

JENNIE C JONES

by William J Simmons

photography by Khary Simon



WS: I'd love to hear more about your combination of visual art with the musical lineages you cite.

JCJ: I've been searching for a long time to find a word that's not "permission." The more I started unpacking and investigating avant-garde modes of music from African Americans, and finding a parallel in art history - where art history and music

history collide and smash up as disciplines - I felt that music history gave me "permission" to explore abstraction through the conceptual lens of the sonic. I was thinking about the expectations of Black women artists and what kinds of images they produce and how they participate in the art world - music kicked the door open. I've truly had to fight to get out there. It has been very difficult to be a minimalist or invested in abstraction, or put something as non-sellable as sound in a white box gallery context. Only in the last few years has this come in to vogue.

WS: This seems to allude both to a lineage of exclusion and a generative space. How does that operate for you?

JCJ: It connects, in a weird way, to punk, and being a punk kid in the 80s. I still have a little part of me that wants to punch holes in the system or kick doors down. It reminds me of Miles Davis facing away from the audience when he played. This comes up again with Agnes Martin and the title of the documentary about her *With My Back to the World* - to think about what it means to reject that double consciousness, to either talk about your rejection or operating inside of rejection. To woodshed, like musicians once did, to lock yourself away and sort it out. But then you'll go back into the world with that same energy. It's very protective. That's also why I'm a small, one-woman show with no assistants. I like my hands on all the stuff I make. Actually, I really dislike reading my "voice" as it



Jennie C. Jones
Silent Clusterfuck (bianca), 2013
Earbuds and acrylic
25 x 3 x 2 inches
63.5 x 7.6 x 5.1 cm

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relates to the work—especially since, like music it operates outside of language.

WS: How does that process of revealing yourself and not revealing yourself operate? Where do you choose to reveal yourself?

JCJ: I just had an intense studio day yesterday, and I see the acoustic panels as part of that restraint and hiding. Sometimes there might be something gestural and crazy underneath which I may end up blocking out. That secretiveness is there.

WS: It's interesting – with punk, there's a secrecy to it as well, an underground. Who were you listening to in your punk days?

JCJ: Or a subculture. Undergrounds and subcultures can't exist anymore. It crosses over in five seconds and becomes a viral thing. I remember seeing safety pins in Urban Outfitters and remember feeling genuinely acknowledged as a freak or a rebel for doing that in school. It was so outrageous that I would rip my father's military jacket and put safety pins on it! Punk stuff: I used to listen to CAN. I was fascinated with CAN for a while because they had a black lead singer. I listened to Crass and Black Flag and The Dead Milkmen and Sex Pistols. It was very of the moment. But also Alice Coltrane, a similar gesture and intention.

WS: What are you working on now?



JCJ: I am continuing with what I showed last fall. The work is more vertical. I struggle with the history of painting and the horizon line. I'm very much invested in the painting as an object, and paint as a tool that conceptual artists can use, as opposed to painting as image, window, or picture. My last show in September at Sikkema, Jenkins & Co. gallery was entitled *Amplitude* and was the first time I got expressive or LOUD. I was thinking about noise and silence. Now seems like a historic moment to make

some noise. That energy goes back to punk, and what it means to disrupt a methodology.



Jennie C. Jones
Dark Amplitude, 2016
Acoustic absorber panel and acrylic paint on canvas
48 x 36 inches
121.9 x 91.4 cm
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