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A Conversation with 5 Car Garage's Emma Gray

by [Jonathan Velardi](#)

"It does exactly what it says on the tin" is a common British idiomatic phrase. At first glance, perhaps a fitting colloquialism for London-transplant Emma Gray's eponymous appointment-only art space in Santa Monica. [5 Car Garage](#) – a renovated multi-car garage at Gray's private home – was one of the first galleries I visited as I began my investigation of the Los Angeles contemporary art scene a few years ago. The idiom however stops at the roll-up doors that run along the breadth of the building. Inside, the gallery falls somewhere between domestic art space and the quintessential anarchic spirit of the suburban garage, so rooted in the American psyche of subgenre music. For the former Arts Editor, her conviction is more than just foregoing a prime asset in the land of four-wheel dependency; it is above all defiance against conventional gallery ideology.

I met with Gray ahead of 5 Car Garage's reopening this week after a hiatus of remodelling last year. The space will introduce its new impetus for audiences seeking an alternative art viewing experience in the city and will inaugurate with [a group exhibition](#) of 10 artists based in Los Angeles and New York City.



JONATHAN VELARDI: What led to 5 Car Garage's recent metamorphosis?

EMMA GRAY: Over the last two years I've figured out what works and what doesn't work. Before construction began I asked myself, 'what am I doing compared to everyone else?' Yes the gallery is domestic, but on a broader view I'm so sick of everything having to be market-based. I often feel so overwhelmed by the rate it's exploded in such a short time. I see the new 5 Car Garage as more of an oasis now - somewhere that's about contemplation and that isn't part of everything else going on in L.A. This evolution was about distancing myself from

the commercial gallery model. It's not about scaling down by any means. I want the programming to have more intent and to be experienced by visitors who want to engage with the work and our events programme. The timing was right to initiate the gallery's new impetus, to support the new artists that I'm taking on this year and to include my interests beyond a contemporary art context.

VELARDI: How does the inaugural exhibition, *SIREN* relate to your intentions for the new space?

GRAY: I now have the opportunity to introduce two very different styles of programming with the downstairs and upstairs spaces. I want *SIREN* to do ten things at once: I want it to be like a call out to the community - like a siren - and on another level tune into the connotations of emergency. I love the idea of a really loud call inviting you to step back into the space after it's been transformed. I'm also introducing a meditation studio above the gallery, which is a very important part of this new direction. I've been meditating since I was 21 years old and have been really into sound baths. Ancient native cultures use sound as part of their practice because it carries images and healing energy - the sound possesses messages. What I love about sound baths is that they're an easy entry to meditation if you've never done it before. I realised last year that a lot of the artists I'm interested in all have a sound fascination. In fact very few of the artists that I work with don't incorporate sound, so an exhibition of this nature made sense. I'm excited to give sound of all genres - from Pop to super intellectual - some attention on 5 Car Garage's programming. Many of the artists are also into meditation themselves - Jesse Fleming is a meditation teacher - so I'm planning on putting on two sound baths with an energy healer for the duration of the show in the studio. I like this parallel between the conceptual and spiritual.

Directly opposite will be an installation by Jennifer Sullivan. She's been producing cathartic cover tracks of her favourite popular songs that include everyone from Drake to Elton John and Kate Bush. The installation will feature a tepee that you'll be able to enter and listen to these karaoke covers on headphones. They're so addictive! It's like eating candy floss - you know it's bad for you but you just can't stop wanting more. Central to the space will sit Adrienne Adar's 'Sonic Succulents'. The work is part of an ongoing series where she animates plants by attaching probes. We may also connect her probes to the trees in the garden so you can hear them from the inside.



Then we have Alison O'Daniel who recently exhibited at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Passerelle in Brest, France. Alison is interested in making sound tangible through tactile and visual means. She'll have a series of textile scores made of Morse code translations of closed captions and audio cues from her ongoing project, 'The Tuba Thieves'. The film is a response to a discovery where tubas were being stolen from orchestras in music schools across L.A. Dots and dashes of Morse will litter the scores and will certainly reference John Cage. As will David Hendron who draws from Cage's 'Variation' scores. David will present 'Variation 1' that consists of charred wood panels that loosely approach the idea of musical scores and the very methodology so familiar with Cage. Stephanie Taylor, who designed the exhibition's poster, has created a piece, 'Mommy' that has a siren in it. She's often incorporated the word 'mommy' in her work because it's become such a bone of contention for her, so the siren will be going

"mommy, mommy, mommy" on loop. Her narrative is playful and even mischievous using a rhyme-based practice to develop an elastic method of storytelling.

Jesse Fleming and Pascual Sisto are both video artists who have recently been very interested in sound. Pascual will present a karaoke video titled 'Daisy' about the song Daisy Bell, which was used in the earliest demonstration of computer speech synthesis. The same song is sung by the HAL 9000 computer in the novel and film '2001: A Space Odyssey' - it's simply beautiful. 'Prelude to a Cycle' by Jesse Fleming fuses visual art and meditation into a hybridized form of communication and will be projected in the meditation studio.

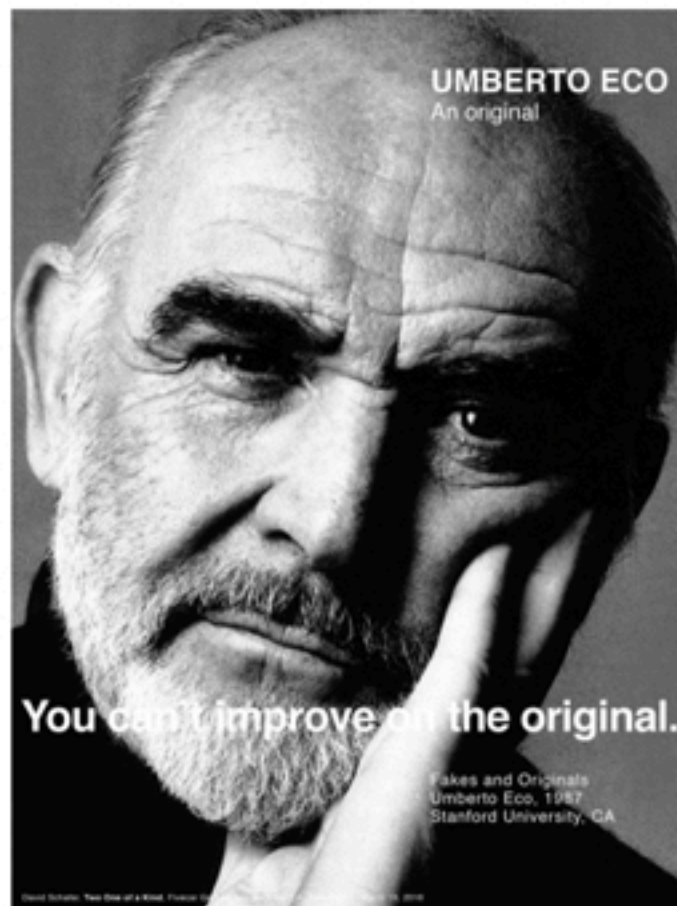
The most seasoned of the group is David Schafer, who teaches at Art Center College of Design and most recently in Critical Studies at USC. David is his own sound machine! He's so knowledgeable - he knows the first farts that were developed by artists as sound art. I'm going to try to get him to do a lecture on the history of sound art upstairs - anyone interested in the medium needs to attend. His contribution, 'Two of a Kind' is based on a cassette tape recording of the author Umberto Eco at a Stanford University lecture on Fakes and Originals in 1987. This will form a sculpture alongside an accompanying poster based on an ad for Jim Beam bourbon from the 1960's that features the actor Sean Connery endorsing the product. The ad presents both Sean Connery and Jim Beam as two one-of-a-kind originals and David plays on the possibility of Connery playing Eco or acting as a stand in for the author given their resemblance. Finally, Kerry Kleinschrodt's video 'Vater Cut' is a dark and disturbing narrative between the artist and her father going out fishing. The exhibition is rich across both gallery and studio spaces: from the plants, to the sound baths; the cathartic karaoke and the sound art lectures, *SIREN* will be dynamic on both contextual and sensory levels.



VELARDI: What can we expect from *SIREN*?

GRAY: It's a diverse exhibition and the first group show that I've curated at 5 Car Garage around a specific theme, after 'Abstract Perversion' in 2013, organised by Max Maslansky. Serendipitously its gender balanced with 5 male and 5 female artists, which makes me happy. Largely unrepresented, 9 of the 10 artists are based in L.A. with Jennifer Sullivan living in Queens, New York City. Scoti Acosta's 'Pink Constellation' from his series 'Pentagonal Monochrome' will comprise of a network of tambourine-like canvases that draw upon the ancient idea of the Music of the Spheres.





VELARDI: What's next for the gallery? Do you have plans to participate in art fairs?

GRAY: Following *SIREN*, 5 Car Garage will put on several exhibitions including a solo show by Bari Ziperstein later this year as well as taking on new artists such as Stephanie Taylor. I've waited to do fairs because I knew this renovation was coming, and I knew I needed a space like this to do fairs. I'd want to be selective about it, so The Independent in New York or Frieze Focus in London would be a good start. The other thing I'm doing is working with very local artists in the Santa Monica area, such as Stephanie Taylor and Max Jansons. The community here is a very important element going forward.



SIREN will run from January 22nd to March 18th 2016 at 5 Car Garage, Los Angeles - viewing by appointment only: info@emmagrayhq.com