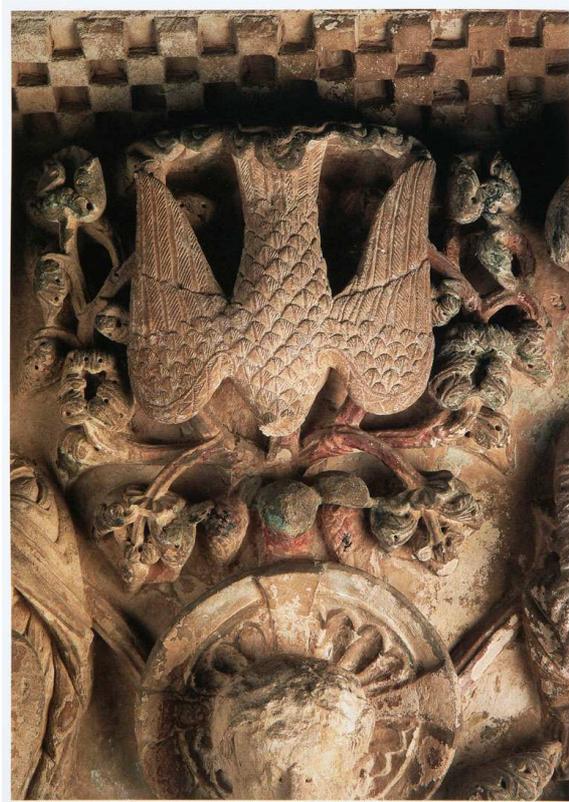


## SUSAN PHILIPSZ *Hazte ver (Appear to Me)*



Capitel románico del claustro de la Abadía de Santo Domingo de Silos (Burgos)  
Fotografía: Manuel Labrado

- DATES:** 9 March 2009 – 30 May 2009
- PLACE:** Abadía de Santo Domingo de Silos (Burgos)  
(Abbey of the Silos monastery)
- ORGANISED BY:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
- COORDINATED BY:** Carmen Román Llorente
- SPONSORED BY:** Caja Círculo. Obra Social



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“Hazte ver” consists of a recording of a young woman singing to the tune of the Gregorian chant, *Salve Regina*. The haunting text, with its allusions to a voice rising like a bird in flight, came unbidden to Susan Philipsz as she mulled over her first trip to the historic abbey. Doubtless prompting her recollection were memories of the various winged creatures she had observed during that visit: carvings of heraldic birds in the cloister; flocks nesting in the ancient cypress in the courtyard; and vultures wheeling overhead in a sanctuary through which she had passed en route.

Informed by the sacred site in which it is installed, “Hazte ver”, in turn, permeates its context. As is customary in Philipsz’s work, she sings unaccompanied. Although she has no professional training her voice is limpid, artless and immediate. In revealing the breaths between phrases, and the minute pauses and inflections normally edited out from professional renderings, this recording takes on a personal intimate tone and suggests that Philipsz was performing in an intimate gathering rather than in a professional or public arena. As a result “Haste ver” integrates itself seamlessly into this sequestered ambiance, this place devoted to an inner life of meditation and reflection.

The spatial values intrinsic to sound enliven this gallery space, transforming it into a place apart. It functions expressively in the way that a soundtrack in a movie orchestrates viewers’ feeling about a place, shaping their reading of its features, and heightening their attentiveness to its character. Since Philipsz’ piece is encountered in the darkling light of the small crypt gallery, it may take on religious overtones, perhaps even conjuring an apparition. Yet, for the artist, it can also allude to the beguiling songs sung by the sirens as they lay in wait for the unwitting Odysseus to pass by. Whatever the nature of the associations the piece conjures, its triggering of memory and anticipation gradually overlay awareness of the present. “Sound-marks”, like land-marks, may become indelible: with their echoes of reveries both singular and collective they continue to resonate long in our imaginations. Since recollections are usually freighted with psychological and emotional overtones, the experience of Philipsz’ work in this charged context makes us aware that whatever what we discover will be filtered through what is already deeply embedded in our own psyches; that is, we become highly conscious how much our experience of the present is veiled by the past and, moreover, how some of the most vivid encounters are those that prove to be vehicles or channels for former dreams and desires to manifest themselves with a renewed vitality.

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Over the past decade, Susan Philipsz has created an impressive body of works based on the voice – usually her own voice – immured in a wide range of different contexts. Inspiration for these signature works comes from a variety of sources: sometimes, as here, it is an involuntary memory generated by the surroundings; at other times, it occurs as a consciously introduced counterpoint designed to imbue the site with a particular identity. The vehicles Philipsz typically chooses for her work – pop tunes, folk songs, and old favorites of various kinds, ranging from classical refrains to music hall numbers, psalms and arias – kindle dormant memories, half-buried or barely decipherable. They in turn trigger spontaneous emotional flights. At its best, this almost serendipitous reawakening of traces of the barely remembered or partially forgotten can become so potent as to transfix us, fusing sight and sound into inextricable attributes of the situation. As we parse the phrases Philipsz sings at Silos, we realize that the text is unfamiliar though the tune well known, and therefore stay with it as it unfolds, rather than drifting off into reverie as occurs with more familiar songs. “Hazte ver” is exceptional in her oeuvre on two counts: it not only employs a text probably unknown to her audience but that text has no narrative. In place of a story line, it offers an expanded image, a richly evocative visual metaphor that, set to the solemn and stately religious refrain, irresistibly conjures an image in the viewer’s mind’s eye – and perhaps also in the dimly light space suffused with the singer’s plaintive tones.