

DIRECTIONS

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY

JUNE 26 - SEPTEMBER 30, 1990



*Recycled Records*, 1984.

Vinyl photograph record fragments; 12 inches in diameter.

Collection of the artist, courtesy Tom Cagliani Gallery, New York. Photo: Peter Muscato.

**C**HRISTIAN MARCLAY LEADS THE artistic double life of a performer and sculptor. In solo and collaborative efforts with other avant-garde composers and musicians, he spins, throws, and otherwise mistreats phonograph records on several turntables to produce a collage of sounds with scratches, skips, and other noises. Borrowing records, stereo speakers, and other elements from the domain of music, he makes witty objects and installations, seeking to create visual references to sound.

Raised in Geneva, Switzerland, Marclay moved to Boston in 1977 to study sculpture at the Massachusetts College of Art. During weekend trips to New York, he frequented downtown clubs where visual artists such as Dan Graham and avant-garde rock groups such as DNA performed. The Punk Rock movement, which was at its height during that time, advocated the idea that anyone, no matter how musically untrained, could make music. The untrained Marclay became attracted to the movement's raw energy and emancipating message.

In 1979, while still in college, Marclay formed his first performance group, The Bachelors, Even, a duo with guitarist Kurt Henry. The name referred to the famous work by the artist Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (Large Glass)*, 1915–23. Marclay's interest in Duchamp and the French-born artist's insistence that art be more than merely "retinal" continues to inform his work. In 1980 Marclay moved to New York and formed a second group, Mon Ton Son, which consisted of a guitarist, a classical violinist, and himself on records. By this time, he had begun his signature practice of cutting up records and reassembling them to form new ones that he then plays.

Marclay, who is fully aware that records are icons for a generation reared on rock music, also considers them potent symbols of youth, fun, and freedom. In the age of the compact disc, records are carriers of history, more tactile and, therefore, seemingly more substantial. Because of the fragility of their surfaces and because every nick can be heard when played, records must be carefully tended: kept clean and stored in a dry, cool place. They are becoming increasingly rare commodities and can be fetishes for those who resist new technology. Marclay exploits these associations in his record-objects.

During the early 1980s, Marclay concentrated on his performance work. He continued to recombine records into what he termed "recycled records" (cover). Using

the vinyl phonograph disc as a material, he carved, fragmented, then reconstructed each record, treating it sculpturally. By combining discs of different colors and designs, Marclay created collages of striking visual patterns. Each of the recycled records is a unique work, reversing the mass-produced nature of the original records. Marclay maintains that he has always considered a record to be an object first, "a physical transcription of sound,"<sup>1</sup> before becoming music. These earlier works can be played on a turntable but with some damage to the needle. Of the many artist-created discs, Marclay's are perhaps most related to the works of Milan Knížák, who was associated with Fluxus, a loosely affiliated international group of artists who were involved in performance activities beginning in the 1960s. Knížák sliced and recombined different records and added objects such as safety pins and plastic toys to his discs.<sup>2</sup>

As in his recycled records, Marclay's subsequent recordings are also comprised of music and sounds that are borrowed from diverse sources, making them his own through their recombination. This appropriation of music parallels the borrowing of images practiced by contemporary artists such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, both of whom are much admired by Marclay.

*Record without a Cover*, 1985, was Marclay's first solo recording. A vinyl disc on which his compositions had been recorded, he intended that it be distributed without a cover. Whatever abuse befell the record was incorporated into the music. Through the simple gesture of eliminating its packaging, Marclay challenged the inviolability of the record surface and the uniformity of recorded music. Composer John Cage's allowance for ambient sounds in his creations became a physical reality in Marclay's work.

Marclay's second record, *Untitled*, 1987, was grooveless with a gold label and packaged in a luxurious black pouch. Completely nonfunctional, it is very much an object to be collected and exists in a limited edition of fifty signed and numbered examples. *Untitled* is Marclay's comment upon the commodity aspect of music, the fact that "music is something free but available for trade when recorded."

Another nonfunctional work is *Secret*, 1988. Although Marclay's music is recorded on this nickel-plated disc, a padlock restricts one from hearing it. Only five of these discs exist, making them even more precious than *Untitled*. They are also more perplexing objects since the potential for sound exists. As a result





Fig. 3. *Tape Fall*, 1989. Recorded magnetic tape, revox, ladder; variable dimensions. Courtesy Tom Coughlin Gallery, New York. Installation at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1989. Photo: Peter Muscato.

of furniture to imply a human presence compound the allusions to the erotic.

The exception to Nauman's silent works is *Tape Fall*, 1989 (fig. 3), which was sparked by his interest in magnetic recording tape as a possible sculptural material. Tape is used in the recording process, and Nauman experimented with the material, constantly unwinding it and watching it spill. Its watery quality eventually suggested the work. The sound track to *Tape Fall* was

his first conscious effort to reproduce sound from nature. The same collaging method he used in other recordings was used here, as he combined various tracks of the sound of dripping water using the latest digital technology. The sound of *Tape Fall* is a soft, comforting, nonintrusive accompaniment to the gradual flow and accumulation of tape. The attached ladder provides access to the tape machine for whoever loads the tapes. This activity adds an element of performance that becomes an important aspect of the work. The first *Tape Fall* was installed at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1989. After the exhibition closed, Nauman collected the tape in bottles and sold it as *Bottled Water*, 1990.

Time, which is a crucial element of music, is also an integral part of Nauman's *Tape Fall*. The tape builds up as time passes, giving the work an organic life of its own. In his records, Nauman allows random events such as scratches to alter what is traditionally thought of as a "finished" piece of music. Similarly, in *Tape Fall*, uncontrollable forces such as gravity are permitted constantly to transform a work of sculpture, a medium usually associated with static, defined forms. This interest in sculptural form as developed through time has its precedence in the Process Art of the 1960s and 1970s in which artists such as Eva Hesse and Richard Serra incorporated pliable materials and chance into their work.

Nauman's sculptures are his attempt to depict the fleeting and immaterial phenomenon of sound. With a Duchampian cleverness and love of puns, he creates pieces that refer to works by earlier modern artists and comment upon contemporary issues concerning the originality and commodification of art and music. Aware of the power of music, he capitalizes on the associations it evokes and on a generation's obsession with its technical accoutrements.

*Amada Cruz*  
Assistant Curator

1. All unattributed quotes are from a March 15, 1990, interview with the artist.

2. For a listing of the artist's records, see Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier, ed., *Broken Music*, exhibition catalog (Berlin: DAAD and Gebel Musik, 1989).

of this impeded access to something coveted, a sense of unfulfilled desire pervades *Secret*. This same feeling of frustration exists in Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise*, 1916, a sculpture consisting of a ball of twine secured between two brass plates. Whatever lies inside is thus an unattainable mystery.

Marclay's *Sound Sheet*, 1990, is comprised of numerous clear flexidiscs that are sewn together. Flexidiscs are pliable, translucent versions of records typically found in magazines or cereal boxes. *Sound Sheet* contains recordings of his music, and if one were to remove the stitching, the discs could be played. Sewn together, they form a transparent curtain, a phantom-like representation of sound.

Record covers, which are meant to give visual clues to an aural experience, also receive special treatment from Marclay. He carves out the words or pictures and replaces them with additions from other record covers. Rectangles of solid color block out titles or figures, transforming these once functional jackets into abstractions reminiscent of the Suprematist compositions of the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich. Viewers are left guessing about the former identities of Marclay's now-masked jackets. In the textual covers, titles or images are replaced to create a series full of spiritual or religious references.

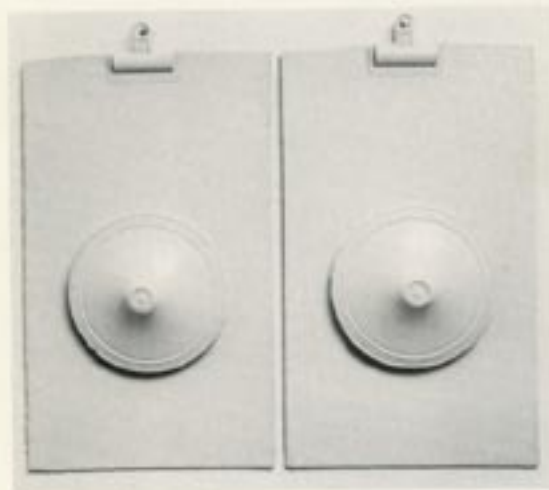


Fig. 1. *Breasts*, 1989. Silicone rubber, metal clips; 16¼ x 18½ x 2 inches overall. Courtesy Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York. Photo: Peter Muscato.

Marclay's sculptures, which are recent creations, are his attempts "to comment on sound without sound being heard." Perhaps the most striking aspect of these objects is their muteness. By virtue of the materials from which they are made, their lack of sound can be all the more haunting. *Cross*, 1987, for example, is comprised of six stereo speakers stacked and joined together. The symbolism of the Christian icon is enhanced by the black and soundless speakers, resulting in an eerie depiction of dead silence.

The same sense of mortality permeates *Chorus*, 1988, a photographic assemblage consisting of cropped and enlarged images of open mouths taken from books, newspapers, and magazines. Framed in old wood frames, they are arranged closely together like the sitters in a group portrait. The cropping eliminates any other identifying traits of those depicted. The isolated open mouths, particularly those with teeth, are at once menacing and humorous. Their muffled cries suggest a loss, as if the work were a memorial to a past event.

Nostalgia also surrounds much of Marclay's work. His use of old records or everyday objects, which have an added texture of age, is his conscious decision to tap into our longing for the familiar. Marclay refers to nostalgia in the same way as advertisers, who for the most part are only too aware of its powerful lure. In *Suitcases*, 1988 (fig. 2), speakers are embedded in antique luggage. F-holes, the sound holes seen on stringed instruments such as violins, are carved into an old, attractively worn door in *Door*, 1988. This work refers to an earlier photograph by Man Ray entitled *Le Violon d'Ingres*, 1924, a depiction of a nude woman with F-holes in her back sitting in a pose taken directly from a painting by the Neoclassical artist J. A. D. Ingres. For Marclay, recordings, both photographic and musical, are always implicitly about the past.

An alignment of the mechanical and sexual occurs in many of Marclay's works. Marcel Duchamp, whose work greatly influenced him, was the master of this strategy, finding in the machine an appropriate metaphor for the erotic. Marclay's *Breasts*, 1989 (fig. 1), is two silicone rubber casts of the face of a stereo speaker. Its protruding conical forms in a spongy, tactile material have an obvious anthropomorphic reference. Duchamp had made a version of a breast in pink foam rubber, *Prêtre de Toucher*, 1947, as a cover for an exhibition catalog. Another sculpture of Marclay's, *Tête à Tête*, 1990, presents the speakers in their original indented forms as plates set in a table laid for two. The reference to feeding and intimacy, and the use



Fig. 2. *Suitcases*, 1988. Suitcases, stereo speakers; 18½ x 67 x 40 inches overall. Courtesy Tom Cagliani Gallery, New York. Photo: Peter Muscatta.



## BIOGRAPHY

Born in San Raphael, California, January 11, 1955. Educated at Ecole Supérieure d'Art Visuel, Geneva, 1975-77; Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, 1977-80. B. F. A., 1980. Awards include: Artists Fellowship, New York Foundation for the Arts, 1985; Visual Artists Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts, 1985; Edgenössisches Kunststipendium, Bundesamt für Kulturpflege, Bern, 1986. Albums include *Record without a Cover* (1985), *Untitled* (1987), *Footsteps and More Encores* (1989). Lives and works in New York.

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1987 The Clocktower, New York, *Christian Marclay: 850 Records*.  
1988 Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York (also 1989, 1990); Gelbe Musik, Berlin, *Christian Marclay: One Thousand Records*.  
1989 Galerie Rivolta, Lausanne, *Christian Marclay "Pochettes de Disques."*

## SELECTED PERFORMANCES

- 1981 Franklin Furnace, New York.  
1982 Palladium, Geneva, Switzerland.  
1983 New Music America Festival, Washington, D. C., P. S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York.  
1984 Roulette, New York (also 1987).  
1985 New Music America Festival, Los Angeles; La Mama, New York; The Kitchen, New York, Ghosts.  
1986 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, *Dead Stories* (with singers); Pyramid Arts Center, Rochester, New York, *Carnival's Quamel, Bring Your Own; Performing Garage*, New York, *Dead Stories* (with singers).  
1986 Württembergischen Kunstverein, Stuttgart, *Record Manipulations*.  
1989 The Kitchen, New York, *Christian Marclay and Perry Hoberman: No Salesman Will Call* (collaboration).  
1990 The Knitting Factory, New York.

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Kimmelman, Michael. "Searching for Some Order in a Show Based on Chaos." *New York Times*, September 15, 1989, sec. C, p. 20.

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Rechler, Glenn. "On the B-Side." *New York Press* 1 (April 29, 1988): 1, 4-7. Statement.

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Saltz, Jerry. "Beautiful Dreamer: Christian Marclay's 'The Beatles.'" *Arts Magazine* 64 (December 1989): 21-22.

Smith, Roberta. "Art that Hails from the Land of Déjà Vu." *New York Times*, June 4, 1989, pp. 29, 38.

Tallman, Susan. "Sound and Vision: Multiples by Not Vital and Christian Marclay." *Arts Magazine* 63 (May 1989): 17-18.

Watrous, Peter. "Hip-Hop Meets the Modernists." *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1989, sec. 2, p. 32.

## CHECKLIST

All works are courtesy Tom Cugliani Gallery, New York, unless noted otherwise.

*Recycled Records*, 1980-86. Nine vinyl phonograph records made of record fragments; each 12 inches in diameter. Collection of the artist.

*Recycled Records*, 1983. Five vinyl phonograph records made of record fragments; each 7 inches in diameter. Collection of the artist.

*Recycled Records*, 1983. Vinyl phonograph record fragments; 9½ inches in diameter. Collection of the artist.

*Record without a Cover*, 1985. Vinyl phonograph record; 12 inches in diameter. Private collection.

*Cross*, 1987. Stereo speakers; 92½ x 60 x 8½ inches. F. Roos Collection, Zug, Switzerland.

*Roundabout*, 1987. 78 rpm shellac compound phonograph records on wood; 43½ x 28 inches. The Progressive Corporation, Cleveland, Ohio.

*Untitled*, 1987. Vinyl phonograph record, ultra-sonic pouch; record, 12 inches in diameter; pouch, 12¼ inches in diameter. Private collection.

*Candle*, 1988. Beeswax, wick, gramophone horn; 31 x 36 x 26 inches overall. F. Roos Collection, Zug, Switzerland.

*Chorus*, 1988. Framed black-and-white photographs; 56 x 74 inches overall. Robert Shiffer Collection.

*Door*, 1988. Wood door; 79¼ x 29½ inches. Jedermann Collection, N. A.

*Music Box*, 1988. Record covers, glue, wood; 12½ x 12½ x 12½ inches. Daniel Newburg Gallery, New York.

*Ring*, 1988. 45 rpm vinyl phonograph records; 28 inches in diameter overall.

*Secret*, 1988. Nickel-plated 45 rpm phonograph record, padlock; 2 x 8½ x 7 inches overall. Ilyse Soutine and Christian Eckart, New York.

*Suitcases*, 1988. Suitcases, stereo speakers; 18½ x 67 x 40 inches overall.

*Untitled*, 1988-89. Fourteen record cover collages; each 12¼ x 12¼ inches.

*Breasts*, 1989. Silicone rubber, metal clips; 16¼ x 18½ x 2 inches overall.

*Five Cubes*, 1989. Vinyl phonograph records; 24 x 50 x 45 inches overall. Eileen and Michael Cohen.

*Footsteps*, 1989-90. Vinyl phonograph record, record cover, poster; record: 12 inches in diameter, record cover: 12¼ x 12¼ inches, poster: 36 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

*Bottled Water*, 1990. Glass bottle, recorded magnetic tape, cork stopper, sealing wax; 12¼ inches high. Edition 1 of 150. The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

*Sound Sheet*, 1990. Flexidiscs, thread; approximately 11 x 9 feet.

*Tape Fall*, 1989. Recorded magnetic tape, revox, ladder; variable dimensions. Installation for Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

*Tête à Tête*, 1990. Wood table, stereo speakers; 29½ x 60 x 24 inches.



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