

PAUL DICKINSON: MUSIC FOR WORMS AND COMPOST
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HALLWALLS



CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER
341 DELAWARE AVENUE, BUFFALO, NY 14202
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Understanding what's important.



In this exhibition of new work by Chicago-based sculptor and audio artist Paul Dickinson (a former Hallwalls Technical Director), the “works” are present and absent, before us and hidden from view, mute and alive with perpetual sound and activity. Three small wooden crates, fitted with visible air vents, sit in the gallery alongside a transformer and stereo speakers. Within each crate are hundreds of red worms wallowing in compost. The interior of each crate is fitted with microphones and infrared cameras, broadcasting visual and audio information to the “outside world.”

Music for Worms and Compost is a specific exploration of ambient sensory experience, a collating and broadcasting of sight and sound that cannot be predetermined or predicted. Isolating the worms as Dickinson has done creates a curious relationship—they are composting, but they are doing so within a rigidly-defined environment and remain dependent upon external sources for access to the nutrients that feed them. They are composting in an unnatural environment and are unable to feed off natural sources (rainwater, insects) that may be available in an earth-recessed compost.

Dickinson’s contained environment is an eerie and acutely apt metaphor for our times. Increasingly cocooned into our own isolated spheres of existence, we are propelled and enabled in this relationship by technological advance. Technology becomes our environment and, increasingly, we become dependent upon external sources for information and sustenance. We become disturbingly like worms, chomping happily in the dark so long as we’re fed the proper nutrients.

The piece deals with multiple layers of remixing and creative relationships. There is a fluid context between composer/performer/audience in Music for Worms and Compost, as Dickinson establishes the environment in which his performers create works that cannot be anticipated for an audience, some of whom (gallery staff) are complicit in the work’s creation through feeding the performers.

The worms’ bedding (and partial diet) includes shredded confidential papers, playfully breaching guidelines by retransmitting—albeit incoherently—confidential information.

— John Massier, Visual Arts Curator

Paul Dickinson’s sound, video and installation works have been broadcast and exhibited internationally. His projects explore the often dissonant relationship between nature and technology. Dickinson has also designed soundtracks and composed scores for a number of films, video works, and installations—including works by Cathy Cook, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, and Julie Zando. He has received awards from Artadia/Chicago, Visual Studies Workshop, Hallwalls/NEA Film Regrant, and the Illinois Arts Council.

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In memory of Mary Apelhof.

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