



# ARI BENJAMIN MEYERS



SEPTEMBER 21 - NOVEMBER 3, 2019



Museum of  
Contemporary Art  
SANTA BARBARA

# ARI BENJAMIN MEYERS: *KUNSTHALLE FOR MUSIC*

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CONTEMPLATE (FEEL)

QUESTION (THINK)

RELATE (BE)

Kunsthalle for Music is a concept, a project, an institution that seeks to create a new space for the live exhibition of music; a space in which to “display” music within the confines and possibilities of contemporary art institutions. At the core of its conceptualization is the raising of questions, not about the meaning of music *per se* but more importantly about the existing musical models and institutions that have endured for centuries. Presented first in a European center for contemporary art, this itinerant institution now moves into another context, making its US debut by inhabiting an American, contemporary art museum.

Why invite Kunsthalle for Music to take over an art museum? Doing so provides a place where the incidental, the chance, and the human element (error) can become central to contemporary music performance practice. In Ari Benjamin Meyers’ words: “An art space has, of course, its own rules, but is still a space you can navigate at your own pace. We as composers and musicians haven’t traditionally had this playground as we know it in contemporary art. We need the Philharmonie or La Scala in all its perfection, but we also need another kind of space for contemporary music performance that hasn’t really existed until now. As a composer, I feel a strong pull towards a non-goal oriented musical space, the *dérive*.”

Kunsthalle for Music is also an idea, a gesture, a work of art. Unexpected, variable, and *ad libitum* are a few adjectives that can describe Meyers’ radical new project, which gathers a selection of existing and newly commissioned compositions and performances created by himself and internationally renowned and lesser known composers, musicians, and visual artists. The Kunsthalle for Music repertoire, its collection, is a narration of how all these artists perceive music; not as a rational, erudite, all-about-perfection art form, but rather as a live art, unpredictable, mutable, and transforming. It is “messy and political,” as Meyers states in the Kunsthalle for Music manifesto.

Kunsthalle for Music is a situation as well: musically, socially, and experimentally. The experience begins in the altering of the typical use of the space. The art museum transforms from a place for showcasing physical objects, such as paintings, sculptures or installations, into one capable of displaying music performed live by an ensemble. Such an experience connects at a relational level. Throughout the six-week exhibition, visitors are welcomed to become part of the temporally specific situation. They are invited to interact with the music, to listen to it, to move within it, to feel it, breathe it, think it, but also to relate to the performers and their actions.

These encounters with the music, the architecture, and the people are all on display at Kunsthalle for Music. They are what makes each day a unique and unrepeatable experience. Coming from diverse backgrounds, the artist, performers, visitors, and museum staff together create an ever-changing musical and social situation. The active participation of every person involved in Kunsthalle for Music is essential, “Just as in the political work,” to quote composer Louis Andriessen.

In music, there is also silence, the pause for breath. At times the museum galleries will be inhabited only by the performers’ instruments and equipment. Such a presentation reminds visitors of the potentiality of music, that in that space music will soon take place, but not now. Visitors will be invited to encounter the instruments, the manifesto, the texts on the walls describing the individual works of the repertoire, and the other visitors in the room. These encounters raise the possibility of dialogue about perception, experience, and expectations of music. According to Meyers’ conception, in such a situation all the essential elements of music will be ready to unfold.

Experience is at the heart of Meyers’ work. He creates spaces for people to encounter each other in unconventional ways and experience each other within the context of music-making and music. Music that has been re-worked, revisited, and transformed and perhaps also, eventually, freed.

*Ari Benjamin Meyers: Kunsthalle for Music* is curated by Abaseh Mirvali, Executive Director and Chief Curator, with the curatorial support of Constanza Medina, Curatorial Research Associate. Exhibition text by Constanza Medina and Abaseh Mirvali.

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