

EDUCATOR'S RESOURCE | SECONDARY & TERTIARY  
SUBJECT TAGS: ART / MUSIC / ENVIRONMENT

## GETTING TO KNOW...

# ZAI TANG *ESCAPE VELOCITY V*



### THE ARTIST

Zai Tang (b. 1984, United Kingdom) is an artist, composer and sound designer based in Singapore. He graduated with a BA in Creative Music Technology from Bath Spa University in 2006.

Tang experiments with different techniques to translate sounds recorded from natural environments to bring attention to the mass extinction of various species. He often creates "visual scores" in response to his soundscapes through drawings.

Tang's work has been presented at festivals and museums including the 2nd Yinchuan Biennale (China, 2018), Danspace Project (New York, 2018), THE O.P.E.N at Singapore International Festival of the Arts (2017), National Gallery Singapore (2017) and Singapore Biennale (2019).



### THE ARTWORK

#### *ESCAPE VELOCITY V*, 2021

Surround-sound and video installation  
Dimensions variable

**MEDIUM:** Sound recordings and digital animation.

**TECHNIQUES / PROCESSES:** Over the past ten years, Tang has recorded the songs and calls of hundreds of different creatures across Singapore. They are the inhabitants of Bukit Brown Cemetery, MacRitchie Reservoir, Mandai, the Rail Corridor and Pulau Ubin—areas which are rich in biodiversity but are also under threat from human development. He also uses graphite, charcoal and digital media to translate the sensuous textures of chirps, croaks, hoots, howls, trills and tweets into graphic form.



**IDEAS / INSPIRATIONS / CONTEXT:** *Escape Velocity V (EV5)* begins with the question, "What does it mean to listen and connect to the sounds of nature in a time of ecological crisis?" This artwork is the fifth artwork in the *Escape Velocity* series, which attempts to bring the ethereal voices of the Singaporean wild to life through animation, sound visualisation and experimenting with the relationship between sound and speed. *EV5* investigates areas in Singapore where wildlife is threatened by urban development. Tang built on his field recordings of birdsong and animal sounds to produce a soundscape of creaturely voices set to an accelerated tempo that mimics the harried pace of urban life. He hopes that audiences will reflect on how our relationship with nature can change after experiencing this immersive sound installation.

### DID YOU KNOW?

"Escape velocity" is a term in physics that describes the speed needed to break free from gravitational influence. In this artwork, it might refer to the need to break free from the human drive to dominate the environment, and the possibility of forging a different relationship with nature.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

***"I'd like students to get a sense of the different ways we can listen to nature and explore the nature of listening." - Zai Tang***

### I AM AT SCHOOL/HOME:



EV5 is an immersive sound installation. However, the artist has provided the sound clip from *Escape Velocity I (EV1)* for remote learning. Download and listen carefully to the sound clip from *EV1*, the first artwork of the *Escape Velocity* series by Zai Tang.

#### DISCOVER:

- Listen to the sounds in the artwork. What do you hear?
- Where do you think these sounds can be heard in Singapore? Suggest a place.

#### DESCRIBE:

Describe the sounds you just heard:

- Are they loud or soft? Do they gradually get louder (crescendo) or gradually get softer (decrescendo)?
- What about the tempo or pitch of the sounds? Are they fast (allegro) or slow (adagio)? Are they high or low?
- How about the timbre (tone) of the sounds? Are they piercing, dark, metallic, bright, mellow, etc?

#### CREATE A RESPONSE TO THE SOUNDSCAPE:

Play the sound clip once more, this time, listen closely to the details. Respond to the sounds by making marks on a piece of paper, using a drawing material of your choice (i.e. pencils, markers, etc).



#### DISCUSS:

Download excerpts from the *Escape Velocity* series and discuss how the artist translated these sounds into graphic form in *EV1-5*.

- How do his artworks differ from your own?
- Are there any similarities or differences? List one of each.
- What other mediums can you use to respond to the soundscape, and why do you think it will be effective?
- Did the artist's use of sound or aural language in the artwork make you think differently about the images they created?

### I AM AT THE ARTWORK:

#### DISCOVER:

- Listen to the sounds in the artwork. What do you hear?
- Where do you think these sounds can be heard in Singapore? Suggest a place.

#### DESCRIBE:

Describe the sounds you just heard:

- Are they loud or soft? Do they gradually get louder (crescendo) or gradually get softer (decrescendo)?
- What about the tempo or pitch of the sounds? Are they fast (allegro) or slow (adagio)? Are they high or low?
- How about the timbre (tone) of the sounds? Are they piercing, dark, metallic, bright, mellow, etc?

#### DISCUSS:

- Listen carefully to the soundscape. Which sounds can you typically hear in Singapore's natural landscape? Why do you think so?
- Observe the visual representations of the sounds presented in the installation. Then, in pairs, discuss how you think the artist translates these sounds into visuals. Do you notice any patterns in the soundscape that correspond with the drawings? For example, do you think he uses bold strokes for loud sounds?

### FIND OUT MORE

#### THE ARTIST AND ARTWORK

- <http://www.zaitang.com/category/news/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/zai.tang/>
- <https://vimeo.com/315444411>
- <https://soundcloud.com/zaitang>

#### OTHERS

- <http://ntu.ccasingapore.org/residencies/zai-tang/>
- <http://cmtalumni.com/zai-tang.html>

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