

no longer sound like the built (collapsing) environment or, more broadly, like the world. Now the world sounds like Neubauten.

James Gormley

### **Jessica Ekomane/Laurel Halo**

#### ***Manifolds/Octavia***

Portraits GRM DL/LP

This split shared between Berlin based French composer Jessica Ekomane and US electronic musician Laurel Halo showcases two daring, stylistically divergent but conceptually complementary experiments. Ekomane tests just how far she can push computer generated music, detaching from traditional composition techniques and swerving towards uncanny multiphonic terrains. Meanwhile, Halo

fuses ambient and contemporary classical aesthetics, interlocking diffuse, eerie textures and flickers of melody into dense passages.

Ekomane's "Manifolds" bursts into life with a cascading cluster of sloshing, fleshy effects that roam uncomfortably across the sound field. But they dissolve almost as soon as they appear, giving way to a surge of soft, crackling dissonance. Despite its in medias res opening, the cut progresses gingerly. Synthetic noises attract each other and form serrated sonic objects, whistling as they fall in slow motion. Beneath them, a layer of fragmented mutter that could have been sourced from a broken TV bubbles up and expands, only for an array of sustained tones to sweep everything away. This process of patient mutation continues

throughout, cresting in a wave of refracting arpeggios and 8-bit bleeps. Utterly alien, utterly affecting.

Made primarily with electronics during Halo's residency at Ina GRM, "Octavia" is a decidedly more organic sounding affair that nonetheless eschews the pitfalls of monotonous ambient music. While subdued, Halo's constructs are dynamic and fluid, her touch nimble when she evolves dense string-like textures into voluminous but lightfooted drones, then fills them with sparse, meandering piano keys. The same jazzy haze that enveloped her 2023 record *Atlas* is present here, built around an abstract architecture, spectral phrases and the lonely echo of scattered piano chords. Just like the

spiderweb city from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* that inspired it, the piece balances over a precipice, its romantic surface obscured by heavy shadows. Listened back to back with “Manifolds”, “Octavia” feels like a reflection of current metaphysical tensions, but with a glimmer of hope in sight.

Antonio Poscic