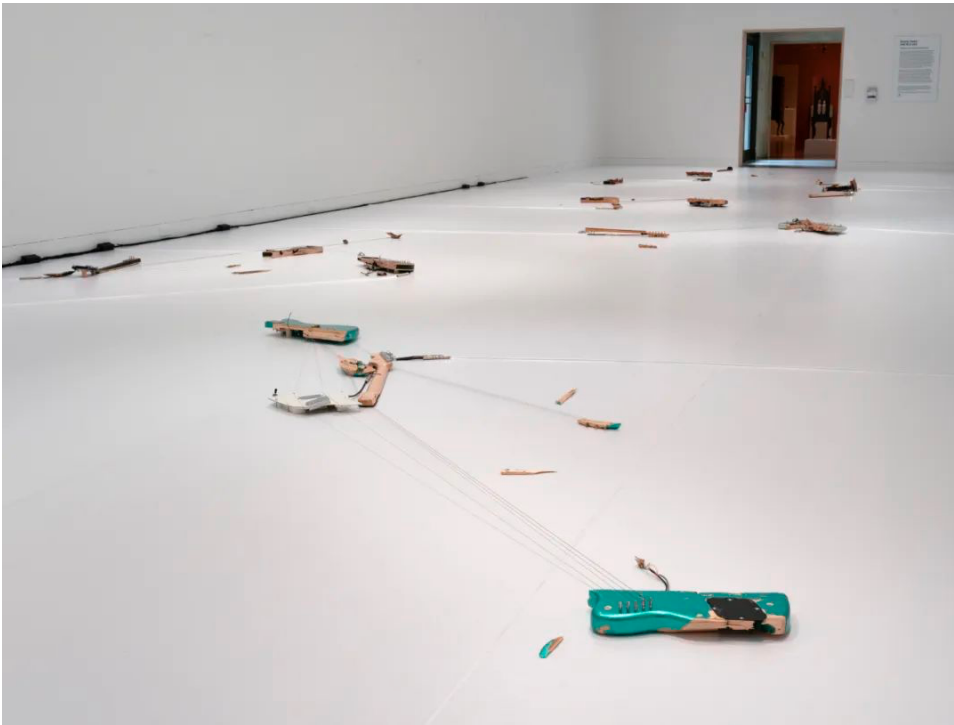


Naama Tsabar: She smashed the guitar AND smashed the history of male-dominated rock and roll.

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Installation view of Naama Tsabar's Matrix 189 Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 6) (2022) at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Image courtesy of Wadsworth Atheneum.

Israeli artist Naama Tsabar studied piano from a young age, joined a rock band when she was a teenager, and did not receive systematic artistic training until her undergraduate degree. Because of her experience as a bartender and rock band in Tel Aviv bars in her 20s and 30s, Tsabar's works are darker in tone, dominated by black, dark purple and indigo, reflecting the bistro and the backstage of the show. The dark environment of the artist—her attention to neglected objects, improvisations, and everyday life stems from it: the reflective tape to hold the wires on stage, the shoes she wears on the streets, the addition of carbon fiber felt that makes it stronger... These seemingly inconspicuous materials can be a source of inspiration for Tsabar.

With years of experience in performances and bands, as well as interacting with audiences on stage, Tsabar pays close attention to "space" and "architecture"—she transformed the exhibition hall into an instrument itself for the

first time in her undergraduate graduation exhibition. By building a double wall of wood and adding a few sets of simple strings, Tsabar created a field between the existing wall and the new wall where the sound could reverberate. She then pursued a master's degree at Columbia University's School of Art in New York and settled in Brooklyn to continue her explorations of sound, sculpture, and architecture. Her works are either completely silent or deafening, dismantling and reconstructing objects in unconventional ways, combining the exhibition hall building itself with the works, activating the potentials of the objects, performers and spaces that are unknown to the public.

Tsabar has a number of long-term projects spanning several years, the earliest of which is the "Performance Reliefs" series. After the band's curtain call, she would cover the wires scattered on the stage with tape, then peel off the tape and transfer it to the cloth. The tape seems to be a mold, casting out time. She exposes corners that no one cares about through disposable consumables, forcing viewers to gaze into the gaps that take place between events.

Another long-term project is Melody of Certain Damage. In the rock scene, the moment of smashing the guitar often marks the climax of the performance - when the vocals are no longer enough to express emotions, only destructive actions can bring out the high spirits on and off the stage. However, "smashing the guitar" is a very private act. She would be alone in the studio, smashing the guitar and the male-dominated rock history it symbolized to the ground, and then recording the exact location of each part, so that she could restore the scene according to the map point at any time. After adding new strings to the pieces, Tsabar invites local musicians to participate in workshops to explore these new sound generators.



In 2019, Naama Tsabar performed with musicians at Kasmin Gallery's solo exhibition "Dedicated," a live performance of "Melodies of Certain Damage" with Rose Blanshei, Rosana Caban, Taja Cheek, Frederique Gnman and Sarah Strauss. Image courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

In Tsabar works, the guitar is no longer an instrument that people hold in their arms and make it sound through plucking, strumming and other actions, but an instrument that requires the performer to bend down and lie on the ground to play — Perhaps it is more appropriate to describe it as a field constructed by objects, because the whole space seems to be transformed into a large musical instrument. The performers are centered on parts scattered all over the place, dictated by where they are located, and must find trigger points that fit them to interact with them



Naama Tsabar, Melody of Certain Damage #15, 2022, broken electric guitar, strings, metal, screws, microphone, 8.3 x 167.6 x 109.2 cm.

For a long time, this exploration of the power momentum between gender, the human body and objects has been the creative theme of Tsabar. On the occasion of Tsabar's solo exhibition at Wadsworth Atheneum Art Museum's MATRIC series, presenting a site specific "Melody of Certain Damage", we spoke about her work and the story behind the creation around the work.

Q: Your parents were fond of painting, and you were fascinated by it since you were a child. And later, you also learned the piano and played in the band. But how did you get involved with sculpture and architecture?

A: My love for sculpture stems from the impact it has on my personal experience. Sculptures of different scales can bring completely different experiences, and sculptures are often composed of different parts. In these respects, it has a lot in common with architecture. I am obsessed with studying the relationship of the body to objects and spaces, so naturally I am interested in sculpture and architecture. Besides, architecture is very important in Israel, especially the walls, and we have had a lot of discussions around the historical and religious nature of the wall.

Q: What do you think about the relationship between architecture, sculpture, and sound?

A: For me, experience takes precedence over rational analysis, followed by ideas. The relationship between these three is like the Holy Trinity, and it is the artistic model that I hope to experience. Sound is probably the most different from the other two media, it's not even a material, it's energy that travels in the medium in the form of waves and is difficult to block out. Sound travels through sculpture and architecture, but also through your eardrums and body.

Q: Since you value the sense of experience so much, do you take the audience into consideration in the creative process?

A: To be honest, I base my work on my own body. Some pieces are played from the outside, others require someone to stand inside the barrier and speak into the microphone, so the musicians I work with may have to lean over or

tiptoe to complete the performance because of their different heights. It also goes back to the logic that the human body needs to adapt to architecture or musical instruments, and the same goes for the audience.



Artist Nama Tsabar. Image courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

Q: This reminds me of your "Melody of Certain Damage" series where you smash the guitar and ask the performers to interact with it based on where the parts are scattered at the moment of destruction - which is also very important to what you've been exploring - the shaping of power and the power to echo.

A: Yes. I will document the locations of where the instrument pieces are smashed, and then restore the scene at the exhibition, so there is also an "accidental" factor. After restoration, I restring them (piano strings, guitar strings, etc.) and invite local musicians from where the exhibition facility is located to perform together. Both the performer and the audience need to adapt to these new "instrument fragments", which break the established imagination of "sitting at the piano" or "singing with a guitar" in the past.

I generally only work with women or non-binary people, and it's interesting how the standing audiences react to the performers when they lie low to the ground and play the fragments of instruments - after all, if it's a regular show, the performers always interact with the audience on a stage higher up. Therefore, the power relationship is deeply imprinted in the architectural space. what does that mean? How do you subvert it? As a female performer, and as the one who often needs to compromise in society, you still need to lie on the ground and be watched condescendingly by the audience. How do you feel when you walk into the center of the stage?



Nama Tsabar. Inversion #6, 2021, wood, strings, varnish, paint, banjo tuner, contact microphone, cable port, 243.8 x 141 x 21 cm

Q: Do these performances have ritual or spiritual implications?

A: When a performance is inspiring, it is spiritual. Acting is like someone who takes you on a journey, and I hope my performing arts are emotionally and spiritually inspiring.

The prep work we do before the performance is kind of like a mystical ritual, because when we rehearse, sometimes seven people are there together, sometimes they're spread out in different spaces - the performers are either facing the wall or facing the floor, very possibly they never look at each other.

I think it can also be likened to a tribe: a group of people connected by a performance created together, not by sight, but by mobilizing other senses to communicate. During the days we rehearsed and performed, I always felt like I was part of some tribe.



In 2019, Nama Tsabar performed with musicians at Kasmin Gallery's solo exhibition, a live performance of *Melodies of Certain Damage*.

Q: The analogy is interesting. Do you give performers some hints as they explore these "instrument fragments"?

A: Yes, the participants have their own specialties of musical instruments, such as violin, drums, guitar, etc., and the fields range from classical to jazz. Everyone has their own unique musical language and a different understanding of the "instruments" in the scene.

I call these rehearsals "workshops" and, depending on the work, usually last five to seven days. The first three days are free to explore and then I will give them some exercises to interact with the objects. For example, two people play a part together as a group, or one person hits the rhythm and the other pulls the main melody out of it. All exercises are about movement and intimacy with objects.

At the same time, I also record everything that's happening so I can go back and watch it after the workshop, sifting out the bits I'd like to discuss in depth with the musicians -- sometimes it's the moment that strikes me as lightnings, sometimes it's playing in a way I never expected. Through these intensive conversations, we gradually finalized the content of the show. Because of this, I often emphasize that these performances are completely collaborative results. Even if one person is absent, the final effect will be very different, so each individual is an essential part.



Naama Tsabar performing at the Perimeters exhibition at the Bass Museum of Art in Miami. Image: Photo by Michael Del Riego.

Q: What is the most important lesson you have learned from your collaborators?

A: I'm always excited by the more possibilities they inspire when interacting with works. I remember the first time "Melody of Certain Damage" was performed in Argentina in 2018, when the legalized abortion was rejected by the Senate after preliminary approval by the House of Representatives. There were many demonstrations and debates about the meaning of the law. The performers I invited put into the show what they wanted to say about it: the abortion rights movement is green, and we painted our nails green. When we hit and play these pieces on the ground, we're actually protesting. One of the benefits of working with locals is that they bring first-hand perception into the work, reflecting the history of the time and the moment.

Q: You often use neglected materials in your creations. Have you been researching any new materials recently?

A: I am currently creating works related to "money" and casting. When I first came to art school in New York, I carried a coin pouch with me. It was kind of like an emergency purse, like when I had \$5 left in my bank account, I would take some money out of the purse, and go get some necessities like eggs - this is very common for newcomers. I recently dug out this small pouch from the bottom of my storage box, and found that there were still changes in it, so I thought about casting the money bag with the money. In addition to materials such as metronomes and stones, I am always expanding my expressions.



Installation view of Naama Tsabar's Matrix 189 Melodies of Certain Damage (Opus 6) (2022) at the Wadsworth Institution Art Gallery.

Q: Your work discusses themes such as patriarchal society, the dissipation of power, and fragmented experiences. What does your imagined utopia look like?

A: It should be a world where people no longer use power in such a violent way. I don't have a very specific imagery of it, but I know what I want to eliminate in today's society - the way humans treat each other, their controlling and greedy hearts. It's really hard to imagine a utopia right now. I can only hope for small things, maybe rocks. I took this road trip to New Mexico and saw rock formations on the Indian reservation. They look like something you'd find on the moon or Mars. These stones are much taller than people, like sculptures. Although they seem to collapse at any time, they balance the world in turn.