



Elana Mann

Meet me in the vortex.

We can each say with authority what our listening feels like: the sensation of being audience, of communal engagement with sound. When we actively listen together—in order to gather more closely, to translate, to build connections (however ephemeral)—the question arises: what does listening

look like (as Mann's *A List of the Sounds That Have Reverberated Through My Body* asks)? What shape does listening take? Further still, what does listening *do*?

Philosopher Gemma Fiumara describes listening as the fundamental openness that makes thinking together possible: however free we may be to speak, we must be able to listen first.¹ Elana Mann's protest instruments (like finely-crafted questions) create and hold this fundamental openness in a vortex of form, utility, and power.

As a chord derives its precise character from the plurality of voices it contains, each instrument presents the possibility of representing—giving voice to—those who play it. Instruments used in protest present a meaningful distinction between the sound of separate instruments joined together when played, as in an ensemble—and the sound of a single, collective instrument requiring coordinated activation by a group of players.

This distinction can be seen throughout Elana Mann's work, as one of serial, collaborative invention, with a characteristic porosity between collective, participatory, and community-based platforms: *The Take a Stand Marching Band* (2017), *Chats About Change* (2015), *Grand Rounds* (2014), *re-re-roar.org* (2013-ongoing), *The People's Microphony Camerata* (2012), *ARLA* (2011), *Eternal Network News* (2010-11), *Exchange Rate: 2008* (2008), *Chan & Mann* (2005-ongoing). One might say these projects are related, like songs in the same key, by a harmonic continuity, a common resonance around the themes of political protest and direct action.

While protest in itself may require no materials—only a pulsating, social subject—the pressed handprints which surround the massive vortex of Mann's megaphone speak to the life of an object used to amplify, focus, and resist. This sculpture is one iteration of the ongoing work of revealing the shape of listening, drawing its inspiration from the *Mega-kazoo-horn*, a one-of-a-kind instrument historically used in political actions, now held at the Folk Music Center and Museum in Claremont CA. Instruments of protest, like political systems themselves, should perhaps always be prototypes, built and re-built in perpetual ad hoc processes that consider the latent histories and possible futures which objects fuse together. In contrast, the other side of protest—the side of power—prefers its designs to be perfectly complete, with inflexible patterns of use, to fix the future in place, to forget the past.

Tuning the sounds produced by these contingent instruments is like cooking a familiar recipe with the ingredients one happens to have on hand: neither planned, nor entirely left to chance.² That is to say, these instruments can't be played wrongly. Their utility, as symbols or as sound makers, is solidly visible, precise and durable. Anyone can pick them up, turn them around, put them to use. For the participatory sculptures *Hands-up-don't-shoot-horn* (2015-16) and *histophone* (2014-16), reversibility—moving from listening objects to speaking objects and back again—is an essential feature derived from how they are used by people in the world. In use, the instruments become tools for the articulation of common language, skills, memories and rituals—their generative use in the opera *Unseal Unseam* by composers Sharon Chohi Kim and Micaela Tobin being one stand-out example. The music we make when we play these instruments reveals sound in its most fundamental form: a disturbance that travels. Through the air, the ocean, the floor, bodies, against walls, by way of musical instruments, orchestras, and sculptures; it repeats and reinforces, it leaves remarkable shapes in its wake. Full of metaphors, sound is a natural material for considering the amplification and distribution of power: rhythmic or resonant, harmonic or dissonant, piercingly loud or whisper-silent. As objects to be performed, always already moving into action, these instruments make music *possible*—allowing for a unique form of virtuosity that modulates between vulnerability and power, where listening finds its form as a mobilization, a vortex.

Luke Fischbeck

Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

Education
MFA, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA, 2007

BFA, Washington University in St. Louis, MO, 2003

Selected exhibitions

2018
Instruments of accountability, Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, CA (solo)

The Incongruous Body, American Museum of Ceramic Art, Pomona, CA (group)

2016
The Assonant Armory, Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles, CA (solo)

Talk through the Hand, Baik Art, Los Angeles, CA (solo)

CHAFIVAFIA, CentroCentro, Madrid, Spain (group)

2015
Laugh-in, Art, Comedy, Performance, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, La Jolla, CA (in collaboration with Audrey Chan as Chan & Mann)

Selected Awards and Residencies

2019
Stone & DeGuille Contemporary Art Award
Artist-in-Residence at the Los Angeles Clean Tech Incubator (AIP at LAC)

¹ Gemma Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London, Routledge, 1990).
² From conversation with the artist, 17 October 2019.

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Instruments of Accountability, installation view at Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, CA, 2018. Photo: Michael Underwood.

Take a Stand Marching Band, documentation at May Day March, Los Angeles, CA, 2017. Twenty sculptures and performers. Photo credit: Nick Popkey.



histophone, 2016. Plastic, enamel. 5.25 x 13.25 x 5.5 inches. Photo: Ruben Diaz.



The Donald Trump(et), 2016.
Bronze, 18k gold. 33 x 12 x 12 inches.
Photo credit: Ruben Diaz.

#me-too-rattle-battle (F.U.J.M.+S.S.),
from the Blame-game Rattle series, 2018.
Ceramic, wood, glass. 6 x 9 x 16 inches.
Photo: Michael Underwood.

No! (*agitation rattle*), documentation from Never Again is
Now protest, Japanese American National Museum,
Los Angeles, CA, 2019.
Ceramic, glass, wood. Photo: the artist.

