



Marcus Fischer

What Was Lost and What Remains

03 Nov 2023 – 11 Feb 2024

How are we changed by loss? What is an acceptable amount of loss? What do we do with our experience of loss?

These are questions Marcus Fischer has asked himself for years.

In his music, Fischer regularly explores “generation loss”: the way that recorded sound gains character as it decays. He accomplishes this by recording sound upon sound using the same length of magnetic tape, foregrounding each subsequent layer while forcing the past to be overwritten, even erased. Because tape is a physical material, the degradation from repeatedly adding sound can be seen as well as heard. Things begin to distort and transform in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Which is to say, it’s a lot like life. Loss takes numerous forms, manifesting in varied ways. Loss is both intangible and felt — that is, loss is defined by an absence, yet it resonates in, even afflicts, our bodies. Loss changes us, often irreparably. Moving from the sonic artifacts of loss into the physical, Fischer has explored ways to illustrate these ideas through objects, all without leaving sound behind. The exploration has led to engagements with unfamiliar materials and methods: melting and casting brass, letterpress printing on fabric, and mapping data in spreadsheets to convert charts into graphic scores.

The anchoring piece in *What Was Lost and What Remains* is a sound installation titled *Mass* that began as a way to grasp the ever-increasing multitudes of individuals killed or injured in mass shootings each year in the United States. In late 2021, Fischer began to think more concertedly about gun violence in his home country, specifically the reality of mass shootings here versus elsewhere in the world.

Using information collected by the Gun Violence Archive, Fischer plotted the data points from the calendar year of 2022 onto charts. These charts, in turn, became graphic scores that provided a framework for the sound of *Mass*: an arc of twelve speakers resting on twelve concrete cylin-

ders. Each speaker vibrates an array of spent bullet casings with each movement of the composition, matching the frequency and intensity of shootings that occurred in each corresponding month.

(This process is commonly referred to as “sonification.”) Fischer’s *Mass* is as much about the subject matter as it is about transforming cold, statistical data into something that the viewer feels in their body and also hears with their ears. *Mass* was developed during Fischer’s time as the sound artist in residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska.

What Was Lost and What Remains is a collection of work addressing themes of loss, generational trauma, and gun violence in America. It also serves as a container to make space for certain things — issues, experiences, feelings, histories — that often aren’t easy to talk about.

Works in the exhibition

A (L-R)

Score for Sine Wave Duet 2023

Slow modulation of sine waves eventually introducing pink noise

17 × 11.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Score for Sine Waves and Pink Noise 2023

15 × 11 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Score for a Trio 2023

15 × 11 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

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Score for Building a Wall 2023

For any number of participants at any duration.
11 × 15 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Score for Ryuichi (Stones on Piano Strings) 2022

14 × 11.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Movement Score 2023

For any number of participants at any duration.
Vary the speed of your movements based on the density of the graphic.

11.5 × 17.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

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Sound Portrait of Low Tide at Suquamish 2022

Stones submerged and exposed with the water in the spaces in between

17.5 × 11.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Score for Rhythm Clusters (With Accents) 2023

14 × 11 in.

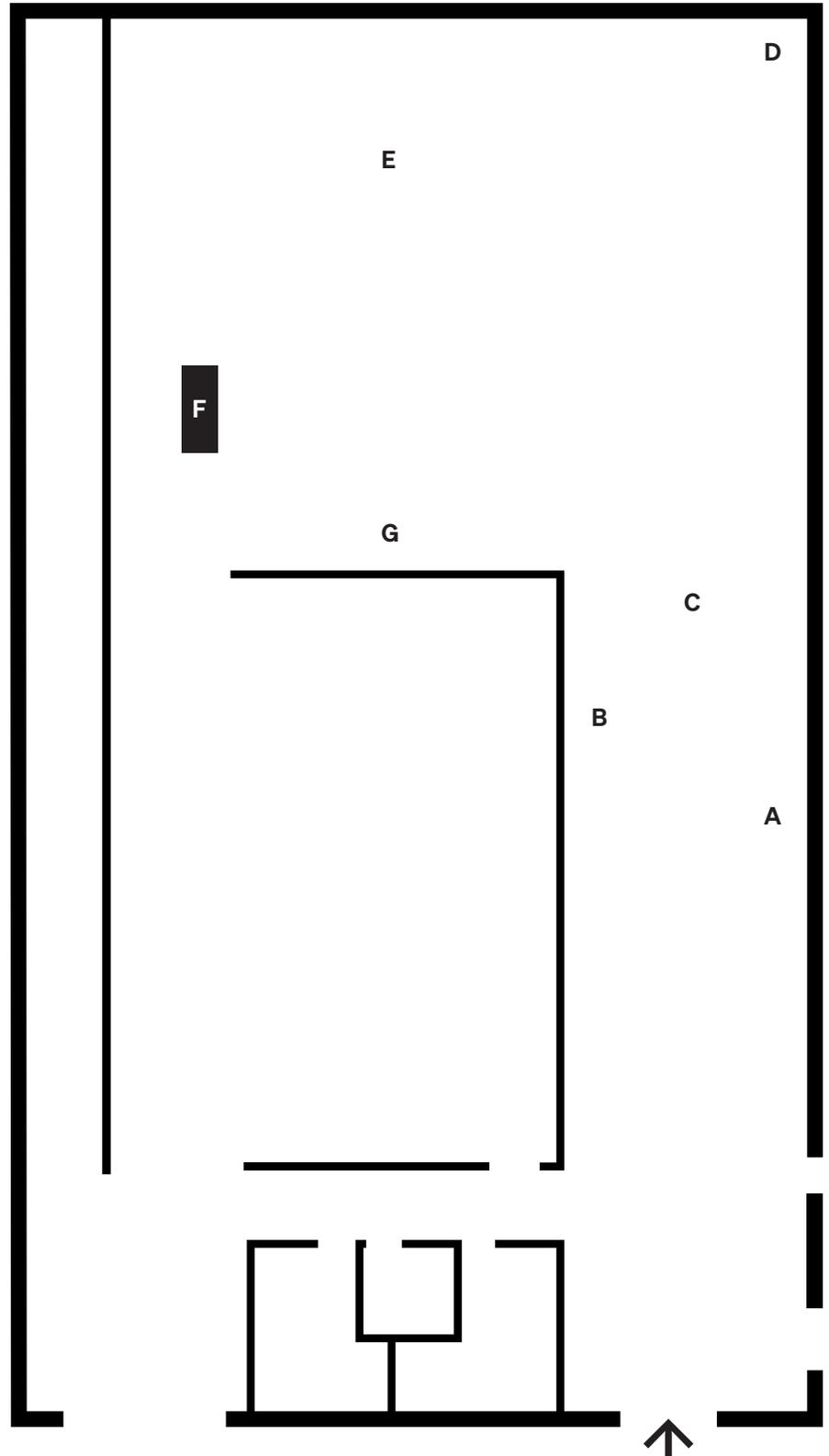
Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Score for Sine Waves and Stones 2023

11 × 14 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

continued





Works in the exhibition

continued from previous

B (L-R)

Score for Slow Modulation at Long Duration 2023

18 × 22.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Three Waves (Reversing Phase) 2023

18 × 24 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Wave Superposition no. 1 2023

15 × 11 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Wave Superposition no. 2 2023

14.5 × 10.5 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

Wave Superposition no. 3 2023

14.75 × 11 in.

Hand-cut Letratone on paper

C

Cairn 2023

37 × 32 in.

Concrete and letterpressed ratchet strap

D

Endlessness 2023

Dimensions variable

Nine letterpressed Möbius strips

E

Mass 2022–2023

14-channel sound (00:50:00)

Speakers, spent bullet casings, speaker cable, and concrete. Voice of Senga Nengudi

F

Twenty-Seven Tones 2017

Dimensions variable

27 cast brass tuning forks

G

What Remains 2023

13 × 25 ft.

Melted brass bullet casings and nails



Notes

Mass 2022–2023

Mass shootings are, for the most part, an American phenomenon. The generally accepted definition of a mass shooting entails that a minimum of four victims have been shot, whether injured or killed—that's not including the shooter, who may also have been injured or killed in the incident. The musical score for *Mass* is created out of data on mass shootings in the United States collected by the Gun Violence Archive and published on the organization's website. The data set represents events that occurred over the course of the year. Each movement depicts a month with a duration of four minutes.

The information placed into the score reflects three variables: the passage of time, the number of people wounded, and the number killed in each event. With those parameters in place, each aspect of the sound was designed to convey the frequency and intensity of events that occurred each month. The twelve speakers in the arc of *Mass* contain an assortment of spent bullet casings. These casings once held a powerful and destructive potential but are now rendered inert. Each speaker rests on a repurposed foot-tall concrete cylinder from a concrete testing facility. Each cylinder has previously been subjected to thousands of pounds of pressure and survived. The use of such simple resources as sine waves and white noise to create the audio for *Mass* required the employment of low-frequency amplitude modulation and discordant tones in order to achieve the desired movement from the speakers, resulting in an experience that is felt as much seen and heard.

Thanks go to Senga Nengudi, who contributed her voice speaking the months of the year. Support provided by the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Sound Art and Experimental Music Residency.

It should be noted that in 1996 the U.S. government stopped providing funding to study and track gun violence and only recently began discussions with the NIH and CDC on funding research again.

What Remains 2023

At the time of this writing, there have been 567 mass shootings this year in the United States.

What Remains serves as an incomplete map depicting roughly 200 of the locations where mass shootings have occurred in 2023. Each marker is made from spent bullet casings melted down and poured over the head of a nail. While some of the shapes that emerge are beautiful and others are grotesque, all of them were treated with care and polished front and back to bring out the luster of the brass.

Twenty-Seven Tones 2017

Throughout much of my recorded music and performances, generation loss or signal degradation are often key elements of how the sound evolves over time. It is an accumulation of events and experiences overlaid onto itself again and again. While some sounds persist, others fade. Bringing those sonic ideas into the physical world, *Twenty-Seven Tones* is an exploration of loss, heredity, and generational trauma. Each of the 27 tuning forks that make up this work is a copy of a copy. The process of sand-casting each fork in brass results in minor flaws and shifts in the geometry of the form. What is lost and what is passed down from generation to generation of these copies is highlighted and brought out through the act of polishing each one before it is to be duplicated again. Some subtle changes occur; pitting gets shallower or deeper, or sometimes disappears altogether. With each generation, the form remains the same but the shape is ever-changing.

Support provided by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Rauschenberg Residency.



Notes

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Endlessness 2023

Repetition and the creation of physical loops are techniques that I utilize constantly in my sound and music practice. One of the things that occurs with endless repetition is that the original sounds begin to take on another form, eventually creating an almost trance-like state in the listener. *Endlessness* carries that practice over to the creation of this series of Möbius strips: a non-orientable surface that contains a phrase illustrating “semantic satiation” (i.e., the phenomenon in which a word or phrase is repeated so often it loses its meaning).

Graphic score series 2017–2023

A graphic or visual score is the representation of music through the use of visual symbols outside the realm of traditional musical notation. Utilizing Letratone and Letraset texture film (an antiquated graphic production material), I have been creating scores for movements and modulations that illustrate ideas of structure and organization. Without any standard notation present, these scores are open to interpretation. Some of the scores more closely follow the aural impression of a physical place, while others express concepts or actions. Throughout the run of *What Was Lost and What Remains*, guest artists will be presenting live interpretations of selected scores.



Contributors

Marcus Fischer

Marcus Fischer is an interdisciplinary artist and musician based in Portland, Oregon. He is a first-generation American artist that explores sound through creation, collection, and transformation into immersive, layered compositions for live performances and exhibitions. Site-specific assemblages of exposed speakers, tape loops, and hand-made objects are characteristic of his installations, often paired with melodies of restraint and tension. Marcus has released numerous recordings—both solo and collaborative. He contributed two sound works and two performances to the 2019 Whitney Biennial as the singular artist from the Pacific Northwest region included in the edition. He has been awarded residencies at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's Rauschenberg Residency, and at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art.

Fischer has recorded and performed nationally and internationally as a solo artist and in collaborations with artists including Taylor Deupree, Aki Onda, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Laura Ortman, Stephen Vitiello, Calexico, Raven Chacon, and Simon Scott. Further information at MAPMAP.CH.

Marcus Fischer would like to thank Nicole & Gemma Fischer, Senga Nengudi, Blake Shell, Dustin Williams & Ox, Rachel Adams & the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Marc Weidenbaum and all his collaborators and friends.

About Site

This exhibition is part of Site, a series of site-specific large-scale solo exhibitions by artists of the Pacific Northwest. Originally a replacement series of exhibitions for our biennial during the pandemic, Site was created to utilize Oregon Contemporary's strength as a large-scale venue and give artists an opportunity for a solo exhibition and the ability to make new work as they expand and grow their creative practices. The success of the program—which included Natalie Ball (in collaboration with Annelia Hillman pue-leek-la'), Rick Silva, and Willie Little—has led us to establish Site as our third core ongoing program in addition to the Biennial and Curator in Residence programs.

The Site program is supported by the Henry Lea Hillman, Jr. Foundation. Oregon Contemporary is supported by The Ford Family Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Robert & Mercedes Eichholz Foundation, VIA Art Fund and Wagner Foundation, the Maybelle Clark Macdonald Fund, the James F. & Marion L. Miller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Regional Arts & Culture Council. Oregon Contemporary also receives support from the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the State of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts. Other businesses and individuals provide additional support.



Oregon Center for Contemporary Art recognizes that our programming is held on the traditional lands of the Chinook, Cowlitz, and many other Nations. We take this opportunity to offer respectful recognition to the Native communities in our region.

Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and colonization, as well as the continual displacement of Native people by the government of the United States. Oregon Contemporary, as part of our Equity Statement and Plan, agrees to recognize the inequities inherent in our culture and take action to dismantle them.

Join us in acknowledging the contributions Indigenous peoples have made, and continue to make, to our region and beyond. Text (907) 312-5085 or visit native-land.ca to find out whose land are you on?

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