his approach takes advantage of the particularly local distinctiveness of charity shops to lend what the artist calls a “patina of place” to his projects. “The every-day, the detritus, the debris, old buttons, harmonicas, slide-shows and mix-tapes... these are emotional and textural fingerprints we leave behind. They give us the possibility to be archaeologists in and of the present.”

Boon’s project of (re)using “what’s there” manifests in a variety of ways. His concert posters for early Grúpat events employed repurposed LPs bought in charity shops, using blackboard paint to turn them into washable notice-boards. His sculpture-instrument *Kuscheltiermarimbaphon* (2006), constructed entirely from second-hand soft toys, colours its comedic appearance with a sound world of muted yet troubling thuds, bumps, clunks and whumps. *Shoepipes* (2005), another sculpture-instrument, presents an array of used shoes, all bought from the same charity shop on the

same day. Arranged by size, isolated and strangely resonant, the instrument’s shoes give us a snapshot of the fashions of the day and leave us wondering what paths their owners once walked. Boon’s silent film, *The Softest Music in the World*, deploys similar objects, coaxing unheard rhythms and melodies out of marshmallows and chocolate bunnies. These works explore the promise of sound, suggesting rather than performing, provoking questions of expectation and intent.

Boon’s scores similarly employ found elements to varied ends. *Kir#73astria* (2006) and *5 23 16* (2007) both employ found sounds: the former through recordings of Tallaght builders talking on their walkie-talkies, the latter through Electronic Voice Phenomena and Instrumental Transcommunication. In both pieces, voices real, unreal and imaginary drop out of the ether, infiltrating our hearing through static and noise. Boon also often uses found elements in the scores themselves, as a feature of their notation. *The Sacred Geometries* (2007) consists of a series of graphic scores constructed from sheet music found at church jumble sales—the traditional two dimensions of music notation explode into spatiality by being folded into origami, whereby the score becomes a collection of geometrical objects which can be arranged and re-arranged at will.

Boon’s most notable score project is the *Community Choir* series (2002-present). This work consists of two basic elements. The first element is an expanding collection of texts relating to South Dublin which Boon has drawn from copyright-free sources. These texts, often considerably aged as a result of the restrictions which dictate their use, range from histories of Ireland through the *Annals of the Four Masters* to the travel diaries of upper-class British tourists. The second element of the series is a collection of what the artist calls



“drawing scores”: highly-detailed notations constructed from solfège and found photographs. In keeping with his political philosophy, Boon considers *Community Choir* an open-source composition, one in which the performer is expected to be an active participant in arranging the elements and to which she is asked to contribute as she sees fit. The deployment of communal authorship in this project recalls for Boon the gift drawings and songs of the Shakers, drawings which were executed as depictions of heavenly inspirations or gifts. Gift drawings were not considered to be the work of an individual artist (the drawings were never signed), but a contribution to the whole community that could be employed as any member saw fit. Boon’s *Community Choir* series is imbued with a similar sense of openness and generosity, which reflects his career-long engagement with the ethics of community and the importance of group spirit.



