



Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

# Style

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# Orchestral Maneuvers

**Music  
Installed at  
Wood Street**

often think you need to take a deep breath before entering most art galleries nowadays. You never know what you are going to find there.

On the second floor of the Wood Street Gallery, Downtown, you could be forgiven if you were to think you had entered the showrooms of a dealer in second-hand office furniture. Twelve desks skirt the room, and on them are 12 obviously decrepit computers and a parallel group of those old-fashioned dot-matrix printers. At one end of the room, there is an array of technical, computerish apparatus for mixing sound. At the other end, there is a large-scale video screen.

It might take a little time for the visitor to realize he or she is in the middle of an orchestra.

Microphones penetrate the printers, and cables from them run to the mixing apparatus. These printers provide the raw sounds that in an ordinary orchestra would be supplied by the flutes, the violins and the bassoons, etc. Live performances can take place under these arrangements, and

when the exhibition opened a few weeks ago, the artists, a collective duo made up of Thomas McIntosh and Emmanuel Madan known as (The User), performed a world premiere of "Symphony for Dot Matrix Printers: The Office Suite," commissioned by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. But during the ordinary opening hours of the gallery, the installation runs on autopilot, governed by a computer program.

(The User) has lightened upon the notion of ambient sound for its attention. It is all around us. It is diffused and it is complex. In extracting one aspect of ambient sound, the background noise of the printer (something that never was intended to be listened to critically), they have alighted upon a cultural signifier. In this, they are not alone. I was reminded of Gian Carlo Menotti's 1949 comic opera, "The Telephone," where the trilling machine plays quite a part. At the Mattress Factory's current exhibition, "Visual Sound," Christina Rubish incorporates the sound of office machinery in her installation (it contrasts with the sound of nature in another part of it). Hans Peter Kraus, on another floor, has adopted industrial sound in his installation. As with (The User)'s "Office Suite,"



**GRAHAM SHEARING**

## DETAILS

### 'Orchestral Maneuvers'

► Through May 12. Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays.  
► Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood St., Downtown.  
► (412) 471-5605.

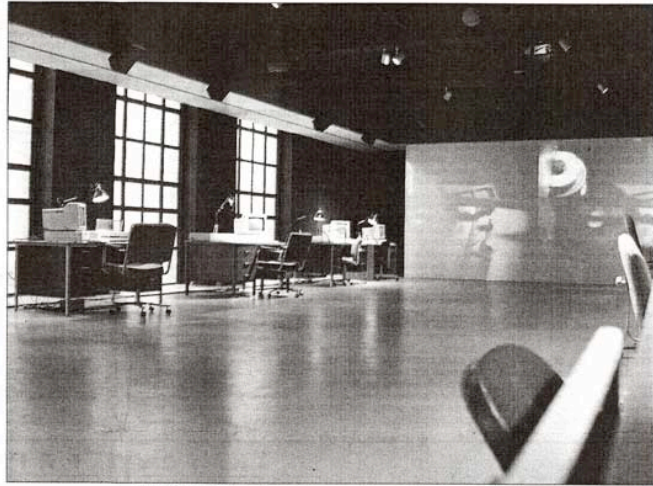
these sounds come to signify some salient aspect of contemporary society. There is an important distinction. At the Mattress Factory there is a chancy randomness to the sound (attributable to the influence of John Cage). At Wood Street, there is a more determined orchestration at work.

But the sounds are not manipulated beyond being re-ordered in a musical pattern. The use of old computers and dot-matrix printers questions the current notion that state-of-the-art technology is necessarily the most desirable. Something like an ecological agenda seems to be surfacing here. The empty chairs in front of the computer screens imply human redundancy, and this adds, perhaps, an urgent social message to the installation.

This is not just a musical happening. It is a multimedia installation. Perhaps it has a claim to be regarded as sculpture. The video element, where cameras fitted inside the mechanisms in the gallery project images onto the two screens, is the weakest link in the piece.

Upstairs, Marina Rosenfeld's "fragment opera 7 — love scene" is rather less easy to grasp. A fragment opera is, according to her, "a series of compositions, musical and visual, made by combining and recombining several ongoing series of elements — photos, LPs, videos, objects." In the gallery, the same sense of installation is present, although it is less easy to read. Rosenfeld also has a penchant for older technologies. She prepares her music by conventional technologies but records the product on nice, old-fashioned 33 1/3 rpm vinyl discs. The sound of the needle scraping along the groove pleases her. (I rather wonder why she didn't use an old 78 rpm disc and fibrous needles).

There is a larger work at the back of her mind, of which "lovescene" is but a part. One gets the impression that each time the work is performed it is capable of extensive variation. In this work, the videos are rather more interesting. Two large projections (landscapes when I was there) are set up at either end of the gallery. A much smaller projection is directed onto the underside of the lid of a



Photos by Sarah Ritter  
**Above:** "Symphony for Dot Matrix Printers: The Office Suite," by (The User). Video screen is live projection from inside the printers.

**Right:** "Fragment opera 7 — love scene," by Marina Rosenfeld. Piano, two turntables, video projection.

white grand piano in the room — somewhat enigmatically.

By contrast with (The User)'s work, where the sound is instantly recognizable, Rosenfeld's is entirely unmemorable. Although the days of walking home, humming a snatch of music heard in performance, is a thing of the past, I have no recollection of any part of her performance. It is as if it existed solely in the gallery.

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