

## Sound Plots: *Aporia (Notes to a Medium)*

### Episode 1: Artist Talk with Azza El Siddique

January 11, 2024

*Solar Evocation* is based on this really important funerary text that's from ancient Egypt, it was actually the precursor to the Amduat, which is an extensive text that shows you how to navigate the afterlife. The idea within their culture, religion and belief is that death was not the end, that there was this sort of cyclical journey that would happen once you were deceased and you were re-born with the sun every day. So when I was doing my MFA at Yale, I had the opportunity because I would take courses in the Egyptology Department, I had the opportunity to go to the storage unit at the Peabody Museum where they had this coffin text, the *Book of Two Ways*. I'm really drawn and excited about research, especially ancient Egyptian and Nubian culture, because they had this profound understanding regarding entropy that death and decay was inevitable, but their whole model was based on essentially slowing it down and preserving it and also seeing paths that death was not the end. In this work, as you can see, I think of them as sort of plinths, this is like an actual map of the *Book of Two Ways*, that's the coffin text, it's drawn on the coffin and it shows you which way you need to navigate and during that course, you'll come across, like, the eternal lake of fire and you will meet, like, this demon, and for them, knowing names is one of the most powerful things.

Also, the vessels within this work are signifiers that come from ancient Egyptian and also African folklore that the god that created humans was a potter. The research, the architectural research, a lot of these mortuary temples and so on, they were essentially spaces for the elite and so for somebody, say like myself, if I was to pass away, I would be just buried in the ground with these certain vessel forms, and it was also another way for loved ones to communicate with the deceased.

And the text that you see, which are mirrored – mirroring is something that is really important in ancient Egyptian and Nubian culture – these are actual spells from the *Book of Two Ways*, so they really believe that wisdom is power. So it was a cheat-sheet to show you how to be born with the sun each day, and during that journey into the netherworld, you will go through a series of tests where there are gods, demons and deities, so I just thought it was really poetic about the way that they envision the afterlife, this sort of care that extended to the deceased. I think the ending is really poetic in the way that it ends with “Ruins will be cities, and vice versa,” so just thinking about that cyclical nature within history. Another quote that I also think about is that “Ruins are always in a state of becoming.” So that there's always a sort of regeneration and cyclical system that we continue to see to this day. The sort of ripple effect that happens, that I'm searching for, through digging through the history of ancient Egypt and Nubia, tracking this record of power in the way that dynasties will come in and out of power. I think about Hatshepsut who was the only female pharaoh that ruled Egypt, she leveraged her power with the church by sending an expedition to Punt and Nubia in order to come back with myrrh trees, and sent for them with such a powerful currency, that she won favour essentially with the church and was able to use that as a way to be the only female pharaoh that ruled. A sort of constant death, decay, destruction and we still continue to witness these sort of systems, trying to obliterate one another in order to contain and hold power.