

# Severe Tropical Storm 9301 Irma / Billy Apple

## Mary Morrison

Billy Apple integrates art with life, using his 1993 travel experience on a freighter as the basis for *Severe Tropical Storm 9301 Irma*.

In March 1993, Apple was a passenger aboard the *Chiricana*, a refrigerated cargo vessel transporting a cargo of high quality squash from New Zealand to Japan. The *Chiricana* made a detour from its predetermined course in an attempt to avoid an encounter with 9301 Irma, the rapidly escalating storm that was deemed to be approaching typhoon proportions. The work documents and encodes into art the sequence of events that took place a day out of Napier and finished a day before arrival into Osaka. Data generated by ship and storm has been collected from the ship's log book and satellite forecasting by Apple, then schematised into the visual, aural and moving image components of this installation.

Severe Tropical Storm 9301 Irma's conceptual twist is the artist's passive position in the work – instead of orchestrating art activities to produce data, it is Nature that dictates to the artist and provides the conceptual impetus. Apple's fort is his ability to use this information as the given, and to refine and present it in an art context within his own set of documentary and branding systems.

Window presents Apple's A0-sized navigation chart flanked by a full-length panel of red light on the left, and green light to the right. These colours are the nautical signs for left and right, or port and starboard, and are also integral to Apple's self-branding repertoire. The green panel positioned at precisely 332° reflects the trajectory of the *Chiricana* at the time it crossed the equator, while the red panel mirrors this angle. The equatorial line is a fundamental component in the formal language of the work, and used to divide the navigational chart into the Golden Section proportions of 1:1.618.

On this chart meteorological information has been transcribed to describe the paths of ship and storm – the latitude and longitude position of the ship is plotted in blue, while a red line demonstrates the course of the storm. As the ferocity of the storm increased it became significant on the Beaufort Wind Scale, and was subsequently named 9301 Irma. International weather agencies monitored and sent out satellite data on its behaviour, and the more ferocious Irma became the more frequent the bulletins. Red circles describe 9301 Irma's diameter, and the thickness of the line details its ferocity. At the height of the storm the wind changed direction and doubled back on itself, heading towards the *Chiricana*. Exhibited on the Window website, Apple's inaugural [net.art piece](#) is an animated sound work based on these events.

As is characteristic of this artist's work, no information in the installation has been –invented– and the music programmed by Jonathan Besser is no exception. At exactly 12 noon daily in accordance with routine ship's log entries, the sound component plays in dual mono channels. John Hurrell writes:

*Two separate channels for the ship and storm play simultaneously in the performance. Their scores are based on data from freighter's log book and include satellite-derived information about the storm, and so the movement of the storm and freighter shown visually is co-ordinated with the acoustic spatial movement of the two streams of music.*

*Apple and Besser's musical notation is derived from a composing system that correlates letters of the alphabet and numbers, with the twelve pitch, chromatic western scale. The first twelve letters of the alphabet are paired up with the twelve individual notes of the scale, but from the thirteenth letter on, double note chords replace single notes. The thirteenth letter [i.e. M] become one and three, combining two notes, (1) A and (3) B, to make the chord. This principal continues up to the twenty-sixth letter [Z] while all numbers in the textual data have a unique note for each of the nine numerals.*

*In this method of "translation", information derived from eight positions plotted from the course of the ship and thirteen from the storm, is fed through Apple's alphabetical/numbering/notation system to generate the musical notation required for Besser's electronic sounds: brittle, bubbly, electric piano-like timbres for the ship, funky bass rhythms and harmonium-like wheezes for the storm. The Chiricana and Irma scores have names, changing positions, dates, times, velocities and directions in their underpinning texts. Other information for the ship includes visibility conditions, extent of cloud cover, wave size, barometer readings and air and sea temperatures. Storm data includes storm classification, its position in relation to land, the wind speed at its centre, and the distance from its centre of radiating 30 knot winds.*

John Hurrell, Curator of Art, Waikato Museum of Art and History, 2001

Severe Tropical Storm 9301 Irma is in its third incarnation at Window. Previous versions have been exhibited in 1998 at Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, and in 2001 at the Waikato Museum of Art and History. Each new installation has seen an evolution in the work. At Window the architectural and conceptual spaces of the project's Online/OnSite configuration has provided the basis for Apple's addition of the port/starboard and web-based components.

Mary Morrison, March 2005

Links

<http://www.window.auckland.ac.nz/archive/0503Tropical/default.php>

<http://www.billyapple.com>

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