

JULIAN ABRAHAM  
TOGAR

BEFORE  
THE DRUM

SEBELUM  
GENDANG

28 OCT - 18 NOV 2017  
KEDAI KEBUN FORUM  
TIRTODIPURAN 03  
YOGYAKARTA

# COLOPHON

## SEBELUM GENDANG

### (Before the Drum)

*Julian Abraham's (Togar) solo exhibition  
as part of the PARALLEL EVENT of the*

Biennale Jogja XIV - 2017

Biennale Equator #4:

Indonesia Meets Brazil

STAGE OF HOPELESSNESS

## LOCATION

Kedai Kebun Forum

Jl. Tirtodipuran 3, Yogyakarta

Indonesia

## EXHIBITION PERIOD

October 28 - November 18, 2017

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## WRITERS

June Yap

Agung Kurniawan

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Budi Laksono (X-CODE films)

## TRANSLATION (ID-EN)

Grace Samboh for Agung Kurniawan's  
essay

## CATALOGUE CONCEPT & PUBLISHING

Hyphen

## PRINT PROPERTIES

Book paper 80gsm, A5-sized

Printed in Kanisius, Yogyakarta

Indonesia, 2017

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Julian Abraham "Togar"

**Julian Abraham "Togar"** (b. Medan, IDN, 1987) is an artist, musician and pseudo scientist. Words like generative, manipulating, dematerialization are often used to identify his work. Connecting one thing to another, expressed in complex algorithms, have enabled his experiences in how art, the environment, science and technology relate to one another to provide new tools to educate and engage both the artist and the society.

**Kedai Kebun Forum** (f. 1996) is an art space that is managed independently by artists. KKF consists of a gallery, a performance space, merchandise store, bookstore, and restaurant. KKF is a small community established with the purpose of providing an arena of learning and studying, in the context of developing sensibilities to all phenomena of social transformation through art. All of the activities of Kedai Kebun Forum are supported by its extraordinary restaurant.

**PARALLEL EVENT of the BIENNALE JOGJA XIV - 2017** [Biennale Equator #4: Indonesia Meets Brazil] is curated by artist Pius Sigit Kuncoro and titled **STAGE OF HOPELESSNESS**. The Parallel Event acts as a space of dialog that summarizes every idea about 'biennale' and accommodates the active participations of local art spaces and actors in comprehending the big idea and discourse of the Equator series of Biennale Jogja.

**Introduction**

168



90

40



90

470



**50 Hertz (2017)**

Sound installation  
Speaker, petri dish, water,  
tone generator, LED light  
32 x 32 x 82 cm

270

270

**Ears Have No Self Defense Mechanism (2017)**

Sound installation  
Micro controller, LED light,  
microphone, speaker  
114 x 54 x 15 cm

265

265

35

35

**Drummer's Gonna' Drum (2017)**  
HD video  
6"  
Edition 1/5

270

300

**Acoustic Analog Digitally Composed #5 (2017)**

Sound installation  
Micro controller,  
DC motor, LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm

**Acoustic Analog Digitally Composed #4 (2017)**

Sound installation  
Micro controller,  
solenoid, LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm

**Acoustic Analog Digitally Composed #3 (2017)**

Sound installation  
Micro controller,  
relay, LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm

300

145

75



62

318



780

95

96

005

# INTRODUCTION

Like other percussions, drums need energy (or force in physics) to sound. Pressure on the drum membrane produces vibrations that propagate, causes the air to vibrate, the ear then catches its vibration, the brain translates it as the sound of drum. These steps simultaneously explain the presence of mechanical processes and psychological processes in hearing work.

Born in Medan (1987), Togar is an artist who is fond of physical sounds. "Before the Drum" presents Togar's experiments on physicalities of sound using elements such as water and light. These materials also allows him to observe the visible aspects of sound. By presenting the physicalities of sound, "Before the Drum" wants to underline the conditions in which the sound is on the way to the ear.



ARS HAVE NO  
SELF-DEFENSE  
MECHANISM







# FROM THE GALLERY

by Agung Kurniawan

*Agung is the artistic director of Kedai Kebun Forum. Born in Jember, East Java, his educational background includes Archeology at Gajah Mada University and Graphic Art at Indonesian Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta; neither of which he completed. His practice stems from drawings and dwells with both cultural and historical baggage of mankind. He often descends to the street and intervenes in bureaucratic structures. Some of his recent works involve performative aspects.*

The interest towards percussion and sound that is generated by beats or throbs took Togar to these pre-percussive explorations on sound. What is there before the (first) beat? Before the stick hits a drum or the hand throbs the tom-tom? In this solo show at Kedai Kebun Forum, Togar disciplinize himself to secede the question by using light boxes in which many equipments are installed beneath the surface. He strictly uses percussive elements. These light boxes are also made to present within a composition that might sound random. This show is titled "Before the Drum" or "Sebelum Gendang".

Togar presents a light box that says EARS HAVE NO SELF-DEFENSE MECHANISM. The light box is stimulated by sound. It will blink light when it detects sound from the environment around it. He also shows a structure hidden by a framed canvas. Below the canvas—hidden—there is a petri dish carrying water on top of a speaker and other electronics that controls it. When electricity is flowed into this device, one will see the shadow of the water on the canvas. One will see a probable visual of the sound coming out of the speaker. In another corner, Togar shows a video of him "beating" at several iconic places of Jogja—sands in the south beach, soil of the south *Alun-alun*, to roots in the woods—with a set of drum stick.

What is so interesting from sound? Living in a noisy country like ours, I think, it is silence that we should dream of. But that may never happen, ever. Everytime I go abroad, one thing I always miss is the noise. Have you ever woke up in a random country, stricken with hor-

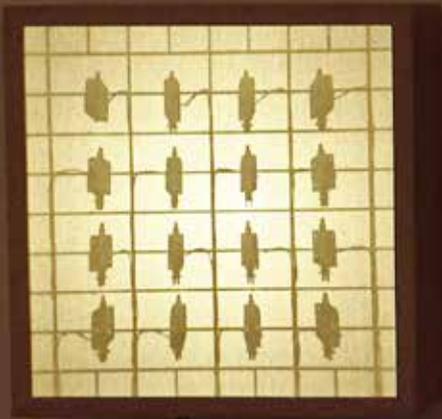
ror because there is almost no sound of anything? So silence, so quiet, so desolate. For Javanese people, silence is *tintrim*, silence is alerting. Silence signifies danger. I guess that is why we never really problematize noisiness (of our environment). Loud noises tells you that everything is okay.

Togar's works probe deep into the roots of sound. What is the sound before sound? How does it look like? What triggers sound? Three light boxes that shows you the shadows of instruments are like the ancestors of sound. It is like *wayang* (shadow puppet) that depict the shadows of something abstract that one might never be able to imagine its power. It presents you the "shadows" of the roots of sound before the drum was beat. I don't really know why Togar depict shadows of these *ancestors*, shadow of the superpowers in life. He really does. And he does it through *wayang* in a light box.

Don't you imagine complex sound (or noise) or music! Here in this show, sound is a composition of beats in programmatic tempo or rhythms. Ones own experiences might associate these sounds to whatever; maybe typewriter in police station, antique clock in the wall of an old house, or whatever. The associations may allow one to generate ones' own stories. But these associations do not matter that much for Togar. He is interested on the sound itself, not at the experience that surrounds or comes with it. Look at *Drummer's Gonna' Drum* (2017), for example. The video work shows you his obsession on beats, tempo. He beats any material that he found with the same rhythm, the same tempo.

A series of the beating event, recorded, then becomes an arranged sound, which then becomes a composition. The beatings allow sound. In the video, it also allow sound to be seen. This is what Togar is striving to do; to make sound visible, seen. Togar sees sound as not only a matter of hearing, or the ears, but also about visibility, or the eyes. I predict that this is a road that will lead him to *rasa* (feeling, senses).

Silence may be deafening, therefore scary. The sounds (that comes before sound) may be seen by premodern man as an alert to danger. Togar's obsession to depict "the ultimate sound", therefore visualizing it, may only be the surface of sound (issues). He is still attached to tools and instruments. One more unavoidable issue is the fact that he is a visual artist. To really present the next layer of the ultimate sound, he may need to transform himself into a performer. He ought to try to create sound with bodily attitude and embodiment. He ought to dig the roots of sound; silence...



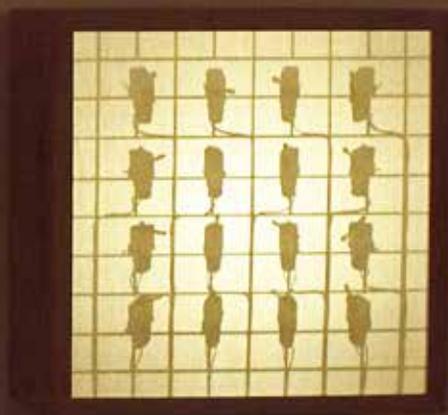
**Acoustic Analog**  
**Digitally Composed #5**  
**(2017)**

*Sound installation*  
Micro controller, solenoid,  
LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm



**Acoustic Analog  
Digitally Composed #4  
(2017)**

*Sound installation*  
Micro controller, relay,  
LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm



**Acoustic Analog  
Digitally Composed #3  
(2017)**

*Sound installation*  
Micro controller, DC  
motor, LED light  
60 x 60 x 30 cm

# SOAKED IN SOUND

by June Yap

*June was recently appointed as the curatorial director for Singapore Art Museum, where she used to work (2003-2004 and consulted for acquisition afterwards). She has been an independent curator since 2008, and was also the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's UBS MAP curator, South and Southeast Asia from 2012 to 2014. Based in Singapore, she has been an independent curator since 2008, during which she organized exhibitions, such as Ho Tzu Nyen's for the Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011 and **You and I, We've Never Been so Far Apart: Works From Asia for the Center for Contemporary Art** in Tel Aviv for the International Video Art Biennial in 2010; and published her book titled **Retrospective: A Historiographical Aesthetic In Contemporary Singapore and Malaysia** in 2016.*

The shadow cast upon the canvas screen shows the silhouette of a grid of daisy-chained solenoids backlit by a single LED light. Triggered, the armatures of the solenoids within this work by Julian Abraham 'Togar' rap out a pattern of taps that develop into a compelling and hypnotic rhythm. Titled *Acoustic Analog Digitally Composed #2*, the work was recently presented at Pekan Seni Media 2017 at Bandar Serai Pekanbaru in Riau, curated by Hafiz Rancajale of Forum Lenteng (a collective focused on art and media in Jakarta). The event was a showcase of media artworks from Indonesia produced from as early as 2001 to the present. Featuring video, sound, installations, performance and documentation, the programme (which included an exhibition, performances and a symposium) brought together the works and efforts of early and younger new media artists. Amongst the latter younger artists is Togar, who, at the exhibition's opening, performed his work *Spatial Trichotomy* comprising a lattice of fluorescent lamps that flash in response to an encoded algorithm and sonic mapping.

Although the field of media arts is broad and rather all-embracing, and in spite of the enthralling visual appeal of his work, Togar's interest is primarily sound. In this work of striking solenoids, he presents a 'live' playing of percussion without conventional percussive instruments. Instead, the electrically-activated performance beats out in metallic tempo an electronically-encoded score. In considering sound or sonic composition as the driving force of his works, Togar has good company

amongst Indonesian artists. Works that come to mind include Duto Hardono's *How to perform John Cage's 4'33" on a Tape Loop Delay as demonstrated by a Band of Cacti* (2009), and *Ting\** (2008) by the collective Tromarama—a stop-motion animation of porcelain tableware moving to a catchy arrangement of percussive and musical tones. That said, prior to these recent explorations and expressions, the medium of sound in the visual arts has a significant history. From looking at German Fluxus artist, Joseph Beuys' 1968 recording of a performance in voice, *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee, Nee, Nee, Nee, Nee* (essentially the words for 'yes' and 'no' repeated in German for over an hour), British artist Ceal Floyer's *Working Title (Digging)* (1995) in which the act of digging is presented via two speakers (one speaker emits the sound of a spade digging, the other, the sound of dirt falling on the ground), to the continuing reading of On Kawara's *One Million Years* (first begun in 1993), it is clear that the employment of sound within the visual arts is marked by a great diversity of intents and forms. Indeed, even the threshold when an artwork crosses from being visual to being sonic could be debated. What then might be said of Togar's particular approach?

Like many youth, Togar was drawn to music. A trained drummer, he was a member of a number of bands and, for a time, considered himself more a musician than an artist. But around 2007, he joined the Jogja new media art collective, House of Natural Fibre (HONF, founded in 1999). Absorbing the group's interactive and

experimental approach to visual and cultural enquiry, HONF provided Togar with opportunities to pursue electronic music and experimental audio visual effects, with Togar pitching in in the organisation of the group's biannual festivals (such as the breakcore\_LABS platform), as well producing visual works, like *Perfect Symmetry* (2009) with its sound-generated images. This continued till 2011, when Togar broke away from the group to produce his own works, attempting to discover exactly what in sound intrigued him. It would appear that he has, of late, come to some conclusions, and he describes his current experiments as arriving at the 'physicality of sound'.

To what does Togar refer in designating sound's physicalness? In observing his work, it would appear that the physicality of sound is both in emergence and embodiment. Here, Togar's mention of Zimoun during our conversation is apropos, for comparison and thus providing a finer distinction to Togar's approach. The Swiss artist is known to create what one might describe as 'sound landscapes'; quite literally too, in how his installations spread over rooms and floors. The sounds of Zimoun's installations emerge from movement (generally via electromechanics) of ordinary objects including wooden planks, cardboard boxes, foil, even woodworms. In large-scale restless vacillation, the friction of these objects fill the space with sounds that are akin to waves on a shore or rain on a roof. Now, one might view Togar's approach to creating sound as related to Zimoun's method, where movement causes a state of

change which has a sonic character. For example the tapping of surface that creates a vibration of a certain frequency, the whip of an object as it cuts through the air, or the magnetic field that is produced by an electric current that causes a metal rod to snap with a striking click. Whereas movement in Zimoun's works occurs with a certain randomness and produces a diffuse and somewhat Brownian effect, for Togar, the nature of sound is also in its pattern. In this, Togar's approach to sound is specific—it is sound as it is *heard*. This is sound that is not just sound as it is produced or as it emerges, but sound as it is understood because of our human capacity for pattern recognition.

Rhythm and its cycles prevail in Togar's new body of works regardless of its material—actual or found percussive instruments, electronic apparatuses, even the surfaces one might encounter in daily life such as upon a railroad track, the wheel of a pushcart, a pavement, a road sign, a leaf, a stream, a breeze, and a fresh coconut awaiting to quench a thirst. However, within these works, the occurrence of rhythm's pattern also becomes deconstructed. Togar references James Gleick's *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood* (2011) in which Gleick draws a line from African talking drums to information technologies. This movement from percussive rhythms to communication systems is made possible by a deconstruction or fragmentation of sorts. In that, just as rhythm can be broken down into its beats, information becomes broken down into its parts which then get transmitted, this time, as 'bits'. This

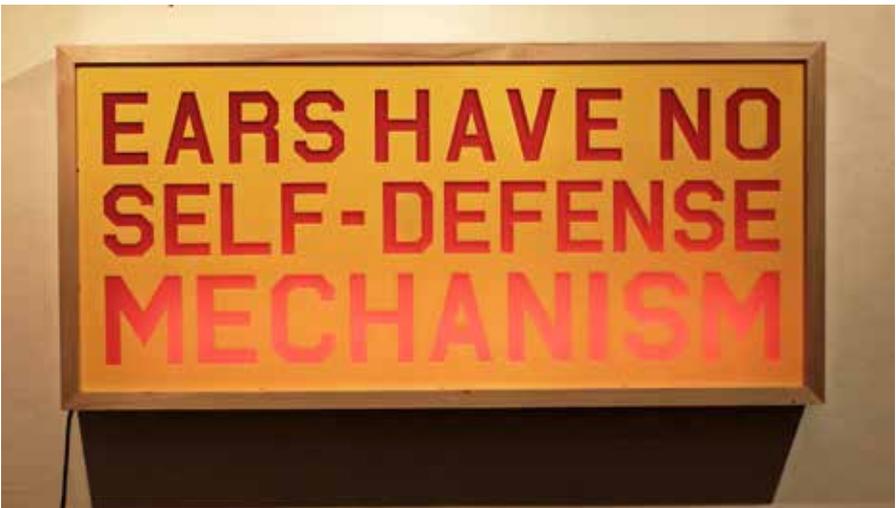
rather seminal discovery of 'bits' (connecting Boolean algebra to circuits) was first theorised by mathematician and cryptographer Claude Shannon in 1948 in a paper titled 'A Mathematical Theory of Communication' published in a Bell Labs technical journal, thus paving the way for the networked technologies of today. What may then be said of Togar's approach to rhythm and its cycles, is a reversal of the proposition that led Shannon to his pioneering conclusion. Key to Shannon's argument then was that the 'semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem'. As for the inversion that Togar performs, in the pursuit of the percussive beat, the instrument (its engineering) becomes irrelevant. That is to say, Togar reminds us that sound and the potential for rhythm is, in fact, in everything and everywhere.

Manifesting the proposition that music (in rhythmic sound) can be produced in a variety of ways, in a collaboration with other musicians and artists, Togar produced and presented *Akustikologi* in 2014, an improvisational music project and exhibition in which electronic amplifiers were eschewed and audio sensitivities heightened by the use of materials such as bamboo and stones as instruments. Paradoxically, in this and other acts of repurposing, sound is no longer just about sound. Rather, sound takes on other forms, bringing us then to the aspect of embodiment in Togar's exploration of physicality. In Togar's new works, physicality is reflected in the employment of light and water. Besides providing visual manifestations of their sonic counterparts, and highlighting the

inherent synchronicity of sound and sight, these combined effects also give rise to synesthetic conditions. This interleaving of the senses is observed (in different form) in the artist's other recent projects, such as in his solo exhibition *Alami Tanah* (*Experience the Earth*) in 2015 at the Jatiwangi Art Factory (JaF) Gallery. An initiative begun by members of the community (Arief Yudi Rahman, Loranitha Theo a.k.a Yumma, and Ginggi Syarief Hasyim—the latter also the village head) and artists, JaF offers a residency and project space within the ceramic-roof-tile-manufacturing village in Jatisura. Extending the material and experience of earth in *Alami Tanah*, Togar presented the following works: *Tepung Tanah/Soil Flour* (essentially soil that one could eat), *Tepung Tayammum/Cleansers' Dust* (dust that, in the absence of water, could be used for purification before prayers), *Bau Tanah/The Earth's Smell* (the bottling of the smell of the earth, a work produced with the Microbiology & Bioscience Lab of Bandung Institute of Technology), *The Earth's Spirit* (a distilled-earth drink that can be imbibed) and, in relation to the present discussion, *Instalasi Tanah Berbunyi/Humming Earth Installation*, in which roof tiles are percussive surfaces.

The phenomenon of synesthesia is still rather a mystery, though what it refers to is the condition where perceptions combine or blend. Unclear as its neural origins and modalities may be, a measure of synesthetic effect is presented here. That is, in the same way that the earth may be tasted, smelt and drunk, the sounds produced in these new works are not simply heard, they

are seen and felt. Yet, the intent is not to conflate or confuse these experiences, but to note how the senses cannot be divorced from one another and, in cases, dissolve into each other. The reason for this coalescence or melding is quite simple and may be seen to extend from Togar's remark on sound's physicality, this time in relation to the body and, specifically, the listener. Just as Togar astutely observes that 'ears have no self-defence mechanism', the physicality of sound is not only in its emergence and embodiment, but, crucially, that we—as listeners—immersed and surrounded in a sea of rhythms and reverberations, are inescapably permeated.



^  
**Ears Have No Self-Defense  
Mechanism (2017)**

*Sound installation*  
Micro controller, LED light,  
microphone, speaker  
114 x 54 x 15 cm

>  
**50 Hertz (2017)**

*Sound installation*  
Speaker, petri dish, water, tone  
generator, LED light  
32 x 32 x 82 cm





**Drummer's Gonna' Drum (2017)**

*HD video*

6 minutes  
in the edition of 5





**Julian Abraham "Togar"**  
born in Medan, Indonesia, 1987  
lives and works in Jogja & Medan

[www.julianabraham.net](http://www.julianabraham.net)

**2005 – 2011**

*Majoring in Broadcast R-TV and Film*  
Akademi Komunikasi Indonesia  
(AKINDO), Yogyakarta, Indonesia

**2013 – 2015**

*Majoring in Electronics, in the Faculty of  
Industrial Technology*  
Institut Teknologi Medan, Sumatera  
Utara, Indonesia

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

2017

**Sebelum Gendang** (Before the Drum),  
Kedai Kebun Forum, Yogyakarta,  
Indonesia

2016

**Museum of Takeshi Bonsai**  
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan  
**Museum of Takeshi Bonsai**  
Calamari Inc, Fukuoka, Japan

2015

**Alami Tanah** (Experiencing the Earth),  
Jatiwangi art Factory Gallery,  
Majalengka, Indonesia  
**Pekak Badak** (literally Deafend Rhino)  
GEDEGAP, Medan

**GROUP EXHIBITION & WORKSHOPS**

2017

**Biennale Jogja XIV - Equator #4 :**  
**"Stage of Hopelessness"** curated by  
Pius Sigit Kuncoro at the Jogja National  
Museum, Yogyakarta

**Biennale Jatim 7 "World is a Hoax"**  
curated by Asy Syams EA & Ayos  
Purwoaji at the Taman Budaya Cak  
Durasim, Surabaya

**Jatiwangi Cup 2017**

*Annual body building competition  
among ceramic roof-tiles home industry*

worker at Jebor Tenang Jaya,  
Majalengka

**OpenLab OK.Video OK.Pangan**

curated by Juliasari Setiati at the  
Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem, Jakarta

**Pekan Seni Media** curated by Hafiz  
Rancajale at the Bandar Serai,  
Pekanbaru

**Prabiennale (Jogja)** at the PKKH UGM,  
Yogyakarta

**Ecology of Creation** curated by Nakao  
Tomomichi at the Fukuoka Asian Art  
Museum, Japan

2016

**Unsung Museum** at the Ruang Gerilya,  
Bandung; Kedai Kebun Forum,  
Yogyakarta; and ROH Projects, Jakarta

**Jatiwangi Cup 2016**

*Annual body building competition  
among ceramic roof-tiles home industry  
worker at Jebor Edy Jaya, Majalengka*

**Open Studio and Workshops** at the  
"Nanyang Technology University –  
Center for Contemporary Art Artist  
Residency Program" Gillman Barracks,  
Singapore

**TAHUN TANAH 2015** (The Earth Year  
2015) curated by Grace Samboh at  
Salian, Bandung, Indonesia

2015

**Biennale Jatim 6 "Art Ecosystem :  
Now!"** curated by Kuss Indarto at the  
Gedung Pemuda, Surabaya

**Jatiwangi Cup 2015**

*Annual body building competition  
among ceramic roof-tiles home industry  
worker at Jebor Super Fajar, Majalengka*

2014

**AKUSTIKOLOGI** at the Gedung  
Layang-Layang, Padepokan Bagong  
Kussudiardja, Yogyakarta

**HackteriaLab 2014 - Yogyakarta**

curated by Lifepatch and Grace  
Samboh, at Kedai Kebun Forum &  
Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta

2013

**HackteriaLab 2013 - Bangalore"** at the  
National Center for Biological Sciences,  
Bangalore

2012

**Metronika "NOISE GARDEN"**

*Experimental electronic music event in  
Medan*

**SIGGRAPH2012** in Los Angeles

**In Context Residency: FOOD &  
ECOLOGY, KHOJ, New Delhi**

**EDIBLE** Exhibition at the Science  
Gallery, Dublin

**Metronika "ELECTRO-CUT  
YOURSELF!"**

*A collaboration performance of Kapitan  
Biopunk "Acoustic Neon Installation",  
Erucakra Mahameru, Metronika  
"Electro-cut Yourself!"*

at the Pitu Cafe, Medan

2011

**HackteriaLab2011 - Romainmotier** in  
Walcheturm, Zurich

**"IB:SC"** at Labtolab 2011, Nantes;

FESTIVAL FÜR ANGEWANDTE

AKUSTIK"; Festival For Applied

Acoustic, 2011, Köln; La Gaité Lyrique,

Paris; Mal Au Pixel 2011, Paris

**"Intelligent Bacteria: Saccaromyces**

**Cerevisiae (IB:SC)"** in the Transmediale  
2011, Berlin

"J.O.N.I." at the **INFLUX: 10 years**

**anniversary of ruangrupa** curated by

Hendro Wiyanto at Galeri Cipta II,

Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta

*Reachable at melt.togar@gmail.com*

JULIAN ABRAHAM  
TOGAR

SEBELUM  
GENDANG

BEFORE  
THE DRUM

28 OCT - 18 NOV 2017  
KEDAI KEBUN FORUM  
TIRTODIPURAN 03  
YOGYAKARTA