

Report: Site-Specific Exhibition

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Site Specific Exhibition Title: *Atmosphaera*

Location: St Mary's Church, Swansea

Rationale

St Mary's Church in Swansea holds profound meaning for my artistic exploration and conceptual approach. The site is not only a historical landmark but also a symbol of resilience and continuity, having been rebuilt following its destruction during the Blitz. Its architectural presence and open interior spaces provide a dynamic canvas for exploring themes of memory, community, and identity. The church's role as a gathering place reflects traditions of connection and belonging, which resonate deeply with the conceptual framework of my work. Central to my installation is the interplay between natural and mechanical sounds, which aim to evoke a layered emotional response. By merging organic sounds of nature with industrial and human-made auditory elements, I invite viewers to reflect on the complexities of their environment and lived experiences. These contrasting soundscapes highlight the dualities present in modern life- tranquility versus disruption, organic versus constructed, and intimacy versus detachment. The bench, built with assistance from my grandfather, serves as an anchor for these ideas. Not only does it symbolize a deeply personal connection to memory and familial bonds, but it also operates as a tactile and functional medium for sound projection. The inclusion of a family photograph on the bench further enhances the personal narrative, encouraging viewers to reflect on their own relationships with heritage and space. Through collaboration with my peers, the broader exhibition investigates the themes of belonging and remembrance, offering diverse interpretations that enrich the overall narrative. By situating this work within the sacred and communal setting of St Mary's Church, I aim to foster an intimate dialogue between the audience, the artwork, and the site itself.

A Summary of the Research

Over the semester, my research evolved into a multifaceted exploration of site specificity, soundscapes, and the integration of personal narratives within a historical context. Beginning with theoretical foundations, I studied Robert Smithson's earth art, and his notions of how physical sites shape perception and meaning. Smithson's emphasis on the inseparability of artwork from its environment provided a framework for understanding the unique opportunities and challenges presented by St Mary's Church. Further research into Ai Weiwei illuminated the ways art can serve as a medium for social dialogue. His work inspired me to consider how my installation could engage with broader themes of collective memory and community identity while retaining a deeply personal perspective. In exploring sound as an artistic medium, I drew inspiration from artists who have pioneered its use to evoke emotional and environmental connections. One such figure was Hildegard Westerkamp, whose soundscapes often highlight the interplay between human activity and the natural world. Her work inspired me to think critically about how everyday sounds such as bells, birds, or wind- can elicit emotional responses and create a sense of place. Additionally, Janet Cardiff and her collaborative works with George Bures Miller influenced my approach to immersive audio experiences. Cardiff's *Walks*, which blend environmental sounds with narrative storytelling, encouraged me to consider the temporal and spatial dimensions of sound in my installation. This approach helped me to integrate site-specific auditory elements into the work, fostering a deeper connection between the audience and the setting. Archival research into the history of the church revealed its transformation over decades, from a site of worship to a space of cultural and historical significance, providing invaluable context for my work. Practical experimentation formed the backbone of my creative process. I began by collecting soundscapes using accessible technology, such as a smartphone, before transitioning to more advanced tools like a Zoom hand recorder. These recordings captured a range of sounds- fireworks, water, construction, bells, birds, and wind chimes, all chosen for their emotive resonance and symbolic associations. The process of testing and refining these sounds within the church's acoustics allowed me to assess how they interacted with space, ensuring that the final installation would achieve its intended emotional impact. This combination of primary and secondary research guided the conceptual and technical development of my artwork, ultimately producing an immersive experience that bridges personal narratives with universal themes of sound, memory, and place.

Techniques Developed for the Production of Your Body of Work

The production of my site-specific installation required the development of both technical skills and creative strategies to effectively realize my vision. Initial recordings, captured on a smartphone, provided a preliminary understanding of how different sounds interacted with the church's acoustics. These early tests revealed the potential for integrating natural and mechanical sounds to create a layered auditory experience. The transition to using a Zoom hand recorder marked a significant advancement in sound quality and precision. This device enabled me to capture nuanced auditory data, such as the intricate textures of wind chimes and the resonant tones of church bells. I also experimented with environmental recordings, including the lively sounds of bonfire night celebrations, to evoke a sense of temporal and cultural context within the work. This process was both technical and creative, as I considered how each sound would contribute to the overall narrative. The design and construction of the bench presented a unique opportunity to integrate tactile and auditory elements. By embedding a speaker within the bench and positioning it strategically, I ensured that sound vibrations would travel through the wood, enhancing the immersive quality of the installation. This approach transformed the bench into more than a functional object- it became an integral part of the sensory experience, inviting viewers to engage both physically and emotionally with the work. While I initially explored the use of motion sensors to create an interactive element, practical limitations led me to simplify this aspect. In hindsight, this decision strengthened the installation by allowing the audience to engage directly with the soundscapes and visual elements without the distraction of complex technology. The inclusion of family photographs added another layer of interaction, encouraging viewers to reflect on themes of memory and identity in a more personal and contemplative manner.

Individual and Group work overview

In contributing to the final site-specific exhibition, my focus was on ensuring that the conceptual elements of my installation aligned with both the theme of the exhibition and the historical and cultural significance of St. Mary's Church. My primary role involved researching, planning, and executing the audio-visual aspects of my work, emphasizing the integration of soundscapes and personal artifacts. Within the group, I served as a collaborator and communicator, facilitating discussions on how individual pieces could harmonize within the shared space. However, during the process, I experienced personal challenges that impacted my ability to fully engage with group dynamics. These difficulties made it harder to maintain consistent communication with the team, which sometimes led to misunderstandings or delays in decision-making. Working in a group proved challenging, particularly when balancing differing perspectives and managing shared responsibilities under these circumstances. Despite these obstacles, I worked diligently to navigate these challenges. I made an effort to listen actively and incorporate constructive feedback into my work, even during moments when I found group communication overwhelming. Recognizing the importance of compromise, I focused on maintaining a professional attitude and seeking support when needed. This approach allowed me to continue contributing meaningfully to the collaborative process while also ensuring my personal challenges did not overly impact the overall success of the group's efforts. Through this project, I honed several skills valuable for future professional development, including teamwork, time management, and adaptability. The experience of managing personal challenges while working collaboratively taught me the importance of resilience and the value of seeking balance. Additionally, I developed technical proficiency in audio recording and spatial sound design, which I anticipate will be beneficial in advancing my career in the arts.

Evaluation of the Exhibition

The exhibition successfully addressed St. Mary's Church's historical and communal significance. My installation's focus on the interplay between natural and mechanical sounds, combined with personal and familial elements, resonated with the site's spiritual and social dynamics. The bench, with its layered meanings of memory and community, effectively bridged the gap between personal reflection and collective history. The chosen soundscapes amplified the immersive quality of the installation, creating an evocative atmosphere within the church. Audience feedback highlighted the installation's ability to foster introspection and emotional engagement. The juxtaposition of organic and artificial sounds invited viewers to immerse themselves in the space and reflect on themes of heritage and identity. Visitors commented positively on the tactile and auditory qualities of the bench, which encouraged an intimate connection with the work. However, the feedback also illuminated areas where the installation could better support accessibility. For example, individuals who are hard of hearing faced challenges in fully engaging with the sound-based elements of the work, suggesting the need for alternative ways to convey the auditory experience. Similarly, those with visual impairments may have found it difficult to interact with the photographic components. These insights underscored the importance of designing installations that are inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences. While the exhibition was largely successful, the areas for improvement highlighted by audience feedback provide a clear direction for future practice. Enhancing accessibility could involve incorporating visual aids, such as subtitles or written descriptions for soundscapes, and tactile elements that engage those who are hard of hearing. For visitors with visual impairments, auditory storytelling or tactile surfaces could provide an alternative means of interaction. Additionally, refining the sound projection further to ensure clarity in a challenging acoustic environment would enhance the overall experience. Moving forward, I plan to explore accessibility features more intentionally during the design phase of future installations. This approach would ensure that my work remains inclusive, fostering engagement with a broader audience while staying true to the conceptual framework of the piece. From this exhibition, I have more confidence in the use of audio and experimentation. In fact, I would like to continue using sound in my future works.