

# OpenStudio

A collection of art-making ideas by artists

## Janet Cardiff's Portraits of Sounds: Drawing the auditory

There are so many sounds in the urban world that it is easy to get overwhelmed and tune them out. Instead, this assignment asks you to focus on the sounds around you, consider how they make you feel, and explore ways of using art to represent them.

### Assignment

Create a CD or load an iPod with various sound effects (airplanes taking off, gunshots, construction noise, highway traffic, bird songs, footsteps, music clips, etc.). Play the sound effects and encourage the students to create an intuitive response on a large piece of paper. Encourage them to think about the sound and the choice of materials, colors, and textures. Ask them to work both on the floor and on a desk so that their physical approach varies according to the sounds they are hearing. Ask them to alternate between working with closed eyes and with their eyes open and see how this changes their responses to the sounds.

After the students have completed their sound portraits, ask the class to compare different responses to the same sound. What are the similarities? Do the sounds seem to have evoked similar reactions (e.g., short lines, bright colors, patterns)? Discuss the idea of aural language and ask the students to consider whether it can be translated visually. Did using sound as inspiration make them think differently about the images they created?

### Materials:

Drawing, Painting, Sound

### Materials:

- + Brushes
- + CD or iPod
- + Clothes
- + Paper
- + Paint
- + Pens and pencils
- + Sponges

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## Artist Biography: Janet Cardiff

Born in Brussels, Ontario, Canada  
Currently lives and works in Berlin,  
Germany, and Grindrod, British Columbia,  
Canada

Janet Cardiff is internationally recognized for her immersive multimedia works. Her installations, often created in collaboration with her partner, George Bures Miller (born 1960), layer audio tracks to create engaging and transcendent multisensory experiences that draw the viewer into ambiguous and unsettling narratives. Their works typically address themes such as time, voyeurism, dreams, and mystery. Bures Miller and Cardiff represented Canada at the 2001 Venice Biennale.



Janet Cardiff recording with binaural head, Jena, 2006