

Artist interview

Sonic sparring and sound Clashes

Inspired by punk, Anri Sala's video art stages a musical battle with time

By Ben Luke

Anri Sala is both a filmmaker and an exhibition-maker. The Albanian-born, Berlin-based artist's Serpentine Gallery show ("Anri Sala", until 20 November) reflects the power of his individual films and his gift for choreographing groups of works into immersive, resonant installations. In the work *3-2-1*, 2011, a live saxophonist, Andre Vida, riffs on Sala's 2005 film "Long Sorrow", improvising a response to Jemeel Moondoc, who in the original film sits on top of a tall building in a modernist Berlin housing estate, sparring sonically with the surrounding buildings. Two recent films use renditions of The Clash's "Should I Stay or Should I Go" on music box and barrel organ to explore specific places—one a disused concert venue in Bordeaux, which echoes the two instruments' melancholy sounds, and the other a square in Mexico City, the site of Aztec ruins, a colonial church, and Mario Pani's modernist architecture, which witnessed a massacre in 1968. Sala's chief concern is to explore "syntax" in terms of language, sound and space. A journey through his enigmatic installations is often disrupted or skewed as his films echo through the space, conversing with each other and with the architecture itself. As Sala says: "To me, it is very important that while you perceive what is given to you in the films, you continue to perceive your surroundings."

The Art Newspaper: It must be a challenge for Andre Vida to



Saxophonist Andre Vida plays live at the Serpentine Gallery in *3-2-1*, 2011, by Anri Sala, below

keep playing to the same structure every day.

Anri Sala: The idea is, at what point is the invitation an inspiration and at what point does it become some kind of musical prison? I find this interesting because when I did the film with Jemeel Moondoc, he was in a different kind of prison—it was like a space prison—so he was suspended in the void, whereas Andre is suspended in time. For so many weeks he will be suspended there, and he has to fight this

void of time; constantly he has to find new ideas, to not fall into something mechanical. And for this, sometimes you get the inspiration from the elements in the film, but the moment the film and the music are the same, then you have to take it elsewhere. And you will see that the exhibition has lots of openings, like the barrel-organ score that is engraved on the walls and the windows. A lot of sounds will come from the show to the outside but also from outside into the show, so

that is another possibility for Andre to fish for details. **The show is carefully choreographed. To what extent can the audience make their own journey?** Given that the space opens both ways, I am not forcing them to go one way or the other, and the other question is that they could arrive at any moment, and that is what I like about doing shows: the audience play a part in how they take in the exhibition, or the proposal. That is why I like doing films,

but I am not interested in the theatre as a display. Here, they could arrive in the middle of a film, at the beginning of the first cycle, at the end of a cycle. To me, it is important not to make a cacophony, and people can go through things from the beginning to the end, but most of the time they have a second choice. You provoke a choreography of the people and their movement through time, but it is not mono; it is a stereo proposal. And yet I think it is very important not to play on this gratuitous idea of the loop—that is not how you play with hunger and appetite. I know that I might lose some people by doing the exhibition like this, but with the ones I don't lose, it is a more generous offer than putting everything in its own box. It is like when you show people a place that is dear to you. You say: "Let me take you around." And the exhibition does take them around. It's not like, "here, go and see it, and I'll wait outside".

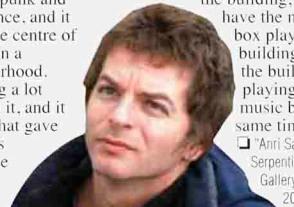
Why did you use a song by The Clash as a basis for "Le Clash", 2010, and "Tlatelolco Clash", 2011?

The place in Bordeaux where I shot the first film was a very famous venue for punk and rock music in France, and it was not even in the centre of Bordeaux; it was in a troubled neighbourhood. I liked the building a lot when I discovered it, and it was the building that gave me the idea. It was abandoned because it was the first building that was

officially closed after they found out about the effects of asbestos. I had this idea to reoccupy it with the sound of music, but not by being inside with the music, because it is an abandoned place and you are not supposed to be there. I thought I would like it to be playing a punk song, but that it should be played on barrel organ and music box, which are two instruments of different syntaxes, because each of them has different skills. And because they are different, suddenly it makes you think of two people playing the instruments; it is like their memory of the song is different at the same time.

Why "Should I Stay or Should I Go" particularly?

It was important to have continuity, but there are not many punk songs that have a continuous melody, because they have speed, they have shouting, they have energy, they have presence. I couldn't find a better song that you recognise throughout thanks to the melody, not other gestures. It was very important that the building played back simultaneously the little musical gestures of the two people going around the building, so you have the music box playing the building and the building playing the music box at the same time. ■



Anri Sala, Serpentine Gallery, until 20 November

