the gallery fills with the murmurings of otherworldly sparrows and whistles of mysterious blackbirds.

Stochastic Generator and *Servitudes* share an approach that shifts between the desire to control a system and the desire to relinquish control. While a sound event would normally unfold in linear time, interactivity short-circuits the way the sound is received, and despite their degree of autonomy, the works serve the will of their viewers. The elements of randomness in Jean-Pierre Gauthier's sound installations spark interactions, echoes, variations, and arrangements—dynamics similar to improvisation, itself an important part of the artist's musical practice per se. Indeed, the freedom to be inspired by and respond to the immediate is a precious kind of servitude.

Charlotte Lalou Rousseau

Servitudes & *Stochastic Generator*

Jean-Pierre Gauthier

May 29 – June 19, 2021 at **OBORO**

June 9 – July 31, 2021 at **ELLEPHANT**

ELLEPHANT

Mechanical, electronic, and programming systems are all rich resources for Jean-Pierre Gauthier, whose artwork-machines take on a life of their own. His diverse practice results in kinetic sculptures and sound installations that are as poetic as they are playful. In the same way as a Foley artist, Gauthier salvages, manipulates, and mechanizes everyday objects to extract their acoustic potential. Funnels, air pumps, and broom sticks come together in unexpected harmonies. Bows and guitar strings are repurposed. The gap between the object, its usual function, and its sound potential—that moment when noise becomes sound—is what fascinates the artist.

In 2002, Gauthier created a project called *Le devenir oiseau* at AXENÉO7. A giant bird box, scaled up to human size, was fitted out with weather-vanes connected to piezoelectric motors; when spun by the wind, these produced a chorus of birdsong. Building on this work, Gauthier launched a deeper exploration into questions of systems and chance, organic and inorganic. The exhibition at OBORO and ELLEPHANT highlights these dualities and others that span Gauthier's artistic and musical practice: order and chaos, composition and decomposition, control and surrender. The installations *Servitudes* (presented at OBORO) and *Stochastic Generator* (presented at ELLEPHANT) are like oxymorons: can chance be reproduced? Can contingencies be arranged? Can the unpredictable be composed? A roll of the dice will never abolish chance, as Mallarmé once wrote, and Gauthier approaches this through play. His installations are primarily activated by human presence, whether voluntary or not: this, indeed, is at the core of interactivity.

Created as part of the Festival de musique actuelle de Victoriaville in 2012, the *Servitudes* installation is a kind of electroacoustic orchestra that functions of its own agency. The alliteration in the title conjures up swirls and spirals, the sonorous and sinuous. Five assemblages with coils of electronic innards are suspended throughout the gallery space, forming an eclectic organized chaos. A central computer links the four limbs of the creature, whose steel pipes, wires, spinning and striking motors, bows, guitar strings, various casings, wood, magnetic emitters, microphones, and speakers form a total of eight invented instruments.

The physical and conceptual structure of the work recalls the paradox of servitude, namely a system at once limited and infinite. The current submission of humans to technology is equalled only by the potential that these technologies afford us. In *Servitudes*, machines become active agents that influence the composer. The metal spirals that structure the installation form the visual argument of this paradox: continuous loops, biting their own tails. The cycle of the four compositions is set off by the presence of viewers in the room. As long as someone is physically there to listen and the space is occupied, the cycle will resume in the same order, on a loop.

Randomness, the organic element of this system, comes into play at two specific stages: composition and spatialization. Firstly, the compositional method is not musical notation, but program code. Initially, the artist has no way of knowing what sound effects this code will produce: a command activates a motor, which strikes a tightened string and produces an unexpected sound. Unlike a composer who, with a particular note in mind, writes the note on the appropriate line of the staff, Gauthier writes his pieces by ear and by trial and error, following the reactions of the device. In this way, the interactive relationship is part of the compositional process itself. Next, the way the spatialization is programmed depends on the attack and amplitude of the sound emitted. These two factors are themselves determined by randomly mechanized microphones. A loud sound travels far and fast through the space from one speaker to another, while a weak sound has much more limited range. From cycle to cycle, different versions become multiple variations.

Stochastic Generator takes a different approach to randomness and interactivity. In mathematics as in music, a stochastic process involves at least one random variable. This installation is akin to a music box in the form of an interactive game-of-chance console; its randomness lies in the composition being partially in the hands of the public. Foot pedals and movement detectors produce analog sounds that are transmitted to, then modulated by digital audio programming inspired by generative music. Three distinct tracks start to drift, overlap, and intertwine in an acousmonium of ABS tubes. In the small gallery, high frequencies dangle from the ceiling, while the low frequencies are built up from the floor in a spatialized intimacy. By activating pedals and kinetic sensors, the viewer takes an active part in the random nature of the arrangement, subverts the system, produces accidents, and becomes a performer. As sound waves become increasingly abstracted from their source,