

Hayward Gallery, London, The Infinite Mix: Contemporary Sound and Image

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[Library](#) ^[1]

2017

Hayward Gallery, London

[Emily Rosamond](#) ^[2]

The Infinite Mix: Contemporary Sound and Image
, Hayward Gallery, in collaboration with The Vinyl Factory, The Store, London,
September 9??December 11, 2016

While undergoing renovation, London's Hayward Gallery goes off-site for ***The Infinite Mix*** an enthusiastically received exhibition of video art that highlights the relation between sound and image. This display of ten works includes well-established artists such as Martin Creed, Stan Douglas, and Elizabeth Price alongside newer talents such as Rachel Rose, Kahlil Joseph, and Cyprien Gaillard. It also doubles as a launch of The Store: a complex of ten studios to be occupied by creative enterprises like The Vinyl Factory, Dazed Media, and FACT Magazine, alongside a shared broadcast studio and an organic café. The exhibition's website devotes considerable space to promoting these businesses, and features a visionary quote from The Store's founder, Alex Eagle: "The future of all space is both the physical experience of being in that space and broadcasting that experience to the world."

It's hard to imagine a more seamless cross-purposing of an exhibition: as both a captivating extension of the Hayward's programming and as the perfect PR tool for the hip, hot-desking, coffee-fuelled creative entrepreneurialism that, at its worst, seems an all-too-perfect marriage between the concerns of contemporary art and those of speculative real estate. This is not to criticize the Hayward for finding alternative partnerships and, with them, funding streams. In an era of declining public support for the arts (particularly pronounced in the UK), these simply must be found. Rather, it is to question why it seems so difficult in this moment, in so many cultural sectors, to imagine anything else.

All of this aside, the show is full of excellent works and terrific twists and turns. And in spite of its pseudo-visionary, PR-centric tone, Eagle's quote above actually encapsulates something quite central to the exhibition: an interest, shared among many of the videos, in the paradoxical ways in which sound relates to images of place.

The lush, catchy soundtracks that accompany many of the works' visuals double and deepen the sense of the depicted places we see: the tense, atmospheric streets of Compton, L.A. (in Joseph's ***m.A.A.d***, 2014); a high school yard in Cleveland, home to a German oak tree gifted to Jesse Owens by Nazi organizers of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games (in Gaillard's ***Nightlife***, 2015); a neutral buoyancy training facility for astronauts (in Rose's ***Everything and More***, 2015); a suburban Alabaman middle-class living room (in Cameron Jamie's ***Massage the History***, 2007?9).

Yet as much as they pull us into such images of place, these works' soundtracks also carry us away. Their deft, delicious repetitiveness (a dub track sampling Alton Ellis' 1970 'Black Man's World' in Gaillard's piece; remixed Kendrick Lamar in Joseph's) extends and abstracts these places. Particularly in works in which the artist has chosen a soundtrack that is deliberately disjointed from the depicted locale (as in Jamie's piece, for instance, which features African-American Alabamian men sensually dancing with living room furniture, but substitutes their own music for a Sonic Youth track), this extension and abstraction of place by sound seems almost to reclaim the places from their rightful owners: their inhabitants. In doing so, these sound-tracked images speak to an uncomfortable territorial tension—a quiet hint of violence—and provoke thought about how such images of place (which, of course, carry with them history, race, class, gender, culture) should travel. Audiences unfamiliar with a specific locale, its histories and its subcultures must do some interpretive labour (to borrow a term from David Graeber) to try to understand these places. The music somehow lubricates this; it converts interpretive labour into the terms of pure feeling, giving the images an illusion of intimacy made of music, rhythm, and pure distance. Yet by facilitating this empathetic exchange of images of place, the music also seems to erase the very possibility of interpretive labour. How are we to understand a place, if it keeps slipping away in a rhythmic, empathetic echo? The most compelling works in this show seem to speak directly to this difficulty—to the simultaneous empathy and violence that the soundtrack unleashes on the image of place. They remind us (as Eldritch Priest also does) that to listen **to** something always also involves listening **away**: bracketing out the incidentals, abstracting, and allowing certain elements to remain below the threshold of interest.

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Artistes:

[Rachel Rose](#) ^[4]

[Cyprien Gaillard](#) ^[5]

[Kahlil Joseph](#) ^[6]

[Cameron Jamie](#) ^[7]

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