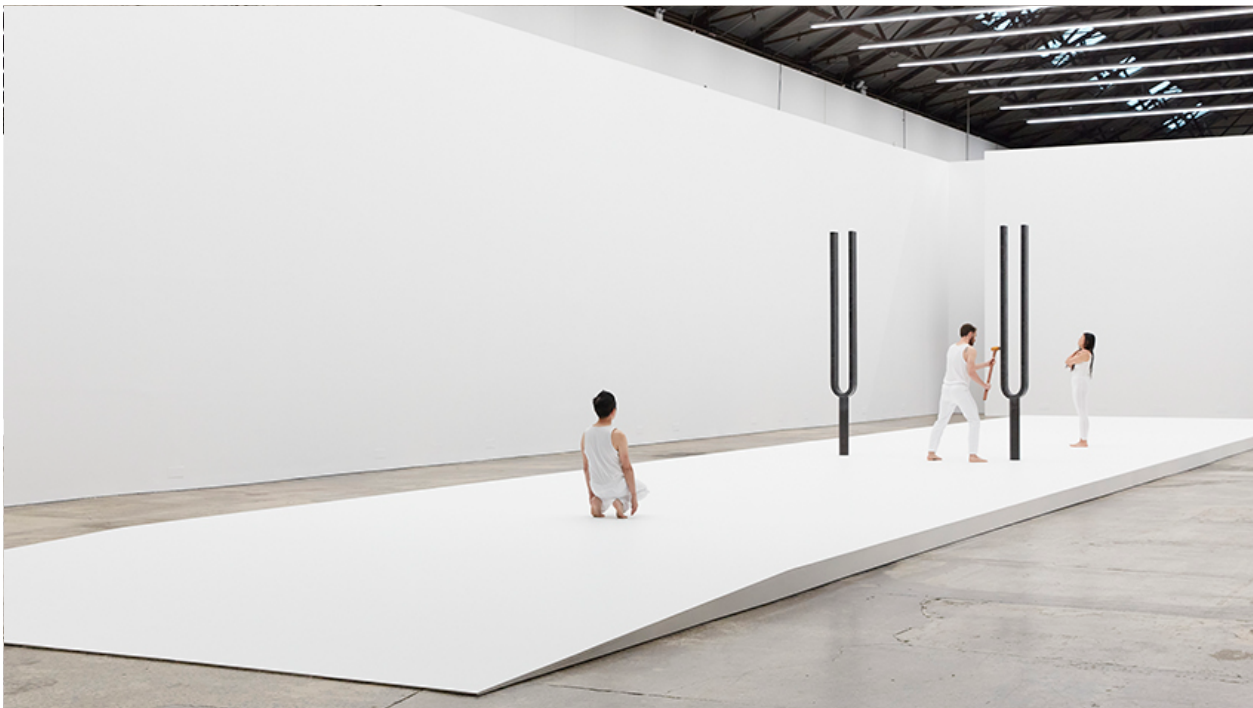


## ALL IS LIFE ESSAY BY MARA HOBERMAN



Mel O'Callaghan, First sound, last sound (performance), 2022. Installation view, All is Life, 2022, Carriageworks. Photo Zan Wimberley.

Gigantic tuning forks, a centuries old ritual, subaquatic microearthquakes and geometric abstractions comprise Mel O'Callaghan's latest bi *Life*. If these subjects initially seem to have little in common, they are in fact all part of the artist's extensive research into various means of installation, a sound piece and a pair of wall paintings—impart messages that are each unique, but all interrelated. Bringing such diverse forms into metaconversation. It also offers a transcendent communal experience, recalling social anthropologist Victor Turner's description of ritual as are incessantly communicating with one another through every physical and mental instrumentality.[1] At once deeply cerebral and surprisingly geological to cultural and symbolic—with special attention to their individual and collective effects on the human body.



Mel O'Callaghan, First sound, last sound (performance), 2022. Installation view, All is Life, 2022, Carriageworks. Photo Zan Wimberley.

musicologist at the University of Sydney and Eveleigh Works (an industrial blacksmiths workshop located near Carriageworks) on the fabric. Both forks are calibrated to 256 hertz, a deeply resonant tone. When one fork is struck, the vibration it emits causes the other fork to vibrate whereby sound waves are not only being reflected, but newly generated. The dialogue between the forks (as initiated by the performers) is the 256 hertz tone, sometimes referred to as 'the god note,' is used in sound therapy techniques to induce a relaxed state of consciousness: each performance of *First sound, last sound* is an opportunity for communal meditation.



Mel O'Callaghan, *First sound, last sound* (performance), 2022. Installation view, *All is Life*, 2022, Carriageworks. Photo Zan Wimberley.

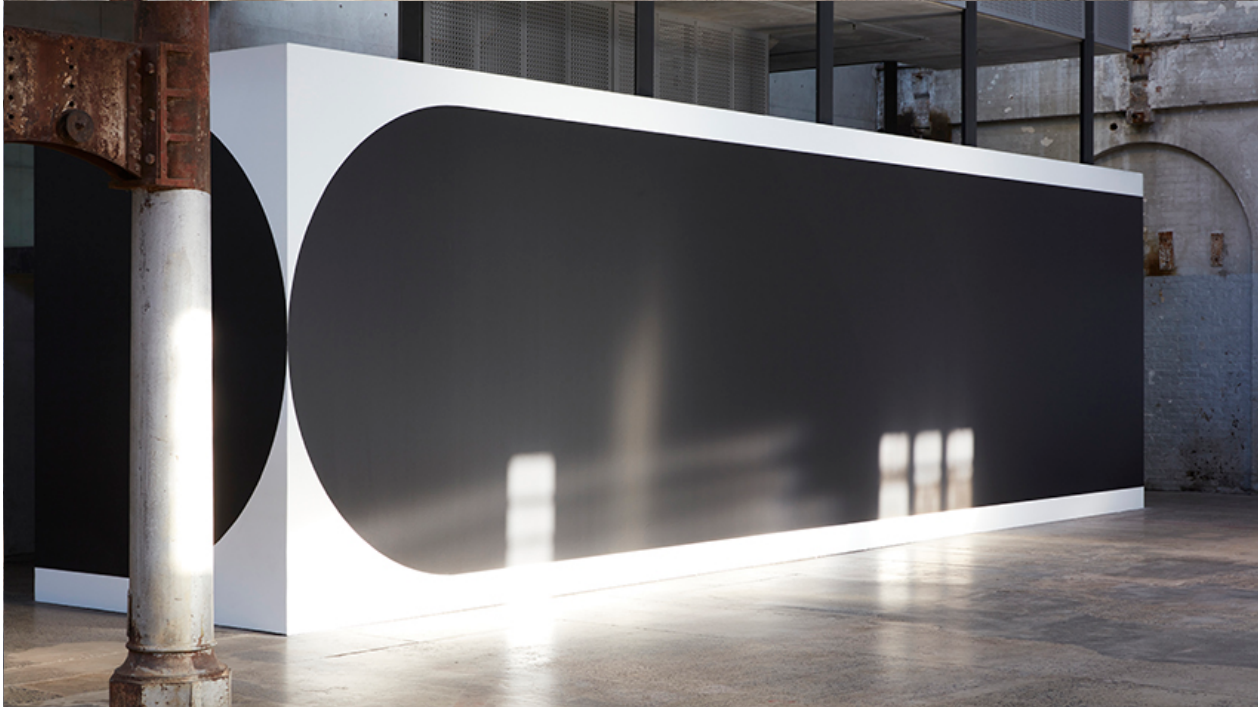
Similarly corporeal, the sound work *Pulse of the Planet* (2022) harkens back to some of O'Callaghan's earlier performances (*Breath repertoire*). Techniques alter the body's physical and mental state. With her latest sound piece, O'Callaghan shifts focus to an arguably more powerful (the percussion of a hydrophobic recording made by oceanographers near the centre of the earth, it is hard not to be hyper aware of the similarity) strangely palpable and personal. At once simple and astounding, *Pulse of the Planet* also underscores the notion of the earth as a giant living worshipped as a personification of the earth, and which still guides rituals performed by certain eco-feminist tribes in India.

One such ritual performed in Southern Goa in India is the subject of the video *All is Life* (2022). Filmed in Gaonkarwada, Ambaulim, a small village from the multi-day celebration of 'Dhalo'. Every January Velip women perform Dhalo through dances, chants, performances and retellings about living in harmony with nature. The video shows women chanting about local flora and fauna and sacred termite mounds in the forest while teaching a younger generation about Velip agricultural practices.



Mel O'Callaghan, *All is Life* (installation), 2022. Installation view, *All is Life*, 2022, Carriageworks. Photo Zan Wimberley.

Dhalo is an ancient ritual that is performed year after year in villages in Goa and has never been recorded in Ambaulim. In close collaboration with poet Devidas Gaonkar, O'Callaghan has created a unique film that evokes the deep physical and spiritual connection between the Velip community and the land. O'Callaghan's visit to Ambaulim in January of 2022 led to many conversations and discussions, excerpts of which are included in the exhibition.



Mel O'Callaghan, *Call and Response*, 2022. Installation view, *All is Life*, 2022, Carriageworks. Photo Zan Wimberley

The back-and-forth chanting captured in *All is Life* is visually echoed by a pair of black and white wall paintings collectively titled *Call and Response*. Painted in black on two white walls of Carriageworks' soaring public space, two symmetrical oblong geometric shapes containing Morse Code symbols or musical notations, the paintings 'talk' (or maybe even shout or sing) to each other in complete silence. This intention of communication without words or sound. The calm meditative moments in *All is Life* are surprisingly powerful, offering a way to get in touch with oneself and emphasizes collectivity and camaraderie. Capturing what performance studies professor Richard Schechner has described as the 'second order' whose qualities of repetition, rhythmicity, exaggeration, condensation, and simplification stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins during experiences.

**Words by Mara Hoberman**

Mara Hoberman is a Paris-based art critic and art historian. A regular contributor to Artforum, she is also currently conducting research for her book.

Visit Mel O'Callaghan's ***All is Life*** at Carriageworks from 23 Jun – 21 Aug 2022, Wed-Sun from 10am – 5pm.

[1] Victor Turner, "Body, Brain, and Culture," *Zygon* vol. 18, issue 3 (September 1983): 243  
[2] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 233