

Exhibition Guide

Helen Cammock

Bass Notes and SiteLines:
The Voice as a Site of Resistance
and the Body as a Site of Resilience

March 23 – June 18, 2023



Rituals of Speaking

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Amant

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Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience was made in collaboration with Aleecha, Amal Khalaf, Amelia Grant, Amy Pope, Claire, Claire Martin, Becky Warnock, Charlotte Marshall-Vale, Danielle, Deanna, Elizabeth Graham, Gemma, Georgia Barrington, Georgia Scotland, InJoy Choir, Jasmine, Joanne Vaughan, Katie Slaymaker, Kellyanne, Kirsty, LBBB Community Solutions, Layla Gatens, Lois Otu Enwo, Lucy, Paige, Paula Robinson, Pause, Petra Prince, Sam Griffiths, Sandra Cammock, Sarah, Sarah Boosey, Sarah Foord, Shannon, Stacey, Susan Cade, Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Tia Rose, Tish Marble, Tracey Hayward, and Wendy Pickles.

Helen Cammock's work explores the multitude of intertwined narratives, both personal and historical, that form the fabric of our culture. She is interested in how these stories are constructed and how their meaning alters depending on who is doing the telling, who is listening, and how the story is told.

In her recent body of work and film of the same title *Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience* (2022), Helen directs her focus to the different ways we experience, understand, and communicate the twinned concepts of resistance and resilience. Partnering with a number of social care services, including Pause, a London-based organization supporting women to make positive changes in their lives, she centers the voices and embodied experiences of social care providers and receivers within this exploration.

Through regular collaborative workshops organized over three years, the groups experimented with drawing, music, and movement. They considered song and gesture as ways to communicate through the body and reflected on how the voice can shift registers to express pain, joy, rage, and care, whether alone or surrounded and supported by other voices. In a process that is documented throughout the film, the groups rehearse and eventually perform together, referencing the long history of singing as an act of collective self-care.

Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience was commissioned as part of Radio Ballads, an ongoing multi-year project by Serpentine Civic and New Town Culture (London, UK).

In the following pages, you can read an excerpt of a conversation between Helen Cammock and Isabella Nimmo of Amant that delves into some of the main questions that run through our *Rituals of Speaking* film series.

Cover image: still from *Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience*, 2022

Isa: In the project series, *Rituals of Speaking* we're exploring the idea of storytelling as an act of care—not just in terms of what stories are told, but how methodologies of care are brought

into the practice of storytelling itself. Ethics and the role and responsibility of the artist (questions of who speaks for whom and how) are clearly considered throughout your practice. Can you elaborate on what care means to you? How might your understanding of care have changed through the making of this film, and how did you consciously 'care' within the process?

Helen: Care for me is about respect; it is about a deep understanding of power relationships on both structural and interpersonal levels. It is about subject position and recognizing who you are in any given relationship, dynamic or 'ask'. And it is about being able to see yourself in others' lives and seeing their life in yours. It is about recognizing and valuing intersectionality and it is about embracing what is unknown. With an intent to tell stories with these ideas as a foundation, care is or should be intrinsic. This has always been an aim in my practice, and it was important to be able to continue that with *Bass Notes and SiteLines*.

With this project, I arrived with some knowledge of social care as a professional having worked in different social work contexts for ten years (I had also run a group work program for women and children affected by domestic violence). But even with this experience I knew how vital the support and care from the professionals from the organization Pause would be in order for me to understand how best to work with everyone on the project. All the participating social work professionals were from different sectors, and it was important to construct specific workshops to support them to feel able to tell their stories. A large part of these workshops took place during the pandemic and happened online, so we had a two-year workshop program that approached engagement in different ways. When it came to working on this project, I felt that I wanted to try something a little different, which is why the singing workshops became a large part of this undertaking. But overall, each program involved music-led, free drawing meditation, drawing workshops, voice workshops, discursive workshops, games, and photographic workshops. We asked people to tell stories through sound, drawing, gesture, body language, and poetry. All of these activities were the work itself.

Isa: Can you explain what you mean by “The work is in the process. That is the work”? How did you mirror the acts of care

and trust building from the group work in the directing and editing of the film?

Helen: The film was a “constructed seepage” of the project, its ideas, and its intent, and so was the performance of the song, which I wrote weaving together and incorporating words and poetic phrases written during workshops by individuals from the groups. This coming together of works, ideas, and voices for me was considered and careful. And for me this is a representation of care. In order to make a film that spoke somewhat of the processes, I decided to film rehearsals and one of the group activities. I also filmed the choir performing on a balcony to an empty car park where we used to rehearse. This was combined with filmed rehearsals of the community choir (made up of social care professionals). These rehearsals happened separately until the opening performance when the choirs came together. This process was about exploring ideas of performance and reality. When we asked the group how they felt about being filmed one of the women jokingly said: “I’ll only do it if we get to do make up!” So this then became a backdrop in the film: both workers and women from the project gently receiving make up with music and conversation in the background. This film doesn’t expose any of the reasons why the women receive care; we intentionally did not present direct stories in the film. I was aware that none of the women should be exposed in any way to spectator judgement. I also never directly identified who were workers and who were the women who used the services. This was not a documentary, and my approach was that this film spoke of ideas of care using gesture, song, poetry, visual and audio documentation to host this conversation.

Isa: With whom does *Bass Notes and Sitelines* speak? What kind of spectatorship are you shaping through this film? And in what way might this mode of viewing carry beyond the screening area?

Helen: *Bass Notes and SiteLines* speaks, I hope, to everyone. It asks you to think about what it means to resist and what it means to find resilience in yourself. But through the film, banner, screen prints, and performance I am speaking directly with people who deliver structural professional care and with those who receive it.

It uses the voices of those who work in the care professions and those who receive care. Through this juxtaposing, the film weaves together a dialogue about what care might mean and how it manifests through voice and body. I am asking people to come along: to sit with, to watch, to listen, to be attentive to the story/ies (in the loosest sense), and to consider themselves in relation to the conversations and to the process unfolding front of them. This is not a spectatorship of voyeurism but a spectatorship of care. So it asks energy and it is an active form of viewing. In its very title, the film asks people to consider voice as a site of resistance and body as a site of resilience. I hope people will consider this in their own lives and their actions as they leave the space.

Reading List

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Ballantine Books, 2009)

Iain Mackenzie, *Resistance and the Politics of Truth* (Transcript Publishing, 2018)

Sonja M. Brown Givens, *Underserved Women of Color, Voice, and Resistance: Claiming a Seat at the Table* (Lexington Books, 2014)

María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017)

Madeleine Bunting, *Labours of Love: The Crisis of Care* (Granta, 2020)

Reiland Rabaka, *Civil Rights Music: The Soundtracks of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington Books, 2016)

Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (Vintage, 1995)

Jayneen Sanders, *Let's Talk About Body Boundaries, Consent and Respect*, illustrated by Sara Jennings (Educate2 Empower Publishing, 2017)

The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto* (Verso, 2020)

Lisa Cherry, *Conversations That Make a Difference for Children and Young People* (Routledge, 2021)

Mickey Vallee, *Sounding Bodies Sounding Worlds: An Exploration of Embodiments in Sound* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Duke University Press, 2016)

Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2015)

Audre Lorde, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (Silver Press, 2018)

Jean Watson, *Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring* (University Press of Colorado, 2008)

Biography

Helen Cammock uses film, photography, print, text, song, and performance to examine mainstream historical and contemporary narratives about Blackness, womanhood, oppression and resistance, wealth and power, poverty, and vulnerability. Her works often cut across time and geography, layering multiple voices as she investigates the cyclical nature of histories in her visual and aural assemblages.

In 2017, Helen won the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, and in 2019 she was the joint recipient of The Turner Prize. She has exhibited and performed worldwide including recent solo shows at the Whitechapel Gallery, The Photographer's Gallery, and Serpentine Galleries (London, UK); Performing Arts Center STUK (Leuven, Belgium); Collezione Maramotti (Reggio Emilia, Italy); VOID (Derry, Northern Ireland); the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin, Ireland); Kestner Gesellschaft (Hannover, Germany); and Hamburger Kunsthalle (Hamburg, Germany).

Rituals of Speaking is a series of film-led projects that explores how artists represent the voices of others through collective storytelling. Borrowing its title from Linda Alcoff's essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991), which analyzes the contexts in which speaking and being heard are made possible, the series responds to recurring questions over who speaks for whom in the stories we tell, by redirecting our attention to how the stories are told.

Rituals of Speaking includes recent and newly commissioned work by Helen Cammock, Dora García, Ephraim Asili and Natalia Lassalle-Morillo.

Each film installation is accompanied by a series of public programs alongside a collection of artworks, texts and contextual materials that provide further insight into the artist's research and collaborative processes.

Helen Cammock, *Bass Notes and SiteLines: The Voice as a Site of Resistance and the Body as a Site of Resilience*, March 23 – June 18, 2023

Dora García, *Amor Rojo*,
June 29 – September 17, 2023

Ephraim Asili, *Song for My Mother*,
September 28, 2023 – January 8, 2024

Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, *En Parábola: Conversations on Tragedy*, January 19 – April 23, 2024

