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Introduction

In the autumn of 2024, I was invited to participate in the exhibition *Nervures*, curated by Coryse Mwape at La Vallée in Brussels. For this occasion, I created *Little Things / Petites choses*, a series of three interactive sound installations made from found natural materials, simple mechanical devices, and electronics.

Conceived as invitations to listening, encounter, and introspection, these works amplify the subtle sounds of feathers, seeds, bark, and other ordinary materials. Drawing on personal experiences that informed their creation, I reflect on the artistic motivations behind the project, the ways visitors engaged with the installations, and the forms of attention they appeared to foster.

I suggest that such "implosive" works—works that do not seek immediate impact or impose meaning—can create conditions for presence, curiosity, and renewed attention in a context where attention is increasingly captured and commodified.

Revealing Absence

Some experiences begin with almost nothing.

In the spring of 2020, I was in Weimar, Germany. It was the time of the first lockdown, and the weather was exceptionally sunny. With the restrictions in place, there were few activities available, so my friend and I spent our time taking long bicycle rides.

One day we followed a river out of the city. We got a little lost in the surrounding villages. By the time we decided to turn back, night was already falling.

We returned to the path along the river and entered a forest. We had no light to guide us. Since we were not in a hurry to get home, we simply moved forward in the darkness. Surprisingly, the return journey left a much stronger memory than the outward trip. Where there was almost nothing to see, everything became something to feel. The landscape, deprived of light, was transformed. The shadows of the trees were undulating silhouettes that surrounded us. The river had never stopped flowing, but suddenly we could hear it fully. We could almost bathe our ears in its crystalline sound, whereas only a few hours earlier we had glanced at it distractedly. Beneath our feet, a carpet of dry leaves crackled softly.

Without feeling entirely reassured, we were fascinated and filled with wonder. That evening, I was grateful to have gotten slightly lost, to have had no light to guide us, and to have had nothing else to do but keep moving forward. The absence of a plan, of distractions, and of visibility revealed the beauty of the river and the forest. We had not missed the distractions; rather, their lack had inspired us.

Today, this revealing experience reminds me of the photographic process of developing a print: the picture does not suddenly appear because it has been created, but because the conditions are right for it to become visible.

Several years later, while creating a series of small sound sculptures made from twigs, seeds, bark and found materials, I recognised something of that experience again.

A Link of Availability

If that moment felt so vivid, it may be because I was available that evening. I had nothing to accomplish, nothing to search for, nothing to prove. I was simply open to being surprised.

This availability creates a particular form of attention towards what surrounds us. The softness of the air, the calm of the forest, or the sound of dry leaves were already there, but they would have remained mere background elements if I had not become attentive to them.

Extending this gesture of welcome towards our environment and our own sensations sometimes allows an experience to become real. Without this listening, events remain superficial: they pass around us without truly leaving a trace within us. But when we allow ourselves to be touched by what surrounds us, something can happen. A shiver, a presence, a form of encounter.

Sometimes all it takes is that almost invisible step: a gesture of curiosity.

From the Obscure to the Invisible

Over time, I have come to understand that beauty is not a property of the things we look at. It is an encounter.

That evening by the river, beauty was not visible; it manifested itself instead as a shiver at the back of my neck—an attentive state in which something of the world could resonate within me.

Perhaps the experience of beauty exists to remind us that we are alive. When we vibrate—through sadness, wonder, or tenderness—something real happens.

As a living being and as an artist, I believe I am searching for this form of reality: an experience that is not only observed, but lived through the body.

Nervures: A Landscape of Relations

Shortly after returning to Brussels, I met Coryse Mwape. Several years later, she invited me to take part in an exhibition entitled *Nervures*. Nervures—whether in trees, veins, or landscapes—are channels through which life flows.

The curatorial approach of the exhibition brought together artists who had explored this theme within their practice: France Lamboray (textile), Aurore Martignoni (photography), Ladislav Athiogbe (sculpture), Pierre Duys (ceramics), Thierry Wieleman (installation), Eric Mersch and Why Elliy (sound art). They were invited to co-create and allow their works to enter into dialogue. A scientific perspective by Yannick Mwape complemented the exhibition.

The exhibition took place from October 24 to November 2, 2024, at La Vallée in Molenbeek, Brussels.

Little Things: A Fragile Luthiery

For this exhibition, I wanted to create an experience that engages the body and invites curiosity and listening. In collaboration with the multidisciplinary artist Why Elliy, I created a sound swing¹ that produces a random melody when someone moves back and forth on it. I also made three small sound sculptures that I called *Little Things / Petites Choses*².

They are built from found and recycled materials: a twig collected in the woods of Sart-Tilman, where I was working at the time; a dried fruit and a piece of bark found in the Moeraske nature reserve near my home; seeds, a bird feather, and small metal fragments found in the streets of Brussels. One of them also incorporates a ceramic bowl made by Pierre Duys. These elements are combined with an electronic device that amplifies and transforms the sound, as well as a mechanism that allows the objects to be manipulated like archaic music boxes.

Giving a Voice to the Insignificant

Through these works, I wanted to give a voice to something that might appear insignificant—not to support a discourse, but to provoke an encounter. For this reason, I chose simple and raw materials (see Figure 1). By using ordinary objects, I hoped to encourage a form of attentiveness to everyday experiences, not by celebrating them, but by remaining open to what they awaken in us.

¹ *Invisible Wind Chimes* (2024) — collaborative interactive sound installation by Why Elliy and Eric Mersch, presented as part of *Nervures*, Brussels.

² *Little Things / Petites choses* (2024) — three interactive sound installations by Eric Mersch, created for the exhibition *Nervures*, curated by Coryse Mwape, Brussels.

Piezo microphones were used to amplify subtle sounds: friction, crackling, small clicks.

These microphones do not capture airborne vibrations; instead, they detect internal vibrations within the object itself—almost as if we were placing our ear directly against the material. I chose them in order to create an intimate listening experience.

I am drawn to raw sounds such as wind or waves. They seem to reach us more directly than language, without requiring interpretation. They do not express anything in particular, yet they can offer a deeply sensory experience.

For this reason, the *Little Things* do not produce music. Rather, the sounds of friction become the intimate signature of the object, like the lines in our palms or the wrinkles on a face.

I hope these works reach visitors before language, before meaning, and restore their capacity to be touched—much like the sound of the wind in the branches touched me during that walk in Weimar.



Figure 1. Little Thing #1

Echo as a Form of Response

The *Little Things* listen; they do not impose themselves. There is no motor. They wait for the curiosity of a visitor in order to speak, and they invite listening in return. When someone dares to address them, they respond in a non-verbal visual and sonic language that simply invites presence (see Figure 2).

A delay effect was added so that the sound continues beyond the gesture. The sound is no longer merely a mechanical reaction. The object becomes an interlocutor rather than an instrument. It resonates after the gesture like a response—much like an echo in the mountains—creating rhythm, inviting slowness, and leaving space for silence.



Figure 2. Little Thing #2

Shared Vulnerability

During the exhibition, I was often present to welcome visitors. This allowed me to observe how people discovered the works.

One day, an old couple approached one of the *Little things*. The man seemed hesitant to touch it at first, but his wife encouraged him to turn the crank. When the feather began to sound, they both smiled with surprise. I was touched by their cautious curiosity and asked if I could keep a photograph of this small moment.

Through their apparent fragility, the *Little Things* invite gentleness. Perhaps when we manipulate them, we recognise our own fragility within them. And perhaps this shared vulnerability becomes the key to a sensitive form of listening—one in which we are not trying to capture, categorise, or judge, but simply to remain present to what is happening within us and around us (see Figure 3).

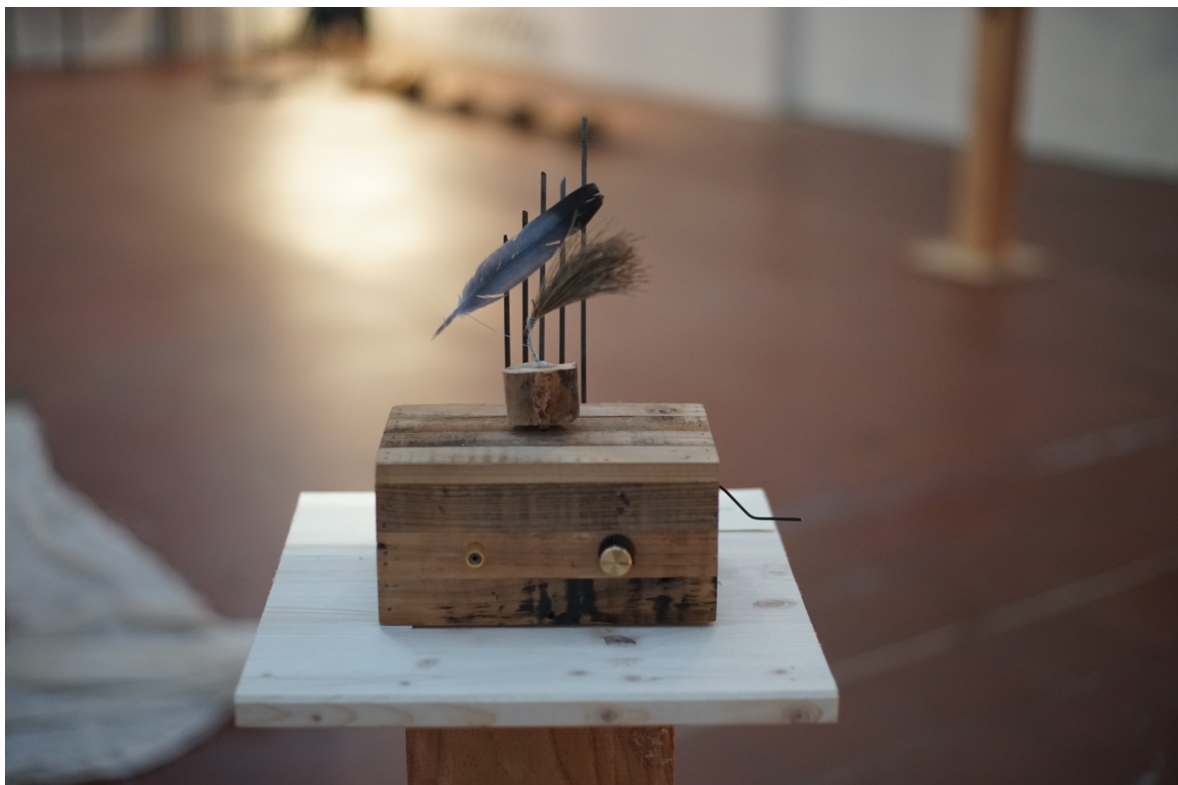


Figure 3. Little Thing #3

The Luthiery of Disappearance

I chose not to reveal the mechanisms or electronics inside the objects. For me there is a connection between magic and the way these elements are concealed. As in a magic trick, we know there must be a mechanism, but we accept not knowing it.

What interests me is not the illusion itself, but the relationship it creates—the space of attention it opens. By hiding the technology, I try to preserve an intimate relationship between the visitor and the object, preventing it from being immediately reduced to its technical function.

The magic is not in the object; it lies in the quality of presence that the encounter with the object makes possible.

Implosive Works

In contemporary societies we are constantly exposed to streams of information competing for our attention. Some authors describe this as an “attention economy” (Citton 2017).

Images, sounds, and messages compete to stand out—becoming more visible, faster, and more intense than others. This competition creates perceptual saturation: a form of noise in which signals no longer listen to one another.

I am personally sensitive to this noise. The sound environments of certain places—supermarkets, for instance—can quickly become exhausting for me. By contrast, I sometimes feel a form of harmony in natural environments such as forests. Different sound sources seem to coexist and adjust to one another: the wind in the branches, birdsong, insects stridulations.

This mutual listening also exists in certain human interactions. In an attentive conversation, two people unconsciously adapt the pitch, intensity, and rhythm of their voices. Even silences become meaningful. This dynamic of adjustment can also be found in some forms of music.

Since the industrial era, however, many human-made sound sources no longer adapt to their environment. They impose themselves. This acoustic imbalance affects not only humans but other living species as well (Krause 2012).

In this context, I feel close to works that could be described as implosive. Unlike a firework, they do not seek spectacular impact or immediate attention. Instead, they emphasise slowness, detail, and the infra-ordinary (Perec 1989). Their power lies not in the intensity of the signal, but in the density of the experience they make possible.

This sensibility can be found across very different artistic fields. In the writing of Yoko Ogawa, seemingly uneventful situations unfold with a quiet, almost musical rhythm that invites contemplation rather than interpretation (Ogawa 2007). In Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, an ordinary gesture becomes the center of attention; the painting draws us towards a world of minute details and concentrated presence. The compositions of Tomoyoshi Date (Date 2011), made of soft piano, field recordings and delicate electronic textures, unfold without dramatic climax or definitive resolution. Rather than directing the listener towards a specific meaning, they open an imaginative space in which perception itself can wander.

These works do not seek to provoke a particular reaction. Instead, they invite a mode of attention in which meaning emerges slowly through the encounter itself.

This approach also resonates with the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*, which values simplicity, traces of time, and an attentiveness to what might otherwise go unnoticed. As

artist and writer Leonard Koren observes, “‘Greatness’ exists in the inconspicuous and overlooked details.” (Koren 2008, 50) Rather than seeking perfection or spectacle, *wabi-sabi* invites us to appreciate the subtle and the transient.

The impact of implosive works is neither spectacular nor immediate: it depends on the time and availability of those who approach them. Rather than capturing attention, they help restore our capacity for it.

The *Little Things* were conceived in this spirit—not to produce more sound, but to make perceptible subtle vibrations that require a gesture, an attention, and a moment of presence.

Play, Spontaneity, and Nostalgia

The *Little Things* were not designed for a specific audience. Yet, through observation, adults and children interact with them differently.

One day, two little girls from the neighbourhood entered the exhibition. One of them asked, quite matter-of-factly: “A feather? Why would you exhibit a feather? It’s not even rare.” I was amused by her directness. Should I have explained that I wanted to give a voice to insignificant things? Instead, I showed them how to play with the installations. They enjoyed it and came back several times between other games in the street.

An adult visitor later told me that she had not dared touch the objects because they looked so fragile, yet she felt deeply moved by them.

These works invite people to play with their bodies. For children, this often comes naturally. For adults, it sometimes requires a small leap of courage. Perhaps this is why the works can awaken a form of nostalgia—not necessarily for childhood itself, but for a state

of openness and a more direct relationship with the world that busy lives often leave behind.

A Quiet Resonance

By allowing visitors to manipulate these objects, I hope to offer them an opportunity to form a connection with the work—and perhaps to sense their own ability to connect with something larger: a kind of fabric or web through which our presence resonates, like an orchestra of life in which each voice has its place, with its colours, its fragilities, and its vulnerabilities.

If these works sometimes succeed in opening a moment of listening or shared presence, then they have already accomplished something.

Towards a Sensitive Listening

The *Little Things* were created from recycled materials and presented during the *Nervures* exhibition in Brussels in the autumn of 2024. During the exhibition, visitors of all ages interacted with the objects (see Figure 4).

I observed these interactions closely. The emotional responses of adults sometimes seemed to express a form of nostalgia for a more open and available mode of attention. I do not know whether this loss of availability is simply part of becoming an adult, or whether it is intensified by our contemporary lifestyles, often saturated with stimuli, screens, and demands for efficiency.

This type of intimate luthiery suggests another regime of attention—slower, more receptive, where silence and vulnerability have their place. Through their quiet, non-verbal

dialogues, the *Little Things* invite us to reclaim our own attention and direct it inward, towards our experiences, towards what is already vibrating within us. They remind us to listen to what is already there—without expectation and with curiosity.



Figure 4. A couple discovering the artwork

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