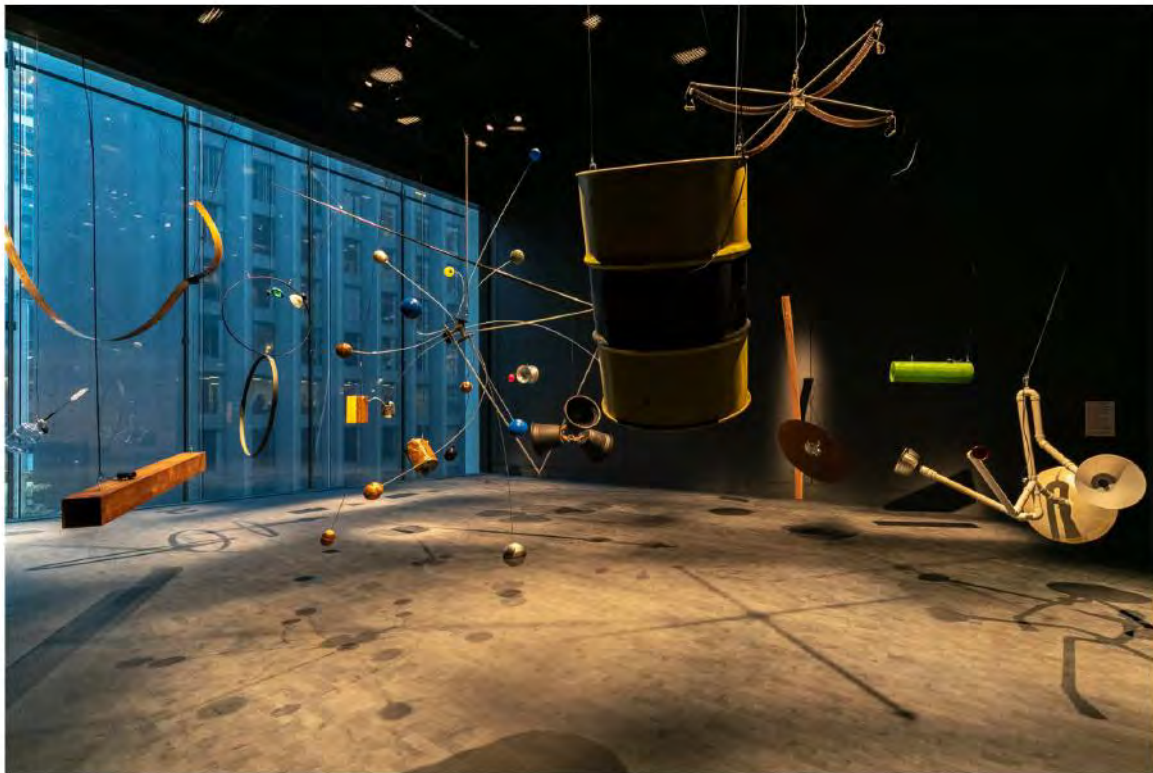


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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

At MoMA, a Musical Pioneer's Rainforest Squeaks and Chirrup

David Tudor's installation "Rainforest V (variation 1)" is coming alive through performances by the artists who helped make it.



David Tudor's sound installation "Rainforest V (variation 1)," inside the Studio of the newly reopened Museum of Modern Art. Jeenah Moon for The New York Times

Since the Museum of Modern Art reopened this month, it has devoted its fourth-floor [Studio space](#) to a strangely wonderful, interactive installation: David Tudor's "Rainforest V (variation 1)." Throughout the room hang about 20 mundane objects, including a metal barrel, a wooden box, a lampshade, a reflective disc, a glass

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jar, a vintage computer's hard drive and more. Collectively they become a kind of urban jungle, suspended like Calder mobiles with the anti-utilitarian aesthetic of Duchamp readymades.

Then, as you wander around them, you realize: This jungle emits noises, and they alter according to your proximity. You may also notice that every object is fitted with a sound transducer, giving each its own resonance. The box, the can, the jar — they're all acoustic sources, as if they were seashells. A window in the gallery overlooks 55th Street, but the constantly changing polyphony of "Rainforest" transports you quite elsewhere.

[David Tudor \(1926-96\)](#) was a musical pioneer in many ways: as an admired virtuoso of modernist piano music; as a composer of electronic music; as a creator of sound installations. Among his colleagues were John Cage and the choreographer Merce Cunningham — who, in 1968, commissioned Tudor to compose a score for his dance company.

This was Tudor's first music written for Cunningham's repertory. But he knew the Cunningham tradition: The choreographer would tell a composer the duration and title of a piece he had in mind. Often, the score would be written independent of the choreography — the music usually had a different title — but in this case, Cunningham's title inspired Tudor, who at once responded, "Oh, then I'll put lots of raindrops into it." In the end, the differences were only a matter of capitalization: Cunningham's dance was "RainForest," and Tudor's score "Rainforest."

For the next three decades, Cunningham commissioned scores from Tudor, always eliciting imaginative sound dramas. But this first one proved a seedbed for Tudor's imagination. The scenic design of "RainForest," after all, featured Andy Warhol's "Silver

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Clouds,” whose theatrical interactions with the dancers inspired Tudor: From the 1970s onward, he developed the material of his score for various spatial setups.

One of those iterations, “Rainforest IV” (1973), was devised with musicians who later became known as Composers Inside Electronics. Three of them — John Driscoll, Phil Edelstein and Matt Rogalsky — then realized “Rainforest V,” an installation version that can play by itself.



MoMA is presenting performances of “Forest Speech,” a score belong to the “Rainforest” family, through Dec. 15. Heidi Bohnenkamp

And so the installation at MoMA is available to see — and hear — at all hours. Throughout the fall, though, the museum is also [presenting performances by Composers Inside Electronics of “Forest Speech,”](#) another Tudor score belonging to the “Rainforest” family. For this, the Studio is outfitted with benches and cushions, and its blinds are lowered to darken the space. The roster of musicians will change with each performance (there are six more

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through Dec. 15); on Sunday, they were Mr. Edelstein, Marina Rosenfeld, Stefan Tcherepnin, Spencer Topel and Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste.

The performers were visible at one end of the room, but their sounds came out of the installation's galaxy of suspended hardware. Here again was the spectrum of isolated chirrups, growls, trills, squeaks, purrs, avian alarm calls. It was hard not to hear the sounds of frogs, cicadas, isolated birds, giant cats and even elephants. (Cunningham said [he took the title of his dance from the Pacific Northwest](#), "from the rainforest of the Olympic Peninsula"; he had also been thinking of Central Africa, inspired by the anthropologist [Colin Turnbull's book "The Forest People."](#) Perhaps he was also thinking of the "Rainforest" sculptures by [his friend Louise Nevelson?](#))

The aural collage of Tudor's musique concrète — squeaks, burbles, rumbles, booms — also evokes more fictional realms, as if a "Star Wars" droid had wandered into the arboreal conclave of Ents in "The Lord of the Rings." These sounds may seem a sonic illusion, but listen closely and you'll know they are just electronics using the frequencies of everyday objects. Tudor's music is multidimensional: fantasy and fact, technology and escapism, poetry and game.