

## **SPEAKERS**

Gregory Bae, Kelly Lloyd

### **Introduction (Kelly Lloyd) 00:35**

You're listening to This Thing We Call Art, a podcast about 'one on one conversations with different people', because 'we need to have more of [them], we need to have a group or something, we need to be able to, you know, support each other or, like, air some grievances or something like that. Like, you know, there needs to be a safer space.'

I'm your host, Kelly Lloyd, a visual artist, essayist, and educator currently based in the U.K. I've been interviewing people in the arts about their livelihoods since 2017, and today you're going to hear a conversation I had with Gregory Bae on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2021, who at 35 years old, tragically, and unexpectedly died in Chicago on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2021.

Gregory Bae was born on Groundhog's Day in 1986 in Salt Lake City. Bae was multi-disciplinary artist based in Chicago. He received his BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2007 and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (S.A.I.C.) in 2012. He exhibited in Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York City, Milan, Busan and Seoul. He won awards from the Chicago Artists Coalition, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, The City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. He attended residencies in Miami, Cheongju, Seoul and Spartanburg. He was the co-founder and director of Chicago API Artists United (CAAU), the Asian and Pacific Islander Artist Collective, and the co-director for Bills Auto, an exhibition space in Chicago. He was a Lecturer in the Painting and Drawing and Contemporary Practices Departments at S.A.I.C. and Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Art Department at the University of Illinois – Chicago.

Greg and I met at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011 when I was a Post-Baccalaureate student, and he was an MFA student. We were both a part of a Chicago art community for years, running into each other at openings and parties. We were put back in touch when he began dating my friend and his partner Ali Aschman, and because of that I was lucky enough to see Greg in London several times. He asked me to have an exhibition at Bill's Auto in 2019, and I'm glad I got a chance to work with him in that way. His kindness and generosity that I had experienced as a friend was extended to me as

an artist under his care. I'm so thankful that I got a chance to have this good long conversation with Greg, and that I get to share it with you now.

Our conversation was three hours long, and while I wish I could share it with you in its entirety, today, you'll listen to excerpts from it. I'm going to drop you in halfway through...

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### **Gregory Bae 03:16**

Before I got hired to teach, I've been trying to get my foot in the door to teach for several years, but I was kind of always just getting sort of turned around and like, like, sometimes there would be like, bullshit things where like, they'll be like, 'Oh, we lost your resume.' Or, you know, like, 'Can you can you reapply?' Or you know, things like that I'm like, you know, and like, you're, you're interviewing for a job. So, you don't want to be like, 'Fuck you!' You want to be like, 'Oh, yeah, sure, no problem! Yeah, I'll definitely do that!' You know, 'Here's another one!' And let me draft up an even better letter!' You know, because you because you want the job, you don't want to be like, I already did that. You have this as I attach it as a PDF. Like, I can see the record of it right here, like... [Sigh] all right.

But anyway, I would still do those, and I would still come up empty, you know? Like, which means I'd have to keep doing these other jobs that I was doing. And, you know, at the same time, these are my, like there are peers of mine that have been now at this point, teaching for, like, [Sigh] seven years or something, you know? That's a long time, you know? And I haven't gotten anywhere in, in progressing professionally at this point, really. I mean, I've had like, maybe a few shows here and there, but like... nothing really happened in the same kind of way. There's no career that's developing, you know? At least at least in a tangible way that I can really feel momentum or anything. It seems if there is something that feels like momentum it kind of seems like it is shot down pretty quickly.

Like for example, like you, like you do a show. And then there's like nothing that kind of, like they actually instrumentalize... like, you know, where you don't know, where actually puts you. It might actually put you in a worse place. But like to get back to my point, you know, some of my friends have been, like, you know, teaching for a long time now, and I'm trying to get my foot in the door teaching for a while, because that life actually sounds pretty good to me. I hear them talk about it. It sounds rewarding, and, you know... they say it's difficult and stuff like that. But in my mind, I'm like, you know, that can't be hard to laboring

all the time. You know, that's kind of what I'm thinking. I'm like, you know, I want that, you know, and surely, I'm qualified too.

There was this one time when I overheard a group of, again, peers of mine, these are literally people that graduated after me or with me. They're all white men. And they're talking about their students. And there's like a large Asian student population. And they're like, talking about cultural differences and, like, how to pronounce things, like their names, and like, you know, how to deal with certain classroom scenarios. And all this stuff is like, stuff that they have to deal with. And I'm kind of thinking like, yo, this is so simple. Y'all just need to hire more Asian teachers, who actually relate to the fucking demographic that you are educating, you know? So, like, I'm sitting there having a beer, and I'm like, 'Hey, you should hire more Asian teachers.' And they're all just like, 'Well, have you thought about teaching? You should do it.' And I'm just like, God dammit.

They're complaining about money all the time, too. So that's kind of why I thought that we were like, kind of in the same boat. They're like, 'Oh, I'm broke. I'm like, oh, yeah, me too, word. So yeah, let's split that Uber. I got you, yeah, yeah.' But it turns out when they say they're broke and I say I'm broke, we're not talking about the same thing. I'm like, literally, like talking about, I have under ten bucks in my checking account, or I'm under and I'm thinking about paying rent. That apparently is not the same deal with some of these people that I was talking about. And I'm like, oh, shit, okay, you know, I really need to get into this teaching game then if that's what's at stake.

And that's what I mean by like, it's been a big upgrade. Not only is it more, like, you know, honorable or something like that to teach. So, like, you know, it sounds better when I can tell my parents that I like teach college. Like, they're like, 'Oh, good.' You know, because being an artist is not ideal for [an] immigrant's son. That's not the American dream here. So, um, so me being able to say that, like, 'Oh, I'm teaching college, like, you know, I'm like, a, like a professor.' They feel like there's some kind of respectability in that, or something like that. Rather than saying, like, 'I'm a laborer.' Or 'I'm doing odd jobs, and shit.' So that's kind of what I mean, it's been a big upgrade. I'm more financially stable but like with that my perception changes. And I, like, it doesn't make me feel like I'm not poor, I feel like, you know, I can eat tomorrow. Like, I don't feel like I'm about to skip a meal. But I do think that this is still not enough. Like, I hear what they were saying, but like, yeah, you know, it's just a man, I was really in the shithole before. [Laughter]

**Kelly Lloyd 08:13**

I'm really thankful that we're having this conversation. And it's just really like, I don't know, it's, um, yeah... and I'm just kind of sorry, you know, like, it's really interesting, like, in my mind, you know, like, you've always made good work. And so like, when I think about you, I obviously don't think about all the things that you're not, like, I think about all the things that you are. But then we also don't have conversations with one another sometimes about like, how difficult things actually are, and all those applications that are getting lost, you know, because that, that's someone not paying attention. That's like someone not paying attention to the amount of faculty they have, like, who's on their faculty, how many times they've applied? Like, what, you know, what their identities are? Like, what's the demographic of the students? Like, how do you meet the needs of the students? Like, how do you get other people into the educational experience like, like to show the students that the art world is not just this one thing, you know? And, and so I like, knew that you were going through this, but I didn't know it, you know?

**Gregory Bae 09:26**

I mean, there's a time when I was like, kind of keeping tally, because the start to get in my head a little bit. And I was like, okay, let me actually really analyze what's going on here. So, like, for example right now, across two institutions now, U.I.C. and S.A.I.C., the Art Institute, currently, I am teaching one class at each school this semester, which I'm very, very grateful for. And let's see, I have a total of near 40 students, okay, across two schools, right? One is public, one is private, so, there's diversity. Which means it's a pretty good sample case of who's coming into Chicago to learn art, and who wants to be an artist to these two these both fine institutions.

There is literally one white male student in both my classes. This person goes by he, but I don't know what their orientation is, or anything like that. So, like, they might be marginalized. They might, I don't know their total demographic. But on the surface level, what I'm talking about here, there is one white male student. Faculty wise, though, there are a *lot* of white men teachers. So, what's happening here is that, if you look at that statistically, all those other people don't really stand that good of a chance to get a job in Education, teaching.

Which is, as I was highlighting before, one of the better ways to sustain being an artist, because otherwise you're going to be a laborer, or you can do some other shit, that doesn't give you the same kind of time and space to make work. It might drain you in a

different kind of mental way, but like, it's not the same. Which is interesting to think about, because it makes me feel super fucking lucky to be teaching. And I already knew that. I already had the experience of trying to get hired, and I'm, like, thinking like, why is this the case?

And the other thing that I'm noticing is I'm having a few repeat students, and you know... [[Sigh] a lot of these students are bringing some like serious content to the table. Like, you know, some of it I can sympathize with, some of it I can actually empathize with. When the students are making work about their content, you probably want a teacher who can kind of relate to this experience to kind of, you know to kind of figure out the mechanics of, like, what's going on here? And if it's worth pursuing the way that you are, like, you know, even just to talk about like... even just to be comfortable, I think. And I think that's, that's fantastic.

So, I then what I realized, like, we had a few, like, you know, big faculty like, you know, orientation type, you know, things and there's this one super awkward one... which I thought was necessary. We did one that was about, like microaggressions and navigating, you know, race with your students. And there was this, like, question that kind of came up a few times, where apparently some of these white male teachers, or just white teachers, I guess, aren't... they're not comfortable talking about content, you know? Especially with your students, you know? So, like, all of this, to me, means the same fucking thing, like hire more diverse faculty! Like, it doesn't mean like, you know, white people don't get what they're getting, it just means, like, hire other people too, that's all I'm saying, you know? It's not like I'm trying to take anything away, but there's clearly a problem here. There's clearly something that doesn't match up, and also, yo, if these students aren't, like, as the pandemic is shown, if these students aren't enrolling, you're not going to have a fucking job, you know?

And also, like, what better way to celebrate what's going on with our changing demographics in the United States by giving them teachers that they can actually relate to, you know? I think that's really important. I think back on my education, I had a lot of white teachers, you know, especially in Art, in fact... were they all white? God damn, let me think about this... No, no... not until grad school, at least. In grad school, I had one non-white advisor, I think... I mean, I had some queer advisors, but um... anyway, that's, that's wild. That is wild to think about.

Yeah, I'm thinking like, okay, I've actually, like, unlearned a lot of things that I was taught that I thought were just like, universal like kind of things. And, you know, as I

developed as an artist, I kind of realized these things are actually what I'm critiquing. And it's not what I want to be a part of. Where I want to have my own kind of legacy, I want to do my own thing. Mostly because it didn't matter how skilled I got at oil painting, for example. Like, I could be like a phenomenal oil painter. And I hate to say this, but like (I mean, I love to say this, but I was. You know, I was super fucking good.

But like, they're not, but they there's no way that like, you know, I would get seen or celebrate in that kind of way, at least in at the time that I was like doing that, you know. Maybe there's some room now today. Hopefully, that would be cool, but at the same time, I feel a little weird out about that. Because like, it's a very, very niche European tradition that is permeating through contemporary art is now a global thing. Much like the English that we are speaking right now, which, you know, I love. Like, I love the English language, but at the same time, like, no, it's something to think about. And making art is something that I do feel like I have enough fluidity and agency where I can kind of change some of these fundamental, seemingly seemingly universal things. You know, it's a critique of cultural, I don't know, materiality, or something like that... It's funny, I've never tried to put it in words exactly, because I try to think more ideas not in... anyway.

So, you know, I had to unlearn a lot of things that I was just kind of taught that I gained a skill in, and it's because I had white teachers who learned from white teachers who learned from white teachers and so on and so forth, you know? And at the time, when I was a student, most of the students were white, actually. Most of the students at Art School, where I went to, were white, and there was [Laughter] also peppered stories with microaggressions and racism, and blah blah blah, but let me move forward... Like but now I am a teacher, and I'm looking at my students and that is *not* the case. So, you know, maybe mix it up a little bit too faculty wise. Which I think I think they're making an effort to do but um, maybe they can be a little more active about it, I don't know.

**Kelly Lloyd 16:56**

Truly, a little faster...

**Gregory Bae 16:57**

And I get it like, you know, at the same time, that's not the only thing that's changed. Also, the way that people are able to live and make a living has changed, too. And there's a reason why some of these people won't let go their jobs, you know?

I don't think any of these teachers are like, consciously like trying to like do like, 'Yeah, I'm like, instilling white supremacy on you!' [Laughter] Like, I don't think anybody like, is like actively thinking that when they're doing it, you know what I mean? But there is a lot of like, you know, mechanisms that are at play, and that's kind of what I'm talking about, I'm not questioning people's intentions, or like, you know, anything that's good or bad. And, of course, there are plenty of young students who don't even realize they go there wanting to learn these things, you know, they want to... But, um, you know, I kind of asked them like, 'Why do you think this is the thing to learn?' And it's like, what we're talking about. It's like, 'Why do you think this is the way that you gain recognition, that you gain self-value? What is it about learning this white world?' And a lot of it has to do with that.

**Kelly Lloyd 17:58**

Yeah. Yeah, I think a lot about that, in terms of, like, why form is just like, so drilled into you. You know, at least in our school. And it's like, oh, it's because you're navigating around content, because, like, you can't speak to it! And so that's one reason why we continue to, like, uphold these racist and like, you know, very limited things at the heart of the Art World is because we just refuse to talk about content! [Laughter]

Or like, it's really fascinating, like reading through people's applications whenever I've been on panels. And you can tell people just straight out of some of these institutions, just trying desperately to navigate around... to say the right thing. Yeah. And a lot of that has to do with like, yeah, saying, like, 'You know what I'm interested in? Light.' And then you're like, no! Like, that is so boring. Or like, or they clearly have a lot of content in their work that they are afraid to talk about, because they don't think that's the thing that is going to get them the opportunity. Instead, they talk about like, yeah, like, color and form, and like, you know, like materiality. But it's like, a material is a culturally specific thing, so, like, talk about that. That's interesting.

**Gregory Bae 19:13**

I mean, I was, I was one of those kids too, but I think I was actually taught that, is kind of what I'm saying, you know? Like, I was taught to address and like, navigate forums in these very... like, you know, sometimes boring ways, you know? There is a lot of interesting theory behind some of this shit, too, but in the end, like, it is what I was taught. And, you know, I can't help but think like, maybe I've got some blind spots here because a lot of the dialogue and discourse that I participate in, does revolve around, you know, call at

least college level education of art. So, like, I know that there are a lot of other art communities out there that are making stuff...[Sight] like, but you know, we are swimming around in the system.

**Kelly Lloyd 20:06**

Something that I'm think is so important that somebody else said ages ago, I have no idea who said it, but it's like you have to unlearn taste. Because you can't, you have to learn how to like other things, you know? Like, you have to learn how to listen differently to people. Because otherwise, if you're like, 'Well, I like what I like.' Then like, you're only going to like a very small portion of the world that you've been taught to like. And you do have to do the hard work of like unlearning all that shit.

**Gregory Bae 20:37**

Kelly, do you, I don't know if you remember this, but like, even back when we were in grad school, which was like circa 2011, around that time. Which, which I guess shouldn't seem like that distant of the past, but it was such a different world back then. That I remember kind of, you know, wandering through critiques and of course, naturally, I'm very interested in how the other people of colour are being, you know, critiqued and talked about. And I recall that there was a sort of palpable discourse that was really really about form specifically.

Like, you know, a lot of it was formal language, a lot of it was... like that was like where the, the high intellectual stuff was percolating in the Painting Department, at least at that time. And I do remember, like, kind of thinking, man, we can we like, we can kind of start to get into content a little bit, but like, the thing that everybody was reactionary against as people of colour was about playing the race card. That was like something that you did not want to do. Like, you didn't want to, like rely on like, you know, who you were as part of your work, which is... is really odd to think about now, because in every other aspect of life, these things, in terms of systems that are being played out in the world are disadvantages, right?

In art, though, where you can talk about content, exploring things, it's the only time where it is actually something you can use. And to kind of put that down or to be afraid to use it, I think is *incredibly* misguided, you know? It's absolutely wild and insane to think about. Like I was doing these portfolio reviews for possible incoming students, and I had this one kid, [who] had dropped out of college, and had a rough life. And she was trans and



had a very difficult upbringing in life, and like was talking about it and stuff and was making really dope ass work with incredible content. And also like, was very inventive with form for that reason. And also, what they were telling me about the work was incredibly interesting. And, you know, all these stories of being marginalized, and kind of overcoming things I kind of, could relate to, maybe not in the exact same kind of way, but I kind of relate to that. But the kind of emotional vibe that they were giving off of being unsure of themselves, and, like, being like, 'Well, this is what I make work about... but it's not really about any, like, you know, like, but I don't think it's even that important.' You know, like, this kind of thing.

I was like, 'No, what are you doing? Like, you should, you should be, you should feel good about being able to talk about this, to have an avenue where you can kind of do this. And also like, it's clear the life that you've lived, all these things that have worked out for you with your family and everything. Like, yo this has been shit for you. Like, I'm not gonna lie, I think you're really brave and amazing. But in your application, when you write about your work, talk about these things, don't be shy.' And they're like, 'I don't know.' I'm like, 'Look, it might be uncomfortable, but I think it's worth it to be vulnerable in this scenario, because in your case, right now, if you want to play the game, it's gonna be good. It's gonna be good, and you need to actually use your disadvantage to an advantage in a Judo technique kind of way when you can. Like, you got to do this. You can go to this school, apply to all of them and get the best scholarship you can and start thinking about grad school. I think you actually are already an artist. Think about, just you probably don't know this, but Yale is like the top school...' And they're like, 'Yale! I can't see myself...' I'm like, 'Look, you could, you know? And use your disadvantages that that is your, you know, you had the cards that you've been dealt in life, that are disadvantages to an actual advantage when you can, which is an art.' And I just like, man, I just think back to like, being shy about content when I was in grad school, and thinking about like, man, I don't want to be labeled as like, you know, an 'Asian artist', you know, this or that or like, you know, and like, that's, that's fucked up.

### **Kelly Lloyd 24:47**

I mean, again, right, like this would be solved if there was more diversity. Because like, what I saw happening whenever there was a hint of something else going on, is like, that's what people fixated on and would not let go. And would not see with any like level of complexity. Like I had some advisors that were like, 'Have you ever looked at Betty Saar's work?' And I'm like, my work and Betty Saar's work are on the opposite side of the

Universe. You're literally only just naming off all the Black people that you know. Like, this is not helpful to me whatsoever. Like, look at the work in front of you, and then maybe do some research. Like, I'm more than happy for you to like, tell me some Black names, but at least have them be like, somewhat related to what I'm doing.

And I mean, I think this is like such a difficult thing Greg, and, like, and I think it's an additional burden, which like, sucks, you know? And I mean, I think this... [Sigh] a couple of things, right? Like, um, you know, in the United States when they desegregated schools, like they laid off so many Black teachers. And they, like, bussed Black students into, like, white neighborhoods, you know? It's like, it's like, you didn't integrate the school population, like, by, like, diversifying teachers. You kept them all white teachers, and then forced these kids to do work that adults should have been doing, to accommodate for their needs, instead of having to, like, deal with like, at this point, right, like, you know, decade's worth of not having teachers that actually see them as human beings, but rather X seeing them as like statistics.

And so like, we again, I think, as people of colour in the institution, are forced to negotiate, like, what parts of ourselves we want to play when to get opportunities, because we know on the other side of the admissions panel, or like the majority of the people at our critique, or like our new advisor, like, they're going to be white people who, like see us as one-dimensional in some ways, and are going to see our work through that being one-dimensional. So, like, while I totally agree with what you're saying, like I feel like that can only be played at certain points, because if you play it too early, or if you play it too often, like no one will ever think your work is about anything else.

### **Gregory Bae 27:07**

That was exactly the thing. Like, yeah, like, that's why you were kind of afraid to like, 'pull a race card' was because you don't want to be seen as... like you want to be, you want to be legitimate, you know? That's kind of like a thing that is in your head, which is like, man, it's weird, because you kind of need to put [Sigh] a big part of yourself aside in a deliberate way, not even, like in a subconscious way. Like it's, a situation, I don't even know what to make of it, but I'm not that every, you know, person of color artist needs to be like, making work about you know, race or something, or every queer artist needs to be making work about being queer, that's not what I'm talking about.

But if there is something in there, like, there's something about this experience that kind of drives content to a degree and, [Sigh] man, I, at this point in my life, I don't see how

I cannot because it's a part of every experience that you have no matter what. You know, there's going to be something in there, there's going to be a kernel in there that needs to be explored. And [Sigh] if I had a student of mine that was making work that was stereotypical to their marginalization, or their, their identity, it doesn't even have to be marginal, like, you know, actually even when it's just like, you know, white kids that are making, 'white art', I try to get them to kind of question that. And kind of explore that a little bit further, like, you know, expand a little bit like, you know, get a little more complex. So, yeah, if I have students that are making shit like that, then I'm going to be like, [Laughter] 'Is this really how you want to be seen?' You know, 'Do you have more to add to this conversation here? Because if that's what you're putting out then, like, maybe that is how you can be seen. But like, that doesn't mean you can't talk about who you are. Don't be afraid of that. But like, let's get that, let's round that out a little bit.'

**Kelly Lloyd 29:07**

Yeah, because it has to be seen as like, not a flavour to add or something, or something to like, assimilate into, but like, another body of things that you can, you can point to in your work or repeat like a call and response, you know? Like, we can't just always be, you know, responding to like, you know, like Modernism, or Postmodernism, or, you know, whatever, like the grid, or... It's like, when we respond to these things, we respond to them because we want to be seen inside of the Art History in a certain way. But we need to, like, see these other cultures that we're a part of as live active things that we also need to respond to, as opposed to like, seeing our culture as processed through Contemporary Art, and then needing to assimilate into that or something, you know?

**Gregory Bae 30:06**

Yeah, kinda like, I mean, to go with what you're saying, like there's all the flip question that I had afterwards where I was like, 'God damn, am I making "white art"?' [Laughter]

**Kelly Lloyd 30:16**

For sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think about, like, my favorite artists and like, still a good chunk of them are white.

**Gregory Bae 30:22**

I mean, I've only been teaching for three semesters, I absolutely love it. I have this issue, and maybe it's because of how I dress, but a lot of students... (probably well, also my behavior sometimes, like my juvenileness) but, they're surprised that I'm a teacher. But like, you know, at the same time, that kind of adds up to like, maybe these kids just aren't used to seeing especially Asian men as faculty members, Fine Art faculty members rather. I know that there are Asian teachers in other fields, but maybe the Art World hasn't seen that many Asian artists or Art Stars, in the West at least.

**Kelly Lloyd 31:04**

Tell me again, about this new network that you formed or like this collective or this...?

**Gregory Bae 31:08**

Let me segue into it this way, the other thing that I kind of... you can't help but become aware of, is that to kind of get anywhere to do anything, or to be anywhere, to be anyone, you do need a network, and you need people that kind of allow you opportunities to kind of be put in these places. So, for example, you know, like, I didn't get into teaching, I mean, I tried for a handful of times, but somebody needed to let me have that, you know? This could have happened in all stages of life, and especially to get into the school and to be in the school, you need support to be there. And what goes on is even after school, like you know, who is going to help you to sustain and to keep living as an artist? Like there is a certain amount of like your own, like volition, your own kind of ambition that you have to carry, but you know, you need to be able to find support, and a network or something that's going to help you achieve these things. And if you don't have that network, then you're going to have a much more difficult life, frankly.

So, all these things kind of, in play in the reality that we live in, it became kind of urgent for me to start a coalition of Asian, Asian American (which is a weird demographic to try to cut this because it's so vast), like, you know, Pacific Islander, like, you know, like, you know, who does that entail, who does that not entail? Anyway, let's just put a broad umbrella term on it, just call it Asian coalition of artists and our writers, you know, people that work in the Art Field. That are in my network that I've that I've gotten to know, throughout being in Chicago and being an artist. And to kind of let us congregate let us like, have a space and be a group of sorts, a loose group, a cohort where we can kind of know

what each other are up to. And we can kind of get together and actually be amongst each other and talk about things, which can be totally inane from like, you know, just talk about your life, talk about your family, talking about whatever, to talking about bigger things, or, you know, anything. You know, just for us to kind of have a space together.

This is something that I've been kind of thinking should be, at least in Chicago, for a while because I hadn't seen or experienced anything like that. But I did start to like I started to know other Asian people that are navigating the same circles that I am. And the idea was to kind of pull us together, and to have some kind of solidarity. Not that everybody has to get along with each other, but at least, you know, to know each other and to have something there available for us.

So, what would happen was throughout in the past, I would have these one-on-one conversations with these different people. And sometimes we would enter into these kinds of conversations, not dissimilar from what we're talking about right now. And thinking like, man, we need to, like, have more of this. We need to, like have a group or something, need to be able to, you know, support each other, or like air some grievances or something like that. Like, you know, there needs to be a safer space, etc. And I kind of kept on just like, you know, I don't want to be the one to do that, I'm like an introvert. So, I don't want to, I don't like putting myself out way too much. And so, but like, it just wasn't coming together.

And then finally, during the pandemic amidst all the crazy things that were happening, there was also a lot of stigma that was being re [Sigh] rehashed about Asian people. And I was like, hearing about these hate crimes, and incidents that were happening. And some things are even happening to artists and stuff like that. And I was like you know, what now is as good of a time as any. And so, I just wrote an email to all the people that I knew. I didn't like, you know, there are people out there that I that I am aware of, but that I don't know. Like, I don't want to email somebody, like, 'Hey, you're Asian.' [Laughter] Like, it's always awkward, I wasn't trying to do that, so, I just contacted people that I know. You know, and invited them in, and like, 'Let's, let's start this, let's have a group.' And, and so we all did, and it was really, the response is fantastic. You know, a lot of people didn't even know each other, or like, this is like the kind of average statistic, like most people knew, maybe like a third or half of the people, but like, now, people are knowing each other more and are aware of each other at least.

So, um, so it was really good. And, and the response and kind of the energy of it is fantastic. We're not that old, we've only started again the summer of 2020. But we got that group now. And, you know, me trying to spearhead this is taking up a lot of energy and

time, but I think it's a good thing. And it's kind of me recognizing that, I'm not going to do this by myself. And also like, it's becoming more and more clear that there's a very good chance that I'm not going to get to do everything in my lifetime that I wanted to do, or that I wanted to accomplish or wanted to be, but maybe I can make some space for the future, you know? Maybe I can, like, do something now that's a little bit more proactive, that's going to set some precedent and bring about some awareness or something like that is going to help other kids that might feel similar to me now, in the future, you know? Like, if I don't, or if this doesn't, then there's just a bigger chance that it'll be more of the same in the future. Like another kid that is exceptionally qualified to maybe teach a class or something that wants to (I feel like I'm bragging, but like, I don't know, like, I am qualified, though, God damnit), but like that might want to, but then like, gets their resumes that keep on getting turned around, but like, you know, if we have some kind of a network that is aware of these things, then it's just less likely to happen, you know?

I just watched this movie about Fred Hampton. And, you know, just to take a page from his book (not that I'm trying to get assassinated or anything) but [Laughter] like, the most ideal situation of this is to link up with other groups. Other groups that are like, kind of maybe formal or informal, that are around like, you know, and have something, a coalition between all of us, you know? That way, if something like let's say, something fucked up, or weird happens to a Latino/Latina/Latinx person at an institution and if that word is certainly going to circulate in their community, but if it can get around to all of us, then it's just less likely to happen to everybody, because everybody's going to be more [Sigh] aware of it, which means people are going to be, going to do more work to not be bad. [Laughter] You know what I mean? So that's kind of what I have in mind.

Of course, activity has been super limited because everybody's at home all the time. So, I'm hoping that we come out of this come out of this, we can, I can... kind of like, you know, we need to solidify a little bit more ourselves too. Because we're super new, but, um, you know, to branch out to other groups that are in Chicago to and kind of, like, have us all aware of each other have a have a broader coalition amongst everybody, you know? We're trying to let it inherently develop this group. I had, you know, I was coming in hot headed, like, you know, angry and like, fiery, because I was just feeling a lot of injustice. And like, you know, just felt like, there was a lot of work to be done. And I was like, organizing all these things in my head. I was getting kind of, like, you know, kind of crazy about it. So, I had like this, three point like, sort of agenda that I wanted to address, which I would like kind of bring up and then people were like, 'Okay, this is like, maybe a little too radical. Like,

you know, maybe we can kind of just let it inherently organically develop.' And I was like, 'Yeah, okay, that's actually probably a better way to go.' Like I said, I'm an introvert, and I'm not like, in my opinion, a natural born, like, leader-type, I'm more of like, I try to be alone, you know, what I mean? So...

**Kelly Lloyd 40:15**

These things are compatible.

**Gregory Bae 40:19**

Okay, right. [Laughter] But to me, like, you know, I was thinking if I'm gonna, if I'm going to go into this, I'm going to go in with all my introverted thoughts that are, I'm going to extrovert now. And I'm going to organize, and I'm going to put it in these ways. So, my idea was this (and sure enough this is actually sort of organically happening anyway), but when I first came in, and I said, this, people were like, 'Let it just develop.' You know? That was kind of the advice that I was getting from older heads that had kind of maybe been through something similar. And they were like, okay, you don't want to push so fast and so hard, because, you know, not everybody's going to have the same experiences as you and blah, blah, blah, I'm like, 'Yeah, true. But like, that's why it's divided up like this.' Like, anyway, my, I'll say, I'll say this now, just for the sake of conversation, the idea was to kind of put it out in three ways. One was for promotion, and knowing each other, so we can kind of like, champion each other. Like, let's say, my friend is having a show somewhere, that, you know, they can always use other people hyping that up for them, and kind of, you know, at least going to check it out, you know? Being more aware of things that they're doing, because there are a lot of shows that happen. So, to kind of build a little bit of a platform where we can kind of promote and kind of recognize each other and have an idea of what's going on with each other.

So that's one, which has become essentially an Instagram page at this point. And, and of course, we, of course people talk amongst each other, too, not everything gets formal this way because sometimes people just have friendships, and they just talk like that. But we but we do have an Instagram page where we try to post people in the group their shows or things that they're doing. The other another aspect of, this was my deal was to kind of have an activist side. So, if something racist happened then there will be a group that can kind of support you, or even fight for you, you know? Or if I'm like a support group, essentially, in that in that case, not about like, what you're making, the shows that you're

doing, but in how you're navigating the world, or how the world is navigating through you rather, yeah. So, like, if something happens to you, then you can relay this information to a group in this group, and they would like, give you advice, rally behind it.

I have a very good story about this. Like, for example, one time, just last Fall, I was out teaching. And we have these long lunch breaks that were being put in place because of the pandemic, but I need to do a canvas stretching demo for a class that I was doing remotely at home. So, during my lunch break, I went to the art supply store and got stretcher bars and Canvas because I don't use that shit anymore, so I went to go get it. And I was on my way back and this this unmasked I'm guessing 30-something year-old like dude, asked me for a cigarette. I did not want to give him a cigarette because I only have, like, so many left so I just kind of looked at when I shook my head like this. And I'm like waiting at the crosswalk. And this is like, this is like the middle of downtown during lunch hour so, like there are a lot of people around. This is like Wabash and Monroe, okay, right? So, I'm sitting here and I'm like waiting at the crosswalk, you know, minding my own God damn business. And I hear this guy kind of like yelling behind me. And I hear a couple slurs sort of slip out, you know? And I'm, like, hold up is this guy yelling at me? And like, I turned around, and this guy is fucking livid, he is pissed off. And he... I think he thought that he was just really going to get a cigarette from me or something? I don't know, he was super mad at me, and he was telling me that I couldn't even verbally respond. He was saying expletives, came right up to my face and was threatening to punch me, like, you know, doing this, like tough guy shit, raising your hands a little bit, like, you know, threatening a punch, you know? And I'm like, 'Dude, I gotta go back and teach a class. I *cannot* deal with this right now.' And it's, it's like, my adrenaline is up, it's in front of a lot of people in public. The crosswalk changes, and I'm like, I'm gonna go. I need to get back to class. I don't want to deal with this. I don't like violence anyway. I cross the street. Luckily, he doesn't follow me.

And I'm like, oh, my God, like, I'm like, put in a vulnerable position involuntarily. I'm feeling sensitive, 'm feeling angry. I'm feeling like, I'm just like, I'm just feeling crazy, you know, I feel upset. And I go in and just before class, I like, wrote something to the group. I'm like, 'Listen, this just happened to me, blah, blah, blah.' And there, there's an older head in the group who had been working in the Institution for a while, who no longer is there, but he, because of his knowledge of the school, he had calculated exactly what time I was getting out of class. And as soon as class ended, I got a phone call from him. And he gave me all this advice about what to do with the situation, about reporting it to Campus Security,



blah, blah, blah. I was like, 'Man, I don't really want to do that, like I don't want to.' And he's like, 'I get what you're saying.' Like, in the end, nothing actually happened, there was no actual altercation. Like, it was super upsetting, and very threatening, but like, nothing actually happened. He's like, 'Yeah, but like, I get that you don't want to, like, you know, go through all the shit more and just want to go home, blah, blah, blah. But it's like, but think about it like this, like, you know, this guy just wanted to just be a fucking jackass, because he felt, you know, disillusioned or something like that. And he was, by the way that he was talking and treating you clearly there was something targeted and motivated in this. It could have been any one of your students, how about that? And he's still out there.' And I was like, 'Yeah, okay, you know what, I'm gonna go report this.' So, I did. And so that's one example of how another part of this organization has been good, like that kind of thing.

Of course, in my mind, this could also involve other things, like, for example, maybe you have a show, and a gallery deals with you in a very weird kind of way, or a museum, like, you know, maybe that's something that people should know about. So, if they do go into that situation, they can be prepared for it, or know that that's kind of the sort of person that they might be dealing with, you know? Not saying that you don't want that opportunity, but like, you know, maybe you can kind of have some context about who this is, or what might happen or might not happen. Anyway, so, there's that too. So, I've got these two things.

And the third one, which I think is the most important is just for community is just for us to get together and shoot the shit. And you know, maybe when things clear up, we can party together in person a little bit. So, we do like Zoom cocktails and stuff like that, where we can actually just, like, be friends with one another and actually get to know each other. Because, you know, that's kind of like the foundation for all of this, like, to feel comfortable enough to kind of talk about any of these things, or to genuinely promote any of these things you do kind of need to be friends and know these people. And also, even if you don't do any of that, you have friends and you know, that's cool.

So that's kind of the three things like this side of activism, this side of promotion, and this side of community. That's what I'm driving for. And I'm sure this can be expanded in all sorts of ways but um, you know, that's the gist of what I had in mind for this group. And it's not my own thing. I need to stress that. I did wrangle people together and it's since grown a lot. Like people have been like, 'Oh, this person might be interested in this, this person is interested in this, can you contact them? Blah, blah, blah.' So, we've like kind of expanded but it is democratic. But yeah, that's what's up.

**Kelly Lloyd 48:34**

So good! What a beautiful gift to have, like, once all of this ends, like actually a community to step into.

**Gregory Bae 48:43**

Some of us might have been a park one-time last Summer which was fun but obviously like, you know, we couldn't even like really share food or anything which, you know, Asian people *love* to share food and eat so... [Laughter] So, it's like a big thing but the idea is that when this clears up at 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Project Space, shout out to James Kao, Mika Horibuchi, Valentina Zamfirescu and SaraNoa Mark who run that space. They're putting up a show with Michiko Itatani, the teacher at SAIC, the painter, right. So, she's going to do a show there. But the idea is that that's where we're gonna, like, that's our first like, post-pandemic get together. We're gonna get together and like, you know, what better place and to celebrate this, this painter that's been working and inspiring so many people for so many years for decades, and to, for a group of us Asian people to kind of show up, show up for her and hang out. And, obviously, there's going to be a lot of other people too, because Michiko has been around for a long time. So, yeah.

**Kelly Lloyd 49:50**

So exciting. Usually, at the end of an interview, I ask, if you have any questions for me? And then also, if there's anything that you thought we would talk about, that we haven't talked about? Or, if there's anything that you just kind of want to say?

**Gregory Bae 50:10**

No, I think we actually talked about a lot more than what I thought we were going to talk about, which is cool. Let's see, um, I guess my last question for you is my interest in the project that you're doing here, is... so it dovetails really nicely with kind of a lot of concepts that you work through in your work. In fact, I think this is maybe in our project, that is a part of your work, perhaps, who knows? Maybe, but like, it's super dope. But my question is, so I'm guessing you've interviewed quite a few people? How do those demographics breakdown so far? Like, how have you, yeah, just set that out as a broad question.

**Kelly Lloyd 50:59**

Yeah, definitely. Um, so you are my 67th interview, and the demographics are not good. [Laughter] So I think, I think, you know, um, the way that I started this project was I thought it was going to be a PhD. And then I just didn't get into any PhDs. And so, then I just kind of started. And I applied to a number of artists residencies with essentially like the same kind of idea of this PhD. And I got into the artist residencies, and I just wanted to start to see what the project was. I started meeting people through the institutions because, like, it's a difficult conversation to have with someone. So, you almost need someone to trust, you know? Even if it's just like an administrator in an institution, or like a friend who refers another friend or something. I think once I actually met up with somebody who just wanted to kind of make sure I wasn't a psychopath, you know, before he, like, talked to me, which was like, totally fine, of course.

Um, I've just kind of been talking to people who want to talk to me. And doing that in, you know, these very white places, and through institutions that typically circulate, like, fairly young people. Now I think, I think I have to do the clunky thing of, like, targeting specific populations that I think will just have to be kind of clunky or clumsy, just for the sake of, like, it needing to be something I have to do. You know, I have up until this project, not been able to pay people. So, I think if I am kind of doing some demographic targeting, like I need to pay people. [Laughter] And hopefully I can retroactively pay people as well. So that's the next hope is that maybe my next grant can be a larger grant, and then I can include in that budget, paying people from the past as well as continuing to pay people in the future. So, the people that I have kind of lined up for these ten interviews, I did try to like, you know, have some, like, diversity in there. The age thing I think, is really difficult for me, because I just like truly don't know that many young people are that many older people. I need to look into that. But so, I think that's kind of really one of the next phases of the project. And I think it also kind of combines with another phase of the project is like, actually paying people.

**Gregory Bae 53:44**

Yeah, no, I'd be curious to kind of like, you know, compare my experiences with other people. So that's, that's kind of the reason why I'm asking, because we're talking about it in a very candid way. So, yeah, I think it's a great archive that you're going to build. And I'm really curious about it.

**Kelly Lloyd 54:02**

We had a good conversation.

**Gregory Bae 54:05**

Yeah, that was fun, it was good.

**Kelly Lloyd 54:07**

I mean, some points were not so fun, but I think we're obviously like really important and really important to talk about together, but then also like on the record. So, thank you for that.

**Gregory Bae 54:20**

I'm flattered and happy to be a part of this. So, thanks for inviting me, for sure.

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**Outro (Kelly Lloyd) 54:31**

You can learn more about Greg and his work by going to his website [gregorybae.com](http://gregorybae.com). If you're in Chicago, Julius Caesar opened two solo shows of Greg's work on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago will have a solo exhibition of Greg's work in June.

You can find the links to all of these events in the show notes on the website, [thisthingwecallart.com](http://thisthingwecallart.com), as well as excerpts from conversations I've had with people in the arts over the years.

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Thanks so much for listening, and tune in next week for my conversation with Gordon Hall.