

**Notable Serenity**  
**Chris Hargreaves at The Blue Oyster**  
**June 19 - July 21 2012**

In this sculptural installation by Auckland-based artist Chris Hargreaves, *Notable Serenity* (2012), participants are invited to visually and audibly contemplate an experimental composition that describes our geographic home in the South Pacific.

Similar to *Halo*, a work he completed in 2010 for the Manukau Festival of the Arts, for this new work a number of layers have been mapped into an overriding Midi score. Comprised of intricately crafted objects and sounds that taken together present an atonal composition, *Notable Serenity* is primarily built around four spoken word 'roles'. These readings, borrowed from scientific texts, are defined in musical terms as: Soprano (Clouds), Alto (Resource Management Act), Tenor (Geology) and Bass (Tectonics).

The disjunctive rush of voices reading technical texts in *Notable Serenity* is a reminder that one is usually best to subjugate the desire to obtain facts in order to first listen. If there is a fault, it is perhaps merely that those of us who are not scientists have the easiest route to engage with this machine-like installation, being that we will not bring to this work the same accumulated technical knowledge of the installation's auditory content as others may.

In addition to being a metaphor for the complexity of our environment – which we have continuously struggled to understand for centuries – *Notable Serenity* generates a sense of the machine-related anxiety that has pervaded humanity since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Prompting us to cultivate a careful and observant attitude, rather than searching for definitions, the sociologist, Richard Sennett, has a similarly open-minded stance to Hargreaves. Describing the enlightenment philosopher Diderot's position at the dawning machine era, he writes:

'The enlightened way to use a machine is to judge its powers, fashion its uses, in light of our own limits rather than the machine's potential. We should not compete against the machine. A machine, like any model, ought to propose rather than command, and humankind should certainly walk away from command to imitate perfection. Against the claim of perfection we can assert our own individuality, which gives distinctive character to the work we do.'<sup>1</sup>

While *Notable Serenity* may be intended – similar to Diderot's machine – as a tool for considering our physical environment, it also serves as a reminder that it is beneficial to get lost occasionally in contemplation. Visual art and music are of course two absorbing ways to do just that. Hargreaves' abstraction is not environmental science, politics nor philosophy, but it can be considered a reflection of what they, individually and collectively, may represent.<sup>2</sup>

Matt Blomeley, 4 June 2012

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<sup>1</sup> Sennett, Richard, *The Craftsman*, Penguin, London, 2009 (pp105,106)

<sup>2</sup> Lütticken, Sven, *Stop Making Sense*, Meaning Liam Gillick (ed. Szewczyk, M et al.), MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2009 (pp40). I believe the same definition applies to Hargreaves' work as Lütticken writes of Gillick: 'That Gillick's objects and installations reflect the becoming-design of abstraction does not, of course, mean that his work is design, merely that it reflects, and reflects on, the status of design as the current paradigm of Gestaltung through its use of post-painterly design elements and its coded implementations of a concept that can be reused and adapted to different situations.'