

# A Certain Presence significant breath

## INSTALLATION OVERVIEW

*The symptoms of a distracted mind are grief, anxiety, trembling, and irregular breathing.*  
(Patanjali)

### DESCRIPTION

A sound installation that seeks to build an intensity of aural and material experience through a combination of limited sensory deprivation and a highly focused sound environment, **A Certain Presence** is an enunciation of human breath. It is an attempt to merge exterior and interior manifestations of breath – that of the piece and that of the visitor – into a whole that is both interlinked and individual.

The piece is prepared for specific exhibition environments. Two high-ceilinged rooms are required: an initial transitional space in which the visual sense is lost, and a second space in which, without any light, sound is experienced. In the first room, the space is lit from one end only – the one opposite the entryway to the second room, which is completely blacked out. The first room is clouded by fog; the quadrangle of lights at one end are of sufficient strength to fade gradually into darkness across the distance to the entrance of the second room – but no more. The visitor experiences the full spatial volume of one end of the first room; that volume gradually fades into blackness. Blank white canvasses line the walls. In the second room, in darkness, the visitor is both alone and in the company of others, each gaining an understanding of the spatial characteristics of the room entirely by sound. Along the floor of both spaces, tiny lights indicate the path to be travelled to and from the second room.

Sonically, the spaces mirror the guided experience of the lighting. In the first room, two loudspeakers are mounted with the lights. From each a subtle and complex resonation, built upon the sound of breath, is heard; this sound moves about the near wall of the first room and provides a white noise-like break from the exterior world; it is the wall of experience. As with the lights, this sound is no longer perceptible once the visitor has reached the entrance to the second room. Inside the second room, only the sound of a person breathing is heard. Amplified through a series of eight loudspeakers set



in pairs along the length of the room, the breathing varies gradually over time and gently moves through the space; visitors may remain for some time as the breath moves through its extended non-verbal narrative.

### READING

Breath comes from the very first moment: in the womb, it is hearing, and the sound of the mother's breath, that the child perceives months before any other sense. Breath is natural and automatic, simultaneously in the foreground and background of the life of the body, and an essential link to the life of the mind. Breath is the material of speech and of song; no sound says more about our health or state of mind. Its richness is often buried underneath its basic function, and yet it is unavoidably *there* – in a reachable and transforming space.

**A Certain Presence** is theater. The piece removes the visitor from the discrete world of art 'viewing', returning to the cave with ears only. The sound of breath in the space, both one's own and that of the piece, point to a confluence of selves and self-knowledge in a much-dismembered world. Enveloped in the public-private darkness of the piece, visitors may find reaction and/or connection to the idea of shared experience.