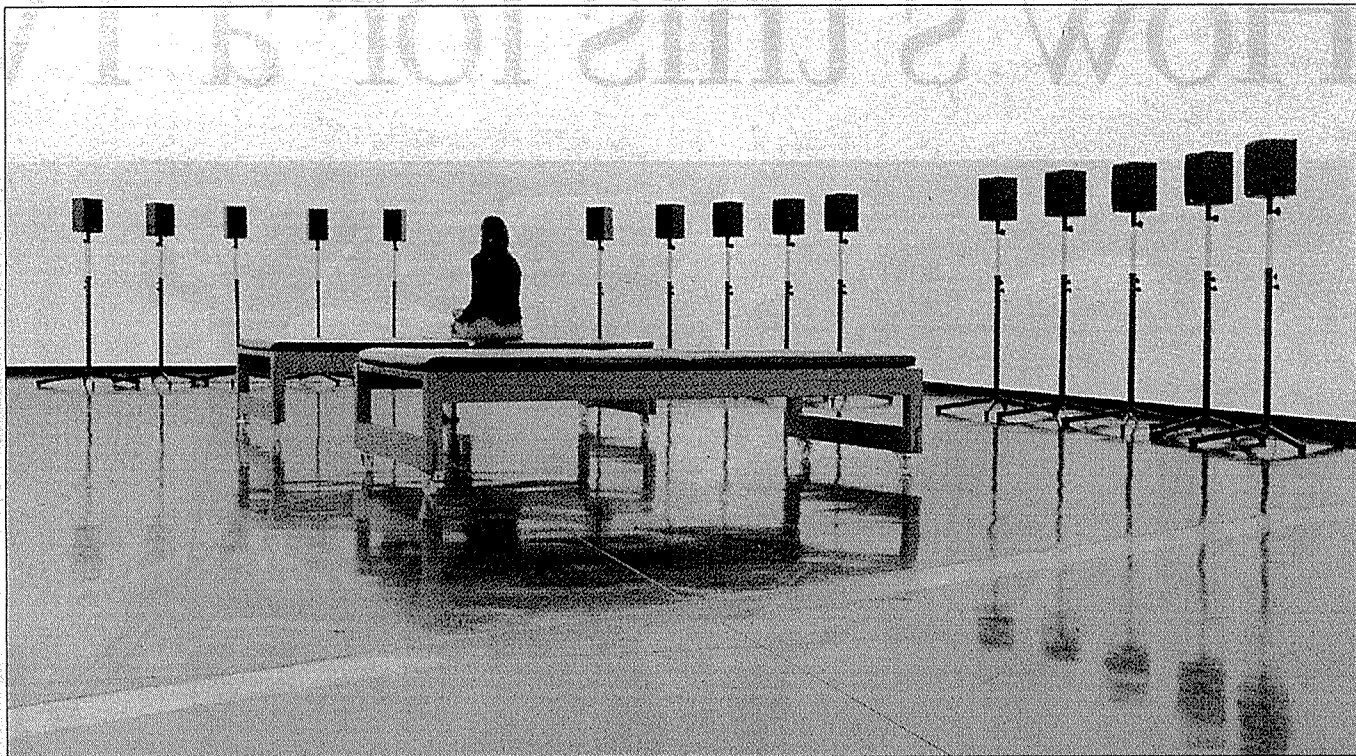


Feel the mighty rhythm



Installation of Canadian artist Janel Cardiff's mighty *Forty part motet*, above. One of Muntean & Rosenblum's clever but pallid paintings, below.

VISUAL ARTS

JANEL CARDIFF'S FORTY PART MOTET and MUNTEAN & ROSENBLUM

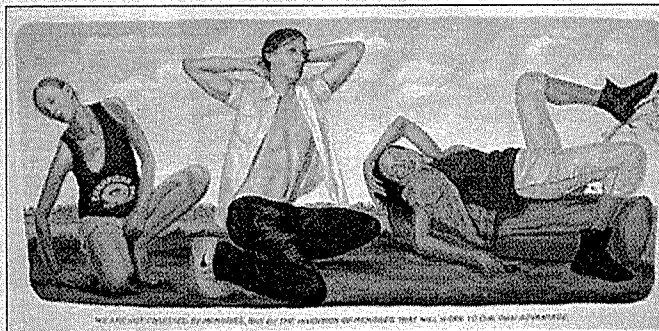
ACCA, Southbank, until December 5

Robert Nelson Reviewer

The theme of this year's Melbourne International Arts Festival — the human voice — was destined not to embrace mainstream visual arts. Nevertheless, some beautiful pieces have been staged at ACCA and Heide involving song in spatial contexts.

An example was Jude Walton's *no hope no reason*, a sumptuously chanted group of poems, performed with choreographed movements against projections in the large gallery at ACCA. Singers, dancers and images joined harmonies with the text, mingling local and celestial reference and transporting you from psychological argie-bargie to the sublime zone of cherubim.

Relying on live performers, the event was confined to four evenings; however a continuing sound-event can be witnessed in the same space — Canadian artist Janel Cardiff's mighty *Forty part motet*. Some benches are surrounded by a choir of 40 speakers. Each speaker relays the voice of a single singer performing the motet by



Thomas Tallis, *Spem in alium*.

At first, I was sceptical: if, like me, you're a lover of Tudor music, you'll know the piece and may remember some of the Latin verses. You're happy to leave the house to hear performers, but not to hear a recording that you can pluck from the rack.

Some of this disbelief was with me as I entered the large gallery and saw people earnestly pondering the music on the minimal pews, surrounded by the totemic college of speakers on stands, discreetly wired and all looking inwards with Masonic geometry.

Of course, the music was sublime, Tallis' polyphony at full stretch. Exploiting the divine Renaissance creation, Cardiff's piece cannot fail to yield a moving experience; but maybe it deserves no more credit than a pair of headphones.

So you dutifully sit down and listen for the nine minutes that it takes, absorbing

the great chords as they rise and fall with sacred euphoria. But then, rather like the movements of tone in the composition, the audience peels away from the benches and circulates in front of the speakers. The black boxes look dumb, and initially you feel a bit dumb consulting their private confessions; but each speaker unmistakably carries a unique voice.

Your body becomes oddly empowered to navigate through the music, to visit this tenor or that soprano singing a line and then maybe waiting a long time before resuming with "domine" or whatever. You pass from voice to voice, wondering how long you can linger. No choir allows this movement with the music. You can hearken to an individual almost to the exclusion of others and then pass on in greater lust for another voice.

It's seductive and also strangely frustrating — as of longing — where you suspect that you could be at the very cusp of the tones somewhere

else, no matter how robust and reassuring are the sonorities that you're enjoying through the voice that you've visited.

And so, like others in the gallery, you unwittingly become a performer yourself, fulfilling a whole allegory of passion and sublimation that began with Tallis and ends in your anticipation of the next syllable, a phoneme which is also word, a word which is also a chord, a chord which is also a rhythm, which is also a crescendo and something angelic beyond.

This minimal installation, alas, quite displaces the Austrian artists, Muntean & Rosenblum's, clever but pallid paintings. Though sustained and consistent, the works are detached in mood and also in pictorial dynamics.

Though quoting old-master idioms, the figure work is photo-dependent: each figure looks cut out; none belongs in its proposed space, and you cannot therefore indulge your fantasy, even though the poses are narcissistic and the dress pornographic.

In copying photographs and pasting the figures into the compositions, the artists haven't really felt the presence of their models, and so you never enjoy any intimacy with them — bimbos all — unlike the closeness that you have with the sublime abstractions in the other room.

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