

# HAND TO YOUR EAR, PART I (PRESENCE/SURPLUS)

Alvaro Barrington, Nikita Gale,  
Jasper Marsalis, Alison O'Daniel,  
Malick Sidibé, Dominique White

Curated by Gabriella Nugent

→ 1 Holywell Lane

London EC2A 3ET

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Sound is often thought of as a sensory quality, something that we perceive through our ears. But sound is actually a vibration, a vibration of waves and those waves coming into contact with us. Sound can be described as a method of contact: something strikes our ear drums, making an impression on our ears that registers as sound. To speak about sound is to therefore speak about touch and being touched. Drawing from theorists such as Tina Campt and Fred Moten, *Hand to your ear* conceives of sound as a haptic and corporeal experience. *Part 1 (presence/surplus)* explores the connections created by sound between people and across geographies. In doing so, it examines sound as a strategy of contact, of being seen and heard by others. If sound entails an experience of visibility, *Part 2 (noise/silence)*, opening February 2022, will consider its inverse: silence and opacity, as in, apropos Édouard Glissant, the refusal to be knowable, understood and rendered transparent by a dominant Western order.

*Part 1 (presence/surplus)* considers artists for whom sound acts an impetus to their making. It examines the world views and collectives enabled by music scenes and the people and communities brought into visibility by them, exploring questions around spectacle and the experience of being seen.

The exhibition opens with photographs taken by Malick Sidibé, who, in the 1960s, was one of the first photographers in Bamako, Mali to take a lighter and cheaper 35mm camera outside the studio to capture young people at house parties. He followed the youth who were themselves following a universal youth movement. Dancing to James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, they embraced rock and roll as a liberation movement. In Sidibé's photographs, young Bamakois are posed like their idols on record albums – some pretend to ignore the camera, while others look toward it, redefining themselves through a new secular and cosmopolitan identity. The sounds and diasporic aesthetic of rock and roll offered a sense of freedom and subjectivity in opposition to the nationalist state at the time. In the mid-1960s, Mali's socialist government created a militia to monitor the behaviour of the people in conformity with teachings of socialism. The government set curfews and sent youth caught wearing mini-skirts, tight skirts, bell-bottoms and afros to re-education camps. After the military takeover in 1968, the same attitude prevailed, and soldiers would patrol the streets of Bamako in search of rebellious youth. For the independence leaders and military regime in Bamako, the youth captured in Sidibé's photographs were mimicking the culture of the coloniser. In actuality, they proposed a theory of decolonisation that could not be recognised at the time, one that travelled beyond national borders and made connections with the African diaspora and universal youth movement of the time.

If sound creates connections between people and across geographies, Nikita Gale's *LOCKED LUNGS* (2021) picks up on this experience of being together in time and space. The work comprises a four-inch acrylic record, inscribed with a locked groove, that indefinitely repeats the sound of someone inhaling and exhaling. The sound is emitted from two tiny speakers, like a pair of lungs pushing air into the gallery. For Gale, these lungs are evocative of caves, the ancestral homes of homo sapiens where people began to tell stories to one another with sounds and images. *LOCKED LUNGS* considers the presence of others, but also how presence is read in the absence of bodies. This negotiation is conveyed through the vinyl record which operates as an abstraction in the way that it occludes the physical body or the source and origins of the sound.

Both Alvaro Barrington and Dominique White ground their artistic practices in music scenes. White's work is embedded in Detroit's techno scene and the nautical myths of the black diaspora that emerged through it. As articulated in the sleeve notes from Drexciya's 1997 album *The Quest*, the group took their name from an underwater country populated by the amphibious children of pregnant African women thrown off slave ships during the Middle Passage; the babies had learned to breathe underwater in their mother's wombs. Drawing from the myth of Drexciya, White's work investigates what she terms as the Shipwreck(ed), a reflexive verb and state of being. In *Flagged Out I* (2020), White presents a tattered flag, created from a reused sail entangled with raffia threads and cowrie shells cast and coated by the artist in a ghostly shroud of kaolin clay. The work suggests both the wreckage of a ship consumed by the sea, as well as the existence of an underwater civilisation where alternate futures could transpire.

Alternatively, Barrington's *Splash em* (2021) is an homage to soca music, a genre which combines African and East Indian rhythms invented in the early 1970s by the Trinidadian musician Lord Shorty. Based on a scene from an eponymously titled music video by Trinidadian musicians Patrice Roberts, Nessa Preppy, Travis World and Dan Evens, *Splash em* offers a contemporary take on the relationship between painting and music – a lineage Barrington traces back to the history of modernism with references ranging from Wassily Kandinsky to Josef Albers. In *Splash em*, Barrington extends the space of the canvas with musical instruments originating from Trinidad and Tobago. Two steelpans hang above and below the frame, conjuring speakers that amplify the sound inherent to the painting, while, on the left-hand side, a galvanised metal garbage lid appears like an ear listening to the musicality of the work.

Allison O'Daniel's *The Tuba Thieves* (2013–ongoing) is a feature-length film in progress comprised of individual scenes that explore what it means *not* to have complete access to sound. The work began in response to tuba thefts from high schools across southern California between 2011 and 2013. O'Daniel, whose binaural hearing loss requires her to wear hearing aids and lip read, saw the loss of these instruments from the band as analogous to her daily experience of missing parts of conversations and having to fill in the gaps. The production of *The Tuba Thieves* reversed the usual process of filmmaking. O'Daniel started with finished pieces of music and wrote scenes based on these compositions commissioned from Deaf sound artist Christine Sun Kim, hearing painter and musician Steve Roden and the late hearing composer Ethan Frederick Greene. In this iteration, *The Tuba Thieves* weaves together the stories of Nyke Prince, a Deaf drummer based in Los Angeles; the marching band students impacted by the thefts; a re-enactment of the 1979 final punk show at The Deaf Club in San Francisco; and an obstacle to comprehension based on the experience of three different narratives: American Sign Language, voice-over and subtitles.

Finally, in his practice, Jasper Marsalis creates a parallel between the space of a painting and a performer on stage, both of which entail an experience of being looked at and consumed by audiences. In the three paintings that comprise *Event 7* (2021), Marsalis depicts glaring spotlights, which ironically obscure their intended object and act as obstacles to vision. The shine of the spotlights is echoed in the solder attached to two of the works, which itself reflects light, preventing further access to the canvas. In this troubling of vision, Marsalis expresses a scepticism toward the ocular centrism of painting and the associated spectacle of performance. *Event 12* (2021) comprises a canvas-based work and a bowling ball. Marsalis's artistic practice is intimately linked to his work as a musician under the moniker Slauson Malone. His performances play with audience expectations and the division between the performer and the crowd. In the same vein, *Event 12* challenges the division between artistic mediums as a solder orb emerges from the surface of an oxidised painting and a cracked purple bowling bowl whose pattern mirrors the orb sits on a bag. Meanwhile, the sculpture *L.F.W.* (2021) presents a bowling ball and a rock, a reference both to the object and the musical genre, drilled with holes. The opaqueness of these objects offers a challenge to the access expected of both performers and paintings.

- Gabriella Nugent

## ALVARO BARRINGTON

Alvaro Barrington (b. 1983 Caracas, Venezuela) lives and works in London, UK and New York, US. He graduated with a BFA from Hunter College, NY, in 2013 and completed the MFA at London's Slade School of Fine Art in 2017. His solo exhibitions have been held at South London Gallery, UK (2021); Emalin, London, UK (2021); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, FR (2021); Corvi-Mora, London, UK (2020); Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK (2019); and MoMA PS1, New York, US (2017). Barrington's work has been included in group exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Art, London, UK (2021); Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2021); and The Drawing Center, New York, US (2020).

## NIKITA GALE

Nikita Gale (b. 1983 Anchorage, AK, US) lives and works in Los Angeles, US. Gale holds a BA in Anthropology with an emphasis in Archaeological Studies from Yale University and earned an MFA in New Genres at UCLA. Gale's work has recently been exhibited at the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, US (2021); MoMA PS1, New York, US (2020); the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, US (2018); Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles, US (2018); 56 Henry, New York, US (2018); and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, US (2017). Gale's first European institutional solo exhibition will take place at London's Chisenhale Gallery in 2022.

## JASPER MARSALIS

Jasper Marsalis (b. 1995 Los Angeles, CA, US) lives and works in Los Angeles, US. He graduated with a BFA from The Cooper Union, NY, in 2017. His work has recently been exhibited at Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, US (2020); Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles, US (2020); cfcp, New York, US (2019); Svetlana, New York, US (2018); and The Cooper Union, New York, US (2017). He performs under the moniker Slauson Malone, including a performance at The Underground Museum, Los Angeles, US (2019).

## ALISON O'DANIEL

Alison O'Daniel (b. 1979, Miami, FL, US) lives and works in Los Angeles, US. She received degrees from the University of California, Irvine in 2010; Goldsmiths College, London in 2005; and Cleveland Institute of Art, US in 2003. Recent solo exhibitions were held at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco, US (2019); Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR (2019); and Centre d'Art Contemporain Passerelle, Brest, FR (2015). Selected group exhibitions include Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, US (2018); Garage Contemporary Art Museum, Moscow, RU (2018); and Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2016).

## MALICK SIDIBÉ

Malick Sidibé was born in 1935, Soloba, Mali and died in 2016, Bamako, Mali. Selected solo exhibitions have been held at Fondation Cartier, Paris, FR (2018); Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, US (2018); Somerset House, London, UK (2016); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL (2001); and Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, US (1999). Selected group exhibitions were held at MoMA, New York, US (2016); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US (2016); Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR (2013); Barbican Centre, London, UK (2012); and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US (2001). His awards include the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of La Biennale di Venezia (2007).

## DOMINIQUE WHITE

Dominique White (b. 1993, Essex, UK) lives and works in Marseille, France, and London, UK. She obtained a BFA from Goldsmiths, London in 2015. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at UKS, Oslo, NO (2021); Kunstverein Kevin Space, Vienna, AT (2019); and VEDA, Florence, IT (2019). Her recent group shows include MO.CO, Montpellier, FR (2020); CAPC Bordeaux, FR (2020); Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, UK (2019); and Love Unlimited, Glasgow, UK (2018). Her solo exhibition is currently on show at VEDA, Florence, IT.

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| <p>1. Malick Sidibé<br/><i>Couples de danseurs</i>, c. 1960-1970<br/>silver gelatin print<br/>13 x 8 cm<br/>29.5 x 25 x 3.5cm (framed)</p>   | <p>8. Alison O'Daniel<br/><i>The Tuba Thieves: Scenes 48, 57: Nyke and the New York Kite Enthusiasts in Santa Monica</i>, 2016<br/>two-channel video, colour, sound<br/>Edition of 3 plus 2 AP<br/>duration: 10 min 20 sec</p> |
| <p>2. Malick Sidibé<br/><i>Couples de danseurs</i>, c. 1960-1970<br/>silver gelatin print<br/>13 x 8 cm<br/>29.5 x 25 x 3.5cm (framed)</p>   | <p>9. Alison O'Daniel<br/><i>The Tuba Thieves: Scene 61: CK's version: Kaleidoscopic Window</i>, 2018-2019<br/>single-channel video, black and white, sound<br/>Edition of 3 plus 2 AP<br/>duration: 05 min 48 sec</p>         |
| <p>3. Malick Sidibé<br/><i>Couples de danseurs</i>, c. 1960-1970<br/>silver gelatin print<br/>11.5 x 7.5 cm<br/>29.5 x 25 x 3.5cm (framed)</p>                                       | <p>10. Jasper Marsalis<br/><i>L.F.W.</i>, 2021<br/>bowling ball, rock<br/>in two parts:<br/>22.9 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm<br/>27.9 x 20.3 x 22.9 cm</p>  |
| <p>4. Malick Sidibé<br/><i>Couples de danseurs</i>, c. 1960-1970<br/>silver gelatin print<br/>13 x 8 cm<br/>29.5 x 25 x 3.5cm (framed)</p>   | <p>11. Jasper Marsalis<br/><i>Event 7</i>, 2021<br/>oil and solder on canvas<br/>in three parts, each:<br/>25.4 x 20.3 cm</p>  |
| <p>5. Dominique White<br/><i>Flagged Out I</i>, 2020<br/>sisal, kaolin, clay, raffia, wood, iron, sail, cowrie shells<br/>196 x 80 x 20 cm</p>                                       | <p>12. Jasper Marsalis<br/><i>Event 12</i>, 2021<br/>oil and solder on canvas, bowling ball<br/>in two parts:<br/>25.4 x 20.3 cm<br/>33 x 21.6 x 27.9 cm</p>   |
| <p>6. Alison O'Daniel<br/><i>The Tuba Thieves: Scene 22: The Deaf Club</i>, 2015<br/>two-channel video, colour, sound<br/>Edition of 3 plus 2 AP<br/>duration: 06 min 17 sec</p>     | <p>13. Nikita Gale<br/><i>LOCKED LUNGS</i>, 2021<br/>clear acrylic 4" locked groove record, WiMi EC008B record player, speakers, amp, acrylic shelf<br/>30.5 x 25.5 x 15 cm</p>  |
| <p>7. Alison O'Daniel<br/><i>The Tuba Thieves: Scenes 46, 47: Away Game</i>, 2015<br/>single-channel video, colour, sound<br/>Edition of 3 plus 2 AP<br/>duration: 07 min 41 sec</p> | <p>14. Alvaro Barrington<br/><i>Splash em</i>, 2021<br/>acrylic and oil on burlap in wooden artist's frame, steelpans, galvanised metal garbage lid<br/>236 x 167 x 22 cm</p>  |

