

# ART PAPERS



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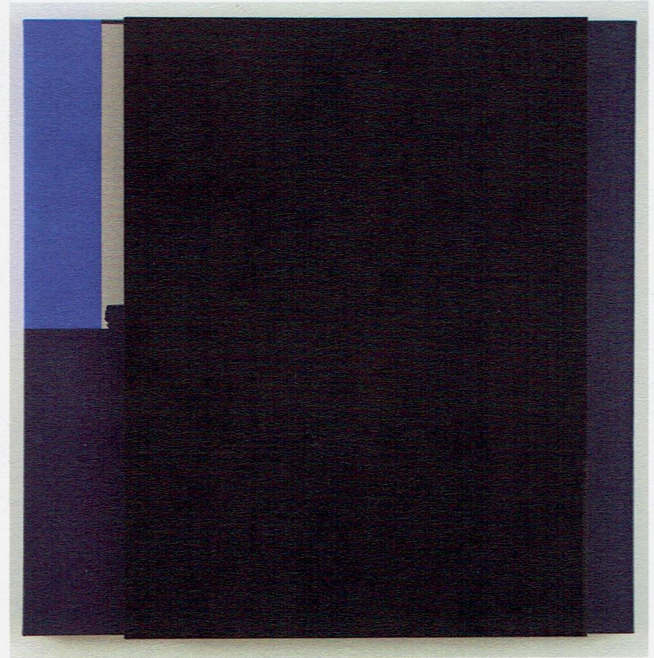
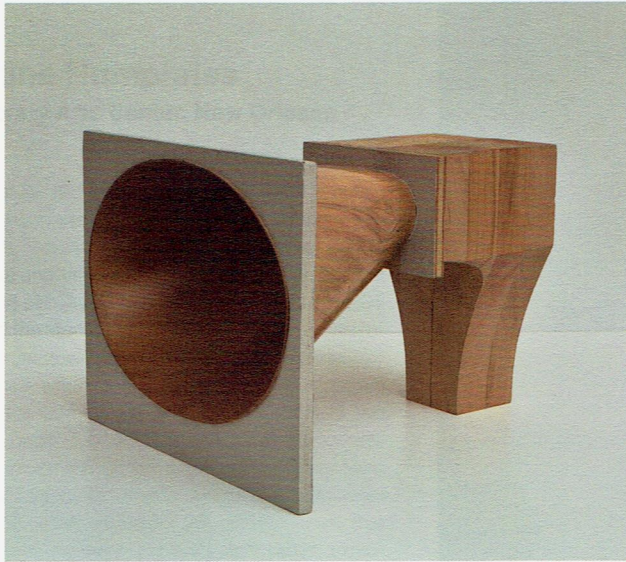
Just outside Atlanta, one of America's most diverse refugee destinations

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R.B. Kitaj, *Where the Railroad Meets the Sea*, 1964, oil on canvas [photo: Marlborough Fine Art; courtesy of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia collection, © R.B. Kitaj Estate]

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Charlotte Salomon, *Leben? Oder Theater? Ein Singspiel*, (circa 1941–1943) [© Charlotte Salomon Foundation; courtesy of the Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam]



## Jennie C. Jones: *Compilation* Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, TX

Silence—at times sobering, dissident, complacent, fearsome, and reifying—permeates the multimedia works in *Jennie C. Jones: Compilation* [December 12, 2015–March 27, 2016], the artist’s midcareer survey at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver.

Referencing—and amplifying—historical and aesthetic links between modernist painting, Duchampian readymades, jazz, and the political acoustics of recent events, Jones filled the CAMH’s first-floor gallery with early collages, works on paper, paintings, and sculptures that hum, hiss, thrum, and snap. Inspired by listening as a conceptual practice, Jones’ compositional process endows visual elements with audible qualities, and vice versa—unplugging and recontextualizing speakers, noise-cancelling instrument cables, CD racks, and acoustic absorber panels into only seemingly muted sculptural objects.

In Jones’ *Acoustic Paintings* series (2011-present), wherein absorber panels are incorporated into the works’ construction, sound waves are transposed into acrylic reds, yellows, blues, and grays to mimic the tension of tritones—in music theory, an interval of three whole tones. These minimalist, monochromatic paintings first appeared with fiery red lining the canvases’ outside edges at The Kitchen in New York in 2011, then with frenzied highlighter yellow at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC, in 2013. At the CAMH, works were marked with melancholic shades of blue, their neoned edges projecting visual vibrations onto the gallery’s white walls, where they resonated with the full sound of the last note in a song.

Jones’ *Blues in C Sharp Minor (for Teddy Wilson)* (2015) seemed to retain all ambient noise in the immedi-

ate atmosphere of the CAMH, an effect that in turn pulled the viewer into the work’s infinite minimalism. Named for a swing jazz pianist who worked with Armstrong, Holiday, Fitzgerald, Goodman, and Horne, this large, dark painting creates an unusual, absorptive silence. The work’s soft, synchronous, seemingly audible waves, punctuated by bright visual jolts, lead to an awareness of the muffling of the entire gallery space, voices and movements eerily buffered by the painting’s filtering materials.

During an artist’s tour of the exhibition, Jones related the “tenacity of maintaining blackness” as an African-American abstractionist to the muted genius of black jazz musicians who were outsung by their modernist painter contemporaries, who frequently appropriated African aesthetic traditions without consent or citation. Jones’ cool, geometric lines on paper and canvas establish a compositional bridge between jazz and modernism, and inform the viewer conceptually for a crescendo of new, timely work concerned not only with sound but also with enduring processes of silencing and erasure.

In *SHH: The Red Series* (2014), knotted noise-cancelling instrument cable is assertively mounted onto the gallery wall and constrained by cable ties—recalling recent instances of police use of deadly restraint and excessive force. *Song Containers* (2011) visualizes the evolutionary diminuendo of the physical musical album, from its vinyl to its digital forms through aluminum sculpture. *Score for Sustained Blackness* (2015), a series of works on paper slashed and struck with ink and acrylic to create handmade (but note-free) sheet music, records the violence that can fester within silence.

Jones’ *Sound Works* (2004–2014) flooded a listening room with 29 minutes of stretched, looped, and inverted audio collages, cut from segments of jazz tunes. The

silence that builds momentum throughout the show pulses into an elongated reverb in one particular audio clip, which ends suddenly in a crash of glass—a startling reset.

Houston is a brassy, busy city, yet one peppered with oases that encourage the practice of silence—the Rothko Chapel, for instance—and in 2012 the Menil Collection mounted *Silence*, which explored the absence of sound as a subject and medium in art since 1916, in a venue conceived as a quiet “place apart” for art viewing. Still, against this Texas backdrop, encountering silence visually, aurally, and conceptually in *Compilation* was jarring. Only an hour away from the CAMH was where Sandra Bland got pulled over by local authorities last summer, only to die under mysterious circumstances in police custody—one of countless instances in recent years that have revealed the deafening patterns of silence with which so much of America still complies.

—Kelly Johnson

ABOVE: Jennie C. Jones, *Blues in C Sharp Minor (for Teddy Wilson)*, 2015, acoustic absorber panel and acrylic paint on canvas; Jennie C. Jones, *Duchamp’s Inner Ear*, 2014-15 [images courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York]