

TONE POEMS

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MM:-

How do you think about generating material for your work? Image sound and gesture are all key parts of your process. Where do you begin?

FZN:-

It's difficult to say what comes first. I make work through setting a series of constraints around a type of action or gesture. I don't focus on finished objects, so there's this tension between constantly generating stuff and thinking about how to show it.

With these silk works I wanted to see what's possible with something as simple as a piece of A4 graph paper and some water colours. I paint them without planning what I'll do, like an improvised performance.

When it comes to sound work, although I have taught myself to play the piano recently and I play the guitar, I tend to write with my voice primarily. I never write things down or think from the paper to the music. I always begin with singing. Walking helps because it offers a rhythm.

Over the past two years I've been doing more research into what I call 'transaesthetic' ways of learning or thinking. It made me realise that there's always been this connection between sound and colour or gesture and tone within my work.

MM:- *That idea of gesture, movement, and the body becomes very much interconnected with all these forms of mark making: the painting, the writing and the music are all forms of mark making.*

FZN:- I like the idea of using the body as the primary tool or material. Of course, I use technologies to record, edit and manipulate it. I see my practice as developing a methodology of making that comes out of an aesthetic responsiveness. I absorb things, I'm drawn towards them, maybe become a bit obsessed by them and then I start to make connections between things. The Bauhaus has been a key starting point I think for a lot of my research around aesthetics and learning. A lot of their workshops focused on developing students' aesthetic skills through a series of exercises.

MM:-

Are there specific people that you look to in the Bauhaus?

FZN:-

Josef and Anni Albers. Their teaching practice is more important to me than their actual work. Josef Albers' book the *Interaction of Colour* explores how our perception of colour is relative to where you are and what it's next to: what kind of light source or materiality. I like thinking about that idea from a social or political perspective. Dalcroze's Eurythmics takes a similar approach, but with the aim of exploring musical, rather than visual, perception.

MM:-

So, within your work there seems to be this idea of things existing in relations, and those layers of relations actually being the thing that produce an effect or even a bodily affect. Is how the viewer's body responds to the things that you're bringing together part of the process for you?

FZN:-

A lot of my work has been trying to create and probe those sorts of bodily affects without necessarily relying

on narrative. There is a book I love that changed my thinking on sound and music called, *Music and the Mind* by psychiatrist Anthony Storr. In one chapter he looks at harmony and dissonance and why certain harmonic intervals affect us. He looks at our responses to different tonal relationships (like a minor chord). Sometimes, what we think moves us because it's some kind of essential force, is actually something that's learnt and socially conditioned.

I always feel within my solo shows or performances that I want to create a scene, a place that's outside of the everyday world that might affect the way somebody moves around a space. When the viewer is there they become a part of it, even if it's in a very passive way.

MM:-

With TONE POEM all of the silk prints have these very geometric forms on them. But other screen prints that you've made have also involved body parts - things that have felt much looser gesturally. What determines the forms that you play with? Do they come out of research or are they more intuitive in terms of design?

FZN:-

When I think about the difference between my screen prints and silk prints I think about the kind of materiality I want to explore, the kind of experience I want to convey. The screen prints are very rhythmic, made through repeating the same motifs, often with more gestural elements underneath. The canvas is quite heavy, rigid and bold and has more of a relationship with painting. Sometimes I want something that's more slippery and relates more to the body: that doesn't have a sense of a loop or a beat, something that's more sinuous and about flow.

I felt the need to return to silk as a material because it suits the music that I'm making at the moment, and I wasn't finding that connection through using screen printing.

MM:-

With Spa Songs there was a whole body of research that culminated in the performance you did at the Brunel Museum. The work very much related to these watery spaces. How did that work come about?

FZN:-

I moved to Bermondsey and would go on long walks to explore the area.

I was in a café one day; a place called The Watch House. It's a strange building on the end of Bermondsey Street. Night watchmen, who were employed by the Abbey would patrol the area and lock local 'criminals' up in it overnight. Sitting there, I had this sense of a violent juxtaposition between the past and the present and felt these layers of history. The whole place is full of underground rivers, the Neckinger runs there and occasionally there'd be these streams that pop up in the road. I felt like the area was very porous. *Spa Songs* related to the spas that are in the area and to the idea of something just coming out.

I hadn't made any music or used my voice for a long time and just felt like I needed to. But it didn't come from nowhere; when I knew about Bermondsey Abbey I started listening to a lot of early music, which is the birth of polyphony in Western music history. I'm always intrigued about the fundamentals of something. The Bauhaus presented an opportunity to explore this idea of primary colours and essential forms. Early music

offered that too. The stave is the first graph ever made, where pitch and time are put together in one place. There's a sense of people trying to work out a system and its rules. Which harmonic intervals are sacred and which are profane? It took two years to make this work and I never imagined myself performing it.

MM:-

The live element of the work also pulls on the language of ritual and of ceremony. Was that something more deliberate?

FZN:-

A lot of the final decisions came about through workshopping it. The costumes (which were capes made from large circles of canvas) became a big part of the piece and how it was performed. At the beginning of the performance I'm wearing all of them. I sing four repeating notes in a call to the performers, that come down the stairs and sing back to me in a canon. You get these cascading musical harmonies, set off by one beat. A hand gesture went with each note. As the performers came towards me one by one, I dressed them in a cape.

It was as if they split from my one voice to become many voices.

MM:- *These actions seem to imitate a type of training process?*

FZN:- My teaching plays a big role in what I do. For workshops, I begin with warmups that take inspiration from someone like Meredith Monk or Pauline Oliveros. If I'm given total freedom, there isn't much division in what I do in a performance or in a workshop or in my studio. It's about establishing a way of being that might enable you to be more responsive to what's around you.

MM:- *Playing is such an essential part of that form of learning. It is bodily. There is that sense of experimentation in terms of how you learn. It exists in lots of different forms: as a kind of game that kids do that requires skill or chance, make believe or risk-taking activities.*

FZN:-

Playing a game is also about setting rules for yourself. Fantasy and make believe are important for my work even if I'm doing something that registers as an object in the real world like a painting or a print. When I'm making it, there's a sense of performance or losing oneself in an idea that it might come together to create a bigger kind of moment where other people can play within that.

Jacques Lecoq says, 'the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant.' I think that just sums up a lot of what I'm trying to do. There's a lot of knowledge that we take on inadvertently, that we've picked up just through walking into a room and being taught something in a certain way.

The performance that is a key part. Going back to what you were saying about the screen prints that have more bodily elements, in a way they were a precursor to my more physical performances. Before then I'd never really performed in a singing or dancing way with my work. It took a lot of confidence to do that.