

Artist of the week 130: Haroon Mirza

Like junk shop merchandise possessed, car-boot treasures come to life in the hands of this gifted composer-cum-artist



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Sound piece ... the visual meets the acoustic in the work of Haroon Mirza. Photograph: Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Haroon Mirza once described his installations as a "hard copy" version of electronic music. Rather than pulsing from an invisible digital file, his compositions of scratches, bass thrums and beats are generated live, right before our eyes. Set off in a chain reaction, arrangements of old furniture come click-clacking to life, retro speakers buzz throatily and video projections provide looped outbursts. Simple conductors like buckets of water might move electric currents through the dangling wires of keyboards, which drip piano tinkles. Radio antennas may spin on turntables, generating static sounds as they pass dangling light-bulbs.

Mirza, who has just been awarded the [Northern Art prize](#), studied design at London's Goldsmith's College before turning to art. Rather than produce prototypes of gadgets for mass production, it was here that he first developed his one-off, hybrid acoustic systems. The cheap, car-boot furniture of yesteryear has long figured in his work, and was first used by the young artist as a handy, cheap component. His all-singing, all-dancing collections of mahogany-effect cabinets, coffee tables and laminated wardrobes resemble a junk shop possessed by spirits. More recently, he's used other people's artworks in the mix, such as [Guy Sherwin's Cycles films](#) from 1977–79. The sound of the hole-punched film whirring through a projector provided percussion for Mirza's 2009 installation, *Ad Infinato*.

Music culture is a frequent inspiration. [Taka Tak](#), from 2008, created after a residency in Pakistan, addresses music's contested place in Muslim culture and how it filters into daily life. An Indian chest, flashing fairy lights, a turntable and a spinning wooden sculpture are rigged to create an industrial-sounding backing track. The frontman is a chef, shown in Mirza's video footage, preparing the street dish Taka Tak, so named for the sound made during its preparation. He wields two knives like drumsticks, expertly

dicing meat on a metal dish and tapping a high-tempo tattoo with the easy flair of a seasoned performer.

As with this irresistible rhythm teased out of everyday kitchen cacophony, Mirza's work explores the edges of things. His compositions turn irritating noise into appealing sound, with artworks doubling as instruments and old junk becoming musical sculpture.

Why We Like Him: Regaining a Degree of Control, 2010, Mirza's inclusion in the British Art Show 7, is a dark, moody affair. Strobe lights, decks and 1980s bedsit-style furniture channel ideas about Joy Division's Ian Curtis and his attitude to his epilepsy.

The Odd Couple: Punk impresario [Richard Strange](#) has performed in a number of Mirza's works, including the black-magic tinged [A Sleek Dry Yell](#). Inspired by Ken Russell's [Altered States](#), it features a video of Strange pronouncing a macabre speech like a Hammer Horror villain.

Where Can I See Him? Haroon Mirza's work is included in the [British Art Show 7](#), at the Hayward Gallery until 17 April.