

His use of sound as image rather than presence is unique. Although artists have long been interested in representing sound, most have used it either romantically in attempts to create a synaesthesia of sound and form or as a means of establishing atmosphere.

Miller's intention is to represent a very particular kind of sound, one he calls "aroundsound." This refers to the noise that permeates the urban environment, unwanted sounds that enter uninvited into one's home, including the muffled sounds of neighbors leaking between stud wall and sheetrock, shouts from the street, car horns, squealing brakes, pumped-up car radios, jet planes passing overhead, and midnight barking. Although these sounds often stay at a threshold level just below awareness, such ambient noise defines interior space and erodes the conventional boundaries of walls and ceilings. These noises are neither music nor communication; their most salient characteristic is random formlessness.

The impetus to deal with ambient sound came about a year ago as a by-product of the birth of Miller's daughter. New parents develop a very acute kind of hearing pitched to distinguish baby sounds from all others; infant cries, murmurs, and babblings led Miller to construct a relationship between sound, space, and silence. The project began as a memory archive of strange sounds that had filtered into various studios and apartments Miller occupied over the years. After making elaborate drawings that traced the topography and movement of these sounds, he decided to concentrate on their physicality and otherness by blurring the distinctions between noise and signal, distance and intimacy. The resulting work recasts the way certain sounds occupy space; the material forming these objects, foamcore, neatly reconfigures the weightlessness of sound. Conceptually, the work is based on a repositioning of sound's temporal fragmentation from the realm of frequency,

Los Angeles

Michael Barton Miller

Post Gallery

"aroundsound," Michael Barton Miller's silent installation, consists of an intensely detailed, obsessive series of objects that create a topography of noise.

invisibility, and free-fall to a tangible three-dimensional space, where it is subject to light, darkness, and the forces of gravity.

Miller creates wiggling, shifting shapes and contours, in hundreds of sandwiched layers of white foamcore, reminiscent of the quivering two-dimensional patterns and lines created by oscilloscopes, echocardiograms, and voice prints. Rather than basing his forms on patterns found in these electronically derived sound equivalents, he generates them from his own

fully embody the volumetric presence of sound, as well as its sneaky and ineradicable presence in our lives.

Miller's body of work is strangely anti-theoretical; it marks a turn toward representation rather than presence—an attempt to model mental events. His work resembles no one else's; it is a demonstration of genuine eccentricity and originality. These two characteristics give his work an aura of authority—despite its unusual subject matter, no element seems

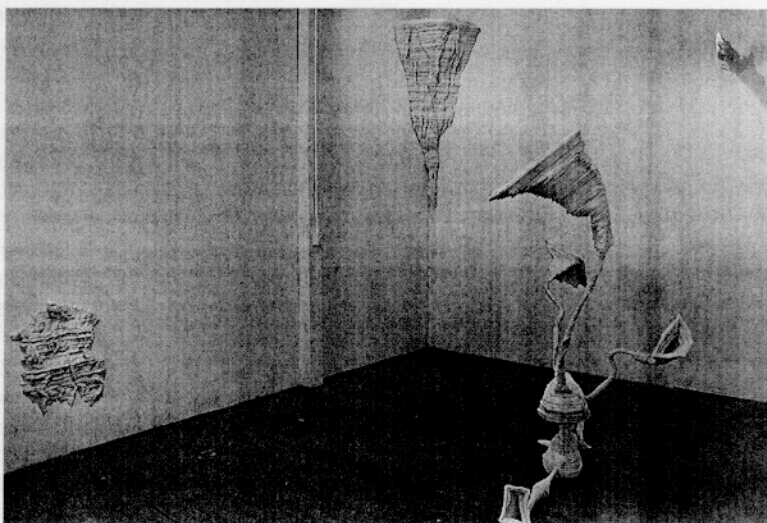
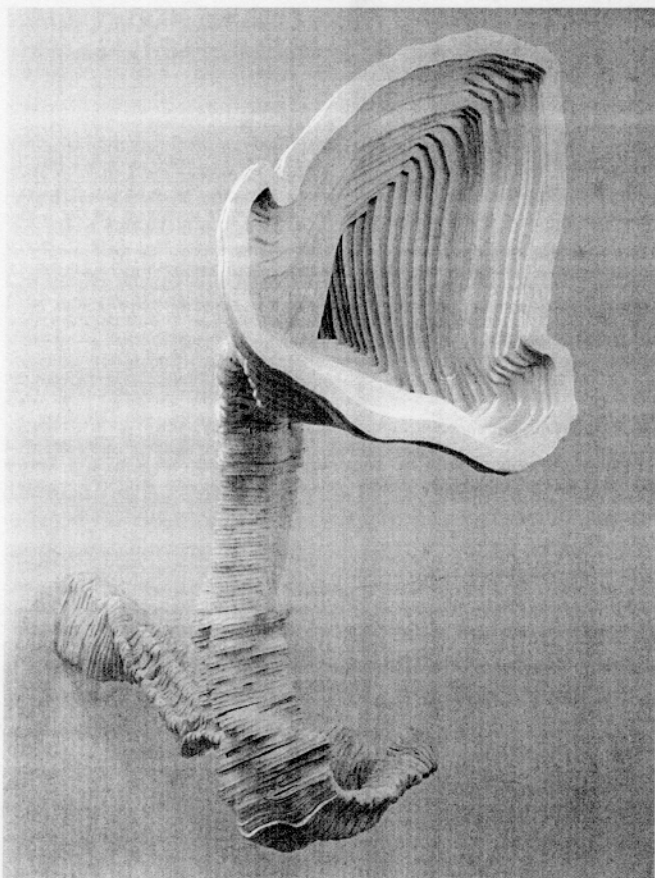
the wall into the room perfectly resembles the sound of yodeling. All of the work has an oddly figurative, distinctly biomorphic aspect; sections of each individual sculpture could be identified in terms of body parts such as head, neck, and feet. The unworldly blue-whiteness of the foamcore projects a quasi-scientific atmosphere, as if the viewer had stepped into a museum room full of skeletons.

Although this work could be perceived as a series of quasi-

of habit systems, of the tininess, silliness, and arbitrariness of the senses. His work neither universalizes nor proposes a model of thought so much as it creates an opportunity to marvel at the range of imagination.

—Kathleen Whitney

Below left: Michael Barton Miller, *aroundsound #2 (elpasoyodel)*, 2000. Foamcore, wood, and steel, 41 x 19 x 35.5 in. Below: View of Miller's exhibition at the Post Gallery.



unscientific impressions and responses. The aural doesn't produce visually intelligible signals. Each listener forms a personal terrain of sound within the confines of the imagination. Miller has drawn from what is known of the navigational apparatus of bats, creating his forms in response to the way spaces muffle, echo, expand, and distort sound. In contrast to machine-produced images, Miller's sculptures

contrived, clichéd, stylish, or merely novel. This visual singularity results from Miller's ability to make work that is intelligent and strongly conceptual yet also beautiful and visually complex. *aroundsound #2 (elpasoyodel)* is paradigmatic. Rorschach-like, it encourages a range of visual associations from the open beak of a baby bird to a distorted ear on a stalk. The quivering stem that lifts this sound-funnel from

scientific experiments, its impact opens the observer to a crucial, often ignored, element of life. This characteristic links Miller's work to John Cage's experiments with sound and silence. His sculpture speaks of a range of elements: mystery, landscape, biomorphic reality, things beyond human control. Amorphous, process-oriented, unpredictable—in short, about nature—it is strongly reminiscent of the Buddhist notion that form is emptiness, emptiness form.

An interesting tension arises in Miller's process, which involves an ostentatious acceptance of uncertainty and indefiniteness, yet takes pride in limited control. This combination of location and imaginative free-fall involves a recognition of the relativity of the self in relation to one's environment, as well as the limitations