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## Aural Art

### The sound, the fury, the tiny loudspeakers of Ted Apel

By [Jessica Holmes](#)



Enso Artspace

Feel the beat. "Incidental Speakers" plays with full-bodied perception in the sound experience.

Step into [Enso Artspace](#) in Garden City until Oct. 11, and see the skin of fellow onlookers turn a sickly yellow hue in the glow of sodium vapor light, while two unsettling tones sound off at the exact frequencies to match the light's wavelengths. Or head into the bathroom, where two small, white-painted speakers play on the look and whir of a washer and dryer. "Incidental Speakers," a new exhibit by Ted Apel, is more than an installation, it's an experience in the making. An award-winning electronic sound artist, Apel blends high concept with low-brow noises and sound systems for a show that speaks to the intellect and the senses--even the one of humor.

"The thought behind this show was to make works about sound that didn't actually make sound," Apel said. "I used the little loudspeaker as an icon to represent and say different things about sound. Unlike, say, someone playing the guitar, electronic music is disembodied noise. We don't have a way to connect to it as a person, beyond this symbol of the speaker."

Most of the pieces at the new exhibit are, in fact, a silent commentary on sound. This is a departure for Apel, who holds a Ph.D. in computer music from the University of California, San Diego, and was twice a prizewinner at the Bourges International Electroacoustic Music Competition.

In "Senses," five small loudspeakers invert the expected with an orange in the sound box of one, or a perfume decanter mounted on top of another, all to "represent touch, taste, sight, sound, smell," Apel said.

In "Acoustic Space," the rounded hollow of a speaker's cavity extends into the actual gallery wall, forming the illusion of unreal depth.

"When we listen to the radio, we might hear music, but we're not really listening to the loudspeaker in the car. Something else is going on. Maybe it's a music video in our minds, or a memory, or an emotion. Our brain is creating more than electronic sound," Apel noted.

"It's conceptually intriguing, beautiful and humorous at the same time," said Cate Brigden, a founding member and artist at Enso who is serving as exhibition coordinator for Apel's show. "We've never had work in this genre before. We've all known about Ted for many years, but there's not really a venue in Boise to showcase sound work. We wanted to give it to him. This is underrepresented in the Boise community."

The exhibit is funded in part by a Boise 150 grant from the Boise City Department of Arts and History. Enso's goal is to highlight area artists with national appeal but scant local recognition. The next exhibition in this grant-funded series, opening mid-October, showcases costume designer Star Moxley, a fixture in the Boise theater scene for more than three decades.

"I first heard Ted's work in his basement during an open studio tour," says Brigden. "It was a typical old house. The basement had a cement floor. But a few speakers created this mood, this emotional response. It was whimsical, like this show."

Apel is a longtime adjunct professor of electronic music at Boise State University, but recently joined the faculty of New Zealand School of Music at Victoria University. So this may be Boise's last chance to see--or hear--his work for some time.

The namesake piece, "Incidental Speakers," does make noise, but it's entirely up to the observer.

Eight loudspeakers recycle ambient sound from the room in loops. So the scuff of shoes on the floor, the voices in the room, the sounds of ordinary shuffling, transform into a sort of strange music.

"I like it," said Michael Cordell, an artist at Enso. "We ran wires through the building next door, so that we could plug the speakers into the unit without people seeing them. It makes for a crisper and cooler exhibition."

During the show's opening, when Brigden called the room to "not necessarily a moment of silence," the hush, the clinking of glasses and the voice of the artist looped from the speakers like a surreal sonic snapshot of the recent past.

"Incidental Speakers" hangs every Thursday until Oct. 11, with a Soup-Art-Talk featuring Apel and UK sound artist Lee Ray slated for Sept. 18.

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