

PRESS RELEASE GIGA-HERTZ AWARD 2021
Festival and award ceremony for electronic music
Sat, 27.11.–Sun, 28.11.2021

Christina Kubisch is the winner of the Giga-Hertz Award 2021

Together with the SWR Experimental Studio, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media annually awards the Giga-Hertz Award for Electronic Music. The 2021 award winner is sound artist Christina Kubisch, who receives the main award of 10,000 euros for her pioneering life's work. The Giga-Hertz Production Awards go to Yvette Janine Jackson from the USA and André Damião from Brazil. Honorary mentions will be given to Maja S. K. Ratkje, Viola Yip and Mendi + Keith Obadike. The award ceremony will take place on November 27 at the ZKM as part of a two-day festival with performances of the award winners' works.

The Giga-Hertz Award is being awarded for the 14th time for electronic music compositions. This year, the main award of 10,000 euros goes to the renowned sound artist Christina Kubisch for her pioneering life's work. Her installations not only interweave acoustic and visual means in a complex way, but are also characterized above all by the unique use of sounds from electromagnetic fields.

The Giga-Hertz Production Awards, each worth 5,000 euros, are awarded on a project-by-project basis. With 187 applications from 47 countries, there were more submissions than ever before. The jury awarded the two production awards to the Brazilian sound artist André Damião, whose work "Chloroquine Pop-ups" (2020) deals with the dramatic Corona situation in Brazil through visual and sonic elements in the web browser, and to the American composer Yvette Janine Jackson for the radio opera "Destination Freedom" (2017), in which she reworks sound and history to create a haunting narrative about the deportation of African slaves to America.

Honorary mentions go to the American-Nigerian artist duo Mendi + Keith Obadike for their installation "Fit (The Battle of Jericho)" (2016), the Norwegian Maja S. K. Ratkje for the live improvisation "Corona Lockdown Concert for TUSK Festival 2020" and the work "Bulbble" (2019), which the Hong Kong-born composer Viola Yip composed for an instrument she made herself.

Representatives of the press are cordially invited to the festival and award ceremony. All award winners are also available for press interviews. Registration at: presse@zkm.de

The jury this year consisted of: Ludger Brümmer (composer, director of the ZKM | Hertz-Lab, professor of composition for digital media, Staatliche Hochschule für Musik Trossingen), Peter Weibel (artistic director of ZKM), Detlef Heusinger (artistic director of the SWR Experimentalstudio), Lydia Jeschke (editorial director New Music and Jazz, SWR2), George Lewis (Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 2020-21 & Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music, Columbia University), Kirsten Reese (composer and sound artist, director of the UNI.K | Studio for Electroacoustic Composition, Sound Art and Sound Research, UdK Berlin)

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Festival Program Giga Hertz Award 2021

November 27-28, 2021

Saturday, November 27, 2021

4 pm, Lecture Hall | Film screening "Sisters with Transistors" about the pioneer women of electronic music

7 pm, Media Theater | Giga-Hertz Award Ceremony in the presence of the award winners. With performance of two of this year's award-winning works

Viola Yip "Bulbble", (2019), for 8-channel electromagnetic self-built instrument with light bulbs and relays, ca. 12'

Yvette Janine Jackson "Destination Freedom", (2017), fixed-media radio opera, 22'09'

Exclusively the award ceremony will also be broadcast as a livestream:
zkm.de/giga-hertz-preis

8:45 pm, Music Balcony | Reception with Performance

Maja S. K. Ratkje "Solo Voice and Live Electronics", live improvisation, ca. 20'

9:45 pm, Cube | Giga-Hertz Award Concert

SWR Experimentalstudio with Óscar Escudero "BIO, the Piece About Your Pianist Life", for pianist, video & live electronics, (2018-21), 16', UA

SWR Experimentalstudio with Hongshuo Fan "Conversation in the Cloud", for clarinet and AI musician, (2020-21), ca. 12', UA

Mendi + Keith Obadike "Fit (The Battle of Jericho)", (2016), sound installation presented as fixed media playback, 9'

Mark Pilkington "Structured Behavior", (2021), algorithmic audio-visual performance, approx. 10', UA

André Damião "Chloroquine Pop-ups", (2020), audiovisual performance, 9'15"

David Bird "Iron Orchid", for piano and live electronics, (2021), 22', premiere

Sunday, 28 November 2021

11 am & 1 pm, Forecourt | "Electrical Walks" (electromagnetic city walks) led by the main award winner Christina Kubisch

4 pm, Cube | Keynote by Christina Kubisch on her life's work followed by a Q&A session

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7 pm, Cube | Giga-Hertz Award Concert II

Electroacoustic compositions with electromagnetic fields from 1980 – 2021 by Christina Kubisch

Giga-Hertz Main Award to Christina Kubisch | Jury Statement Lydia Jeschke

A Brazilian frog jumps over a Swiss waterfall. The starry sky opens in the gasometer. An electricity box makes music... The sound artist Christina Kubisch finds and invents spaces whose existence, connection or expressive power we previously had no idea of.

Outside and inside

When we walk through the world with the induction-controlled headphones that Christina Kubisch has helped to develop, a new, completely exclusive world is created in our heads. Both are real – the inner and the outer world. Through the membranes of our bodies, they connect and thus enter into alliances that sometimes seem strange. A natural sound from another continent may at first – as in "Waldesruh" for a nocturnal sound walk at the Festival Neue Musik Rümelingen 2003 – fit harmoniously into the current natural context, but then it irritates. But both worlds, the one in the headphones and the one around us, are connected by the movement in which we experience them. Because with every step, other signals reach us – from the electromagnetic induction field as well as from our immediate surroundings. This is certainly one secret of the impressiveness in Christina Kubisch's induced works. Another lies in our trust in the power of imagination. Christina Kubisch's art projects set it in motion and give it a respective specific direction.

This direction is never abstract or artificially forced. Rather, once we have taken it in our imaginary world, it seems almost frighteningly obvious. The fact that no stars can be seen at night in a closed gas container is part of our urban world of experience. In Christina Kubisch's "Licht Himmel" (2006) for the Oberhausen Gasometer, they suddenly do exist – and even regardless of the time of day. However, in this permanent light-sound installation, we do not just feel that we have been transported into nature, but rather at the same time into a theater that reflects nature. Not by chance: Friedrich Schinkel's stage design for a performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "The Magic Flute" was the inspiration for the 200 light points that symmetrically accentuate the steel girders of the Gasometer. The inner life of the gasometer with its various angles and sections is sounded out via loudspeakers. As we walk through the space, we pass various composed fields. Here, a real-fantastic world does not penetrate our innermost sensorium via vibrations picked up in the headphones, but unfolds, walkable-experiential, in an architectural interior.

Blue and black

Schinkel's dome of the sky is a deep blue, and luminous blue has also become a

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Christina Kubisch color over the years. In Oberhausen in 2006, the blue glow of the Gasometer sky is also visible from far away. Mostly, however, the blueness shines indoors, where it focuses individual perception. And it is then already the result of reaction and reflection: its origin lies in the invisible wave range of so-called black light (or UV light). Usually used in research or forensics, it makes fluorescent surfaces – such as the optically brightened white clothing of visitors to an installation – appear blue. Above all, however, it makes visible what cannot normally be seen: organic traces such as those of lichens, bacteria or fungi in rooms and caves.

"consecutio temporum" is the name of a series of sound/light installations that began in 1993 in a former studio space of Joseph Beuys. Since then, Christina Kubisch has been discovering more and more places. These are places with a special but little-noticed history that she makes tangible. Sounds played over loudspeakers create resonances and reinforce spatial structures. In the dark room, the black light makes visible what is hidden in the brightness.

Making the hidden tangible – this desire is the driving force and a strong expressive moment for Kubisch's work. Since 2003, in her electromagnetic city walks "Electrical Walks", she has been exploring vibrations that send electrical charges into our urban environment. Amplified in our headphones, we hear the electric fields of neon signs, mobile phones, tram overhead lines, power boxes and other current-controlled installations in our world. Like an acoustic black light, what existed before but remained hidden from perception appears. Chiming urban places of a new, at times quite eerie or alarming kind are created. The radio play "Desert Bloom" is based on the particularly "loud", diverse electronic sounds in Las Vegas, which Christina Kubisch collected there over several weeks with her special headphone technology. In 2016, "Desert Bloom" was awarded the Karl Sczuka Prize for Radio Play as Radio Art at the Donaueschingen Festival.

Christina Kubisch has always thought about the present and the absent. In 2011, she brought silence to Donaueschingen – paradoxically in the form of a sound installation for the Donaueschingen Festival. The word "silence" resounds in different languages, the sounds also become visually comprehensible in the sonogram. "Silent Exercises" asks – a few decades after John Cage – once again at the traditional music venue whether and how silence can be named, practiced or heard.

Art and Science

It has become clear by now: The sound artist (and occasional performer) Christina Kubisch does not distinguish between research and artistic work. Technical developments serve art projects, but at the same time their (further) development is fuelled by artistic ideas. This is the case in electromagnetic induction as well as in the incorporation of solar technology, which Christina Kubisch has been using since the early 1990s, especially in natural environments: Sounds are evoked by the incidence of light; the rhythm of the sun's rays determines the musical course.

Research and teaching became another field of activity, following international guest professorships especially at the Chair of Sculpture / Audiovisual Art, which

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Christina Kubisch held at the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Saar from 1994 to 2013. During this time, Christina Kubisch influenced many students not only as a personality but also in her genre-spanning way of working. But even beyond this circle, she became, directly or indirectly, a pioneer for many artists of the following generation.

Finding paths: another recurring theme in Christina Kubisch's work. If we, as during the Darmstädter Ferienkurse 2018, have to find our own paths through a large, sounding cable forest in order to experience music, then with some luck we might arrive at our very own "Orchestra On A Wire" (the title of the interactive live installation for orchestra, electromagnetic fields, electric cables, induction headphones and string quartet) – a metaphor for the beauty of an auditive world always to be discovered anew.

For the creative and emphatic sensitization and aestheticization of our perception, for the diverse opening up of new worlds in the ear, the jury of the Giga-Hertz Award 2021 awards Christina Kubisch the main award for lifetime achievement.

Giga-Hertz Production Award to André Damião for *Chloroquine Pop-ups* (2020) | Jury Statement Ludger Brümmer

In his interactive work "Chloroquine Pop-ups", André Damião impressively describes the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, which has now claimed over 500,000 lives. This is done by means of audio-visual elements that Damião calls up with the help of Javascript within a web browser and invites to interact. He uses very expressive photos, for example empty graves, the narrative of rhythmically arranged numbers or finally white empty spaces that pop up rhythmically in multiple browser windows. This is accompanied by an insistent collage of soundscapes and dramatic sounds or clusters. Added to this are voices, images, individual words and the progression of the death rate as a graphic building block. At the same time, everything appears matter-of-factly abstracted, sparing exaggerated drama. In this way, he creates a dramaturgical element out of the otherwise so mundane pop-up window of the browser and transforms it, as an expression of visual rhythm, not only into an explicit pillar of information, but also into a musical element.

He frames all this as a drastic symbolization of a desperate, to put it with Martin Heidegger, Dasein in the world. At the same time, he formulates a drastic political indictment that is a clear expression of hopelessness and ignorance in the face of an unscrupulous political caste.

"Chloroquine Pop-ups" integrates auditory and visual means in a strikingly unusual way and captivates with a strong reduction and efficiency as well as with the intense effect created. The jury honors this impressive reinterpretation and musicalization of everyday digital information carriers with a production award.

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Giga-Hertz Production Award to Yvette Janine Jackson for *Destination Freedom* (2017) | Jury Statement George Lewis

Yvette Janine Jackson's "Destination Freedom" is a multichannel fixed media composition, part of her series of works that combine theatre, installation, and immersive electroacoustics to create what she calls radio opera. The work draws from Jackson's research on the oral histories of former American slaves, and its Afrofuturist orientation sonically imagines a spacetime journey by enslaved Africans from the inner cargo hold of a slave schooner to the zero-gravity of a spaceship.

"Destination Freedom" weaves together a complex assemblage of Foley, electronic synthesis, instrumental performance, sung and spoken recitatives, and field recordings of the sounds of water from San Diego Bay and Pier in Southern California, to advance an aesthetic of narrative soundscape that draws from history to examine social issues. The work asserts an historical mission, in the form of a sensory history in which the slowly unfolding narrative immerses listeners in the sonic ecology of slavery, including the indeterminate and uncertain Wittgensteinian timelessness that must have marked the horrors of the Middle Passage. In the end, the sonic materials of "Destination Freedom" can be said to deploy history, memory, legacy, and myth to confront the staggering moral contradiction between trafficking in persons and the Enlightenment itself. The final section of the piece, with its ironic juxtaposition of glacially slow tempo and Theremin-like blues soprano voice, poses the question of whether a fresh hell or an Ethiopianist freedom and respite awaits the formerly enslaved in outer space.

"Destination Freedom" represents the future of a creolized sonic art in which new subjects for opera and musical theater offer new possibilities for a decolonized Afrodiasporic Gesamtkunstwerk without borders or limits. For this technically pristine and emotionally affecting work, the jury of the Giga-Hertz Prize 2021 awards Yvette Janine Jackson a Production Award.

Honorary Mention for Maja S. K. Ratkje for *Corona Lockdown Concert for TUSK Festival 2020* | Kirsten Reese

For her artistically unique voice, cultivated over decades in the field of live electronic performances as a "performing composer", the jury of the Giga-Hertz Award 2021 awards Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje with an honorary mention. Exemplary for Ratkje's work is the 30-minute "Corona Lockdown Concert for TUSK Festival 2020", which was performed as an audiovisual stream and in which the Norwegian vocalist and electronic musician performs with a live electronic set. She uses her voice as the sound source material, which she condenses into sound layers and textures through electronic manipulation, triggering it in a virtuoso interplay of software, interfaces and controllers, samples and recordings of digital and analogue instruments, while moving between the most diverse electronic processes in a shape-shifting manner. As an artist, Maja Ratkje is continuously expanding her spectrum of forms of expression. Whether in collaborations with improvising musicians, installations with text or visual material,

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in scores for large orchestral works, or in the collaboration with Sami singers and in the examination of Northern European singing traditions. An essential core of her work, however, remains live performances, often as a solo artist, in which she creates and transforms multi-layered, often unwieldy as well as disparate sound materials and weaves them into expressive dramaturgical arcs with surprising formal developments and unpredictable contrapuntal juxtapositions.

Honorary Mention for Viola Yip for *Bulbble* (2019) | Detlef Heusinger

...narration resembles music in that it fills time, "fills it out decently", "divides" it and makes that "there is something about it" and "something going on with it"...

Viola Yip refuses this narrative apostrophized by Thomas Mann in "The Magic Mountain". Her fatherless art refers back to her "grandfather" John Cage. Her "point zero" in music history is a "short circuit", her new beginning a real "eclat". And yet she is a Gesamtkunsthandwerkerin – a synthesizing artisan – whereby this designation should not have any negative connotation here, but should simply be seen as an extension of Gesamtkunstwerk, since Yip herself lends a hand as an instrument maker and performer. In the process, she creates a mini-music that further condenses even minimal music, which sensibly and enlighteningly forms an informal music like installation from the aforementioned short circuit. Since in "Bulbble" she consistently exhibits the pure functioning of the electrical discharge as art, one can say with Jean Baudrillard: "If everything is functional, nothing is functional any more". The total negation of traditional musical contexts tells a new story; it is not a worship of new snow, as Theodor Adorno once polemicized, but a condensed striding from space into time, as described by Richard Wagner in "Parsifal".

Parsifal: "I am hardly walking, yet already feel far ahead."

Gurnemanz: "You see, my son, here time becomes space."

Honorary Mention for Mendi + Keith Obadike for *Fit (The Battle of Jericho)* (2016) | George Lewis

"Fit (The Battle of Jericho)" by the United States duo of Mendi + Keith Obadike is an installation whose physical materials are comprised of wall-mounted transducers that carry eight channels of sound, delivering sine tones, a folk-blues arrangement for voice and electric guitar of the well-known African-American spiritual, "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho", and a nine-minute sound work, a lament of abduction, loss, and violence.

The piece deploys data sonification to render audible ominous correlations between the incidence of online searches for "Black Lives Matter" and incidents of racist violence and political protest found in online news reports. In the spiritual, "fit" becomes a linguistic alteration of "fought," and other sonic texts in the installation invoke such phrases as "fit the description," referring to the common

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pretext used by police for surveilling persons of color, and “fought the law,” or resistance to state-sponsored injustice.

The spiritual is believed to have been composed by enslaved African Americans in the first half of the 19th century. Over the ensuing years, the song has been recorded by a great variety of singers, but this version reclaims the intent of its original composers, for whom the phrase “the walls came tumblin’ down” referred to their hopes and aspirations for freedom from slavery.

For this sensually and intellectually affecting assemblage of data sonification with Afrofuturist technology and social justice, the jury of the Giga-Hertz-Award 2021 awards Mendi + Keith Obadike an honorary mention.

General information on the Giga-Hertz Award

The Giga-Hertz Award is dedicated to the world-famous physicist Heinrich Hertz (1857–1894); he taught at the end of the 19th century at the Technical University of Karlsruhe (now the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) and discovered electromagnetic waves there. The aim of the award is to promote electronic music and to give impulses through new sonic and compositional possibilities. The Giga-Hertz Award is one of the most important awards of its kind internationally and has received steadily increasing attention in recent years with its accompanying concerts and performances. Previous award winners include such greats as Pierre Boulez, John Chowning, Francis Dhomont, Jean-Claude Risset, Pauline Oliveros, Brian Eno, Gottfried Michael Koenig, Trevor Wishart, Jonathan Harvey, Curtis Roads, Laurie Anderson and Éliane Radigue.

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