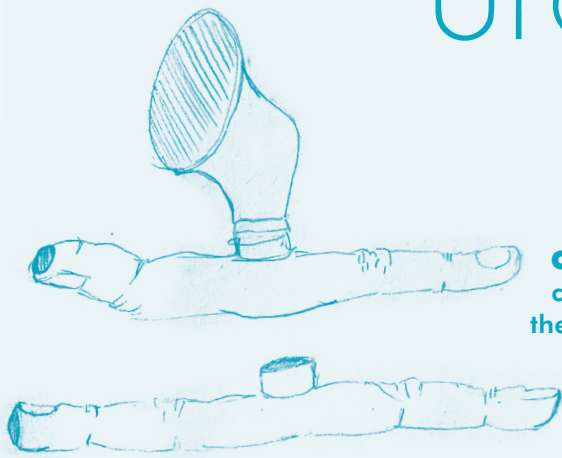


ELANA MANN AND CIARA ENNIS IN CONVERSATION

urgency & echo



Sketch for *me-and-you-kazoo*, 2016, graphite on paper, 8.5" x 11"

Ciara Ennis: I'd like to start this conversation by discussing the influence that the late queer Tejana composer and musician, Pauline Oliveros, has had on your work, specifically her ideas on "deep listening," which she defined as, "listening in every possible way to everything possible."¹ How does "deep listening" manifest in your practice?

Elana Mann: Pauline Oliveros' music does something remarkable: her compositions ask listeners to explore both inner and outer experience simultaneously. Her pieces often direct you to listen to your own sounds while listening to others. Oliveros' "deep listening" philosophy and compositions are intrinsically connected to the study of consciousness while at the same time, they bring a greater awareness to one's environment, both natural and social. She has discussed the social aim of her work as promoting healing and building peace in society.

Like Oliveros, my artwork has the social and political goal of healing, promoting peace, and spreading equanimity, though I engage with protest environments and social movements more directly. I have studied Oliveros' compositions and theory alongside workshops in Non-Violent Communication, Council (a group dialogical form used in prisons and schools), and Industrial Workers of the World community organizing. All of these trainings feed back into my artwork involving people and materials.

The interplay between listening to inner and outer experience has guided my artwork for many years. For example, the *me-and-you-kazoo* in the *Instruments of Accountability* exhibition have fingers pointing away and towards the one playing the instrument, implicating both the other and the self in the same breath. Emitting a shrill (yet not unpleasant) hum, the kazoos indicate the space of "deep listening" in which one can develop an understanding of one's own needs and a curiosity about others' needs. This space linking individual to community is also key to effective social justice work.

CE: As a feminist, Oliveros sought to call attention to the gendered aspect of music, which she explored in her *New York Times* article "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers,"² but also to the entrenched roles attached to the production and reception of music—active performers versus passive listeners. As your sculptural-horn hybrids can be used by anyone—professional musicians as well as those without musical training—are you attempting to challenge these rigid binaries determining who, what, and how participation can occur?

EM: I have no formal musical training. Oliveros' text scores were my gateway to experimental music-making and helped widen my own spectrum of appropriate, pleasurable, and satisfying sounds.

With my sculptural instruments, I strive to democratize experimental sound, so that anyone can fool around with noise-making, not just highly trained musicians or sonically fearless kids.

The sculptural instruments are extremely easy to use, lightweight, and portable, so they can be taken to the street or to the concert hall. These objects harken back to art historical movements, like Fluxus and the Feminist Art Movement, that attempted to break down the barriers between art and viewer, art and life, and art and politics. But unlike the "un-art" or "non-art" creations of these aforementioned movements my sculptural instruments are highly crafted objects that read as artworks. The forms of my pieces are playful and surreal, drawing in a viewer/participant with their level of finish that mimics more traditional musical instruments. Listener becomes performer, impromptu concerts happen, protests become musical, music becomes protest and so on. There is so much policing and shame around who can make (what) sounds in public. I want my sculptures to help liberate the voice and body to clamor, clatter, blast.

CE: In previous conversations you have often discussed listening as a political act, can you elaborate on this and discuss how it relates to the *Instruments of Accountability* exhibition?

There is so much policing and shame around who can make what sounds in public. I want my sculptures to help liberate the voice and body to clamor, clatter, blast.

EM: People typically ascribe speaking up and speaking out with action and power; many view listening as passive and powerless. However, being an ethical and active listener does not mean being silent. Rather, true listening involves the greatest powers we have as humans: the power of empathy, the power to heal, and the power to change. *Instruments of Accountability* had many paths to activate and empower ears and voices, through experimental instruments, musical scores, installation, participatory artworks, and sound interventions.

Leaders have ruled through authoritarian shouting for millennia, and we are on the edge of destroying our world and ourselves. Now is the time for the opposite approach: to listen, to empathize, to encourage a plurality of voices, and hopefully humanity will survive.

CE: Your hybrid sculptural-horn forms have been used as tools for protest on many occasions, when were they used most effectively and how would you characterize audience interaction and participation in those events?

EM: I began creating the first sculptural instruments, the *histophone* and *hands-up-don't-shoot-horn* with an eye towards using them in protests and propaganda. They function as megaphones, amplifying a speaker's voice through passive sonic technology that does not involve electronics.

I have used my sculptural instruments within the street performance troupe that I founded called "Take a Stand Marching Band." The idea for this troupe began at the principal Women's March on January 21, 2017. This march was an outpouring of both outrage and creative fury: the signs, the chants, the costumes, the choreography all helped to give the movement visibility and embolden those involved. I brought my *histophone* sculpture and saw how the piece made people laugh, listen, and slow down for a moment.

I like to think of what I do as "parallel play"—a term I have come to know well as a mother. "Parallel play" describes kids playing side by side, interested in what one another is doing and happy for the company, but not seeking to have control over the play space. In a march or protest "Take a Stand Marching Band" is playing seriously alongside other activists, cheerfully supporting, sharing space, and adding another kind of creative energy to the environment.

CE: How do the *blame-game rattles* and *me-and-you-kazoos* in *Instruments of Accountability* augment your panoply of protest tools?

EM: Both the *blame-game rattles* and the *me-and-you-kazoos* point to, literally and figuratively, the cultural dynamics of responsibility, condemnation, guilt, and censure, forces which have recently brought great restoration and pain to our society. The form of these works, with fingers directed away and towards the person holding the instrument, highlights how the act of blame involves the one criticizing

just as much as the one being judged. As I was creating the *blame-game rattles* my attitudes changed, from perceiving blame as purely negative to thinking about blame in a more generative light. The shapes of the rattles reflect this shift. For instance, one of the rattles has women's fingers united in one direction, showing the strength of solidarity we have seen in such movements as #metoo and #timesup.

The *blame-game rattles* and the *me-and-you-kazoos* add different sounds (percussive and vibratory) to my series of sculptural instruments. They take some pressure away from the voice to produce and perform and allow other noises to resound and rumble.

CE: Collaboration and participation are two major strands in your work. This aspect of your practice is particularly apparent in *Instruments of Accountability*, which features scores by a variety of composers, artists, and poets. On the one hand, this speaks to your rich and varied interdisciplinary practice, on the other hand, to a conscious effort to blur, or rather share, authorship—would this be a correct assessment?

EM: For *Instruments of Accountability* I commissioned four composers/teams to create original pieces for my sculptural instruments, and I also included two previously composed pieces: all of them were displayed in the gallery and are reproduced here in this book.

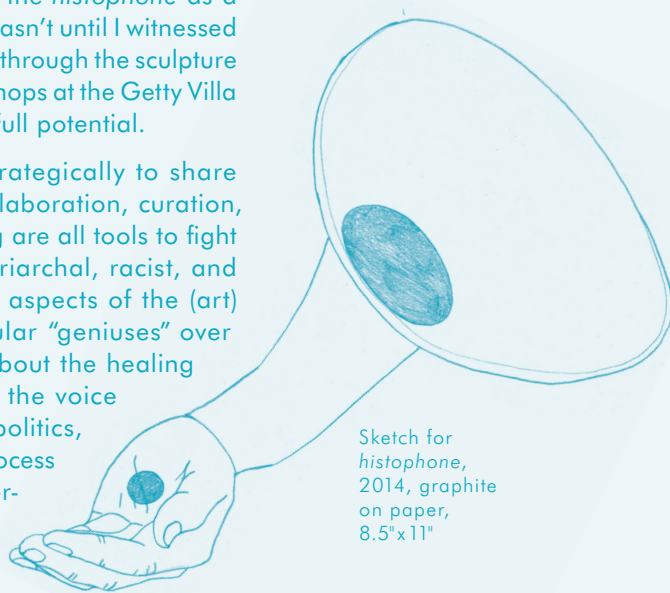
Since the instruments are made for use, I want to explore the full potential of how they can be employed, and I learn so much by noticing the ways other people interact with my artwork. In fact, I first designed the *histophone* as a listening device and it wasn't until I witnessed someone making noise through the sculpture during one of my workshops at the Getty Villa that I began to see its full potential.

I use collaboration strategically to share space and power. Collaboration, curation, organizing, and writing are all tools to fight against the elitist, patriarchal, racist, and economically unequal aspects of the (art) world that value singular "geniuses" over community. Artwork about the healing power of listening, or the voice in protest, or gender politics, needs to engage in a process of dialogue and conversation that reflects the content. And working with your friends can be a lot of fun!

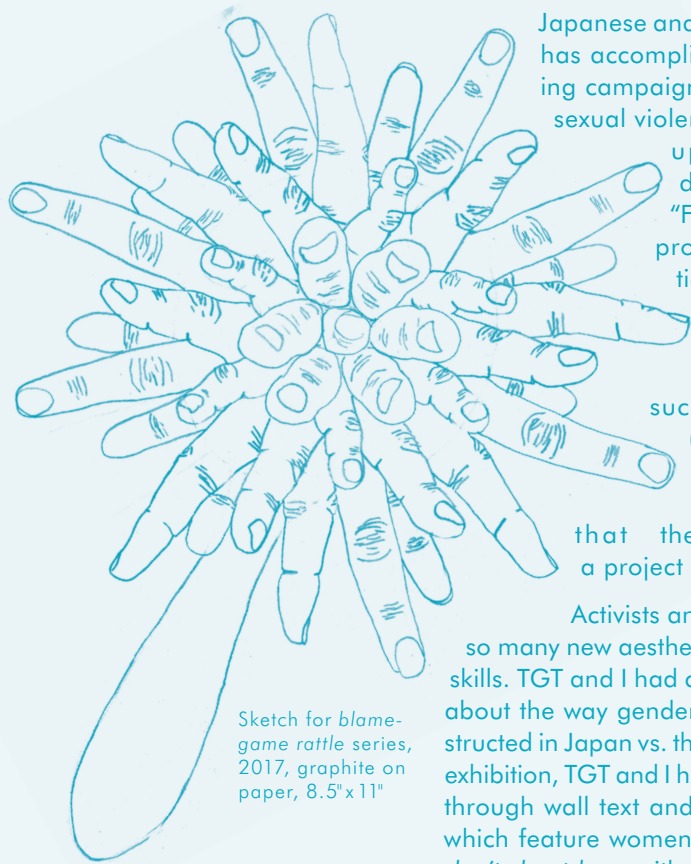
CE: Similarly, *Instruments of Accountability* also presents a collaborative work with Tomorrow Girls Troop (TGT), the self-described "world-wide feminist activist art collective," which takes the form of posters—can you discuss your decision to work with TGT?

EM: I met TGT through "Take a Stand Marching Band's" participation in the 2017 May Day March in downtown Los Angeles. I was struck by the effectiveness of TGT's activism and how they negotiate complicated gender politics in

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Sketch for *histophone*, 2014, graphite on paper, 8.5"x11"



Sketch for *blame-game rattle series*, 2017, graphite on paper, 8.5"x 11"

Japanese and Korean societies. TGT has accomplished so much, including campaigns that helped change sexual violence laws in Japan and updated an archaic definition of the word "Feminism" in the most prominent Japanese dictionary. Although I have experience working with community organizers in past projects, such as "Grand Rounds" (2014) and "Listening as (a) movement" (2013), this was the first time that the aesthetic choices of a project were also co-created.

Activists and organizers teach me so many new aesthetic, social, and political skills. TGT and I had countless conversations about the way gender is legislated and constructed in Japan vs. the United States. For the exhibition, TGT and I highlighted our dialogue through wall text and collaborative posters, which feature women playing the *hands-up-don't-shoot-horn* with the slogan "A woman's place is in the house and the senate" in English and "Gender Equality at Home and in Politics" in Japanese. The project also has a pedagogical aim—teaching about the stranglehold of patriarchy and misogyny across cultures.

CE: Tucker Neel's *323 Projects* is also part of your exhibition. Can you describe your participatory work with this nomadic exhibitionary space and how it resonates with *Instruments of Accountability*?

EM: My collaboration with *323 Projects* came out of my desires to transform the Pitzer College campus into a sound vessel and include the voices of students in the exhibition. Visitors were encouraged to leave a message with their thoughts about the question "What if women were in charge?". Selected messages were played through Pitzer College's clocktower during the run of the show. Thus, the *323* telephone piece penetrated gallery walls and gender norms, connecting the gallery space with the other spaces of the College, and with broader political struggles in our society.

The timing of this piece could not have been more apt: the exhibition opened the week after Dr. Blasey Ford and Judge Kavanaugh testified in front of the country and the world over Kavanaugh's alleged attempted rape of Dr. Ford when they were teenagers. What this testimony and subsequent confirmation of Judge Kavanaugh illustrated so clearly is that the political elite in the U.S. don't believe in, or care about, women's stories. And even though women can be just as sexist as men, men are the main perpetrators and enforcers of patriarchy. The *323 Projects'* piece asked people to examine the relationship of gender to power and imagine what a different future could look like.

CE: In *Instruments of Accountability*, the seventeenth-century polymath and curator, Athanasius Kircher, features prominently

both in the *Songbook* and exhibition as represented by his diagrams and drawings of proto listening devices. In referencing Kircher was it your aim to excavate a history of innovative sound apparatuses, which in Kircher's case included "speaking trumpets" hidden in sculptures³ or was there another aspect of his practice that was inspirational?

EM: I had a number of Athanasius Kircher's speculative sound drawings up in my studio walls for years and eventually these drawings gave me the permission to start envisioning my own sculptural instruments. I couldn't help but connect his obsession with the magnification of sound (Kircher invented the first megaphone) to my obsession with the amplification/distribution of power (the megaphone in context).

As I started researching Kircher more, I was drawn to his mystical musings, in which he tried to understand the laws and forces that govern the world. Kircher's sonic diagrams, some of which were featured in *Instruments of Accountability*, relate to sacred geometries like mandalas (also an interest of Oliveros). Beyond their political aspirations, my instruments are interwoven within my spiritual upbringing. For instance, the *histophone* and *hands-up-don't-shoot-horn* connect to the purpose and function of a Jewish Shofar (ritual ram horns that are blown during the Jewish New Year celebration and at other times of strife and struggle).

It is a painful time for me to wrestle with my Jewish identity. The lack of Israeli listening/empathy towards Palestinians and other Jews is destructive, traumatic, and tragic. With antisemitism on the rise, Jews are being killed in mass shootings. Perhaps my artwork about increasing listening and fostering healing in society is a way for my own inner and outer awareness to intermingle and co-exist.

CE: While Kircher connects your exhibition to a seventeenth-century wunderkammer, the inclusion of the *Mega-Kazoo-Horn* on loan from the Folk Music Center in Claremont links the show to a contemporary (albeit unconventional) museum. Can you discuss your rationale for including this object and its relationship to histories of protest?

EM: The Folk Music Center and Museum is a treasure, filled with classical and folk instruments, a collection of sculptures from all over the world, and personal memorabilia. It is also a community space, hosting concerts and other gatherings. When I found the *Mega-Kazoo-Horn* there I had a eureka moment—of course other folks have been creating custom protest instruments, too! The *Mega-Kazoo-Horn* was produced with a similar intent as my sculptural instruments. It was designed in the '70s to amplify the sounds of six kazoo players, who marched with the giant horn during protests. I was thrilled that the Folk Music Center allowed me to display their family heirloom as part of the exhibition. The *Mega-Kazoo-Horn* reveals the historical continuum of creative protest and gives hope that there will always be people struggling to create a more equal and just world for everyone.

¹ Pauline Oliveros, "Acoustic and Virtual Space as a Dynamic Element in Music," *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 5, 1995, 19-22.

² Pauline Oliveros, "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers," *New York Times*, September 13, 1970.

³ Paul Findlen discusses Athanasius Kircher's listening and speaking devices that were installed in his wunderkammer in "Sites of Knowledge," *Possessing Nature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 1996), 107. A speaking trumpet was hidden in the *Delphic Oracle* and a thirty-foot speaking tube allowed him to communicate with viewers in his museum from his living quarters. The Museum of Jurassic Technology features a wing dedicated to Kircher's experiments with catoptrics and magnetism.