

General Questions from Patti Durr Nov 1, 2023 re: *You Don't Need to Hear to Listen* -

1. can you elaborate a bit more on the title of this show and installations - what made you rest on this title?

The title organically popped into my head when I began discussing the show with Fran. I think about listening and noise often and how it can sometimes feel that whoever speaks the loudest will be most heard. There is just so much noise in our everyday existence. When I say "noise," I also mean external influences that distract us - like our phones and the constant chatter of external events. In the news, political issues make a lot of noise, and we watch tensions and conflict rise and fall. This noise can disconnect us from the internal parts that bind us together.

In my own life, I have an ongoing meditation practice, which came into my life around the same time I moved to LA. Meditation is all about going within - listening through silence and feeling our way through life's changes. We can learn much from quieting the outer noise and listening within. This is a challenging task but a very impactful one. I've been on two silent meditation retreats over the last two years, which were impactful in learning about myself and the world around me. In addition, this show relates a lot to plants and the earth. When we engage with other species beyond humans, listening has much more to do with feelings than verbal exchange. In a time where we are experiencing unseen natural disasters, I feel it is the earth calling for help from our exploitation of our "collective mother." I think of *You Don't Need to Hear to Listen* as a call to action - to listen beyond noise and listen with our hearts.

2. The works in the exhibit seem to have a theme of re-birth (from the yoni flower paintings above the entrance to dyer with their vaginal / labia imagery and the tunnel structure as the vaginal canal to the 2nd floor womb/cave-like space). Deaf people have remarked on a feeling of being "born again" as a Deaf person when they begin to discover their Deafhood. Previously many see ourselves as "hearing people who can not hear." Is this part of your message musing? i dont want to impose meaning on your work that you might not feel is there (from your packet and a statement fran sent me - it seems to fit but i want to confirm and give you an opportunity to expand if desired)

I enjoyed this read on the work - as being "reborn as a deaf person" and how all the work revolves around the themes of birth and rebirth. First, I genuinely appreciate being included in the d/Deaf/hard-of-hearing community. As someone who has been experiencing hearing loss since my late teens, the experience has happened gradually but had a significant impact. It wasn't until I was 27 that I became diligent about getting hearing aids, and I did this so I could take part in the "hearing culture" of the LA art world. However, I spend most of my time without my hearing aids, and I enjoy my natural perception.

Do you know that there is a surgery for otosclerosis? This was presented to me as an option when I was diagnosed. One reason the (male) doctor gave me was that, as a woman, "people may think I'm arrogant because I'm (unintentionally) ignoring them." I at least wanted to experience my life with hearing aids before making a life-altering decision.

I think it's essential we open the conversation to understand that what we see as disability - or, in this case, deafness - is not always a "loss" and can also be a rebirth. When I was a child, my home could be so loud and chaotic. Much of my early inspiration to make installation art - these womb-like safe spaces - stems from these early childhood experiences of wanting to hide and create a haven where I could tune out everything and feel comforted. In addition to doing the work for my childhood self, I think this need for safety is universal.

I am continually fascinated by the idea of creation, and birth is when we see creation come into the world. What is deafness is not a loss but another addition to my experience of the world? As I engage more with the d/Deaf/hard-of-hearing community, I realize how much more I want to learn and embrace it more than change myself to fit into a standard.

3. You emphasize nature in your work via your repetitive motifs - do you see your growing into your being Deaf as part of a natural evolution and that Deaf folks are part of biodiversity/organic part of the world - is this part of your message/meaning?

My hearing loss is a natural evolution - otosclerosis is genetic, and my dad has the same condition, although he was never diagnosed. Like me, my dad spends a lot of time in his own world - he works for himself, and he's very focused. There has only been one time he's asked to wear my hearing aids - at his favorite Italian restaurant - he wanted to hear the specials for the day! Given that this is genetic, other ancestors have experienced this, too, without knowledge. We're not all meant to experience this world in the same way - this is what adds to our collective consciousness. I also believe that sometimes, my muted hearing has helped me tune out the outer noise and focus on the work.

In addition, *You Don't Need to Hear to Listen* marks significance in my artwork and career. This show was the first time I openly spoke about my hearing loss and its impact on my artwork and perception.

4. Can you tell me more about the work *Sweatlodge*? I have some ideas but would love to know more from you.

Sweatlodge (2012) is the earliest piece in the show, and this was one of the first pieces I made after I graduated from Carnegie Mellon in 2012. Finally, being out of a rigorous critical environment, I could paint freely for the first time in four years. A lot clicked for me in the studio, piecing together prints and creating a story. *Sweatlodge*, like the overall theme of this show, is about death and rebirth! It's interesting; the first piece in this show is about a sweatlodge - a Native American ceremony where you go into a hand-made sauna environment, sweat out, and are "reborn." The skulls represent death, and the fetus in the hut represents new life. Interestingly enough, the latest piece in the show, *Only Way Through* (2023), is a person meditating, experiencing intense vibrations as noise, and having their hearing aids and listening devices to the side while exploring the inner self and the natural environment. So, the show begins with a piece about ceremonial death and rebirth and ends with a person meditating in their deafness, experiencing a world of vibrations and connections to the earth.

5. You have a lot of feminine figures/goddesses/Venus in this show. Is this to emphasize creation and how women are creators as they carry children?

There are a few reasons for feminine figures. The goddesses/Venus figures are more recent and inspired by my time in Rome last December (2022). I spent a month as a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome, providing unanticipated interest in ancient goddess cultures and symbols. This discovery also made me realize that my work has long been about female empowerment, and I feel most empowered through my creativity. The work is often autobiographical, and the female figure is the one I live within, so she comes naturally. She is often experiencing my inner world and experiences, and I use visuals to share these in the hopes of connecting. When we go within, we have so many similarities.

6. Your works have some Deaf View/Image Art (De'VIA) symbology (one eye shown or none, hands closed or hidden, doll/mask, flowers, seeds etc). Do these motifs have a specific meaning to you as an emerging Deaf person? (You might not be that familiar with De'VIA but many Deaf artists are not aware yet organically draw from imagery that seems to be in our Deaf collective conscience.)

Again, I want to express gratitude for including me in that conversation. As someone who is not entirely deaf or fully hearing, there is a world of in-between, and it's interesting to think about how these symbols have unconsciously made their way into the work without me being initially aware. My creative state is one of freedom, intuition, and flow - I feel connected to the collective unconscious when I am in that state. I don't "think" about what comes next; I just get cues and feel what is right. I am only recently familiar with De'Via, but having read more about it - including your paper - I am glad there is a name and placement for deaf arts and imagery. When Fran and I were talking about the paintings in the show, she also remarked on how they are particularly expressive and similar to ASL's expressiveness. It's fascinating to be part of a larger collective consciousness and unconsciousness.

7. Your 2D and 3D works feel to be inviting folks into your space into their own evolution and understanding of life, diversity, the planet - you appear to do this via the intricacy of images and mixed media in your 2D pieces and in the enclosing spaces of your large installation pieces. Any thoughts on this read?

This is an accurate read. The work is very narrative of my own experience, which - perhaps also with aid from my deafness - is often an internal experience. I aim to openly, honestly, and expressively share what is within me in hopes of interconnectedness through that authenticity.

9. Your creation of spaces also seems to emphasize the need to quiet ourselves to truly listen/hear. Do you ever desire as an artist to have a more tactile component to your work?

The more tactile component is next! *You Don't Need to Hear to Listen* is my first show of this size - at a large museum and seeing the paintings and installations with so much space and in such a beautiful space. So, there's been a lot of reflection on "what comes next." I just finished tufting a rug for a smaller installation piece, and that happened because I felt like the floor needed a "run your hands through the grass" kind of

feeling. I am interested in expanding to more tactile components, and I was also thinking of experimenting with a sound bowl/ vibrations in my new work.

10. Is there any significance to you in the colors and mediums you pick for your works?

The colors are often chosen intuitively, although sometimes there is also more significant planning. I often think in colors, and the chosen colors can outline the following details. Mediums are also chosen intuitively and by my experience working with them. However, I also chose mediums specific to the project. I began working with vinyl because I was making outdoor installations. The piece in the gallery's center was first displayed at the San Diego Museum of Art and then at the Three Rivers Arts Festival. It's exciting to see the piece in a museum setting. Seeing everything together in the Dyer Arts Center has made me think about the work I want to create next.