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*In the beginning  
was listening...*



MUSÉE RÉATTU

Sound Art  
Department

*Sound  
images?*

**Sophie  
Berger**

- \_ **Cargo** at the Listening Room
- \_ **Loire** at the Listening Balcony
- \_ **Banc de brume** Meeting

Arles is renowned for its *still images*, thanks to photography; for its *moving images*, thanks to the cultural industries that have developed here; for its *drawings*, thanks to the Arles Drawing Festival; and for its *suggested images*, thanks to Phonurgia Nova, a pioneer in sound art with which the Museum has enjoyed a fruitful collaboration over the past 20 years, and of which this Sound Art Department is the result.

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A debut novel (published by Gallimard), a discussion at the Actes Sud bookshop, two radio plays at the Musée Réattu: Sophie Berger, winner of a *Pierre Schaeffer Discovery Prize* in 2014, opens the new sound season in Arles, which again this year will explore the significance of listening at the interface of sensitive writing, literature, drawing, the graphic and photographic arts and cinema ●

“When you wake up  
from your deafness,  
you never stop  
meeting the world.”  
(René Jentet, 1979)

# Balcony

1st floor / Loggia

## Loire

(2013, 50')

**A trip down the Loire  
with microphones**

With *Loire*, Sophie Berger embarks on her quest for an immersive audio-documentary narrative: an endeavour she began at the end of her course at Ensatt (sound design department founded by Daniel Deshays\*) and initiated with this walk along the river with microphones, from its source to its mouth. *Loire* was awarded a *Pierre Schaeffer Discovery Prize* in 2014 as part of the “Phonurgia Nova Awards”.

“One day, I knew I had to hit the road. I was 26, I'd never done it before, and I didn't know what I was going to find. I just knew I had to do it. I had to hit the road. It wasn't rational, it wasn't logical, but I had no choice. It was an emergency. Something inside me was screaming out “take to the road with your microphones”. I managed to find the time I needed, and as soon as I could, I left. It was still winter. I had chosen the Loire as my navigational path. I wanted to walk 621 miles (1,000 km) along it, from the source to the estuary, to get back to the town where I'd seen it flow when I was a kid - Nantes.”

Sophie Berger

\* Sound engineer, sound producer, essayist and university lecturer, author of numerous works on the topic, Daniel Deshays is involved in the design of the DAS at the Musée Réattu in Arles and is a member of its scientific committee.

# Listening Room

Level 1 / Room 18

## Cargo

(2015, 62')

**An immersive journey  
between Le Havre and the China Sea**

*Cargo* takes us on board a container ship, speeding along at 20 knots. First there is the classic horn as the ship sets off through the channel and the sound of the bow slicing through the waves. The clatter of engines, the roar of machinery, alarms: the belly of the giant of the seas is a soundbox. The men on watch take us into the bowels of the ship, as a corrosion warning requires their attention. Later, a violent storm breaks out, and the metal sheets of the hull are battered by the raging wind and sea. *Cargo* tells the story of the crash of the global economy, of man at the service of the economic machine: optimising loads, traffic, language and flows...

“I boarded a container ship for a full shift between Europe and China. At the port of Le Havre, I switched off my phone. I left a message on my answering machine and in my mailbox, saying that it wouldn't be worth trying to contact me for three months. I set sail and left. On board, I lived at the rhythm of the container ship and its crew, as we circumnavigated the globe. On board, I was where I was, with the winds, with the oceans, with the containers and the engines. I tried to capture this with my microphones. *Cargo* is a journey to be listened to.” S.B.

## Author

**Sophie Berger** is a sound engineer and writer for radio and live performance. With her microphones, she travelled the length and breadth of France, on foot, along the Loire, to create a sound piece of the same name. She then spent three months on board a cargo ship bound for the China Sea, then in 2017 on a supply ship to the Kerguelen Islands and, more recently, on a boat bound for Easter Island. Each time, she has brought back immersive sound pieces that are an invitation to cast off our visual moorings and listen to the world. Her work has been heard on France Culture, ARTE Radio, RTBF and at numerous festivals. She also creates for the performing arts, notably with director Anne Théron, and since 2022 has collaborated with Fabrice Melquiot on multidisciplinary stage and radio performances. Her first novel, *Banc de brume*, a reflection on the family, the silence that plagues memory, mourning and generational transmission, was published by Gallimard in January 2024.

illustrations : Guillaume Reynard



## Book-signing talk on *Banc de brume*

**a debut novel, born of silence,  
published by Gallimard**

**14th March, 5.30pm \_ Librairie Actes Sud  
\_ Free admission**

“Tracking down everything that emerges from silence. Searching in all directions. Over the course of time. In the obscurity of a foggy history. Imagining the missing pieces. Looking for the way they fit together. (...) Getting to the end of the story. To be told at last. Now. Sometimes I find a visible piece. Sometimes I think the fog bank will dissipate for a moment.” *Banc de brume*, p. 93

“10 years of my experience and passion for sound went into the writing of *Banc de brume*. 10 years of recording everywhere, in all weathers, from the banks of the Loire to the holds of a cargo ship. From Kerguelen to Easter Island. Inventing the ambient sound of a drama in the dark of a theatre, developing its secret dramaturgy. Writing sound. Really writing. Whether for headphones, rotary phones, ship VHF, large room broadcasts, or the intimacy of radio waves. To probe the silence, I had to let go of the microphones. I needed words.” S.B.

## Sound syntax event discussing Sophie Berger's documentary sound writing

**27th March, 6pm \_ Commanderie Sainte Luce  
\_ Free admission**

## Advanced course in sound writing

**Sound recording as a form of writing**  
by Sophie Berger

Scheduled alternately in Arles and Dinard, this is an in-depth module open to practitioners wishing to advance their sound recording skills, and to all those who (whether in the field of radio, live performance, exhibitions or installations...) are faced with recording as an act of writing.

**Further information:** [www.phonurgia.fr](http://www.phonurgia.fr)

# A museum that listens

Sound has risen to the rank of the fine arts, just as photography and video did in their day. To reflect this development, the Musée Réattu created a “sound art department” in 2007. The first of its kind in France, developed in partnership with Phonurgia Nova, the department aims to explore the visual and radio approaches to sound in an open-ended dialogue with contemporary painting, drawing, sculpture and photography. The name of this *Listening Room* is taken from a famous painting by René Magritte.

It is supported by educational workshops. The CNAP has been supporting this initiative since 2018.



**Phonurgia Nova** highlights the talent that is driving forward the practice of sound as a medium and as an art form. Established in Arles in 1986, the association supports authors in their professional development and helps to promote them on European radio stations. Over 250 creators take part in its sound writing courses every year.

## THE PHONURGIA NOVA AWARDS

Awarded every year in November by an international jury deliberating in public, initiated in Arles in 1986 and transferred to Paris in 2011, the prizes are awarded to authors of audio narrative in all its forms.

**Sound art** : rewards initiatives that explore the sonic depths of the radio medium, examine its recording devices and question the limits of our powers of attention.

**Spoken Word Archives**: encourages the transmission of the spoken word and seeks to “capture the living word”.

# The DAS

## A pioneering department within a pioneering museum

Through its annual programme, this Sound Art Department, which is supported by the CNAP, is making its mark on the history of radio and sound creation. By casting a veil over the images, the *Listening room* and *Listening balcony* restore the emotional and memorial power of sound and reveal the narrative and visual power of works that use sound as their primary source material.

### The Listening Balcony

First opened in 2007 and revamped in 2024, the Listening Balcony provides an unparalleled view of today's international sound creation landscape, highlighting authors who explore the narrative and visual dimensions of sound.

### The Listening Room

A sound projection space at the heart of the permanent collections, the Listening Room encourages visitors to break away from the visual world and immerse themselves in listening.

**Sound fiction**: distinguishes works which, through the lens of fiction, question our contemporary myths.

**Field recording** : explores our relationship with “other living things”: birds, insects, mammals. It honours authors of sound landscapes that have been captured or invented from scratch. What do places tell us when we explore them with microphones?

**Découvertes Pierre Schaeffer** : showcases authors under the age of 30 who are charting a unique course in the world of sound.

[www.phonurgia.fr](http://www.phonurgia.fr)