

The Nature of DIY, Systematic Sampling

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Numéro 105, été 2015

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/78402ac>

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Éditeur(s)

Revue d'art contemporain ETC inc.

ISSN

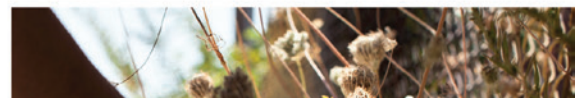
2368-030X (imprimé)

2368-0318 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Bourdages, E. (2015). The Nature of DIY, Systematic Sampling. *ETC MEDIA*, (105), 64–69.



Ellie Irons, *Invasive Pigments*, 2013. Colour sampler, plexiglass, deep-well slides, plant based pigments in gum arabic.
Photo: Melissa F. Clark.

The Nature of DIY



Ryan Pierce, *Postcards from Paradise #3, Hardin, Montana, 2014*.
Flashe paint on digital photograph reprinted via offset and digital printing. Photo: Ryan Pierce.

Stream Gallery, located on Myrtle Avenue in Bushwick, Brooklyn, recently presented *Systematic Sampling*, a group exhibition examining the links between art, science and technology, in particular how these loosely or closely intersect with the environment, nature, ecology and other related subjects.¹ The exhibition assembled artists with interdisciplinary practices (visual art, digital art, music, sound art, industrial design), some of whom collaborate with scientists. Various mediums were represented, including sound, light, photography and video. Both of the American curators, Melissa F. Clarke and Miriam Simun, have interdisciplinary art practices with a research focus on the environment and technology. As a non-profit organization, Stream Gallery is particularly dedicated to supporting emerging new media artists and curators. At first glance, the hanging of the exhibition in the small gallery was surprising. The works, placed on shelves along the walls, were closely juxtaposed, except for Sascha Pohflepp's photograph, *Situated Sampling Set*, which rested on the floor, and Audra Wolowiec's inflatable sculpture, *Breathing Room*, which was hanging from the ceiling. Maximally occupying the space, this configuration indicates a desire to reveal a homogeneity and unity among the small-scale works, all of which are explicitly connected to science and technology and employ a do-it-yourself aesthetic that emphasizes making something outside the mainstream and large industries. Using low-cost means, the DIY approach is based on independent research, creativity and innovation. In this context, the artists produce the works themselves, which often gives the objects a more or less crafted aspect.

DIY culture is typically committed to addressing social and political issues.² The curatorial premise of *Systematic Sampling* raises various questions about the environment at a time when the demographic growth of urban centres is being examined. To this end, the curators state that "over a third of the earth is now considered a 'novel' ecosystem: shaped by human force, self-sustaining."³ How do artists' techno-scientific works echo this new ecosystem, these emerging ecologies? The artists in *Systematic Sampling* deal with ecology, directly or abstractly, through scientific and technological processes. Art and science work complementarily and in tandem. In the last few decades, we have grown accustomed to the image of the artist as a researcher-scientist. We must note that it is misleading to use the term "hybridity" to describe the convergence of art and science and/or technology, since it designates "an atypical combination of two different elements." Ingeborg Reichle, the German author and art historian who specializes in contemporary art, new technologies and new media, insists that art and science should not be perceived as a dichotomy, as two systems in which science is considered objective and the arts, subjective.⁴ When artists work in labs, they use research methods similar to those of scientists. "Sampling"—the term included in the exhibition title—evokes information capture and retrieval and real data sampling. The purpose of collecting such information is to generate something new. The installation *Spectral Resonance*, by artist Erin Sexton, sets up a chemical reaction that renders audible the tones of an oscillator produced by submerging fine electrical wires in a beaker of blue copper chloride solution. Bronze wires coiled around most of the work give it extra elegance.

Some of the works consider natural resources. Such is the case with *Invasive Pigments*, by Ellie Irons, which offers a study on plant migration and proliferation. The installation presents the artist's investigation process: from the collection of plant samples found near her residence to their transformation into a palette of brightly coloured pigments used for different purposes. With his project *Postcards from Paradise*, Ryan Pierce documents abandoned industrial sites prefiguring the possible route that coal cuts across the American West. Inscriptions added in postproduction give the photographs a personal touch. One print displays the following statement, at once nostalgic and humorous: "The days of buying Manhattan for trinkets and beads are over!"

Other works illustrate research in data sonification and visualization through the conversion of data into sound and light. For the installation *Cities Are Natural*, which deals with urbanism and architecture, Melissa F. Clarke used contact microphones to record the vibrations of buildings near her studio on Kent Avenue, in Brooklyn. She transposed the audio data into visual elements rendered as many coloured lights that are projected onto an assemblage of small glass and paper sculptures representing the city. Clarke also offers an interpretation and account of the Bushwick neighbourhood, currently undergoing considerable change as a result of the demolition and construction of many buildings.

Siphonal N9604Z, by artist Nanu Al-Hammad, examines acoustic phenomena: a recording of the sea, connected to an audio system, plays inside a shell. The sound installation *Meta*, by Richard Garett, is composed of a quad audio interface, which circulates the sound via four small sound exciters that amplify the surface vibrations of the wall to which they are attached. Garett invites visitors to listen to an ambient soundtrack in real time, mixed with hums and punctuated by various high-pitched sounds. In so doing, the artist directs our attention to the noises of our everyday environment.

Showing much originality and using low-cost methods, the works assembled in *Systematic Sampling* contribute to our understanding and awareness of certain disquieting issues related to the current socio-political climate. By taking a stand and striving to bring forth new ideas with an economy of means, the artists brilliantly carry on the DIY tradition.

Esther Bourdages

Translation: Oana Avasilichioaei

Esther Bourdages is an art writer and independent curator. Having received a Master in Art History, which focused on the Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely, from the Université de Montréal, she is currently investigating a broader sense of sculpture (art in situ, installation), often in relation with sound and digital art.

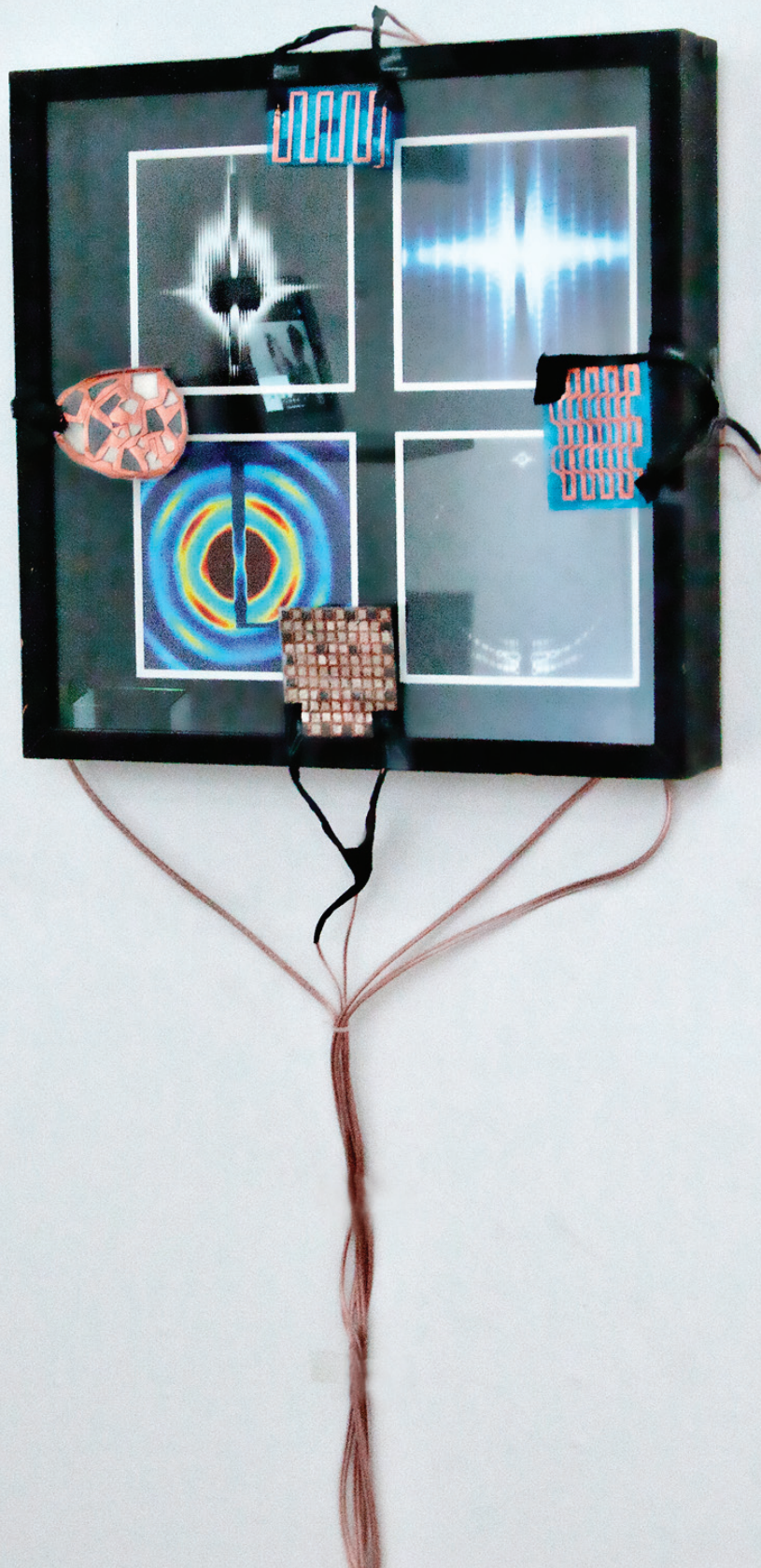
¹ *Systematic Sampling* was presented at Stream Gallery, in Brooklyn, from January 8 to 22, 2015. The exhibiting artists were Audra Wolowiec (USA), Brenna Murphy (USA), Ellie Irons (USA), Genevieve Hoffman, Jess Rowland & Margaret Schedel & Kevin Yager, Melissa F. Clarke (USA), Nanu Al-Hammad (Kuwait) & Miriam Simun (USA), Natalie Jeremijenko (Australia) & The xDesign Team (USA), Phil Sterns (USA), Richard Garett (Uruguay, USA), Trish Mackenzie (USA), Chris Woebken & Sascha Pohflepp (Germany), Erin Sexton (Canada). Curators: Melissa F. Clarke and Miriam Simun (USA).

² For more information on the emergence and development of DIY see: McKay, Georges. "DIY Culture: notes towards an intro." *DIY Culture: Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*. Ed. George McKay. London: Verso, 1998. 1-53.

³ Clarke, Melissa F. & Miriam Simun. *Systematic sampling*. Ex. Cat. Brooklyn: Stream Gallery, 2015.

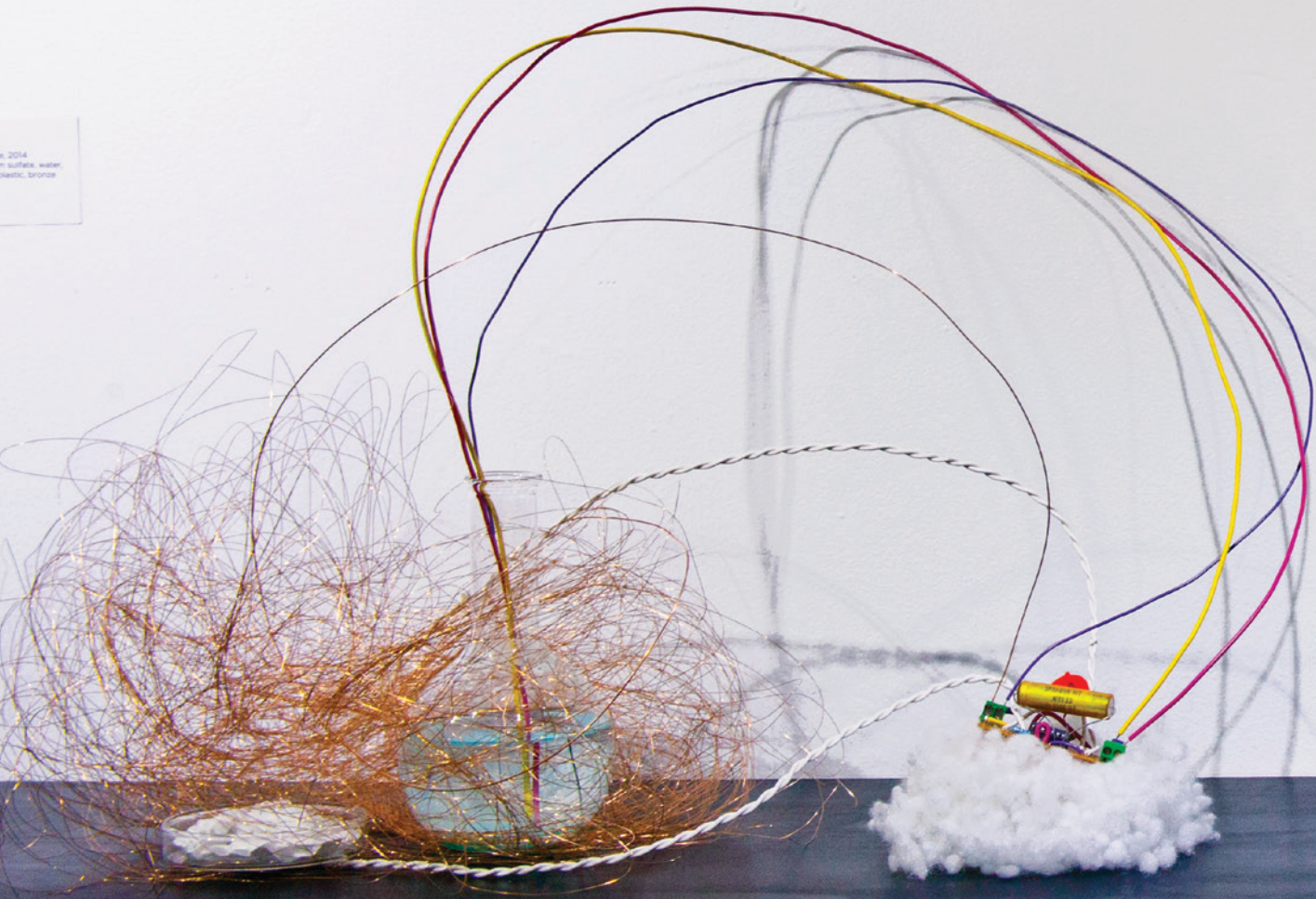
⁴ Ingeborg Reichle states that "art today not only serves to comment on science, it also represents its own form of research and knowledge production—though one belonging to a radically different epistemological tradition." "Ingeborg Reichle Curriculum Vitae." *Kunstgeschichte*. <http://www.kunstgeschichte.de/reichle/cv.html>. 2003. Web. 13 May 2015.



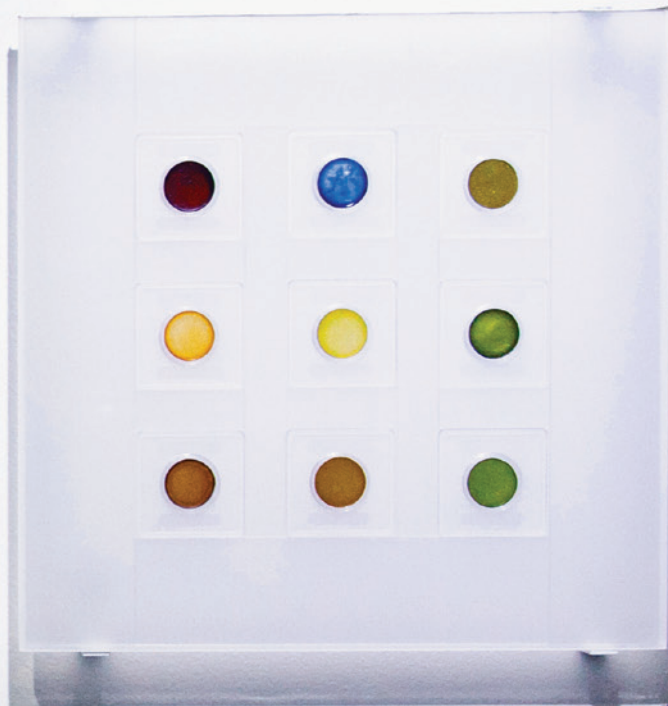


Jess Rowland, Kevin Tager &
Margaret Anne Schwab
Ambiguous Records of Reality,
2014
X-ray scattering images,
identification: Home made speakers

© 2014
In surface, water,
elastic, bronze



Brenna Murphy
Embodied Entity, 2013
3d printed plastic resin



Elle Irons
Invasive Pigments Color Sampler,
2013
Plexiglass, deep well slides, plant
based pigments in gum arabic



Erin Sexton, Spectral Resonance, 2014, Cuivre, Magnesium sulfate,
eau, verre, électronique, plastique, bronze. Photo : Erin Sexton.