

When considering cultural identity, is it possible to dissociate nature from our social constructions? The predominance of landscape painting in Canada shows how formative its uninhabited expanses have been on our perception of space and our collective identity. Yet, as this “nature” was transposed from the real to the canvas, it became sublimated, purified, harmonized. Sound artist Julien Champagne’s video installation, *Pieces for Instruments* (2022), simultaneously undertakes a deconstruction of our cultural representations and a reconstruction articulated around the musicality of the environment. In three filmed perambulations through the countryside, Champagne brings to light our cultural dimension by way of a contemporary exploration of our visual heritage.

From the dawn of modernity, painters have employed nature to represent a search for the ideal or universal. Like Caspar David Friedrich in his *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), Champagne films his wanderings with his back turned to us, clearly reminding us of our 19th century romantic heritage. The image frame affords another perspective, however; at his feet, bumping on the rough terrain, instruments dragged along by ropes reverberate on raw contact with matter. By turning our attention to the ground, the work shows nature in all its disorderliness and irregularity, far from the refined and transformed representation of the horizon.

Like musical scores, these wanderings “make the landscape sing” and accentuate the various sounds of the materials, which the artist symbolically associates with the instruments. The age-old practice of percussion calls back to the formation over eons of minerals and rocks; the taught guitar strings strike knotted tree roots; microphones record the rhythmic wave songs. Yet the dissonance caused by ground elements expresses the sensory complexity that the body feels upon direct contact with the materiality of nature. The artist’s filmed interventions give voice to the discordances that mark our journeying, leaving behind the meditative harmony usually associated with landscape.

Like a painter transposing his sketches onto canvas in the studio, Champagne reuses his sound recordings to compose experimental musical pieces. These compositions, arranged for visitors’ free listening in the gallery, allow us to imagine new ways of presenting nature while highlighting the sensory and auditory importance of the landscape.

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**Marie-Hélène Toutant** is a candidate for a master’s in art history, specializing in feminist studies, at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Her research is focused on representations of gender social relationships, mainly in connection with femicides, and their spatial characteristics in contemporary art.

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Presented in collaboration with Vidéographe, *Pieces for instruments* is a video installation articulated around the meeting of sound and landscape. In its three videos, the artist strolls through some breathtaking natural landscapes while pulling musical instruments behind him. Dragged along the ground, the instruments emit sounds that, together, create the soundtrack for the piece.

How does the landscape influence our auditory and musical imagination? What instruments, what rhythms, and what melodies is a given landscape likely to suggest? By what means can a forest floor, a mountain, or a beach play the part of a musical score? The gallery becomes a space of contemplation in which these questions intersect.

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**Julien Champagne** has developed a multidisciplinary practice that spans the fields of media arts and experimental music. His work explores the malleability of sound, landscape and everyday objects, while often referencing 20th century canonical artworks.

He recently presented his work at Art Quarter Budapest (Hungary) and collaborated with Artex (Montreal, Canada) to release his album *Data String Oscillations*. His work has previously been exhibited at Clark (Montreal, Canada), Occurrence (Montreal, Canada), Daïmôn (Gatineau, Canada), La Déviation (Marseille, France), Praxis art actuel (Sainte-Thérèse, Canada), as well as at Traverse Vidéo festival (Toulouse, France) and the Rendez-vous Québec Cinéma (Montreal, Canada).

His album *A Take on Piece for Guitars*, inspired by the present exhibition, will soon be released on the Archive Officielle label. Champagne's practice has received support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. Some of his works are distributed by Vidéographe. He lives and works in Montréal.

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