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ART

It's Hard to Get People to Look at Art. Will They Listen to It Instead?

Artists are using sound in new ways to reach audiences raised on podcasts and streaming platforms.

By Taylor Dafoe

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Cevdet Erek, *Americas*, 2026, at SculptureCenter, New York. Photography by Charles Benton. Image courtesy of the artist and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

For the artist Cevdet Erek, whose solo exhibition “Americas” is on view at SculptureCenter in Queens through Dec. 28, the way we listen has as much to do with acoustics as it does with “our psychology, our experience, our education.” The Turkish artist maps the increasingly nuanced ways in which artists can articulate meaning through sound to rapid advancements in sound technology, noting that what was cutting-edge music software even just a decade ago is now readily downloadable for free. In other words, what we hear is all about *how* we hear.

A former student of architecture and sound engineering who has translated hatch marks on rulers and the dates of coup d’états in 20th-century Turkey into musical scores, Erek has filled SculptureCenter’s underground galleries with a blend of metal guitars (he’s the drummer of the long-running Turkish prog rock band called Nekropsi) and urban clangs. In his new Musique concrète commission *Sound/Artwork,* 2026, the steel squeals of the nearby Queensboro Bridge compete with breathy beats recreated from Vito Acconci’s performance in SculptureCenter’s 1984 exhibition “Sound/Art.”

That show, an early milestone in the emergence of the medium, posed sound art as a form of sculpture, even as most of the participants were, like Acconci, performance artists. Barbara London, the curator of another pioneering exhibition, 1979’s “Sound Art” at MoMA, wrote that the medium’s primary purpose is to “stimulate the observer’s visual imagination.” Her definition was blunt: “Sound Art pieces are more closely allied to art than to music, and are usually presented in the museum, gallery, or alternative space.”