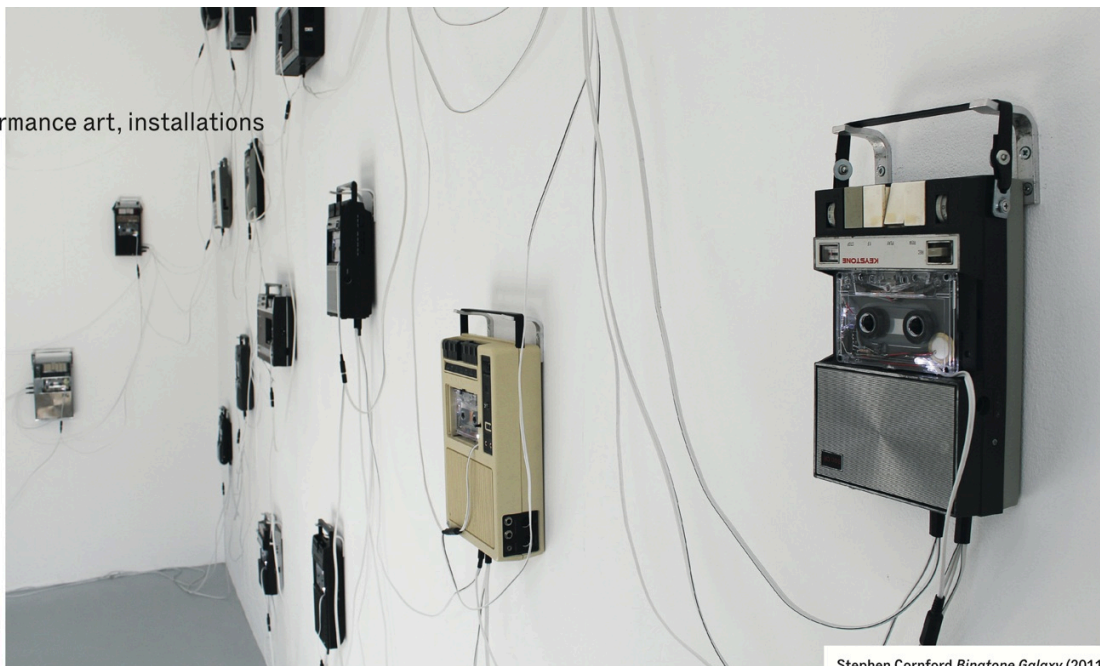


On Site

Exhibitions, performance art, installations



Stephen Cornford *Binatone Galaxy* (2011)

Stephen Cornford *Binatone Galaxy*

Campbell Works, London, UK

On the walls of a white room, brightly illuminated with natural light, Stephen Cornford, an artist who describes his work existing at the “intersection of sculpture and music”, has mounted some 30 old cassette recorders. Models from Boots, Sanyo, Robotic, one lone and gorgeously named *Binatone Galaxy*: they all hang on the walls, wired up, tapes loaded and ready for action. Smitten by an attack of technological melancholia, the visitor can wonder who owned these things, what pop charts did these machines once record? Were they ever placed next to pillows, late at night, for surreptitious listening pleasures? What

happened to the voices that once rubbed the magnetic heads of these little machines?

For some artists, the speed (and resulting impact) of obsolescence on the technology that we once took for granted has spawned a form of fetishism, in which the voices – the human agency – they once recorded exist in an alternate, ghostly dimension, a reminder of what once was. This is not Cornford’s theme. The fact that each audio cassette in his machines is fitted with a motion sensor and a contact mic, so that, on entry, the machines whirr into action, indicates that *Binatone Galaxy* is very much of the here and now. Yes, Cornford has chosen old, cheap and accessible technology with which to realise this, but I suspect that he is aiming for a fur4554uuuzy audio intimacy.

The sensitivity of the mics is such that Cornford achieves this well. Each audio cassette becomes not simply a means of playback, but its own indeterminate instrument. It works as long as there is movement to activate it – and like Alvin Lucier’s *I Am Sitting In A Room*, a soundwork which places sonic decay at its heart, each little soundworld within *Binatone Galaxy* ripples out to form continually newer and fainter ones. It doesn’t take long for the noises generated by the playback operations to suggest their own fantasised sounds: the clapping of horses’ hooves on the cobblestones outside is one (Campbell Works is situated in a former Stoke Newington brewery); a pulsating brassy sound is another. The effects are

surprisingly rich in timbre and intensity. The visitor becomes an unwitting conductor, as sensors will switch off unless continually activated, so tempi and volume change constantly. Combined, there is a continual kinetic activity and rhythm to the piece.

There is a practice of deliberate, anarchic displacement, an effort to place things where they shouldn’t be, that is central to Cornford’s work. It’s in *Trespassing The Olympic Site*, a series of actions in which he tried (with varying success) to penetrate Fortress Olympics in East London, as much as in *Battery Acid*, scored for car battery, wires and mic cables. The results are not only playful, but a necessary retaliation to all forms of authority, audio and otherwise.

Loise Gray

Jennie C Jones *Absorb/Diffuse*

The Kitchen, New York City, USA

Jennie C Jones’s *Absorb/Diffuse* is an exploration of graphic notation as an immersive sensory experience. The show, exhibited at the Kitchen in New York from 8 September to 29 October, includes two works: a series of paintings using absorber and diffuser panels entitled *Acoustic Paintings* (2011) and a sound composition, *From The Low* (2011), broadcast through the gallery on a four channel sound system. Motivated by the notable lack of African-Americans in the modernist canon, Jones sees her practice as an attempt to draw out the parallels between the march of modernist art in the 20th century, especially in the United States, and the developments of avant garde jazz during this same period. Both movements share a focus on abstraction and stripped down, minimalist forms – approaches central to much of Jones’s work.

Graphic notation, in many instances, permits a freeing up of interpretation by

the player, but *Absorb/Diffuse* suggests removing the musician from the process altogether to allow the symbol to ‘speak’ in conjunction with its surroundings. Constituted from soundproofing materials, The graphic symbols found in the *Acoustic Paintings* have the capacity to silence the deep reverberations of *From The Low*. Their sound-cancelling properties subtly interplay with the amplified piece, ultimately enclosing the viewer within the composition itself.

The placement of *Acoustic Paintings* is strategic: large rectangular blocks are placed on the wall around the gallery, with measured blank spots between them. The geometrically precise placement of these stark blocks possesses a strong visual correspondence to Morton Feldman’s graphic notation for his *Projections* (1951), and the effect, seen from further away, indicates that they are indeed part of a larger score. A number of the paintings layer the black and tan soundproofing panels on top of black canvas, with single stark, contrasting lines of hot pink paint

nestled on the side. One exception to the series is a five-part painting entitled *Long, Low, Rest (semibreve)* (2011), which stretches a grey semibreve (or musical rest) across a white background, denoting silence, while the other wall pieces *act as* silence. This work employs the strategies of Jones’s older drawings such as *The Walkman Compositions* (2008–09), where she pulled out design elements used on the exterior casing of popular Walkman models, such as the Sanyo FM and the Sony WM-18, and drew them in isolation. The drawings, like the *Acoustic Paintings*, provoke a familiarity with an object or context (in the case of *Long, Low, Rest (semibreve)*, the sheet music) that is absent.

This same effect is at play in *From The Low*, which projects sound from above on suspended speakers, and from below via a thunderous subwoofer on the floor. The composition is an ominous dark rumble of low frequency samples appropriated from jazz and classical music, ranging from musicians and composers like Charles Mingus, JS Bach, Ray Brown,

Sergei Prokofiev and Arvo Pärt, frequently interspersed with silence. One might briefly recognise an upright bass solo or violin strings before they’re subsumed in the larger stretch of sound, or sudden pauses. In weaving these multiple sources together, Jones had to attune herself to their acoustic physicality. The distribution of the overhead speakers and subwoofer permit the viewer to not only hear but feel the sound. During one of the main movements within the piece, the subwoofer emits a barely audible, but intensely physical low rhythmic pulse, while pockets of bass feed in and out from above.

Jones’s previous sound works have been attentive to the voices of celebrated African-American singers, such as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Nina Simone – separating their voices out from the musical accompaniment to give new voice to the voiceless. In *Absorb/Diffuse* this intention took on a new form, with ‘voice’ becoming an enveloping presence within the exhibition space.

Ceci Moss