



Tarek Atoui

MATRIX 258 MARCH 2–NOVEMBER 8, 2015

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

MATRIX 258 features the work of artist and electroacoustic composer Tarek Atoui (b. 1980).

Born in Lebanon and based in Paris, Atoui initiates and curates multidisciplinary interventions, concerts, performances, and workshops. His work often radiates around large-scale, collaborative performances that develop from extensive research into the history of music and instrumentation, while also exploring new methods for production. Using custom-built electronic instruments and computers, Atoui often articulates social realities and histories in his work, while presenting music as a powerful mode of expression and identity.

Over the past seven years, Atoui has researched the relationships among sound, vibrations, instruments, and the body. This inquiry, encapsulated in his project *WITHIN*, grew out of a 2008 residency at the Sharjah Art Foundation, in the United Arab Emirates, culminating in his contribution to the *Sharjah Biennial 11* in 2013. Throughout the course of his residency, he conducted workshops at the Al Amal School for the Deaf in Sharjah, and it was the conversations he had with students there that formed the core of *WITHIN* and became the foundation for concerts, events, and lectures at the biennial. In 2012 Atoui joined forces with the research agency Council (founded by Gregory Castéra and Sandra Terdjman), whose project TACET explores how deaf people experience and perceive sound.¹

The insights Atoui gained from both Council and the Al Amal School for the Deaf informed *WITHIN*. Conceived as a multipartite musical composition, *WITHIN* unfolded in four sections spatially and temporally across the city for the duration of the biennial. After learning that the deaf students' favorite musical instrument was the drum, due to the vibrations it produces as well as its physical potential, Atoui invited well-known drummers to perform in spaces throughout the city for the first part of *WITHIN*, "The Call." Drummers Brian Chippendale, Susie Ibarra, and Cevdet Ereğ, and eight other musicians, performed in public squares and rooftops that possessed optimal sonic qualities for deaf people. For the final part of the project, "The Emic," Atoui worked with the students to compose and perform a piece based on infrasonic frequencies, or those below 160 hertz (Hz), that are primarily perceived through touch.

As part of the workshops with the Al Amal students, Atoui and Council invited architect Hansel Bauman from Gallaudet University in Washington, DC to present DeafSpace Project (DSP), a system Bauman and his colleagues developed in 2005 to examine the principles of sonic architecture and favored methods of communication among the deaf. Working with the ASL Deaf Studies Department at Gallaudet University, DSP produced a series of guidelines for distinct architectural design elements "that address the five major touch points between deaf experiences and the built environment: space and proximity, sensory reach, mobility and proximity, light and color, and finally acoustics."² The techniques outlined by DSP have amplified Atoui's own thinking about and approach to the possibilities of instrument building for deaf communities.

For his MATRIX project, *WITHIN 2*, produced in concert with the Experimental Media and Performing Art Center (EMPAC) at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York, Atoui continues his

exploration into how sound is perceived by both the hearing and nonhearing. In March 2015, Atoui spent three weeks at UC Berkeley coteaching an instrument-making seminar with art professor Greg Niemeyer, with the ultimate goal of realizing a few of the designs for instruments explored during the course. During this initial residency phase, Atoui gave a public lecture on campus introducing *WITHIN* and his experience with making musical instruments.³ He also performed a concert utilizing his own customized electronic instruments at Meyer Sound's acoustically unique Pearson Theater. The second phase of **MATRIX 258** comprises a series of concerts in early November that will premiere new instruments developed out of Atoui's spring residency, played by William Winant, James Fei, and other Bay Area musicians.

Atoui developed the first of these instruments, *Zero Point Nine*, in collaboration with Greg Niemeyer, Perrin Meyer of Meyer Sound, Jeff Lubow from Berkeley's Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT), and UC Berkeley sophomore Mitchell Karchemsky. The instrument is in essence a novel bass synthesizer that produces ultra-low-frequency electronic sounds that are physically felt, perhaps even before they are heard. Tones are generated through interference that occurs among the nine channels of speakers that emit sonic frequencies in the range of 1 to 125 Hz. The musician stands on a platform above the speakers and performs gestures that relate to conducting and sign language that in turn generate audible sensations. For the concert, performers will activate several connected subwoofer speakers to create a subsonic experience variously perceptible to deaf and hearing members of the audience.

The SuperPac, the second instrument Atoui is developing for MATRIX, is a percussive instrument played by one to four musicians in front of a limited audience ranging from twelve to twenty-four. Soft, Subpac speakers that induce vibrations press against the audience members' backs as they are seated and generate a physical experience rooted in felt vibrations. These speakers connect electronically to a computer station and to a set of tables that have unique surfaces that can be played like a drum with objects such as mallets or sticks. A conductor stands at the computer station to control the sensorial connections between the performers and the audience.

WITHIN 2 will continue during the months of September 2015 and January 2016, when Atoui will be in residence at EMPAC in Troy, New York. He will work with musician and Distinguished Research Professor of Music Pauline Oliveros to engage RPI students in designing and building additional instruments and interfaces for performance. The entire project will culminate at the Bergen Assembly 2016, a citywide series of performances, workshops, events, and lectures Atoui will organize in Norway, working with local institutions, musicians, artists, and audiences centered on his expanded exploration of sound with deaf communities.

Apsara DiQuinzio

CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR



1. Council made TACET into a web platform that outlines and articulates their activities and research project. http://www.formsof-council.org/en/inquiries/3o_tacet_or_the_cochlear_vertigo

2. <http://www.gallaudet.edu/campus-design/deafspace.html>

3. Atoui's lecture was part of the Art, Technology, and Culture Colloquium hosted by the Berkeley Center for New Media (BCNM) and the Arts Research Center (ARC), and can be accessed at <http://bcnm.berkeley.edu/index.php/event/?id=215>.

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Biography

Tarek Atoui was born in Lebanon in 1980 and moved to France in 1998 where he studied sound art and electroacoustic music. In 2006 he released his first solo album as part of the Mort Aux Vaches series for Staalplaat Records, and in 2008 he served as artistic director of the STEIM Studios in Amsterdam, a center for the research and development of new electronic musical instruments. Atoui has presented his work internationally at the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates (2009 and 2013); the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (2010); Mediacity Biennial in Seoul (2010); the Haus Der Kunst in Munich (2010); Performa 11 in New York (2011); dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, Germany (2012); the Serpentine Gallery in London (2012); and the 8th Berlin Biennial (2014). He was recently appointed one of the artistic directors of the 2016 Bergen Assembly, a triennial for contemporary art in Norway.

FRONT AND BACK
Tarek Atoui: *WITHIN*, 2013; performance at the *Sharjah Biennial 11*; courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE, RIGHT
Tarek Atoui: Diagram for *Zero Point Nine*, 2015.
Tarek Atoui: Diagram for *The SuperPac*, 2015.



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