

# MUTED: A Retrospective Account

Muted took place in the late nineties, as part of Intermix, at CCCB in Barcelona. In 1998, its subtitle was "A Factory of Silences," and in 1999, it was "A Celebration of Silence, The Loudest Existing Sound." The project for 2000, proposed as an independent event, was subtitled "Silence, The Ear, and The World," but it was not carried out, as it could not be included in the CCCB schedule for that year.

Muted was an enormously positive experience, as it showed there is real interest in silence from a wide, diverse audience as well as the media. My feeling about this initiative is that silence is culture, and that it is necessary to create a space like Muted in order to call attention to that subject with rigor and in a broad sense, i.e. considering its multiple contexts (language, philosophy, music, ecology, architecture, contemporary art, and so on).

For me, silence is a fundamental right and a legitimate demand that free human beings are entitled to make. It is also a realm of artistic freedom that is seldom explored. Silence is generally defined as an absence, hence the idea of Muted to endow it with presence and to think about it in greater depth.

I wanted to raise silence to the level of a logical and necessary option in a world that grows noisier, chattier, and more and more manipulated by the minute. In our society, information, the constant bombardment of images, and the total colonization of silent spaces by noise and music create a permanent state of acoustic toxicity. This situation has reached conspirational proportions and its most likely goal is to make us stop thinking.



Muted 99, a celebration of silence, the loudest existing sound. From the CCCB

press release:

As part of the Intermix program, MUTED 99 is presented this year as a celebration of silence, a space to call attention to the subject of silence in its broader sense.

Silence has been an important concern in all areas of contemporary culture. The purpose of Muted is to endow it with presence and, of course, to make as much noise with it as possible, so silence "is heard loud and clear."

In order to do that, for three days and already in its second consecutive year, the CCCB lobby will become a territory of cultural dissidence, a space bathed in musical, visual, and verbal silences where music is not conceived as an organization of sound, but the opposite, as an organization of silences.

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## What is Muted?

It could be thought of as an installation of multiple parts, one that involves several artists and media supports. It also borrows from the tradition of "happenings," offering a series of very special concerts, which I call "silent concerts." Muted is also prone to a certain proselytizing impulse.

It opens with a Silent Cocktail at which guests are invited not to speak. It is a mute party that gives us the opportunity to exercise our right to remain silent in a social context. At the Silent Cocktail, guests are freed from the social obligation of verbal communication and find themselves in situations where hearing, seeing, being quiet, or just "being," are activities rediscovered with surprise and pleasure. The first Concert of Silences of Muted 99 was performed during the Silent Cocktail. It was a concert for tubas and electronic music.

## What is a Concert of Silences?

The structure of music, its architecture, is built on silence, but that silence is only noticed when it is framed and accompanied by sound, which it both complements and opposes. Silence can extend itself in time. It can be measured and realized in time. Time is the basic matter whereby silence is constituted as a two-dimensional organization, based as it is on both sound and duration.

The goal of Muted is to increase awareness of the importance of silence in music. It is a very obvious claim, and yet one rarely voiced. Silence becomes freedom when it acquires a spatial quality, when it escapes time and the reference to the sound preceding it dissipates. In a concert of silences, the sounds exist as elements of silence, and not the other way around. The purpose of sound is no other than to frame and highlight silence, endow it with presence, and continuously call attention to it.