



Michael Brewster: Frequency



installation View:
Falls from sky proposed installation drawing (left)
1994
Ink on draft paper
22 x 45.5 inches

Courtesy of Panza Collection



installation View:
Back Room, LACE Drawing (Right)
2002
Graphite and colored pencil on drafting paper
20.25 x 26.5 inches

Baik Art is pleased to present *Michael Brewster: Frequency*, an exhibition featuring works and ephemera by the late artist, Michael Brewster. This installation largely reflects works produced early-on and late in Brewster's career with reference to a group show at F-Space gallery in 1971 and a subsequent solo show at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions in 2002. Reflecting on the artist's lifelong examination of sound and space, *Frequency*, pairs five works with various hand-drawn schematics, and archival materials to illustrate Brewster's methodical practice, and his lasting contributions to Southern California's artistic canon.

Michael Brewster had committed to making "sound-sculptures" for the span of his 40-year career, using sound as a means to entice audience engagement, spatial awareness, and collaborations between art and technology. The audible works produced by Brewster were conceived immersive sonic environments which activate the gallery's interior volume, similarly to sculpture. The artist famously stated, "You can't make sound become hard and solid; but you can make it seem to stand still, as if hovering in place... Sustained sound in a room with good echo can appear to us as an archipelago of audial sensations. A dimensional substance you can move through without hitting your head on anything."

This mode of experimental thinking proved radical in Los Angeles during the 1970's and affirmed Brewster's place among avant-garde contemporaries such as, Barbara Smith, Nancy Buchanan, Bruce Dunlap, and Chris Burden. Pictured to the right of Brewster's drawing of F-Space is Chris Burden performing his iconic performance Shoot. The two were longtime friends and shared the gallery. Although the image has been widely circulated, a key detail, discovered by art historian H.C. Arnold, reveals a circular speaker constructed by Michael Brewster as part of his first ever acoustic sculpture, Fixed Frequency. Early works by Brewster, consisting primarily of echoing whistles, clicks, custom built audio equipment, and flashing lights, framed the artists initial disposition towards contemporary art production and paved the way for further and more nuanced investigations.

Along with other artists involved in the Light and Space Movement of the 1960s, Brewster became interested in exploring the boundaries of phenomenological experiences and challenging hegemonic notions around art viewership. Later featured in an exhibition at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (L.A.C.E.), the artist presents a matured body of work which epitomized his thinking around the material of sound and its surrounding environment. Most notably the work, Falls From the Sky, was produced as an exploration of harmonizing and repetitive tones that when placed at varying intervals alter the way viewers decipher the piece and its reverberation within space. The five "acoustic sculptures," featured here are operated from a touch screen in the main gallery space and are made to encourage viewers to listen to tonal variations as they move throughout the exhibition.

Michael Leslie Brewster was born in Oregon in 1946 and was raised as an 'expat' child in Brazil. He graduated from a Sao Paulo high school where he developed a love of the theatre and set design. In 1964, he returned to the United States and attended Pomona College earning a B.A. in sculpture. Brewster then obtained his M.F.A. at Claremont Graduate School in 1970. Following graduation, he lived in Claremont, then Santa Ana, and then for 40 years in two Venice studios.

As an artist, Brewster's forty years of acoustic works have been exhibited in galleries, museums, and outdoor sites from Southern California to New York, Italy, and Australia. He was recognized with multiple NEA Grants over the years and as a Guggenheim Foundation fellow in 1998. His works are part of the permanent collections of the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, the Orange County Museum of Art, MOCA Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, and the Giuseppe Panza Collection. Three of his sound installations are on permanent display in the Panza/FAI Villa in Varese, Italy.



I work with sound's spatial effects to promote the appreciation of sculptural sensations rather than of objects. My two main series, the Sonic Drawings and the Acoustic Sculptures, use sound in space to generate expanded experiences of drawing and sculpture.

The Sonic Drawings delineate the intertwining of unpredictable "events" produced by the sounding of separate, individual clicking or whistling sources in a schematic way, literally drawing our attention to the "room" as they toy with our expectations, our sense of timing, and the flavors of our anticipations.

An Acoustic Sculpture is a mix of electronic tones emitted into a bare room by a single loudspeaker. The

sounds, echoing through each other, produce a field of sound populated by stationary places of differing loudnesses and tonal content. The zones seem to hover in space, some full and dense, others empty and thin; yet others pulse and ring with excitement. These physical effects exist in an invisible but tangible array throughout each installation.

To see an Acoustic Sculpture we must shift our sculpture-viewing habits from the "stand and look" behavior to an exploratory "move and listen" approach; slowly walking our ears, instead of moving our eyes, through the elaborated physicality inside these acoustically produced volumes.

-Michael Brewster

Acoustic Sculptures:

Falls from the Sky

1994

6:31 min.

Noname

1999

5:59 min.

Slider

1999

5:58 min.

Turkish

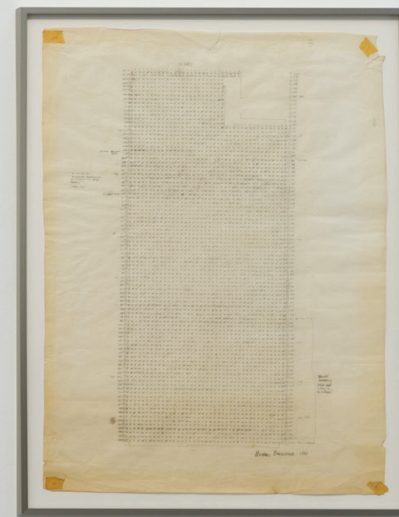
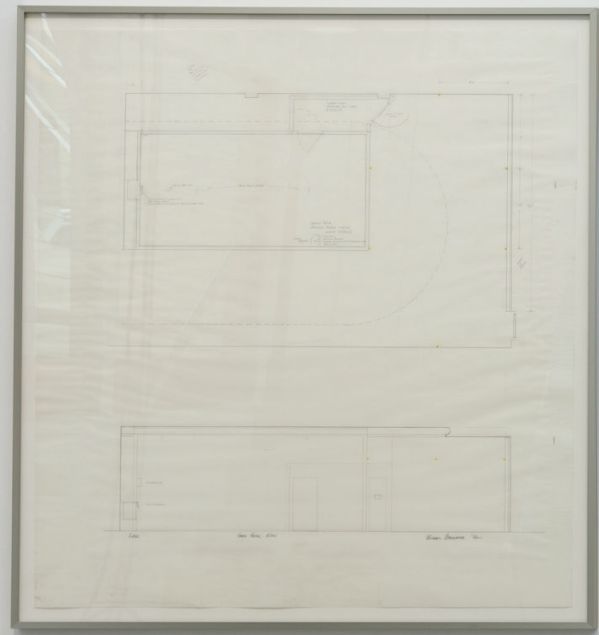
1999

6:17 min.

Oh So Pretty

2000

4:11 min.

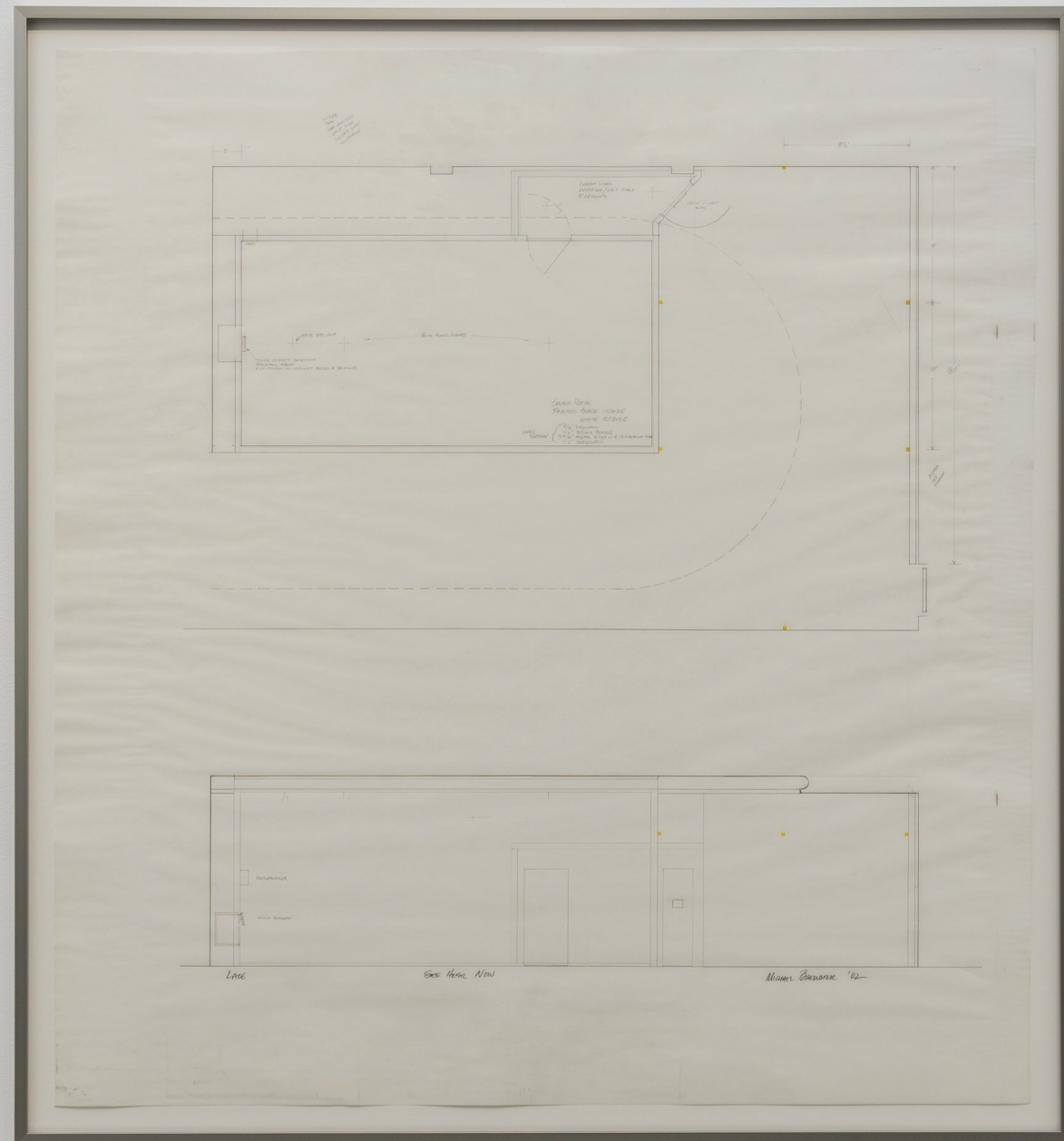


Radical Formalism: Michael Brewster's collaborative-materialism H.C. Arnold

Michael Brewster's work exists in the complicated terrain between the visual and the audible. Being neither music nor sculpture, his pieces employ devices from both genres to construct a hybrid form of immersive installation art. His lifelong desire was to move the viewer from the passive role of simply looking at an artwork into the position of being a participant within it. One does not simply gaze at Brewster's pieces. One must activate them, become surrounded by them, and physically explore them. To pass on the advice he gave me years ago, you must "move."

Bringing sound to the forefront of his art and employing it as his primary medium reveals the legacy of Southern California. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s in Los Angeles, Brewster was maturing as an artist in the middle of a conceptualist wave of aesthetics that encouraged the exploration of new materials and alternative forms of gallery practice. Leaving traditional methods of art-making and reliance on institutional museums behind became the standard approach artists pursued across the city. Such avant-gardist's tendency was also compelled by the simultaneous economic recession of the 1970s juxtaposed with the creation of new art schools and university art departments throughout the region. In the absence of financial support yet bolstered by a communal creative spirit, the artists who developed during this time displayed an inspiring creativity and resourcefulness.

The two most important influences on Brewster's artistic development from this period were the Light and Space artists, including figures such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell, and what became labeled "performance art" or "body art," most notably the work of Chris Burden and Mowry Baden. In Brewster's mature practice, a pairing of the aesthetic concerns of both movements is clearly discernable. From the former, Brewster employed their challenge to art's assumed objecthood alongside their critical investigations into ephemerality as a means for creating self-awareness. From the latter, Brewster adopted the utilization of the body as a performative vehicle that exists in the world by way of a direct tactility. Through these groups' drastic revisions that revealed the porous definition of what had become known as sculpture during the late 1960s, both the purpose and location of the mind and body were brought to the forefront of the viewer's consciousness.



See Here Now Lace Drawing

2002

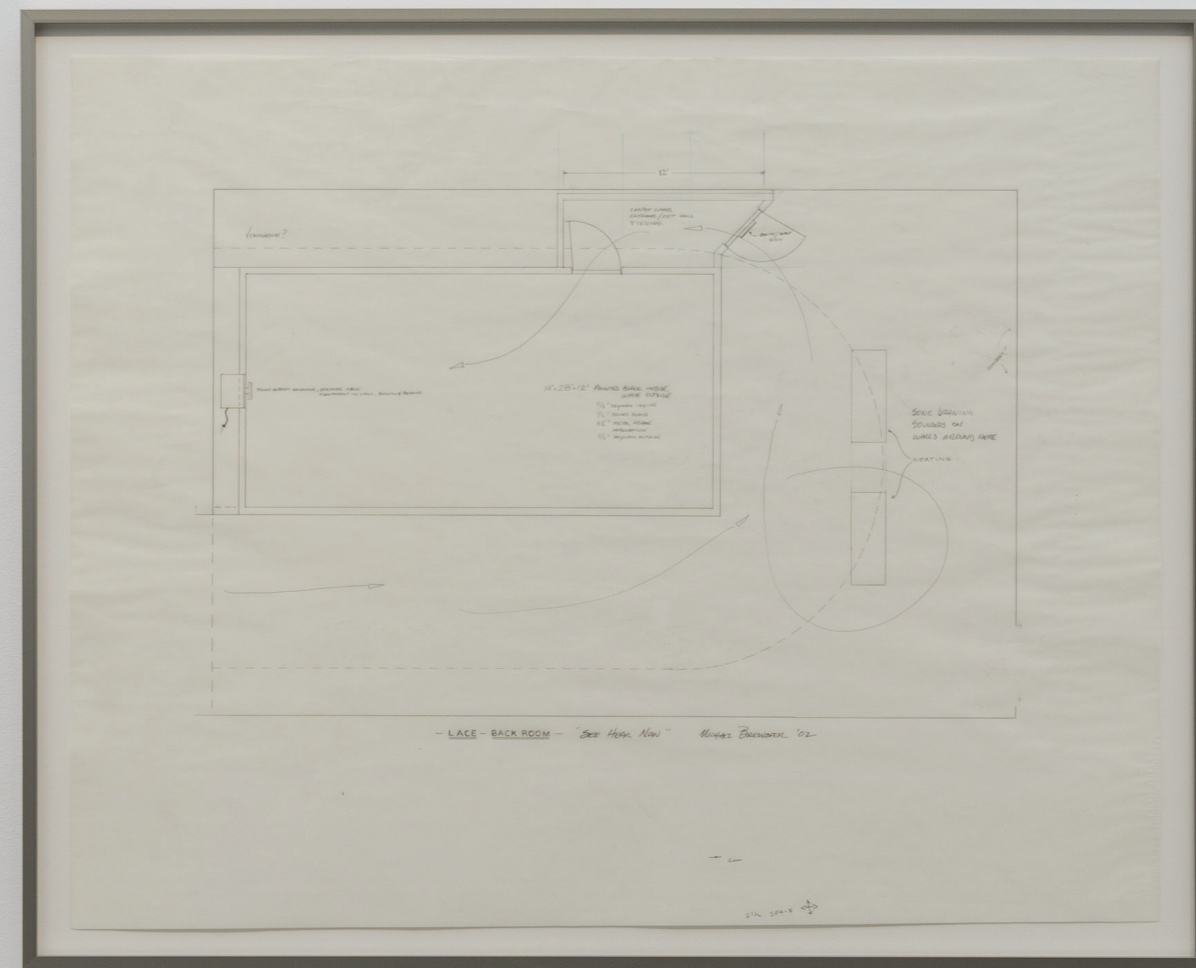
Graphite and colored pencil on drafting paper

31.5 x 29 inches

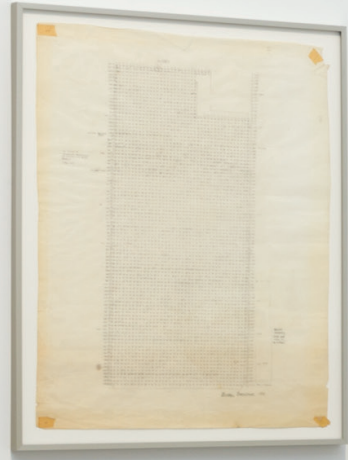
Michael's revision of sculpture occurred while he was attending Claremont Graduate School under the tutelage of Mowry Baden in 1970. Already exploring non-traditional sculpture practices at the time, his epiphany to use sound took place as he sat at his kitchen table and heard his friend's Volkswagen coming down the road. As Brewster told the story, he could tell where the car was headed and the mental state of his friend by how the car was being driven. Brewster explained, "All of this I knew without facing it, with my back to the street, as the fork made it's way to my mouth. I had heard so much three-dimensional information, and I had a complete picture of what was happening based on what I heard. I went SOUND! A SCULPTURE! It hit me like a ton of bricks."

Yet the sounds he would go on to create deny representation. Unlike the roar of the engine that was most certainly his friend's car, Brewster labored to produce tones absent of any signified referent. We are not supposed to think of something when we experience his work. The sound is not meant to direct us to what produces it. Instead, we are supposed to be in the abstract ether of the sonic landscape, in the present moment, and accepting the tones we hear as a pure unadulterated material. In this way, his art reflects his adherence to formalist abstraction. In particular, it holds a strong fidelity to the material it is made from and evokes a phenomenological recognition within us. Surrounded by the tones and chirps the work produces, we are made cognizant of our location within the space we occupy, both within the room and within ourselves. Yet unlike his formalist counterparts, our situational awareness comes not from seeing, but from the tacility of the soundwaves reaching us. We feel Brewster's work. And, it allows us to feel the world beyond it.

This feeling is dependent upon more than the sound alone as nothing can ever be truly autonomous. Each person's place within the room, their subsequent movements, and their numbers affect the resonance of the sound. As such, Brewster's art does not force something on us in a singular and commanding address. Instead, it creates a collaborative dialogue between us and itself. The constant interchangeability and unpredictability of the work's experiencers is a variable in the larger composition of the piece and metaphorically reflects our constant evolution through both time and space. Brewster's radical formalism is in his devotion to a material as a way to address the post-modern phenomenological concerns of selfhood and being.



Back Room, LACE Drawing
2002
Graphite and colored pencil on drafting paper
20.25 x 26.5 inches



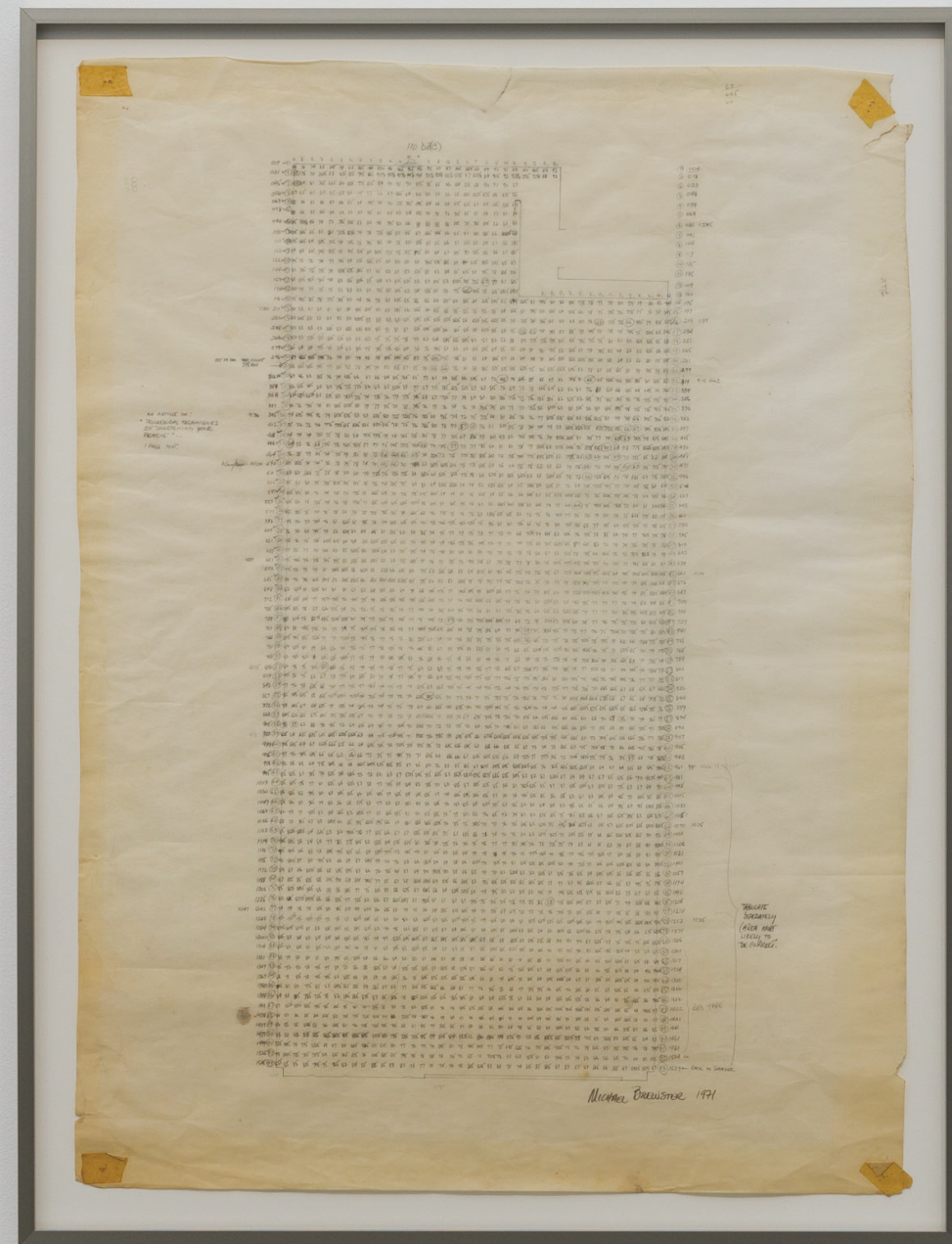
F-Space Q&A

by H. C. Arnold and Joshua Hossain Hashemzadeh

JHH: I know we have discussed in length how much of Los Angeles's artistic legacy has been overlooked through the decades and it seems that curators, collectors, and academics are just now starting to unearth and appreciate the stories behind some of the city's great artists and spaces, one of which being the F-Space gallery in Santa Ana during the 1970s. For those who may not be familiar with this artist-run space can you give us a brief overview of how it was formed and how Michael Brewster became affiliated with this cohort?

HCA: F-Space started in the early 1970s when Chris Burden asked several of his classmates at UCI to go in with him on a studio space in Saddleback Industrial Park in Santa Ana. UCI was relatively new then, and it did not have studio spaces for its graduate students. This was Burden's solution. The idea was to have a self-contained artist space where its members would be free to experiment and probe at the question: "what is art?" It was named F-Space because each workspace was listed alphabetically. The initial members were Nancy Buchanan, Bruce Dunlap, Chris Burden, Gary Beydler, Margaret Wilson, George Williams, Robert Walker, Debbie Peck, Larry Shep, Kathy Mennaely, and Barbara Smith. They acquired the space in January of 1971. After the initial 6-month lease was up, the group began to change, assumedly because members had graduated from UCI and were moving on. At that point, membership was open to whoever wanted to chip in on rent and participate. Brewster knew Burden from their time at Pomona College and was asked to join. Brewster gladly agreed, and his first show there was in the summer of 1971.

JHH: Baik Art's exhibition, *Michael Brewster: Frequency*, presents a drawing done during that exhibition in 1971, I'm interested to know more about the relationship between Micheal's drawing and his first acoustic sculpture pictured on that back wall of F-Space. Can you shed light on the significance of that drawing and how his piece, "Fixed Frequency" may have influenced the trajectory of his practice?



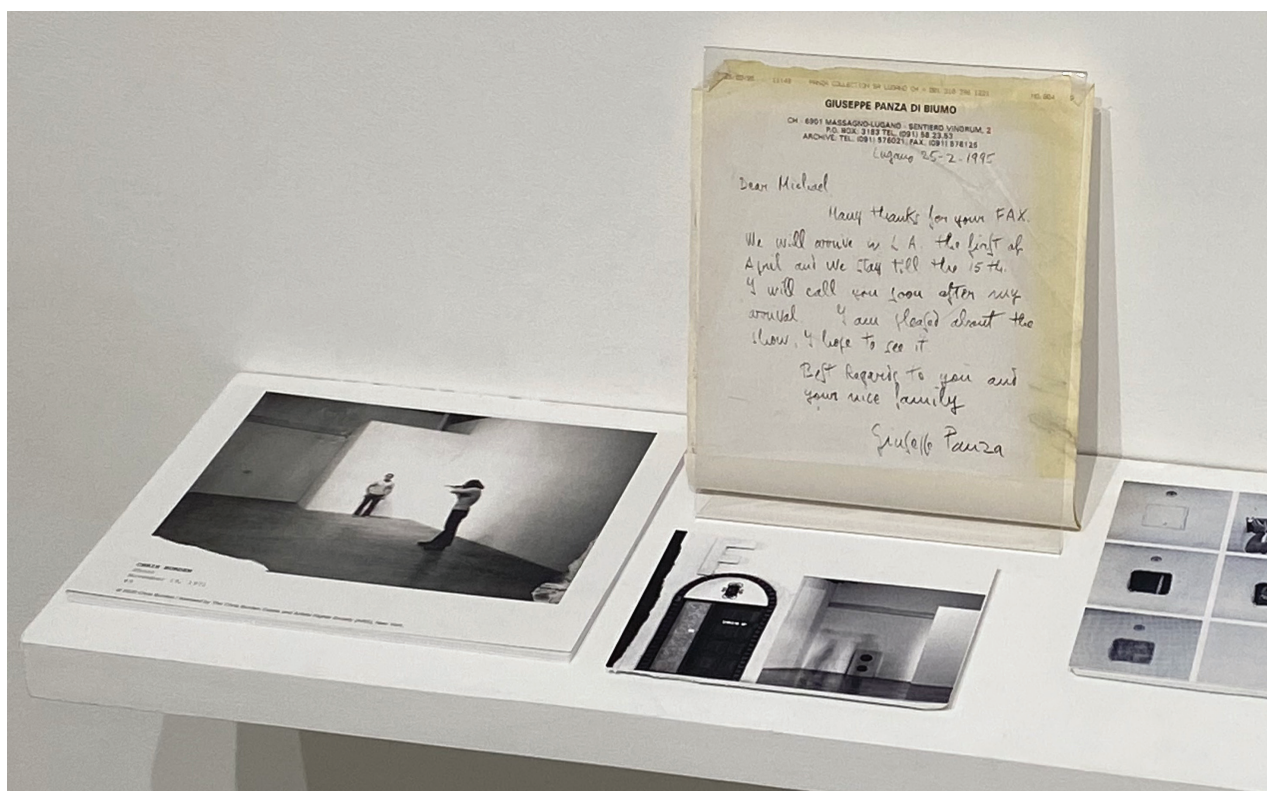
Numerical Drawing of F Space
1971
Graphite on drafting paper
26.5 x 19 inches
Courtesy of Michael Brewster Trust



HCA: So, a few things about all this. As the only art-historian working on Brewster, my research indicates he did not show this drawing at his first exhibition at F-Space. In fact, I'm not sure if it was shown publically during his lifetime. It's a unique insight into his working method. Further, as for the drawing's relationship to his first-ever acoustic sculpture, Fixed Frequency (its' speaker visible along the back wall of Burden's image of Shoot), I discovered it is a frequency plot of that piece. So, what we see are the various decibel readings of Fixed Frequency active in F-Space. Brewster was learning about standing waves at this time, and I assert this drawing is part of that self-education as well as a unique documentation of the work. This learning about sound waves ends up leading to his entire body of "acoustic sculptures," a selection of which Baik Art is currently showing.

JHH: It's pretty remarkable that so many important artists were all able to link up at that time to create such an innovative space. Considering LA's history with venues, artists, and thinkers who broadened the artistic canon, why do you think so much of the cities contributions from artists, like Michael Brewster, have largely been overlooked in the latter part of the 20th century?

HCA: I think New York took the spotlight for a long time. However, this has begun to change recently. The Pacific Standard Time initiative by the Getty is a good example. Their first round of exhibitions under the broad project titled "Los Angeles Art 1945-1980" hosted a variety of exhibitions that put a spotlight on what Los Angeles offered between those years. My hope is that this city's artistic legacy will continue to be explored and contextualized over time. Exhibitions such as this one are a great step in that direction.



On November the 19th, 1971, Chris Burden performed his now legendary Shoot at F-space in Santa Ana. The piece involved him being shot in the left arm. Pictured to the lower left, this photograph captures the moment right before the trigger was pulled. Although the image has been widely circulated and published, one key detail has been overlooked until recently. The art Historian H.C. Arnold noticed that the circular speaker of Michael Brewster's first ever "acoustic sculpture" Fixed Frequency is visible along the back wall. Both Brewster and Burden were friends and co-shared F-space where they collaborated together on Burden's 220. This image along with this exhibition help to reposition Brewster and ex- pand his role in defining the Southern California art scene of the 1970s.

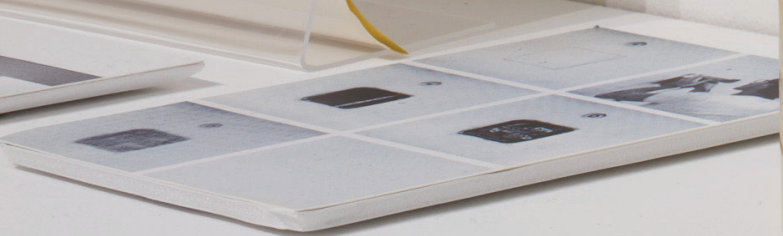
-H.C. Arnold is the manager of the Michael Brewster archive and is in the process of drafting several articles for publication on the late artist.

Chris Burden
Shoot
November 19, 1971
(Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery)

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Dear Michael
Many thanks for your FAX.
We will arrive in L.A. the first of
April and we stay till the 15th.
I will call you soon after my
arrival. I am excited about the
show, I hope to see it.
Best regards to you and
your nice family
Giuseppe Panza



Baik Art Installation View
(original recordings, soundwave visualization, and hand built audio equipment)



Anna Dusi: The Emotions of Sound

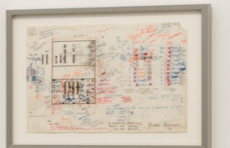
When you enter one of Michael Brewster's acoustic environments you feel encompassed. Totally surrounded. You feel a responsibility to engage with the sound around you, moving through the space as the differences in tonal vibrations enact themselves on your body. Michael's inventive practices and thorough understandings of amplified sound define the artist's uniquely crafted experiences and affirm the merit of his 40-year career. Although I'm currently working with his trust today, my relationship to the artist exists purely through my interactions with his immense archive of ephemera, schematic drawings, photo slides, and archived works. I regret not having Michael here with us today but can say my vicarious relationship to him, through his work, has proved extremely rewarding and enlightening as a curator.

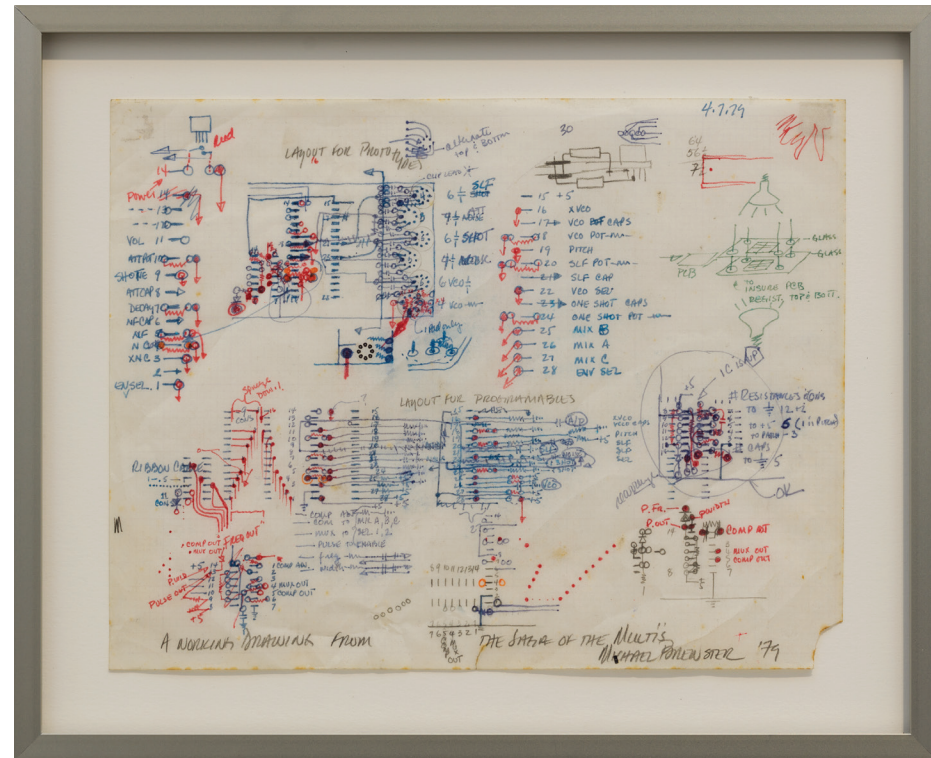
Anna Dusi
Curator & Art Advisor



Whistlers 2
1994
One speaker
3.5 x 7 x 7 inches

(Courtesy of Lily Scholer)





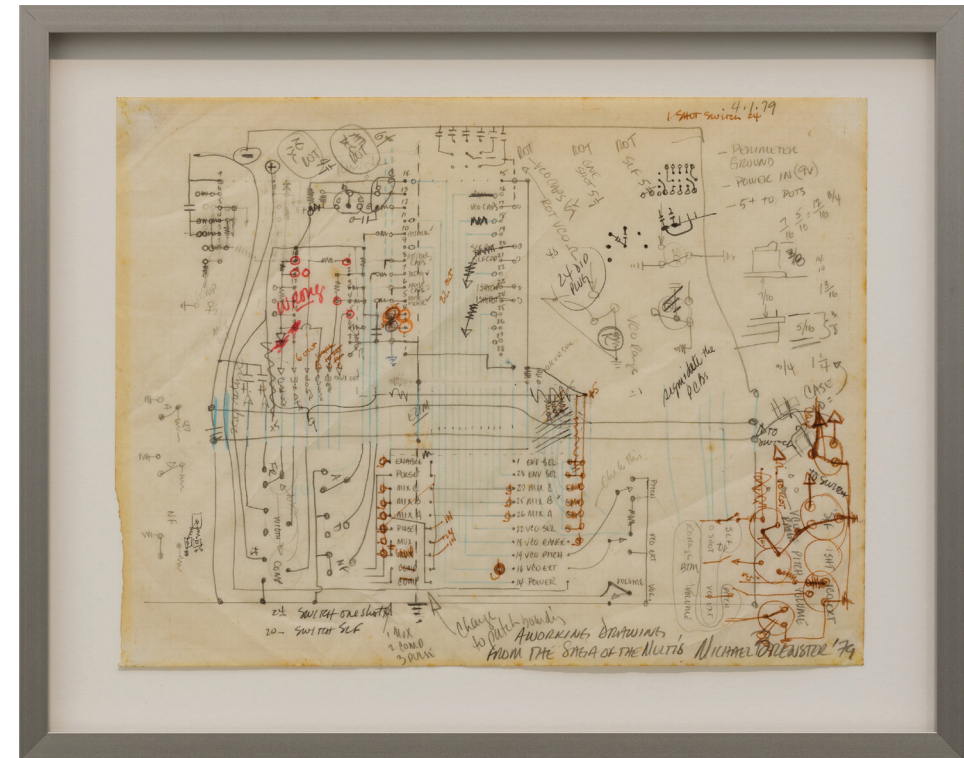
Saga of the Multis 1

1979

Graphite and colored pencil on gridded paper

8.25 x 10.5 inches

Courtesy of Michael Brewster Trust



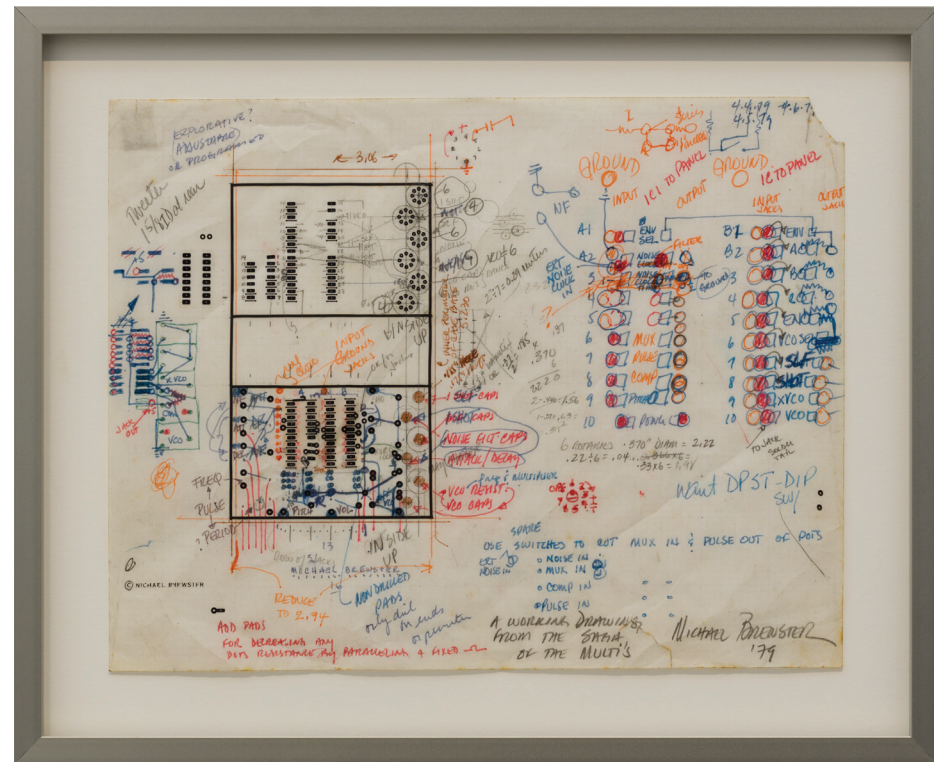
Saga of the Multis 2

1979

Graphite and colored pencil on gridded paper

8.25 x 10.5 inches

Courtesy of Michael Brewster Trust



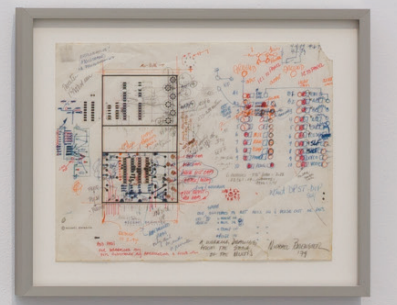
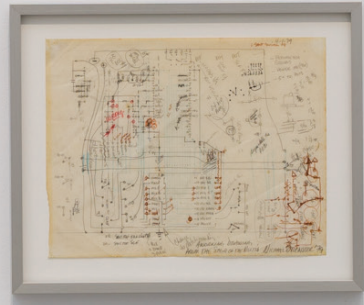
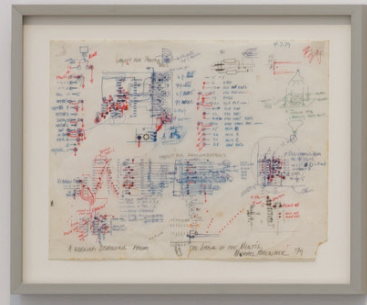
Saga of the Multis 3

1979

Graphite and colored pencil on gridded paper

8.25 x 10.5 inches

Courtesy of Michael Brewster Trust



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