

# VAS VISUAL ART eNEWSLETTER

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Jónsi, “Vox” by Jody Zellen

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, Los Angeles, California  
Continuing through February 3, 2024

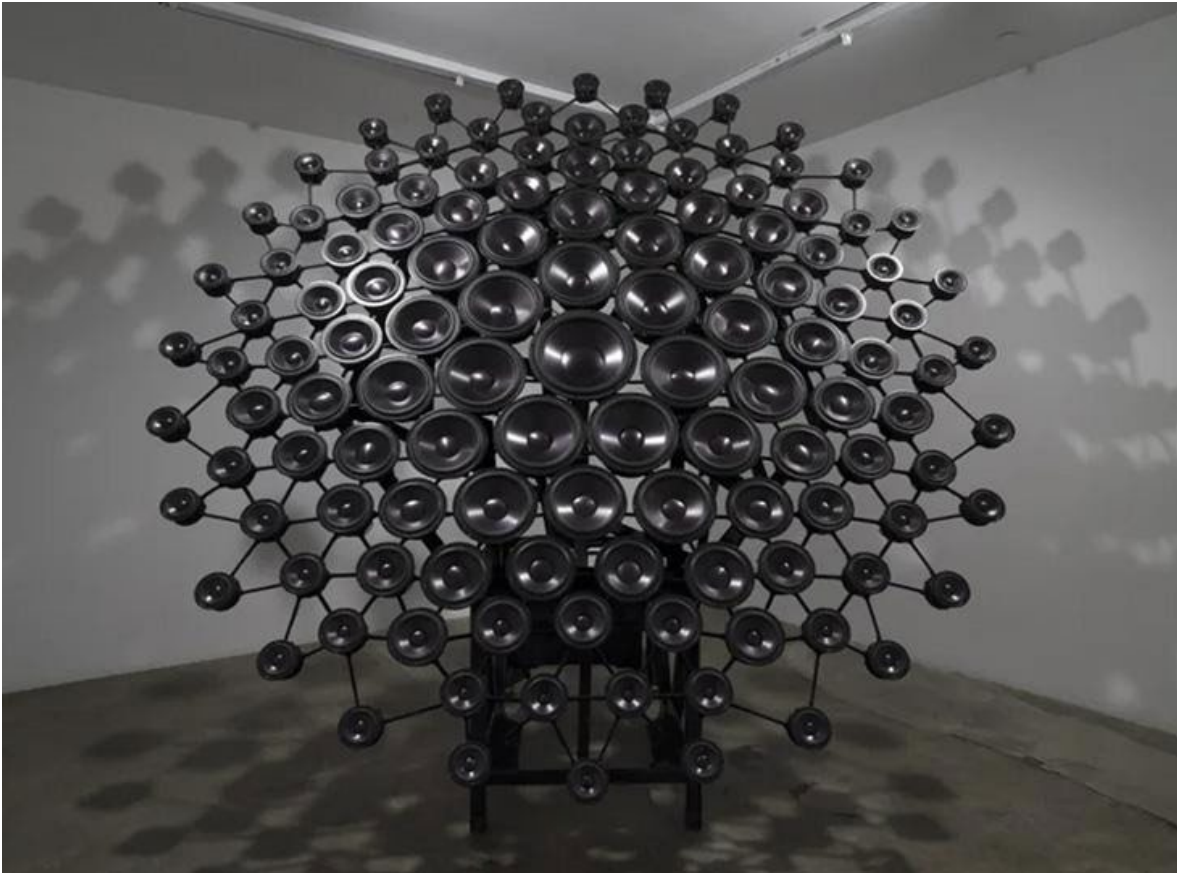


Jónsi, “Vox”

Though best known as the lead vocalist for the Icelandic post-rock band Sigur Rós, artist/musician Jón Þór “Jónsi” Birgisson is also an accomplished visual artist. His current show, “Vox,” is comprised of three pieces in which he combines speakers, LEDs and sounds in different ways. Although each work occupies its own space, they are interrelated, investigating not only how sound can envelope a space, but also its visual qualities. While sound on its own is not visual per se, its method of display (as arrays or canopies of speakers) can be. Both “Var (safespace)” and “Silent sigh (dark)” share affinities with the work of Alan Rath (1959-2020) whose sculptures often combined numerous speakers that undulated like animated entities pulsating up and down and emitting soft sounds produced by Rath’s computer algorithms.

Like Rath and San Francisco-based artist Jim Campbell (known for his LED installations), Jónsi’s works rely on sophisticated electronics and programming. “Var” (the Icelandic word for shelter) hangs overhead and consists of hundreds of small speakers wired together to form a canopy or tent-like enclosure. According to Jónsi, it is supposed to evoke a “safe space” filled with calming sounds (a six-minute loop) and the scent of cis-3-hexenol (one of the components in freshly cut grass). Yet while the suspended canopy offers refuge in some ways, its wing-like shape also calls to mind the body of a bat in flight.

“Silent sigh (dark)” is a free-standing sculpture that fills a small, dimly illuminated space. The work is arranged in an array, something of a mechanical snowflake, where the larger speakers are in the center and the smaller ones extend out toward the edges. Jónsi uses computers (nested in the base of the sculpture) to control direct currents that change the physical state of the different speakers. This causes them to ripple and emit breath-like sounds that allude to the perception that they could be “alive.”



Jónsi, "Silent sigh (dark)"

Filling the darkened main gallery space is the eight-channel sound and LED installation "Vox." With a duration of twenty-five minutes, Vox visualizes the human voice. It intertwines Jónsi's own voice with those generated by an AI to create an eerie and ambiguous audio environment that syncs with choreographed bursts and flashes of light on approximately two-foot-high LED screens encircling but not filling the four walls of the gallery. While it is difficult to make out actual words or sentences, the work evokes a sense of awe and mystery due to the visually palpable sound. We enter the space through a curtain and as your eyes adjust to the darkness you might notice a single bench that appears to be floating in the middle of the space like a horizontal version of the monolith from "2001: A Space Odyssey," its black surface reflecting aspects of the pulsating light. This bench beckons. It is an indicator that to experience the piece in full, one might want to sit. As the tonalities begin to ebb and flow the LEDs follow suit to become a visual and aural soundscape that is both soothing and otherworldly simultaneously.

Jónsi's sound-works are subtle and not meant to overpower the space or the viewer. Though electronically created, they reference the subtleties of the natural as well as the built world. The pieces are seductive, contemplative and inviting. As a musician, Jónsi has performed in different arenas, as well as worked with visual artists such as Doug Aitken and Olafur Eliasson, so he is familiar with the power of immersing audiences within seemingly empty spaces. Once filled with both frenetic and soothing sounds, these spaces become a visual field to project your own imagination.

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**Jody Zellen** is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist's books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit [www.jodyzellen.com](http://www.jodyzellen.com).