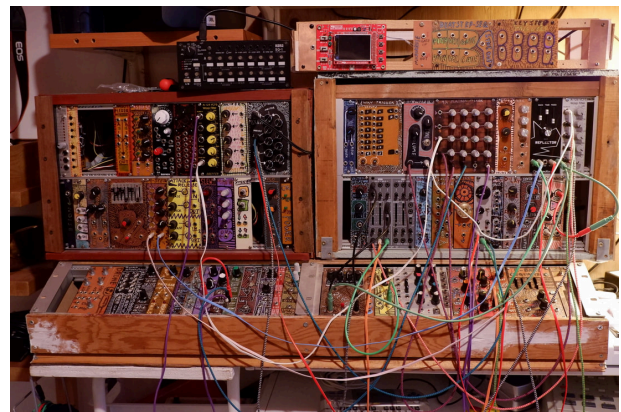


Visiting Multimedia Artist Simon Juhl in his Workshop in Frederiksbjerg

Text and photography by Nora Benz | January 2022

One of the most prevalent questions in art is about its definition, its borders, what art is, where it starts and where it ends. The creative work of multimedia artist Simon Juhl shows that art is by no means limited to certain tools or specific methods. Articulate paid the Danish artist a visit in his workplace in Frederiksbjerg.



You are working with a lot of different media including sound and visuals. Do you have a preferred media? If yes, why?

I guess I like sculptures or installations most. I really like the idea of having something that you can either interact with or that can interact with you. I think this is also why I moved away from drawings and paintings. I just feel like there is not that much to explore in terms of interaction and it's pretty limited in its space. I think my favorite way to work is when I can combine different

materials, like for example motors or speakers that make a sound when there is movement, with some visual material. But I also really like to think in feedback loops.

You also differentiate between sound and music. Can you explain what the main differences between the two are for you personally?

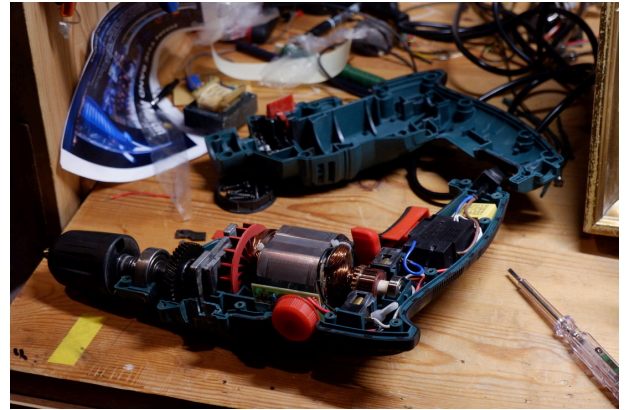
I think of music as a more traditional thing, something that you listen to and that has a beat and a melody and so on. Sound for me is more about experimenting, without any goal, not knowing what is going to happen and what sounds are going to emerge. It is about creating a sound universe.

If you say you don't have a goal, is there anything like mistakes in your working processes or the feeling of having screwed up?

Mistakes? Yeah, I mean, that's the whole thing. I usually work with sound emerging from nothing which is actually just effects, feedback loops and so on. You can't predict what comes out of it. So mistakes are not necessarily bad but rather something I can use. When something weird happens in the circuit I can discover new things and use it. I don't have a feeling of frustration because something goes wrong because when working with sounds, there are no rules. It is just what it is. That's also the difference to music where there is a standard form and you know how it is supposed to be like.

Rules can be regarded from two sides, as advantage and as disadvantage. Do you prefer the freedom of not having any rules or do you find the endless freedom intimidating or overwhelming?

I think when I make sounds it is actually already limited by the actual tools I use. For example, if I just use what I have here in my workspace I am already limited in some way. And if I decrease the amount of tools further and further I create my own limitations. That's also when I start to try different things. So you can say that whatever I use as an instrument is my boundaries. I actually think it's fun to try and see what's possible to do with as little tools and stuff as possible. Because that's when you create the really interesting things.



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As you are working with different medias, are your work processes always the same no matter the media and are there any reoccurring element in your work flow? Or is the work flow different depending on the media or even different every time you are working on a new project?

I think it changes a lot and it really depends on what material I work with as I mainly work with things and materials that I find on the streets. For example, this drill that I found is not working anymore. I am trying to fix it and if I can't fix it I repurpose the different individual parts and transform it from a tool into a piece of art. Sometimes I also find chips or similar products that have been thrown out and try to find another purpose for the chips in some kind of sculpture for example. Whenever I find some interesting material or thing I try to think about where it can be used differently. It is just so interesting to repurpose materials and technology.

Is there anything you wish you would find on the streets one day?

There are always these typical things you find and could use like a normal thing. I guess in the moment in which you see the thing it is when you think, wow did I really find this? Just because you had never thought of it.

Do you have a favorite material to work with?

Yes, wood and metal. And the combination of the two. It is mostly because of their structures. At

the moment I am also experimenting a lot with weavings. I try to weave some kind of technology into the weaving. I also really like combining different materials that usually don't fit together. Like I did in this one piece where I put leaves in a frame.

You also do visual art work for musicians. What role does this collaboration play for you?

When I am doing visual projections for bands I am mostly doing feedback loops. However, not with audio but with video. You basically just have a web-camera and you film what you project. So that's how you get the visual feedback loop. It gets generated by the surroundings and then I put an effect in-between. It's a similar technic in visuals like with audio. I really think it is interesting to generate something out of nothing.

Usually I work alone. Mostly because I just haven't found any real friends that are doing the same combination of things that I do. This combination of very technical but at the same time artistic work is quiet unique. But I am thinking about possible music collaborations. I personally don't know much about producing music, but I like making sounds so it would be great to team up with someone and combine my not very musical sounds with something more musical.



Under the projects section on your webpage you write that "Some projects may include schematics and source-codes that you should feel free to use or modify." Why do you choose to leave your projects up to modification?

Well, the technical part of the things I do are not what you normally see. If I, for example, make a code which is in a chip you can't see that from the outside. And I think that's why it is interesting to share it and make the code accessible for anyone. I also think that it is great when other people use the code I made in order to create something. Many people can use the same code and the pieces will still not be the same because some people will use the code to make something completely different than what I did with the code. So even though I might have used the code to create something with an artistic purpose, someone else can take some functionality out of the code and use it for very different uses, too. And I think I also like to share the codes because, in the beginning when I started making things that I could code into, I sometimes struggled to find code that other people had made for something specific. So it is nice to share code and make it more accessible for other people, especially for beginners looking for code.

You studied multimedia design and are currently studying electrical engineering. What role does skill-sharing and self-education play for you?

The whole electronic part of my art is self-taught. I started to experiment with electronics during my time at the gymnasium. I experimented a lot with it but I didn't have any knowledge. So I learned along the way. When I began studying electrical engineering I re-learned everything but in the right way. So I am finally able to truly understand what is happening.

How do you start a new project? Do you have a concept or idea outlined before-hand?

Actually I just started drawing down my ideas in a book but I forgot where I put it. Usually I just start by building a circuit and then I figure out if it works and then build and construct the rest around it. So it's about getting all the technicalities to work, then putting everything up for the sculpture that is going to be controlled, alive or glowing.

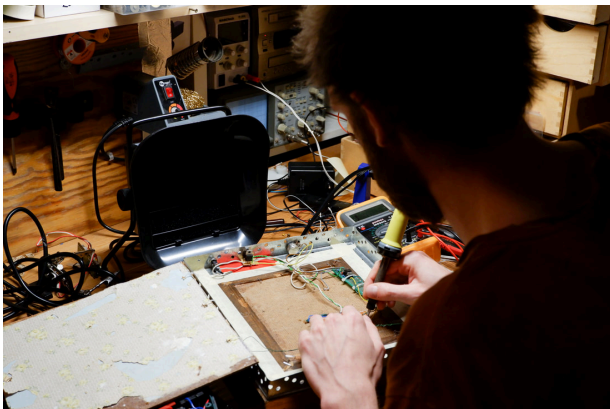
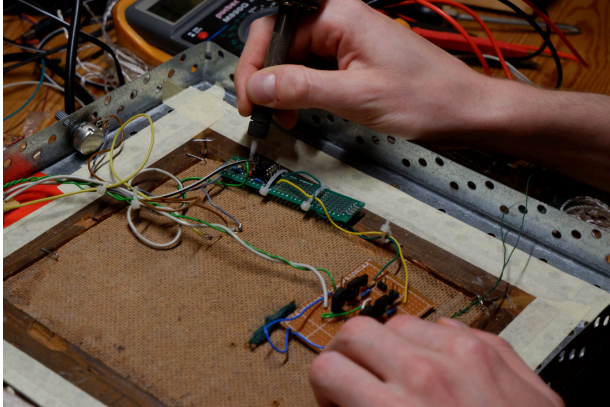
You say you experiment a lot and often work without a specific goal in mind. How do you know when a piece of work is finished and how does finishing a project feel like?

That's actually quite interesting. Sometimes I get caught in a loop where I can't really stop thinking about what if I do this or that? And I just keep changing small things to see what is happening. Thus, I sometimes end up in this loop where I just keep changing things and that's kind of a problem. But sometimes I can also say to myself that it's okay to finish now. I think most of the time I have an idea of where I am going but it is often very blurry. So I usually don't know precisely where I am going.

When you decide that a piece of art is finished, is it then also properly finished for you or do you sometimes pick the seemingly finished work up at a later point to change things again?

I have some projects that I actually just put away. But then there are other things that I built and I

am ready to test but I haven't tested it yet because I know that it is not gonna work. And then it will take a long time to figure out why it is not working. But I mean, that's part of the process, some phases are just technical and mainly about testing and so on. I also like splitting up one project into many tiny pieces. Then it is also easier to test every individual thing. But sometimes I also get new ideas while working on a piece of art and then I always add to it.



Do you have a bad creative habit that you would like to change?

I think one bad habit is collecting too many things that are never going to be used. At the moment, due to school, I don't have a lot of time to make art. If you look around, you can see all those things for which I have ideas but that could not be properly used yet. Sometimes I also find materials that I like and don't have an idea for but keep them anyways. But sometimes I find new things and remember that I have another thing lying around that I could combine with my new find.

Can you tell where you draw your inspiration from?

I think despite the things I find on the streets, it is when I see some kind of technology. I don't know how to explain it but a vibration from a material, for example, can sometimes generate sounds. That is also something I draw inspiration from. Actually there are a lot of things I get inspired by. It can be anything from a movie or just something I find on the internet. Whenever I

find something I get ideas for what to do with it, how to repurpose it. Sometimes it is also just something that looks nice or I find the material as such interesting. I just love to experiment, not knowing what I will find. So it's kind of random. But I think at the moment it is at school where I get inspired the most. It is when I learn something new that I get ideas for alternative uses for the technologies we are introduced to. Especially because I currently have a subject only about sensors. I then usually think about interesting ways in which I could use the sensors for some kind of art installation.

Art and NFTs, Art and Artificial Intelligence, computer generated art etc. are a very omnipresent topic at the moment. As you already work a lot with technology, to what extent are art and AI, digital art, CGI, etc. an issue for you? Could you imagine combining your works with AI/digital tools or even make digital art yourself?

I find digital tools such as machine-learning and AI very interesting but often it requires a lot of technical knowledge to use these tools, which is a bit frustrating. On the other hand I see that many of these types of tools are getting more and more available in a user-friendly and intuitive format, so I'm excited to have easier access to these tools in the future. I have been experimenting with manipulating images digitally. I have, for example, been using code instead of programs like photoshop to manipulate images. I often think about combining large amounts of data or live data with some of my physical works, to make them reflect interesting data from reality. Data that can often be boring or meaningless in a simple context like a spread-sheet or a graph gets a whole other dimension when put in a conceptual context, like a sculpture.



Do you have a goal where you would like to get with your art?

I would be great if I could do larger installations or something that is more complex with regard to technology. I would also love to do art works, like for example sculptures, the audience can interact with. So yeah, using larger things in which I put some kind of technology and make it more alive on a huge scale would be great.

Do you have a favorite time to work?

Yes, I think it's late. Sometimes I can get hung up on work and then time just flies by until it is late at night. I guess I work best when I start early in the morning and have the whole day to do art.

Do you have a favorite corner or part here in your space?

It's my workshop with all my tools and gear. It is usually cluttered with a lot of stuff but I have created my own kind of workspace here. I built everything by myself and also really optimized every square millimeter of it. I guess you could also say that the size of my workspace is also limiting my work, especially with regard to the size of the pieces I can develop here. Because as soon as I start to work on something here on the floor it is laying in the way, I start to fall over and it's getting messy.

What are you currently working on?

I currently work on the frame I exhibited at **Output Festival**. It did not work during the festival how it was supposed to. It was originally a camera lens. I wanted that the optics go in and out when someone passes by. But I couldn't make the sensor work so I just ended up making it go on and off randomly. So I am currently trying to fix it and make it work. I am setting it up anew but I haven't figure out yet how exactly.

Take a closer look at Simon's work

Website

Instagram