

LOS ANGELES: THE BOX
By Danielle Sommeror
Published in Art in America
January 5, 2013



LOS ANGELES: THE BOX

True to its name, Simone Forti's second solo show at The Box, "Sounding," featured around a dozen works based on the artist's renowned performance oeuvre, all with "a central element of sound." Incorporating props and recordings from past performances, video documentation, photos and drawings, as well as several live performances, the exhibition engaged viewers on multiple levels, including aural. But to expect merely artworks with soundtracks underestimates Forti's 50-plus-year love affair with phenomenology, as well as her quest to create the kind of awareness that brings the self and its tenuous relation to the rest of the universe into sharp focus.

The show's centerpiece, *Largo Argentina (Rome Cats)*, 1968/2012, consisted of a white sheet, hanging loosely and undulating in the gentle breeze of a fan. Toward the bottom of the sheet, a digital slideshow of Forti's photographs of feral cats, taken at Rome's Largo di Torre Argentina cat sanctuary, played in a loop. A wind chime dangled from the sheet, ringing softly and consistently. It was the only noise in the gallery that never ceased; the sounds associated with the other works played on individual headphones, although many



were also timed to broadcast once an hour through various speakers, sometimes overlapping one another.

Viewers familiar with Forti may have recognized props from some of her more famous pieces, such as the loop of sturdy rope she created for *Accompaniment for La Monte's '2 sounds'* (1961). The rope hangs in a "U" shape from the ceiling and stops just a few feet off the floor. When *Accompaniment* is performed (as it was several times during this show's run), a dancer steps onto the rope at the beginning of La Monte Young's agonizing Minimalist score. The rope is wound tightly by another performer and then released. The unwinding happens quickly, after which the performer remains stationary, giving the viewer something to focus on, and through that focus, hopefully the discipline to stay still and listen to Young's composition, a 12-minute cacophony in which one person scrapes a bucket against a glass door while another scrapes cans on a window. For "Sounding," a recording of Young's work played once a day.

It's tempting to interpret Forti's project as one of translating sound into movement, as with *Accompaniment*, or movement into sound, as with *Song of the Vowels* (2012). For the latter piece, Forti's drawings of Jacques Lipchitz's Cubist sculpture of a harp (*The Song of the Vowels*, 1931-32) hung on the gallery wall next to a video in which Forti performed the drawings by interpreting them as a score. Allowing herself only short and long vowel sounds, she used her entire body as she made sounds like "Eee eee eee" and "Oh-uuuuu," activating Lipchitz's rendition of the instrument.

Over and over in "Sounding," Forti mixed stillness and focus with dissonance, or items with "soft" and "hard" characteristics, such as in *Censor* (1961), a recording of the artist singing an Italian folk song while rattling nails in a metal bowl. In her autobiography-cum-instruction-manual, *Handbook in Motion* (1974), she describes her interest as being less in simple cause-and-effect relationships and more in the "juxtaposition of qualities or concerns, from which would emerge a third quality." Rather than replacing one sensation or action with another, Forti positions her materials-whether they are images, sounds, words or movements-atop and among each other, constantly willing her audience to notice itself noticing, and through this, to accept the magic of being in between.

Photo: Simone Forti: Largo Argentina (Rome Cats), 1968/2012, C-print, 14 by 20½ inches; at The Box.

