

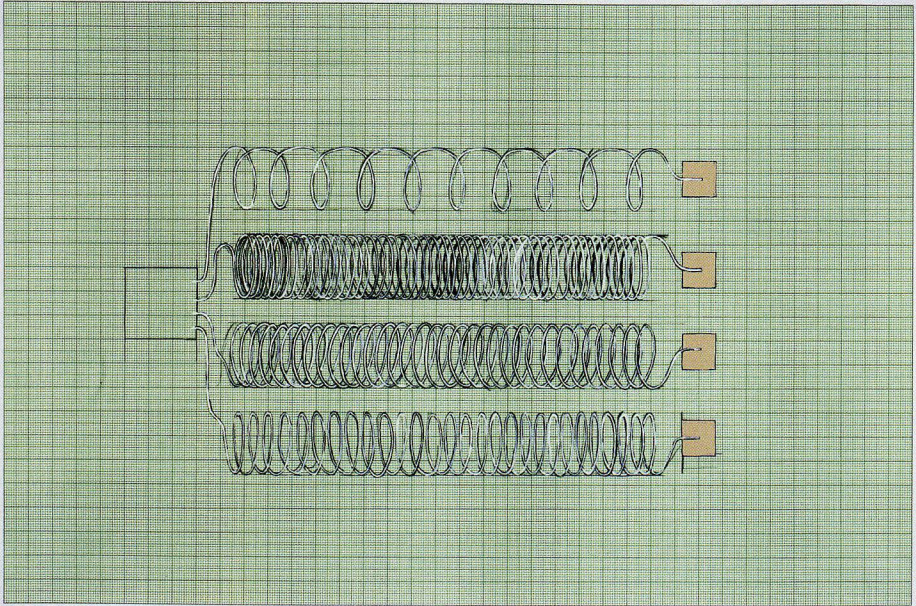
How to Draw Sound

Nancy Campbell

Invention starts from a simple idea, a hunch, a curiosity about something. When brush touches paper it makes a mark and records the thought. Sometimes this exercise goes somewhere; sometimes it stops at the point of conception.

In the case of Toronto artist Marla Hlady, the art-making process starts when brush hits paper. Her exquisite ink notations are records of her thought processes, inklings and curiosities. Her process is simple: drawing by association. In the case of the working drawings that precede her latest sculptural sound work, *She Moves Through the Fair*, Hlady starts with the not-so-simple idea of sound. She draws a set of speakers emerging from a surface, seen in her first rendition as a blue square, perhaps suggestive of water. The progression develops with a second drawing of microphones emerging from plasticine. Here she decides that rather than deal with the fickleness of water, she will explore an insulator with her trademark plasticine. Hlady moves on to complete a large series of drawings, each a permutation of its predecessor, to become the foundation for the sound sculpture. The drawings digress at points, exploring tangents that may or may not be realized in the final work. Throughout the series we see tubes or conductors twist and bend, extend and shorten, emit one "arrow" of sound or a cacophony of silent noise. Once her ideas have coalesced, however, the drawing stops and the sculptural work begins. This is not to imply that these drawings are merely preliminary or unrefined. They are in fact lovely little signatures, a score on the making of sound presented in a linear fashion, allowing the viewer access to Hlady's working processes.

The practice of drawing has always been part of Hlady's oeuvre. In the extensive body of work that she has produced one can easily trace her development through the vast archive of ink drawings. Since 1994, most are done on green graph paper, allowing the artist to precisely annotate her mechanical productions. By contrast, the latest series marks a departure from the confines of the grid, a freeing up of the image, with the



Plan for Sound Sculpture with Plasticine, Microphones and Copper Tubing, 2000.
Ink and acrylic on graph paper. 27.9 x 41.9 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

soundscapes being produced on large white sheets, looping and exploding in little blasts on the page.

There is another side of Hlady's drawing practice, distinguished by drawings that exist where no three-dimensional realization has been developed. This is not to imply that the ideas explored had no relevance or merit but rather that, like Duchamp's imagined Surrealist contraptions, they are inventions purely of the imagination. With titles like *Plan for a Sculpture to Make People Fly*, *Electromagnetic Clown Machine* and *Untitled (plan for gameboard kit)*, these fanciful ink drawings are intended as exercises for the mind's eye, offering up possibilities for dreams and whimsy. They also serve to motivate and enlighten the artist between larger projects, allowing her to realize conceptually ideas that cannot be realized otherwise.

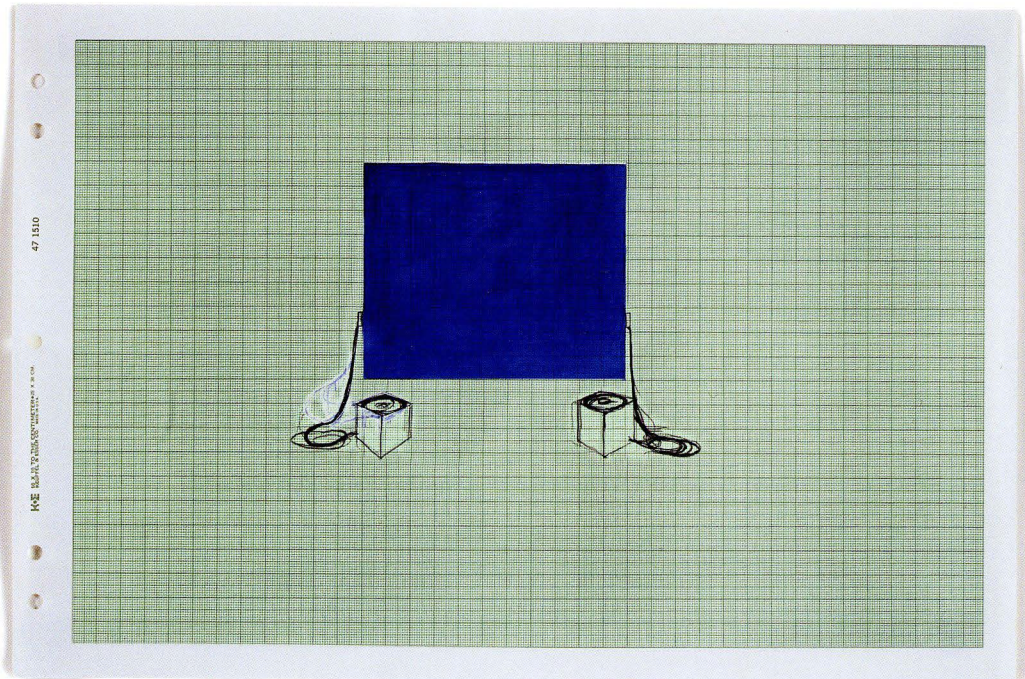
So, how to draw sound? The magic of drawing is that it enables one to see sound, touch fire or hear silence. Hlady's discriminating diagrams are a visual archive of such possibilities, allowing the viewer a glimpse into the impossible yet plausible inventions of her mind's eye.

Opposite

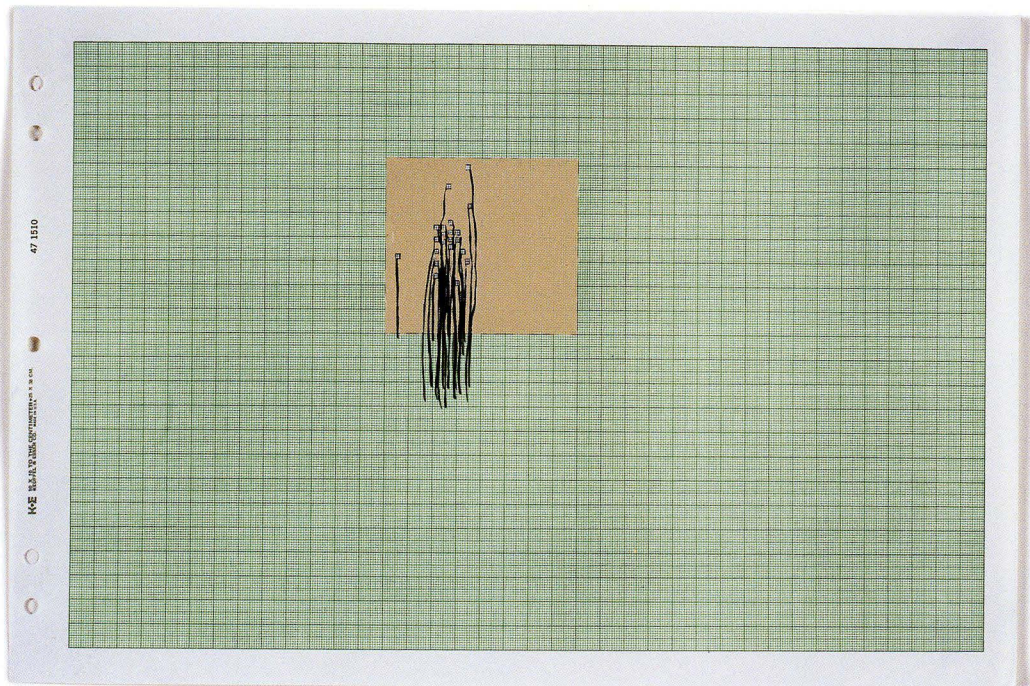
Ear or Cone of Confusion #2 (detail), 2000.

Ink and acrylic on paper. 44.5 x 57.2 cm.

Courtesy of the artist.



Plan for Sound Sculpture, 2000.
Ink, acrylic and gouache on graph paper. 27.9 x 41.9 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.



Plan for Sound Sculpture with Plasticine and Microphones, 2000.
Ink and acrylic on graph paper. 27.9 x 41.9 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

