

# MAYA DUNIETZ

# ROOT OF TWO

Curated by Rachel Adams  
Chief Curator and Director of Programs

May 7–September 18, 2022

BEMIS X CENTER

“[Sound] flows through the environment as temporal material lending dramatically to the experiences we have of being in particular buildings, and with particular people.”

–Brandon LaBelle¹

“But, as the music left my home and went from piano to piano and from pianist to pianist, it became clear that not only are two pianists essentially different from one another, but two pianos are not the same either. Instead of the possibility of repetition, we are faced in life with the unique qualities and characteristics of each occasion.”

–John Cage²

Maya Dunietz engages with sound as a composer, musician and a visual artist. In *Root of Two*, she has created a four-month long performance, in collaboration with the spaces of Bemis and the body of the visitor walking through those spaces. As a practitioner, Dunietz explores notions related to psychoacoustics, resonance and the embodied experience—which changes depending on objects’ location within a given architecture and the viewer’s proximity to them. While engaging with the four galleries of Bemis Center, the score expands in both time and space. The movement of sound between the interior and exterior of each designated area creates links between the bodies moving through and spending time in these spaces and with the works. As Duneitz’s work grows in dimensionality, *Root of Two* is a complex introduction to the sensory impression of sound.

An ever-evolving sonic pulse winds its way through the exhibition to which *25Hz – 25fps* (2022) sets the stage. As a silent work that emits movement in lieu of sound, it asks the audience to listen physically. Through a large-scale silent projection, Dunietz explores the physicality of sound by removing the auditory elements and emphasizing rhythm.

¹Brandon LaBelle: *Overheard and Interrupted* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2016), 265.

²John Cage, “Foreword” in *The Well Prepared Piano*, ed. Richard Bunker (Colorado Springs: (The Colorado College Music Press, 1973)

# ROOT OF TWO

PERFORMANCE SERIES

**May 7, 4 PM: Maya Dunietz and Roscoe Mitchell**

This special opening performance will feature the legendary saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell with Maya Dunietz inside the seventeen vibrating pianos of  $\sqrt{2}$ .

**June 8, 7 PM: Lori Goldston and Kyle Hanson**

In this two-set performance, Lori Goldston and Kyle Hanson respond to  $\sqrt{2}$ . Goldston is a master of color, texture and expression on the cello, playing a concert of lyrical abstract beauty. Hanson is a non-traditional accordionist and composer, who will play uplifting and motivating compositions.

**August 11, 7 PM: The Fugu Plan**

Comprised of vocalist/composer YUKA and musician Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz, The Fugu Plan explores traditions of ritual, tribal, and spiritual music through the customs and folktales of Japan. The performance includes a second set of wild improv that “hacks” into  $\sqrt{2}$ —inserting objects into the pianos, and intervening in the vibration system through various means.

**September 17, 4 PM: Dorian Wood, Carmina Escobar, and Possibilities of Milk**

Carmina Escobar and Dorian Wood will respond to  $\sqrt{2}$  with their powerful hypnotizing voices—exploring the spaces above, against, along and inside the droney vibrations of the pianos. Possibilities Of Milk—a new, loud kraut rock improvisation band by Maya Dunietz, David Lemoine, Haggai Fershtman and Daniel Meir will perform their wild, unhinged sound in and amongst  $\sqrt{2}$ .

This gallery guide is available in Spanish at  
[bemiscenter.org/media/pdfs/summer2021.pdf](https://bemiscenter.org/media/pdfs/summer2021.pdf).

Esta guía de la galería está disponible en español en  
[bemiscenter.org/media/pdfs/summer2021.pdf](https://bemiscenter.org/media/pdfs/summer2021.pdf).



## 5

The title of the piece *25Hz – 25fps* refers to the moment in which the speed of the speaker (25 hertz) meets up with the film rate (25 frames per second). At that point, synchronization occurs, creating an illusion of stillness and exposing the blindspot of video.

The exploration of the sound and body relationship continues with *Brain on a plate* and *Mechanical Lungs*, both from 2022. While *25Hz – 25fps* silently heightens the body, these two works emit sound while creating more meditative spaces that reference nature, improvisation and interdependence. *Mechanical Lungs* invites the viewer to gaze in between the three breathing rhythms. *Brain on a plate* gives a key to the exhibition. It asks—where is the sound? Is it in the space? In the objects? In our body? Inside the brain? Together these works set the stage for active, deep listening that continues throughout the exhibition.

Emanating from gallery two is the singular work  $\sqrt{2}$  (2022)—comprised of seventeen pianos drilled with transducers and connected to powerful amplifiers. These pianos, which Dunietz refers to as “mammoths,” spend their second life humming, roaring, shaking and radiating out the composition through their bodies. When one walks through the installation, or places their body on or against a piano as it speaks, the body of the visitor mixes with the sound of the pianos which mixes with the architecture of the space—creating an entirely new experience. While the square root of two is an irrational number, the title suggests that this work deals with the impossible and the unreachable. In reality, the work allows for sound to penetrate one’s psyche, allowing each visitor space and time to reflect on both past, present and future.

This site-specific installation is the full version of  $\sqrt{2}$ , preceded by a version with one piano and later with five. At Bemis, the work has grown into a herd of pianos dotting the gallery, grouped in families and couples. Beginning at a young age, Dunietz performed contemporary repertoire and with this specific work, she expands on her personal history with the piano while also referencing historical experimental works by John Cage with prepared piano, Joseph Beuys with *Infiltration for Piano* (1966), and Annea Lockwood’s *Piano Transplants* (1968–72).

Working through free improvisation as a methodology, they ended up creating two stand alone works that resemble their personal tempos, with an old answering machine acting as both a mediator and a missed connection between them. Visitors will be privy to messages Dunietz and Lemoine might leave each other throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Alluding to an empty nightclub, gallery four contains six plywood boxes of different sizes resembling a casually-arranged sound system. Powerful, loud, energetic music and natural soundscapes emanate from within the empty boxes, inviting visitors to engage with the work: to touch, stand inside, and crawl into the display. The music flows as if from a void, with each box playing a layer of a recorded live set by *Possibilities of Milk*—the new band comprising of musicians Haggai Fershtman, David Lemoine, Daniel Meir and Maya Dunietz, recorded in Kibbutz Haogen in Israel for the purpose of this work. *Boxes* (2022) was built during Dunietz and Lemoine’s residency at Bemis. Closing the exhibition, this work speaks a language that intertwines visual minimalism with auditory maximalism.

*Root of Two* is a durational exhibition—one that is experienced through time, and through the body. As it shifts and changes during the four months on view, visitors also impact the works— their bodies act as both receivers, and as active components in the exhibition. Whether it is through personal solo exploration or socials with a group, this exhibition is an invitation to open oneself up to new ways of listening.

Maya Dunietz: *Root of Two* commissioning sponsor:



Maya Dunietz: *Root of Two* is also supported, in part, by:

Albert and Eleanor Feldman Family  
Israel Foundation

Anonymous\*

אמנים  
artis

Mellon  
Foundation

NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

NEBRASKA CULTURAL LANDMARK  
OF AMERICA  
FOUNDATION

OMAHA STEAKS  
SINCE 1911

Additional support for performances and talks is provided, in part, by:

The Jewish Federation  
of Omaha

SCHWALB CENTER  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
THE SCHWALB CENTER  
FOR ISRAEL AND JEWISH STUDIES

## 4

A prepared piano has sounds temporarily altered by placing objects on or between the strings, such as bolts, screws, rubber erasers. Lockwood’s *Piano Transplants* are iconic compositions and site-specific installations that also expand on the history of the piano as an object and instrument. Taking pianos that were beyond repair, Lockwood burned, drowned and planted them in English gardens, focusing on elemental and natural sound sources and interdisciplinary interventions, where the piano became played by its environmental and contextual circumstance.<sup>3</sup> With Beuys, *Infiltration for Piano* became about silencing. Covering the instrument with gray felt, he condemned it to silence. In  $\sqrt{2}$ , Dunietz removes the shackles from the instrument and frees their voices. Using this transducer technology, she resurrects each piano and by removing the human element from the equation, the pianos are free to express themselves and speak to each other, and we are free to interact with them in new, unimagined ways.

In gallery three, the viewer enters first into an almost pitch-black room, adjusting to the darkness by using their hearing. Immediately, Dunietz connects to our primal instincts—how sound initially (and still continues) to help us negotiate space. *Air Sculpture* (2013) creates a mapping of spaces through a collection of sounds and tones, transferring the viewers into a constantly morphing auditory landscape. Through a five-way sound system, field recordings of Algeria, Morocco, India, and France created by Dunietz and her late friend Ghedalia Tazartes are juxtaposed into a geological narrative, taking the viewer on an imaginary journey to the world outside this room. Playing with auditory perception, the work evokes physical dimensions and qualities that play with auditory memory.

*Bemis Surprise* (2022) is a collaboration with David Lemoine that emerged from Dunietz and Lemoine’s time as artists-in-residence at Bemis Center in fall of 2021. Inspired by their time at Bemis and combing the fourth-floor materials lab a.k.a Bemis thrift store, this work acts as an autobiography of two artists, who not only collaborate and inspire one another, but in fact share lives and children together.

³“Annea Lockwood: *Piano Transplants – Piano Burning, Piano Garden & Piano Drowning*,” Issue Project Room, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://issueprojectroom.org/event/annea-lockwood-piano-transplants-piano-burning-piano-garden-piano-drowning>



