

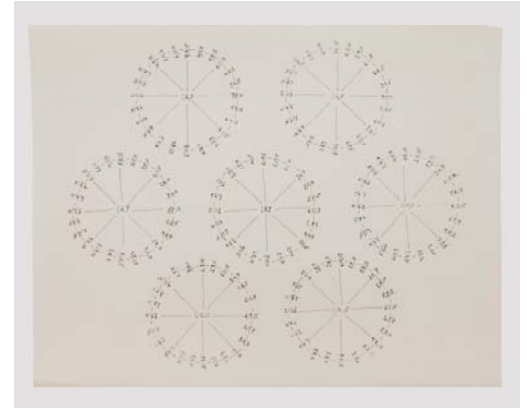
# Tom Johnson

## Logical music

**14.2 > 20.4.24**

**Opening: 14.2.24 – 19 h.**

àngels barcelona. C. Pintor Fortuny, 27



Tom Johnson (Colorado, USA, 1939) is a musician who has carried out tireless exploration in order to push the boundaries of the arts and pave new paths. Although he is more widely known as a composer, Tom Johnson is the creator of an exceptional body of visual work that runs parallel to his musical work or, to be more accurate, forms an integral part of it. At a vertex where music, minimalism, mathematics, performance and visual arts converge, Tom Johnson has been constructing a world of his own based on very complex approaches that he employs with simplicity and serenity. He was not only one of the first to speak of minimal music in 1972, but also one of the few to remain faithful to its principles.

But to better understand Johnson's work, we may need to resort to a more accurate adjective than 'minimalist'. As Gilbert Delor states: "What will undoubtedly remain Tom Johnson's main characteristic as a composer is that he was, if not the inventor, at least the most assertive and explicit promoter of what could be called logical music." Unlike many of the better-known minimalist composers, repetition and superimposition are not his aim, but a consequence of the rules. He departs from the hypnotic effect and sensory pleasure of Reich and Glass and instead allows himself to be guided by logic, and at the same time extend his field of action to the visual arts.

Over the last three decades, Tom Johnson has devoted himself conscientiously to creating a series of drawings made up of numbers and lines. They are the graphic representation of the different possibilities of the diverse formulations that define each of these series. Or in other words, the different solutions to the (mathematical) problems posed in each composition. In these works mathematics and music define the visual work, which can be interpreted either musically, as an intellectual artefact or as a simple diagram. One of these series is *Kirkman's Ladies*, which is shown here.

In 1847, an English minister and mathematician named Thomas Pennington Kirkman posed the following problem: "Fifteen young ladies in a school walk out three abreast for seven days in succession: it is required to arrange them daily so that no two shall walk twice abreast." Kirkman's schoolgirls can be considered the beginning of the combinatorial designs in *Kirkman's Ladies* (2005). It takes 35 blocks to solve the problem: five blocks a day for a seven-day week. And that is what this piece, based on rational harmonies. Its visual translation is these drawings, which, based on a highly rational approach, convey the beauty of numbers and sets.

This exhibition also presents a selection of originals from *Imaginary Music*, a book by Tom Johnson published in 1974 and composed of a selection of 104 drawings that reinterpret the motifs of musical notation to create scores that can only be performed by one's own imagination. In all cases, the drawings are hand-drawn, with an air reminiscent of the world of comics and often with a playful tone. By means of a somewhat unusual exercise, Tom Johnson transforms himself into a visual artist in order to lose control over the final form of his music.

Text by Eduard Escoffet\*

\* Text based on the research carried out for the exhibition "Tom Johnson. Illustrated Music" at the Centro José Guerrero in Granada, 26.10.23 - 28.1.24

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Tom Johnson (Colorado, 1939) is a composer who trained in several American universities and was a student of Morton Feldman. Johnson composes in the minimalist tradition. It is a term that he was the first to apply to music in an article published in *The Village Voice* in 1972 when he was a music critic. His musical structures, usually depend on logical sequences in which he explores procedures of accumulation, counting and isorhythm – procedures which have earned him the title of the founder of logical music. Johnson is best known for his operas: *The Four-Note Opera* (1972); *Riemannoper* has been staged more than 15 times since its premiere in Bremen in 1988. Perhaps his greatest work is the *Bonhoeffer Oratorio*, composed for orchestra, chorus and soloists, with German texts by the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Johnson has also composed numerous works for radio. In 1989 the Apollon publishing house published *The Voice of New*, a collection of articles of musical criticism written during the period 1971-1982. *Self-Similar Melodies*, published by Editions 75 in 1996, is the first theoretical compilation of the systems used by Tom Johnson in his work. Tom Johnson received the national award "Victoires de la musique 2000" for his work *Kientzy Loops* and was curator of the exhibition *Música silente* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2001. Since 1983 he has been living in Paris. Recently he has had the solo exhibition: "Tom Johnson. Illustrated Music" at the Centro José Guerrero in Granada, 26.10.23 - 28.1.24