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Elana Mann

10.11.16



Elana Mann, *Learning to live within the all of it, 2016.* Performance view, Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles, 2016. Diana-Sofia Estrada, Guan Rong, Justin Dixon, Janice Gomez, Atticus Korman, Derrick Maddox, and Kimberly Kim. Photo: Devon Tsuno.

Elana Mann is a Los Angeles–based artist whose interdisciplinary performance, sculpture, video work, and collaborative organizing practice address the radical political potential and material aesthetics of listening and speaking. With Robby Herbst, Mann recently organized "Chats About Change," a series of grassroots conversations with artists involved in creative social change. Here she discusses her public mural Talk Through the Hand, which is on view at Baik Art, in the La Cienega Boulevard art corridor, through December 16, 2016, and her solo exhibition, "The Assonant Armory," which is at Commonwealth & Council through November 5, 2016.

IN 2014, I started working on a series of sculptures that originated as listening devices but also function as speaking devices. I began work on *hands-up-don't-shoot-horn* during the protests in Ferguson. I went to school in Saint Louis to study sculpture as an undergrad and lived maybe ten minutes from Ferguson, so the Black Lives Matter protests there were really resonant to me. The sculpture is a cast hand that covers up your mouth, but the palm of the hand has a hole that you can speak into and the arm extends into the bell of a trumpet, so it actually works like a megaphone. I was thinking about the forces of society trying to quiet the voices of people resisting state oppression and white supremacy, and those voices of resistance still being so strong regardless.

While working on this piece, I saw a performance by LA artist Derrick Maddox in which he recounted his own experience of police brutality. I approached him and we did a photo shoot together of him interacting with the sculpture. The mural *Talk Through the Hand* at Baik Art came out of that. While working on it, I also began talking to Black Lives Matter Los Angeles organizer Shamell Bell about allyship. What does being an ally mean to specific movements and causes? Creating these kinds of dialogues is another way for me to engage and support the larger project of racial justice.

Hands-up-don't-shoot-horn is in my show at Commonwealth & Council, as is an earlier sculpture that also covers the mouth and has a trumpet shape. I made ten of each sculpture, because for me as a Jew, the number ten is very symbolic: You need ten individuals to actually make a community. There is also a singular *The Donald Trum(pet)*, a megaphone with the golden cast of an anus plugging the speaking end, effectively muting it. Anybody can use and experiment with these sculptures. Some have straps so they are easily transportable. I am excited about starting to bring these sculptures to protests or to different sites and employing them on the streets.

The horn is actually one of the first sculptures I've made that's about speaking rather than listening. Since 2010, I had been making work focused on listening as an inherently political act. When you are listening, the sounds of another body are literally penetrating your body. You can shut your eyes, but you can't shut your ears to other people's voices, both physically and metaphorically. And if you truly listen to somebody else you can't remain the same. I interviewed an Iraq War veteran about the sounds of war and did a series of listening pieces inspired by Pauline Oliveros in tandem with Occupy. At Occupy LA, the musician Juliana

Snapper and I organized a listening parade and workshops, and we performed Oliveros's scores as well as others we wrote specifically for that context. We formed an ensemble, the People's Microphony Camerata, to play with the people's mic as a political and aesthetic instrument, and we published a songbook of political music scores written by experimental composers and poets. All of this work explored ideas around the radical potential of listening in order to change society. I've come to think about listening in terms of a tuning knob. Not every voice needs to be listened to at the same volume. You have to check your own impulse to tune in, or out, too. When am I dialing down the volume when I shouldn't be? When do I need to dial up the volume because this person is saying something I really need to consider?

— *As told to Natilee Harren*

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