

## Interview with artist Maja Zećo April 2026

A conversation between artist Maja Zećo and curator Rachel Grant, on arts practice, sound and environmentalism. The conversation took place during the development of 'The Attuning Zone' an exhibition exploring how people experience the sounds, textures and atmospheres of energy transition presented at Peacock & the worm, Aberdeen 2026.

The exhibition includes works in performance, sound and video as well as print and ephemera. Existing works included in 'The Attuning Zone' were produced as part of 'Living with Energy Transition'<sup>1</sup> a collaborative project between the arts and social sciences. The project began with a series of soundwalks - a practice of listening while walking - that took place at St Fittick's Park in Torry, Aberdeen. St Fittick's Park is a site partially earmarked for development as an energy transition zone despite the protests of the local community and activists<sup>2</sup>. The work was first showcased as part of 'Sensing energy transition' an exhibition at the Atrium Gallery at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). For 'The Attuning Zone' Maja developed a new performance and work in print.

Maja is a practice-based artist researcher exploring identities and listening in spaces of socio-political tensions and post-conflict areas. Her sound and performance pieces have been presented internationally, and her writing was published in Organised Sound (Cambridge University Press) and Journal of Sonic Studies (Leiden University Press).<sup>3</sup>

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**Rachel:** Thank you Maja for your time today, I really appreciate it. To start, could we talk about your journey as an artist-researcher?

**Maja:** My journey hasn't been the most conventional, but that's where I find kinship with the sound art community because a lot of sound artists have similar backgrounds or quite interdisciplinary trajectories. If I think about being an artist-researcher, that started much earlier and again from very unlikely sources. In my teenage years, I was really interested in grassroots arts. I was volunteering in radio stations, I was making zines, I was part of various youth magazines and non-governmental organisations which are part of civic society in Bosnia. I met a lot of people and for me it was really important - being part of those communities. I went on my first residency, had first shows and performances but that scene ran parallel to the official art world. I always wanted to study new media, but Bosnian art schools

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<sup>1</sup> An interview conducted with the project team is available at <https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/sustainability/aberdeen-etz-clean-energy-ambitions>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://foe.scot/saint-fitticks>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Maja Zećo's practice and projects visit <https://majazeco.com>

are very traditional and so I ended up studying design. During those years, I started VJing because I knew a lot of people in the music scene. VJing is the mixing and creation of live visuals, usually to accompany music. I was part of the music scene in that way, and I was quite a prominent woman VJ because there were not many of us out there, especially at that time in Bosnia. After that design education, I stayed at university teaching, and that's something that opened up to me as an opportunity, but all that interdisciplinary grassroots nature - I carried with me and combined it with this university education and teaching.

I developed an interest in research and then I came to the UK in 2015 to commit to a PhD, supported by Gray's School of Art and the Music Department of the University of Aberdeen. That's where I became part of the international sound art community. That enabled me to become the practice researcher that I am now and like many sound artists - I'm a practitioner, I'm also a researcher. Many of my colleagues that I met in that discipline have really mixed backgrounds; playing in bands, working in organisations, dealing with activism, and that's what we all have in common. So, while it's maybe not so likely or such a usual path for contemporary artists, in the niche area of sound art it's actually quite common and that's where I found the community.

**Rachel:** The exhibition contains existing work from 'Sensing energy transition' developed as part of 'Living with Energy Transition' a collaborative project between the arts and social sciences. New work included in 'The Attuning Zone' includes a performance and experimentation in screen-printing. Could you talk a bit about these new works?

**Maja:** I'll start with the screen prints because when I start on the performance, we might not go back to the screen prints. It was great. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to work with the Peacock team and Printmaker James Vass. I always wanted to learn screen printing because it taps into some of the things I already said about my design education. Screen printing is a medium often used by grassroots artists to disseminate the work, the message, creating posters for music concerts and similar. It is a medium that is at the core of that scene. For me, it was really interesting to engage with it, and it opens some ideas for future works as well, because this exhibition has some prints on textiles. So print is something that might develop in my future work or lead to further development.

I developed three designs that were printed on posters and postcard-sized formats. They will be placed in public spaces with questions that remind people to listen and pay attention to their sonic environment. Questions such as 'Do you hear this?' 'Do you hear the hums?' I think these questions link to soundwalking (a practice of listening whilst walking) because soundwalks raise our awareness of sonic environments. What is common to both pieces is that they operate in public spaces.

The performance also engages with sounds, specifically of St Fittick's Park. For the performance, I developed a suit consisting of rubber boots, chest waders and a

jacket made from yellow and black neoprene. The colours are often associated with industrial zones and hazard areas. Neoprene as a material is used in PPE, but also by diverse communities that are engaging with nature. All the materials, rubber and neoprene are derivatives of oil and are artificial materials. But in its shape, the suit references those industrial connotations of St Fittick's Park that I was inspired by, but also the organic wildlife, and in this case of the birds that inhabit the park. Some of my movements and gestures in the performance are informed by this dialogue between nature and man-made. This also informs the sonic aspect of the piece, because besides the suit, I also equip myself with a large parabolic microphone which collects sounds and amplifies it with the help of the speaker - a Bluetooth speaker that I also carry with me. In a sense, the suit amplifies the sounds around it, but in the process, it creates intense feedback loops that can be perceived as technological shrieks and voices of this bird/technological – animal/technological hybrid. The performance will take place on 1 May 2026, just before the opening of the exhibition. The suit will be exhibited in the space following the opening.

**Rachel:** With the choices of colour, you described the relationships of hazards as well as birds. It triggered a memory about the European Goldfinch, whose colours are also a vibrant yellow and black and it's a resident of St Fittick's Park. There's an interesting relationship to thinking about species globally or broadly to then hyper locally.

The 'Living with Energy Transition' project, the 'Sensing Energy Transition' exhibition and now 'The Attuning Zone' exhibition. This body of work has developed over the past two to three years. St Fittick's Park is a site partially earmarked for the development of an energy transition zone, you've spent time there developing soundwalks, field recordings, moving image work and now the performance. The space of St Fittick's, it's radically changed from where it was and how people can currently access that space. Could you speak a bit to this change, particularly around how you negotiate the performance in a changing landscape? And how you may or may not be able to access particular spaces?

**Maja:** While developing this performance, I had in mind to explore different areas of the park, both sonically, but also through performance gestures and bringing the audience into a few areas of the park. This was - in particular the central area of the park, which is a pond with a number of duck species living there, which I think brings joy to many residents around St Fittick's Park and residents of Torry. It is a spot that every soundwalk either passed or touched on in some way. The park is also inhabited by deer and various insects and birds that we see from further away, but our interaction with them might be challenged depending on the size of the group and we simply might not be lucky to encounter them. In this case, whenever you went to the park until recently, you could bet that you will at least probably see a few ducks there and, in the shrubs, – so I was really looking forward to this. But the other day when I tried to test the performance, I realised that many of the walking paths were closed and fenced off and the pond was inaccessible, which speaks to the

change that you mentioned. But I think it also speaks to the nature of a performance piece, developed for public spaces. The work will find other ways to engage sonically and maybe at more of a distance. It is also worth pointing out that although the piece is inspired and informed by all the detailed listening to and in the park, it's not meant to be only performed there. This piece was developed for other similar sites, the edgelands where industrial areas meet what we would consider nature. This could be energy transition zones, but it could be other types of industrial developments that are encroaching onto human and more than human life. Thinking about all the sounds and situations in St Fittick's - that helped me to have a kind of case study of all these interactions and also the architecture – the jackup rigs that appear occasionally around the park. They all informed my decision on using materials, but I could see this work responding to other sites across the UK and Europe, because this is an ongoing discussion. I think through performance and sound, we can actually deal with and tackle a lot of these entanglements because the whole notion of the divide of nature and man-made or nature and technology is being blurred greatly, I think. Through sound and performance, we can deal with this in more tangible ways.

**Rachel:** 'The Attuning Zone' is a really interesting title. I suppose my thoughts meander between the personal and environmental. Thinking about how I might attune myself to different environments or 'zones' to listen differently or perhaps a gesture towards physical or environmental boundaries that shape what is heard – and who hears it for example in an Industrial Zone. Could you talk further about your decision on the exhibition title?

**Maja:** I always struggle with exhibition titles and work titles as well. But I did feel that 'Attuning Zone', as you mentioned, speaks about these different processes because attuning is active, it's an active word that requires us to do something, to continue adjusting and readjusting to a change of circumstances. Instruments must be tuned and attuned all the time, depending on the humidity of the room, the movement or transportation or acoustics of the space and sometimes even as a response to the musician and their body. It's quite an interesting process and this exhibition is full of sound. Every single piece that's here, either draws from the sonic experience or is voicing, from different perspectives. I'm aware that I'm asking quite a lot from the audience, in the sense that they need to attune to different pieces, and this attuning will require slightly different apparatus. From moving image work that also has sound field recordings that I gathered over this two to three-year period in St. Fittick's Park, to voices of people that contributed to the soundwalks. Those stories are really important. We will be able to hear different ages, social and educational backgrounds, stories, experiences and memories of the park - so that requires slightly different listening.

There are large scale printed maps on fabric, informed by listening and sound walking, there are various ephemera and even the photographs taken kindly by Phoebe McBride. The whole show requires different attunings. Moving from that to

the questions printed on the windows of the gallery, those are there to continue prompting people to listen and listen not just with their ears, but also with their eyes and bodies. I hope that people will imaginatively listen across the city and attune with communities of Torry -human and more than human - across the river that divides the Castle Gate and St Fittick's Park. I think there are all kinds of things in this attuning that I hope that people will welcome. This is also a contemplative space, and I hope they will engage with their own experiences of what these sounds do, their voices, their bodies, and their memories.

**Rachel:** There is a real generosity in that use of questions – they not only knit pieces of work within the exhibition together, but also audiences can take those questions back into their own environment for their own exploration.

**Maja:** Yes. We can look at this question and ask even a bit more literally, can we hear the hums from Torry and from St Fittick's Park at the Castle Gate? On many levels we can say yes, if we are attuned with more than just our ears. For that to work, we need a bit of imagination and a bit of solidarity as well, with communities living across the city.

**Rachel:** Your practice is framed by listening in spaces of social-political tensions and post-conflict areas but perhaps with less emphasis on environmental concerns – although I'm mindful of how these elements intersect. This body of work, although still rooted in social-political tensions, has a very clear environmental focus. Could you speak to this environmental focus? And perhaps what impact this work has had on your practice more broadly?

**Maja:** I think it's really difficult to talk about sound and not consider the environment because sound is experienced in space and moves through the space and through various boundaries and obstacles in the space. That being the case, I am quite driven by questions that we could consider as political and, in this context, even on just transition - which communities will endure the brunt of another industrial development and energy transition? There's also the aspect of acoustic ecology, which is part of sound art, which allowed me to think more deeply about the effects of bluntly - noise. So that's where the posters are also informed from. Noise and industrial hums affect human and more than human communities.

The project itself made me think more critically about my own practice as a sound artist, of course, and the technology I use to record sounds: microphones, cables, recorders, they all contain extracted materials from all over the world. It's a practice - although it's often ephemeral - I don't produce too many objects in my work - it is still carbon heavy – so that's another aspect.

I think if you ask me specifically about environments, there is one thing that through this project I'm trying to tease out and that I will take further is I really feel that it is becoming impossible to draw a clear line between what we would consider man-

made and so-called natural. As a sound artist, I'm not the sort of practitioner that would take out the sound of a car passing by when I'm recording a beautiful soundscape somewhere in nature - many practitioners do that. However, this question of merging is really quite interesting because the fact is that man-made activity and all derivatives, such as plastic, are in our bodies. They are part of all the living creatures known on the planet. We breathe plastic, we eat it, it's part of our tissues. I think my future work will deal with and confront us more with that, becoming one with these man-made substances love it or not. This is the consequence of our own actions, there is a merging between the technological, industrial, mass produced products and our organic bodies, nature around us.

I think the medium to deal with these worlds of coming together is performance, video and sound because there is no listening without the body and listening always happens in an environment. These three media are interconnected. Listening is a deeply embodied experience. Whenever we attempt to listen, we also become aware that we are not the only ones listening and voicing. Listening is a deeply engaging, environmentally engaging activity.

**Rachel:** Could we end by speaking briefly to what's next for your work?

**Maja:** There is always a lot on. This strand of my work that deals with soundwalking is quite interesting. This summer, I might go to Macedonia to be part of an interdisciplinary workshop that explores dance, movement, body and sound through listening. So that should be interesting. I'm developing a project that will inhabit both physical space, but also radio waves from a former prison in Kosovo, which occupies me at the moment. Many of my pieces have an extended life, but because they are performances, they require my body to engage, and in a sense, we have this co-dependency. I'm still performing the pieces that I first developed quite a few years ago, and I'm really excited that this summer I'm developing an artist moving image piece from the performance called 'Dissolutions' that I developed in 2022, just at the start of the war in Ukraine. Unfortunately, the war is still going and the situation in the world is not becoming any better. The work is quite layered and deals with coloniality and our relationship to the other, it's also informed by British-based writer Rebecca West. This moving image work allows me to go a little deeper into her writing and engage with the Orientalist gaze she cast on people in Bosnia.

And we will see where other projects take me. As I mentioned during the interview, I would be interested to develop more works, exploring these relationships with technology and the body. So we'll see what the future brings.