

Symphony of a Missing Room (2009 - ongoing)

Duration: 17'



Symphony of a Missing Room - Mnemosyne Revolution (2017) 3rd Kochi Muziris Biennale. Image courtesy Kochi Muziris Foundation

Can an artwork learn?
And then,
- where would the memory
be retained?

Symphony of a Missing Room is a mutating, site-sensitive work. A composite that builds on over a decade of tacit learnings from earlier environments.

Since its inception in 2009 at the Swedish National Museum in Stockholm, the artwork Symphony of a Missing Room has been hosted by a twentyfold internationally renowned museums and Biennials. Earlier commissions have included Martin-Gropius-Bau, Royal Academy of Arts, Momentum 8 – Tunnel Vision, Centre Pompidou Metz, MMK Frankfurt, S.M.A.K, Bern Biennale and Kochi Muziris Biennale.

See a [video documentation](#) of a previous new commission of the artwork from the 3rd Kochi Muziris Biennale, India

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Description

In a museum, gallery or other site, visitors are greeted by a host that introduces the artwork. Soon they will receive a pair of headphones - and with the guidance from an unseen performer's hand, engage in an internal exercise on how to extend their sensory experience into their surroundings.

Although involving technology, this is not what defines the work. The virtual experience in the work is created through a combination of techniques. While wearing sightless goggles, the visitors are led into movement by an unseen performer. A three-dimensional sound in headphones in combination with a precise choreography strengthened by a suggestive narrative description starts a multisensory-binding loop between the body's nervous system and the imagined, through a reversed engineering of vision. In the process of passing through the artwork's score, in the friction between visual and auditory organs, the nerves of the skin the visitors examine where and when artworks exist and where one's own body begins and ends. Notions of freedom, autonomy, and what is real, imagined, and perceived are negotiated in an investigation of *virtual reality*, not as a form of technology but as an ability or sensibility to the relationship we create with our surroundings with an increased insight how technology makes us.

In a process of listening, adapting, and responding, first of all to the site where the work is shown and then to every visitor entering the work, *Symphony of a Missing Room* operates in direct opposition to the default mode of capitalism, which relates to the world through calculation, command, and control.

New Site Sensitive Commission -

Each *new iteration* of the *Symphony* is made in resonance with a local place. The artists spend time on location and dive into a creative iterative process working on a new score of instructions, record spatial sound and testing it as a movement choreography.

Each new commission becomes an event in the history of the artwork that continuously projects into the future. The places and ideas that shaped the artworks form until now, are carried forward in time and touch the present context at a distance, via the unseen performer's hands choreographing the visitor's movement. The artwork is therefore dependant on its visitors to exist. Without them being there to receive and organize the sensory impressions into a world, the artwork would not exist. When an iteration of *Symphony* has passed, the score is often acquired for a collection or in other ways kept and maintained by the local site. The knowledge transfer on how to install the work is carried out between the artists, local performers and the new owner of the work.

Symphony of a Missing Room series

Symphony of a Missing Room also is shown in a form that is not influenced by the new location. While the site-sensitive version, described above focuses on the present physical place, *Symphony of a Missing Room series*, focuses more on the artwork's own virtual history: the reverberation of past environments incorporated into *Symphony* as a body of works. By becoming an artwork that collects its museum gradually *Symphony* made itself

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independent from the environment where it was conceived from. By integrating these learnings into the work's choreographic score, as triggers for future experience, we were not collecting individual sounds, ideas, or spaces from the past, but rather, enacting the past to play out horizontally in the present visitors body. A multitude of ideas and experiences, thoughts, and reflections echoes inside the symphony as an endless conversation between presences and absences.

Symphony of A Missing Room now exists as a series of artworks. There are two options for how the artworks can be made/experienced:

- As a '**guided version**' led by trained performers
- As a '**visitors' version**' in which two visitors experience the work together: one leading, one following, and then roles change.

1. Adaptation of an existing artwork from the Symphony series

It is possible to commission an existing artwork from the Symphony series which can go through a series of minor adaptations. Timeline: Preparations off-site, 4 days training on site with performers in tandem with installation.

2. A new artwork in the Symphony series

It is also possible to commission a new artwork in the series. Here we make a site-sensitive adaptation where we allow the artwork to be influenced by the local environment - and the history of a building or institution. Timeline: 1 week research on site, approximately 2 month period off-site, 4 days training with performers in tandem with installation.

Examples of site-sensitive adaptations of the work:

A recent public exhibition of the work was at *Temple of Alternative Histories* at Kassel Staatstheater, in conjunction with Documenta Fifteen.

Devising processes on how to guide the mind through these experiences where conventional strategies of understanding and rationalization prove insufficient Lundahl & Seidl create a language of what may not be said.

Taking place in the relationship between two visitors bodies forming a relation of trust through their hands, each embodying different qualities: of water and stone, to become a river. Shaped by the friction between visual and auditory organs, and the nerves of the skin in the contact between two bodies the artwork echoes natural processes in a practice of extending one's sensory experience into one's surroundings and merging with it through the relationship.

*You are the gravity pulling me downhill,
leading me to follow through the path of least resistance*

*Together we grind boulders, chisel away mountains,
and transport rocks and sediment downstream*

As part of the SCB Biennale in Berlin, in the fall of 2022, *Symphony* were shown at the Archenhold Observatory (the place where Einstein for the first time presented the *Theory of Relativity*)

Adapting to the location of the Archenhold Observatory, this new iteration of *Symphony of a Missing Room* emerges from a playful engagement with the German word *Sternwarte*, which translates as “observatory” but is composed of the words *Stern* (“star”) and *Warte* (“wait”). *Sternwarte*, star-wait, overtones the receptive aspect of the human gaze into the cosmos, whereas the English word emphasizes the subtly invasive act of observing—or peeping—through a telescopic hole.

In *Symphony of a Missing Room: Sternwarte*, we are receivers of the light that travels from the stars and penetrates our retina. We exercise the extension of our sensorial experience into the surroundings and attempt to make contact with a signal that reaches us from a multiple light-years distance. In this work, you create a river together with the unseen performer by embodying the quality of Water and of Stone. The water represents the flow of time, and like time, the river flows in different rhythms; flows more slowly around rocks and shores than in the middle - like the effect of gravity on time in our space. According to Einstein, gravity and larger celestial bodies have an effect on the rhythm and flow of time. A black hole is the most extreme example.

Practical Information

Production details

Duration: 30'

Number of Guides (performers): 3 - (no maximum)

Capacity is a ratio of one performer : one visitor

Number of tours per day: 8 hours = 16 slots

Language: English (translation possible)

Symphony of a Missing Room was commissioned and developed specifically for National Museum in Stockholm, Sweden 2009. From 2010 onwards it has been adapted and remade as a series of artworks for commissions by venues in UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

Symphony tech rider

Transport of equipment (depending on number of visitors. Most of the time cases can go with Lundahl & Seidl as luggage on a flight / train.

Technology we use

For recording:

KU-100 dummy head microphone, Sennheiser & Neumann (11kg)

For editing:

- Martina uses MAC + Logic Pro

For visitors experiencing the work:

- Each visitor will be given a pair of Sennheiser headphones and a media player. The headphones are Sennheiser HD-380 Pro. The goggles are specially made by costume designer Julia Reindell: <http://www.julareindell.com/> They are designed to remove vision, while still letting through information about changes in light conditions.

Items to be provided by venue/commissioner:

- Microphone stand x1
- AA batteries (how many depends on the length of the run)
- Odourless anti-bacterial hand cleaner/other covid protections
- Glasses strings
- A comments book

Facilities:

- A room with plenty of power points where Guides can reset the work and charge equipment
- A lockable room where Guides can store their belongings
- A staff card to give full access to non-public areas where possible

venue collaboration:

- In cases of co-production and showings in venues which is not the commissioners: For C&M, one of the most important things to secure is a partner who is genuinely involved

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in the project. That means that the venue produces marketing for the work and that audiences are shared between the venue and the commissioner.

- Inform all venue staff that the project is happening (this avoids delays and problems with the work as it moves through the museum)
- C&M may need access to the venue before its opening hours for recording sound

FAQS

How do we make the work coexist with other activities and exhibitions in the Museum / venue

There are no physical changes made to the venue. All equipment and organization required for the work is facilitated by the artists and the co-producing organization. See a more detailed description below, dividing the work into parts.

1) Beginning

The visitors' first experience of the work is meeting their guide. They are taken to a place in the building where the media players of the work is started simultaneously.

2) The Virtual Museum

Some parts of the work are independent to any particular physical space. Here the visitors are wearing 'white-out goggles' and headphones with binaural sound. The visitors are accompanied with a guiding performer at all times. We have done this inside National Museum's Cast Collection which involved navigation in limited spaces - our performers are trained and very professional. These parts are virtual explorations of architecture - by the sensory deprivation of visual input and by adding a layer of three-dimensional sound recording synchronized with methods of choreographed touch and movement, these multi-sensory illusions simulate a kinaesthetic environment to the sound that is played out in the headphones.

3) The artwork ends in a location chosen specifically for a building / context.

4) Afterwards

When the visitors take off their headphones they can choose if they want to be on their own or spending some time together.

Development and changes to the work for a new venue or full adaptation to create a new artwork in the Symphony series

We need to access the venue in advance to research the history of the building and previous exhibitions. We would like to speak with different people working at the museum, everyone from the curators to the people working in the archive and storage as well as caretakers. We also need to rehearse with performers around 3-4 days before the start of the project and to make test-tours with groups to refine the work for its launch.

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These rehearsals and test tours can take place during normal opening hours. We also need to have access to make sound recordings inside the exhibition spaces/public spaces of the venue. For every new commission of the work we draw a specific itinerary of the work through the museum which through the recorded sound, voice instructions, choreographed touch and movement sculpts a cavity inside the visitor's mind – particular to the physical site.

How much involvement is needed by the venue?

The work is completely independent from any involvement by the venue staff. Lundahl & Seidl's collaborators guide the visitors from beginning to end.

Bookings

Regarding the booking of tickets, this could be decided between the venue and the commissioner/co-producer. On previous commissions all the bookings were made through an internet ticket-site. A volunteer/staff member has been present to tick off booked visitors in the box-office area next to a sign with information about the work.

Marketing

Marketing has previously been shared between the venue and the co-producer. As Lundahl & Seidl's background is in the visual arts, their request is that the venue makes their own marketing of the project and works towards spreading the project within the field of contemporary visual art and to the venue visitors. One important aspect of the project is how it is communicated afterwards in between visitors, but also the critical writing of articles and essays. We would like the venue to be part of inviting critics, writers and others to continue this conversation about the work. Artists talk, a panel or seminar is other activities that support that side of the project.

Space requirements and physical objects in the venue

The work does not occupy any space permanently inside the venue. For organizational needs, depending on the building, we need a storage space for headphones and goggles, as well as for the Guides' personal belongings. The Guides need a place to change, and a room in the museum in which they can rest between tours (a 'green room'). It makes the process easier if Guides are allowed access throughout the building for the duration of their rehearsal and performance. Sometimes this involves giving Guides a staff pass or keycard (at least two staff passes/keycards to be shared by the group).

Lighting

In a non-museum / non-theatre space we would require to light the space where the performance takes place. Possibly including a hazer. (Lundahl & Seidl own one)

Health and safety

Safety precautions are taken and if anyone would like to end the tour they are free to at any time. We have a covid protocol which you may choose to adopt/adapt to your venue.

Accessibility

We have had visitors entering the tour on wheelchairs and it showed to be an interesting experience after talking to the visitors. Blind people could experience the work with help of a guide. Children can enter the tour if they understand English and if their parents can give permission, indeed we have worked on adaptations within this series specifically for children and their families.

Example for CALL and what qualities we are looking for in a performer:

We are looking for xxx performers for the immersive artwork *Symphony of a Missing Room*, showing as part of the artist duo Lundahl & seidl's visit to [venue] in [date].

The requirement, first of all, is someone with a genuine interest for process-oriented work. The qualities we are looking for may be present in someone with training in movement/body awareness. But in general, the qualities needed could be found in anyone with a sensitivity to human intra-action. It is important that any prospective performer understand that the work of the performer is quite demanding physically and mentally. The artwork is open for around 8 hours a day. We will work with several performers that work in shifts which means you will perform/guide visitors for around 4 hours a day.

This role is not a performance to be looked at, but more of a facilitating role to help the visitors in the encounter with the artwork. Although the work is choreographed and based on instructions, it requires improvisation and tuning in with the differences in each visitor's interpretation of instructions and triggers within the work. Some visitors move very slowly, others fast, some follow the choreography and flow with the performer's movement, others seem to move more in friction with the work's choreography - this does not mean that they do not appreciate the artwork but just that their bodies move and exist in time differently than others. The performer's work is to tune in with these differences to be the organic element that mediates between the artwork's set choreography and the interpretation and difference of each visitor's interpretation.

How do we work with the performers and train them to learn the work's choreography?

We would start by letting them experience the work (from within) and then show them how we perform it. (They would listen to the instructions, but look at the choreography from the outside). We would then show them one by one the physical techniques of leading. Then they would train by leading each other and us (Christer and Martina). After the first day, they will get a recording of the instructions that they can listen to and make notes in the script depending on how they learn best. Someone may like to do physical learning more.

The performers will alternate the role of being a guide for visitors in the artwork.