

## ACCOMPLISSH 2016: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION in BASCHET SOUNDSCULPTURE at the UB Martí Ruiz PH.D., Coordinator of the Baschet Soundsculpture Workshop UB

It is a pleasure to tell you about a beautiful story we became part of, related to the impact of knowledge and culture in society. After few years of the creation of the Sound Art Laboratory by Dr.Cerdà at the Faculty of Fine Arts, we knew that François Baschet, the legendary pioneer of Soundsculpture was still alive and living in Barcelona. On our first meeting we all decided to collaborate in the creation of the Baschet Soundsculpture Workshop as a unity to preserve all the knowledge achieved by the Baschet Brothers during sixty years of research, and keep looking for new ways to develop the ideas. We had found the best possible chairman of applied acoustics, pioneer of a whole system to push the invention of musical instruments, so we learned the theory and practices, as fast as we could, because it was so amusing but also because François was already in his nineties. I personally devoted five years to learn, analyze, test and develop the acoustical system, as the topic of my PH.D work, now available for everyone via internet, -so I won't go into that here-; The most charming thing is that all that theory and applied knowledge, was grown and harvested with one intention in mind: to claim the aesthetic citizenship for everyone, so the science and the arts would be no longer disciplines no segregate certain social groups, but instead, culture should be a collective and inclusive project. We had found a pioneer of social inclusion, not as acknowledged as he deserved, (probably because when you fight elitism, the elites tend to find ways to keep you underground). Anyway, their work reached millions of people around the world, so not everything was lost. There are some books -out of print, nowadays- written by François himself, explaining in detail the history of the social achievements of the Baschet Brothers, that I will now summarize, to help you understand which are our contemporary goals and struggles.

### **The historical impact of the Baschet work**

As I mentioned, François and Bernard Baschet, invented a system to analyze and conceive the acoustic functional elements, so they started to create new kinds of sound objects, exploring the relationship among materials and shapes for new experimental sounds. Since their beginnings around 1957 they decided to implement the shapes and sounds to create not only musical instruments for musicians, but also to create interactive sculptures for everyone, that have to be played with, in order to discover the sounds hidden on them. The appearance would let everybody forget about musical skills, inviting to manipulate just by intuition, in a new frame of action in which there is no particular expectation, technique or even a standard on what is right or wrong. This inclusive and accessible idea of an art that brings the fruits of methodical research to society, on a playful free way, was as revolutionary as the new sounds themselves. The participative exhibitions of the Baschet at the biggest world museums –MOMA, Guggenheim, Barbican, Osaka Universal Expo70 and so on- were always successful and memorable events, since the sixties until nowadays. The idea of interactivity is now common, but on those early years, the operation was audacious and risky: the established routines of the museums summarized by the command “please do not touch” was switched by a challenging new invitation written down as “please play!”.



We still find people who attended one of those exhibitions (in Spain, Mexico or Japan) and the mark left on them is always unique and unforgettable. The simple fact of allowing the visitors to play on the sculptures at their own will is a major groundbreaking experience, bringing our human playful skills to its natural state. Adults and children from around the world appreciate the confidence and friendly trust to them. The Baschet works welcomes everyone, arising very powerful emotions. The participation also arises fundamental

questions on what, who, how, where, aesthetic experience belongs. Do we need to be considered artists to enjoy with sounds and shapes? Do we have to be considered scientists to make questions about the world and its phenomena? What is then the role of the artist, of the critics, of the educators, of the institutions? Even if you do not like the Baschet shapes or their sounds, the social event happening at every exhibition is a major case for study, just as well as why after 60 years of happy visitors most people in the art world do not know about that. Baschet decided to focus on reaching more diverse people as possible, so they developed a pedagogical Instrumentarium for children, people with disabilities and adults discouraged by music academic teaching, to introduce a new way to listen, appreciate and play with complex sounds. François, personally spent long time teaching construction courses and publishing the technical and conceptual system, to encourage “normal average people” to let their creativity bloom.



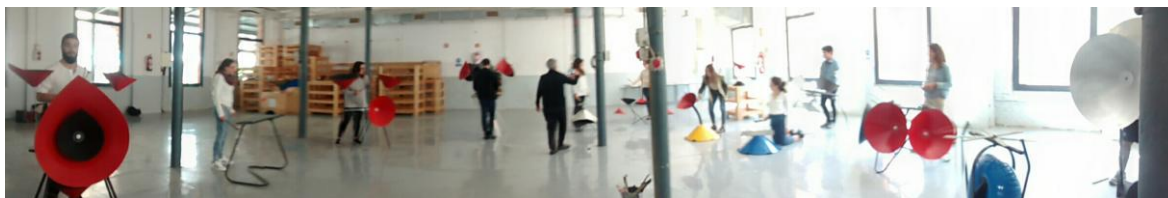
School visit at Canjaumandreu, 2016.

### **The contemporary value of the living practices**

Can you imagine how to implement these fruitful ideas into a public university?

This is what we try. The benefits are so splendid and numerous that usually seem unreal to anyone that didn't had the experience yet. After François passed away two years ago, we have to stand a link between an inspiring past and a promising future. Despite the fact that the Baschet Pedagogical Instrumentarium is still used in several countries –in France there are more than 400 institutions using it- there is a huge work to do to preserve the original pieces and particularly to keep the inventive spirit alive. To learn from the original works maintenance and restoration is needed, as every interactive piece will require in the future. We already began to do so in Japan in collaboration with Kyoto City University of Arts and the Osaka prefecture. But, the technical issues are not an actual problem. It is the social approach that still requires a twist in order to guarantee a success. Many institutions are not confident with the idea of interactivity, as it demands a higher involvement on their side to attend the visitors, to communicate and share. The good news are that every time that there is a Baschet exhibition, more people realizes of the interesting possibilities and expand their horizons, willing to share this kind of initiatives to a broader range of people. There are many communities that could benefit from the Baschet approach of a social art, and probably many of our cultural, cross-cultural or intercultural challenges could be eased by the non-verbal communication that takes place around the soundsculptures. It is an excellent medium to show the value of cultural diversity. This is why we are so convinced that we need to introduce new generations of students from many different disciplines into the Baschet practices, as a double-trigger operation, just as we could witness as the younger team of François: new generations learn from the successful experience gathered by the older, helping to preserve a meaningful part of our history, and bring new resources to face new social realities. Real interaction with real people is probably the best training we all could have, -as scholars and finally as human beings- and this is what we would like to provide to our students. This is why we feel lucky to be part of the beginning of the UB Humanities and Social Sciences Park. This venue is conceived as a platform to communicate with society and ease the relationship amongst faculties. With the trust of its director Dr.Gaspar Coll and its little crew, we could start a new stage on the Baschet Soundsculpture history, which is to actually have an exhibition open to the general public, and at the same time, to create links and start collaborations with other faculties. The kind

of interactions that should naturally occur for the nature of our interdisciplinary subjects, but complicated indeed due to sheer size of the UB. It is remarkable that even in a crisis time as we are living, with its dreadful cuttings on the public budgets, we reached to have the exhibition open for hundreds of people who discovered the Baschet world with the same joyful surprise as expected, and confirming that each of them gets a personal interpretation and impact. We collected some texts and expressive drawings by the visitors, but those are nothing else but a beautiful spark to remember interesting relationships, not actual data to analyze. There are lots of intangible benefits and lots aspects on the visitors' experiences that are non-quantifiable. The range of personal impressions, emotions, reactions, and intellectual outcomes, is diverse and asymmetric for each visitor. Some of them might be easy to notice immediately, some other might be long term effects. Therefore, it is particularly needed to be reasonable before the temptation to simplify the effects of such project. Now it seems clear that we should take steps towards evaluation protocols on the reception by the visitors, to qualify rather than quantify their experiences. It seems a paradox to have to measure certain aspects of human impressions in order to prove that a cultural project is worthy. But of course, it would be useful to reach a method to have sensitive statistics, in terms of personal satisfaction, scientific and artistic vocation growing, etc. It would be useful essentially to improve our activities, but provably to have more arguments to claim for the deserved resources for such social oriented projects. By now, the fact that some schools already asked us to build new soundsculptures for them, and with them, as interdisciplinary workshops on their classrooms, is showing how the Baschet project is needed nowadays. Even if we cannot yet measure and analyze all the benefits regarding the quality of the teaching and learning processes, the communication amongst the school collective, we already feel that it is worthy, as teachers and children showed in the activities.



History of Art Master's Student, visit at Canjaumandreu, 2016.

Despite the fact that we didn't get the resources to open daily for a year, visitors and university students were offered a guided tour and the freedom to play, for free, and some school groups attended specially designed activities for a reasonable price. At the same time, our little team kept learning about interaction and accessible divulgation strategies. Having the soundsculptures installed as an infrastructure for research and disclosure at the UB, will allow several simultaneous processes, in which certain scholars can read the participative activities through each own disciplines –Musicology, History, Education, Anthropology, Philosophy of art-. Thanks to this two-sided process, we hope we will strengthen the collaborations and create the synergies within faculties that the complexity of the cultural experience deserves. In this aspect, we have to mention that the Yamashirogumi Institute for Science and Culture, pioneer researchers on the hypersonic effect, came to the exhibition to study the sound of the pieces, as a collaboration to do research on the physical properties of the Baschet acoustic sounds. The study of the perceptual processes of listening to sounds with rich compound of non audible high frequencies - found only in Gamelan and few natural environments by Yamashirogumi-, is now entering a new stage after we discovered that the Baschet Soundsculptures features these hypersonic frequencies. All those benefits, analyzed from neuroacoustics or from sociology of art, are the as a potential tool to bring something good to humankind. François and Bernard had a strong intuition on that, we hope you can play the actual real sounds, and join our quest.