

A Concussive Experiment in Metal Noise

by [Allison Meier](#) on October 1, 2014



Xiu Xiu playing in their “Metal” collaboration with Danh Vo at The Kitchen (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Jamie Stewart, of the band **Xiu Xiu**, describes how he and artist **Danh Vō** started to collaborate as “amorphous,” with Vō having incorporated some of Stewart’s lyrics from “**Fabulous Muscles**” into his visual art. This mutual appreciation has now culminated in a **performance** at The Kitchen in Chelsea.



Gold pounders at The Kitchen

Vō and Xiu Xiu’s **Metal** opened Saturday with two Thai gold pounders — Nantapol and Puan Panicharam — flattening 24-karat gold squares on a sort of seesaw mechanism in the gallery. Alongside for the duration of the metronome-like pummeling of the metal, Stewart with bandmates Shayna Dunkelman and Ches Smith battered through five-minute long music compositions, some melodic on bells or gongs, others with candy being slingshot against cymbals, or whistles blown at once, each ended with a static alarm.

“It takes them three hours to pound through a pack of gold, and the hammers are unfathomably heavy, I found that I actually could not pick one up,” Stewart told Hyperallergic over the phone. “There are very definite questions that we had asked ourselves in so far in how the work that they are doing relates to the idea of playing music as work, and whether or not there can be any real serious juxtaposition.”



Xiu Xiu at The Kitchen



Lyrics and detail of Michelangelo sculpture hands on the Kitchen walls

Metal follows Xiu Xiu's participation in Danh Võ's [dedication of a tombstone to his father](#) last October at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis — where Stewart deconstructed an unnerving rendition of Berlin's "Take My Breathe Away" while Võ's father visually transcribed Xiu Xiu's lyrics — and a joint piece at this year's [Berlin Biennale](#). They also plan to collaborate at the Danish Pavilion in the 2015 Venice Biennale, where Võ will be presented. While those who know Xiu Xiu best for emotional lyrics as open as wounds stung smartly against chaotic noise, and Võ for conceptual art inspired by his Vietnamese and Danish identity, it might seem like a curious pairing. Yet there's an openness to experimentation in their work, and joy despite its dark themes in creation, that is resulting in some engaging art.

"In the last few years, Xiu Xiu has been doing the kind of song records that we've been making since 2012," Stewart said. "This

seems an extension of what the band has been interested in, the percussion music that we've been drawing from."



Jamie Stewart attaching vibrators to one of the Danh Vo sculptures at Brooklyn Bridge Park

In addition to *Metal*, this past Sunday Xiu Xiu spent three hours taping 999 vibrators — the number responding to the 999 stamped on 24-karat gold bars — on one of Vō's *We the People* Statue of Liberty replica segments in Brooklyn Bridge Park. Stewart explained that he came at the percussive piece, called *Kling Klang*, mostly interested in what all that shaking pink plastic would sound like against the copper as they were "gradually turned on and all gradually turned off." But while sticking the vibrators, which Stewart said were the cheapest they could get, likely from some "rotten factory" in Asia, to the sculpture, he started to think on how they were "something that someone probably suffered to make." All this while the real Statue of Liberty, a grand symbol of international movement and thus economy loomed visibly in the harbor.

Meanwhile, at The Kitchen, each day during gallery hours for the three hours it takes to flatten gold until the conclusion of *Metal* on October 18, Xiu Xiu will continue to toss cymbals, clang gongs, and likely try out more vibrator-on-metal tests all against the heavy tick-tock of hammers. That final evening Xiu Xiu will have a more usual concert at *Glasslands*, but it's likely you'll still hear some of that experimentation with percussive noise banging up from the intense soundscape.



Xiu Xiu: Kling Klang at Brooklyn Bridge Park

Danh Vo & Xiu Xiu: Metal continues at The Kitchen through October 18, with performance hours from 12 to 3 pm during gallery hours. **Xiu Xiu: Kling Klang** was September 28 in Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Brooklyn Bridge Park**Danh Vo****The Kitchen****Xiu Xiu**