

## Jennie C. Jones at CAMH: Combining Art and Sound in Engaging Ways

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As a kid growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, Jennie C. Jones was exposed to music from a very early age, through both music lessons and her mother's record collection, but it wasn't until the artist was in her early thirties that she began to incorporate sound and audio devices into her visual work.

Jones had an epiphany when she realized how much time and effort she put into choosing the music she wished to listen to while working on art, and how large a connection sound and music had on the creative process. Newly aware of the way art and sound were linked, she began to explore that relationship across a variety of mediums.

Walking into "Jennie C. Jones: Compilation," which is being exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Museum through March 27, I was first struck by how spare many of the walls look — Jones's work is minimalist and much of it is small to medium-size, so her work doesn't fill the room in a way that some larger pieces might. But after a few minutes, something interesting began to happen — I gradually became aware of unexpected sounds intruding upon the otherwise mostly silent space. At first the crackles and pops I heard surprised me, and I wondered if the source of those sounds was an accidental encroachment of street noise or something else from outside the museum. Then, after a few moments, I realized that small speakers were discreetly located around The Brown Foundation Gallery and that the entire space was "alive" with sound in a way that most art shows are not. The effect is profound, because the ambient sound piece being played complements Jones's visual art in a way that draws the viewer in, bridging the gap between aural and visual mediums.

The minimalist style Jones has mastered lends itself to that connection between listening and seeing. Her "acoustic paintings," for instance, resonate on several different levels — painted canvases combined with black acoustic absorber panels have a stark, minimalist look, but also suggest moments of silence, employing a material traditionally used to dampen sound. Jones, who is an African-American artist, is also interested in exploring ways that avant-garde art and musical histories have often omitted contributions by artists of color. Jones's use of monochromatic black surfaces in her acoustic paintings plays with the concepts of sound and minimalist visual cues and the idea of "black" as a social construct. She uses color, but sparingly and to great effect — some of Jones's paintings have brightly colored edges that reflect on the gallery's wall almost as if they were illuminated in some way. The effect is a dramatic surprise, and quite interesting.

Jones's earliest works on display are small drawings that are literal references to objects that create or record sound. The minimalist drawings portray speakers, earbuds, audio cables and pieces of commercial audio packaging — economically penned, and using blank space to create an interesting balance. Speakers and audio cables seem to hang in space, waiting to come alive and transmit sound. Jones's more recent drawings are representations of staff paper and musical scores, evoking the visual immediacy of sheet music, with a much greater sense of visual flair.

The exhibition also has several of Jones's sculptures on display, all of which have or suggest an acoustic purpose of some kind. For instance, *Duchamp's Inner Ear* is a very recent piece created from a repurposed 1923 Victrola part and acrylic paint, its name a playful tribute to Marcel Duchamp, another artist who made clever use of found objects. There is a room tucked around a corner of the exhibit with dark painted walls and a bench for visitors to sit on while listening to a 29-minute loop of 14 different sonic pieces that Jones composed. It's an interesting and engaging way to decompress and process all the information taken in previously, and ties together the visual representations of sound and how different artistic mediums share certain attributes with each other.

"Jennie C. Jones: Compilation" is an immersive experience that engages the viewer on several different levels. It displays an impressive body of work, and tears down the walls separating art

and music. It's an excellent mid-career survey of an artist who uses minimalism to great effect while asking us to think about how we look at and listen to the world around us.