



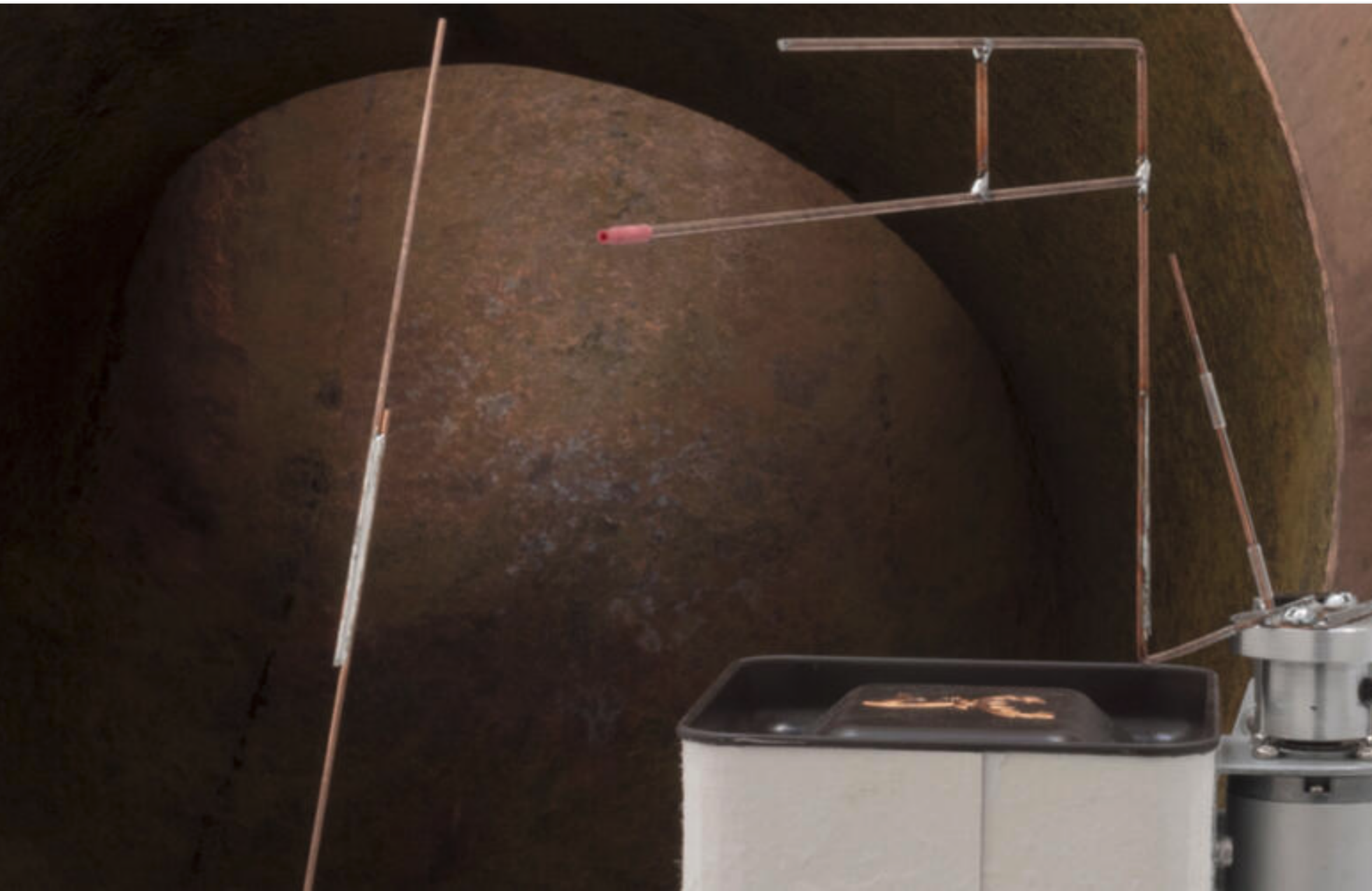
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Marla Hlady and Christof Migone's Whisky-Infused Resonances

The artists' installations of components retired from the whisky-distillation process explore sound, labour and materiality

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BY NEIL PRICE IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, REVIEWS ACROSS THE WORLD | 08 NOV 22



There is something uniquely irresistible in the way Marla Hlady and Christof Migone's exhibition, 'Swan Song', mashes the familiar with the strange, causing us to reflect upon our often-imperceptible relations with materiality. After its debut at the Artists at Glenfiddich Space in Dufftown, Scotland, in 2019, followed by an initial Canadian run at Christie Contemporary in March 2020 disrupted by the pandemic, the work has returned to the Toronto-based gallery in a slightly different format to give viewers another opportunity to linger in its sonic interplay.



Marla Hlady + Christof Migone, *Swan Song*, 2019, copper swan necks, cardboard whisky sleeves, motors, speakers, recordings, electronics, 1.6 x 2.7 x 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Christie Contemporary; photograph: Adam Swica

Made from two 'swan necks' – sections of metal piping used in the whisky-distillation process, before being retired after 12 years – the titular kinetic sculpture *Swan Song* (all works 2019) consists of tubular forms placed on a table, with their open ends facing opposite walls. When viewers walk near the sculpture, sensors trigger a set of electronic motors that cause thin metal rods to swivel on circular axes. The movement is smooth but occasionally suspended when the metal rods quietly meet. The mechanics then become enveloped in a massive wave of sound: the two ends of the tubes act as a pair of giant gramophones, filling the entire gallery with tones loud, ominous and intriguing.

The works in 'Swan Song' were created as part of a residency that both artists attended at the Glenfiddich Distillery. They include a series of overlaid and mixed recordings that feature water sluicing through cairns, coopers working and repairing casks, substances moving through vats and noises of bottling. A choir, composed of distillery staff whose voices were arranged according to their years of service, adds a human texture to the show's cacophony.



Marla Hlady + Christof Migone, *Swan Song* (detail), 2019, copper swan necks, cardboard whisky sleeves, motors, speakers, recordings, electronics, 1.6 × 2.7 × 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Christie Contemporary; photograph: Marla Hlady and Christof Migone

Apart from its sophisticated engineering, the power of the exhibition lies in how it questions what we may take for granted when we observe or use everyday materials, challenging us to see simple objects as containers – literally and figuratively – of complex ideas, histories and experiences. A seemingly singular sound, for example, actually derives from temporally fragmented and collective ones; the apparent unchangingness of distillery labour and movement, paradoxically, creates new matter. We see how the often-observed inner workings of things are of no less importance. As if to reinforce this point, the web of wires and circuits that forms the sculpture's brain centre are concealed beneath the table.

Part of the work's intrigue is the indecipherability of its recorded sounds. There are moments when they carry the strain of a blaring siren; at other times, we hear the mechanical grinding and screeching of metal. Caught in an enjoyable state of curiosity, the viewer lingers with the work to discern its various sonic textures, to make sense of what has been upended or repurposed.



Marla Hlady + Christof Migone, *Swan Song* (detail), 2019, copper swan necks, cardboard whisky sleeves, motors, speakers, recordings, electronics, 1.6 × 2.7 × 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Christie Contemporary; photograph: Marla Hlady and Christof Migone

On a nearby wall, and within an upper gallery space, objects from the residency form an accompanying work titled *Sampler*. Among the items on display is *Sampler (Single Blend)*, which shows a conjoined bottle containing one single malt from the Highlands and one from the Lowlands, slowly mixing into each other. Another object, *Sampler (Tilt Level)*, is composed of two conjoined sample bottles: each contains water from different but linked bodies of water. It all amounts to a playful extension of the show's overarching concern for interconnection, aural imprint and materiality. In their accompanying artists' statement, Hlady and Migone revel in the ideas that these baffling items provoke. 'They cannot be proven or disproven,' the artists write. 'They teeter, they unfold, they puzzle.' 'Swan Song', with its thoughtful exploration of sonic and physical resonances, invites us to think about labour, sound and material coming together in often surprising and inscrutable ways, delighting while it bemuses.

Marla Hlady + Christof Migone, 'Swan Song', is on view at Christie Contemporary through 19 November.

Main image: Marla Hlady + Christof Migone, Swan Song (detail), 2019, copper swan necks, cardboard whisky sleeves, motors, speakers, recordings, electronics, 1.6 × 2.7 × 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Christie Contemporary;

photograph: Marla Hlady and Christof Migone



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