



# LAUMEIER

## SCULPTURE PARK

[ this side ]

Alison Ouellette-Kirby  
and Noah Kirby, *Arena*, 2016.  
Fiberglass, steel, wood.  
Courtesy the artists, St. Louis.

[ other side ]

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### PUBLIC PROGRAMS

#### PUBLIC OPENING

Adam Aronson Fine Art Center  
Saturday, November 5, 11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

#### COFFEE + CONVERSATION

Drink hot chocolate and make s'mores around a campfire with the artists and Curator of Exhibitions Dana Turkovic.  
Saturday, November 12, 11:00 a.m.  
Way Field

12580 Rott Road / Saint Louis, Missouri 63127 / 314.615.5278 [www.laumeier.org](http://www.laumeier.org)



This series is generously supported by Nancy and Ken Kranzberg.  
Special thanks to America's Central Port, Granite City, Illinois, and Greg Pond, Sewanee, Tennessee.

### 2016 KRANZBERG EXHIBITION SERIES

## ALISON OUELLETTE-KIRBY + NOAH KIRBY: ARENA

NOVEMBER 5, 2016—JANUARY 29, 2017

### INTRODUCTION

Laumeier Sculpture Park's 2016 *Kranzberg Exhibition Series* artists Noah Kirby and Alison Ouellette-Kirby continue our tradition of providing regional artists the chance to experiment with bigger themes and forms than they might have been able to in the past, and engaging the diverse audiences that use Laumeier as their living room, back room, family room and meditation room. Their new work *Arena*, 2016, is sensitively attuned to the unique natural spaces at Laumeier. *Arena* calls for a mindfulness to the ambient environment that evokes the work of influential American composer John Cage from the 1950s through the 1990s. I won't tell you more—you have to experience the work to understand the emotionally rich experience.

In addition to their own work, Noah and Alison also provide support and education to other artists through their work at Six Mile Sculpture Works in Granite City, Illinois. The pair invites artists from around the country for residencies, and they organize an annual Iron Pour Conference in the fall to teach, entertain and challenge artists interested in the art form. Their work *Arena* is part of a long tradition of artists using the unique chemical processes of shaping and molding the earth, with Kirby and Ouellette-Kirby using their work to frame new landscape experiences.

It is also important to note that Noah Kirby has been part of the sculptural history of St. Louis by working with Bob Cassily (1949–2011), whose City Museum is one of the most imaginative spaces in the region, if not the country. First-time visitors to the City Museum may feel as if Cassily turned his creative mind inside-out for the world to see—the rebar passageways, high-flying airplane and teetering bus may be metaphors for the complex internal workings of the brain. Like Cassily, Kirby works with his hands to create experiences that also work on the mind.

Thanks go to Nancy and Ken Kranzberg, whose leadership at Laumeier has helped us to create meaningful opportunities for artists and fulfill the hopes and dreams of the visitors who come to us for a variety of reasons, whether to see cutting-edge art or to enjoy nature with their families or pets. All visitors are welcome, and all interpretations of art are welcome, too. Thanks also go to Chief Preparator Marty Linson, Assistant Preparator Ryan Bredlau and Collections Manager & Registrar Erika Rogers for their active involvement in making the 13th edition of the *Kranzberg Exhibition Series* successful, and to the rest of the Laumeier staff who create the beating heart of the organization.

Marilu Knode, Executive Director  
Aronson Endowed Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art and Art History, University of Missouri-St. Louis

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### SOUND WRITING

Remnants of data in fleeting communication is the foundation of Alison Ouellette-Kirby and Noah Kirby's collaborative work. In much of their sculpture, they explore the semantics of people's conversations, interested in the intricacy of language, and translate it into what is effectively, to a human ear, unintelligible sound. *Arena*, 2016, expands on their shared artistic production beyond the walls of a gallery space by utilizing the lyrics of the language and speech of the public in an effort to more directly communicate with the natural environment at Laumeier.

Hunter-gatherers wasted not a scrap of a killed animal and fashioned flutes from bones, horns from antlers and drums from stomachs. Other sinews were used to bind and elaborate on these first musical instruments, the first music to accompany the human voice came from these otherwise unusable fragments. Around the campfire, stories of the hunt were told via a rhythmic note or a thudding beat. Love was offered and rebuffed via a melody. Eventually, these devices were used for wider utilitarian purposes such as by shepherds for signaling and marshalling a dog, for hunting signals used to coordinate a kill, for keeping an army marching in lockstep or even heralding the arrival of a king. Here, with *Arena*, five sheet-metal horns, each eight feet long with interactive audio elements, explore the notions of communication, playback and recording.

In a digital age, it is surprising that vinyl is still the preferred format of DJs and audiophiles, and the Kirbys' decidedly retro-looking amplifiers follow this edgy paleo-ponic trend by supersizing the look of Edison-era technics. Forming a hexagon and sited on the Amphitheater stage, *Arena* is a giant's theater of conical gramophones. The speaker diaphragm nestled inside each mouthpiece incorporates a mechanism that transliterates the visitor's voice into harmonic gibberish. A series of calls and responses is generated by the humans on the ground to the birds in the trees, as both the flora and fauna at Laumeier mix with the noise of human interaction.

The Kirbys previously created speakers and amplifiers through the tradition of steel casting and metal fabrication in *Orator*, 2013, and Noah Kirby's solo work *Untitled*, 2011, installed temporarily during Laumeier's *Poetry in Place* exhibition—but never before on this scale. Their combination of physical mass, technological savvy and light-hearted playfulness in *Arena* has developed into an environment and scenario that are conceptually complex, yet instantly accessible.

Sound as a medium provides a means to activate perception and create or dissipate spatial boundaries, bodies and voices. *Arena*, in its shape and in its function, reveals and projects the power of sound as an artistic medium, calling on its relational abilities to harness, analyze and perform. The act of repetition increases discordant communications and amplifies the collective experience. The "megaphones" in *Arena* navigate, reverberate, amplify, silence, contort and distort with similar commotion. When activated, a singular voice projected in multiplicity is translated into a menacing clamor.

These pieces dramatize the act of listening, not merely because they are situated on the Amphitheater stage at Laumeier, but because they activate a deeper internal dialogue with an external social call and response. The word here is a living thing, and preferable to the still symbols of a written language. The spoken word becomes the vehicle of communication among artist, audience and object, and every single utterance becomes an implied recognition of rival uses in conflict and harmony with itself.

By playing with and responding to the environment at Laumeier, the Kirbys' sculpture gets to the core of Laumeier's mission. *Arena* becomes the conduit between audience and nature, but also offers a space for public dialogue and physical interaction through sculpture. By speaking into one of the mouthpieces, your voice can disrupt conversation, be misplaced, be displaced, and create a micro-environment that is borderless on the one hand, site-specific on the other.

Finally, the Kirbys' *Arena* provokes an immersive experience that represents the contradiction and clash in our understanding of and communication with each other and with nature, which is at the heart of the Laumeier experience.

Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions

