

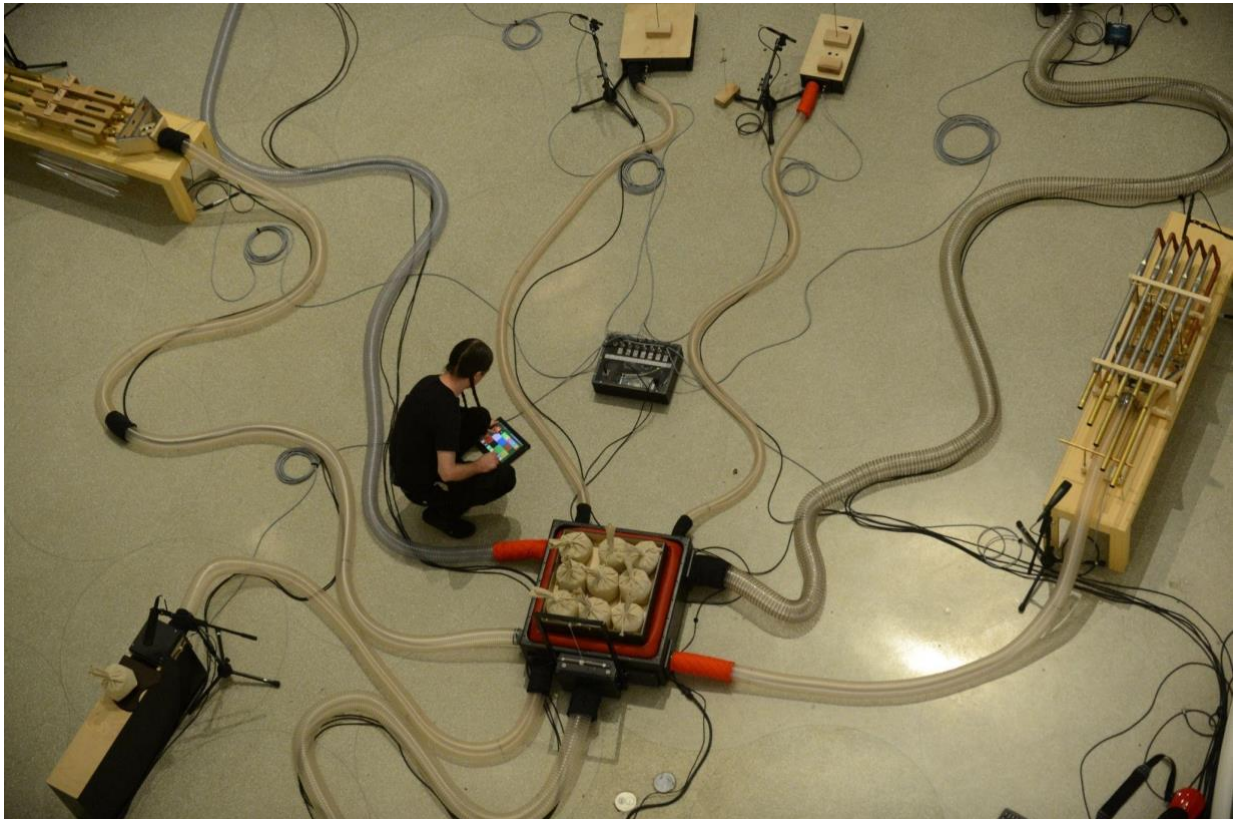
PRESS RELEASE

Tarek Atoui

the Shore / a place I'd like to be

5.April.2024 – 25.August.2024

Performance: Tarek Atoui, 9pm 5.April.2024



Tarek Atoui, *The Organ Within*, 2019, Performance at Guggenheim Museum (New York, USA) © Enid Alvarez

In April 2024, S.M.A.K. will present the first institutional solo exhibition in Belgium by Lebanese-French artist Tarek Atoui (b.1980). Titled *the Shore / a place I'd like to be*, this sonic-sculptural landscape brings together new and existing works in a carefully composed installation prompted by Atoui's unique understanding of deep listening, attention to sensory perception, and socio-political motivation.

As an electro-acoustic composer and artist, Tarek Atoui is known for creating inventive listening environments. Not only appealing to the ear, Atoui layers sound, images, matter, space, time, human actions and organic processes to create rich experiences and interactions.

The meticulously designed musical instruments, listening devices, sculptures and objects that are part of Atoui's works result from a well-considered process of thinking and making. Drawing on historical, anthropological, musicological and technical research and embodied experiments, they bear the stamp of his collaborations with experts, craftsmen, educators, students, volunteers, and many other people involved. The

composition of these installations provokes activity and instigates a learning environment where, without any hierarchical distinction, instruments can be activated. Whether they are played by professional musicians or are the object of a participatory workshop, each instrument prompts visitors to listen to the space, to each other and to themselves.

In the exhibition at S.M.A.K., the exploration of the space, observation of the exhibited artworks, and engagement with a succession of varied listening situations are all part of a network of sonic, sensory and human experiences, within which the creation of sound and listening are inseparably connected with each other.

WITHIN (2013–ongoing) represents an anchor point in Atoui's practice. Exploring how deafness can change our perception of the sound spectrum, the project seeks to extend notions of listening beyond the purely auditory to achieve sound factors with tactile, physical or visual origins, or which depart from gestures. It has among other things resulted in the creation of twelve musical instruments for both deaf people and hearing people. These instruments have already been played by hundreds of professionals and amateurs. They all contributed to the collection of sounds and 'playabilities' *WITHIN* is developing over time. On the occasion of this exhibition, two new productions will be presented: *66 Soft Cells* and *Wind House*.

The Whisperers (2021-22) is a series of listening devices made from different materials that conduct and amplify sound in a multi-sensorial way. They were inspired by 5 educational workshop sessions held in Paris with pupils from a kindergarten class who were introduced to the concepts of vibration, underwater sound and rotation in an explanatory and playful manner. Proposing new ways of listening to music, the assemblages in *The Whisperers* – made of plastic, wood, brass, water, bronze, glass and stone – allow for experimentation with the acoustic properties of each material and how they transmit and reflect sound. Various auditory sources and inputs (sounds relating to industry, water and percussion instruments, or those from vinyl records) converge in an intricate circuit of water, sound and vibration.

The instruments *The Spin Collector* and *The Limaçon* from 2019's *THE WAVE* project were also developed with deaf collaborators, unfamiliar with sound and performance, as well as professional musicians with a vast knowledge of improvisation and other expansive techniques. The sounds in *THE WAVE* are field recordings made for *I/E*, Atoui's project with and about the port cities of Beirut, Abu Dhabi, Athens, Singapore, and Porto.

Tarek Atoui's practice calls many things into question: the act of listening itself; how instruments are designed and played; the conventional definitions of improvisation; the writing of musical scores; and audience relationship. Interested in invoking perception, intuition, action, interpretation, memory and imagination as the catalysts for personal expression and identity formation, the exhibition does not prescribe fixed trajectories, nor does it depend on classical behavioural codes. How people play or appreciate sound is no longer dependent on a single form of knowledge, but on curiosity and a willingness to look at the world differently.

A special Dutch edition of the *Whispering Manual* will be published, presenting four experimental sound workshops designed by Atoui that explore the notions of vibration, water, rotation and wind. This guide is designed to enable teachers and educators to pursue these explorations of listening and collective improvisation themselves.

This exhibition is produced with the support of the French Embassy in Belgium and the Institut Français Paris. The exhibition is organised within the framework of EXTRA, a programme supporting contemporary French creations in Belgium.

Press information

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Link to press images + captions [here](#)

S.M.A.K.

Situated in Ghent, Belgium, S.M.A.K. shows art from its own collection in dialogue with works of contemporary artists from all corners of the world. By means of contemporary art, we seek and give meaning to this complex and fragmented world. In doing so, we make every effort to be accessible and inclusive, because art is for everyone. With our experimental approach, we hope visitors will be introduced to artists with a surprising and visionary view of the world. <https://smak.be/en>

Tarek Atoui

Tarek Atoui (b. 1980, Beirut, Lebanon) lives and works in Paris. He has participated in major international exhibitions over the past decade, including dOCUMENTA 13 (2012) and the 58th Venice Biennale (2019). Solo exhibitions include MCA, Sydney (2023); IAC, Lyon (2023); Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (2022); the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto (2022 and 2018); The Contemporary Austin (2022); The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2022); Bourse du Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris (2021); Fridericianum, Kassel (2020); Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (2020); NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (2018); Bergen Assembly (2016); Tate Modern, London (2016); Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2015) and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2014 and 2015).