

Hacking MIT with Ivaana Muse: A music researcher, lyrical storyteller and sound artist

"...After four and half years of very slow but intense self-discovery, I finally have my project – A Square and a Half-The Colors are Sounding lined up for publication in October, 2018. My entire world is currently orbiting in a slow circle around this process. I can't wait to share. The hours are creaking but the clouds are all clear. Clucking birds are flying over the River Charles, embracing the grandeur of the skies. I feel lighter on the earth as the darkness clears – Never saw I, I never felt, a calm so deep..."²

Meral: With respect to your background in English literature, Theatre and Music, how could you describe "creativity" in the process, method and end-product of your project? What would you like to say about the potential contribution of your project to the understanding of creativity in your field?

Ivaana: Thank you for this question Meral. I think, growing up, I learned the "inking" and the "linking" between what I read (Literature), what I heard (Music) and what I performed or watched the performances of (Theatre). The creative process is a silent and spontaneous one for me and I sheepishly admit that I stay away from being bound by method. This creative silence is one that emanates from within and one that tends to flow outwards and in this project the silence within has transformed and healed me completely. The writing process has entailed a dialectic between what I had almost forgotten, my readings, my passion for theatre and of course the ability to freely express what I wanted to, rather than adhere to mere structural necessities. For instance,

when I was younger, whatever I read became an invisible force that I surrendered to completely. I believed in the characters, the words, the plot, the places-almost everything that needed my attention. My readings translated oftentimes to little shabby illustrations, or dance performances or theatrical enactments. Music was always at the backdrop of all of this because I grew up in a joint family system where my father, uncle, aunts and cousins had day time jobs but were playing or discussing music almost as if their lives sustained on the magic of music. So, I honestly never learned to think without music pervading my senses, thus naturally helping my bodily self into an imaginative space. Creativity was never a process or a method but a means of being capable of expressing all my uncertainties, ecstasies, visual images, ideas or shapes that somehow could gain form from being honest and free.

I doubt I have a "field" so to speak where I qualify to fit in. It used to be awkward in the beginning to share how I don't quite have a genre of writing or composing music, but now with time and sharing my ideas with people such

as yourself, I feel my field is a space which impels rhythm, language, sounds, pictures, sudden fits of light and darkness that makes me oftentimes restless like a caged bird. I hope to contribute to those who can relate to this field by sharing my own experiences as an open source researcher and lyrical storyteller, believing that no external or internal force ever "stops not being written".

Meral: How and why did you decide to write stories and compose music from an interdisciplinary perspective that are related to "MIT" when you moved into Cambridge from Florida in 2012? As a music researcher, lyrical storyteller and sound artist³ with a degree in "literature and music", what was your essential motivation to establish a creative dialog with multilayered "scientific, technological and artistic" layers of a pioneering research-based university? Based on your observation, dialogs and experience at the campus, what would you like to say about "being a creative artist" within such a scientific, technological and artistic context in "the 21st century?"

Ivaana: Meral, essentially moving from Florida to Massachusetts was for the sake of my son who was being homeschooled until then. My son got accepted to a summer program at MIT at age 12 and we just decided to move to Massachusetts since it was his dream to attend MIT. I never knew that I would forge an impalpable bond with the University's ideologies and its research as well as its architectural spaces. It just happened. "A Square and a Half-The Colors are Sounding" narrates and musically translates my experiences. The motivation was born without me realizing what was actually changing-within and without. I believe I was born again as an artist where I could translate my emotions and sensations

into words, sounds and images as I delved into the research, art, news articles, public art and people at MIT. I think my experience thus far has been timeless and I wouldn't cage it to just being relevant to the 21st century.

Meral: In general, what would you like to say "the essential principles" of pedagogical approach to writing and composing music? More specifically, you conducted your project with your close dialogs with several professors, students, scholars at MIT, and how has "the current education, research and innovation understanding" (at this research-based university) affected your own pedagogical approach in your current endeavor?

Ivaana: Meral, I grew up in a family that understood, practiced and lived Indian classical music. My father however had an intent ear for western music. He introduced me to Woodie Guthrie, Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan to name a few, at a very early age. I was told I could not sing and since I preferred theatre and dance over singing, music was mostly listening for me till I was much older. I learned some classical Indian music but not because I wanted to. Later once I moved to the US, I enrolled in Berklee online music lessons and completed their songwriting certification course. I feel I learned the rules only to break them, especially being inspired by the transdisciplinary/interdisciplinary possibilities posed by the connections between scientific research and the arts. To be honest, I was scarcely ever completely pedagogical in my approach to writing or teaching. Interacting with MIT scholars, professors and artists has happily made me return to my original desire to create a non-mimetic or experimental language that externalizes the truth of the unconscious mind. Throughout the writing of the book and even during the compositional processes

of the sung narratives, I have freely been able to manifest the internal chaos and fragmentation-something I always wanted to do. A new paradigm had been established and I went along with it.

Meral: As a sound artist, how could you describe the role and function of sound (as the primary medium) in the exploration and experimentation of your artistic creativity? What would you like to say about the significance of your project among recent works on sound art, in particular related to MIT? Trained as an architect and a scholar in this field, more specifically, I would like to know the most challenging, interesting and seductive features of the sound of architectural spaces at MIT at the core of your visual, lyrical and musical creativity in your current project?

Ivaana: For me sound and rhythm and silence are everything in terms of writing or composing music. Someone told me that I have Chromesthesia which is a type of synesthesia in which sounds almost automatically translate to sensations of color. I do however visualize sounds, feel and embrace sounds as one would if they met another human. Sounds and the spaces in between or those unseen and silent gaps are at the core of what I write and compose.

Sound art is a very large or extensive field. The sounds I have explored in this project are all real sounds that have first been metaphorically and visually transposed through narratives and then have composed melodies or instrumental sections with unconventional tuning, based off those narratives. All the sounds in my project have emanated from experience. Each part of MIT has a

form, a texture and materiality that craves for representation. For instance, Jean Tinguely's clanking machine sculptures generate fields of electrophysical noise. A similar labyrinthine, machine like absurdity of space sounds inhabit different parts of the MIT campus. Are these sounds art? For me they are. I have not processed these sounds over a machine or computer but have attempted to recreate first a lyrical narrative and then a similar metaphorical melodic mood in my compositions.

I like what you say-"sound of architectural spaces at MIT". I can't help quoting the words of John Cage who said believed that there could be no genuine silence anywhere-"until I die there will be sounds." There is a beautiful book by MIT alumni Barry Blesser and Linda Ruth Salter named: "Spaces Speak, Are You Listening"? The authors analyze beautifully architectural aural spaces from the perspective of art, science, cultures, subcultures and of course music. Spatial awareness is everything. I have no idea about the neurological processing of sounds with regard to MIT's architecture but yes I have revisited a million times over, much of MIT'S architectural spaces to find myself, my personal memories, readings, connections with art and culture. There is a strange sonic reflection in each part of MIT's architectural space, one that requires just a wee bit of attention and soulful connection. For instance, if you are in building 6, you cannot but step a few stairs down to the lobby art and watch the plaque sculpture there. As you wait, especially if you are alone, you sense an environmental stimulation. That stimulation is enough to carry you through several layers of consciousness as you explore your own emotional and

sensory response to the space. From the libraries to the Dome, to the enclosed spaces inside classrooms, the Chapel-MIT's architectural spaces have a language and aural brilliance that induces the creative spirit to think beyond the box. Everything in MIT is seductive. The challenge is in acknowledging that you are being lured into its giant but cohesive acoustic forest.

Meral: You are not only "a (woman) artist" whose project aims to open up and explore multilayered scientific, technological and artistic dimensions of MIT but also "a mother" whose son has been studying at MIT. In general, what would you like to say about the influence of "being a mother" on your artistic vision as a woman? In other words, how has "the existence of your son" contributed to your artistic creativity? More specifically, how have your two different but interrelated identities interacted with each other during your project?

Ivaana: Glad you ask this Meral. My son is at the very core of my existence. I doubt we would have ever moved to Cambridge, had it not been for his dream to study at the institute. Being a mother is my most crucial identity. Without him my life is a black and white canvas. He paints the canvas with several layers of immutable pigment-all different in hue and texture-all suggesting just the right yin and yang to provide a uniformity of tension that allows me to believe that I am art. Yes we are very similar and very dissimilar and I am happy he has grown to have a strong independent mind of his own. We are friends above all and I believe we have talked about everything during the making of this project, but our focus has been on Baseball more than art or music, since both of us eat, breathe and sleep Baseball. But no matter what has been

the topic of our interaction, it has been the source of illuminating all my emotions. I could liken our interactive bond to Van Gogh's painting "Café Terrace at Night" where the creation of light from darkness with an underlying sense of the infinite is all powerful.

Meral: In this project, you have been exploring MIT (and Cambridge) with a synthesis of your eastern cultural upbringing and intellectual background (from India) along with scientific, technological and artistic aspect of the western world with a specific emphasis on this research-based university (in the U.S.). What has been the biggest challenge and potential of being at the intersection of two different cultures; and trying to synthesize two of them in today's U.S.? Does your project have any messages for the creative potential of "diversity and inclusion" in your field?

Ivaana: I did not take more than a moment to identify with the American culture so to speak. I did not forget my eastern upbringing and of course my education in India-my wonderful teachers and above all the teachings of my father. All of this has been expressed through various accidental nuances in the book. I would not say there has been any challenge in trying to synthesize the cultures in this project. MIT is absolutely all embracing. I have experienced this in many of my interactions and it is this diversity that is at the core of the title: A Square and a Half-The Colors are Sounding. The art of making such a quilt on fabric involves triangular and square shaped fabrics of diverse colors, scales, emphasis and textures pieced together. I feel MIT's social and cultural and disciplinary diversity is at the basis of the choice of my imaginary quilt as a design metaphor for this project. I think bringing this truth through music, stories and visual

strategies may be a valuable tool for social change for one major key element that MIT upholds is helping students develop insights about racial and cultural differences. Each chapter in my book is dedicated to the work achieved not just by MIT scholars, professors and researchers but by academicians and artists around the world who are somehow connected to MIT in some unique or magical way. I unbiasedly wish that our society can expand its perspective and that there is an open intercultural exchange in every strata of human existence-I imagine such a utopian world and find peace in my belief.

Meral: If you compare your first album, "Silver Lines and Strings" digitally released in 2012 with your current project and album, what would you like to share with your readers and listeners? In terms of research on music, lyrical storytelling and sound art, how have you evolved and transformed since 2012? In addition to your strong and deep focal point on MIT and your own cultural, intellectual background, is there any other context or person as a source for your inspiration, evaluation and transformation since that year?

Ivaana: Silver Lines and Strings was an expression of the self on a very surface level I would say, when I look back. I believe it has been a learning curve. However, I don't want to go back and find flaws and say, "I wish I had done it differently". That's who I was back then, and this is who I am now. The transformation has been huge. MIT has been the focal point but I have been inspired by people and their works, strange discoveries, visual and sonic perspectives and above all I have found my free will to experiment and find meaning in the simplest things in

life.

Meral: In your book, there are many references to "architectural spaces" at MIT ⁴ with your interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, your focal point is to comprehend its multisensory dimension and its potential beyond its physical nature (as one of the core issues of architecture education, architecture discipline and architecture profession ⁵). While reading your book, we have been tracing the convergence of the aural and visual capacity of architectural spaces, the public and the private spatial hearing within them, etc. Do you have any plans to share your project with the MIT, Department of Architecture or related education and/or research programs to discuss possibly a new innovative and collaborative (interdisciplinary) ways of architectural design education?

Ivaana : I would be very happy and honored to share the project Meral. I truly believe that poetry, architecture and music build the arts. American architect John Hejduk's anthology: Such Places As Memory is a non-poetic autobiographical manifestation of the buildings that artists create in the mind. His poems make us reflect that architecture and memory are timelessly interconnected. The hauntingly absent and the immensely real spaces revoke what we had never forgotten. Thus, this convergence of thought is not new so to speak. In my project, architecture also unites with fantasy and mythology and the visual arts in several segments of the book. I do feel that just as architecture inspires poetry and music, fantastical poetical concepts can also trigger a new vocabulary and thus transcribe to a utopian vision for a dynamic reality. An architect is a disciplined poet whose metaphors are etched in stone or concrete. The aesthetic emotions or

concepts that a poet or musician conceives of, can be beautifully carved into an enriched reality by an architect- for utopian stories are very much like architectural projections.

Meral: In your book, one of the most significant parts in terms of architectural interest is the influence of Corridor Lab (Strobe Alley) in the MIT building 4 on your revisiting your past, your culture and in particular your conversation with your dad. I think that your readers and listeners will witness the (re)construction of a/n (woman) artist's personal memory through her poetic language, visual and aesthetic sensibility, pictorial, illustrative skills and her in-depth intellectual perspective as well as "the memory of 'the Institute'". It is an inevitable fact that historical institutions (like MIT) have a strong potential to unfold multilayered (his/her) stories related to their own and creative individuals' pasts. Based on your experience, what would you like to say about the potential of documenting multicultural (scientific and art) histories of pioneering institutions to support and promote new creative visions and projects?⁶

Ivaana: Very insightful question Meral. The Strobe Alley of the Edgerton Center at MIT houses Harold Edgerton's exceptional achievements in stroboscopy and electronic flash photography, light equipment, glass cabinets full of strobe lamps, cameras, deep sea artifacts and other memorabilia. Each time I return to the Alley, I have a different perception, a different recollection of past experiences or the spark of a fantastical story that starts possibly from a visual metaphor that the mind creates. I believe many institutions are already working on wonderful projects such that explore the changing themes in media, visual

studies and culture. What I feel isn't very common is to interpret such experiences through a deeper personal perspective into stories, music and creative writing in general. The intersections need to get more poignantly webbed and expressive. For instance, when we walk through the woods, we start collecting sensory data and slowly over time we have a personal impression of the place. The impression includes contrasts in foliage, discarded crumpled paper or cigarette stubs, dry leaves, bird feathers, sounds of birds or the fragrance of tree sap or other ephemera. The images get densely entrenched in the mind. We sometimes forget to document our walks, the connected thoughts, emotions or the repetitive and contemplative bodily rhythms. I feel if we "map" our attention we can create wonderful new creative ventures. That's all it takes.

Meral: You prefer to sum up the effect MIT has had on your musical or lyrical sensibility by comparing the experience to the monochrome ink paintings by [Hasegawa Tōhaku](#) (1539–1610), one of Japan's leading artistic innovators (16th Century) and the founder of the Hasegawa school of painting. You chose to refer in particular, to "Pine Trees", one of his notable paintings with its hazy landscape transitioning from thick to thin or blurred and defined at the same time, etc. What would you like to say about the potential of your project for your listeners and readers? Do you think that it has a potential of "their own pine tree"?

Ivaana: That is the entire goal Meral. When we walk next to the ocean and admire its magnificence, we want others to either witness or share our joy or revisit the waters, so they may express their own adoration, in their

own significant way. Like Tohaku's Pine Trees, each of us has the ability to define their own artistic or spatial content and perhaps create a similar illusion of depth with sublime dreamy mists as Tohaku did. My upcoming online school intends to explore these concepts in greater details.

Meral: How did you construct the structure of your book from "prologue" to "America's most wired composer, Tod Machover"? What is the logic behind the structure of this content and what would you like to say about the process of this construction? You prefer to finalize your book with "Tod Machover"; would you like share the significance of his projects for "the evolution and progress of your creative vision"?

Ivaana: To begin with, I had no structure in mind. I was just stitching, walking, mapping textures, tones and dyeing my thoughts with literary, musical, artistic and illustrative colors. Memory has sensory pathways. I just walking through them as I ventured into this new world of scientific research and information. Like French art critic and poet Baudelaire, I believe that memory involves a conscious and overt indulgence in the senses and their intermingling, also known as synesthesia. Yes, I wanted to offer a tribute to Tod Machover and his works to conclude because I have been highly inspired by his ingenuity, his humility and his childlike ability to keep learning as he continues his journey as a composer of the highest order. Above all I believe his works transcend time and transform how we think of, hear and perform music.

Meral: As L. Rafael Reif, the MIT President states, "MIT's greatest invention may be itself -an unusual

concentration of unusual talent, restlessly reinventing itself on a mission to make better world". ⁷ In today's world, humanity has been facing many crises and creative thinking with imaginative problem-solving skills is one of the significant factors to challenge this critical situation. At that point, as a creative artist, do you have any messages with your current project for a better world?

Ivaana: Meral I think that is a huge responsibility. I pray my son works in that direction. I am here to support him in his journey. If my project can inspire young students and creative artists to come alive with their own thoughts and feelings in the most honest way they can, I would feel humbled.

Meral: It has been a real pleasure for me to talk with you about your inspiring journey at MIT, thank you for this interview.

"....now I find her* again,
In frozen flowers, leaves, the depth of the
Charles River..." ⁸

Ivaana Muse
From her biography

Meral Ekincioglu, Ph.D.
A hacker & a visiting scholar at the MIT, HTC
Program (2014-2016).
Notes and references:

1. For Hacking Culture at MIT, see "Forbidden Research liveblog: Hacking Culture at MIT", <https://civic.mit.edu/2016/07/21/forbidden-research-liveblog-hacking-culture-at-mit>, accessed on September 1st 2018. In addition to this, Professor Arindam Dutta from the MIT-HTC program defines "the hacker" who offers "her" labor gratis in further exploring and exposing a system's limitations. For more information on his comments on "the hacker" and "hacking", see, Dutta, A. (interviewee), 2014, "Architecture and the Creative Economy", Kim, J. (ed.), in Task Environment, published May 15, 2014, <http://www.arpajournal.net/task-environment>, accessed on September 1st 2018.

2. <http://www.ivaana.com/research>, accessed on August 28, 2018.

3. For some significant projects on Sound Art at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies (C V A S) , see , <http://act.mit.edu/cavs/format/sound%20art>, accessed on September 1st 2018.

4. For a recent historical examination on the design and building of MIT's Cambridge campus, see Jarzombek, M., 2017, Designing MIT, Bosworth's New Tech, SA+P Press, March; <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/distribution/sap-press>, accessed on September 2nd 2018.

5. For some essentials of architecture discipline and architecture profession, see, Anderson, S., 2001, "The Profession and Discipline of Architecture: Practice and Education", in Andrzej Piotrowski and Julia Williams Robinson (eds)., The Discipline of Architecture, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press , p p . 2 9 2 - 3 0 5 ; http://web.mit.edu/soa/www/downloads/2000-09/AE_Piotrowski_PracEd_2001.pdf, accessed on September 1st 2018.

6. See for a recent MIT initiative to document its multicultural and underrepresented community, "Uncovering pioneering women in science and engineering in MIT's archives, New initiative focuses on underrepresented aspect of

M I T h i s t o r y " , <https://libraries.mit.edu/news/uncovering-pioneering/24722/>

7. <https://betterworld.mit.edu/about-the-campaign>, accessed on September 2nd 2018.

8. Ivaana Muse refers to her mother in her sentence, please see, <http://www.ivaana.com/bio>, accessed on August 28, 2018.

9. Following her advanced academic research project at the MIT-HTC Program (2014-2016), the title of academic presentation by Dr. Ekinoglu at the same program (2016) was "Hacking the Politics of Gender" as related to her research problem. As "a hacker" in her scholarly endeavor, her aim is to explore and expose "the politics of gender" in the limitations of institutions, academia, the profession, education, history and history-writing in (postwar) architecture.

Dr. Meral Ekincioglu

As a feminist scholar in architecture history, the subjects of Dr. Ekincioglu's recent academic study are politics of gender, multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion in global architecture history. She has conducted her advanced academic research project, "Historical recognition of Turkish and Turkish-American women architects of the postwar generation in the U.S." at the MIT-History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture in 2014-2016. Based on her archival research and findings, she presented her scholarly studies at the MIT-HTC Program (2016), the International Women in Architecture Symposium at Virginia Tech. (2017), the MIT-Women's and Gender Studies Program (2017), the Women's Studies Speaker Series organized by CUNY (2017), Harvard University-NETSA (2017) and at the 71st Society of Architectural Historians, Annual International Conference (2018) where she was awarded by SAH Fellowship. Dr. Ekincioglu also presented her two academic papers at "Media in Transition 5 and 6", two international conferences organized by the MIT-Comparative Media Studies in 2007 and in 2009.

In 2014-2016, she created and developed the collection, "Women in Modern and Contemporary Territories of Turkish Architecture" for Archnet, online source of MIT. In addition, in her field, she conducted three short documentary films produced by TATV and aired in the U.S. in 2016-2017.

Based on her Ph.D. dissertation research at Harvard University, Aga Khan History of Art and Architecture, Ph.D. Program in 2006-2007 (as special Turkish fellow) and at Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Ph.D. Program in 2008-2009 (as research scholar), she obtained her Ph.D. degree in Architecture at Istanbul Technical University in 2011.

Meral's deep research in the creative fields of architecture and related arts has also helped her to forge bonds with music and musicians, world over. She has been actively reflecting on the music compositional logistics from the architectural perspective. She is constantly trying to bridge the reciprocal influences between music and architecture.