

## CHRISTIAN MARCLAY: COMPOSITIONS

- ▶ This exhibition is the first for over a decade in Spain devoted to the Swiss-American artist Christian Marclay (b. 1955).
- ▶ This exhibition **examines Marclay's work through** his engagement with **composition, understood as the ordering of sounds in time and space.**
- ▶ The exhibition addresses Marclay's **concern with composition** through his **recourse to popular culture and mass media**, together with his **exploration of both traditional and digital technologies**, and their **material qualities**
- ▶ While Marclay has produced video, sculpture, sound recording and performance, as well as text work, graphic scores, collages and prints, this exhibition includes some of his recent audio-visual installations, alongside a select number of his earlier pieces.
- ▶ **The interactive installation *Chalkboard* (2010) invites the audience to mark an architecturally-scaled chalkboard ruled with musical staff lines, which is then interpreted by musicians in a series of concerts scheduled during the exhibition.**
- ▶ On the occasion of the **Day and Night of the Museums** the scores *Zoom Zoom* (2007–2019) and *Manga Scroll* (2010) will also be activated, with the participation of the vocal artist **Shelley Hirsch**.  
And, coinciding with **Sónar**, Marclay will participate in a talk at **Sónar+D** on 18 July. The next day ten pianists will perform his latest score, ***Investigations*** (2018).

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**Title:** Christian Marclay: Compositions **Opening:** 11 April 2019 **Dates:** 12 April – 24 September 2019  
**Organisation:** MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona **Curator:** Tanya Barson  
With the support of **Pro Helvetia, Swiss Arts Council**

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PHOTOS: [www.macba.cat/press/christian-marclay3254](http://www.macba.cat/press/christian-marclay3254)

# CHRISTIAN MARCLAY: COMPOSITIONS

**Press conference:** 11 April, 11.30 am

**Opening:** 11 April, 8 pm

**Dates:** 12 April – 24 September 2019

**Curator:** Tanya Barson, Chief Curator, MACBA

This exhibition is the first for over a decade in Spain devoted to the Swiss-American artist Christian Marclay (b. 1955), who currently lives and works in London, and will include a selection focusing on his sonic compositions, from graphic scores to video installations. Marclay has consistently focused on the relationship between sound and vision, exploring the ways that sound can be manifested visually. As the artist himself said, 'music runs through almost everything I do'.



Christian Marclay *Manga Scroll*, 2010, lithographic hand scroll 16 x 787 1/2 in. (40.6 x 2,000.3 cm)  
© The artist. Photo © USF Graphicstudio (Will Lytch) Courtesy White Cube

This exhibition will examine Marclay's work through his engagement with composition, understood as the ordering of sounds in time and space. Each piece shown will reveal the ways in which Marclay approaches the creation of a composition, and how this relates to other aspects of his work such as his deployment of the techniques of appropriation and montage, together with his engagement in performance and his tendency towards inviting participation and collaboration.



Christian Marclay, *Video Quartet*, 2002, four-channel DVD projection with sound  
Duration: 14 minutes 30 seconds. © The artist. Photo © Stephen White Courtesy White Cube

While Marclay has produced video, sculpture, sound recording and performance, as well as text work, graphic scores, collages and prints, this exhibition includes some of his recent audio-visual installations, alongside a select number of his earlier pieces. Central to the exhibition are major video works, the masterpiece *Video Quartet* (2002), a four-screen audio-visual composition made from movie clips, and the immersive installation *Surround Sounds* (2014–15), which is perhaps the climax of his investigation of onomatopoeia, as well as several graphic scores, such as the slide projection *Zoom Zoom* (2007–19) and *Manga Scroll* (2010), a 20-metre-long hand scroll vocal score and the interactive installation *Chalkboard* (2010) that invites the audience to mark an architecturally-scaled chalkboard ruled with musical staff lines, which is then interpreted by musicians in a series of concerts scheduled during the exhibition.

The exhibition addresses Marclay's concern with composition through his recourse to popular culture and mass media, together with his exploration of both traditional and digital technologies, and their material qualities. The exhibition focuses on the manner in which he composes through his interdisciplinary use of appropriation, montage, remixing and improvisation, practices that themselves traverse the boundaries between the experimental and the popular.

On the one hand, Marclay can be situated in relation to the avant-garde and experimental traditions via the aesthetic legacies of Dada, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely, John Cage, Fluxus and Happenings, and, on the other, he engages with popular culture through his involvement with manifestations such as punk rock, comics, fanzines, cinema and aspects of underground subcultures. Even while Marclay has engaged with some of the major figures of the historical avant-garde, including Edvard Munch and Duchamp, he has also established a dialogue with contemporary peers from the differing fields that his work has sought to traverse, including that of filmmaker Bruce Conner,

performance artist Laurie Anderson and musician John Zorn, as well as the band Sonic Youth, among many others. Early in his career he became involved in experimental performance through his influential role in the development of turntablism (the use of record turntables to make compositions, especially using mixes and manipulations of sound) and his relationship to plunderphonics (the compositional potential of sound collage and/or sampling), becoming a significant practitioner of both.

That the exhibition will be presented at MACBA in Barcelona is also important as the city has a strong connection to the world of experimental music. Marclay himself knows the city through his own experiences of its music scene, and this music landscape will also be signalled in the exhibition through a programme of performances.

## CHRISTIAN MARCLAY: COMPOSITIONS

### SELECTED WORKS FROM THE EXHIBITION

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2A

**Video Quartet**, a four-screen, audio-visual composition made from found movie clips, is the only work included in the exhibition that uses sound audibly. The excerpts feature moments when music or sound occurs in films. Marclay edits these together so that each screen features a different clip that is carefully synchronised with the others to form an overall musical quartet. In addition to moments that include musical instruments or the human voice, the precise montage also uses excerpts featuring noisy actions. All sounds, musical or concrete, are therefore part of the composition.

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2B

In this interactive installation, Marclay invites visitors to participate in the act of composing by marking the architecturally-scaled chalkboard ruled with musical staff lines. This open and evolving composition is then interpreted by musicians in a series of performances scheduled during the exhibition. The board is erased afterwards and the process restarted until the next performance. The exhibition includes a number of works Marclay describes collectively as 'scores', but which often take unconventional forms. **Chalkboard** is recognisable as a score through the structure of the staves, yet it undermines traditional scoring by giving the audience the freedom to make any marks they wish, including drawings, scribbles and graffiti, and letting the musicians play according to their own free interpretation.

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2B

The slide-projection **Zoom Zoom** is an example of Marclay's 'graphic scores', a series of unconventional compositions that use images as well as text as the basis for musical performances. This work also forms part of Marclay's extended investigation into onomatopoeia – words that replicate the sounds or actions that they describe. It is comprised of photographs taken by the artist that document the use of onomatopoeia in the urban environment, in advertisements, branding and design. This work was conceived for the vocal artist Shelley Hirsch, to be performed with Marclay triggering the images from a laptop in a call-and-response duet.

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#### *Along the Wall of second floor*

A collage composed of extracts from music reviews, **Mixed Reviews** consists of sentences that describe musical sounds. For each display, the prior translation is re-translated into the local language where it is exhibited. Through this process, the descriptive phrases become ever more distant from the sounds they were initially intended to describe, highlighting the fact that the text is itself an abstraction through language that can never reproduce the sounds. While it has been previously translated into German, Japanese and French, among many other languages, here the text is translated into Catalan for the first time.

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2C

To create **Graffiti Composition**, Marclay pasted blank music sheets around the streets of Berlin and later photographed the addition of notes, drawings and graffiti found on

the ripped, torn or otherwise abraded posters. The 150 photographs of the amended sheets thus form one of Marclay's earlier scores, a collaboration with a multitude of unnamed contributors.

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2C

**Ephemera** is a 'graphic score' that takes the form of 28 folios that document a collection of musical notations found on packaging, clothes, record covers and other printed materials. These found notes have been extracted by the designers from music or otherwise have been imagined specifically to symbolise music graphically. The British experimental musician Steve Beresford, who has performed *Ephemera* on both piano and a Baroque organ, has described how in 'reading' the score 'the notation (or approximation of notation) is sometimes vertical, quite small and slightly wonky... sometimes the difference between improvising and playing one of Christian's pieces is obvious: readable bits of notation in *Ephemera*, which turn out to be old American folk songs get played quite literally.'

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2C

In the 'graphic score' **To Be Continued**, Marclay makes use of a variety of sonically evocative images sampled from comics that he has collaged and returned to a comic-book format. Here multiple copies of the book are shown that reveal the inner as well as outer pages and their sequence. A number of previously unexhibited preparatory collages for the score are also shown nearby.

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2C

The most recent work in the exhibition, **Investigations**, reflects Marclay's interest in photography and the non-traditional use of classical instruments. This score was made from a collection of 100 found and cropped images of hands playing piano. The score is to be interpreted by a large ensemble of pianists, who are asked to decipher the sound made when the photograph was taken and notate the results of their investigation. The British experimental musician Steve Beresford who was among the performers for the premier of the work has said that 'when we are playing but also looking at pictures or printed words or mutated music notation, perhaps we engage bits of our brains usually not involved in playing music... Christian's scores get us playing things we would never have thought of.'

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2C

This vitrine contains a series of small-scale-sculptures that includes re-imagined musical instruments undermining their original purpose to make sound, such as a recorder with multiple holes and a set of glass drumsticks. It also includes a series of vinyl records that use the fragility of the medium as a means to generate compositions and contradict their primary purpose to preserve music. These also revise Surrealist sculpture and Marcel Duchamp's 'assisted readymade' (a transformed ordinary object), stressing the failure or frustration of musical experience, in the way that Surrealism frequently addressed unfulfilled desire.

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2C

Marclay has frequently mixed vinyl records in his DJ performances, and also used their covers in his work. **Imaginary Records** is an extended series in which Marclay intervened by collaging the various covers. Through this process, he reimagined the

musical content through his redesign, emphasising with humour the theme of sound, or silence, through word play and visual-textual puns. In these works, Marclay likewise explores the social resonances of music, addressing a range of themes such as sexual stereotyping or notions of kitsch and nostalgia. The series is also critical of the ways in which music is packaged and sold as a commodity.

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2C

The 'graphic score' ***Manga Scroll*** is composed of onomatopoeia, but in this case the words have been drawn from North American translations of Japanese graphic manga novels and collaged into an undulating, linear composition on a long paper scroll. Such scrolls date from the eleventh century onwards in Japan and might be thought of as a precursor to contemporary Japanese graphic novels or serialised comics. However, ***Manga Scroll*** is a vocal score, intended for performance. In this sense it evokes avant-garde, performed phonetic poems, such as Kurt Schwitters' Dada work *Ursonate* (1932), but also pays tribute to Cathy Berberian's *Stripsody* (1966).

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2C

This work addresses Marclay's fascination with the absence rather than the presence of sound, here it is through a series of found and cropped images of open mouths shown together as a silent choir. ***Chorus II*** demonstrates the artist's interest in the visual traces of sound and music, as well as in their photographic registering and how we might interpret the images back into sounds, even if only in our imaginations through a process of identification. In this piece, the idea of performed vocal sound is emphasised and relates it to certain of Marclay's 'graphic scores' such as *Zoom Zoom* and *Manga Scroll*.

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2D

This group of '**action paintings**' continues Marclay's concern with onomatopoeia, textual approximations to sounds, through a combination of paint and silkscreen. Onomatopoeias humorously denoting 'wet' sounds are collaged from comic books and then silkscreened over corresponding painterly actions. While the works suggest the physical and performative process involved in their creation, they also subvert this by translating the gestural painting via a printing technique – a form of mechanical reproduction. The works therefore evoke but also gently poke fun at American Abstract-Expressionist masters such as Jackson Pollock and suggest an ironic stance closer to that of Pop artists like Andy Warhol.

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Access 2D

The immersive installation ***Surround Sounds*** is a 360-degree video animation made from scanned comics. It is perhaps the culmination of Marclay's exploration of onomatopoeia. This time, onomatopoeias are animated into an all-encompassing, four-screen silent composition. Like much of the exhibition, it is both playful and contradictory: the visitor is quite literally surrounded by a visual cacophony, despite hearing nothing, and is invited to imagine the sounds whirring, buzzing or swooping around them

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## CHRISTIAN MARCLAY. COMPOSITIONS PERFORMANCES OF SOME OF THE WORKS

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### **CHALKBOARD** CONCERTS

Approximately once a month, the museum will invite an instrumentalist to interpret the **Chalkboard** score. In this interactive installation, Marclay invites visitors to participate in the act of composing by marking the architecturally-scaled chalkboard ruled with musical staff lines. The board is erased afterwards and the process resumed until the next performance. *Chalkboard* is recognisable as a score through the structure of the staves, yet it undermines traditional scoring by giving the audience the freedom to make any marks they wish, including drawings, scribbles and graffiti, and letting the musicians play according to their own free interpretation. [ More information will be posted on macba.cat shortly]

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### **ZOOM ZOOM and MANGA SCROLL** PERFORMANCES. DAY AND NIGHT OF THE MUSEUMS

During the **Night of the Museums**, two of Christian Marclay's graphic scores will be interpreted:

**Zoom Zoom** (2007–19), with the participation of Marclay himself and the vocal artist **Shelley Hirsch**, who has worked regularly with the artist during the last thirty years, and for whom the piece was conceived.

**Manga Scroll** (2010), interpreted by Shelley Hirsch.

**Place:** Capella MACBA. Limited places  
**18 May**, 7–11 pm

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### **INVESTIGATIONS** COLLABORATION WITH SÓNAR+D

In collaboration with **Sónar+D** 2019, Christian Marclay will participate in a talk that will take place on **18 July** as part of the programme of the congress of creative technologies, which will be held on 17, 18, 19 and 20 July simultaneously with Sónar by Day at Fira Montjuïc in Barcelona. This conversation will precede a new staging in the Capella MACBA of his most recent work, **Investigations** (2018), on **19 July**. It reflects Marclay's interest in photography and the non-traditional use of classical instruments. This score was made from a collection of 100 found and cropped images of hands playing piano. The score is to be interpreted by a large ensemble of pianists,



ten in this case, who are asked to decipher the sound made when the photograph was taken and notate the results of their investigation. The British experimental musician Steve Beresford who was among the performers for the premier of the work in Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival has said that 'when we are playing but also looking at pictures or printed words or mutated music notation, perhaps we engage bits of our brains usually not involved in playing music... Christian's scores get us playing things we would never have thought of.'

Within the framework of this collaboration, MACBA will offer free admission to the Museum for everyone accredited to Sónar+D 2019 (until 24 September). More information will shortly be available at [sonarplusd.com](http://sonarplusd.com) and [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

## CHRISTIAN MARCLAY. COMPOSITIONS RELATED ACTIVITIES

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### LET'S INTERPRET CHRISTIAN MARCLAY

#### Guided visit

**Let's talk about\***... Christian Marclay *Let's interpret Christian Marclay*

\*For this exhibition, the programme *Let's talk about...* has been adapted to *Let's interpret...*

The exhibition *Christian Marclay: Compositions* examines the artist's work through his engagement with composition, understood as the ordering of sounds in time and space, but also as visual composition. Each piece shown will reveal the ways in which Marclay approaches the creation of a composition, and how this relates to other aspects of his work such as his deployment of the techniques of appropriation and montage, as well as his engagement in performance and his tendency towards inviting participation and collaboration.

Artist, researcher and teacher, **Serafín Álvarez**, takes us on a tour of *Christian Marclay: Compositions*, **Saturday 13 April, at 6 pm**

Percussionist **Miquel Bernat**, takes us on a tour of *Christian Marclay: Compositions*, **Saturday 11 May, at 6 pm**

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### CHALKBOARD PERFORMANCE

**Chalkboard** (2010), an interactive installation by Christian Marclay, invites visitors to mark an architecturally-scaled chalkboard ruled with musical staff lines with notes, drawings or graffiti. Afterwards, the resulting 'score' is performed by musicians. Although a musical notation, the work undermines classical composition and traditional

scoring by giving total freedom to the audience and musicians. On this occasion, a professional soloist has been invited to interpret this changing score.

Saturday **29 June**, 6–10 pm

**Venue: Museum galleries**

**Price:** Free MACBA Saturday thanks to **Uniqlo**

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## ACCESSIBLE VISITS

Visits with accessibility for people with hearing difficulties available on request at [educacio@macba.cat](mailto:educacio@macba.cat)

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## EXCLUSIVE GUIDED TOURS

Friends of MACBA

Led by **Tanya Barson**, curator of the exhibition (in English). **Friday 7 June, 11 am**

Led by **Anna Cerdà**, **Thursday 27 June, 6 pm**

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## PUBLICATION

The book examines the work of Christian Marclay through his interest in composition, understood as an arrangement of sounds in time and space, but also as a visual composition. It includes essays by critic **Erika Balsom**, curator **Tanya Barson** and writer **Tom McCarthy**.

Trilingual publication (Catalan, Spanish and English).



PHOTOS: [www.macba.cat/press/christian-marclay3254](http://www.macba.cat/press/christian-marclay3254)

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■ MORE INFORMATION AT [macba.cat](http://macba.cat) and @MACBA\_Barcelona

Segueix-nos a:    **#ChristianMarclay**

■ **MACBA:** Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona, [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

■ **TIMES:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am – 7.30 pm. Tuesdays except public holidays, closed. Saturdays, 10 am – 8 pm. Sundays and public holidays, 10 am – 3 pm.

■ **Ticket valid for one month**

- Within the framework of the collaboration with Sónar+D, MACBA will offer free admission to the Museum for everyone accredited to Sónar+D 2019 (until 24 September).

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