

# *Signal Tide* at LACMA, Sept 21.–24.

A sound and extraterrestrial radio installation by **Kovács/O'Doherty**

With music and sound by **David Bryant** (Godspeed You! Black Emperor), **Drew Barnet**, and **James Hamilton**

September 21.–24., 2017 · **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

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*Signal Tide* is a sound and extraterrestrial radio installation artwork by **Kovács/O'Doherty**. It combines real-time signals from an abandoned satellite currently orbiting the earth (the LES-1, launched in 1965) with specially-commissioned music and sound, created by **David Bryant** (of **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** and **Hiss Tracts**), **Drew Barnet**, and **James Hamilton**, in collaboration with Kovács/O'Doherty.

*Signal Tide* will be initially presented at the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)**, Los Angeles, from **September 21.–24., 2017**. The work is supported by the LACMA Art + Technology Lab, with technical assistance from **Kris Slyka**.

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## **About the work**

*Signal Tide* is an installation which combines audio, derived from the signal of the LES-1 satellite, with a generative sound accompaniment based on sacred harp hymnal and singing melodies.

The LES-1, manufactured in the early 1960s at MIT, in Boston, Massachusetts, was launched in 1965. It functioned for the following two years, but it then ceased to transmit signals in 1967, and was abandoned as cold-war-era space-junk. However, in 2013, signals from the LES-1 were unexpectedly received again, for the first time in 46 years. This resurrected spacecraft is still giving its ghostly signal (which can be received at 237MHz on any VHF antenna). The satellite is now also seemingly tumbling slowly around its own axis every few seconds, as it orbits the earth — this means that it gives an unstable but steady signal, with distinctly-perceivable gaps caused by this tumbling action.

*Signal Tide* will combine audio, derived from the live feed of the satellite's signal (received from an antenna mounted on the roof of LACMA), with a musical 'answering' signal, in real time, as the satellite passes overhead above the site of the installation in Los Angeles. The LES-1, an artificial moon and a relic of a different era, will pull an earthbound tide of sound toward it, in a fleeting accompaniment, as it passes overhead on its looping extraterrestrial pilgrimage.

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## **About the music**

The music for *Signal Tide* has been specifically written and recorded for use in this work. The sound, as played in the work, is generative — it will never repeat in the same way, and so each pass of the satellite has its own unique accompaniment. The recordings feature contributions from David Bryant and Sophie Trudeau (of Godspeed You! Black Emperor), Drew Barnet, James Hamilton, a choir of local Montréal sacred harp singers, and more — a full list is below.

This generative musical accompaniment is derived from melodies used in sacred harp hymns and anthems. Sacred harp singing is a distinct tradition of American and Canadian shape-note choral music, which has a centuries-long history as Christian sacred music, with distinct 'southern' and 'northern' schools. One of the areas where the 'northern' tradition is

particularly strong is in Boston, and the wider New England area. As such, the LES-1 satellite, having been built in Boston, will be serenaded with music that is part of a folk tradition of a place which is, in an anthropomorphised sense, its home and point of origin.

Each pass of the LES-1 (during daylight hours and within antenna range of the site of the installation) lasts approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The installation is active only during these passes (listed at [www.lacma.org/series/signal-tide](http://www.lacma.org/series/signal-tide)). During these times, a row of overhead speakers will play the audio derived from the live signal of the satellite. Simultaneously, a series of ground-level speakers will play a unique, generative accompaniment, serenading the satellite as it passes overhead.

The lyrics of sacred harp songs often consider themes of ephemerality, hope, and transcendence. The metaphorical potential of these beautiful, haunting songs, as an accompaniment to the weary and lonely LES-1, has been an artistic point of departure in considering the musical elements of this work. The process of research for the work has been ongoing since mid-2016, and the majority of the music used in the work was recorded in The Pines recording studio, Montréal, in April 2017.

*Participants and contributors:* David Bryant, Drew Barnet, James Hamilton, Sophie Trudeau, Patrick DeDauw, Xarah Dion, Philippe Doyle-Gosselin, Esther Wade, Elena Horgan, Collin Findlay, Kata Kovács and Tom O'Doherty. Work on this project has also been assisted by singer, musician, and sacred harp scholar Tim Eriksen.

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#### Links:

Event listings on LACMA's website — how to attend

<http://www.lacma.org/series/signal-tide>

Website for the work — read more, listen, download info

<http://www.signaltide.com>

Read more on LACMA's blog

<http://unframed.lacma.org/2017/04/19/signal-tide>

Kovács/O'Doherty website

<http://www.kovacsodoherty.com>

Signal Tide Project blog

<https://medium.com/signal-tide>

How to say the name :)

<https://soundcloud.com/kovacsodoherty/kovacsodoherty>

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#### About Kovács/O'Doherty



The work of **Kovács/O'Doherty** combines elements of durational and time-based art, minimalist sound and composition, video, and movement. Kata Kovács and Tom O'Doherty live and work in Berlin, Germany, and have worked as a collaborative duo since 2011. Their work has been presented by, among others, Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (Porto), Sophiensaele (Berlin), Museu do Chiado, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea (Lisbon), Kunstkraftwerk (Leipzig), and Bakelit (Budapest).

*Kata Kovács and Tom O'Doherty are available for interviews – for more information, please email [mail@kovacsodoherty.com](mailto:mail@kovacsodoherty.com).*

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#### About the LACMA Art + Technology Lab

Inspired by the spirit of LACMA's original Art and Technology program (1967-1971), which paired artists with technology companies in Southern California, the Art + Technology Lab at LACMA supports artist experiments with emerging technology. Through our sponsors, the Lab provides grants, in-kind support, and facilities at the museum to develop new artist projects. To date, more than 20 artists from around the world, including Ghana, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Switzerland, have received awards through the Art + Technology Lab.

For more information visit: <http://www.lacma.org/LAB>