

Nika Schmitt

EDWARD STEICHEN AWARD



LUXEMBOURG RESIDENT

2022

“Nika Schmitt effectively engages spaces with artistic arrangements including mechanical movement and sound. Incorporating eco-sensitivity into her work, she creates deeply symbolic installations on timeless subjects. She is not afraid of interacting with the audience and taking space in a unique fresh way.”

JURY STATEMENT

Nika Schmitt

Born in Luxembourg in 1992, works and lives in Rotterdam (NL)
www.schmittnika.com

Exhibitions, residencies, projects, presentations

- 2022** **Meakusma**, Rotondes/CUBE, Luxembourg (LU)
Experimance, Garely Haus, group exhibition / sound festival, Saarbrücken (DE)
Wasteland, Grey Space in the Middle, group exhibition, collaboration with Flora van Dullemen, The Hague (NL)
Meakusma, IKOB, Eupen (BE), Rotondes, Luxembourg (LU) et CUBE (LU)
Territorio Especifico (part 2), expeditions in specific territory, sound residency program, Rostock (DE), Berlin (DE)
- 2021** **Raar Sound Series**, Een Kunstcentrum Charlois, performance / kinetic sculpture, Rotterdam (NL)
Territorio Especifico (part 1), expeditions in specific territory, sound residency program, Montevideo (UY)
Actie, Grey Space in the Middle, group exhibition / preview show, The Hague (NL)
Sonic Explorers (part2), Künstlerforum, Sonotopia, Beethoven Stiftung, residency project and group exhibition, Bonn (DE)
Klankenbos spring edition 2021, Klankenbos, 'Flux' group exhibition, Pelt (BE)
- 2020** **Radau Radar**, In the framework of Esch2022 European Capital of Culture, Annexe22, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
Bâtiment 4, Cueva, group exhibition, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
Eng Aaner Siicht op d'Natur (Another View on Nature), Mirador Stengefort, 'Flux', public space group exhibition, permanent work, Steinfurt (LU)
Sonic Explorers (part1), Kër Thiossane, Beethoven Stiftung, residency project, Dakar (SE)
- 2019** **rainy days 2019**, Philharmonie de Luxembourg, curated by Lydia Rilling, commissioned work / single work presentation, Luxembourg (LU)
Klangmoor Schopfe, curated by Patrick Kessler, group exhibition (sound), Gais (CH)
- 2018** **locus motus**, Fabrik45, Sonotopia 2018, bonn hoeren and Beethoven Stiftung Bonn, curated by Carsten Seiffarth, solo exhibition, Bonn (DE)
électromagnétique mobile, Off-program Dak'art: african contemporary art biennale, collaborative project, Dakar (SE)
- 2017** **Lankelz**, CUEVA, group exhibition, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU)
Fresh Cacao en Carat Lucas Gassel Prijs, Cacaofabriek, group exhibition, Helmond (NL)
Artspotting, Nederlandse Bank (DNB) with Martin Van Vreden, group exhibition, Amsterdam (NL)
Back to Maybe, MAFaD, graduation show, Maastricht(NL)
- 2016** **Transplant**, Kunstpodium T, group exhibition led by Annegret Kellner, Tilburg (NL)
 Artistic research trip led by Mique Eggermont, Dakar (Senegal)
Antropical, art residency led by Aurélie d'Incau, Steinfurt (LU)

During her studies in Maastricht, Nika Schmitt was already fascinated by the vibrations of the natural elements. In her earlier observations she followed the scientific impulse to measure these organic movements and quickly recognized the potential in the contrast between uncontrollable elements and the human need for structure.

It was precisely the interwoven relationship between movement and sound that Nika saw as an opportunity not only to observe, but also to form sensory experiences.

In her work with rhythm and patterns, whether regular or chaotic, Nika shows how data is formed in contact with other data and how this interactive relationship is connected to one's own sensory experiences.

While she was initially concerned with the research on movement of individual elements, she now is increasingly interested in their interaction with ever more complex systems.

For Nika, each space can be broken down into its components. Light, sound and temperature are measured and altered through minimal interventions, the new combination thus distorting the experience of space and time.

Therefore, she plays with expectations and the human inclination for regularity while always remaining unpredictable, like the element of chance infiltrating almost all of her created systems from the outside.

With her kinetic sound installations with mostly self-made mechanical systems, Nika Schmitt tells stories that are connected to the places where the works are located. With empathy and a lot of humor, the viewer is led into the artist's universe of light and sound immersed in a multi-sensory experience.

Sandra Schwender
Carl Rethmann

Cover: Radau Radar © photo Mike Zenari

Sweet Zenith

Intertwined feedback systems, kinetic sculpture, 500 x 300 cm, Meakusma, Ikob, Eupen (BE) | 2022



Mirrored in space, two light pendulums orbit solar collectors mounted on poles. Driven by their own luminosity, the pendulums never come to rest. *Sweet Zenith* displays elemental forces that are transformed from one into the next, repeatedly colliding in a chaotic motion. Sound becomes light, light becomes movement and movement again becomes sound in perpetual feedback loop. Sound and light bounce off the walls and constantly change course. The exhibition space itself generates and limits the entropy of the spectacle and witnesses a seemingly endless trial of opposing forces.



Molenfeuer

Sound intervention, hydrophone, underwater-speaker, ca 250 m distance, Territorio Especifico, Rostock (DE), exhibited at lieb12, Berlin (DE) | 2022



Molenfeuer was created during the residency 'Territorio Especifico' in Rostock in collaboration with Carsten Stabenow.

Nika and Carsten generated an underwater feedback sound composition between the two closest opposing points at the harbor's bay. The entrance to the harbor is marked by two light towers, a green one on the west and a red one on the east side (*Molenfeuer*). Separated by the ocean, they are placed at a distance of approximately 250 m from one another towards the open sea. Not directly accessible by foot, they triggered the idea to connect the two points symbolically through

sound. After studying various marine communication methods, Carsten and Nika decided to send the sounds of the ocean and ship traffic noises back and forth between the two towers, in real time. A hydrophone was placed on one side and an underwater speaker on the other. A Zoom call tied the loose ends of the feedback loop between the two towers. First, the sounds from the water, ships and motors became audible, then a rhythmic feedback sound slowly established itself. At times, it was interrupted by a passing ship or strong underwater currents, but then reconnected again.

Radio Rotor

Self-sustained kinetic sculpture, 40 x 40 cm, Territorio Especifico (res), Montevideo (UY) | 2021



The *Radio Rotor* robot is a kinetic model that merely reacts to its surroundings. It receives radio frequencies and translates sounds into a rotary mechanic movement. This movement displaces the robot and the attached radio antenna at the same time.

The incoming frequency thereby changes and in return controls the robot's movement in real time. A feedback loop is created between movement and sound with the alternating factor of the location-dependent radio sounds.

Coin-cidence

Kinetic sculpture/performance, 45 x 45 cm + 35 x 35 cm, Een Kunstcentrum Charlois, Rotterdam (NL) | 2021



Destiny or coincidence? *Coin-cidence* is a kinetic sculpture that searches for a path on uneven surfaces.

The visitors are invited to throw coins on the ground and make a wish. The sculpture rolls around uncontrollably and will occasionally roll over a coin producing a "bedum-tss"- sound which, allegedly, makes the wish come true.



LOOP

**Kinetic installation (three units + external factor), 700 x 300 cm,
Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (kabk), The Hague (NL) | 2021**



© photo Pedro Gossler

Loop is a kinetic installation that consists of three main interconnected „models“ and an external unit (factor) „rando“ which is located at the window. Every unit represents a type of repetitive movement in time and influences the process of the other units either through light or vibration. The installation engages in an endless loop and continuously programs its own repetitions mechanically. „Rando“, the external factor, consists of a sun panel placed outside that directly powers a small dc motor connected to unit 2 (dancing spaghettis). Whenever there is sun, there is movement. The movement expressed in rhythmic tappings on the surface of the table determines the

speed and type of movement of unit 1. Unit 1 then mechanically operates the power switch of the two motors found in unit 3. The latter interact through motion dynamics created between them. The fluctuations are made visible through light bulbs installed in unit 2. The light bulbs then feed four dc motors through solar panels. Four individual spaghettis are dancing and tapping on the table of unit 2 and thereby again accelerate the movement of unit 1 in charge of the power supply of unit 2. The loop closes here. This work is an ode to time itself. The installation is a research on cyclic and repetitive phenomena in relation to time perception.

Radau Radar

**Kinetic sound installation, 900 x 500 cm, Annexe22,
Esch2022 European Capital of Culture, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU) | 2020-21**

In *Radau Radar* sound reflections are reshaped and made audible by moving physical surfaces. The idea for this work arose during the Sonic Explorers artist residency in Dakar (SE) and became part of Nika's ongoing research into cyclic and repetitive phenomena. With her kinetic installations, she examines the effects of rhythmic stimuli on our spatial orientation and our ability to estimate time.

A feedback noise can be heard through a number of speakers and microphones installed in the exhibition. The frequency is continuously reflected and realigned by a rotating parabolic dish that is suspended in the middle of the room. As a result of the installation, the reverberation encounters changing conditions on its way through the exhibition space. This means the pitch and the rhythmic structure of the frequency change constantly. Different types of microphones record the acoustic conditions over time and feed the signals separately to the individual loudspeakers in real time.



© photo Mike Zenari

The visitors can perceive a kind of “Chinese whisper” effect, better known as the popular children’s game “Telephone” or “Silent Mail”. Changing sound sources, moving light reflections and moving elements create a spatial composition that reinvents the acoustic and visual experience of the existing interior.

Balls to the Wall

**Kinetic installation, 300 x 430 cm, Batiment 5, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU) | 2020
and Experimance, Saarbrücken (DE) | 2022**



The work is part of a series based on time perception studies involving the effects of perceived motion, stimuli repetition and physical and emotional tension.

Neoprene fabric is stretched across the room building a second ceiling. Metal bearing balls are spread on top of the sheet and are casting small shadow dots which are perceivable from underneath the cloth. The top of the cover, however, stays invisible. A linear actuator placed in the middle of the room is moving a

magnet repeatedly up and down. As the magnet reaches the top, it attracts a metal pendulum from the other side of the neoprene sheet. As it moves down, the fabric starts to shape a funnel so that the other metal balls which are loosely spread across the fabric start to roll towards the middle. As the tension grows the abrupt release of the fabric catapults the gathered balls towards the ceiling producing a “bang”. The procedure repeats itself. The repetitive movement of the actuator stays the same, however the moment of the release of the fabric and the sound of the “bang” changes depending on how many balls gather in the middle. The goal is to create a linear event that has a changing outcome governed by “chance”. Like rolling dice, the balls land on the fabric in a different constellation over and over again, each new configuration ultimately influencing the next.

Flux

**Kinetic analogue sound installation, 120 x 20 cm, Eng aaner Siicht op d’Natur, Stengefort (LU)
and Klankenbos Spring Expo, 2020-21, Pelt (BE) | 2017**

The kinetic installation *Flux* is a subtle intervention involving movement and analogue sounds. It reflects the changing dynamics of the current of the river Eisch in Steinfort (LU). A row of bells attached to the railing of a bridge ring, triggered by fish in the stream. Unpredictable rhythmic patterns arise and can be heard on top of the bridge. The varying compositions of *Flux* introduce an alternative perception on nature’s movement dynamics; such as the water stream of the river Eisch. This installation is part of the group exhibition *Eng aaner Siicht op d’Natur*.



Echotrope

Site specific kinetic sound installation, 300 x 300 cm + other, rainy days,
Philharmonie, Luxembourg (LU) | 2019



Even the smallest incident can have a considerable influence over a big event. This is the central idea behind *Echotrope*. Creating a sensory relationship between two architectural volumes of largely different sizes, Luxembourg's Philharmonie (Christian de Portzamparc, 2005) and the adjacent *European Pentagon Safe & Sorry Pavilion* (Bert Theis, 2005), the sound installation *Echotrope* addresses notions of inside and outside, literally juxtaposing auditory and visual experiences. Inside the glass pavilion, slender glass tubes mirroring the 827 iconic columns of the Philharmonie on a small scale, are attached to a revolving platform and are transformed into audio sources. The tubes are



visible from the outside, as they slowly turn. The duration of one rotation corresponds approximately to the time it takes to walk around the main hall of Portzamparc's majestic building. The sounds of this «mini»-Philharmonie are transmitted to the building itself so that its architecture can be experienced and heard in a new way.

Seismic Trail

Sound sculpture/object, 40 x 13.8 x 12.5 cm, Off-program,
African Contemporary Art Biennial: Dak'art, Dakar (SE) | 2018

The performative sound sculpture *Seismic Trail* took shape following a research trip in Dakar (SE) in 2016 under the guidance of Mique Eggermond. Performed live and broadcasted by the nomadic radio station 'électro magnetic mobile' hosted by Paul Devens, this work became part of the Off Program of the African Contemporary Art Biennial: Dak'art in 2018. In 2016, on the island Ile de Mar in the south of Dakar, a collection of maps drawn by the local population lead to a research based on specific features that contribute to one's orientation and spacial remembrance of a known place. Hereby the outline of the island or street names seemingly became less important in comparison to details found on the island like trees, communal buildings or religious monuments and the approximate space between them. Also, given directions abounded with characteristics of the environment like pavement surfaces, color of houses, or other irregular features instead of street or village names. The work *Seismic Trail* creates maps along with its journey. Instead of showing territorial borders or infrastructure such as roads, railroads



and buildings, only one line is drawn onto the middle of a paper roll. A built seismograph is placed on the ground of a minivan and traces its horizontal movements while driving through the streets of Dakar. The frequency that is created and then captured by the lens of a smartphone is turned through the app Phono Paper into a changing sound. This sound frequency is played back almost immediately by a megaphone through the bus window. Sharp turns, rough roads or the smoothness of renovated streets reshape the sound scape continuously. Hereby the driving bus becomes a moving audio sculpture itself through the documentation of its own movement. A spacial exploratory map is created that can be played at any time and thereby becomes a map of a journey that can be experienced through a single sound frequency.



© photos Simon Vogel

Locus motus

Kinetic sound installation, 1300 x 1600 x 600 cm, Sonotopia, Fabrik 45, Bonn (DE) | 2018

Locus motus is a kinetic installation in space. In sets of two, long steel tubes are aligned and hung horizontally, one pair after another, on transmission belts. At one end, the tubes rest on a wooden structure. Driven by electric motors attached to the steel beams of the ceiling, they are made to rotate rhythmically. The friction of the rotating steel tubes on the wooden surface causes varying frequencies that produce a constantly changing composition of sounds.

The interior of Fabrik 45 does not only house the installation but is also the linchpin to the work itself. Neither the work nor the space are perceivable without one another. The shapes of the functional architecture are on the one hand affirmed and on the other rejected by the installation's coherent and systematic structure. In its resemblance to an industrial system, it seemingly refers to the factory's initial purpose. Its role and its non-functional and non-materialistic product, are however in

contradiction to its nostalgic aesthetics. Each tube rotates according to its own periodic time system. Yet the predictable sequences transform into an erratic continuum of repetitions that is impossible to follow.

The entirety of the installation appears to engage in a timeless spectacle. In contrast to visual repetitions, the drastically changing soundscape reflects the transformation of the installation over time. A combination of rough noises, clear and minute friction sounds enters into a play that influences the auditory perception of the setting. The sound frequencies and the mechanically powered elements together with the given interior suggest an altered spatial and temporal perception of the location. By a set of rhythmic and arrhythmic stimuli, the visitors' sense of time is challenged, causing them to subjectively experience the constant process of change of the environment.

Dadder

Kinetic installation, 400 x 300 x 300 cm, Lankelz, Esch-sur-Alzette (LU) | 2018
Klangmoor Schopfe, Gais (CH) | 2019

Dadder (also *dather: totter or tremble*) is a self-composing sound installation that displays four steel plates. The plates are pulled up by magnets and are dropped again when the tension between both exceeds the gravitational force. The plates vibrate until they become silent again. As the steel plates wear off, the sequences shorten and the sounds become softer.

A literal and metaphorical tension between ground and ceiling is created, where the ground is repeatedly 'pulled' towards the ceiling. The sudden release of the vertical tension is transformed into sound and air waves that are pushed toward the surrounding walls. A dialogue is given that reformulates the forces of the interior again and again. *Dadder* was exhibited at 'Lankelz' in Esch-sur-Alzette (LU) by Cueva, curated by Théid Johanss.



Rise-set

Kinetic/sound installation, 300 x 300 x 250 cm medium, back to maybe, Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Maastricht (NL) | 2017



© photo Romy Finke

Three blinds are continuously pulled down by cords which are connected to a central mechanical system installed in the middle of the exhibition space. When the bottom of the window frame is reached, the blind slips up again and the procedure repeats shortly after. A slightly absurdist repetitive process takes place that produces a rhythmic composition of analogue sounds around the room. With the movement of the blinds, the light source within the room constantly changes directions. The light intensity in the room however, almost stays the same. It is never completely dark and never completely bright. Since the corner of the space, which

holds two walls perpendicularly, points towards the North, the sun moves from the right side of the room towards the left. Thereby the central light source shifts during a day from one side to the other. A dialogue between the slow movement of the sun and the quick recurring process of the machine is created that challenges the subjective experience of time in that particular space. Even though, the conditions of the interior space are changing, such as lights and noises, the very experience of time passage is reduced through the returning circular movement displayed by the machinery.



© photos Romy Finke

Re-wind

Mixed media, inflatable installation, 500 x 400 x 250 cm, back to maybe, Academy of Fine Arts and Design Maastricht (NL) | 2017

The work *Re-wind* features an inflatable room interior that is made-to-measure. All existing architectural elements of the space are repeated by interconnected fabric segments. The inflating of all segments is timed to equal intervals of eight minutes (on/off). The fluorescent light in the room is connected to the activity of a blower and fluctuates accordingly. The visitors are free to explore the space and thereby inevitably influence the inflating and deflating of the installation.

Re-wind emerged from research on ocean tides as an analogy for experiencing time and the constitution of physical spaces. Returning ocean tides gradually change the shape of shores, while the shore changes the condition for the re-entering water. Shore and tide thus continuously define one another. It is the same for the inflating and deflating spaces of the installation. Moreover, the visitors themselves contribute to the shaping of the space in their own way, as they interact with the volumes of installation.

Vitamin D

Sound sculpture/performance, 350 x 250 x 400 cm, back to maybe, Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Maastricht (NL) | 2017

For the performative audio work *Vitamine D*, light sensors attached to speakers are handed out to visitors. Rhythmic ticking sounds indicate the intensities of light found in the space. Each visitor entering the room carries a sensor. The speed of the beat varies according to the intensity of the surrounding light. The complexity of the rhythmic composition of numerous ticking-noises is increased by the number of participants.

Through the work *Vitamine D*, an empirical study took place on how the human sense of sight manipulates the 'audioception' and general perception of space. Since the human sight is not capable to differentiate between the wide range of light shades, the sensors are used as a tool to express a wider scheme of intensities through sound. An extended experience of light and shadows is provided that exceeds the visual understanding of space and is amplified and backed up through the auditory sense. *Vitamine D* found its first form through a collaborative work



© photo Romy Finke

with Don Possen (NL) in February 2017 for Kunstpodium T's exhibition In Tilburg (NL) #4Transplant. Here, the sensors were attached along one of the walls of an interior space. As observed, the sunbeams entered the room during a specific time frame of three hours per day and would travel along the wall until exiting again.

For the graduation show 2017 *Back To Maybe*, an extended form of *Vitamine D* was accessible online. In this form of the work the presence of the actual light was completely extracted from the experience resulting in an audio representation of an idea of light.

Between me

250 x 150 x 300 cm, back to maybe, Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Maastricht (NL) | 2017

Between me features a narrow room divided by a partially translucent plastic sheet. The visitor cannot access or see the second part of the space. A carpet floor and noise damming material on the walls are decreasing exterior noises. Whenever visitors enter the space and start to talk, their conversation is recorded in sequences of two seconds from a hidden microphone and is played back in different delays from speakers from the other side of the room. However, if no sound is made, the found circumstances won't change and the visitor leaves the room unaware of the second part of the work. The inspiration for the work *Between me* came during an artistic research in Senegal (2016). The high walls and barriers surrounding many neighborhoods in Dakar strongly emphasize the polarity of the city, stressing the physical exclusion of a large number of its citizens from a part of the grounds. However, even though one cannot physically reach or perceive certain spaces, it is possible to recreate



the invisible parts of a room or outdoor space through the echoes of one's own voice reappearing from the 'other' side. A playful investigation of spatial properties took shape resulting in the *Between me* installation.

Steng-sin-focht

(Stones are gone), sculpture, interactive performance, different sizes,
Antropical (res), Steinfurt (LU) | 2016



Steng-sin-focht took shape during the residency 'Antropical' in the nature park of Steinfurt (LU). The work is inspired by the concept of preserving nature through reconstructing landscapes in parks, comparing these man-made landscapes to theater stages. Indeed, many parks are shaped and composed by soils, trees and rocks from different places in the world. Each element can thus be seen as a prop from a stage set;

each removal or replacement, affecting the entire composition. Following this line of thought, it seemed important to address notions of value, which again led to the idea of a treasure hunt. Participants were therefore invited to search for "copies" of rocks from the park placed in the forest. After the copy of each stone was found, the original rocks returned to their initial spots.

The 2022 jury of the Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg was composed of Susan Hapgood (ISCP, NYC), Bettina Steinbrügge (MUDAM, Luxembourg), Anett Holzheid (ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe) and Michèle Walerich (Œuvre Nationale de Secours Grande-Duchesse Charlotte / Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, CNA, Luxembourg).

Nika Schmitt was nominated for the Edward Steichen Luxembourg Resident in New York award by Marc Scozzai (Rotondes) and Sandra Schwender (Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, CNA).

Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg

The Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg is a tribute to the life and work of Edward Steichen, born in Luxembourg in 1879. The prize honours Steichen's artistic achievements as a photographer and curator, as well as his tireless commitment to advocating for the arts and nurturing new talent.

The Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg is a biennial incentive in support of emerging European talents in the field of contemporary visual arts. It was initiated in 2004 to create an opportunity for young artists up to 35 years to expand their horizon and immerse themselves in the ebullient cultural context of New York City, that proved so fertile for Steichen himself.

There are two categories to the Award, the first with a resolutely European outlook, the second more specifically designed for artists from Luxembourg. Both prizes consist of a residency in New York City. The Edward Steichen Award Laureate is hosted for a six months residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program

(ISCP), a renowned residency-based contemporary art centre in Brooklyn for artists and curators. The Edward Steichen Luxembourg Resident in New York, on the other hand, sponsored by fonds-stART up, Œuvre Nationale de Secours Grande-Duchesse Charlotte, is granted as a four-months stay at ISCP.

Our most heartfelt thanks go to all our partners, sponsors and friends: Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA), fonds-stART up de l' Œuvre Nationale de Secours Grande-Duchesse Charlotte, Luxembourg American Chamber of Commerce, Ministère de la Culture, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et Européennes, Mudam Luxembourg and Ville de Luxembourg.

We also would like to thank the family of Edward Steichen for their ongoing support and trust.

The Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg is placed under the high patronage of H.R.H. the Grand-Duchess of Luxembourg.

Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg Laureates

2005	Su-Mei Tse
2007	Etienne Boulanger
2009	Bertille Bak
2011	Maria Loboda
2013	Sophie Jung
2015	Max Pinckers
2017	Esther Hovers
2019	Mary-Audrey Ramirez
2022	Eva L'Hoest

Edward Steichen Luxembourg Residents in New York

2011	Claudia Passeri
2013	Jeff Desom
2015	Jeff Weber
2017	Daniel Wagener
2019	Nora Wagner
2022	Nika Schmitt

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