

Jacob Kirkegaard
TESTIMONIUM

Fridman Gallery, New York, US/fridmangallery.com

TESTIMONIUM is an audiovisual installation by Danish sound artist Jacob Kirkegaard, whose focused, penetrating, and elegant thinking makes him adept at crossing the boundaries of music/sound, physical media, performance and video. *TESTIMONIUM* itself comes in two pieces; one is a 25 minute video on view on the ground level of Fridman Gallery, on New York's Bowery, the other is an 8-channel audio-only version that can be heard in surround in the gallery's basement room. This showing is the most complete realisation of the work as yet produced.

The sounds of *TESTIMONIUM* are gathered from the field, with recordings from recycling and wastewater facilities in Europe, a landfill in Nairobi, captured via microphones, motion sensors and

hydrophones. Waste is the source and the point, and while the descriptive material for the installation argues that it presents issues "addressing climate justice and environmental racism", Kirkegaard, in a Zoom conversation from the gallery, is more agnostic. About waste, he says "It goes somewhere, it doesn't go away". But rather than decrying that he says, "I'm more interested in... how that's an experience of life", and how it's infrequently confronted.

The installation is, then, both a presentation of the accumulation of what we leave behind and a work in the tradition pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer, whom Kirkegaard names as an inspiration. Like *Étude Aux Chemins De Fer*, *TESTIMONIUM* is a musical form made out of the audio material of nonmusical sounds.

The two versions are drastically different. Paired, but not synced, with the video, the audio is a soundtrack to the

passage of time visually marked by the steam rising from a fermenting landfill, or buff-coloured bubbles frothing and popping on top of slowly undulating wastewater. There's the quality of watching an Andy Goldsworthy concept play out, and the mind meshes the sounds and images and looks for some direction and purpose, grasps for an abstract drama.

Sitting amid the 8-channel audio, one hears incredible details, and there's a timelessness that breaks from the sequenced motion of the video. It's peaceful, even sensual. While the video has a certain lulling quality that is pernicious in an unintended way – despite the gentleness of the viewing, one should imagine the inherent sounds and smells – the audio has a sharp, cleansing purity. It's beautifully crafted, and the 8-channels create the sonic illusion of a depth and

breadth to the space that goes far past the walls, ceiling and floor of the room.

Without the video, the sound grips the attention, full of rustles and whispers. The industrial sounds are more obviously of the source, but in this context, they evoke a fascination with distance and the unknown. Talking about his materials, Kirkegaard says he tried to "find the character of the sound, the timbre".

If there's dread in hearing the environment swamped by the wastefulness of consumer capitalism, it's that of the sublime. Kirkegaard thinks that any listener could find something beautiful in the sounds of waste that he's assembled, and *TESTIMONIUM* exerts the same fascination as a Caspar David Friedrich painting. There may be something dreadful out there, but that just makes one want to touch it even more.

George Grella



Stills from Jacob Kirkegaard's *TESTIMONIUM* (2019)

Courtesy Fridman Gallery