

Weaving Noise / Geluid Weven — Interview

Introduction

Interview with artist Lina Maria Giraldo about the Weaving Noise / Geluid Weven installation at Merksemdok Cultural Center, December 2025.

1. Why inspire you to treat people’s emotions and stories about sound as equally important as institutional noise data?

Data is not equal—and that’s an important place to begin. We tend to rely solely on data already collected, but in many cases, that information is uneven, incomplete, or purely quantitative. Institutional datasets rarely account for cultural context, memory, stress, belonging, or the emotional impact of sound. Yet environmental noise is produced by humans and profoundly affects humans.

If we want to truly understand our environment, we can’t separate numbers from lived experience. The feelings, memories, and personal interpretations that people carry are a form of data, too. In this project, I wanted to shift away from the idea that data is purely technical and instead highlight the emotional and cultural layers that science alone cannot capture.

By creating a participatory process that removes technological barriers, I invite people to communicate through their own sensory language—how sound makes them feel, how it affects their days, how it shapes their sense of place. This emotional knowledge completes the picture that decibel measurements alone cannot show.

2. Why is it meaningful for communities like Merksem—with so many cultures and languages—to

take part in defining what their sound environment feels like?

Merksem is an incredibly diverse community, with many cultures, languages, and levels of media, data, and tech literacy. Traditional environmental data often excludes people simply because the tools were not designed for them. When information is only accessible through complex maps or technical language, entire communities are left out.

So I wanted to create a shared language that didn't rely on words: color, emotion, and sensory experience. A color palette becomes an equalizer—something everyone can interpret regardless of background.

Merksem is also uniquely positioned next to one of Europe's busiest ports and surrounded by industrial zones, which makes noise a central part of daily life. Europe has made significant efforts to address environmental equity through noise policies, and this project builds on that momentum by creating a space where residents themselves define the meaning of sound.

Coming from another country, I approached this work with humility—creating a platform where residents can express themselves without language or technical barriers. Their perspectives shape the sonic story of their own neighborhood.

3. What do you hope people experience when they compare the official noise patterns on the windows with the feeling map inside?

One of the beautiful things about public art is that it's unpredictable. Once the work exists in the world, people engage with it through their own histories, moods, and experiences.

I hope that comparing the official noise data on the windows with the emotional map inside sparks curiosity and conversation. The window decals use the same color palettes and gradients as institutional noise maps, but recontextualized within a community space. Instead of representing strict decibel levels, the interior map asks: *How does this place make you feel?*

This contrast reveals the gap between institutional knowledge and lived experience. The official maps show patterns from traffic, highways, and the port,

but they can't tell us how noise affects someone's sleep, stress, or sense of home. If people begin talking about how noise influences their daily lives, that becomes a form of environmental literacy—one rooted in community knowledge. These conversations also highlight the limitations of big data and AI systems, which are trained on historical datasets that often miss emotional or cultural dimensions. By gathering personal experiences and transforming them into color, memory, and collective expression, the project invites a more equitable understanding of environmental data.

4. What future do you see for AI systems that learn from community-generated experience instead of only scientific measurement?

I imagine a future where AI is not only trained on institutional or governmental datasets, but also on the emotional, cultural, and sensory experiences of the people who live in those environments.

In my previous work in Massachusetts, we built our own environmental sensors. That maker perspective—understanding how data is produced—helped communities reclaim ownership over their own information. When I began prototyping this noise project, I noticed that most AI systems rely on generalized sensor averages and lack any personal dimension.

So the question became: *What would it mean for AI to learn from emotion?* What if the colors people choose, the feelings they map, or the way they describe sound could become training data?

This project is an early experiment in that direction. It takes a risk by treating emotional experience as valid data. It imagines AI systems that are more equitable, more responsive, and more reflective of human experience—systems that understand noise not just as measurement, but as lived reality.

5. How has working in Merksem influenced the way you think about environmental storytelling and data?

My relationship with noise data began from afar—researching how noise is measured, how maps are produced, and how Europe approaches environmental policy. I was deeply inspired by how seriously the EU treats noise as a public health issue.

At the same time, institutional datasets often overlook the lived experiences of working-class and immigrant neighborhoods. So my role here has been to create a sandbox where official knowledge and community experience can meet.

The true heart of this project will emerge through interaction: people placing color-coded stickers on the participatory map, sharing how specific places feel, and walking through the neighborhood during the January workshop.

Working in Merksem has taught me the importance of listening first—entering with humility and letting the community guide the story. Environmental storytelling is not something I impose; it emerges through dialogue.

I'm especially grateful to community communications director Laura Vargas, whose insight into Merksem's social fabric has guided my approach. Her guidance reminded me that environmental data is more than numbers. It is a relationship.

Merksem has expanded my understanding of how environmental storytelling can honor both institutional knowledge and community wisdom.