Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum Presents
“Directions: Jennie C. Jones: Higher Resonance”

*Artist Connects Modernist Abstraction and African American Avant-Garde Music in First Solo Museum Exhibition*

Jennie C. Jones (American, b. Cincinnati, Ohio, 1968; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York) explores the confluences between abstract visual art and African American avant-garde music in an exhibition of new work at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. On view from May 16 through Oct. 27, the site-specific installation melds paintings and sculptures with a sound piece that manipulates elements of works by experimental composers and performers. The combination testifies to Jones’ conception of abstraction as a language that can encompass cultural, political and historical ideas and can work toward spanning the critical gulf between African American and dominant modernisms.

The artist’s first solo museum exhibition, “Directions: Jennie C. Jones: Higher Resonance” is installed on the Hirshhorn’s third level, directly between single-artist galleries devoted to the abstraction of Ellsworth Kelly and Clyfford Still. Jones’ work opens up a conceptual dialogue with the modernist history embodied by these painters and extends it to encompass the music of figures such as Alvin Singleton, Wendell Logan, Olly Wilson, Alice Coltrane, Rahsaan Roland Kirk and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, whose source material she digitally “re-composes” for “Higher Resonance” (2013), the sound work that gives the exhibition its title. With looping, tempo changes and repetition, as well as the addition of silent expanses, Jones reinterprets music she has played in her studio as she works.

Jones reconfigures the contours of the gallery itself with a curved wall that visually suggests a phrase mark connecting a sequence of notes in a musical score and architecturally echoes the curved walls of the museum. The artist’s “acoustic intervention” defines a listening area for “Higher
Resonance,” encouraging visitors to move around the room and examine the resulting shifts in their perception of sound.

Jones’ Acoustic Paintings and Bass Trap Sculptures further shape the sound in the gallery. As she recently told the National Endowment for the Arts’ Art Works podcast, “Perhaps a piece of mine could read or have a relationship to someone like Ellsworth Kelly’s work, but at the same time it’s functioning in the space. It’s active. It’s affecting the sound and the environment that it’s placed in.”

Making use of acoustic absorber panels originally designed to reduce sound reflections in recording studios, Jones’ Acoustic Paintings, such as “Soft Gray Tone with Reverberation #1–4” (2013), are visually grounded in the aesthetics of minimalism and color field painting. Strips and patches of bright yellow acrylic strike bold accents, evoking the painted “zips” of Barnett Newman and, by reflecting halos of color onto the surrounding walls, suggesting both the physicality and transcendence of sound.

For “Bass Traps with False Tones” (2013), Jones alters a pair of prefabricated plywood-and-fabric acoustic bass absorbers, recording-studio fixtures that damp low-frequency sound. Painting selected planes of the plywood with vivid yellow or resonant navy blue, she emphasizes the objects’ strikingly sculptural forms and imbues them with a coloristic presence the unaltered originals lacked. Although both the Bass Traps and the Acoustic Paintings are acoustically active, Jones considers them discrete objects that can also function independently of a sound work.

Completing the installation is a series of understated screenprints published at the Lower East Side Print Shop in New York City. Made from scanned and recomposed images of roundwound, double ball bass strings and printed with transparent silver inks, “Static Reverberation/String Arrangements #1–3” (2012) visualizes the physical vibration that is the fundamental source of all sound.

Throughout the exhibition, Jones advances an interest in exactly which modernist histories are seen and heard—and thus made available for future artists to build on—and which are excluded from the dominant narrative. By emphasizing the diversity of her sources, based in art worlds that have traditionally been seen as distinct entities, and by recombing them to suit her own purposes, she claims for herself a territory not circumscribed by medium, race or social milieu, while maintaining an awareness of the way such categories have been employed divisively in the past.

In January 2013, Jones was awarded the Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, presented annually by the Studio Museum in Harlem. Established by jazz impresario George Wein to honor the
memory of his wife, the prize, which carries a $50,000 award, recognizes an “African American artist who demonstrates great innovation, promise and creativity.”

“Directions: Jennie C. Jones: Higher Resonance” is organized by associate curator Evelyn Hankins. Major funding for “Directions” is provided by Altria Group, with additional support from the Herb Alpert Foundation.

**Related Programs**

The Hirshhorn offers a range of interactive educational experiences designed to engage people of all interest levels in contemporary art. On Thursday, May 23, at 7 p.m., in the Ring Auditorium, Jones discusses her work and the connection between avant-garde musical and visual practices with Jason Moran, artistic advisor for jazz at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in the latest in the Hirshhorn’s ongoing series of Meet the Artist lectures.

Curators, scholars and other experts address “Directions: Jennie C. Jones: Higher Resonance” in depth in several Friday Gallery Talks. Scheduled speakers include Hirshhorn associate curator Hankins (June 7), WPFW 89.3 FM jazz host and Georgetown University adjunct professor Rusty Hassan (June 14) and Library of Congress curator of recorded sound Matthew Barton (Sept. 13). Visit [hirshhorn.si.edu](http://hirshhorn.si.edu) for the latest schedule. The museum’s library of podcasts, archived on its website, makes gallery walk-throughs and interviews with artists accessible internationally.

**About the Hirshhorn**

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Smithsonian’s museum of international modern and contemporary art, has nearly 12,000 paintings, sculptures, photographs, mixed-media installations, works on paper and new media works in its collection. The Hirshhorn presents diverse exhibitions and offers an array of public programs that explore modern and contemporary art. Located at Independence Avenue and Seventh Street S.W., the museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission to the galleries and special programs is free. For more information about exhibitions and events, visit [hirshhorn.si.edu](http://hirshhorn.si.edu). Follow the Hirshhorn on Facebook at [facebook.com/hirshhorn](http://facebook.com/hirshhorn) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/hirshhorn](http://twitter.com/hirshhorn). Or sign up for the museum’s eBlasts at [hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/social-media](http://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/social-media). To request accessibility services, contact Kristy Maruca at marucak@si.edu or (202) 633-2796, preferably two weeks in advance.

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