

IKON

Mariateresa Sartori

Étude Op.25 N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin

Étude Op.25 N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin by Italian artist Mariateresa Sartori explores connections between music and language, one of her research fields. Trained in the psychology of art, Sartori combines scientific methods with poetic gestures, creating works which playfully highlight tensions between subjective and objective knowledge and expressions.

Ikon Curator Melanie Pocock spoke to Sartori about the ideas behind *Étude Op.25 N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin* (2012).

Melanie Pocock: In your work, *Étude N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin*, viewers see the mouths of two individuals engaged in a conversation. Their speech, however, has been replaced with the sound of Frédéric Chopin's eponymous piano study. The dramatic scales and wistful melody of the music almost mirror their expressions.

Why did you decide to use this particular piece by Chopin? And where did the idea of juxtaposing his music with a visual recording of a conversation come from?

Mariateresa Sartori: I have always been interested in the relationship between language and music. Ever since I was a girl, I've felt that certain pieces by Chopin were dialogues between people. In other words, that they were not simply reflections of human conversations, but actual dialogues, conducted through music. *Étude N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin* is a visual representation of this sensation.

Later, and having discussed this sensation with musicologists, I discovered that my impressions weren't unfounded. The musicologists explained to me that the length of musical phrases in Chopin's works is similar to phrases in human dialogue. It's also different to the duration of phrases in the music of other composers, such as Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt and Sergey Rachmaninoff.

I chose this piece because of its circularity: it finishes exactly where it starts. It's like a conversation, which takes the form of an endless merry-go-round. It also has two very different sections, which create a dialogic relationship through their opposition.

MP: This work was last presented at the Fondazione Querini Stampala in your hometown, Venice, as part of a joint exhibition with artist Roman Opalka, titled *Dire il tempo / Telling the Time* (2019). For the exhibition, you decided to dedicate this work to him. Can you share more about your friendship with Opalka and his influence on your work?

MS: I remember the first time that Roman Opalka and his wife, Marie-Madeleine, visited my studio in Venice. Marie-Madeleine – to whom I will always be grateful – was encouraging and affectionate and helped me overcome my awe of Roman's work. During their visit, Roman commented on my work with measured, precise words, instantly grasping its meaning. He also saw other meanings in it, which had not yet occurred to me. Since that first visit, we met

every time they came to Venice. Looking back, I feel fortunate to have spent so much time with them.

Now – many years later – I remember one of our conversations. I explained to Roman the idea of a video work that I was working on at the time, which was *Étude Op.25 N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin*. Roman immediately recognised an element in the work that could have been misleading (in terms of what I wanted to convey) and proposed a solution. “Swap the roles”, he said, “by alternating the man and woman. This will accentuate the circular movement of the video, in an endless carousel...”.

This was our last meeting. I decided to dedicate the video to Roman, who passed away before he could see it. It includes the solution which Roman had suggested.

MP: When your exhibition opened in Ikon’s Tower Room on 4 March, few people would have anticipated the severe restrictions on movement that we are experiencing now as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Seeing your work again in this context feels poignant. The video’s close-up view, for example, has a paradoxical effect: by focusing on the couple’s mouths, it enlarges the distance between them. Viewed in this way, it’s as if the couple are striving to communicate, across an unbridgeable gap.

MS: Your observation about the resonance of *Étude N.10 in B minor, Homage to Chopin* is very interesting. We are living in extreme circumstances, which highlight our need to communicate and to be close to one another. At the same time, the enormous number of divorces in China following the lockdown shows the difficulty of living in constant proximity to one’s partner, in isolation. Humans are contradictory creatures, moved by conflicting impulses.

The circularity of my work suggests movement, but without a way out. While the positions of the couple interchange, the gap between them remains unbridgeable.