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# Artist Keren Cytter's Vociferous: an intimate, alienating blizzard of noise and images

Vociferous is part gig, part dance club, part video installation – and all theatre. Adrian Searle encounters a love story, from an artist whose films often hinge on thwarted desire

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**Adrian Searle**

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A still from work by Keren Cytter – who made our critic's nostril hairs vibrate. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

A man and a woman go to a club. The man wants to propose to the woman but the music is so loud he can't hear his own voice, let alone her reply, if she has one. If this sounds a bit vague it is because I can't hear either, the music kicking in well before the amplified voice begins to explain the situation at the start of [Keren Cytter's Vociferous](#). A collaboration between the [Israeli artist](#), now living in New York after more than a decade in Europe, and the London-based musicians Keira Fox and Charlie Feinstein, of

the band Maria and the Mirrors, and David Aird of Vindicatrix, Vociferous is part gig, part dance club, part video installation. It is all theatre.

We are in the ICA theatre, the space divided by a big screen, and a stage for the live performers. The artist herself is at the mixing desk in a far corner. A couple of smaller screens hang on the walls in the dark space. Found video images come and go. Here is some gooey green food. There is a brightly lit pizza parlour. Now a succession of Moorish columns, then a demolition site. A helicopter crashes and a car slews into a crowd. Belching clouds of smoke haze add to the mental fog, while the music, ramping up in volume, seems to displace thought itself.

Recorded and live music and amplified commentaries vie with each other in the dark. There is a blitzkrieg of strobe lighting and amplified beats. At some point a voice starts going on about what a wonderfully curated exhibition this is, a treat for any art lover, with its 50/50 mix of male and female artists, the contemporary masterpiece being projected in the centre of the room. Blah blah.

As a mix of live performance and video, the recent collaboration between Adam Curtis and Massive Attack at the Manchester International Festival set a standard. Vociferous is both more intimate, more alienating, and more of a mash-up. Here, we are actors too. But where's the promised love story, thwarted though it might be? At one point I did get a kiss, when I went off-piste for a moment from my critical role, forgetting this was not just another night out down the club. Call it relational aesthetics if you like.

After a bit I gave up trying to follow anything like a story, if there was one, or to chase the projected imagery, which came and went intermittently, first on one screen, then another. I felt a bit of a berk, running through the crowd with a notebook, trying to keep up, like an undercover cop blowing my own cover.

Towards the end, Fox and Feinstein take up the electronic drums, and Fox starts singing from a ragged sheet of lyrics, the music hitting such a pitch that my nostril-hairs start to vibrate in sympathy. This is a novel and not altogether welcome experience, unknown to me in younger years. A few people try to dance, but the music defeats them. The music might be described as industrial-hardcore, percussion-driven whatever, ballasted with thick slabs of portentous droning.

I have a horrible flashback to one of The Grateful Dead's Dark Star thrashes. The things one has witnessed, in the name of art. Oh how we suffer, clawing at the rock face of creative endeavor. The evening before, at a Q&A session following a screening of some of her videos at the ICA, Cytter described Vociferous as "very loud" and "not for epileptic people".

Premiered at the Wysing Music Festival, (which commissioned the project) a week ago, Vociferous is a love story, or a sorry tale of thwarted desire and mis-communication,

often the hinge about which Cytter's videos turn. A highly prolific video maker ([much of her work is available on Vimeo](#)), Cytter's work is marked by its often memorable and arresting images: snow falls in a bedroom, and on an indoor Christmas tree in [Four Seasons](#) (2009). Later the tree, and a cake, are consumed by fire. In her work dialogue is fractured, stories bifurcate, people pass in and out of their roles. Voices are dubbed, apparently pointlessly, and subtitles flow between languages, often at odds with the language of the spoken dialogue.

We go from European art-house style to [Casavettes](#), from TV sitcom to scratch video. There are beatings and there is blood. Feelings are expressed, but often in a kind of affectless monotone. The lack of engagement of a character in her recent [Corrections](#), who has just shot a couple walking on the street, and asks, "Why is it morally wrong to kill your parents?" is all the more chilling for its indifference. Cytter's characters frequently seem not so much to inhabit their roles as wander through them.

Cytter's videos rarely last more than 10 or 15 minutes, but each packs a lot in. She has tried to make feature-length films, but has been unhappy with the results. Last year she made [the seven-part Vengeance](#), whose style is based on a daily TV soap, each episode lasting around a quarter-hour. Funny, superficial and fabulously incoherent, [Vengeance](#) is almost entirely indistinguishable from regular TV. I watch it flow and I flow with it, identifying with none of the characters, confused by who they are and where we are going. This too is a kind of verisimilitude. What we are left with is texture, the timbre and atmosphere of life mediated by television, background made foreground, and all drama negating itself, stories tailing off or morphing into one another rather than being rounded up by any sort of conclusion.

Other videos by Cytter, like her 2007 [Der Spiegel \(the Mirror\)](#), in which a naked, fortysomething woman yearns for love and lost youth, is much more memorable, coherent and biting. The very funny [Video Art Manual](#) (2011), which both references [Bruce Nauman](#) and features a wooden duck telephone that does not rely on electricity, offers ruminations on fact and fiction, the danger of solar flares and the fear of ageing, pain and death. "If you offer any human being one second of boredom he'll think about death," one character says.

At the end of [Vociferous](#), through the blizzard of noise, Keira Fox spells out the phrase W.E A.R.E B.O.R.E.D. Comment or conclusion, nobody died, and we live to dance and love another day.

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