



Vinyl

Records and Covers by Artists

Opening: Tuesday, May 16 2006, 7:30 pm.

Exhibition Dates: From May 17 to September 3, 2006

Curator: Guy Schraenen

Co-production: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen (NMWB)

Historiography has overlooked the meetings between art and the world of sound, but these days they have taken on an undeniable centrality. Artistic and musical practices have produced works which mark out the very history of the avant-garde. Along with the huge growth in digital technology, crossovers between sound and vision have multiplied exponentially and this has created a whole new universe of experimentation, invention, categories and classifications. In 2002, the MACBA looked at music culture in the digital age with the exhibition *Sonic Process*. Now *Vinyl* traces the phenomenon's genealogy, from its roots in the evolution of the art in the 1960s and 70s, right up to our own time, by means of an object which has always been deeply rooted in our everyday life: the LP record.

Vinyl. Albums and Record Sleeves by Artists takes a look at one of the most traditional musical / sound media supports, now well on its way towards extinction. Up to now, there have been very few exhibitions dealing with this area of creativity, *The Record Cover as Artwork*, in London in 1973, or *Broken Music*, in Berlin in 1988 being two rare exceptions. The

phonoautograph was invented in 1857, but it wasn't until 1904 that the first two-sided vinyl records were commercially produced. 1987, the year which saw the invention of the digital compact disc marked the beginning of the end of vinyl as an instrument and means of communication. Today it survives only in the hands of DJs, record collectors and those artists who still go back to that black plastic circle.

The origin of artistic practices in this area can be traced through the avant-garde movements – like Dada and Futurism – with artists like Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann or Marcel Duchamp. Groups like Fluxus, CoBrA or the Lettrists made full use of the medium. From the 1970s onwards, collaborations between musicians and visual artists diversified, representing a range of languages and fashions, from experimental music or sound documents to the most commercial kinds of pop and rock music.

Structure of the Exhibition at the MACBA

The MACBA exhibition will be divided into different sections following various chronological and visual criteria, covering everything from the 1920s avant-garde movements up to the most recent sound experiments, via movements like Fluxus, Nouveau Réalisme, Pop Art and conceptual art. There will be around 750 record sleeves from Guy Schraenen's collection, by artists like John Baldessari, Joseph Beuys, Günter Brus, William Burroughs, Jean Dubuffet, Robert Frank, Allen Ginsberg, Richard Hamilton, Keith Haring, Yves Klein, Fernand Léger, Roy Lichtenstein, Joan Miró, Hermann Nitsch, A.R. Penck, Raymond Pettibon, Pistoletto, Gerhard Richter, Dieter Roth, Andy Warhol and Tom Wesselman, among others. The show will also contain a great deal of additional material (cassettes, publications and other documentation) and visitors will have the chance to listen to the exhibition's wide selection of more than a thousand records through a digital system especially designed for the occasion.

A section dedicated to collaborations between artists and musicians in Spain – curated by Víctor Nubla, working with Joan Ramon Guzmán, Jordi Segura and Pedro G. Romero – will complete the MACBA exhibition, containing some 150 record sleeves.

“Vinyl” was shown at the Neues Museum Weserburg in Bremen, Germany, from August to November 2005, and in Autumn it will travel to the Serralves Museum in Porto, Portugal. The MACBA exhibition forms part of the programming of the SONAR festival, which takes place in Barcelona from June 15 to 17 2006.

Publications:

■ VINYL. Records and Covers by Artists

Concept and editing: Guy Schraenen

Coproduction of Studienzentrum für Künstlerpublikationen / Archive for Small Press & Communication im Neuen Museum Weserburg Bremen and Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 2005

■ Vinil. So i col·leccionisme

Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Servei de Publicacions de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2006. Texts by Pedro G. Romero, Diedrich Diederichsen, Jean-Yves Bosseur, and Mark Jamieson.

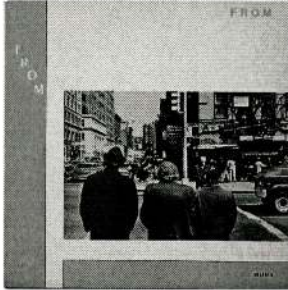
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Vinyl: records and covers by artists

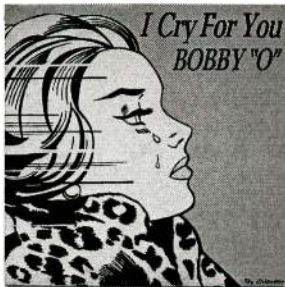
Bent over the Grundig tape recorder with a broad smile, and vigorously trumpeting out of the limits of the picture: Jean Dubuffet's figures on the cover of his *Musical Experiences* mark the beginning of *Vinyl: records and covers by artists*. The record, published in 1961, is one of the earliest examples of the discovery of a medium that combines image and sound in a unique way to make art. Without formal musical education, and thus in the best sense free of the music world's traditional rules and limitations, visual artists enthusiastically explored the possibilities of instruments, sound, and voice. The tape recorder made it possible for the first time for them to direct and create their own recordings without great technical complications, and to multiply them afterwards, using the vinyl record.



The record *From*, by Peter Downsbrough, is exhibited alongside a four-piece graphic work by the same artist. The different media stand side by side on an equal level and use words in their respective ways, as (sound) sculpting material, to deal with the subject of language and space.



In Gerhard Rühm's and Hanne Darboven's bodies of work, their graphic works are constructed like scores, and the record is also always present.

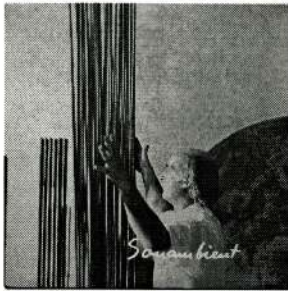


All currents in 20th Century Art are represented. The spectrum ranges from Futurism and Dadaism, including Contemporary Classics such as Joan Miró and Fernand Léger, movements like Cobra, Lettrism, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Sound Poetry, Fluxus and Pop-Art, as well as the latest trends. The list of those who have designed record covers for musicians or bands includes such prestigious or popular artists as Roy Lichtenstein, Keith Haring, Pistoletto, John Baldessari, Gerhard Richter, Francisco Clemente or Raymond Pettibon. With his series of six record covers for Philip Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts*, Sol LeWitt has created a body of work that relates to the spirit of Minimalist Music and at the same time has consistency in and of itself as a visual piece of art.



The project *Selten gehörte Musik* ("music rarely listened to") came to life in the workshops of the artist friends Dieter Roth, Gerhard Rühm, Oswald Wiener, Günther Brus, Hermann Nitsch and others: They met several times in a casual way to improvise together and to experiment with music and language. A.R. Penck, Michael Snow or Alan Davie also participated in groups of "free Music."

During his artistic career, Lawrence Weiner used different sound formats: LP and Single, audio cassette and CD. The new Museum Weserburg Bremen can furthermore demonstrate a literally "fundamental" extension of his visual media: The title "piece" of the record, *Having been built on sand. With another base (basis) in fact* is written in big letters on the exterior of the museum, right above the surface of the river Weser.



In the beginning of the seventies, the designer and sculptor Harry Bertoia developed many sound sculptures. For the joint effect of the materials, the installation in space, and the resulting sound experiments, he coined the term "Sonambient." The record series documents the sounds produced by the different sculptures.

The spoken word is featured on the vinyl record in a great variety of ways: as a lecture, a reading, a conversation, or, in 1969, on the record *Art by Telephone*, even as a catalogue: The Museum for Contemporary Art in Chicago composed telephone calls with artists, in which they made a preliminary description of their works planned for the museum.



The Slovenian band Laibach, founded in 1980 and named after the capital city Ljubljana, also belongs to the artist group "New Slovenian Art" (NSK, Neue Slovenische Kunst, in the German initials). Their often ironic play on totalitarian ideologies and their symbols were controversial and much-discussed. Distorted and personal interpretations of Pop classics, like *Let it Be* by the Beatles, also form a part of Laibach's repertoire.

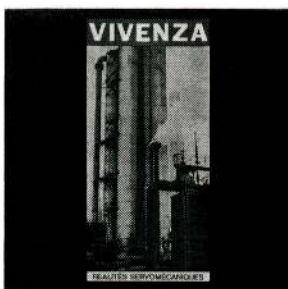


Joseph Beuys' artists' records are at the centre of a "network" of collaborations. The recording of *Ja Ja Ja, Nee, Nee, Nee* was made in 1970 and is made up of the permanent repetition of the words "yes yes yes no no no" in all thinkable nuances. Joseph Beuys, founding member of the German Green Party, in 1982 claimed *Sonne statt Reagan* (literally "Sun instead of Rain", but the German word for rain, "Regen," was replaced by the U.S. President's name). Further records were made in collaboration with Nam June Paik, Henning Christiansen or Albrecht d., who, in their turn, also made solo records or performed in other artist constellations.



The early Avant-garde movements of the first decades of the 20th Century, like Dadaism and Futurism, had already broken new ground in transgression in Music, Theatre, Visual Art and Literature. They presented their works in public performances – early forms of Happening and Performance Art. Composers like Eric Satie also had great influence on later generations and the understanding of music and visual art.

The Futurists integrated the sounds of airplanes or train engines into their works. From the eighties on, similar procedures can be found in Industrial Music, in groups like *Vivenza*, who use the industrial sound of machines.



The LP *RRR 500* constitutes a unique project, which could only be carried out in the medium of the vinyl record. It is a collection of 500 continuous record grooves by 500 artists. The pickup arm has to be put into place manually again and again. This record furthermore constitutes an example of a total visual design concept, including the label and the inner sleeve as well as the outer cover.



The Collection Guy Schraenen, to which all exposed pieces belong, with special dedication to the sixties and seventies, also includes some records that, at first glance, seem to be out of context. These recordings were included because of their innovative nature or because of their influence on the perception and conception of music and sound. Thus, Karl Valentin, for example, is represented, as well as the *Singing of Whales* ("Gesang der Wale"), which opened up previously unknown worlds of sound.

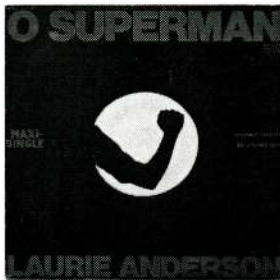


The Fluxus movement and related currents, like Zaj in Spain, enriched Art with new artistic positions, as well as actions and performances that went under the name of "concerts." Three video examples with which Ben Vautier represents pieces by Nam June Paik and Mieko Shiomi, demonstrate the break with traditional concepts. Instruments make their appearance in totally unexpected and striking ways: a violin slowly lowers itself down to the stage or, after slowly and dramatically gaining momentum; it is smashed to pieces on the edge of the table. Actors cover a piano in paint, while Ben nails down the keys and in this way obtains a last sound sequence from the instrument.

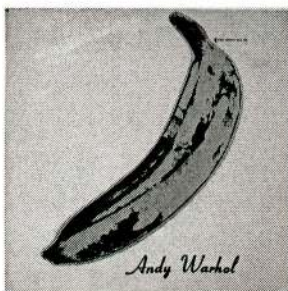


Milan Knižák cuts vinyl records into pieces and recomposes them. The record object *Destroyed Music* is composed of two halves of different initial records. In theory, one can still play it – the result is an unusual assembly of two different sound sources.

George Brecht, with his handwritten sentence, addresses himself directly to the receptive onlooker/listener: Musik ist das, was du in diesem Moment hörst ("Music is what you are listening to at this very moment").



Laurie Anderson's *O Superman* is one of the few exceptions in Sound Art that was put out by a big record company and found its way up to the top of the Hit Parades. Generally, the artists financed and produced themselves, according to demand, in small editions, something that could be done very well with the easily available audio cassette. The material became known mainly by way of word of mouth.



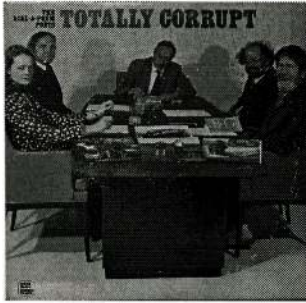
Andy Warhol's record cover for Velvet Underground & Nico from 1971 is probably the most well-known piece in the exhibit. The banana, which one could peel in the original version, revealing a pink peeled banana, has attained a fetish function with its ambiguous character that is similar to that of Warhol's Sticky Fingers cover for the Rolling Stones. Other classics of the genre in the pop and rock world: Richard Hamilton's *White-Album* cover or Peter Blake's *Sgt. Pepper's* cover for the Beatles.

At another point, the exhibit presents a group of record covers by Andy Warhol, designed in the fashion of his popular portrait series. In the case of Diana Ross's double cover, all four inner and outer surfaces are filled, in Paul Anka's and John Lennon's, the front and the back sides, respectively.



Some artists give the record more significance visually, or as an object in itself. The *picture disc*, with a picture printed on one or both sides of the vinyl record, is one of the more well-known examples. More unusual is Hans Schabus' record, shaped like a saw blade, or the record by an unknown author, stuck in a cover made of sandpaper with the rough side turned inside.

The CD as a supplement in magazines, catalogues and other publications has replaced the Flexidisc, which was common in the eighties. Simple and cheap to produce, the CD serves the purpose of documenting sound creations and thus acquires a function similar to the photographic reproductions of visual artworks.

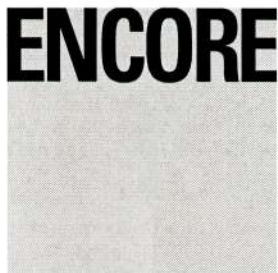


Many literary works by artists of the Beat Generation have been conserved in recordings and impress one with the voices of the authors, such as, for example Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* from 1955. The series *Giorno-Poetry-Systems*, initiated by John Giorno in the seventies, represents the Beat Generation, along with artists from other verbal vocal currents. On the record cover of *Totally Corrupt*, for instance, Anne Waldman, John Giorno, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and John Cage pose together.

Sound Poetry is a current in itself, developed essentially by the extension of literary forms into the realm of sound. Henri Chopin is one of its most significant representatives. The magazine *Revue OU*, which he edited in the sixties and seventies, included supplementary records by sound poets in practically every issue, by François Dufrêne, Brion Gysin or Sten Hanson, among others. The newly-awakened interest in these works is reflected by the fact that all the sound contributions were re-edited on CD in 2002.



The "Sound Station" of the exhibit has 300 digitalized records at its disposal that can be selected and heard individually. Pavel Böhler's single *Encore*, which came out on 2005, marks the last visual and acoustic accent of the exhibition: the artist reproduces the opening or closing applause of different concerts one after the other - indeed very animating and comforting for the listening watcher.



Bettina Brach

Making use of the glossary composed by Guy Schraenen in the catalogue *Vinyl – Records and Covers by Artists*, 2005

VINYL – Spain

Introduction

Throughout practically the whole of the 20th century, vinyl records were the most popular and best-quality support for recorded music. Never before had it been possible to store music so exhaustively as to form a first-hand, historic documentary archive such as that available to us now, informing us about musical culture in the last century. Neither could it have been predicted that the covers used to protect these supports would, over the years, acquire the category of art supports in themselves, and that reading record sleeves would provide as much or more information as listening to the content they present. But that is exactly what has occurred. The result of research into vinyl record covers published in Spain from the 1960s to the 1980s provides a vision of history that reveals how little, with certain exceptions, music evolved in our country, and how little reached us from abroad. This state of affairs was caused by the cultural isolation we suffered from, precisely during the decades when half the world was going crazy about a series of completely new developments. Amongst other things, over that period young people became a social class that made its own decisions and had its own purchasing power, and music was becoming what it still is – the main vehicle for generational and inter-generational communication. However, at the same time, our creative microclimate developed organs suited to different functions than those performed in the prosperous, relatively global West.

By establishing certain parallels we quickly realise that in the 1960s, in countries like Germany, Britain or the United States, the critical political attitudes expressed in musical creation can be linked, in the generation of

composers involved in exploring electro-acoustic music, to the eruption of free jazz or electrification and the break with its own traditions that rock underwent. In Spain, whilst the regime closed fledgling laboratories researching into electro-acoustic sounds – most of their founders working abroad for the most part – and isolation prevented foreign music from reaching our shores – something that rock and pop, as highly imitative genres, needed in order to exist and become autochthonous later – the critical outlook and the progressive spirit were manifested through singer-songwriters (protest songs), and the covers of their records were often expressly created for them by contemporary artists. This example alone should be sufficient to indicate a significance that visitors to the exhibition can confirm for themselves. We can now go on to consider other highly singular features of the Spanish historic and cultural process: the remarkable importance acquired by the comic book in the 1970s as a vehicle for social and generational expression of radical, critical, underground stances, for rejection of the system; and the move, in the 1980s, of many designers and illustrators into the field of painting. The surprising proliferation of local musicians who have themselves begun to work in the plastic arts is, perhaps, an idiosyncratic feature of the underground environment into which record production has inevitably developed, or a display of Renaissance multi-disciplinary skills, but, whatever the explanation, it has produced a very interesting collection of record sleeves and constitutes a highly specific characteristic of our local culture.

It would appear that the word “exceptional” is the most recurrent when it comes to explaining artistic creation linked to record production in the years when the state of exception was such a frequent fact of life. Then came video and computer images which, as far as vinyl record covers are concerned, progressed no further than the pixel aesthetic as, by the time the Spanish music industry and market had got up to European levels, the CD arrived. But that is another story...

We should like to note that the contents in this section of the exhibition comes from private collections and is, therefore, neither exhaustive nor imbued with the desire for "completeness", though we do feel that it provides a suitably broad, eclectic image. The selection criteria in this section are based on the technique or art field to which the author of the cover belongs, and the content is arranged by decade. There are five broad categories:

1) Work by painters or eminently plastic artists

We might say that this is the most "classical" form of cooperation, common to all countries and, in ours, especially interesting in the case of work by singer-songwriters in the 1960s and 70s.

2) Works by illustrators and photographers

Also very important in the pop and progressive music fields during the 60s and 70s. Such pieces provide valuable testimony to the pop aesthetic in Spain.

3) Works by comic book artists

Between the 70s and the 80s, as part of the "movida" movement in Madrid and Barcelona, comics rose to great importance, and many artists sprang from the drawing board to the art gallery during the transition from one decade to another. Fanzine aesthetics also find their place here.

4) Works by designers

We do not mean designers specialising in album sleeves, but others who worked with musicians from time to time, but with particularly relevant results in the 1980s, at a time when Catalan design was also achieving considerable prestige.

5) Works by the musicians themselves

Perhaps as a consequence of certain self-management models that emerged in response to the precarious record production and marketing

environment, but also – particularly in Catalonia – as a result of the multi-disciplinary approach characteristic of local creation, a very interesting collection of sleeves designed by the recording artists themselves bears testimony to this unusual phenomenon.

Victor Nubla

Exhibition Credits:

Section co-curated by Victor Nubla in cooperation with Jordi Segura, Joan Ramon Guzmán and Pedro G. Romero.

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VINYL. Records and Covers by Artists

(Introduction Text to the book)

The end of the 1950s and the advent of "inter-media" art gave rise to a radical change in the conception and the reception of works of art. Performances, installations, happenings, video works, artists' films and soundworks proliferated. These creations were often situated at a crossroads between several different artistic practices. Artists who, in one way or another, used sound as a medium and the vinyl record as the means of diffusing their work emerged from all the major artistic movements including Cobra, conceptual art, Fluxus, Lettrisme, sound poetry and Nouveau Réalisme.

As its indicates the exhibition "Vinyl" is mainly dedicated to soundworks that have been released on vinyl. Thanks to the specific characteristics of its format, the record cover became a support for visual creations directly related to the sound content of the records, a juxtaposition of sound and image. Most record covers were created by the authors of the sound works diffused on the records. However, the existence of record covers created by visual artists for musicians, notably in the rock and pop world, demonstrates the mutual interests linking two domains which, at first glance, seem to have little in common.

The ensemble of works presented, collected consecutively with the creation of these new works from the end of the 1960s onwards, is mainly dedicated to researches conducted in the domain of sound by visual artists and to verbo-vocal experiments carried out in the 1960s and 1970s. The project also encompasses some examples of the sound researches of the historical avant-garde movements.

We wanted to expand the scope of the project to embrace certain major and innovative musical creations-concrete music, electro-acoustic music and repetitive music. A collection of over 1000 works on record, audio-cassette or cd is completed by a selection of visual works relating to the subject, as well as record-objects and scores which are interesting in terms of their particular visual characteristics. The totality is supplemented by a collection of books and documentation.

This exhibition, which is mainly devoted to the subject of records and record covers, are complemented by works recorded on audio-cassettes as well as by some unreleased or rare works on compact disc.

In the catalogue we have chosen to publish a discography, not in alphabetical order, as is usually the case, but in chronological order. This approach enables us to highlight the often-surprising dates of creation of some of the works. The index at the end of the publication is a practical tool enabling the reader to situate the works of art and their creators in context.

A glossary throws light on some of the historical or technical aspects of the works or of their supports. The principal purpose of the publication is to constitute a discography that is as exhaustive as possible. The exhibition, on the other hand, represents a journey into sound and vision, through the works of a particularly innovative period in the history of art.

Guy Schraenen