

# Artist turns exhibits into an orchestra

David Sanderson,  
Arts Correspondent



Oliver Beer's installation at the Met Breuer museum of New York has 32 pieces  
ADAM REICH

The 5,000-year-old jar from Persia is the middle D while the 20th-century Joan Miró abstract vase gives a middle F. With another 30 objects from across civilisations and cultures, they will become an orchestra.

The British artist Oliver Beer has been given free rein in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collections for the "Vessel Orchestra" which from next month will be conducted by a series of musicians.



A series of musicians will use a mixer and keyboard to conduct the Vessel Orchestra  
WILSON SANTIAGO

The 32 vessels will be placed in the centre of a room at the Met Breuer in New York, have a microphone installed and be connected to a mixer and keyboard. Then the conductor presses a key corresponding to the vessel and music is made.

“Any empty space, any empty room, wine glass or sea shell has its own musical note, based on the geometry and volume,” Beer said.

“And it never changes. If you make a vessel or pot in 3,000BC it is still singing the same note now as the day it was made. It is one of the universal truths of the world.”

Beer, 34, who attended the Ruskin School of Fine Art at the University of Oxford, said he had been aware of the intrinsic harmony of vessels but in 2015 had discovered that by hooking up a microphone and turning the volume up on a speaker it “creates a feedback loop at the exact note of the vessel”. “I realised I could make a wine glass sing without touching it,” he said.

Sheena Wagstaff, the Met’s chairwoman of modern and contemporary art, said Beer had “discovered a remarkable secret resonance” within objects from the museum’s collection.

She said his “genius is releasing the essential musicality” of the objects “giving acoustic form to their secret interiors . . . I now have an exhibition with what looks like an orchestra in the middle of the room but each player is an individual piece, which could be from 7th century BC Iran, or from 21st-century America.”

Beer said: “Pieces chose themselves although there were some notes that recurred many times — I kept getting E flat coming back across the millennia.”