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## MUSIC ON STEEL TRACKS

Nik Nowak

*"My objects reveal analogies to the Jamaican sound system culture of the '60s and the ghetto blaster cult of the '80s, correlations which have been transferred to a contemporary context."*

During my art studies in Germany, I dealt extensively with electronic music and, in addition to drawing, began composing pieces that only consisted of low-pitched tones. In this context, I designed an abstruse mobile bass sound system, the *Baron Bass*, which was to produce frequencies beyond the audible range, below 30Hz. The aim was to integrate a psycho-acoustic level into the compositions. In the attempt to mix and master my sound works for their distribution on CDs, it became clear that most of the sounds could only be reproduced to achieve their full effect in certain loudspeakers, with a specific mix and in a suitable space. I thus pursued the idea of developing further sound systems for specific sounds.

In order to be able to share my music with other people and not to wither away in my studio, the sound systems needed to be mobile. This is how my first series of mobile sound systems – each one a different way of projecting sound – like the *Mobile Booster* (a mobile PA system), *Souvenirs* (two remote-controlled satellite speakers made of reconstructed toy tanks), *Boombox* (a transport case with loudspeakers

on a bicycle rack) *Baron Bass* (for especially low frequencies, *Dolly/China Diary* (a tuned-up dolly with collected speakers, on which a travel diary is rendered) and *Cocoons*, (a concept for hanging speakers), came into being.

The final component of the series is a real sound tank, an "all-rounder" among the sound systems, my latest creation with the simple title of *Tank*. *Tank* was supposed to have a particular frequency spectrum and, according to the motto "hit me with music," and was to attain a considerable volume level. It also should be mobile and independent of a street infrastructure. A Japanese mini dumper with steel tracks, which I had purchased at an internet auction in 2008, served as a basis. I dismantled it and, under consideration of acoustic parameters, rebuilt it into a sound vehicle. With six 12-inch mid-range drivers, three 18-inch subwoofers and four tweeters, I kept the frequency ranges neatly apart so that I could always get the right sound mix. With a performance of 4000 Watt, I would also have a good basis for attaining a considerable volume on outdoor sites. The wall of speakers can be

hydraulically raised and aligned.

The aspiration of developing the ultimate mobile sound system obviously turned out to be rather absurd, as mobility happens to be extremely restricted for tracked vehicles in urban space. Unfortunately, the prospect of obtaining road permission for a tracked vehicle is very, very slim, which makes a tour around the globe rather unlikely. Nevertheless, the vehicle will soon be on the move and will, in certain selected places, allow music to become a public phenomenon once more. Hopefully, my gallery *White Trash Contemporary*, will bring *Tank* to an art fair near you soon. Last time, in Cologne when they organized a performance with my *Mobile Booster*, it scared the shit out of our foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle.

My objects reveal analogies to the Jamaican sound system culture of the '60s and the ghetto blaster cult of the '80s, correlations which have been transferred to a contemporary context. Developing a particular and exclusive sound and using a closed speaker system to reproduce it, has its origin in dub music.



Nik Nowak, *Tank*, 2011. Photo Credit & Courtesy of White Trash Gallery, Hamburg, Germany.

The engineer becomes an artist and vice versa. Like with the music of Lee Scratch Perry or King Tubby, the equipment is incorporated into the musical/creative process. LL cool J was turned the ghetto blaster into a cult object in the '80s. With the ghetto blaster or boombox, music was carried into the streets and parks of the cities. People would get together and enjoy the most popular tracks, have jam sessions or

of course, also cause trouble.

Today, things have dramatically changed. The concept of sharing music in the park is now realized in cyberspace in the form of anonymous exchanges on internet platforms. My objects are, in a sense, a reaction to this increasing anonymization of life taking place by dwelling in virtual space—a utopian enterprise of setting something

against this virtual world by bringing steel, wood and deep bass to the fore. Franz West claimed that one should at least be able to sit on a sculpture. In my case, the claim is that a sculpture should at least be able to play music. At the end of the day, it's about art. □

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