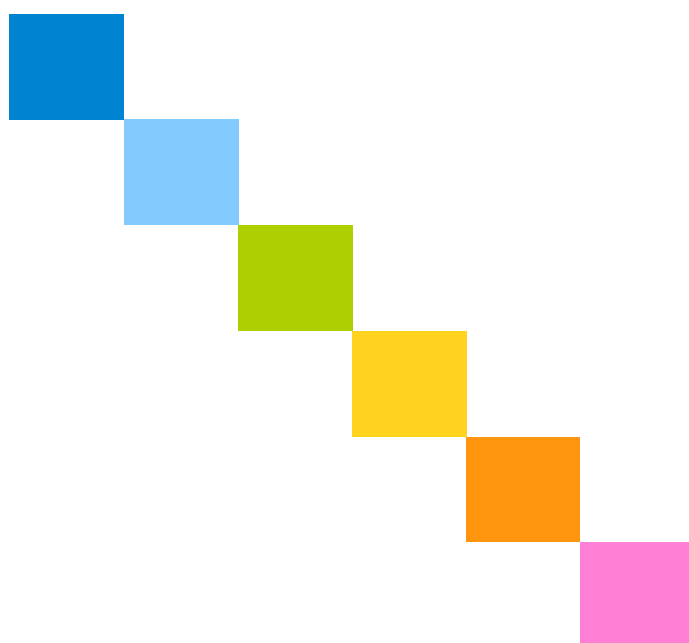


MIKEL URQUIZA



CATALOGUE

2024

Feu de joie (2023)

wind orchestra

10 minutes

Commissioned by IRCAM

on the occasion of the reopening of the Stravinsky fountain

Première : Pupils of the Mozart music school – 2024



The Stravinsky square is an icon of Paris, with one side facing the past (Saint-Merry), another facing the present (Centre Pompidou), and hosting underneath the research of the future (IRCAM). The fountain imagined by Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely is aware of this crossing and takes root in several myths with a modern vision in mind : no monumental gesture here, a barely elevated flat surface shows characters (issued from Stravinsky's universe) that blend with the crowd, dance hip-hop with the teenagers and spray children on summer days. This particular coexistence of time-layers and styles, light and charming, mysteriously easy and gay, is a unique attribute of the city.

I chose to write a very light piece of music, full of references to the popular culture. From Stravinsky I have inherited the appreciation of humour and excess, a taste for mechanical and acid orchestrations, a polymorphic habit, slightly kleptomaniac. The first section is inspired by cartoon music, it is colourful like Saint Phalle's statues and articulated like Tinguely's mechanisms. The second one is built on a quotation by Mussorgsky, *The great gate of Kiev*, which brings the magnificence that an opening requires, while reminding of the Ukrainian invasion by Russia. The third section explores the many identities that gather on the streets of Paris : musettes, waltzes and songs that "fill the evening air". [...]

Pentimenti (2020)

percussion concerto [2.2.2.2-2.2.2-4 perc-harp-strings]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Peter Eötvös Foundation

Première : Dániel Janca, Savaria Symphony Orchestra & Rémi Durupt – 2023



A pentimento or repentance is, in a painting, the presence or emergence of earlier images, forms or strokes that have been changed and painted over. They usually correspond to details, such as the position of an arm, or the nature of a represented object. More often than not, they are connected to mistakes of drawing or proportion, but they can change completely the interpretation of a painting.

When they do not appear to the naked eye, it is possible to explore the inner layers of a painting through X-rays or infrared reflectography. The access to this "fossil" register is helping art

historians identify figures, clarify the authorship and the date of paintings, and better understand the legacy of the artists, who portrayed their time through their mistakes as much as through their successes.

Moreover, pentimenti have their own aesthetic value: they are ghosts living in the paintings, almost forgotten memories – which seem to portray a gesture or an air draft. They change with time; some of them appear progressively, through the first layer of paint which, in contact with air, becomes more transparent.

I use the instrumental group as a canvas that holds the music and the percussion soloist as a tool that allows me to modify it, provoking the emergence of a music behind the music – a future heritage, a past inspiration, a potential detour. The abundance of possible actions and timbers on a percussion set make this soloist a perfect machine to accomplish this task of nostalgia, surprise and oblivion.

Mis monstruos marinos (2019)

symphony orchestra [3.3.3.3-4.3.3.1-3 perc-harp-strings]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Basque National Orchestra

Première: Euskadiko Orkestra, Ruth Reinhardt - 29/01/2021, San Sebastian



Mis monstruos marinos is a commission of the Euskadiko Orkestra, which wanted to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the circumnavigation of the Earth. I am less interested in the historical fact than in its cultural and psychological consequences : proving the finitude of the world was a huge step towards the disappearance of the *terra incognita*, margins of maps inhabited by monsters and dragons, that the Renaissance cartography narrowed and modern exploration eliminated. My piece is a page to shelter those evicted monsters, a space of fantasy to host an old world that doesn't fit the Atlas.

The orchestra, a kind of monster, is both the serpent and its territory. In the first movement (*Mi monstruo despierto*), a waving gesture borrowed from Tchaikovsky's 6th symphony recalls a sea tempest and a beast ; in the second (*Mi monstruo dormido*), a peaceful sea hides huge chords (that are horns, bells, roars) – borrowed from my vocal piece *I nalt be clode on the frolt* ; in the third movement (*Sueno del monstruo*), I have orchestrated a short canon made of rain drops, that I invented for a chamber music piece. In French, "serpent de mer", sea serpent, is a conversation topic that arises periodically without finding resolution ; a rumour that will not die.

I will state the obvious, that the sea is the monster. I have spent half of my life by the Atlantic ocean and I carry its immensity. If you approached your ear to mine, you would hear the waves.

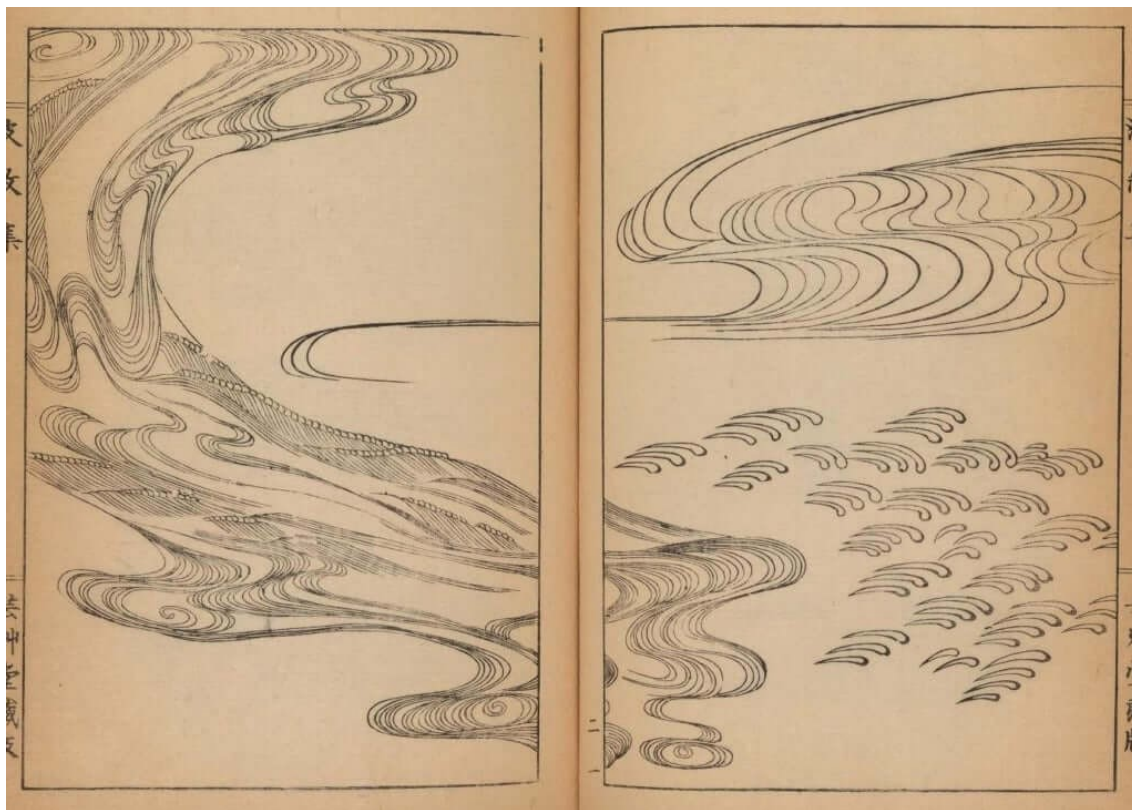
Las olas (2017)

string orchestra [6.5.4.4.2]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Basque Department for Culture

Première: OLC, Pieter-Jelle de Boer - 06/10/2017, Paris



Las olas – the waves – borrows the title from Virginia Woolf's iconic novel. From this book, which narrates the lives of six friends from childhood to adulthood, I retain the peculiar writing : we don't hear the characters speak, but think, reflect or imagine, always in first person. This interior and plural flux becomes hypnotic.

Woolf's book is not only a story : the sequences about the group of friends are intertwined with meticulous descriptions of a day by the sea – dawn is coupled with childhood, morning with youth, and so on... In spite of the undeniable debussian perfume, this slow progression towards the night echoes in my mind Strauss *Metamorphosis*, which are based on a funeral theme by Beethoven.

This state of mind has invited to my piece a lyricism that is uncustomary in my work, perhaps because it was my *Piece de prix*, the end of my studies, and music carries emotions unknown.

Ikusia ikusirik (2016)

symphony orchestra [3.3.3.3-4.3.3.1-3 perc-cel-acc-harp-strings]

7 minutes

Commissioned by Musikene

Première: Musikene Orchestra & A. Tamayo - 21/02/2016, San Sebastian



Ikusia ikusirik is a festive overture full of fanfares, enthusiastic horn glissandi, trumpet roaring and snare drum rolling. It celebrates San Sebastian as European Capital of Culture 2016 and the 80th anniversary of Helmut Lachnemann, honorary guest at the concert, whose music has had a deep impact on me.

It is also a travel story ; a tale told so often that it has been engulfed by the ornaments, exaggerated feats and selective forgetfulness. I came back to Musikene 5 years after receiving my diploma bringing a caravan of gadgets (mattress pumps, bowls, rubber ducks) : the collection of objects that, as proof, I present to back my story.

"Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures: jumps, screams of wonder and horror, barking and animal singing, or with objects that he extracted from his saddlebag : ostrich feathers, blowguns, quartz, and showed before him like chess pieces." Italo Calvino, *The invisible cities*

The piece is dedicated to Ramon Lazkano, who was my first orchestration teacher, showed to me Lachenmann's music for the first time and made the premiere possible.

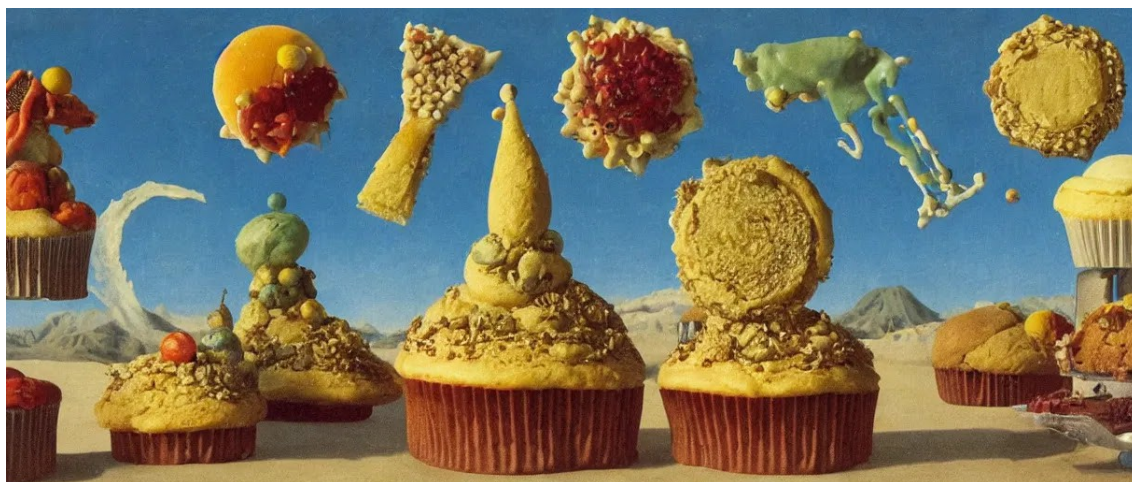
Tiramisù (2023)

[solo accordion, fl, cl, trp, perc, kbd, vn, va, vc, db]

17 minutes

Commissioned by Divertimento Ensemble

Première : M. Berlanda & Divertimento Ensemble – 9/9/2023, Moncalvo



There are several stories about the invention of this dessert, but I will save you the bore; I'm more interested in its bitter-sweet taste, that words describe so poorly. The bitterness comes from the cocoa and the coffee, tropical fruits, although they come across as Swiss and Italian specialities; the erasing of their distant origin, the convenient oversight of their exotic condition, contributes to the unequal retribution of the people who grow them (the biggest producer of cocoa is the Ivory Coast, where the average consumption is 0.5 kg of chocolate per person/year, against 8.8 kg in Switzerland). Tiramisu is also part of the many world-known Italian recipes (several restaurants offer it in Yamoussoukro) ; the centrifuge force that brings raw materials to Europe has a countering centripetal force that exports our culture and ideas.

Did I say bitterness? Squeaking harmonies abound, strong instrumentation contrasts, a critical use of ethnic, kitsch materials as found in the advertisements of these products. But don't panic, I didn't write a political piece: at the risk of being complacent, my score is dreamy and sweet, because – gentle reminder – we are dealing with a desert. One can feel the crispy biscuits (which in music become tactile, percussive, articulated), the creaminess of the mascarpone cheese and the eggs (which brings legato, glissandi, clusters) and the gluttony of sugar (melody, chords, rhythmic simplicity), dripping all over the place. [...]

Cancionero sin palacio (2021)

[trp, cl, sax, acc, cymb, perc, pno, mand, guit, harp, vc, db]

11 minutes

Commissioned by C Barré ensemble

Première : C Barré ensemble & Sébastien Boin – 21/12/2021, Marseille

[CD: *Espiègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



In 2020 I wrote *Lavorare stanca* for the C Barré ensemble. It is a piece about work and tiredness – and it is unfortunately one minute shorter than the agreed duration of the commission. Hoping to be forgiven, I transcribed for the same instrument set up a piece of the *Cancionero de palacio* (a volume of Spanish Renaissance music) which is an invitation to pleasure and relaxation : *hoy comamos y bebamos*. The distraction manoeuvre worked and C Barré ensemble asked for more ; the project of a revisited songbook was born. [...]

To transcribe is to write for different means, but also for a different context. The transition is both acoustic (from a way of producing sound to another) and perceptive (from a way of listening to another). I have submitted these renaissance pieces to a constant doubling of their acoustic and poetic signs, hoping that they will find in this rebound a new way of speaking to us.

Ships vanishing in the horizon (2021)

[fl, cl, trp, hn, perc, pno, 2vn, va, vc]

15 minutes

Commissioned by the New European Ensemble

Première : New European Ensemble – 09/06/2021, The Hague



Picture a great dune by the sea, crowned by a belvedere. From the top you can see the beach, some boats at rest, and summer villas; a bit further, a Dutch city of the nineteenth century, elegant and dynamic, with red brick houses, canals and factories. Behind the city, bell-towers, at the feet of the belvedere, some timid plants struggling to grow on the sand. If you close your eyes you can feel... nothing at all – if you look closely you'll realise the landscape is just a clever *trompe l'oeil*. Hendrik Willem Mesdag's *Panorama*, is one of the Hague's hidden treasures: a dome full of sunlight where a false belvedere on a false dune looks out over a false landscape.

A spiral staircase leads to the belvedere. Narrow and dark, it makes the eye adapt to the scarce light only to increase the brightness of the view. From the top, we search the horizon, which seems far, thanks to the curved walls of the dome. We notice the false plants, but the kitsch effect does not diminish the impression of *entering the outside*. Mesdag's tricks are not able to fool a skeptical, but are more than enough to seduce a mind willing to believe. [...]

I have imagined an analog device: an introduction in the form of a stair and a panorama where every detail is a movement – to be performed without pauses. First the dunes (with wavy profiles as deployed spectrums), then a ride on the beach (childish, a miniature, as seen from afar), the roofs of the city (steep, overlapping), a bell tower, ships on the horizon (that we greet) and the clouds (forever light). Two small, concrete interludes are inspired by the decor: a chair, the sand. The piece ends with a descent of the stairs, back to the darkness of the concert-hall. [...]

Peristylum (2021)

[fl, cl, sax, pno, vn, vc]

5 minutes

Commissioned by Sonido Extremo

Première : Sonido Extremo, Jordi Francés - 24/03/2021, Madrid



The *ars memoriae* or "art of memory" is an ancient discipline which tried to understand how memory works and developed techniques to use it better. [...] One of the most remarkable techniques is that of the *loci* or places : the construction of a mental building (a *memory palace*) in which memories can be stored linked to the different spaces. Interested in this relation with architecture, I have built a piece of music based on the structure of a Roman *domus* (still unfinished) : the movements that follow are related to the peristyle (*peristylum*).

We find a *nymphaeum*, where three ondines call us with a ravelian voice : the wind instruments play *Une barque sur l'océan* while the string instruments play *Jeux d'eau* and the piano plays *Ondine*. Their watery overlapped gestures remind of the clothes and the hair of Warburgs nymph, animated by an invisible breeze ; here, wind and nymph share the body of the music.

We find a cuckoo that sings *hallelujah*. It celebrates the metamorphosis of its own singing into music ; a resurrection allowing him to sing beyond death.

We find, among the bushes, a copy of the *spinario* (boy with thorn), who discovered the wrong way that "a rose is a rose is a rose" (Gertrud Stein). This phrase, which apparently expresses identity, becomes dramatic in Mecano's pop song *Una rosa es una rosa* ; the rose that calls us sweetly is the same that punctures us with love, is the same that cures the wound (and calls us sweetly). A rose of mahlerian perfume is punctured with Mecano's *rumba flamenca* and slowly flows towards a shared ecstasy. The piece ends with the second lesson of the *spinario* ; nothings stings more than the hole left by the thorn.

Lavorare stanca (2020)

[trp, cl, sax, acc, cymb, perc, pno, mand, guit, harp, vc, db]

10 minutes

Commissioned by C Barre ensemble

Première : C Barré ensemble & Guillaume Bourgogne - 18/03/2021, Paris

[CD: *Espiègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



Cesare Pavese reminds us in his poetry book *Lavorare stanca* that working is tiring ; it seems evident – but we tend to forget it when we are not working. Behind some of the most common urban gestures (call a cab, order food, hire a maid) there is an underpaid work that the screen of the telephone hides and no one wants to see.

During the XXth century most workers could rely on the strength of their numbers. Today smartphones are personal machines, personal factories, and workers are isolated, incapable of fighting injustice. On social networks, they might show themselves resting or having fun, since work has become shameful, but behind the facade tiredness persists.

Playing an instrument is also tiring. Musical virtuosity is more impressive when it is accompanied by an aura of ease, but it is a calculated effect, built on practice and study. The long work hours of musicians are often as invisible as those of drivers, maids, delivery men and women ; musicians and 2.0 workers rely on their instruments/telephones with the same intimacy, intensity, need.

I want to honor that effort ; understand it, aestheticize it and show it so that we can look at it, appreciate it and pay a fair price for it – hoping that a newly discovered sensitivity can transcend music and extend to all work, that is tiring.

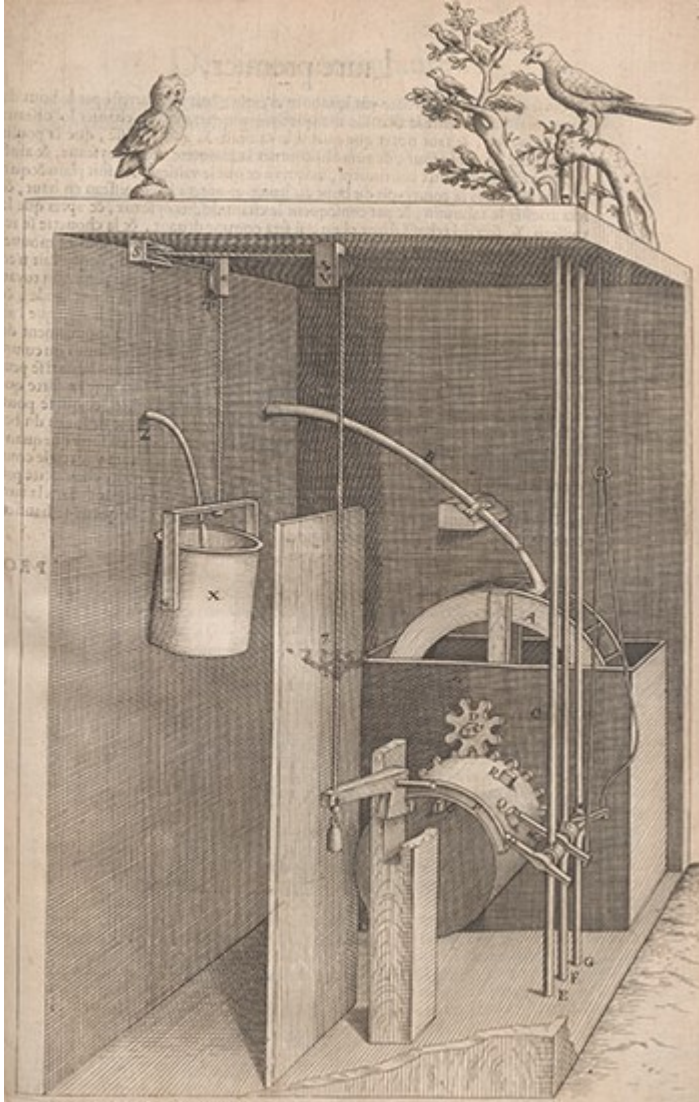
Oiseaux gazouillants et hibou qui se retourne (2020)

[2 fl, 2 cl, trp, 2 perc, harp, cel, 2 vn, vla, vc]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the E. Intercontemporain and the French Department for Culture

Première : Ensemble Intercontemporain & M. Pintscher – 21/12/2020, Paris



Oiseaux gazouillants et hibou qui se retourne (babbling birds and turning owl) is the name of a hydraulic automaton built by Philon of Byzantium in the third century A.C. The trills produced by water whistles stop every time that a metal owl turns. It's a little dramatic scene where the joy of the prey is periodically interrupted by the serious look of the predator.

If we observe the automaton long enough, the silence that follows every moment of babbling is perceived as the real moment of listening, where the information surrounding us can finally reach our ears. In the world of sounds, babbling is the predator – and silence its prey.

This project was imagined in collaboration with the artist Alexander Fahima and the Ensemble Intercontemporain for a concert called *A cabin in*

the woods, which aimed to transform the concert hall into a forest. I proposed to hide three soloists, like birds on the branches, and gave them strong instrumental identities.

The ensemble babbles further ; it represents the sounding mass of the forest. The conductor, as a *turning owl*, gives both sounds and silences, builds an alternation of chants and layers (this responsorial game is also a bit Venetian, and Venice a bit Byzantine) ; I pictured a virtuous and elegant conducting, matching Matthias Pintscher's gesture, to whom the piece is dedicated. When the trees don't let you see the forest, listen to the birds sing it.

Ars memoriae (2019)

[fl, cl, pno, vn or va, vc]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Peter Eötvös Foundation

Première : UMZE ensemble, Rémi Durupt - 30/11/2019, Budapest



The *ars memoriae* or "art of memory" is an ancient discipline which tried to understand how memory works and developed techniques to use it better. "The art of memory" is also the title of Frances Yates' famous essay which traces the evolution of this knowledge from its Greek origins to the extensive use in medieval Europe and its relevance during the renaissance period.

One of the most remarkable techniques is that of the *loci* or places : the construction of a mental building (a *memory palace*) in which memories can be stored linked to the different spaces. Interested in this relation with architecture, I have built a piece of music based on the structure of a Roman *domus* (still unfinished) that holds : an entrance (*fauces I*), a basin (*impluvium*), two rooms (*cubicula*) and an exit (*fauces II*).

In the corridors, I have placed my memories of a corridor - light spreading on a wall and an air current ; in the basin, a memory of the rain ; in the rooms, a memory of sleep and a memory of love. This memory of love explores another technique of the art of memory : the *imagines agentes*, vivid images used to codify information through a shocking (sometimes disturbing) combination of elements.

These are invented memories, but it shouldn't matter, since every time we evoke a memory we corrupt it – and bring it further from reality. Memory can only be pictured as a shifting building, with moving rooms changing shape and size ; a building which, like the Roman *domus*, has lost its roof and some walls, is covered in ivy and dust, slowly becomes a memory of itself.

Monte Altissimo (2018)

string ensemble (2.2.2.2.1)

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Peter Eötvös Foundation

Première : Danubia Orchestra – 27/02/2019, Budapest



Monte Altissimo (literally, very high mountain) is the name of a mountain in Tuscany. Although it can be easily spotted from the coast – thanks to its position and its mass – its height is not remarkable, barely 1589m. What makes it special is its marble "uniform, homogeneous, crystalline and comparable to sugar", in Michelangelo's words. Since the Renaissance period, this stone has given life to sculptures of Rodin, Moore and Miró – and it is still extracted and sent around the world.

This piece is the last of a long series of commissions, where I felt that I had to go further every time to find the materials for my music. Overflowing with a feverish energy, I wanted to use this search as the theme of the composition, to illustrate the effort, the tenacity, the concentration and the fascination of the process. It is an endless climb during which one finds precious stones, unexpected landscapes, flashes and abysses.

Michelangelo dreamed of sculpting the summit on-site, instead of transporting the marble blocks to his atelier. Art lovers would have climbed to see his work, shining under the sun and surrounded by a breathtaking view. Music is fortunately lighter than stone : I spare the audience the trip to Monte Altissimo, and ask only to stay still – the mountain will come to you.

Sex doll deluxe (2018)

[trp, trb, perc, pno, guit, vc]

11 minutes

Commissioned by ECLAT Festival

Première : ascolta ensemble – 10/02/2019, Stuttgart



In 2018 a brothel was opened in Barcelona which, under the name *Lumidolls*, offers the services of three hyperrealistic sex dolls made of silicon. I would not find this particularly interesting if, nine days later, the establishment had not closed, in order to relocate and repair the dolls, completely destroyed due to the common habit among customers of beating them for pleasure. In spite of the expensive repairs, it is a successful business, and the same company has opened new facilities in Turin and Moscow.

This idea of sexual intercourse as a violent domination is present all around our culture, from literature to marketing and cinema; but its non consensual practice is limited by law. We roughly know the amount of men that hit women – appalling, but still a minority – but it is impossible to know the even more appalling amount of men who would like to do so and do not dare. What hits me, in the *Lumidolls* case, is that a violent response seems to be something general, provided that the victim/object has no physical or juridical defence.

I wanted to give this empty-eyed doll a voice through music, as it was coming out from its often broken and mended silicon body. The piece is made of kissing sounds, plastic friction, mechanical breath, sexual iterations, a brief trumpet solo that might be a cry, different noises produced with toys. Even if a small quantity of drama is necessary for a piece on such a theme, humour is equally important: there is something really grotesque and ridiculous in these grown-up men beating the hell out of a doll, as hyperrealistic as it may be.

Opus vermiculatum (2017)

[fl, ob, cl, sax, pno, perc, vn, vla, vc]

11 minutes

Commissioned by the Goethe Institut and the Spanish Centre for Music

Première : ensemble mosaik, Enno Poppe – 20/03/2017, Madrid



Opus vermiculatum – worm work – is a laborious mosaic technique. Tiny tiles are chosen and set in curves that follow the contour, shadows and wrinkles of the represented objects ; from a short distance, the delicate and twisted rings look like the track of a worm, from afar, they blend in a realistic image. [...]

My piece frees the thoroughness and the curve from their service to the shape. Consider the form and colour of the tiles, the flow of their concatenation, the fissure between them – at worm view, the portion that marks the eye of a horse and that of a man looks the same. Consider the colour hues on a line, the warmth with which they intertwine, the surprising autonomy with which they rebel and break – the abrupt ending of every path is a death signal.

Also. A guided tour to the workshop, focused on hands : a notion of effort, of bone architecture, of patience. The nacre tiled nail, the blind ring finger, the premonitory palm ; all of them are dug by time, the greatest worm. A chrysalis of groove, time patiently grows nothingness. In the centre of my piece a tenuto section illustrates that crying silence.

The mixed instrumental ensemble has become, with small variations, a standard of contemporary music. It gathers in a small amount of instruments a large variety of timbres which is multiplied by extended techniques, percussions and gadgets. Although I don't refuse the sonic diversity of the ensemble, I question it through traditional note writing. Two written G's on the flute and the violin can look like two round black tiles, opposed eyes, head and tail of a horse, tip of the friend beard or the enemy's spear.

Serpientes y escaleras (serenata) (2016)

[harp, pno, perc, vn, vla, vc]

10 minutes

Commissioned by the WDR

Première : L'Instant Donné – 24/04/2016, Witten

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



The requirements are simple: a garden – roses are optional but valued, creeping plants, orange trees and jasmin; a balcony – at least a window, if possible a stone window, if possible a carved stone window; *desire* – that from now on will be referred to as *love*; one or more obstacles, namely shame, fear, weakness, isolation, pride; and always the night.

A ladder: one's voice, for the lines of the stave are steps. Guitar accompaniment, for frets are steps. Every word that is said is a step. It flies around like a glow-worm, then settles on top of the previous ones, weaving a ladder. Every silence is a step that extends the ladder into the invisible. Every sigh is an attempted assault.

A snake: to think that one is not a) dorable b) rave c) lever enough, that one is too d) ull e) xtraneous f) oolish. Snakes growing from one's head, like Medusa's hair. Snakes frightening the horses, if there are, winding around the ladder, dissuading us from climbing it. Additionally, gestures of boredom or indifference from above, meandering down the wall, all jaws and eyes.

When the time comes, no rehearsal will prove useful, improvisation and caution alone. Extend the music like a hand is extended into darkness, repeat the name of *love* like a radar repeats *beep*, wait for the echo (wait for the echo). Be more g) enerous than h) eroic, more i) nfantile than j) udicious. Beware of the snakes.

Isiltzen denak (2015)

[fl, cl, perc, pno, guit, vn, vc]

5 minutes

Commissioned by the Mikel Laboa Chair (University of the Basque Country)

Première : Kuraia Ensemble – 14/10/2015, San Sebastian



Zer dio isiltzen denak isiltzen denean? What does the silenced say when it shuts up ? Is the rhetorical question in the text *Gure hitzak* (Our words) by Bernardo Atxaga, that Mikel Laboa set into music. The chorus of the song hopes we will never know it, because it will mean that Basque language is alive. But music is a space for invention, the answer doesn't need to be quiet.

I have based my piece on one of the shortest songs by Mikel Laboa, *Haize hegoa* (South wind). I built contrasting sections out of its two phrases : the first one develops the rythmical element, explores its weirdness and its madness ; the second one pictures the warm caress, the sweat and the boredom. The south wind, when silenced is both menacing and sensual.

A major second oscillation, like a litany, introduces, spaces and closes both sections : it is the head of *Haize hegoa*'s motif, but can be heard as an objects abandoned to the wind – which blows on harmonicas, bottles, and whistles. The rythm percuted by the strings on the instrument is a silenced version of the chorus of *Gure hitzak*, similar to steps. What is silenced walks away.

Les lueurs se sont multipliées (2015)

[fl, cl, perc, pno, vn, vla, vc]

11 minutes

Commissioned by L'Instant Donné and the French Department for Culture

Première : L'Instant Donné – 28/06/2015, Festival Format Raisins

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



Les lueurs se sont multipliées. It's the first phrase of the novel *L'emploi du temps* (*Passing time*) by Michel Butor. From the train, through ashes and rain, the hero of the novel sees the petrol-lamps of a northern city pass by. I chose this title for a long, dark piece – but I wrote something else.

A second train crossed my mind ; the Paris-Rome of *La modification* (*Second thoughts*), another novel by Butor. In this book, a married Parisian man imagines how life will be when he finally moves in with his Roman mistress – but all his desires change during the journey.

Between the piece that I decided to write in Paris and the one I finally wrote in Rome – while spending three months at Villa Medici – my idea went also through several *modifications*. I couldn't refrain myself from writing two pieces with a Roman theme – *Stanza di Livia* and *Clair de lune au bosco* – then a prologue and an epilogue to frame the triptych.

Far from being weakened by variability or doubts, the artistic proposal became more faithful : the abundance of sources became an abundance of sounds, the literary concern became a formal singularity ; all the writing process was a labyrinth worthy of Butor's imagination.

Zintzil (2012)

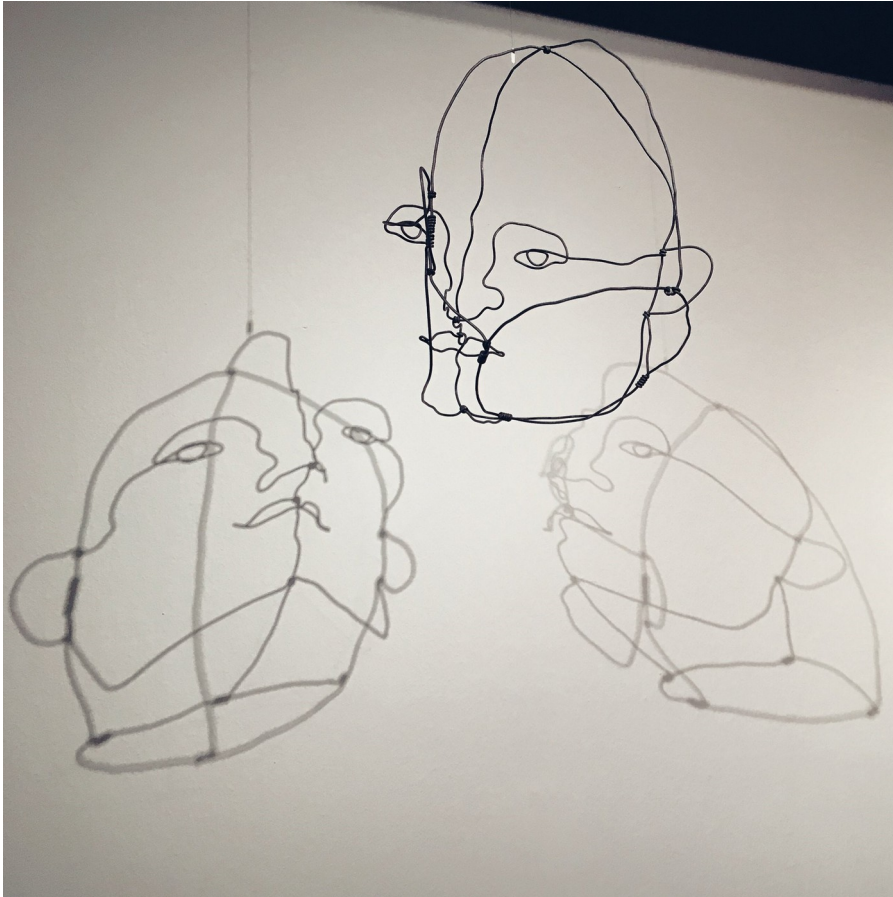
[fl, acc, va, gui, cel, perc]

8 minutes

Commissioned by the BBVA Foundation

Première: Krater Ensemble - 10/01/2012, Bilbao

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



A circular space where nine speakers play Beethoven's nine symphonies simultaneously, the audience walks among them and mixes the music through movement. *Zintzil* is one of the possible paths.

Zintzil, in Basque, aloft ; we explore landscapes through our feet, but also overfly them through our listening. *Zintzil*, hanging, like one of Calder's mobiles built with symphonies instead of coloured elements and a common pulse instead of wire.

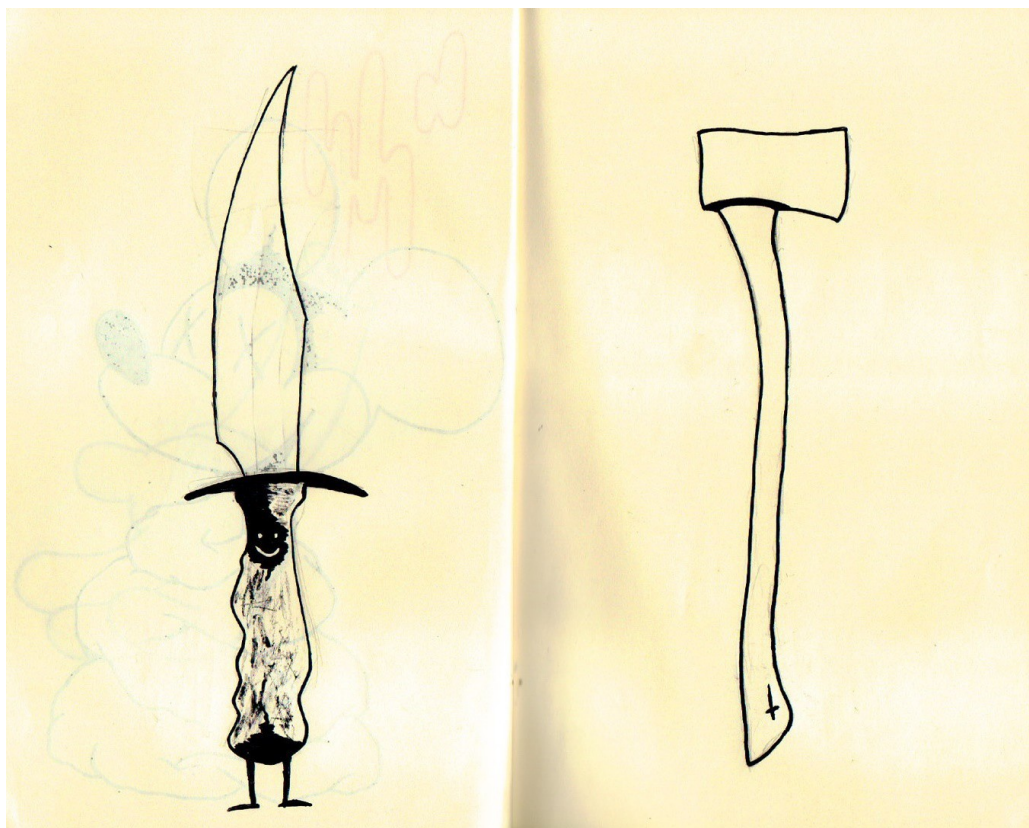
It was a filtering process ; first I wrote in pencil the ensemble of Beethoven's melodies, then privileged a listening thread and made space around it with a rubber. The erasing gesture is the airstream that gives life to the mobile, which underlines counterpoints, harmonic collisions and cadences. However, I kept an excess of matter, a great amount of lines, diverse and *cantabile* ; free paths for the ear to err.

Passage à l'acte (2022)

cello and piano

10 minutes

Première: Lionel and Demian Martin – 09/10/2022, Frankfurt



First a repetition, an echo, a double, a replica, an iteration, an imitation, a reprise, a restatement, a redundancy, a recurrence, a relapse, a cadence, a period, a penchant, a leaning, a pattern, a refrain, a habit, a routine, a ritual, a custom, a manner, a way, a tradition, a rule, a fixation, a vice, a mania, an obsession, a compulsion, a fetish, a craze, a pathology, a condition, an illness, a flaw.

Then a transition, a transposition, a transformation, a transfiguration, a transubstantiation, a change, a modification, a mutation, an adjustment, an adaptation, a metamorphosis, a revolution, a fracture, a tearing, a cut, a rupture, a border, a limit, an edge, an end.

An overflow, an overmuch, an overrun, an outburst, an outbreak, an outrage, a tantrum, an eruption, an explosion, going bananas, going bonkers, going crackers, going cuckoo, going lunatic, going psycho, having a shock, a bump, a jolt, a clash, a crash ; an act, an attack, an action, an aggression, an assault, a liberation, a deliverance, a catharsis, a redemption, a rehabilitation, a recovery, a healing.

Atelier de Giacometti (2019)

flute and piano

7 minutes

Première: Olech & Mazari – 21/09/2019, Musique aux Mirabelles



Workshops were not always poetic places. The artists who represented themselves at work often showed a clean and tidy place, without the accumulation of waste, without risk : all but a workshop. Only the XIXth and XXth century paid attention to the process of creation and admired the true places where it happened, often decrepit and chaotic. Today, house museums thrive, as do reconstructed workshops which recreate the spaces from remaining elements and pictures. Archive, library, collection, gallery and worksite, all reunited in the hope of understanding better the artists and their work.

The Giacometti Institute, which opened its doors in June 2018 at Montparnasse, hosts, among others, a replica of his workshop : a few pieces of furniture, a lot of waste (failures, bottles, cigarette ends) and sculptures of all sizes and materials from ground to ceiling. Traditionally shown isolated, his art was for me an expression of solitude; but surrounded by a tide of figures – that often represent his family and friends – I understood that it can be a collection of idols to fight it.

For this portrait of the workshop in music, I have written three movements that take the names of sculptures by Giacometti : *toute petite figurine*, where we hear the strength of the chisel and the delicacy of the carving ; *buste de Diego*, which explores the anamorphosis created by the opposed layouts of face and body ; and *l'homme qui marche*, his most iconic sculpture, that I animated with breath and mechanics, the signs of a secret life.

Cálculo de la caída (2015)

violin and viola

6 minutes

Première: DAI Contemporain – 09/12/2015, Paris



Cliffs or eyes, wells or lies, abysses are mesmerizing. We calculate their depth unconsciously, we test them through our gaze – but the bottom refuses to appear, we see it swarm not be. Then we throw a stone. We say : I am this stone, its whistle falling is my breath, its tip the tip of my fingers, its pounding against the walls the beating of my heart. The final bounce arrives covered with echoes : the weaker it is the larger the distance – the bigger the danger.

This common experiment, exploratory, childish, can become a method of research. In 1644, Giovanni Battista Riccioli dropped an iron ball and a clay ball from the top of the Asinelli tower in Bologna. He wanted to prove that Galileo was wrong and that heavier objects fall faster, but he ended up proving him right and calculating quite accurately the acceleration of gravity : $9,6 \text{ m/s}^2$. The tricky part of the process was making sure that the monks in charge of the stop-pendulums were not hit by the balls.

The title of this piece describes a repetitive descent, the carefree game of a child or the methodic experiments of Riccioli : the laws of physics are shared by all falling objects. A third image haunts the piece : that of a man thrown from the top of a building in Mosul by members of the Islamic State (a scene repeated in Hama and Palmyra). He is suspended in void, untouched by gravity, saved by photography. My music collaborates in this rebellion : the fall lasts, is prolonged, is refused, is denied the possibility of a ground.

Ex voto (2019)

saxophone, percussion, piano

20 minutes

Commissioned by Radio France

Première: Trio Accanto - 15/02/2019, Paris



Here is a small collection of *ex voto* - thanking sculptures, miniatures, images – for Dea Roma, who has kindly welcomed me at Villa Medici during the months in which I have written the piece.

The first movement [pavone] is a peacock : the animal that greeted me upon my arrival. A silly bird with a ridiculous cry (why not say it) and an elegant silhouette which reminds of the fantastic animals depicted in grotesques. The music starts with a homorhythmic phrase and fans slowly its feathers to cover the whole acoustic space.

The second movement [occhio] is my eye, admiring the spectacular panorama of the city. The details, the depths, the quick change of the weather and the light, caress the senses with a gentle and demanding murmur. The third movement [cuore] is my heart, beating for Rome's heart : its antique heritage which lies deep beneath its surface (marbles in baroque palaces, proportions in renaissance paintings, the foundations of most buildings). The music throws a stone to its own depths and takes the time to listen to the echo.

The fourth movement [orecchio] is my ear, the one which questions the garden, that answers mostly with a silence - that I appreciate. The fifth movement [piede] is my foot, the keeper of my freedom in a city in which public transport is impractical, but where it is always pleasant to walk – or run. I have put a sound before the other as I do with my feet to walk – and soon, through this simple but effective movement, I have found myself elsewhere. [...]

Respirare l'ombra (2019)

three percussionists

8 minutes

Commissioned by the Peter Eötvös Foundation

Première: Schlanger, Nevelo, Kiss - 14/05/2019, Budapest



Respirare l'ombra (to breathe the shadow) is the title of a work by Giuseppe Penone, an Italian artist close to the Arte Povera movement. Son of farmers, he shows a privileged relationship to nature, that is visible in his sculptures and installations ; austere or exuberant, controlled or wild.

In *Respirare l'ombra* he covered the walls of a museum room with mesh cages full of laurel leaves, creating an intense concentration of perfume that extends to the neighbouring rooms. Attracted by the smell, the visitors enter a dimly lit room, where the only bright spot is a bronze sculpture representing a pair of lungs (from a close distance, one appreciates that the skin of the organ is made of golden laurel leaves). It's a magic trick : the sculpture is a reminder of

the physical aspect of the smell, made of tiny particles that travel from the leaves to noses and lungs. During a short instant, we are led to believe that the bronze lungs are our own, and that we exist both outside and inside ourselves. We see us see, we breathe us breath.

When leaving, we feel the wonder and the responsibility of carrying the work of art inside us.

It is widely accepted that sound waves do not carry matter, but that statement doesn't stop listeners from carrying the music with them : first of all because the body (or at least a part of it) vibrates with the exact frequency that is perceived, but also because music needs memory in order to spread its form.

I have tried to reproduce in music the experience proposed by Penone, imagining musical equivalents to the caress of a perfume, the search for its source, a dim lit room, the brightness of bronze... hoping that this journey can make us live, as does the installation, a moment of suspension, doubt and grace.

Pièges de neige (2018)

clarinet, cello, piano

13 minutes

Commissioned by Köln music

Première: Trio Catch - 19/02/2019, Cologne



"Man is a shepherd of being. The artist is a hunter of being. And art ? In basque, *arte* means trap : artists are cheaters, creators of traps."

This sentence, by the basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003) led me to write *Cinq pièges brefs* (five short traps) in 2012, a piano trio. I had just arrived in Paris, my catalogue was very short, and this piece, which was performed many times and broadcast by the French radio, became my visiting card. On the programme note that I wrote to accompany the score, this sentence seems now a premonition : "the artist weaves, braids, and sets up a replica – a double that will end up taking his place".

The piece has remained the same, but I couldn't but change, modifying my writing through reading and listening, evolving through curiosity and taste; a bit like Ravel, who by the end of his life could not recognise his own music, I surprised myself completely unbothered by a performance of *Cinq pièges brefs*. But that was not the case for people around me, who hears my new pieces like an extension of the first universe that they knew. What I captured of myself remains, and they recognise it better than myself.

Am I the victim of my own creation? Have I expressed such an essential trait of my music that my only option is to repeat it? On the contrary, I believe that an unconscious change works secretly; a ripening, a bubbling, a mutation. By writing new traps, *Pièges de neige*, I want to explore that effervescence and draw its concrete consequences.

Elurretan (2017)

plucked string trio - mandoline, guitar, harp

9 minutes

Commissioned by C Barré ensemble

Première: C Barré - 25/04/2017, Musique à la Ferme

[CD: *Espiègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



Elurretan (on snow), was to be the music of an image – Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow*'s music. I wanted to portrait the vast whiteness, hard and beautiful, funny and unkind. Later, other images covered the first one : Hiroshige's delicate prints, Monet translucent paintings, a lonely walk at the snowy English garden in Munich – the particular damped soundscape, that makes every noise so sharp, has a certain violence.

The title of the first movement, *Mara-mara*, is a Basque onomatopoeia that describes snow falling, generous and light. We hear small particles articulated by rhythmical interventions. I wanted to look at the flakes from afar and very close simultaneously ; to oppose the fluffy look of a snowy hill to the cutting and geometrical profile of every snow-flake, a tiny weapon, necessary gear of the cold machine. The second movement, *Irrist*, contains glissandi, that correspond to the movements on a skating rink. It is, of course, a playful movement (guitar and mandolin ping-pong the notes of a common line), but I tried to bring up, through deeper gestures, a certain intensity ; an aggravation to reveal the dramatic side of chamber music. *Dardar*, tremor, represents the cold through a constant tremolo, a vibration of the air close to a vision – like those of Andersen's match girl. A ghost appears : a melody by Ravel, *D'Anne qui me jecta de la neige*.

Elurretan is also an extension of a previous piece for guitar and electronics, *Belarretan* (sur l'herbe), which imagined the music that Titian's *Concert champêtre* might contain. The electronics opened a door to an unlimited deployment of guitar sound ; in *Elurretan* I made my ideas exist in a restrained world of instrumental sounds, willingly repetitive and dull. I was inspired by the paradox of snow : a monotony born of the repetition precious and unique objects.

Cinq pièges brefs (2013)

piano trio - violin, violoncello, piano

8 minutes

Première: DAI Contemporain - 21/02/2013, Paris

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



<< Man is a shepherd of being. The artist is a hunter of being. And art ? In basque, 'arte' means trap : artists are cheaters, creators of traps.>>

This sentence of the basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003), after Martin Heidegger, might initially look surprising. In the romantic occidental conception, the artist is refined like Mendelssohn, delicate like Chopin, or suffering like Schubert, which doesn't seem to match the paleolithic hunter Oteiza is thinking of.

Nevertheless, if Oteiza pictures an artist who is less developed than his shepherd brothers – who are a metaphor of neolithic – it is in order to explain that hunters, who don't know the stability of growing the land, are forced to a nomad life, always searching. Searching for what ? Oteiza says : being.

This agile and nervous prey, must be called in a clever way and captured with extraordinary rapidity. The mechanic tactic of a trap becomes necessary. The artist creates then an artwork, which is both a hunting device and a shelter, paradigm of a labyrinth.

An aseptic trap not to alter the being. A comfortable trap not to suffocate the being. A transparent trap to see the being change and grow to become itself the trap. Being, isn't it the first trap in which we're caught ? The artist weaves, braids and sets up a replica, a double who will end up taking his place.

Les perfectibilités – traité d'ornement (2024)

saxophone quartet

17 minutes

Commissioned by Kebyart ensemble

Première: Kebyart ensemble – 08/11/2024, Música en Segura



The beauty of imperfection is seductive... but difficult to master; how does one produce a nonchalant music, slightly undressed, styling carefully its casual-messy hair ? [...]

To the traditional ideals of perfection (harmonic, sonic, melodic, interpretative), I have opposed aesthetic countermodels to open a playing space where the notion of *improvement* bears a musical meaning. We could understand it as a representation of the writing process, which starts a draft and is then refined until it reaches its true expression. I wouldn't dare use the word *perfections* (I defy anyone to write *that* !) but am happy to call them *perfectibilities* – this bits of dust dance under the light of an absolut sun, dreaming they catch its fire.

Index (2021)

string quartet n°2

Commissioned by the Scene Nationale d'Orleans and Quatuor Diotima

18 minutes

Première: Quatuor Diotima – 26/09/2021, Festival Musica, Strasbourg



The string quartet, both a characteristic genre of written music and a privileged field for musical speculation, continues to explore the why and how of its own writing. In *Index*, I question beginnings, variations, series and endings. I have chosen to do it under the form of a list, first because it is a convenient form, but also because it is an unconventional one : *Index* is a list of lists.

The first movement, *Incipit*, presents the first measures of (almost) all of Haydn's quartets in (an almost) chronological order. At first, we appreciate the tonal, melodic and rhythmical variety, but contrasts tire the perception and listening becomes fluid, the quartets flow like waves.

The second movement, *Dix manières d'entendre la pluie*, borrows Hans Eisler's title for a more literal approach : it is a list of extended techniques under the umbrella of the rain. The paradigm of the quartet as a field for noise exploration is perhaps exhausted but, should we water nice old sounds, they might still flourish.

The third movement, *Vertige de la liste*, wears a title by Umberto Eco. In music, we speak of series; we think we know them, but a straight path can always bring to a bumpy landscape. Towards the extreme they wander, making us wonder.

The fourth movement, *C'est fini les amis*, quotes the endings of Beethovens last four quartets in a breathless countdown. The more we upstream time, the more it resists. The more we write quartets, the less we understand them ; Borges knew that an index cannot explain a library, it extends it.

Opus latericium (2018)

[fl, cl, sax, pno]

Commissioned by L'Imaginaire ensemble

14 minutes

Première: L'Imaginaire - 17/06/2018, Faubourg 12, Strasbourg



Opus latericium is a Roman construction technique based on brickwork, which became the dominant form of wall construction in the Imperial era. The triangle-shaped bricks were placed with an angle inwards (against a mass of concrete) and its opposite flat surface outwards, making the skin of the wall. It is a very solid method, as proved by the numerous buildings that remain.

The beginning of the piece is a wall. A dotted and polished surface, hard and reflective. Only the use of a certain violence can break through the bricks and access a sonorous heart, sustained and intense: a long piano solo illustrates this effort. Then, nothing but ruins — made of the same matter but unressembling, scattered rests of memory.

Opus latericium is part of a series of pieces inspired by Roman opus. It has been written in collaboration with Ensemble L'imaginaire during a residence at Royaumont Abbey.

Indicio (2016)

string quartet

Commissioned by the Diotima Quartet

18 minutes

Première: Diotima Quartet - 22/07/2016, Festival Pontino



In the film *Proof* (J. Moorhouse, 1991), a blind photographer tries to prove by his pictures that what he lives is real, even if he always needs other eyes to confirm it. His pictures are above all a testimony, maybe a story, only as a side-effect an estetic object. My string quartet wants to extend this thinking to the field of sound.

There are four movements, to be played without interruption. The first two are based on press articles widely diffused when I started writing : *ultimo rinoceronte blanco*, on the last white rhino male in Kenya, watched by armed guards (april 2015) ; *superficie de Pluton*, after the first images of the surface of Pluto, released by NASA in july 2015. A near disappearance and the promise of a discovery, heads and tails of creation.

The fourth mouvement is an homage to Robert Rauschenberg's *Gluts* (1986-95), last group of sculptures made from garbage. I tried to develop the same technique, working with music that I normally reject – as a matter of fact, the majority of my sound environment: telephone ringtones, lift music, music on hold, massively consumed pop and dance music.

Unlike the other movements, the third one withdraws from the world. An introspective garden unfolds in the centre of the piece, *jardin nunca visto*. In the film, the blind photographer's mother describes everyday the park before the house, the child speculates: if she tells the truth, he knows the view by heart; if she lies, all possibility of confidence dissapears. Why would she? The child answers: because she can. [...]

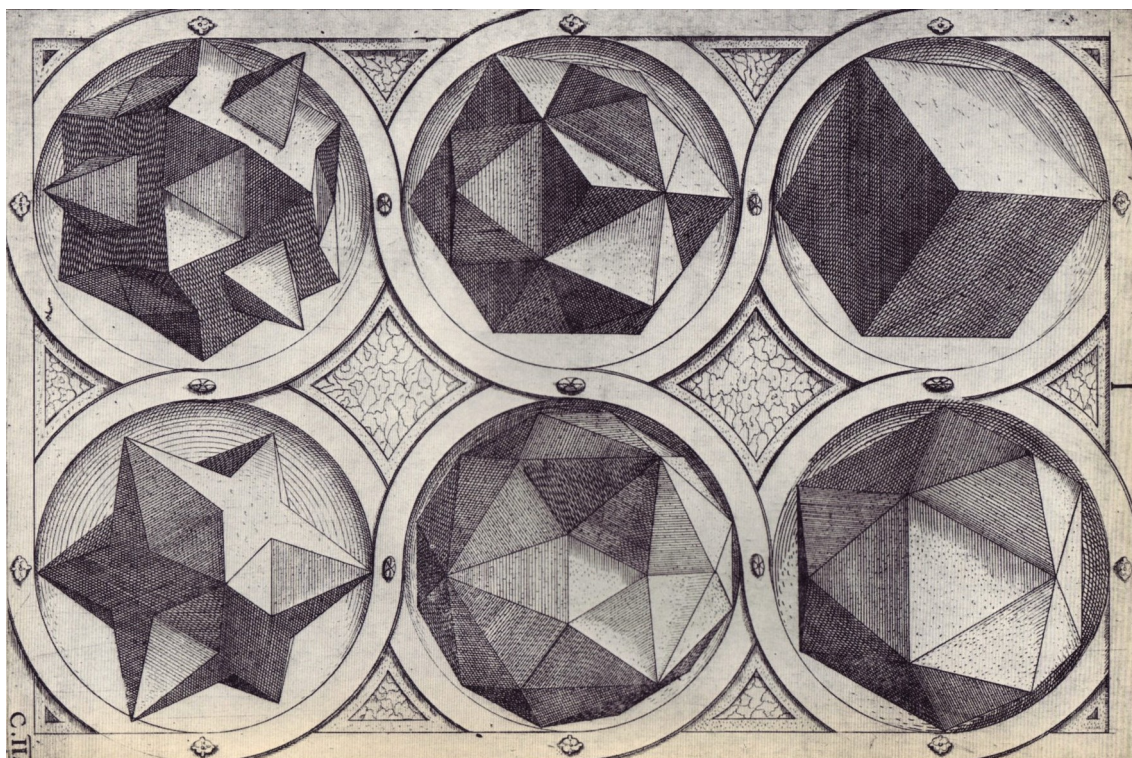
Cinco sólidos perfectos y una mariposa (2018)

piano quintet

15 minutes

Commissioned by the Saint Sebastian Music Fortnight

Première : Cuarteto Cosmos & Noelia Rodiles - 21/08/2018, San Sebastian



Platonic solids are convex regular polyhedron in three dimensional Euclidean space. There are five and only five such polyhedra: tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, dodecahedron, icosahedron. Since Plato described them in his dialog *Timaeus*, they are also known as platonic solids.

At school, these objects seemed to me extremely fragile; consistent when one imagines them growing from their equations, but incapable of standing the imperfection of matter. Their graphic representation and 3D models are false like painted marble, like a jewel in a theatre play, they shine so much that they look like they are about to break.

All music unfolds in an analog contradiction : the proportional relations between frequencies and durations are abstract, but the sound that embodies them is born, spreads and resounds in a material (imperfect) medium. Part of the theatricality in music is due to the horror inspired to intervals by their own sounding bodies.

In *Cinco solidos perfectos y una mariposa* (Five perfect solids and a butterfly) I have imagined five panels in which I associate a perfect solid to an insect, forcing the mathematical object to adopt a represented form to coexist with the animal – almost a still life : tetrahedron with beetle, cube with dragonfly, octahedron with mantis, dodecahedron with flea, icosahedron with firefly.

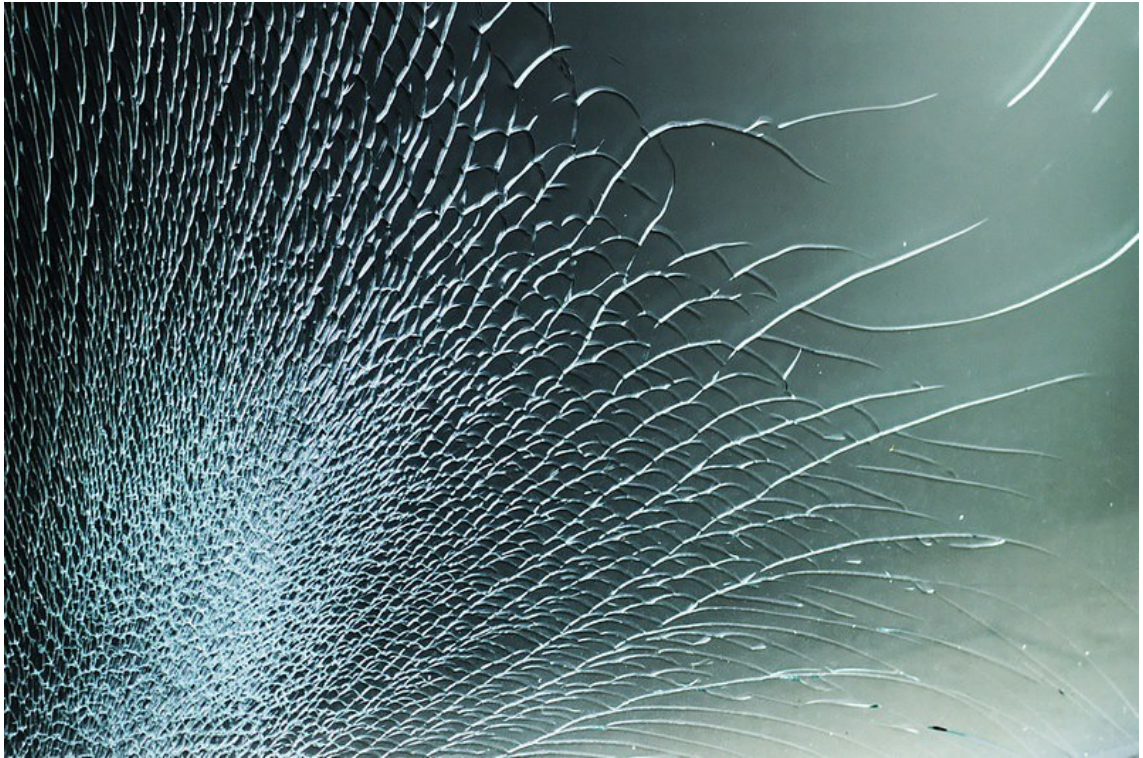
Actes manqués (2024)

for harp

9 minutes

Commissioned by the Ensemble Intercontemporain

Première : Valeria Kafelnikov



Succeeding as a harpist requires mastering arpeggios, scales, *glissandi*, and delightful melodies; having a bright, almost angelic touch. But, just this once, let's not succeed.

If the *acte manqué* (or Freudian slip) contains a hidden truth and takes a step aside from the planned direction, a series of slips would be some kind of shortcut, an erratic behaviour towards a goal that is both precise and unknown : one's desire?

I have deployed these Freudian slips on an electric and chromatic harp. These features are opposed to the instrument's traditional clarity: the amplification makes the sound more ambiguous, while the chromatic extension creates richer harmonies, allowing the possibility of a mistake.

Each movement of the piece focusses on a cliché of the harp, only to avoid it better by aiming for its breaking point. What destroys a habit also creates new music. In order to change: take a routine, introduce a pebble among the cogs, wait for the machinery to explode – and build again from its fragments.

Portmanteau (2023)

for piano

5 minutes

Commissioned by the Conservatorio Profesional de Badajoz

Première : Pupils of the Badajoz Music School – 2023, Badajoz



Portmanteau is a nicer name for blend words, but I wouldn't have chosen an English term if for a piece premiered in Spain if it didn't convey a subtle difference : I am not thinking of dull spiderwebs or scarecrows, but of spicier neologisms – brunch, spanglish, *Brangelina*. The mechanism is similar, but instead of mixing a function or a quality with a name, many of the newly coined words fusion entities of the same nature, describing hybrid realities, ambiguous beings, chimeras.

This piece presents three combinations : a competition of serenades (Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and Chopin's Nocturn in G minor) ; an eclipse of Moonlights, (Debussy feat. Beethoven) and a new shade of pink (*La vie en rose*, the *Pink Panther*). A common thread appears : Mozart and Chopin's night

finds brighter skies on the second movement, becomes later the smoke of a cabaret or the shadow of a spy. Perhaps, these unlikely figures exist better in darkness, where it is difficult to tell them apart... but the mystery cannot last; the pieces shine briefly, one wonders if their few notes were heard or just imagined.

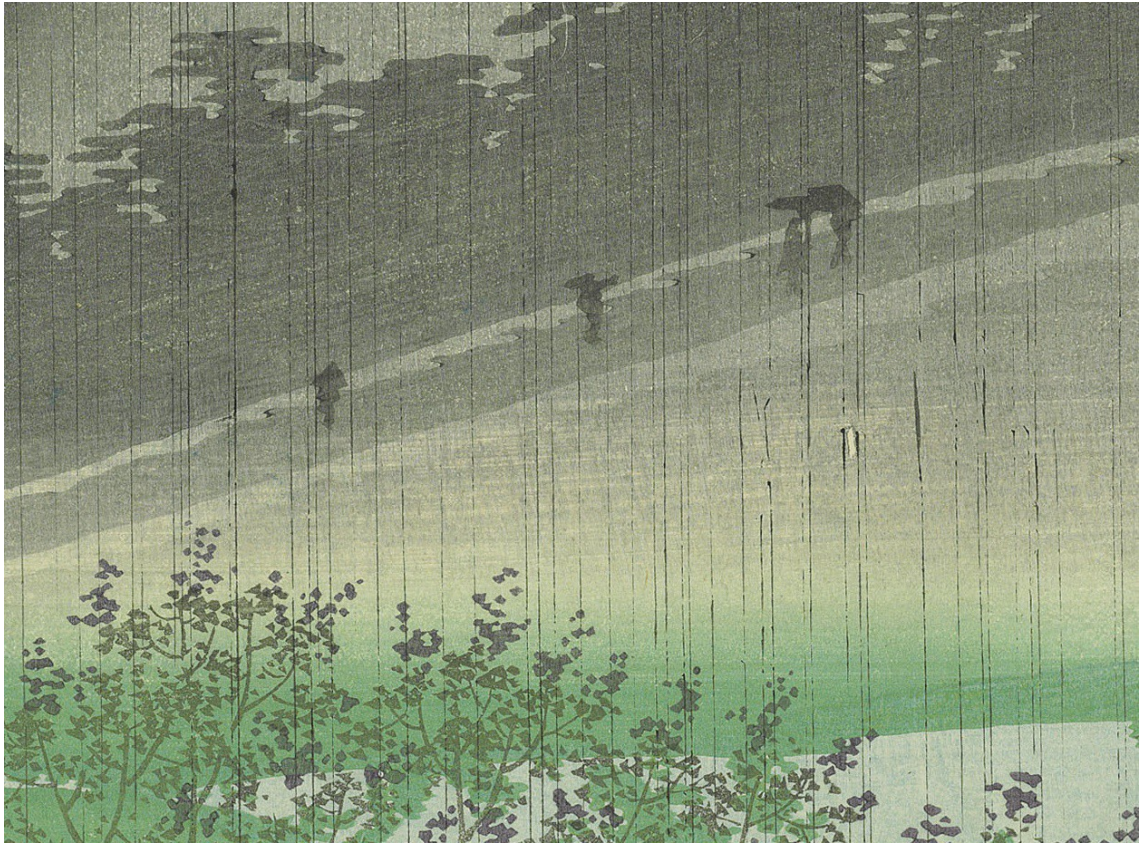
La pluie dans un verre d'eau (2022)

for flute

10 minutes

Commissioned by Acht brücken – musik für Köln

Première : Dietmar Wiesner – 01/05/2023, Cologne



Lunch in the garden on a summer day, after dessert some drops announce a storm. Guests get up, rather amused, not really rushing, saying "I can't believe this", but believing it, covering their heads with plates and heading somewhere among the trees, seeking refuge inside a house that we can not see. On the table, shiny spoons that cradle one drop, forks that pinch a cloud, knives that cut the wind.

A glass, lipstick-kissed, showing some fingerprints, containing a bread crumb, or what is left of it, is our world. It misses the recent party, the fuss of conversations, the pulse of the hand holding it, the warmth of a mouth, but it indulges under the fluid caress, it plunges in the flowing grace, it embraces the liquid touch.

Shall we look at the quiet garden through the deforming prism ? Lay at the bottom among the algae ? Navigate its currents ? Ondulate its surface ? Read its heavens ? What fortune can one guess in the clouds that travel the tiny sky of a glass of water?

Blond vénitien (2022)

for cello

10 minutes

Commissioned by Acht brucken – musik fur Koln

Première : Eva Böcker – 01/05/2023, Cologne



Venetian blonde is the fairest of red shades – so not blonde. The sun as a blind person would describe it glued on the head like a hat. More than a colour, a question : *alba o tramonto* ? Claude Lorrain himself could not have answered.

The word *Venetian* figures a bit by chance : it reminds us that during the Renaissance period women would decolour their hair with urine, only to dye it later with saffron, lemon and rhubarb. One can admire the result (without suffering the aroma) in Titian's paintings.

But since we're in Venice let's chill at Fondamente Nuove, a wharf that is blonde every evening, when the last sunrays flow on waves like liquid gold. It is a flat, solid colour that covers everything like a pigment, a lively substance, yet heavy.

Blonde feet on the blonde lagoon could easily walk the hundreds of meters to the graveyard of San Michele, where lays Luigi Nono, who loved waves, light and walks (*Sofferte onde serene, Como una ola de fuerza y luz, "Hay que caminar" sonando*). I have never heard his music live outside the concerts of the Festival d'Automne in Paris, programmed by Joséphine Markovits, a Venetian blonde.

Jupiter muscarius (2021)

violin

8 minutes

Commissioned by the I&I foundation

Première: Maja Horvat – 2022

I read this name for the first time in Winckelmann's *History of the art of antiquity*: "Muscarius, whose figure is borrowed from a fly, so that the wings form the beard; the belly forms the face; and on the head, in the place of hair, is the head of the fly". It is also the legend accompanying Jean-Baptiste Muret's drawings of three engraved stones, two of which match this fantastic description.



Euan Wall's recent research on the subject (at the French art history institute) argues that the Roman god might have never existed ; it was the fruit of combining different ancient texts to produce a "fly-warding god" from several Greek, Roman and Phoenician deities linked to flies.

Nevertheless, the existence of a Greek "Zeus Averter of Flies" is described by the geographer Pausanias : "there is a story that when Heracles the son of Alcmena was sacrificing at Olympia he was much worried by the flies. So [...] he sacrificed to Zeus Averter of Flies, and thus the flies were diverted to the other side of the Alpheius. It is said that in the same way the Eleans too sacrifice to Zeus Averter of Flies, to drive the flies out of Olympia".

Jupiter muscarius makes me think of the violin, that can sound like a fly and is divine ; the bowing gestures resemble those we make to ward off an insect. If we look closely at the instrument's articulated body, with a broad thorax and a small head, with black pegs like small antennae, and the "f" holes like jupiterian moustaches, there is no doubt : Jupiter has become an instrument to seduce our ears – and, like a bee produces honey, he produces sound, golden and sweet.

Atelier d'Escher (2020)

piano

10 minutes

Commissioned by Orléans Concours International

Première: Summer 2021



Escher's prints are a part of the popular culture of the XXth century; the taste for paradox (shared with writers like Borges), the surrealist technique (which remind's of Magritte's) and the graphic imaginary inspired by craft arts (like Klee's) shaped into striking and accessible images have enjoyed a spectacular success, hundreds of exhibitions and all kinds of editions.

Because of their success and ubiquity, some prints (especially those that are reproduced more often), have lost their ability to surprise: we think we know what we will see, so we don't pay attention anymore. Moreover, their fantastic aesthetics (with monsters and castles) links them often to the world of children. It is obviously a mistake, because the visual trick is not the only interesting thing about them, also the delicacy of its representation: characters, locations, light, always detailed and wise.

I wanted to look again at these mistreated works. I can't see them anew, but I can recall, through study, the same kind of astonishment (and satisfaction) the dizziness of the first time.

This volume has a pedagogical purpose, firstly because the pieces are not difficult (they are not easy either), but above all because they embody a simplicity of ideas typically escherian, a fondness for communication and sharing; an invitation to look at the world like we didn't know it – one must learn it young and never forget it.

Un lugar de Nueva Inglaterra en el que nunca he estado (2017)

microtonal accordion

4 minutes

Première: Iñaki Alberdi – 04/04/2018, Madrid



Charles Ives, CEO of an insurance company and renowned composer in his free time, wrote between 1912 and 1921 an orchestral suite in three movements titled *Three places in new England*, which was premiered in Boston in 1930. The first *place*, a military monument, gathers echoes of marches and songs; the second one, a gibberish of popular music; the third place, a walk in the fields, bells from afar and a nearby stream.

Ives was also a pioneer of microtonal music. His *Three quarter tone pieces* for two pianos are extremely creative and musical; they explore new harmonic possibilities with humour, lightness and a certain exactitude. When imagining my piece for microtonal accordion, I wanted to root on his freedom, using quarter tones in an expressive way instead of calculating combinations.

Although Ives thinks about three particular places, I have never been to New England – I write of ears. New England is bees and introspection, says Emily Dickinson; it is the lonely garden of pastor Simeon Pease Cheney who, between 1860 and 1880, transcribed the bird songs of the region; it is forests changing colour under the warm regular light of Edward Hopper.

Contrapluma (2016)

piano

6 minutes

Commissioned by Bozar Brussels and ECHO

Première: Mariam Batsashvili – 07/03/2016, Cologne

Published : 2019, Suvini Zerboni

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



If a man can be caressed against the sense of the hair, a bird can also be caressed against the sense of the feathers – provided that it is consenting. The man is Albrecht Dürer ; the bird, a blue roller of which he painted the wing with breathtaking precision (*Wing of a blue roller*, 1512). Caressing the wrong way allows to feel the grain, the imperfection, the unique detail.

Music can also be caressed: in this case, Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 4. The bouncing, descending arpeggio is atomised and transposed into the highest register, deprived of all its gentleness. Every cascade of notes reproduces the wavy form of a wing, the light flags of semiquavers remind the morphology of feathers. The background is grey, full of minor and major seconds, but it is illuminated by flashes of pure colour: thirds, fourths, fifths and perfect chords, brief and intense; fauvist. The different types of ascending glissando are a caress against the sense of the keys, an ascension close from flying.

Finally, we can also write against the sense of the pen – we should at least reconsider every instinct. I must have written every measure of *Contrapluma* three times, getting gradually closer to my original vision of the piece. Writing is reaching oneself the wrong way.

Belarretan (2014)

guitar and electronics

6 minutes

Première: Bertrand Chavarria-Aldrete – 07/03/2014, Paris

[CD: Carpere Fide(s). Bertrand Chavarría-Aldrete. Odradek ODRCD346]



Belarretan. In basque : on the grass. After Manet's famous *lunch* (at Musée d'Orsay), inspired by Titian's *Pastoral concert* (at the Louvre) – whose title was borrowed by Poulenc for his harpsichord concerto. In the center of Titian's painting, a richly dressed noble, whose face stays in the shadows, plays the guitar. Beside, barefoot, a shepherd looks – and probably listens as well – very closely. They are in the countryside (in the background trees, a flock, some isolated houses) in the company of two naked, almost unreal women, one of which sits holding a flûte, listening, whereas the other, standing, pours water from a jug.

What mystery turns visible the invisible, makes the noble and the shepherd equals, together in nature ? Could it be the sublime musique, sister of flowing water and bird singing, suspended in the illuminated gesture of the guitarist, whose features will remain forever unknown ?

In *Belarretan*, ten guitar pieces from the renaissance are spinning, troubled by their own echo and the amplification of parasite sounds ; the inaudible, become audible, speaks of the instrument's nature (wood, strings, metal) and the human nature (bone, flesh) that produces sound. Music is drown in music as nature drowns, to us, in nature.

Ouverture Française (2014)

accordion

3 minutes

Première: Vincent Lhermet – 15/10/2014, Lille

[CD: Rameau, hier et aujourd'hui. Vincent Lhermet. KLARTHE Audio K011]



The *French defense* is a chess opening, named after a correspondence game in 1834 between the Westminster Club in Londres and the Parisian circle of la Régence, "the place in Paris where the game is best played", *Le neveu de Rameau* (Diderot).

One must open in a protected way, measure in each step those that could follow. The musical form *ouverture à la française*, that Rameau used, seems to follow the same principles : a first majestic part feels the acoustic space, then a fast *fugato* wakes up the fingers and the mind.

In this piece that recalls Rameau, which uses a material close to his *rappel des oiseaux* (remembrance of birds), I didn't choose slowness as an opening strategy, but stammering; the first trill of a bird is always uncertain, only later it becomes insistent, urgent, obsessed.

Howl (2022)

six voices

10 minutes

Commissioned by the city council of Witten

Première: Exaudi – 07/05/2022, Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik



I need to howl! Too much lockdown is trying. Now that we approach the end (is it really the end?) relief and grief and accumulated sorrow and cheerful excitement block my throat and there seems to be no other way to unblock it: I howl.

Also: the planet is burning and no alarm is ringing. Monkeys are howling in disappearing jungles and bears on disappearing icebergs, too far to be heard. I shall howl for them. Also: the pandemic has seen a rise of economic inequalities, new tides of racist movements, migrants dying at sea. I dare not howl for those in need, but I do howl with them.

I howl with klaxons and air raid sirens, with engines and ambulances, with whistling bombs and all the explosions I can think of. I howl with the sound of cities, because their mechanical purring has forgotten how to be animal: wild, tender, caring. Every noise I invoke on the voice becomes the voice - and I would like to think that all cities, sung by human voices, can become human again.

My voice is my password (2021)

six voices

10 minutes

Commissioned by the Basque department for culture

Première: Neue Vocalsolisten – 12/02/2023, Festival Présences

[CD: *Espiègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



I could recently hear my sister-in-law yelling at her telephone : "my voice is my password", trying to convince an algorithm somewhere that she had the right to access her bank account. Voice authentication is an effective technology, but not flawless.

Cheaper than humans, machines have colonized all customer services. They identify users, make them wait, direct them to the proper interlocutor, and sometimes solve problems themselves. One could hope that with their help the quality of the service would improve ; but it is worse. Both public and private companies (in areas such as health, work assistance, and communication) are offering subfunded, completely disfunctional services in which a machine-run system forwards calls from a receiver to the next one in an endless loop.

This unkind, dehumanizing assistance is far from being innocent and is eloquent about the society we live in. We are replacing humans with machines when the technology is not ready, even before figuring out what to do with the displaced workers, the digital illiterates and the elderly.

In "my voice is my password" I reproduce different customer service situations. "Dial" uses the sounds of a telephone call, "Greeting" explores the fluidity of human contact as opposed to a mechanical environment, "Conversation" portraits an impossible communication, and "Are you a robot?" brings swing to captchas. The whole piece is written in the key of humour ; because irony is my voice – and my voice is my password.

Songs of Spam (2019)

[2sopr, alto, tenor, barytone, bass, cl, sax, acc, perc, mand, guit, double bass]

13 minutes

Commissioned by C Barré and the Ernst Von Siemens Music Foundation

Première: Neue Vocalsolisten & C Barré – 09/02/2020, Stuttgart

[CD: *Espègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



Songs of Spam uses a text found in my spam folder. These undesired, often rough messages, use the most aggressive marketing techniques (lies, threats, manipulation) showing that publicity is a mechanism of mind control. The first movement is built on the Nigerian Prince scam, the second one endlessly repeats one of Trump's favourite expressions ("billions and billions"), the third movement sets into music the description of a miracle, and the fourth one elaborates a teleshopping advertisement. All of them have in common the will to bully us; thinking or writing about it is an act of resistance.

Alfabet (2019)

poems by Inger Christensen

[soprano, double bell trumpet, clarinet and percussion]

16 minutes

Commissioned by the WDR and Cumulus

Première: Sarah Sun & Musikfabrik soloists – 12/05/2019, Witten



Alfabet is an astonishing poetry collection by Inger Christensen, published in 1981 and later translated and appreciated worldwide. It is, obviously, a volume about the alphabet — each poem focuses on words starting with the same letter — but, more precisely, it is a volume about the alphabet's creative power: giving a name is also giving existence. This generative approach is stressed by formal choices (the first poems are a list of existing things), vocabulary (plants, animals, chemical elements), and the use of Fibonacci sequence (where every element is equal to the sum of the two previous ones: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13...) to determine the length of each poem.

In order to show the evolution of Christensen's writing, I have chosen separate texts: the first three poems, that illustrate clearly the alphabetical and the arithmetical approach; the sixth, that relates elements to their environment; and the fourteenth, which introduces nouns and metaphors. The

instrumentation follows the idea of accumulation present in *Alfabet*: *abrikostraerne findes* is written for solo voice; *bregnerne findes* for voice and trumpet; *cikaderne findes* for voice, trumpet, and percussion; *fiskehejren findes* for voice and clarinet (this is an exception in the growing logic); *navnene findes* is a tutti. The last movement, *Barentshaven*, is a list of place names arranged as a duo for voice and percussion.

I got to know *Alfabet* through a bilingual (Danish/French) edition. It was marvellously translated in French but, due to the alphabetical features of the text, I spent most of the time reading the unknown Danish words, as it was more satisfying to see them all begin with the same letter. This mysterious northern language (in which I could hear the long winter nights, rabbits hiding under ferns, wild strawberries), made me want to say the words out loud, to unravel the world they hid. One can only try; like in any other language, the essence of a word remains unspeakable, its domain unending, and its secret untouched.

I nalt be clode on the frolt (2018)

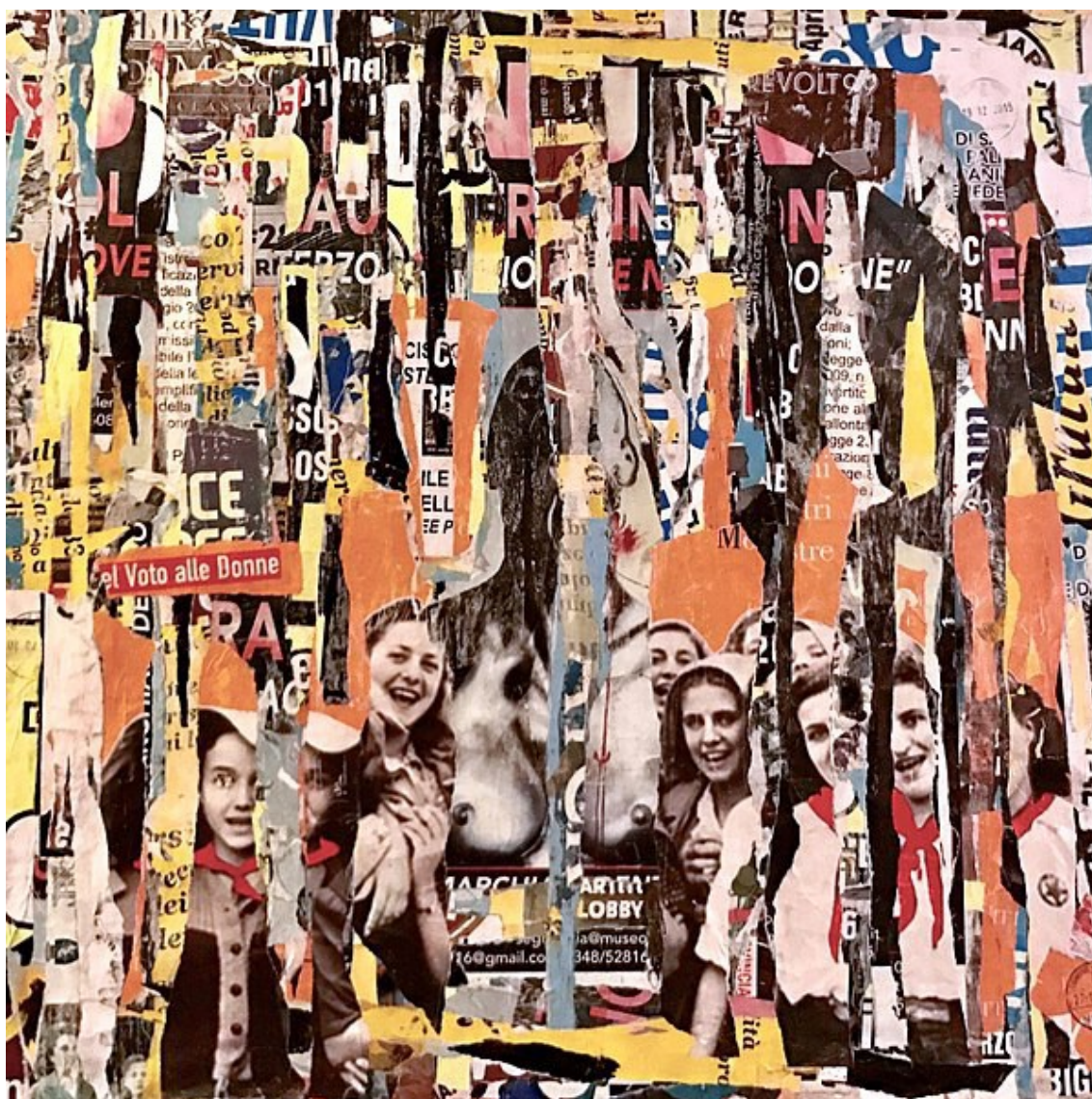
[soprano, flute, oboe, clarinet, harp, piano, percussion, violin, viola and cello]

10 minutes

Commissioned by Radio France and L'Instant Donné

Première: M. Tassou & L'Instant Donné – 17/04/2018, Radio France

[CD : *Cherche Titre*, Marion Tassou, L'Instant Donné, Odradek ODRCD434]



Among the texts of Helmut Lachenmann's lied *Got lost*, we find a small note about a lost laundry basket, written in a childish, funny way. Next to Pessoa's or Nietzsche's more ambitious texts, it could easily go unnoticed, but I was surprised by its theatrical possibilities. I searched several classified ad websites for similar jewels in order to follow my intuition. [...]

Four songs inspired by ads are completed by a fifth anti consumption movement named after a phrase by Henry David Thoreau : *The wind that blows is all that anybody knows*.

More sweetly forgot (2017)

poems by Sappho / Carson

[soprano, saxophone, accordion and percussion]

12 minutes

Commissioned by C Barré ensemble

Première: Sarah Sun and C barré Ensemble— 11/10/2017, Nicosia

[CD: *Espiègle*. C Barré & Neue Vocalsolisten. Empreinte digitale ED13263]



More sweetly forgot is a cycle of four songs on Sappho's verses. Like most of her poems, they were meant to be sung to a music that no longer exists; time has left us only very short fragments, often containing a word alone. Sappho, the famous and free poet, the lesbian and creative musician, has often been betrayed by her translators who, judging her fragments too brief, have joined and modified them. The Canadian poet Anne Carson, sensitive to the erasing, proposes a faithful version in which fragments appear on different pages that they rarely fill. She also invents a sign for disappearance: the character] stands for a missing or unreadable word.

I have tried to transcribe that emptiness as much as the writing. In the first song, the singing on consonants reminds of lost words. The articulations of the voice are then echoed by the instruments, that weave a thread of doubles. The second song is built on one word: *youth*. It is very moving to read it on a manuscript that is more that 2000 years old. This word, that survived all the others on the same poem, is a symbol of endurance. *Being* young is not important as long as one *stays* young.

The third song, in *sprechgesang*, shows a different way of approaching disappearance and oblivion. As the soprano creates a softer atmosphere (by asking colleagues to play *more sweetly*, we finally hear it: love. A very slow fourth song. A message tender and visionary. *Someone will remember us...*

Sobre lo apenas entrevisto (2015)

poems by Su Xiaoxiao

[mezzo-soprano, guitar, accordion and percussion]

13 minutes

Commissioned by the BBVA Foundation

Première: Carola Schlüter and Smash Ensemble – 24/03/2015, Bilbao



|
sobre lo apenas entrevisto
una pregunta
creí leerlo en el vuelo del pájaro
el cruce temido el movimiento de los tobillos
al andar
me dije cuál será la dureza de las uñas
el tamaño de los huesos tras la piel

|
*on the glimpsed
a question
I thought I read it in the flight of the bird
the feared crossroad the movement of the ankles
walking
I told myself what is the hardness of nails
the size of bones under the skin*

White nights (2014)

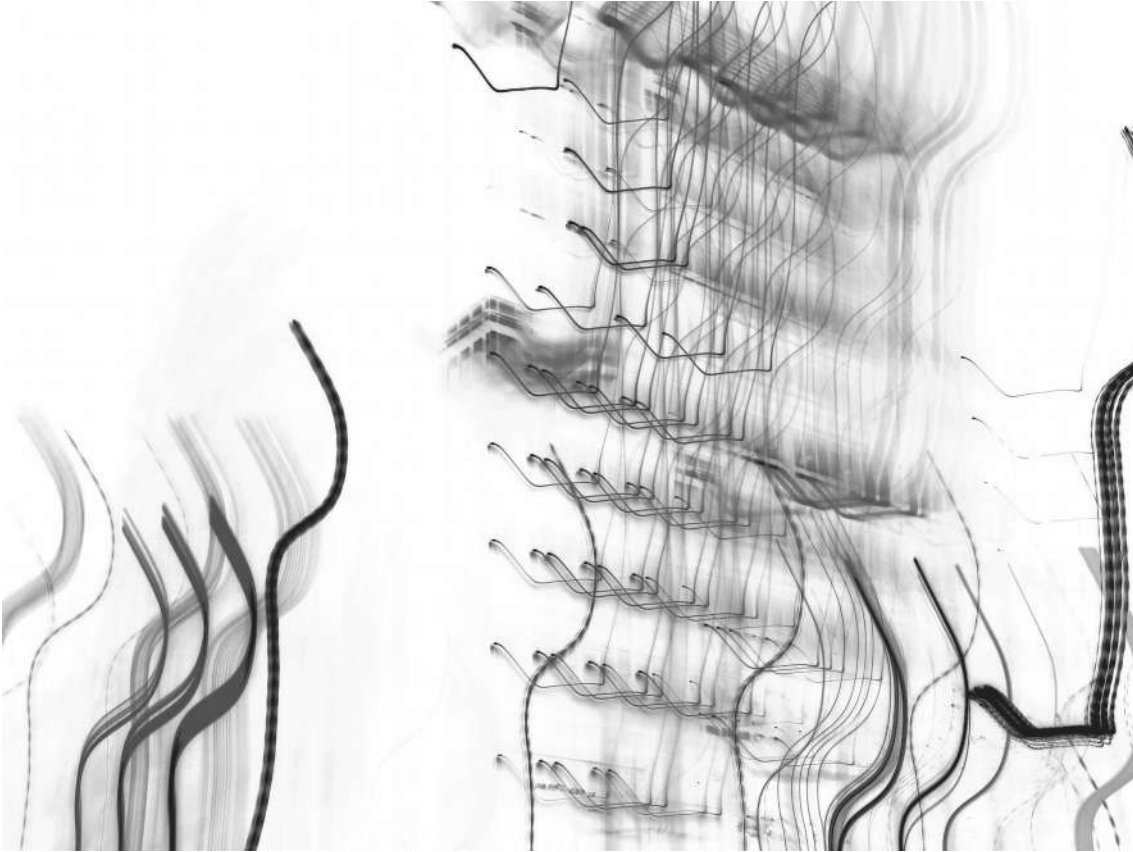
poems by Paul Auster

soprano and string quartet

12 minutes

Programme Voix nouvelles Royaumont

Première: Sarah Sun and Quatuor Diotima – 28/09/2014, Royaumont Abbey



Choosing Paul Auster's poetry, better known for his novels, could seem rather capricious, as the languages I can read lack no poets. Nevertheless, apart from the quality of his writing, there are two elements that have seduced me :

On the one hand, most of his poetry – including the four poems I selected – belongs to a period of youth spent in Paris, in difficult material conditions. This period announces and contains everything that his novels will accomplish, both as a crystal ball and an egg.

The spherical metaphor pleases me particularly because it appeals also to the round form of the poems - constructed very often through repetition - and to their solidity, such a high density that we find ourselves paradoxically in void.

On the other hand, there is the simplicity of the language, almost that of the novels, that presents images in an immediate, powerful way, like a juggler throws knives or fire torches. Because I like understanding the text, this becomes an important asset : it is pointless to use lyrics if the poem is folded within itself ; these poems unfold so that we can admire them.

Chiisana tsubame (2021)

[Noh voice and cello]

15 minutes

Commissioned by Ryoko Aoki

Première: Ryoko Aoki and Ayano Kamimura – 12/01/2022, Tokyo



Oscar Wilde's tales are special : sad and mature, unafraid of complexity. The relatively simple plot of *The happy prince* hides a subtle relation between its two moving characters (the prince and the swallow), which has allowed me to develop an intimate, psychological approach to the singing, while preserving the storytelling qualities of the Noh genre.

The story is as follows : the statue of the happy prince asks a swallow to detach progressively all the jewels and gold leaves that ornate it in order to feed the poor. Having stayed until winter instead of migrating, the bird dies of cold. I have decided to avoid the *deus ex machina* resurrection (on Wilde's text), because I prefer ambiguous endings.

Since the Noh singer embodies two characters, there is a mask standing in the middle of the scene, like a statue, which allows the singer to represent the prince when standing behind it, and the swallow when moving around (using the fan as an only wing). As the music goes on, the difference between the characters becomes uncertain in terms of musical writing and dramatic representation.

Oscar Wilde famously said that "the whole of Japan is a pure invention" ; he might have meant that he saw the country through the fantastic engravings, sculptures and drawings, rather than through his eyes. The cultural distance between the East and the West is now narrower : we might as well add to the list anime and literature, gastronomy and architecture. Reversely, many Japanese children might have grown with American films, French pastries, or Wilde's tales. Our cultural borders are blurred by a constant migration of swallows bringing jewels across the continent. Unlike the happy prince, the more we share, the brighter we become.

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