

## Donna Legault: 'Transformations' in Feminism

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Soft Transference, 2011, Donna Legault. Image via the artist's website: <http://donnalegault.com/softtransference>

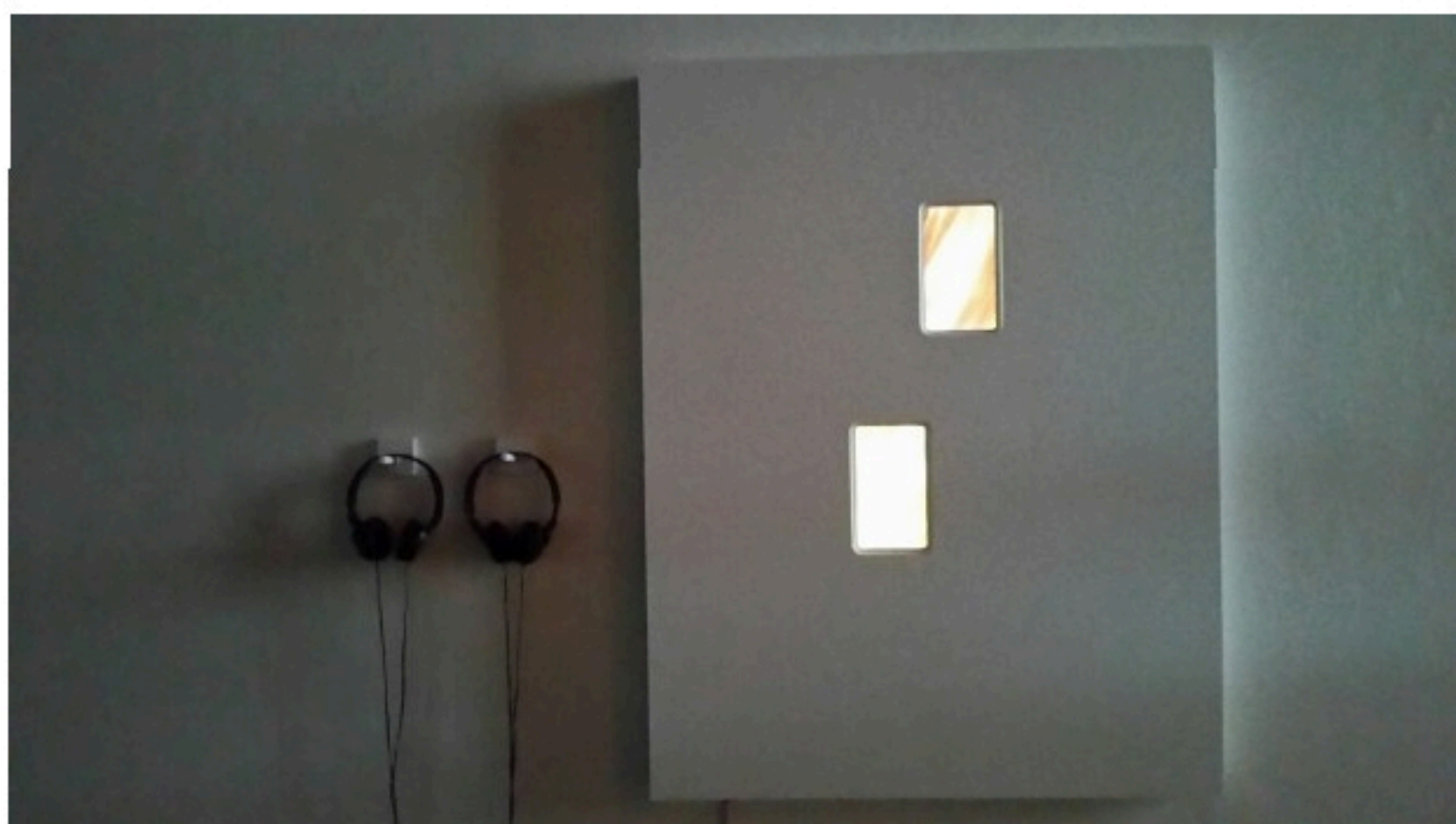
Sound artist Donna Legault's inspirations of John Cage and Nam June Paik are sensed in her exhibition, *Transformations*, at West Virginia University's Paul Mesaros Gallery. A feminist context is also evident through her contemporary consideration of the body, enriching textual component, and prominent social interaction.

Appropriately titled, *Subtle Territory* (2015) greets visitors, consisting of two speakers and a microphone which "manifests imperceptible sounds of the surroundings." The low hum and elusive purrs immediately make visitors aware of each bodily move, as the sounds both come from and enter the visitor's body, disrupting the surroundings.



Donna Legault, Audio Horizon, electronically modified CRT TVs, 2015. Image taken by the author.

The body has long been a contentious site for feminist art. The body plays a significant point of inquiry for Legault in *Resonant Variations* (2015), *Audio Horizon* (2015) and *Subtle Territory* (2015). *Audio Horizon* invites viewer participation (a feminist technique encouraging collectivity), allowing bodies to be *literally* heard—and seen abstractly. Visitors walk around the curved ramp echoing the curved installation of eleven approximately 13" screens suspended in the corner. The sound made by each step transmits through microphones, converting into linear notations on the screens. This visualization makes movements collaboratively present. The sonic experience challenges the normative art-as-other on the wall and body-as-figure, now body-as-movement and sound.



Donna Legault, Resonant Variations, electronic devices, 2015. Image taken by the author.

In *Resonant Variations*, the artist's heartbeats are visualized on two horizontally-installed approximately 5"x 7" screens. Visitors privately listen on headphones to a low, sonogram-type sound, with subtle laser-like creaks throughout. The abstract visuals appear as neon DNA-strands floating in black. This public sharing of private inner-bodily function explores the body as genderless, a contemporary feminist investigation.

Though feminist intent is not indicated, the exhibition text was agreeably ample, giving viewers a brief explanation for her intent with each piece, and installation open and inviting. Silence echoes Cage's influence, but also, sound artist Paula Oliveros. The repetition resonates Paik, but too, the video work of Dara Birnbaum in which sound is a major component, and others, as new media are modes of feminist avant garde.

Considering Legault's earlier work, such as *Dress for Breathing* (2012), an activated sculpture referencing "the history of bodily confinement in women's clothing," as well as this exhibition, a social feminist inquiry is subtly evident. Feminist scholars might consider a connection with the Ottawa-based artist to Canadian and noted sound artist Heldegard Westerkamp, who has overtly examined feminist topics.

*Transformations* is certainly a testament to the exploration of Cage, but also calls to mind feminist artists who aesthetically and institutionally paved the way for Legault to bring the viewer an enlightening and delightfully disruptive exhibition.

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*Transformations* is on view at the Paul Mesaros Gallery on the West Virginia University campus until October 2nd, 2015.

Sally Deskins is founding editor of Les Femmes Folles, a completely volunteer run organization founded with the mission to support and promote women in all forms, styles and levels of art; [femmesfollesnebraska.tumblr.com](http://femmesfollesnebraska.tumblr.com).

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