

## Transcript

**In Conversation: Jock McFadyen and Jem Finer**

**Hosted by Will Gompertz**

**Recorded live: 20 April 2026**

**Location: Roman Amphitheatre, Guildhall Art Gallery, London**

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### Opening

**Will Gompertz:**

Good evening, everybody. It's fantastic to see so many people here, right to the back of the Roman Amphitheatre. It really is an incredible space to be in.

London was first settled nearly 2,000 years ago, and this is what remains of that history, an extraordinary place to gather.

Before I begin, I'm Will Gompertz. I used to spend time here when I was Artistic Director of the Barbican, and I now run the Sir John Soane's Museum.

We're very lucky tonight to have two people whose work I absolutely admire: painter **Jock McFadyen** and musician and composer **Jem Finer**, who will be discussing their collaboration.

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### On the origins of the collaboration

**Will Gompertz:**

Jock, let's start with you. This project begins with the Underground, and here we are, underground. How did it begin?

**Jock McFadyen:**

It didn't begin with being underground so much as with sound. I fell in love with the noise of the Central line, specifically the journey between Liverpool Street and Bethnal Green.

I wanted to somehow "own" that sound, like you might with a painting. To take something from the real world and bring it into a private space. That instinct has always existed, even going back to cave paintings.

So I thought: maybe I could record it. But I realised I needed help, and that's where Jem came in.

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**Jem Finer:**

Jock asked me if I could record this stretch of the Underground, and I was immediately interested. He was describing the sound like a complex musical composition.

So I recorded the journey, starting from my home in Kentish Town, travelling all the way to Bethnal Green, then going back and forth multiple times. I gathered a large archive of sounds.

Very quickly, this moved beyond simple recording into something else: pairing the sound with Jock's paintings in an exhibition.

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## **On sound and composition**

### **Will Gompertz:**

So you started with raw recordings. How did those become compositions?

### **Jem Finer:**

The first version was essentially all the loudest, most intense moments, the heavy, cacophonous sound of the trains. It was quite extreme.

Then we realised that for an exhibition space, that could be too overwhelming. So I began reworking it, adding quieter moments, platform sounds, footsteps, announcements. Gradually, the piece became more balanced.

Eventually, I moved further away from literal representation, shaping the sound more abstractly, stretching, layering, and transforming it, much like paint in Jock's work.

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### **Jock McFadyen:**

What Jem did was reveal things I hadn't even noticed, the electricity building, the mechanical rhythms. He made something new out of something familiar.

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## **On painting and sound**

### **Jem Finer:**

One idea that influenced me was something Jock has said, that the subject of painting is the paint itself.

For me, the subject of music is sound. That connection became central to how I approached the final piece.

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### **Jock McFadyen:**

Yes, we share that idea. Whether figurative or abstract, the process matters. You're not just representing something, you're transforming it.

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## **On realism, abstraction, and process**

### **Will Gompertz:**

Jock, your paintings aren't made directly in front of the subject, are they?

### **Jock McFadyen:**

No. Most painting isn't. Even historically, large works are developed in studios using sketches, memory, and references.

In my case, photography plays a role. But painting is always a combination of observation, memory, and invention.

Even abstract paintings need some element of truth, a kind of anchor.

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## **On collaboration and exhibition**

### **Jock McFadyen:**

At one point, we considered showing the work inside an Underground station, but realised it wouldn't work.

Why create an artistic version of the Underground when the real thing is just next door?

So instead, the exhibition creates a dialogue between sound and image, not an immersive simulation, but something more open and reflective.

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### **Jem Finer:**

Yes, it's not about recreating reality. It's about creating a relationship between the works, something symbiotic, rather than illustrative.

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## **On experience and interpretation**

### **Jem Finer:**

When I saw the exhibition fully for the first time, there were moments where the sound and paintings aligned in a very powerful way, almost cinematic.

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### **Jock McFadyen:**

That's interesting, because some of the paintings, like *Ghosts*, evolved through layers, adding and removing figures, leaving traces behind.

That process creates something that feels present and absent at the same time.

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## **On artistic practice and change**

### **Will Gompertz:**

Your work spans decades. How has it evolved?

### **Jock McFadyen:**

I began as a figurative painter, but over time I became more interested in landscape, atmosphere, and space.

There comes a point where you realise you don't have to keep doing the same thing, you can shift focus, take risks.

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## **On tradition and influence**

### **Jock McFadyen:**

What excites me about painting is being part of a long tradition.

People were painting tens of thousands of years ago, and that hasn't stopped. You're just adding another link in the chain.

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**Jem Finer:**

I feel the same about music. There's a continuity, an ongoing conversation across generations.

Even with my work in The Pogues, I see that now more clearly. It's all connected, past, present, and future.

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**On collaboration**

**Will Gompertz:**

Will you work together again?

**Jem Finer:**

I'd love to. It's been a real pleasure and privilege. But I don't think you force these things, if something emerges naturally, that would be wonderful.

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**Will Gompertz:**

I think you should just go on tour together, frankly.

*(laughter)*

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**Closing**

**Will Gompertz:**

It's been fantastic talking to you both. Thank you.

Please join me in giving a very warm round of applause to Jock McFadyen and Jem Finer.

*(applause)*

The exhibition is open, the music is playing, and drinks are available, so please enjoy the evening.

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