

An Out Of Sight (But Not Out Of Mind) Conversation Between Olivier Millagou and Gabriela Jauregui

Gabriela Jauregui: First off, could you tell me more about exhibition title? There is a nice play on words: 'Out of Sight' can mean that which is, literally, hidden from sight—in this case the darker side of the sunny Beach Boys legacy, and the darkness of the gallery space itself—and it can also mean out of sight as in something amazing, surprising, unbelievable, which can be 'seen' the brighter side of these same characters who inspire your work.

Olivier Millagou: The first thing *Out Of Sight* refers to, is the title of a beach party movie from 1966. I often give a beach movie name to my shows. In the case of the movie title it both refers to the expression 'out of sight' as amazing or far-out, as you mention; but to me, *Out Of Sight* is also literally like a way out, a sideslip, off-screen.

With this show, I was first interested in the question of what surf music is. Originally, surf music was simply the music that surfers listened to, and it varied depending on the place you were at and your age. It was not formatted until the mid-'60s when record companies realized that this was another possibility of making money with teenagers. After that, surf music was clearly defined.

The title interests me because it can also be read like a ending: An ending, and certainly the beginning of something else—something new. 'Out of sight' means you're far away and nothing can be seen about what's happening. Therefore, all is possible.

G J : And how is this how a continuation from your previous work?

O M : For a while, black was no longer present in my work, I was only in something more luminous. My last Show *Paradise Sounds* was entirely white, close to the idea of paradise. But we were blinded and overwhelmed by a strong light. I developed this idea of blindness and now we are 'out of sight' and off camera not just due to blackness but also to the sound.

G J : Can you also tell us more about the recording we hear? This 'natural orchestra' played by the sand of Death Valley—how it speaks, sings, makes music? You mention Mallarmé's sentence about le "tambour des dunes mystérieuses." What is this mystery you point to here?

O M : Yes, it is the recording of a natural orchestra, music played by the sand of Death Valley.

The ideas behind this came from my interest in Brian Wilson (from the Beach Boys) who built a sandbox in his lounge and put his piano there, so he could compose with his feet feeling the warmth of the sand. But at the same time, sand has another property: During his journeys throughout the Gobi Desert in the 13th Century, Marco Polo was the first to describe it met a curious noise phenomenon in as "sounds of all kinds of musical instruments", and also as "drums and the crash of weapons". Since then, several dunes have revealed the same properties: what is known as singing sand, creating sounds like cries, animal noises or screams...

I did some research about the various places where sand sings, and I chose Death Valley, in California, so close to the birthplace of surf music to record these sounds. Also the name is so close to hell—its dry climate, and the location evokes images of animal skulls, the simple crosses of graves scattered in the desert, as well as the illusion of distant mirages trembling in the scorching air.

I imagine Brian Wilson could have listened to these strange sounds in his lounge sandbox and maybe even be afraid about them, not knowing where they came from.

G J : Guitars, ukuleles, basses hang over us like rain falling from the sky, like omens sent from a different plain, like Zeus's angry thunder, or perhaps they watch over us as we are attracted by the pulsating light and heat of the O. Is the O an Omen? Is the O a slowly dying sun, the sun that the Beach Boys—as symbols for youth— seemed to worship?

O M : The installation is like a thunderstorm, the sky is dark; the clouds too. The guitars, bass guitars, ukuleles, banjos all symbolize the threat of an unprecedented thunderstorm that Brian Wilson was perhaps the only one to have seen on the Beach Boys' bright horizon. The Golden Era of Surf Music was brief, and then ended like a surf session does when the weather changes.

The O is an old found neon letter, a memento of a brilliant past, resting on the ground. It's also a letter from any sign, any maybe from the Beach Boys, or the movie *Out Of Sight*, or any other brand or product. I have changed out the neon gas and put in a heater. As opposed to the neon sign working with light, i.e. visually, here the O has a sensory effect: the more you approach the O, the more you feel the heat.

In the middle of the darkness, and under this impending thunderstorm, the O appears like a dying sun. *Out of sight*, is the end of the golden age.

G J : Brian Wilson famously said: "We were doing witchcraft, trying to make witchcraft music." Could *Out of Sight* be an exorcism? An incantation? A different kind of sorcery?

O M : Sand music is witchcraft. In it, Marco Polo imagined ghosts, and spirits, and Maupassant saw death itself.

G J : There is one guitar that is different from all the others. Can you tell me more about it? Why are all these animals present here?

O M : The title for this piece is, "Every Time I Kill An Animal With My Guitar It Appears Above." The idea is to have a guitar that looks like a hippie guitar, with a lot of animals, almost painted in a naïve style. First I made this guitar for a friend of mine, who is really rock n' roll, and I loved the idea that from afar, the guitar looks like something innocent, while in fact it's an instrument of death, having killed each animal that is painted on it. The guitar is partially damaged in the places it has stricken an animal to kill it. This guitar could be the result of madness linked to witchcraft.