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## Tokion

ARTIST ALYSSA PHEOBUS DRAWS ON SONGS OF LONGING

### MEANING FROM MUSIC

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There are few instances where graphite pencils, needlepoint and Neil Young can be said to complement one another, but the artwork of Alyssa Pheobus seems to be the primary exception. The Brooklyn-based artist's large-scale typographic drawings, while strongly evocative of textile arts, have featured song lyrics from Young, Leonard Cohen, PJ Harvey and many more. We asked Alyssa via email to explain how and why music has had such an obviously profound influence on her work. Her prose is as composed as her artwork.

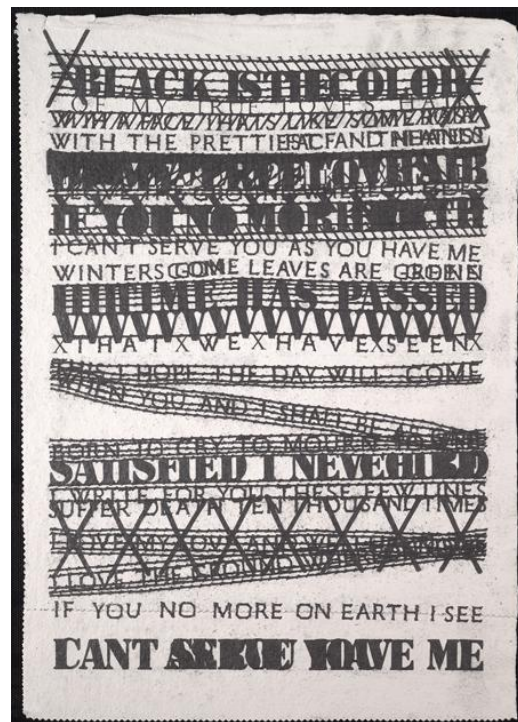
**How does music influence your work?** I belong to a special variety of audiophiles who have no innate musical ability. This partially explains the logocentric nature of my attraction to musical sources as well as the narratives of longing that often surface in my work. I also listen to music constantly when I'm working and have a tendency toward contemplative repetition – something that's definitely reflected in my drawing process.

**What is it about a lyric that compels you to use it in your work?** My sensibility has always leaned toward the nostalgic and melancholic. I'm fascinated by folk music when it has a feeling of timelessness, whether it's been passed down through many interpreters or written yesterday.

**How do the lyrics play into the aesthetic decisions in your pieces?** The words that make it into my drawings usually hang around awhile in various corners of my life until I figure out how to use them. It's as if they're hidden in plain view until a key presents itself, often in the form of an aesthetic decision that brings together different elements to create new meanings.

**What's your favorite lyric or musician whom you haven't yet found a place for?** I'm a huge admirer of Tom Waits, but I can't bring myself to borrow from him because he's already doing the work of an artist along with the work of a musician. He manages to fully inhabit the genres he borrows from while presenting them in a new, often critical light.

**Your work is created with the intense care and attention that one might bestow on a devotional object or a love song. Who are you creating your works for?** Since all of my drawings are instigated by insights that grown out of relationships and other forms of guidance, on some intimate level they're made for the guides. But more broadly speaking, I hope they're accessible to many people, especially the contemplative types.





**Do you have a proprietary relationship with the lyrics you work with or a more empathetic relationship?** My involvement with the songs always starts off as empathetic. I can't work with a text unless I have an emotional response to it. I used to be interested in the idea of making "signature performances" of songs through drawing – like Johnny Cash covering Nine Inch Nails with such a strong, proprietary difference that the song becomes detached from its usual milieu and rendered unsingable for a while. This is less of a concern for me now.

**Would you describe your work as covering or sampling?** I see it as doing both. In some instances I sample a verse or a few lines, transforming the fragment into something new through repetition. In others I use the complete lyrics in order to be faithful to the full arc of the song.

**If your life was a song, what would be the refrain?** I always take the long way home.

**Give us the five songs on your playlist today.**

"I Believe in You," by Bob Dylan

"Tere Ishq Nachaya," by Abida Parveen

"West," by Lucinda Williams

"Idumea," by Sacred Harp Singers

"Picture in a Frame," by Tom Waits