drawings

Max Neuhaus

sound works volume II

cantz

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Introduction

Drawings are ways of speaking for me – statements, indicators and tracings of these invisible sound works. They circumscribe them as drawings by other sculptors circumscribe their visible works.

Speaking in a different language, outside the medium of sound, they cannot be mistaken for reductions or imitations. Restrained by their medium, neither can they disclose what happens when sound actually engages mind, in place. That journey of experience can only be made by each individual perceiver in the sound work itself. These drawings are neither guides to this experience nor descriptions of it.

They are, however, manifestations of the ideas: forming catalysts for individual trains of thought, active memories, viewpoints into process, and projections of what a thought might become.

M. N.

Drawing by Ear

A point beats in your breast: your heart.
A point beats for your hand: your pulse.
A point beats in space. Listen.
Edmond Jabès

There are but few methods of drawing sound: musical notation and of course the one you are looking at now – phonetic notation of speech – are the most often used. Max Neuhaus' art lies outside both speech and musical conventions, outside the doted line of writing vocals of voice or of instrument.

As he found himself out at sea he had to teach himself how to swim, how to draw with only an aural thought to make us see, let us hear. His syllables are image and song.

We take the sonority of our world for granted. We are no longer able to experience aurally the spaces we live in, places to which we are no longer listening. There are also those who do not want to hear, or are simply hard of hearing, or bound to remain out of hearing.

But if you grant these drawings a hearing you are bound to see things differently. To listen to a voice, to attend a reading is to accept it a priori; we follow an advice, we obey a command.

Some of these sounds are no longer, some will not continue in time. Therefore, these drawings are also the only possibility of knowing certain thoughts that otherwise would remain unimaginable.

Drawn on translucent paper, shimmering and reflective, as if the lines are suspended just above the surface, asserting their own shadow against the transparency of the paper – an introduction to an aural difference which endows these lines with a shape in the absence of images, a thought cut from the landscape which is simply an immense white screen. A form is born out of the silence at the outskirts of unmarked space.

Neuhaus draws in primary colour; the colours are applied with a pencil, the colours referring to sound differences. They are

never mimetic and yet they take as a point of departure a conventional and descriptive language, depicting a space as given; they take note of a site.

If seen as drawings in relation to the places of which they are not, they are relatively small in scale, somewhat like landscape drawings, small in relation to the large project they are part of.

And yet the source of these manifestations is unlike any other drawings with which we are already familiar. More like technical drawings of a bygone age or graphic means used by aboriginals to represent the terrain or even ordinary topographic map-making, except they have little in common with these familiar things, they are unlike other representations; they represent what would otherwise not exist.

Our innermost being refines sounds, tunes our voices to renew the pact with a world we rebuild in our mind. In these drawings, sound is closer to a groove yet barely a trace, as if the mark is a threshold of a line, of a line creating its shadow as sound. At each turn of the street we are made to make a point of taking our bearings. We draw to circumscribe that which is invisible, that which we cannot circumscribe – where there is nothing.

The real quality and grandeur of these drawings lies in having created the sound works which bear the resemblance of the world of dispersion and which give it a meaning on the verge of discord. His difficult triumph, on the edge of perception, is to have been able to extract from the incessant flight of sound forms, by means of memory and intelligence alone, the tentative trembling icons of the sound of human sensibility.

Notes on the Drawings

I

The process of building sound is an intuitive one – of trying, modifying, comparing, adding – by ear. The same process that artists have always used, I imagine, but with the ear rather than the eye.

The role of drawings as blueprints for something to be made by others is not necessary here. As I work alone with sound, the traditional procedure of drawing the idea on paper first, before taking the irrevocable steps of execution, need not be done. I don't have to communicate the idea to anyone else beforehand; even if I make a piece several kilometers in diameter, like a *Time Piece*, I do not need a group of workmen to make it. I build the sound with my own hand and my own ear, in place, no matter what its scale.

Which, of course, is not to say I don't need to draw.

II

Many of my projects are large scale and require a proposal stage.

There is no possibility for me to conceive and develop a sound work on paper beforehand; my experience with the acoustic of the site is an integral part of forming the work.

The problem faced by sculptors who work in visual mediums – having to reduce their work to a maquette – becomes a physical impossibility with a sound work made up of its surroundings.

Perhaps more important, a proposal usually assumes the work is finished, and simply requires execution. For me, the proposal is the beginning of the process of conceiving the work.

The point of embarkation is the moment I try the first sound at the work's place. But to reach this point, approvals must be accomplished and the means need to be in hand.

Rather than the vehicle for reducing a three dimensional reality to two, the drawing here can become a means of stating an idea in an open medium, without the fixative of verbal language, a medium outside that of the sound work which does not impinge on it.

III

Sometimes, in order to shape a sound in place, I have to explain a problem to myself. Usually it's about what it is happening with sound in a particular space.

I start by thinking: 'If I do this, and this and this, that should happen'. Even if I know that it won't happen, by observing what should happen, and comparing it with what does happen, I begin to get a grip on this situation. Drawing is a good way to think about those problems.

In these working drawings I am trying to explain something to myself, usually in a special context. Say I am dealing with the aural topography of a space; making a drawing, transferring it into another medium, can show me another side of it. I can look at it in a different way. With the ear, you can only explore a sound topography by walking within it; it is a point-by-point exploration. But by snapping it into a visual world, I can examine it, imagine it with my ear, all at once.

In the elusive source works, in order to create this illusion where you find a sound and then it disappears or moves to another point in the room, I have to solve a problem like a complicated billiard shot, but with something you cannot see. You have to get the ball to go into the hole, without being able to see the ball. You only know that you have succeeded, when it goes in. Many times these drawings take the form of maps. When a work uses complex sound reflections from elements in the space, I make drawings which show sound pathways.

IV

The third volume of this series is made up of another kind of drawing – the drawing afterwards. They are a form of statement of idea which evolved after many trials and errors.

Although all these works are concerned with constructing places, the photograph is useless in describing them; in fact it is a distortion as it overemphasizes the absence of a visual component.

The visual works in volume III are diptychs; each consists of two drawings, one visual and one verbal – a drawn image and a handwritten text hung side by side.

For legibility in book form, however, the text panels have been typeset rather than reproduced in their handwritten form. I felt that it was far more important to have the clear impact of the words than to reproduce the panels themselves.

The mixture of the two panels separates these works even more from the sound work: not only to have a medium which is visual for something which is aural, but also a medium which is verbal; and then to combine the two, trading and passing ideas between them.

These visual works can also function as a kind of preface, reshaping the preconceptions around the sound work, without trying to replicate it on paper – clearing the ground around of what people expect a sound work to be, using both a visual image and a verbal image mixed in different ways.

V

These drawings are never shown within a sound work; they are not works within works.

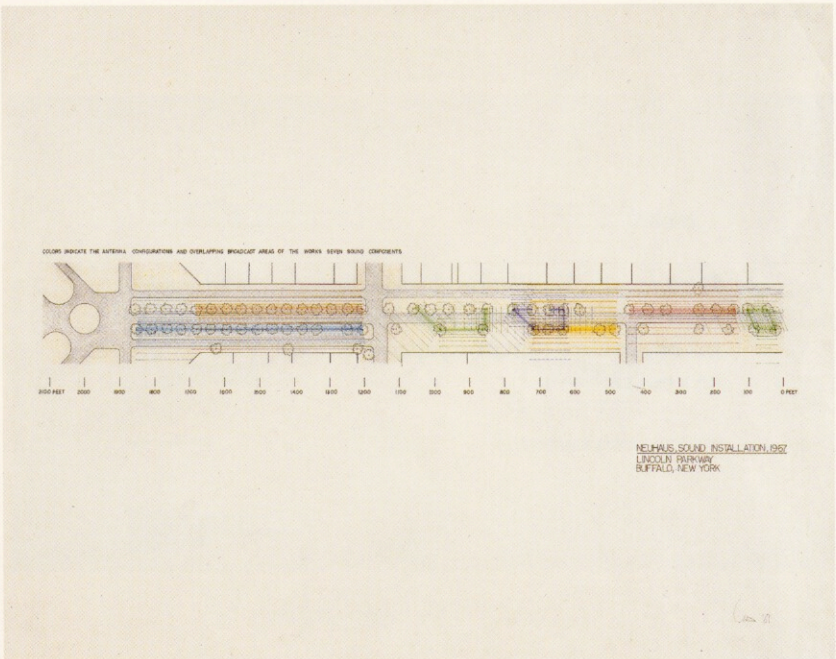
The diptychs are sometimes shown outside a sound work, as a preface, depending on how difficult the context is.

The proposal drawings and the working drawings do not belong to the sound work. They are not part of the process of perceiving a sound work; they are reflections upon it.

Selected Working and Proposal Drawings, 1978–1992

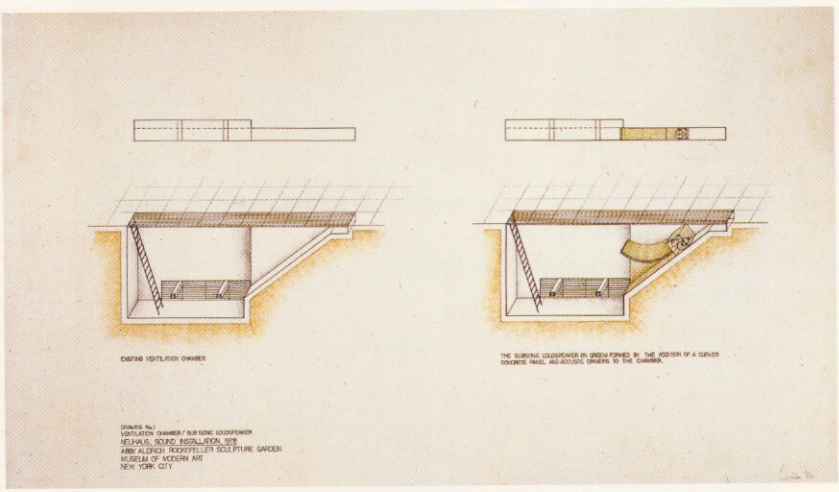
Sound Paths, Radio Net, 1978
Cibachrome print and paint
68 x 101 cm

Plan of antenna configurations, Drive In Music, Buffalo, 1981
Ink and colored pencil on paper
56x75 cm



NEUHAUS, SOUND INSTALLATION, 1987
LINCOLN PARKWAY
BUFFALO, NEW YORK

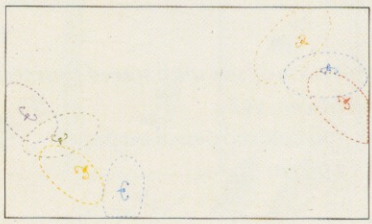
Drawing # 1, Ventilation chamber/subsonic loudspeaker, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1982
Ink and colored pencil on paper
56 x 90 cm


EXISTING VENTILATION CHAMBER
THE SUBSONIC LOUDSPEAKER GRID FORMED BY THE ADDITION OF A CURVED CONCRETE PANEL AND ACOUSTIC DRIVERS TO THE CHAMBER.
DRAWING No.1
VENTILATION CHAMBER / SUB SONIC LOUDSPEAKER
NEUHAUS, SOUND INSTALLATION, 1978
ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER SCULPTURE GARDEN
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK CITY

Projection of underwater shape with sound source locations, Water Whistle V, 1983
Ink and colored pencil on paper
96 x 96 cm

POLYHEDRIC VOLUME OF WATER DEFINED BY POOL

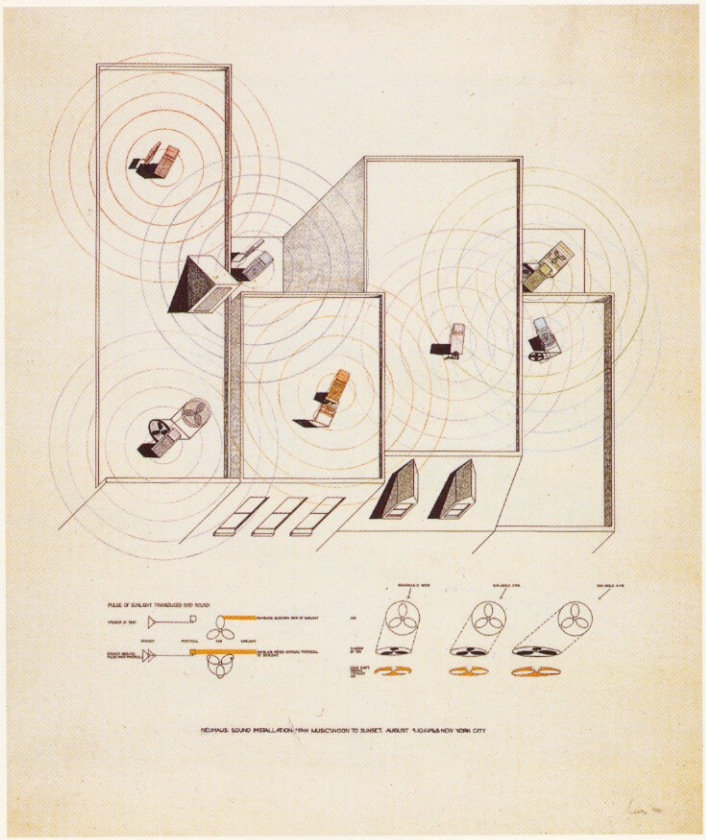
PLAN OF POOL SHOWING SOUND SOURCES AND THEIR AREAS OF MOVEMENT



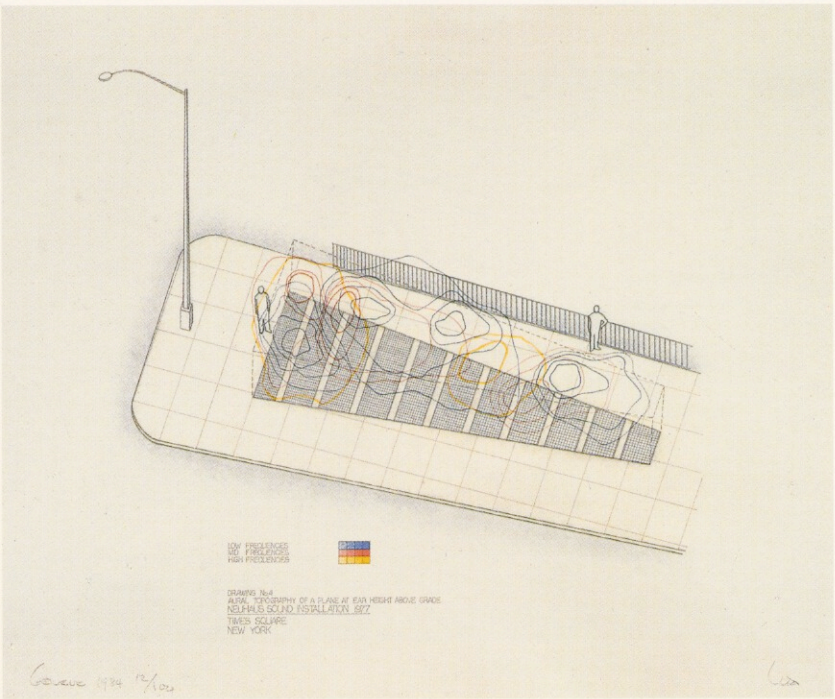
PERSPECTIVE DIAGRAM OF POOL WITH SOUND SOURCE AREAS.

NEUHAUS-"WATER WHISTLE X" 1982
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

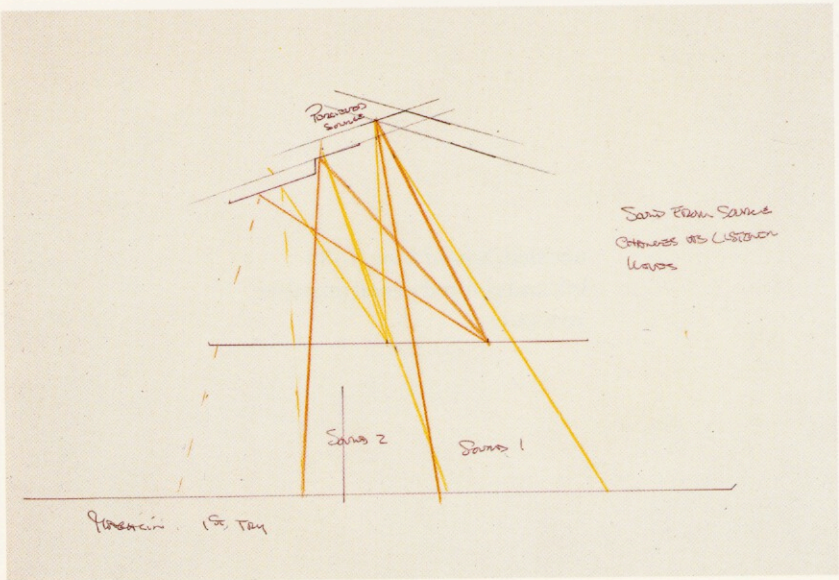
Projection of site with sound sources, Fan Music, 1984
Ink and colored pencil on paper
115 x 95 cm



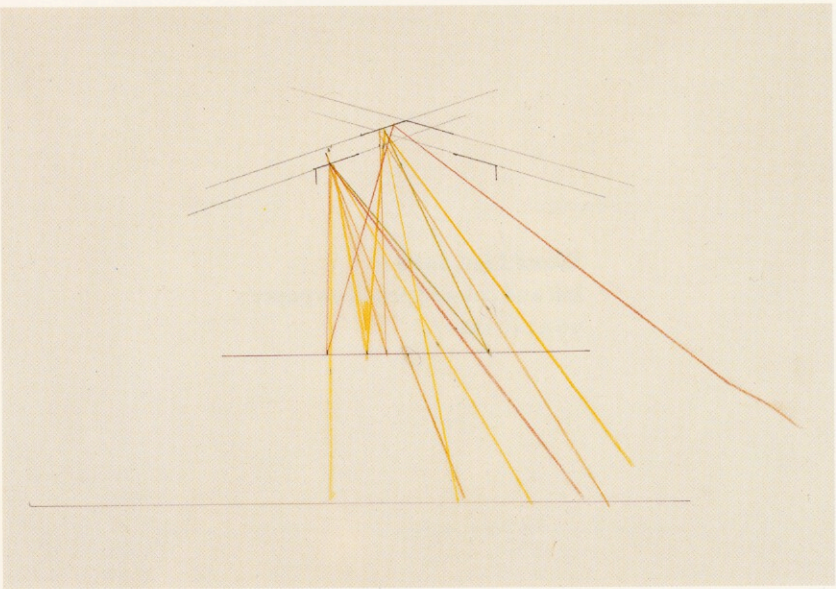
Drawing #4, Aural topography, Times Square, 1984
Silk-screen on paper
61 x 73 cm
Edition of 100


LOW FREQUENCIES
MID FREQUENCIES
HIGH FREQUENCIES
DRAWING No.4
AURAL TOPOGRAPHY OF A PLANE AT EAR HEIGHT ABOVE GRADE
NEUHAUS SOUND INSTALLATION 1977
TIMES SQUARE
NEW YORK

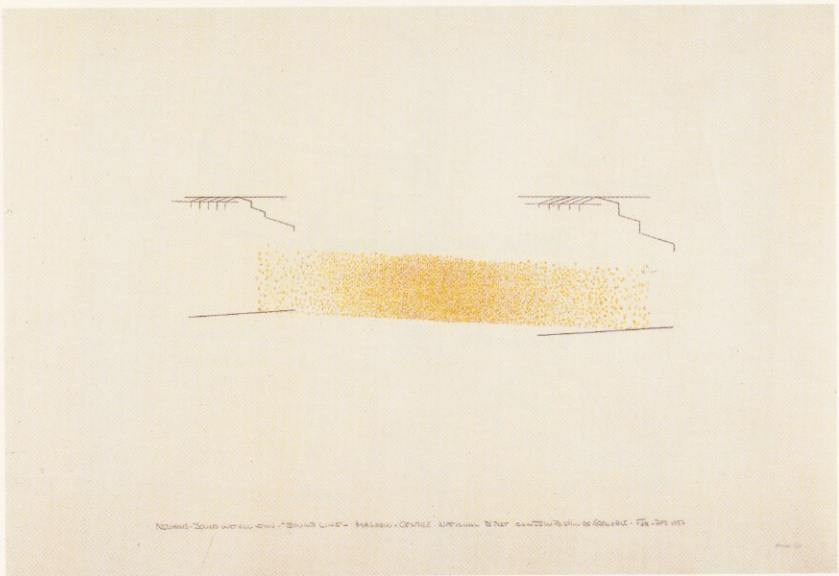
Magasin First Try, Sound Line, 1987
Ink and colored pencil on paper
30 x 42 cm


Sound 2
Sound 1

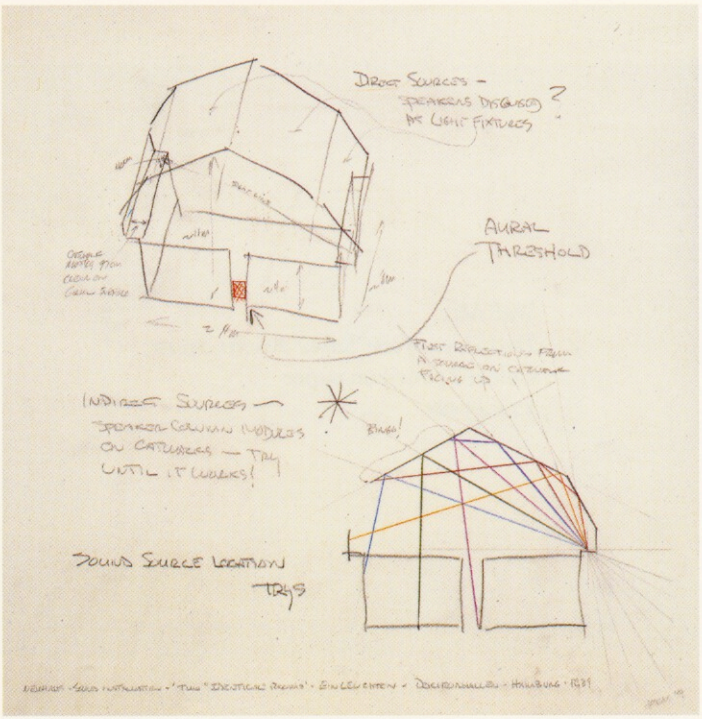
untitled, *Sound Line*, 1987
Ink and colored pencil on paper
30 x 42 cm



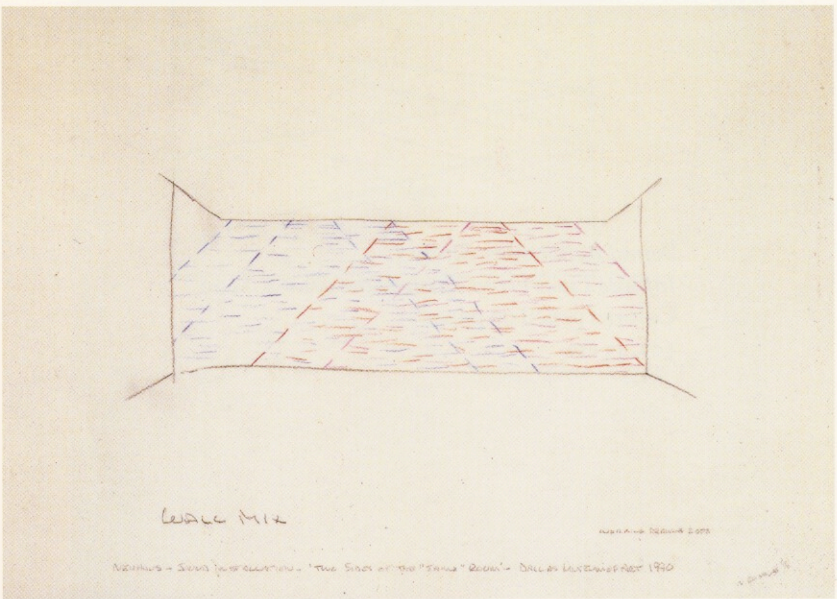
Sound Line, 1988
Ink and colored pencil on paper
96 x 140 cm



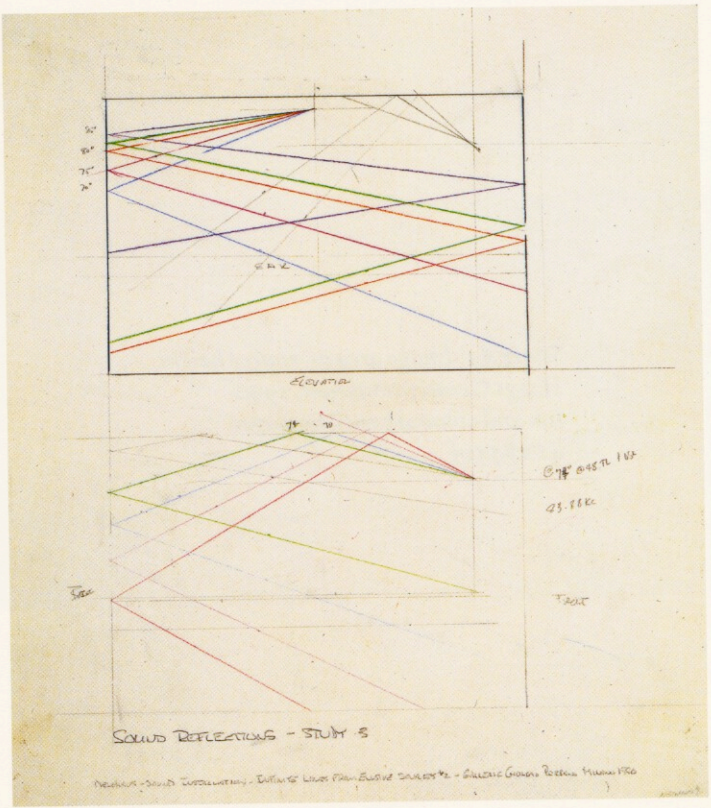
Sound Source Location Trys,
Two 'Identical' Rooms, 1989
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 43 cm


DIRECT SOURCES –
SPEAKERS DISGUISED
AS LIGHT FIXTURES ?
AURAL
THRESHOLD
INDIRECT SOURCES –
SPEAKERS BEHIND WOOFERS
ON CATWALKS – TRY
UNTIL IT WORKS!
SOUND SOURCE LOCATION
TRYS
BAM!

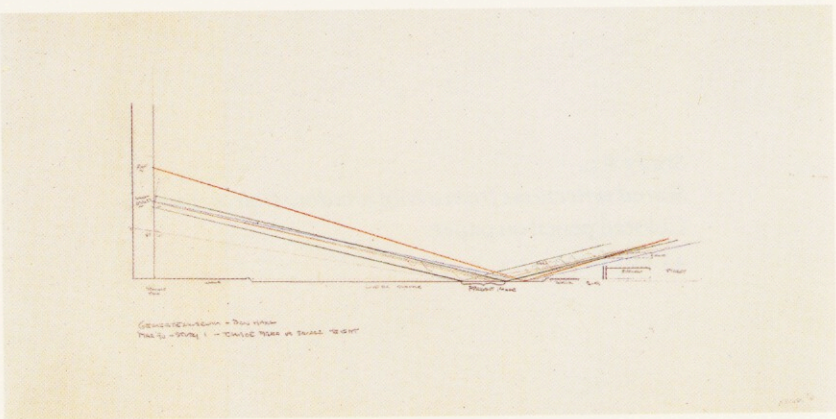
Wall Mix,
Two Sides of the 'Same' Room, 1990
Colored pencil on paper
33 x 45 cm


WALL MIX

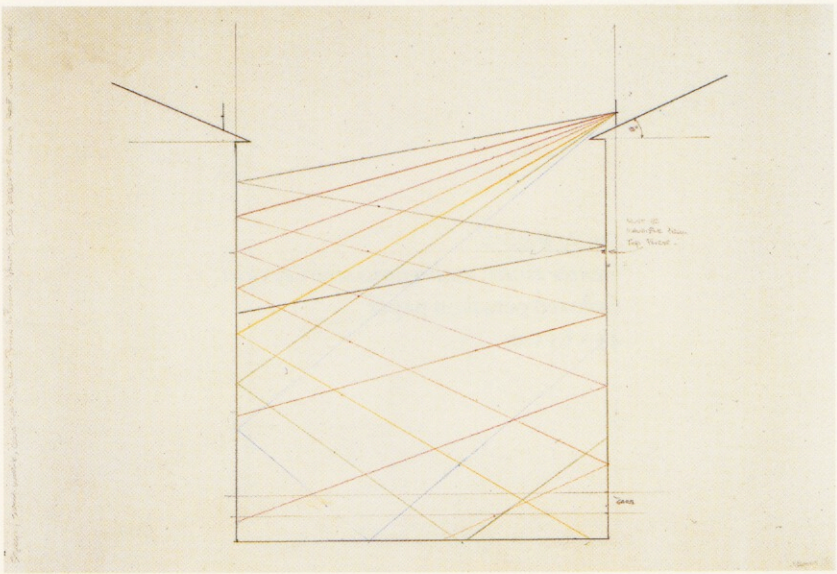
Sound Reflections, Study 3,
Infinite Lines From Elusive Sources #2, 1990
Colored pencil on paper
50x45 cm


ELEVATION
FRONT
SOLID REFLECTIONS - STUDY 5

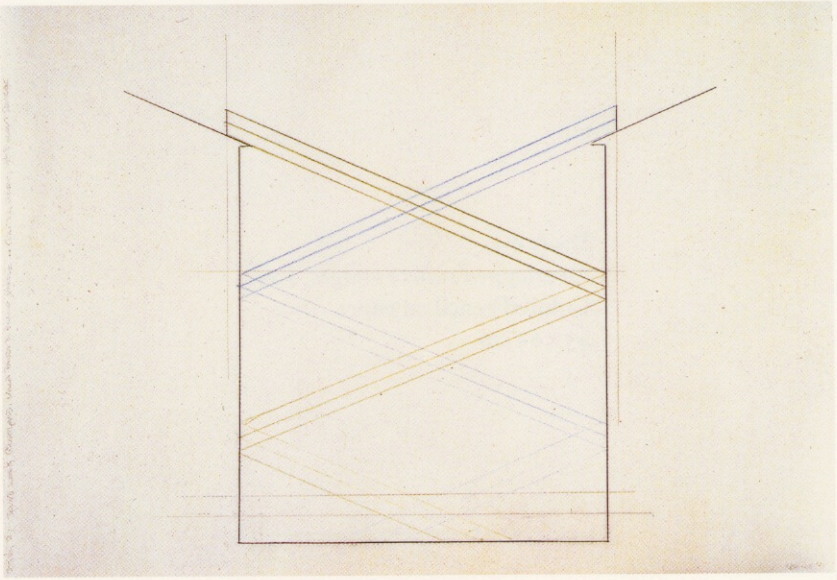
Study # 1, Image area vs. source height, Haags Gemeentmuseum, 1990
Ink and colored pencil on paper
42 x 85 cm



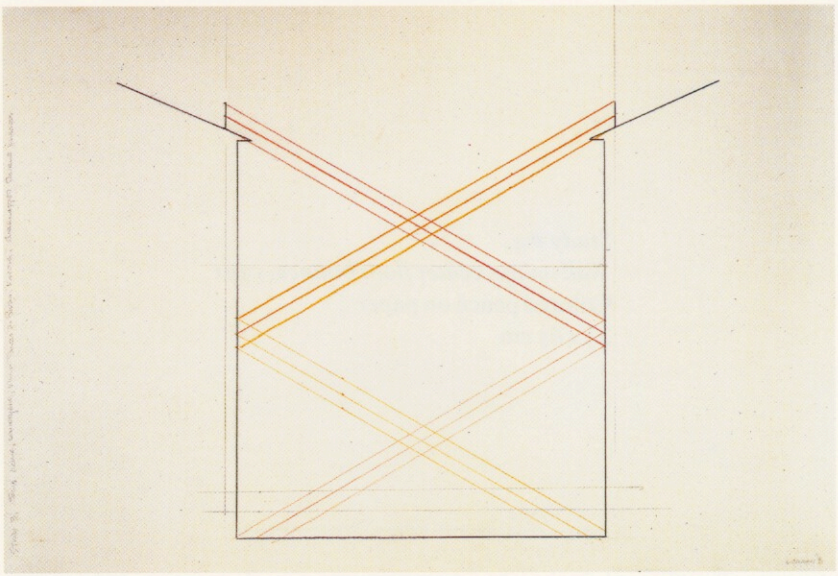
Study # 1,
Sound reflections from a roof window source, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 65 cm



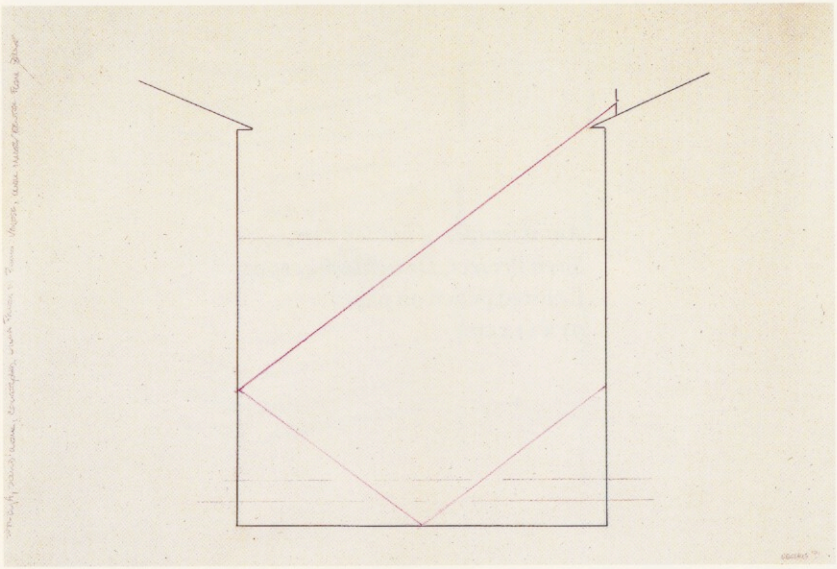
Study #2,
Center court, ambiguous source, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 65 cm



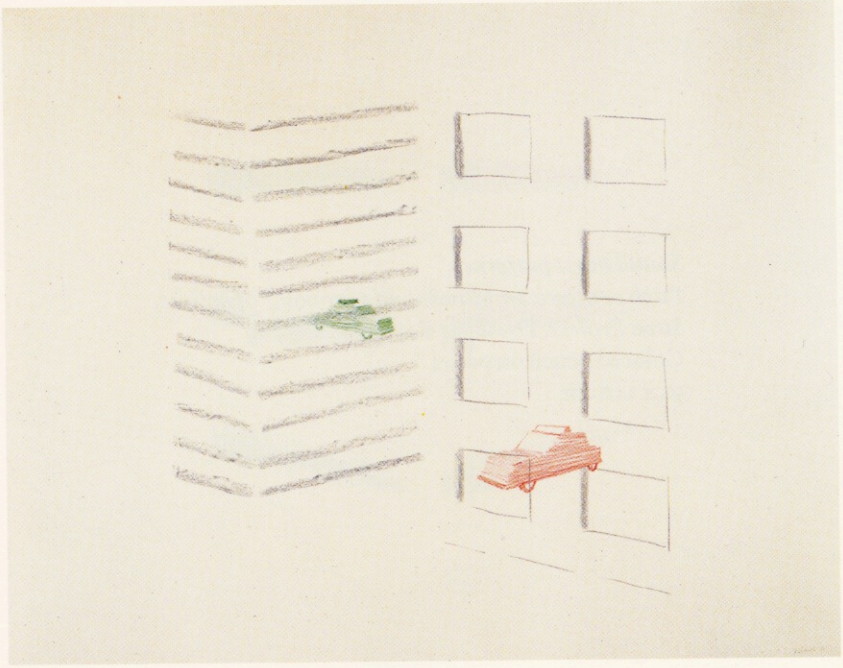
Study # 3,
Overlapped source images, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 65 cm



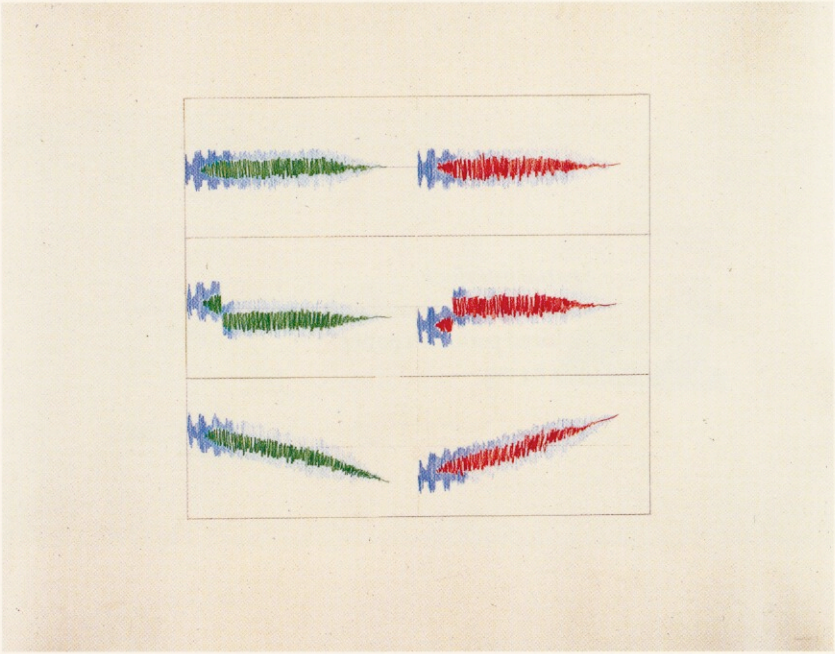
Study #4,
Wall image, center floor bounce, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 65 cm



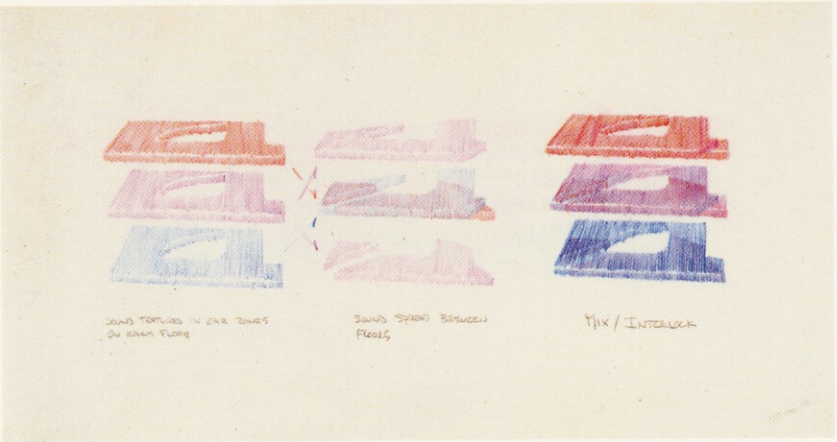
Aural images of hidden cars,
Siren Project, Drawing #4, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
91 x 112 cm



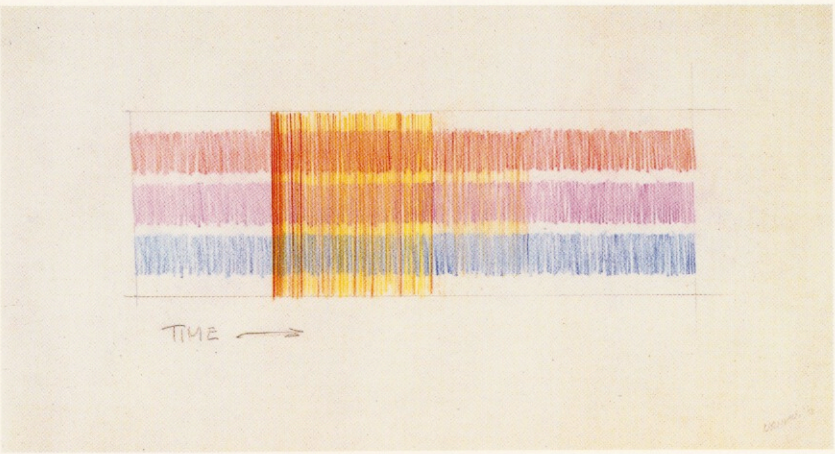
Sound burst patterns,
Pitch contour, amplitude and tone color over time,
Siren Project, Drawing #2, 1991
Colored pencil on paper
91 x 110 cm



Spatial interlock,
Three to One, Drawing #4, 1992
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 84 cm


SOUND TEXTURES IN FIVE ZONES ON EACH FLOOR
SOUND SPREAD BETWEEN FLOORS
MIX / INTERLOCK

Passage and mix of an outside sound,
Three to One, Drawing #6, 1992
Colored pencil on paper
45 x 84 cm


TIME