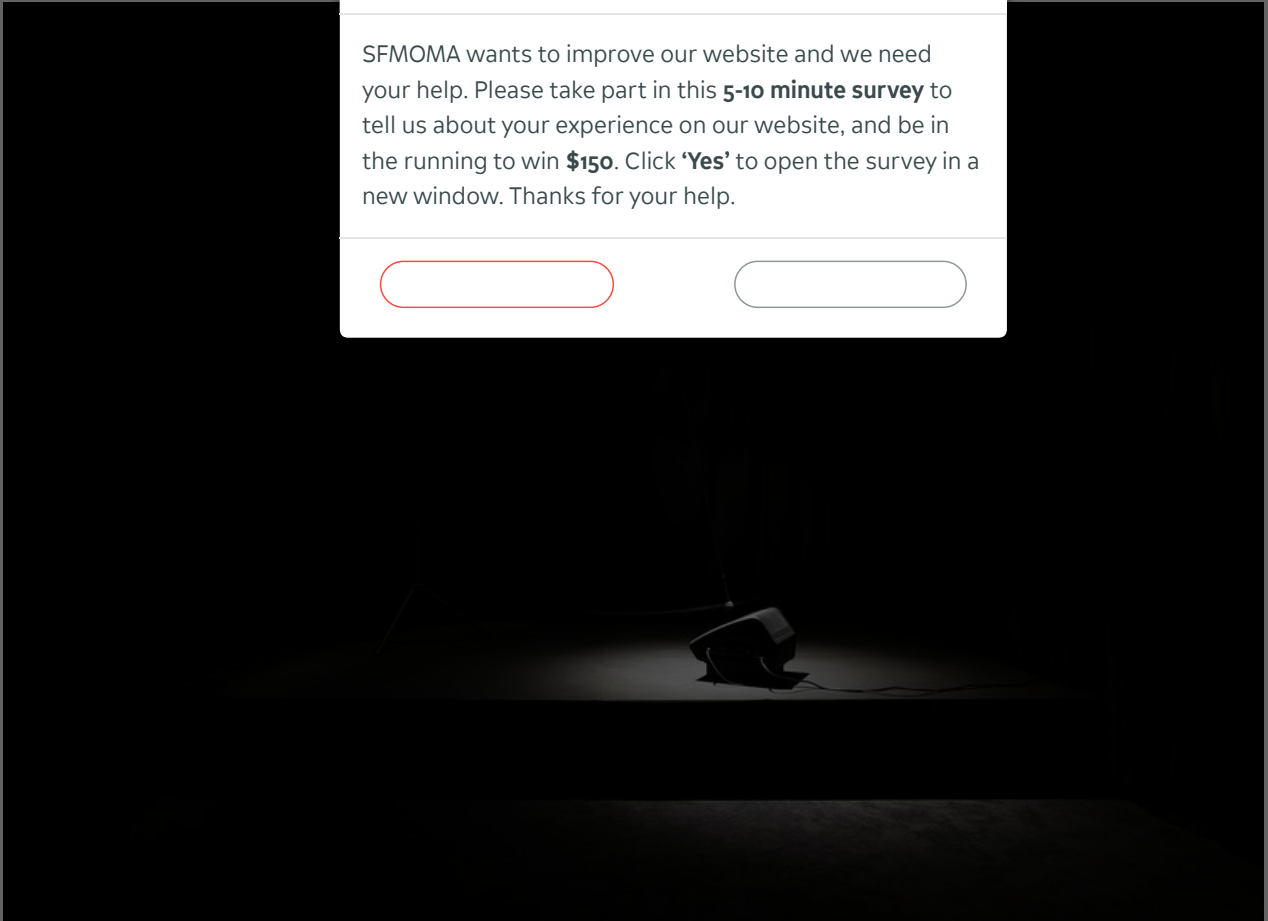


## Camille Norment

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Camille Norment, *Lull*, 2016; dynamic sound installation with pendulum microphone; dimensions variable; courtesy the Camille Norment Studio; installation view, SFMOMA, 2017; © Camille Norment; photo: Katherine Du Tiel

The music stage is defined by its sheer functionality, typically adorned only with props such as microphone stands, audio monitors, and lighting, while equipment for amplification and mixing is placed in the audience to avoid the jarring noise of acoustical interference. In *Lull* (2016), however, American artist Camille Norment addresses the fine line between seamless performance and interference. She upsets the standard arrangement by making the microphone a kinetic unit and letting it swing in front of a stage monitor in order to create a simple feedback mechanism. This *mise-en-scène* does not aim to disrupt, but rather to produce a subtle effect of ambiguity. Emanating from the monitor, which is lit by a single spotlight, a female voice sings a lullaby in endless repetition. For Norment, “the repetition of phrase and tone relays a pre-lingual message, a beckoning,” visually supported by the constant, pendulum-like swinging of the suspended microphone. As the microphone passes over the monitor, the voice temporarily distorts into feedback that resounds throughout the darkened environment. For the artist, “the intimate soothing voice, and calming situation of the lullaby and its fantasy, is repeatedly undermined by the threats of the external world.”<sup>1</sup>

*Lull* seeks to embody and perform a delicate relationship between sonic harmony and dissonance, underpinning it with connotations of deeply felt memories of childhood as well as cultural traditions. Norment is acutely aware of the etymology of the word *lullaby*. Referring to the mythological figure of Lilith, Adam’s first wife, who was cast down for refusing to submit to a subservient position, she states, “One of the accepted beliefs is that it came from the Hebrew term ‘Lilith a-bi,’ which later

became 'Lilla-be.' It meant 'Lilith be gone.' This phrase was inscribed on an amulet that was placed around the child's neck before putting it to sleep, in order to protect it from Lilith the demon who might take its life during the night."<sup>2</sup> Norment—whose installation *Rapture*, created for the 2015 Venice Biennale, referenced the history of hysteria, among other topics—here listens to the female voice.<sup>3</sup> Far from simply offering a regressive experience, however, *Lull* allows visitors to observe the duality between voice and noise as a precarious border, a moment of disturbance, an instability of a living system, but gently so. There is a complex interplay between absence and presence: the microphone is alone and is clearly live—hence the feedback—and yet the singer is not onstage, even though we can hear her. This is a psychoanalytical theory of child development on the famous "fort-da" game, where the child gradually learned to be temporary as she reliably comes back.

— Rudolf Frieling

### Notes

1. "Lull — So Ro 2016," Camille Norment. The title of the installation was abbreviated to *Lull* for the exhibition. [http://www.norment.net/work/text-nd/lull-So-Ro/](#). The title of the
2. "Camille Norment in conversation with David Toop," [http://www.norment.net/work/text-nd/camille-norment-in-conversation-with-david-toop/](#).
3. See the artist's illuminating remarks on the relationship between hysteria, social conditions, and the voice in "The Pathology of Music: A Discussion between Camille Norment, Katya García-Antón and Antonio Cataldo," in *Rapture 03* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2015). ^

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### Watch



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