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HUDSON GALLERY

205 Hudson Street New York, NY 10013

Reviews New York: William Anastasi By Kim Levin

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“William Anastasi: Sound Works, 1963–2013” was a revelatory show that examined the conceptual and perceptual role of sound in the work of this underknown but highly influential artist who was a pivotal figure in the development of Conceptual, Process, and Minimal art—almost before those movements existed. His radical ideas provoked other artists from Robert Morris to Eva Hesse.

The sensitively curated exhibition began with *Microphone* (1963), a Tandberg Model 5 tape recorder, tape, and take-up reel emitting the sounds made by the machine itself. It is, as Anastasi explained at the time, “a recording of the recorder recording the recorder.” Another amazing work, not shown since Anastasi’s 1966 “Sound Objects” exhibition at Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, was *Window on the Airshaft* (1964). A large slice-of-life chunk of wall from his East Eighth Street apartment, with faded floral wallpaper and a big open window, emits the muffled sounds of eight hours of stray conversations, sirens, and barking dogs that the artist recorded in 1964. This Installation is an aural time capsule: about chance, randomness, the act of listening, the world as it is or was, and external circumstance.

Also influential was *Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony* (1965), an unspooled tangle of shiny, brown magnetic analog tape hanging from two nails. The position of the nails parallels the outstretched arms of not only the artist but also of Bruno Wolter, conductor of the symphony recorded on tape, and it suggests Leonardo’s Vitruvian Man. Several of Anastasi’s “Sound Objects” with speakers and ready-made noises, such as a hissing radiator, were included, along with—in the gallery’s windows—a pneumatic drill and a whirring fan.



William Anastasi, *Window on the Airshaft*, 1964, mixed media, dimensions variable, installation view. The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College.

Four blind “Constellation Drawings” made with eyes closed and determined by the duration of a Bach fugue, offered an expanded experience of Bach’s inaudible sounds. And there were “Concert Drawings,” made during performances by John Cage and Merce Cunningham. An added bonus was Anastasi’s *Coleslaw*, a film of the artist “singing Cole Porter 7 times.”

Like Cage, Anastasi depended on chance and randomness as ordering principles. His now-obsolete technology, synesthetic esthetics, and edgy ahead-of-their-time ideas are captivating today, as is his relevance to the relational art of our century.