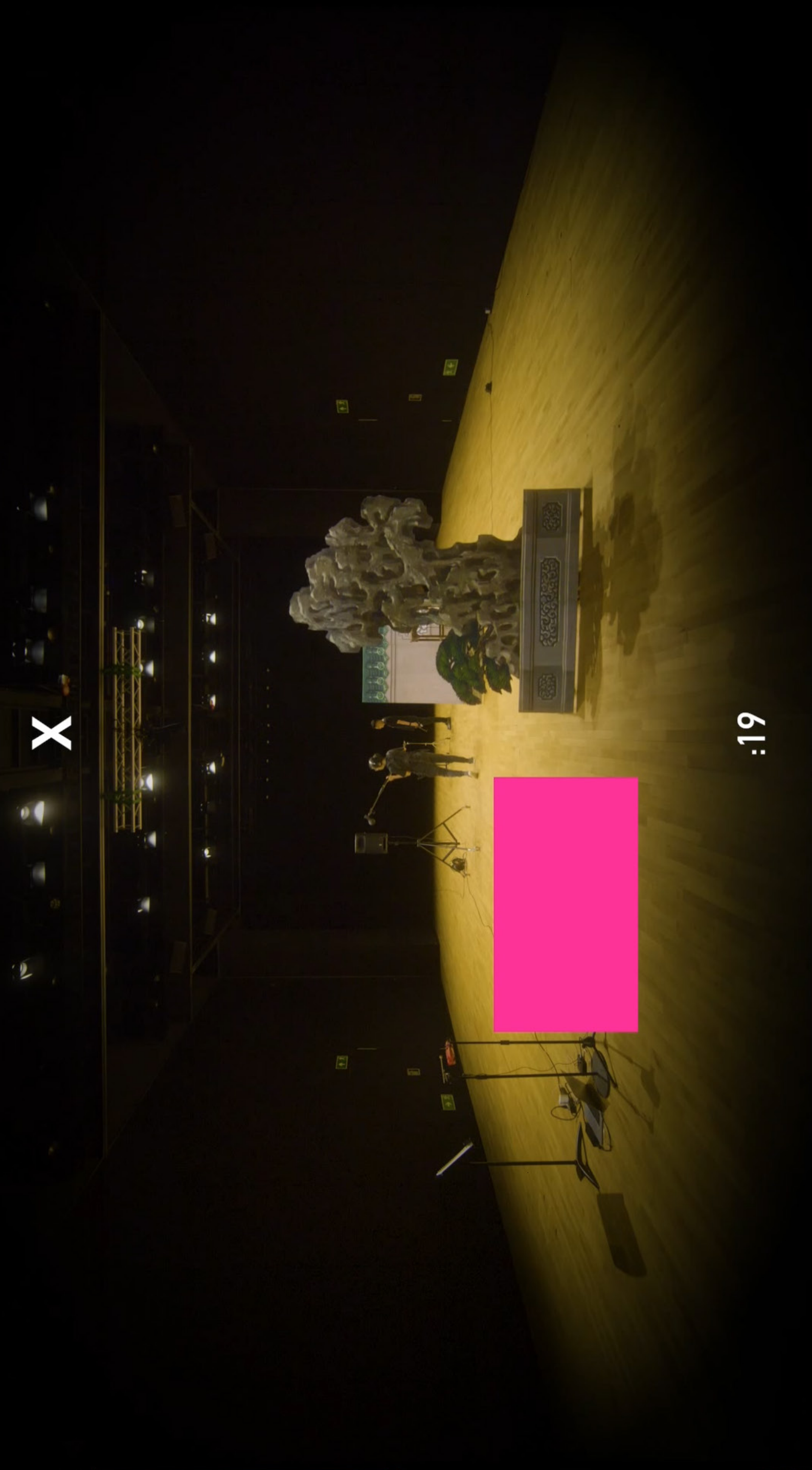


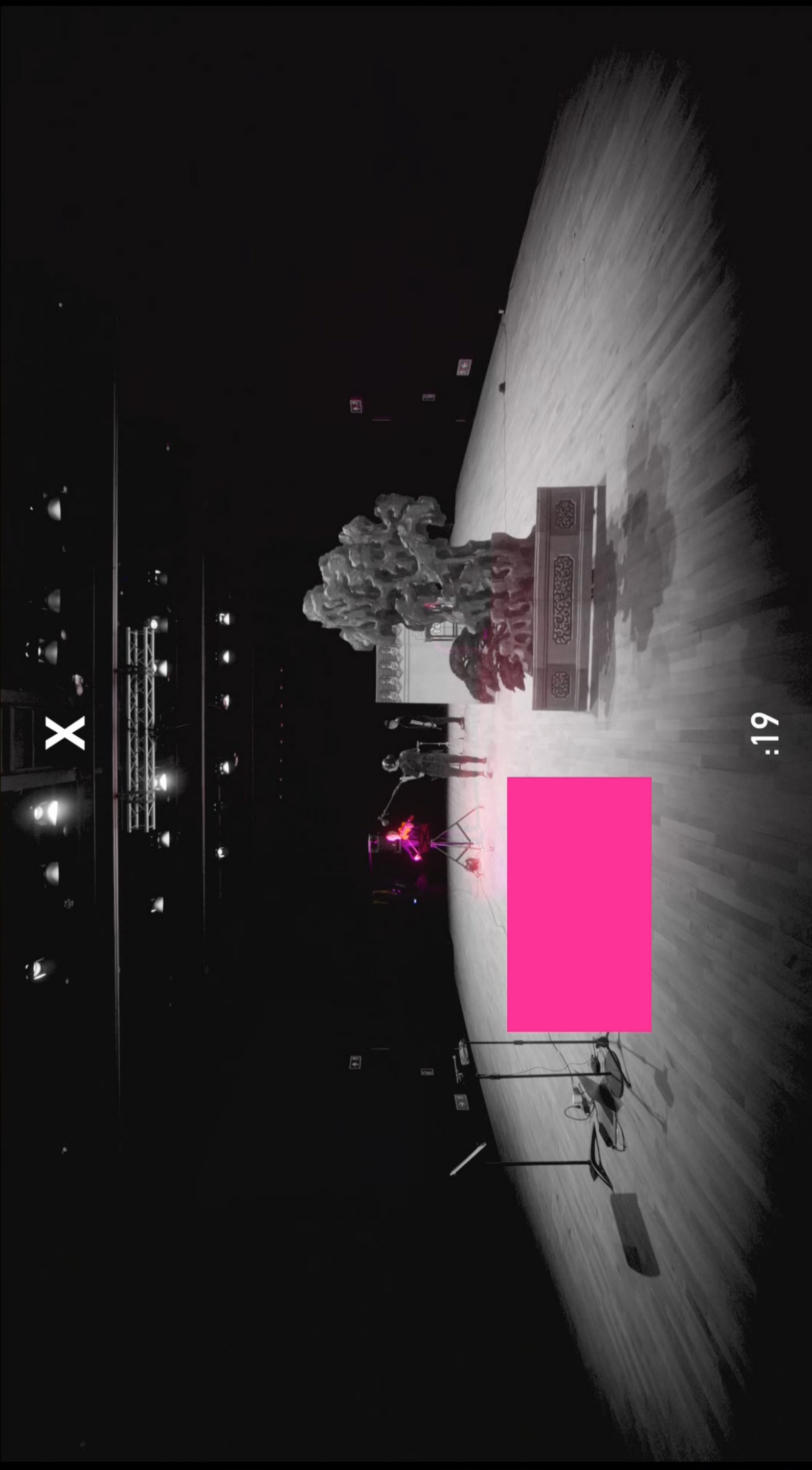
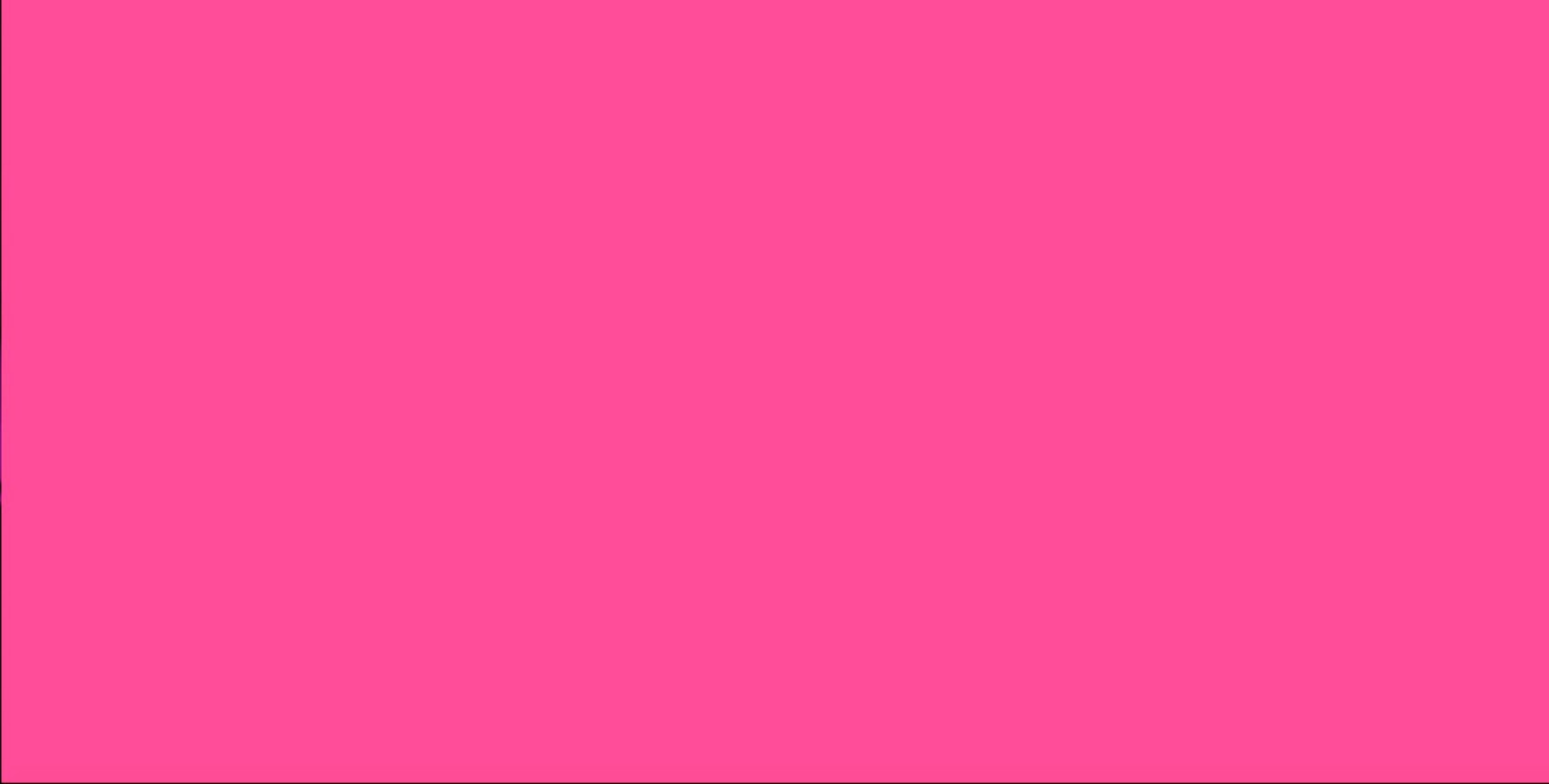


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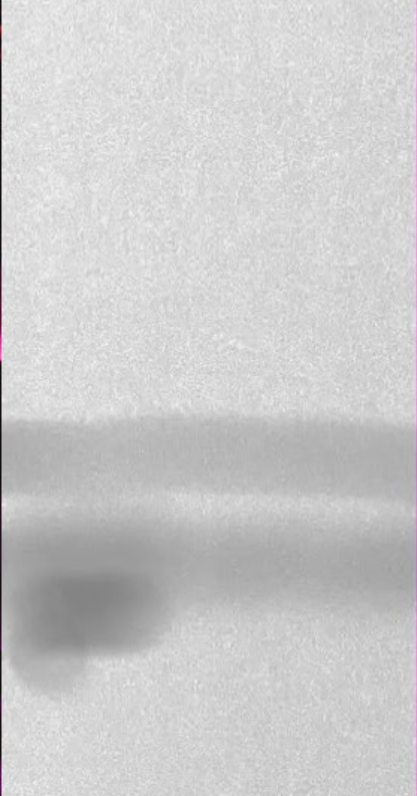
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SAMSON YOUNG

Samson Young's aesthetically powerful and scientifically precise works, with historical and social references and conflicts, move at the intersection of philosophy, literature, performance, and the recent history of audiovisual convergence. Young composes multidisciplinary spaces that oscillate between sound and image. His exhibition at the Kestner Gesellschaft consists of two multichannel sound and video installations and 3D print sculptural works, investigating a phenomenon of the so-called „situated listening“.

The works are part of a long process. Already the recordings of the interactions were systematically and cartographically planned by Young. In our halls we show symphonies in space and time.

While critical commentaries often situate my work in the field of sound art, my practice draws inspiration more broadly from philosophy, literature, performance, and the recent history of audio-visual convergence.

At the turn of the last century, artists and writers called for a musicalization of visual art. Painters took ideas from music to support an evolution towards non-representationality. This cross-current subsequently gave rise to the non-representational film and raumlichtmusik (space-light-music) experiments of the 20s and 30s, and expanded cinema in the decades that followed. Audio and visual signals now share digital codes, furthering the path towards seamless convergence. In *Towards a Space-Time Art*, Sven Sterken characterized Iannis Xenakis's *Philips Pavilion* (1958) as “a global and parallel formalization in the spaces of architecture, light, and sound” (Sterken, 2001). This total formalization, which constitutes a musicalization of space that today may be experienced as spectacles, is born of a partial understanding of music as corporeal, immediate, and non-discursive. My work



SAMSON YOUNG, *Variations of 96 Chords in Space* (feat. William Lane), 2023

considers the implication of a reverse-direction influence, where music reflects upon its own surface, to imagine a plane of listening as a threshold that the mind's ear may hole-through, fixate on, or circumvent. As the mind's ear moves between vectors, sound is sometimes an ally in art's critique of the authorial image. Other times, it pulls towards non-discursive perception, which may lead us back to imaging albeit of a different kind.

HALLE 1

The Travellers and the Listeners (installation version), 2023

Video with 4 channels of audio

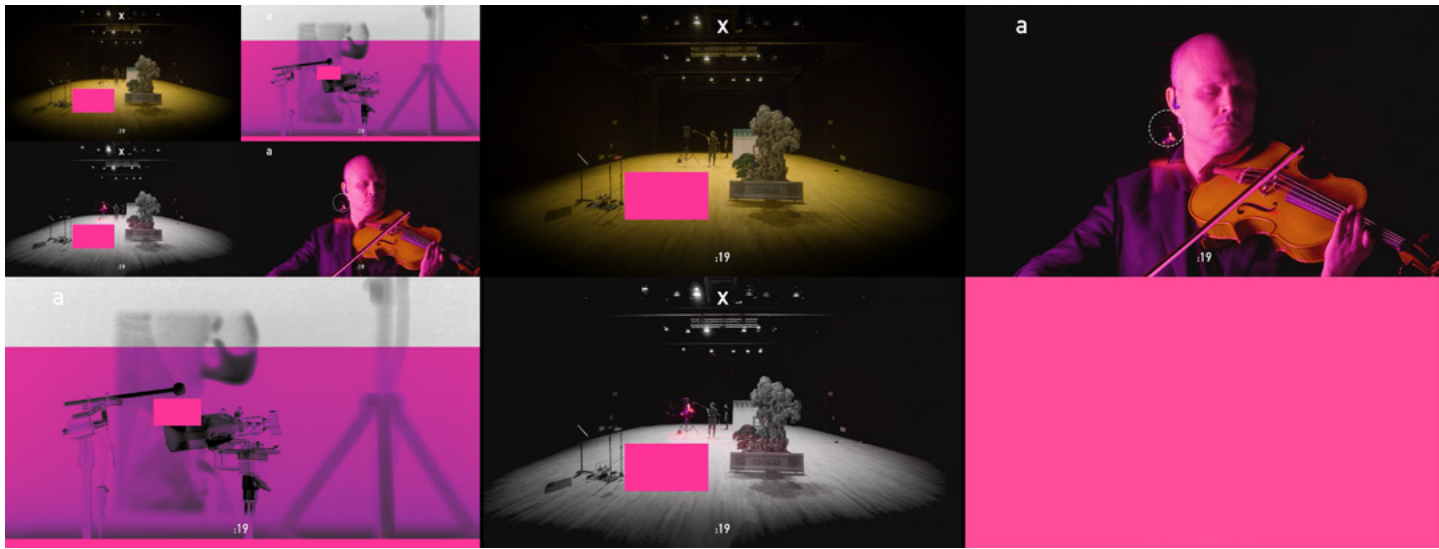
Duration 41'

1. Traveller
2. Gray eyes
3. Phantoms
4. Word
5. Word fell
6. Softly backward

This work was structured around Walter de la Mare's short poem *The Listener*. It took inspiration from images of the poem in a loose chronological order. There are six musical movements. Below is an excerpt from a text I wrote about the work:

“[Walter de la Mare's *The Listeners*] asks that crucial question about poetry in general: who listens, and what does it mean to listen to the silence of the poem on the page, which is a silence always still asking to be voiced [...] Hearing things in that house of poetry may lead to ghosts and phantoms, or to the memorable rhythm of urgent knocks, or perhaps just to those open, unanswered questions which were our own in the first place, but are returned to us, magnified, by the hospitable acoustic openness of the poem.”

Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things*, 2018



SAMSON YOUNG, *Variations of 96 Chords in Space* (feat. William Lane), 2023

The photographic dipian, an image in its pre-developed form, is an inversion that gives an other-worldly appearance, requiring decoding on the part of the reader. We may also think of the photographic negative as a literal negative record, a fupian: a suppressed, traumatic image that haunts. A suppressed image could be private, which is to say, an unpleasant part of the self that one is unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge. Image-suppression could also be communal: an openly-inadmissible imprint that speaks to the tension between knowledge and acknowledgement.

Listening suggests a focused stillness, an auditory attention that is usually held in silence. The phantom who listens is, therefore, a double negative: a concealed-silence. The silence in de la Mare's *The Listeners* is framed by the receding resonance of urgent knocks. Who knocks for whom, to what end, and in whose hall?

The first photographic negative invented by Nicéphore Niepce took days of sunlight to come to life. If reading-for-signal is likened to scanning, and to the anxious reproduction of sequential snapshots in response to intermittent flashes, then the mode of reading that *The Listeners* activates is more akin to long-exposure, where light is allowed to soak through multiple imprints across time, where time not only gives shape to and clarify an image, but also adds to it to produce contour overlays.

WALTER DE LA MARE

The Listeners

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
'Is there anybody there?' he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

c. 1912
Walter de la Mare

situated listening



SAMSON YOUNG, *The Travellers and the Listeners* (installation version), 2023

HALLE 4

Variation of 96 Chords in Space (feat. William Lane), 2023

6-channel video with 6 channels of audio (composition for viola, crotales, woodblock, self-playing piano, e-bows on piano strings, electronic sounds, water fountain, painted screens, and custom software)

Duration variable, a cycle averages at 2h10'

In a recent work *Variations of 96 Chords in Space* (2023), I presented a color-to-sound-to-action schema that took the form of a video and sound installation. The system consists of 96 colors, each is transposed to a chord, and subsequently into actions in a theater. A software recombines the films of these actions in endless combinations according to the logic of analogous and complementary color. The schema that underpins the work is logical in method and transparent in mechanics. Yet, to a viewer, it may function like a system of belief that is enacted in rituals. There is no meeting of minds at the half-way house of semantic-free data, no source code of perception for us to return to, only the impossible quest of approaching another's Cartesian theater.

The system that underpinned the work is important insofar that it helped to sustain a process in this particular instance for longer than if I were to rely on intuition alone; but ultimately the experience—a sequencing of music and images that is sometimes ordered, sometimes (more often, actually) haphazard—is probably more important.



SAMSON YOUNG, *The Travellers and the Listeners* (installation version), 2023

I started with a chart of 96 'color chords.' There are 12 hues of color within the set. Each hue is associated with a key area. Lighter tints yielded chords with fewer varieties of intervals, and as the color tone gets darker the intervallic relationships within a chord become more varied and complex.

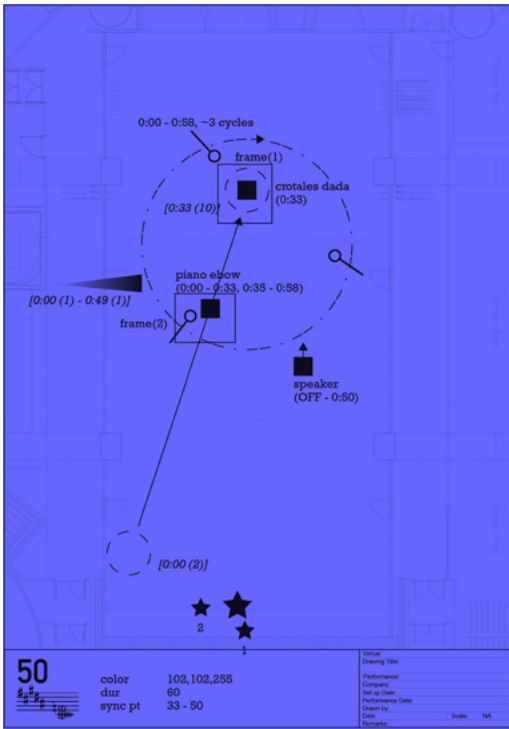
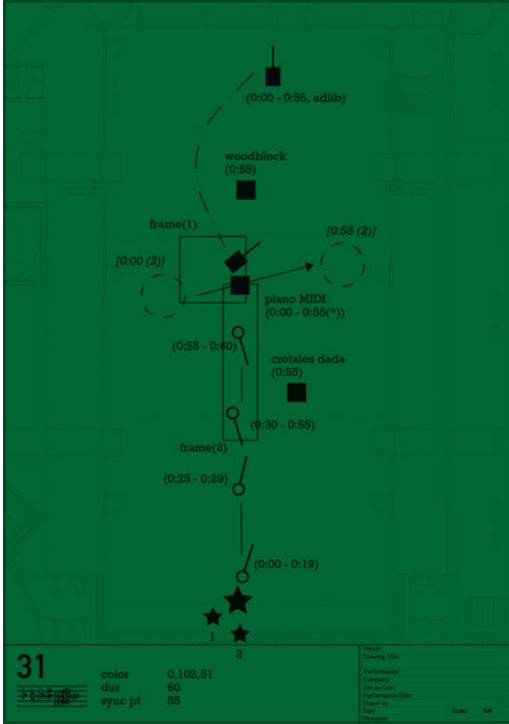
The work of composing involved the arrangement of notes and sounds, but also the choreography other elements, including the microphones that 'listened' to the sources of these sounds. We used four kinds of microphones in this work: (1) a shotgun microphone, which is the most directional and has the shortest capture range, which I think of as the equivalent of a "tight" camera frame; (2) an omni-directional microphone, a kind of 'mid-shot'; (3) binaural microphones that I was wearing over my ears, which is a kind of 'POV image' of the room that moves with me; (4) a XY stereo pair, which is placed at the front of the room. 1, 2 and 3 moved around the room to explore a variety of listening positions and range, while mic 4 was stationary and stayed with the front-of room camera.

Each color chord gave rise to a short composition of either 60 or 90 seconds. Each short composition was filmed twice in the same theater, each time with a different subset of compositional elements.

Born in Hong Kong in 1979, multidisciplinary artist **Samson Young** works with sound, performance, video, and installation. Young studied music, philosophy, gender studies until he completed his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D) in Music Composition at Princeton University in 2007. He now lives and works in Hong Kong, where he also spent time teaching at the media art school.

In 2017, he represented Hong Kong at the 57th Venice Biennale with a solo project titled *Songs for Disaster Relief*. He was awarded the BMW Art Journey Award and the Prix Ars Electronica Award of Distinction in Sound Art and Digital Music, and received the inaugural Uli Sigg Prize in 2020. Young has exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Gropius Bau, Berlin; Performa 19, New York; Biennale of Sydney; Shanghai Biennale; National Museum of Art, Osaka; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Ars Electronica, Linz; and documenta 14: documenta radio, among others.

Recent solo projects include: De Appel, Amsterdam; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf; Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh; SMART Museum, Chicago; Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art, Manchester; Manchester International Festival; M+ Pavilion, Hong Kong; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Ryosoku-in im Kenninji-Tempel, Kyoto; Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne; Jameel Art Centre, Dubai, u. a.



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Works cited
Walter de la Mare, *The Listeners, The Collected Poems of Walter de la Mare*, 1979

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Samson Young, *Variations of 96 Chords in Space* (feat. William Lane), 2023, Courtesy the artist and Petzel Gallery

Back Site
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Samson Young, *The Travellers and the Listeners* (installation version), 2023, Courtesy the artist and West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

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