Jennie C. Jones

Simply Because You’re Near Me

Artists Space
38 Greene Street, SoHo,
Through Feb. 18

Jennie C. Jones’s installation “Homage to an Unknown Suburban Black Girl” was one of the stealth highlights of “Freestyle” at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001. Based on a found snapshot of a young black girl sitting in what looks like a suburban interior, the piece focused on how two different strands of African-American history coexist in a single picture.

One history is of assimilation, implied by the middle-class setting. The other, suggested by the girl’s Afro hairstyle, is of Black Power politics, which arose in response to a racism that integration alone could not change. In short, in Ms. Jones’s reading, the photograph was a document of people who remained, consciously or not, tolerated guests in the house — American culture — that they had helped to build.

Ms. Jones’s even subtler installation at Artists Space considers a particular aspect of that cultural contribution: music, specifically jazz. This time the document she presents is aural: the sound of Charlie Parker’s music as informally recorded by another saxophonist, Dean Benedetti, who was obsessed with Parker’s life and art. The tapes surfaced in 1988 and were regarded as treasured relics despite their poorly recorded and distorted sound.

In the gallery, an edited version of the recordings plays from two large speakers, and small collage-drawings by Ms. Jones hang on the wall. At first glance, the drawings are classic Modernist-style abstractions composed of squares and rectangles. But wirelike black ink lines that emerge from the geometric forms turn them into something else: clusters of tiny microphones or speakers.

Positioned around the room, they seem to be at once recording and projecting Parker’s music, music that is, Ms. Jones seems to suggest, not a distorted ghost from the past or the obscure object of someone’s desire, but the very sound of Modernism itself, loud, clear and everywhere.

HOLLAND COTTER