

# Galerie Thomas Bernard

## Cortex Athletico

Press release

Music in a Corner, Early Works

Artists : Rolf Julius

Location :

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## COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE :

### Discrete encounter and low fidelity

My encounter with Rolf Julius happened a couple of years ago. I chose the word encounter because it wasn't just a question of discovering an artwork in a museum but of the precise moment when I was touched and profoundly questioned on what I was seeing (and hearing). You can spend years seeing artworks in galleries, seeing them reproduced in catalogues, talking about them during evenings with friends, without ever encountering them. They exist but you don't know them. The encounter is the moment when dialogue starts, when you understand the reality and the necessity of an artwork (or a person). It's an instant that can change your life, if you allow it to do so.

My encounter with Rolf Julius happened in a Berlin museum, where the artworks progressively become more and more imposing and monumental, year after year. On the upper floor there was a slightly scratched glass plate of an A4 format, very simply installed a certain distance from the wall. Behind the plate, a small loudspeaker, stuck between the wall and the glass. You had to get really close to hear a slight sound. The installation gave off a feeling of fragility and immediacy, as if the artist had had an intuition in his studio and had rapidly created this object. I remember this artwork from memory, its image remained with me but, as always, our memory can play games with us. I know approximately when the encounter happened, I could look in my archives to find the exact date of the exhibition and the title of the artwork. I won't. It must remain a memory image as it synthesises for me the entire corpus of Rolf Julius's work.

Many artworks from the 1980s produced by Rolf Julius proceed with the combination of small amounts of elements. They are almost all united by their discretion and fragility. Two loudspeakers in two paper bags placed directly on the floor (Music for old paint, 1983), another one on the floor leaning against a skirting board and covered in cement (Dirt Line, 1983), other loudspeakers that are simply suspended and sometimes covered in spray paint (Orange Cello (Sound Cooking), 1984 or Yellow Music Spots, 1984). These artworks do not look to occupy all of the gallery or art centre space, they position themselves in the corner of a room (Music in a Corner, UA New York, 1983), on a window edge (Music in a Window, 1986-87). They tuck themselves away and the first thing that hits us is their wise and delicate use of the space. In this sense, they are pure contemporary sculptures that have understood that there is no point in occupying architecture with monumentality and artificial staging: one can position oneself in the background and, at the same time, take control of the space. Becoming a discrete yet undeniable presence, that forces the visitor to pay even more attention.

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One of the things that attracts me the most in Rolf Julius's works is their fragility. The loudspeakers are used

as they are, and associated with dust, cement, leftover paint. And everywhere there is an infinite lightness in the choice of materials for the artwork, its fabrication, its details. This fragility allows them to create an intimacy that contemporary art has forgotten over the last 20 years. The glass plate I remember being damaged, it seemed ready to break at any moment, it was to be approached with delicacy and care. But this artwork had a strong reference to visual art tradition: it was like a drawing hung directly on the wall without a frame, the scratch acting as a crayon line, whereas the loudspeaker drew a perfect black disk. Here also, it resumed the artist's practice: combining the visual and the audio. Thus, in 1981, Rolf Julius created his artwork with a manifesto title: Music for the Eyes (the visitor is invited to lie on the floor and place directly on his/her eyes two small loudspeakers with sound). From the very title, it is about the association between sound and sight. By asking the visitor to lie down and participate in a sort of experience, it also becomes a question of perception. And if I can hear music with my eyes, can I listen to a drawing? This is the beautiful paradox that allows a small glass plate to become a great artwork.

Audio art does not avoid the temptation of the monumental that contemporary art is currently experiencing. It also now uses high fidelity. From then on, exhibiting a sound artist obliges us to confront ourselves with three types of problem: first of all, technical (the means used often require the presence of an engineer), then spatial (the sound occupies the entire exhibition space, entering in conflict with the other exhibited artworks), and finally aesthetic (artists worship black cables and the amplifier with scintillating lights, they "fetishize" their machinery). Nothing of the sort with Rolf Julius. His artworks are of extreme precision, but with technical and material simplicity, they keep an improvised, light and immediate aspect. All this gives them a rare spontaneity. These artworks created in the 1980s could have marked a turning point in the history of audio art, but artists chose another path: that of large formats, entertainment and high volumes. It is here that the beauty of Rolf Julius's works resides: contrary to the current trend, they are a starting point for another history of art. Provided that we are ready to encounter them.

Thibaut de Ruyter, september 2017