

SPEAKERS

Ruth Lie, Kelly Lloyd, Zarina Muhammad, Morgan Quaintance

Kelly Lloyd 00:34

You're listening to This Thing We Call Art, a podcast about the 'issues and inequalities surrounding artistic labour.'

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 on the 24th of February 2022 with Zarina Muhammad and Morgan Quaintance at The Whitechapel Gallery. This event was organized by Ruth Lie, a curator at Public Programmes at Whitechapel Gallery, who I met while we were both Artist Mentors at Space Studios' London Creative Network Programme. I'll let Ruth introduce us...

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Ruth Lie 01:13

Hello, good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for coming. My name is Ruth Lee, and I'm the curator of Public Programs here at Whitechapel Gallery. I'm really, really happy that Morgan Quaintance, Zarina Muhammad and Kelly Lloyd are here tonight. So, I'm going to give you a little bit of background. This panel discussion forms part of our *Ways of Knowing* series, which is a program of art and ideas to explore alternative ways of thinking about our relationship to the world. For our spring season, we're exploring ideas around work and process inspired by *A Century of the Artist Studio* exhibition, a 100-year survey of the studio, through the work of artists and image makers from around the world, which opened here at the gallery today. Please also visit the living studios in Galleries Five and Six if you can, which is a free making space, and it's open until nine o'clock tonight. As part of this, I think it's really essential, especially within the institutional context of a public program, to examine and acknowledge the issues arising from inequalities in the creative

sector. And as such, I hope we can touch upon some of these concerns this evening. So, I'd like to introduce Morgan, Zarina, and Kelly.

Morgan Quaintance is a London-based artist and writer. His moving image work has been shown and exhibited widely at festivals and institutions, including MoMA in New York, Images Festival in Toronto, and the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. Over the past 10 years, his critical writings on contemporary art, aesthetics and their socio-political contexts have featured in publications including *Art Monthly*, *The Wire* and the *Guardian*, and helped shape the landscape of discourse and debate in the UK. [Laughter]

Zarina Muhammad is a writer, art critic and is the co-founder of The White Pube an online art criticism platform that publishes reviews, essays and more. White Pube's recent pamphlet for rough trade books, which came out in November last year, called *ideas for a new art world* (which you can get in our bookshop tonight) collects exactly that, their ideas for new art world during a time when things can really feel quite broken.

Kelly, who will be chairing this event this evening, is a transdisciplinary artist who focuses on issues of representation and knowledge production and prioritizes public facing collaborative research. She's currently doing a PhD in Fine Art at the Ruskin School of Art, is a member of 12ø Collective and was recently a mentor as part of SPACE Studios' Creative Network programme. Kelly's podcast, *This Thing We Call Art* began in 2017, and since then, she's interviewed 85 people in the arts about their livelihoods, documenting diverse stories of artists as workers. In addition to the online archive (which will be continuously updated) she'll share excerpts from a series of interviews through a podcast, which is available now on her website, thisthingwecallart.com

So, the panel is going to last around 45 minutes, and then there'll be plenty of time for questions afterwards. And finally, if you're able to wear a face mask, we'd really appreciate you doing so. So, I'm going to hand over to Kelly now. Thank you! [Applause]

Kelly Lloyd 04:51

Thanks for being here, thanks for coming. I think we're just going to have a chat, like, a pretty informal chat, I guess talking about the inequalities in... 'artistic issues and inequalities surrounding artistic labor'. But in a casual way, I think. Hopefully not, like, a really intense way (even though all this stuff is really intense). Um... maybe do you have anything you want to add to your bios in your introductions?

Zarina Muhammad 05:22

Oh God... Wait, I just wanna say [Morgan] yours is very official.

Morgan Quaintance 05:25

Was it?

Zarina Muhammad 05:25

It's a very professional bio. It's very intimidating.

Morgan Quaintance 05:26

I tried to make it as like chill as possible, not over stuffing it, you know? So, I tried to be like 'Morgan Quaintance is the artist and writer' and people were like no... there has to be some detail in it. So, yeah, I provided some. Actually, I didn't do that, someone else did that.

Kelly Lloyd 05:45

Somebody else wrote it?

Morgan Quaintance 05:45

Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 05:46

I think that's the best way.

Morgan Quaintance 05:48

Yeah... not somebody else that I employed. [Laughter] I mean, someone else put that together. Yeah, someone here.

Kelly Lloyd 05:56

I think maybe Ruth did it. Ruth put it together. Thank you, Ruth.

Ruth Lie 05:59

Sorry Morgan!

Kelly Lloyd 06:00

Yeah, um, yeah. So, do you [Zarina] want to add anything? Also, I don't know if your bio was separate from The White Pube or? I don't know, [Morgan] do you want to say anything else about you before we...

Morgan Quaintance 06:14

Just chilled, nice guy. [Laughter] Looking to make friends after the pandemic.

Kelly Lloyd 06:20

Panel as dating profile.

Morgan Quaintance 06:25

Connections yeah. I'm serious, I'm actually serious! [Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 06:31

[Zarina] would you like to introduce yourself in any other way?

Zarina Muhammad 06:33

Oh, no. Yeah, I'm The White Pube, I always send over The White Pube not my individual one. I don't know why, it just makes more sense. I feel like it's embarrassing to be introduced by my name. Conversely, it doesn't make sense., I walk into a room and I'm like, 'Hello, I'm The White Pube.' That's less embarrassing. Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 06:49

Yeah, for sure. Like having the cover of other people. So, you don't want to say like, 'Hi, my name is...?'

Zarina Muhammad 06:57

Hi, my name is Zarina Muhammad. I'm here to have fun and be myself. Yeah.
[Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 07:03

Okay cool. I feel like I had to do one of these now... Hi, my name is Kelly Lloyd. I'm here to be with people who I am interested in talking to and respect, and also to prove to myself that I still have a career. [Laughter]... Yeah, also that have fun and stuff, you know?

Cool. Um, I mean, I do I want to just ask you both how you're doing in general, specifically in terms of like your material conditions, but also don't... feel free to not answer anything that I asked you, and then also feel free to not share anything that you wouldn't want to share. But I did want to start off with like, a tweet that The White Pube tweeted... (twote?) I think, this past weekend, if that's okay, too, like... Yeah, and then... so then maybe, yeah, so I'll start with that, say something else about Morgan, and then just ask you both how you're doing.

Um, so this past weekend, I think this past Sunday, The White Pube tweeted, 'everyone in every industry seems to have such low morale at the moment. no will, no joy just barely climbing forward through the days. is anyone doing well?' I'm a part of a collective with Lou Macnamara and Eva Duerden, and we were together in Southend at Metal, where you're also...

Morgan Quaintance 08:24

... a non-resident resident, yeah. Supposed to be there now. But yeah, I'm gonna go in a couple weeks.

Kelly Lloyd 08:31

They said that you were doing a residency, like, over time?

Morgan Quaintance 08:35

But they also said, this is the thing where, like, you don't have to come here. So, I was like, oh, okay. But the residency ends in a few weeks. So, like, I've got to go up.

Kelly Lloyd 08:45

Okay. But have you been there at all?

Morgan Quaintance 08:47

I've been to Metal before. Yeah, yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 08:48

Super lovely. So, I was in, like, this really idyllic situation with friends working. And then we read this tweet. And it was like, dramatically. Yeah, so I just wanted to read it out loud dramatically. And then also, so I don't know if you would want to talk about that or not, I just wanted to bring it up.

And then Morgan, I just wanted to, so yeah, so with this, this project, *This Thing We Call Art*, it didn't start off as a podcast, I just started interviewing people in 2017, really just trying to understand, like, what people were dealing with as people working in the arts. And then over time it kind of formed itself into an archive, which is now online, and then also this podcast. And so, one of the people that I interviewed in this series of people that I interviewed was Morgan (thanks for letting me interview you, Morgan). Um, and at the time, you were like, super busy, but you were thinking that you might need to, like, ease off a bit, so did you actually do that?

Morgan Quaintance 09:45

I don't remember when we spoke.

Kelly Lloyd 09:47

We spoke like, last year. Sometime... like spring last year.

Morgan Quaintance 09:52

I don't know. You know, I was honestly if I'm gonna be completely candid, I was just trying to survive. Like psychologically it was very bleak place. So, I don't remember being like super super, like, busy and productive. I just remember being, like, hanging by a thread, so to speak. So, but I'm still here! [Laughter] Yeah. Yeah, but like, I mean, that's why I remember from last Spring. Yeah. Sorry.

Kelly Lloyd 10:29

No, I asked you for it. Yeah, yeah yeah. No, you go for it.

Morgan Quaintance 10:31

No, that's enough for now.

Zarina Muhammad 10:33

Yeah, relatable content because, like, I think last year was the most bonkers year of my life. Like, I mean, maybe an exaggeration, I feel like being like a toddler must have been pretty wild, but like, I think last year, Gab got COVID, then long COVID. And we already kind of have this like, quite strange, long-distance relationship, which is like just takes place purely on WhatsApp. So, I just kind of have to assume that she's there on the other end, like doing good, happy living life. And then all of a sudden, it's never felt like, distance distance. But all of a sudden, yeah, that distance felt really, really far. And I was like, my friend is not okay. Like, that's mental, bonkers, hate it. And kind of the same kind of hanging on to a thread, just like clenching, and hoping that at some point it will stop. Yeah, it did. It's all good. Like, 2022 not as many bad vibes, I think.

Kelly Lloyd 11:23

I think. Okay, cool. So 'still here', 'not as many bad vibes', as just like as a general update. Yeah, I think I just kind of wanted to ask you, like, if you wanted to talk about your material conditions, specifically, (again, you don't have to like, you know, answer this. I could also answer it). Zarina, I know that, that you also work a part time job outside of the arts. And then I remember in our conversation Morgan, you were talking about, I think I just asked you the question (I don't even know if it was like, relevant to where you were in your career at that point) but just about like, how does one get an article published? And like, if you're still kind of like, pitching, pitching, pitching, or if you have, like, you know, kind of a stable foundation as a staff writer, you know, at *Art Monthly*, or one of the other places that you publish?

Morgan Quaintance 12:14

Do you want me to start?

Kelly Lloyd 12:17

Yeah, I think maybe I'm just asking joint questions, so maybe start with that, and then it comes back around.

Morgan Quaintance 12:23

The way I survive at the moment is that, like, before the pandemic, when the pandemic happened, I was like, I have to get a job. I just knew I needed to get a job because I was like, there's not going to be... I just was like, I need to get a job. So, I got a job teaching lecturing at Kingston. And then I separated from my partner at the time, so I had to move out of my flat. And then I moved in with these, like, nightmare people. I mean, like they were just really, I could describe them as like, aggressively normal. [Laughing] Yeah, yeah. And it was just crushing. And so, I knew I was like, I have to live on my own, you know. So basically, now my whole entire wage goes on my rent.

And so, I'm now back in the market like pitching, pitching, pitching, doing, and like, doing things like this. And then I realized I like have to try and survive on the film festival economy. So, I won a few awards, like, last year and the year before. And those awards are basically like my subsistence money. So now I'm like, I need to make an award-winning film every year so that I can kind of survive. Yeah. Which is kind of, it's weird, but it's kind of cool because it's like, well, you've got to make a decent one. Yeah, I know it sounds kind of strange. But I don't know. So you know, basically, what I'm saying is I'm kind of out there trying to make stuff again, because I love it, but also because it's a kind of existential imperative to. Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 14:01

Can I just, like, ask a follow up question about... because I don't know anything about film screenings, and like, how much money you're paid, you know, for the distribution of your film. But then also, like, if you're in a film festival, are you paid to participate? Or is it really only, like, what if you get a... if it's an award-winning film? And then like, how, if you don't mind me asking, how much money is that?

Morgan Quaintance 14:20

Yeah, so. So, like, 5k usually get about 5,000 if you win a prize, so... but some people don't give you a prize, it just gives me prestige. [Laughter] Yeah. And then, you know, when you could fly, they fly you out somewhere. And then I guess, I've only had one statement from my film distributors, and it was like about two grand for, like, a year's worth of film. So that'd be like, but then you know, I don't know because, well, let's see what it's like this year, because that the first year of the pandemic, everything went online. So,

everybody was like renting film, so I don't know if that's like an unusual amount, or an average, yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 15:06

How, on the on the website to it says, 'I have a part time job, don't ask me about it' or like, 'it's none of your business'. There's also if it's not my business...

Zarina Muhammad 15:14

You know, that was a different job. So, like, when the pandemic started, or before the pandemic started, I used to work for a VIP travel company, doing their like social media was so silly. It was like very Girl boss life. I used to work three days a week, I got paid awfully, like buttons, but it was alright, because I was kind of clocking in three days a week, running around doing things like this, like, jet set life, like three days a week in the office. And then I'd be like, in Oslo for the weekend, and like, spending all the money I was earning because Oslo is really fucking expensive. But I live with my mom, so it's fine. Like, didn't have to worry about rent, which is huge privilege, like massive pressure off. But then, during the pandemic, obviously, travel stopped. So, no more travel job. And it was also kind of, or I was alright with that. Because my boss then turned into like an anti-vaxxer hashtag, pandemic person, because I think she just like... just the whole kind of travel has to stop thing, she couldn't compute it. And I was like, yeah, no, I need to leave because you're scaring me.

And then I got a new job doing one day a week for a sustainable fashion social enterprise. And because they're a social enterprise, they pay me a lot better. I work one day a week. Literally a day job. And I get paid 150 pounds as a day rate standard, and everyone kind of gets paid the same amount. So that's really good. Love that. Much happier. No nutters. Cool.

Kelly Lloyd 16:40

Yeah. What does that mean, because there's social enterprise, they pay you more?

Zarina Muhammad 16:45

Oh. So like, everyone's on the same wage. I think that kind of is. I don't actually know essentially what social enterprise is [Laughter] but that's what it means to them.

Kelly Lloyd 16:54

Neither do I. Yeah, yeah yeah, and in one of the many things that you wrote was quite interesting because you spoke about having a part time job being a kind of privilege to then allow you to say no to, like, things that you want to say no to, you know, things that you're asked to do in the art world or something like that.

Zarina Muhammad 17:10

Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 17:11

I just thought that was quite interesting. Like, I feel like whenever I think about how many jobs I have to work, it's always, like, I'm always resentful of it or something. As opposed to like, seeing it as maybe some kind of a privilege to, like, set boundaries in certain ways. I mean, most of the time, it's very bad. But like, sometimes it is nice to, yeah, work in a cafe or something like that, so that I can not do something that somebody else wants me to do.

Zarina Muhammad 17:37

Hmm. I think I mean, I'm using the word privilege there maybe a bit carefully. Because it's like a, it's a day job where I'm doing, like, an office-ey kind of nice white-collar kind of thing. Like in both of those situations, I have a like quite nice office and like I'd get to have a chat. Like, it's bullshit jobs, basically, where I'm not really doing anything. I can just turn my brain off for like a day or three days and just kind of put things into the social media scheduler. But like, it's really... it kind of makes sense as like, quite cushy thing for me.

I think if I was kind of working retail, or like, customer service, or like hospitality, I'd feel really differently about it. I'd feel a little more burnt out. But like, I just kind of have nice conversations with people, make coffee, go to, like, a fancy bougie studio. I really like all the people I work with. And I think I kind of end up feeling quite grounded at the end of it. I can kind of... the art world feels a bit odd at times. So, when you, like, have to explain it to, like, Janet it from accounts that, like, you know, that you're off to Oslo next weekend because there's like an art weekend. And Janet's like, 'Wow, that's so glamorous!' And I'm like, well actually, it's not. It's really fucking knackered, and like, is this, that and the other. Like, it doesn't kind of link up. It's quite nice. It like takes you back to the real world. Because yeah, art feels a bit odd.

And in terms of being able to say no, it's been really useful, because Gab also had a part time job before the pandemic. Now, kind of, in and out of it. But it's been this really nice way for us to have like a stable, bankable income that we can say no to people we don't want to work with. I think just because we've got, like, other sources of income, that aren't precarious-ish.

Kelly Lloyd 19:14

Yeah. And then I also know that White Pube has done a number of things to also kind of, like, court other forms of funding. And, and so like, does that count as the kind of like other additional stable thing or is that really just like Patreon, like, truly who knows how much money we're gonna get this month, and so, you really do just have to rely on like, the part time jobs or savings or something like that.

Zarina Muhammad 19:39

With the Patreon, it kind of it can, like, fluctuate to context. For context, Patreon is a... it's kind of quite an American thing. It came about maybe during the YouTube Adpocalypse if anyone is familiar. When YouTube kind of like really readjusted their advertising financial kind of terms and conditions, and creators on YouTube started getting paid a lot less or a bit less reliably because the terms and conditions were a bit different. So, they turned to this new model of funding where they could be funded directly by their audience who like were really invested, really into it. And they could like, you know, the same way you'd sponsor a donkey. [Laughter] You can pay one pound a month sponsor an art critic, or like, you know, a YouTube creator, or whatever.

And for us, it's been really helpful because we find it quite awkward asking for public funding, like you got to provide some kind of public value. I don't think we're publicly valuable. We're quite niche. Like, honestly, like, straight up. Like, I think it's quite a niche thing, we're only really useful to our readers. I don't know if we're useful to... like, my aunts don't read what I write. Like, it's taxpayer money, I take that seriously. Like, I kind of feel bad, but we're already, we're already accountable to our readers. So, I think it made sense for us to kind of ask them for a pound a month, if they can, if not, don't worry about it.

It can go up and down, but it's a bit more stable at the moment. And we do like odd Wheeler, Wheeler Dealer, kind of like Doughboy tactics where we, like, sell merch to pay for website renovations or things like that. It's kind of, none of it is like turning a massive

profit, but it's, I think, quite fun to like, play the dodgy businessman. Have a go if you like. You know, a contestant on *The Apprentice* or something.

Kelly Lloyd 21:23

Yeah, yeah. I feel like you're the only person that's ever made crowdfunding seem somewhat appealing. [Laughter] Um, so yeah. And also, like, it's quite interesting what you said, I think in terms of, like, who are you being accountable to and what you can ask of them? And that being an understanding that you have with your audience, as opposed to maybe, crowdfunding being like your aunt or something like that. And then you're just, like, always hitting up your aunt for money in like, these different forms [Laughter] which I feel like, I don't know, is my understanding of crowdfunding. But obviously, there, there are other ways.

So I mean, both of you speak to the conditions of artists, and also, you know, the political conditions of the arts (very vaguely, I'm sorry to say that very vaguely) in a number of ways. Like and, and so I just kind of wanted to ask you, I guess if, like, what the connection is there between your personal experiences and, like, your scholarship around these issues? Or your advocacy around these issues? Or just your art around these issues?

And you know, I think this, maybe also I want to ask you [Morgan] about *Studio Visit*. I'm not entirely sure Morgan, how this is connected to this question. But I am interested in... so I didn't know this when I, when I spoke to you, when I interviewed you. And I think I didn't know this because it wasn't on your website. But then as soon as I, like, started talking to people about the fact that I was interviewing people, they were like, oh, like, Morgan had the show on Resonance FM. Like everybody knew about it, except for me, because it wasn't... because I'm not from here, obviously, and then, also, because it wasn't on your website. And so, you know, and you have so many things that you do, you know. We were talking earlier about, like, what it means to reduce all these things to like 'artist and writer', but, like, you were a musician (you maybe are a musician?) ...

Morgan Quaintance 23:30

I still am... [Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 23:30

And you, you know, are a curator and you are, you know, you were a broadcaster. And so, I don't know, I also just wanted to ask you about *Studio Visit*, eight year-long program, you interviewing people in the arts, you were the first to do like an hour-long...

Morgan Quaintance 23:46

That's right!

Kelly Lloyd 23:47

Yeah, yeah yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 23:48

That is right, yeah? No, just because people have bitten it, you know what I mean? [Laughter] And you know, I was just out here doing it, and, like, nobody was doing it. Sorry, I just got it off my chest... so pissed off about that.

Kelly Lloyd 23:59

No, no. No, no. I mean, one reason... you mentioned that to me in our interview.

Morgan Quaintance 24:00

Oh, did I?

Kelly Lloyd 24:00

And I wanted to mention it because I think it is really important.

Morgan Quaintance 24:05

Yeah!

Kelly Lloyd 24:05

And I think it's important that you get the recognition that you deserve.

Morgan Quaintance 24:09

Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 24:10

But it's also important to talk about what it's like to be the first, and like, I got Arts Council funding for this project, and I remember also talking to you about it, and you being like, 'Oh, like...'

Morgan Quaintance 24:24

'... what you can get funding for it?' Yeah, no. Yeah, I just did it because I really wanted to do it. And I was like... I just really wanted to talk to people. And I remember when I was in a band before, I was going to do this project where I was going to interview people that I was on tour with. And I started with this guy called Har Mar Superstar, I don't know if people remember him, yeah... remember Har Mar? And it was a pretty crazy night. And so that sort of stopped there. The next one was going to be Peaches, but then we couldn't get it. To get it, like, she wanted to be interviewed right then and I was like, 'oh, I don't have my questions...' and the rest didn't sort of happen.

So, when I got into the art world, I was like, I'd quite like to do this. And so, I just started talking to people. And it was just out of a passion, really. And I didn't really think about getting money for it, I just figured no one's gonna give me any funding to do this. So, I started off by doing one a week. And then I was like, bro, that's kind of a mad schedule, because it would take about three days to do the research to talk to someone for an hour. And then so then it was like, I'd do seasons of two months on and two months off. And then as I went on, it just got more and more like, further apart. And then it was just one a month.

So yeah, I just did it because I really enjoy talking to people. And I also was like, part of the reason I got into writing about art was because I felt so many people were doing it so badly. And I felt like so many people were not really taking analysis of cultural production seriously. Or doing what I would consider like a proper, like, foundation of a discourse. Like, for example, I think it was Jane Fisher, who said to me, we were talking one time, and she was like, 'it's about sort of founding a discourse.' That you do a piece, or you do a piece of interpretation that allows other people who've done less research to enter into the work because you've created a kind of understanding. And I used to really enjoy doing that. And I still really enjoy doing such a high level of research. So, in the interview, I knew so much about my subject that, like, we could be having a surface conversation and then I could just go really deep into the consciousness and ask them a question that no one had asked before.

And one interview in particular sticks in my mind was interviewing a guy called Clifford Owens a performance artist... do you know him? From New York. And around the time though, it's a real emphasis on performance artists as like these conduits for like deep spiritual experiences. You'd be in the presence of a performance artist, and you'd have some sort of profound connection, you know, via Marina Abramovich *The Artist is Present*, you know, there's a real high point at that moment.

So, Clifford would do these things where he could he'd be this real galvanizer of social connections. And I, what I thought was like, wow, must be lonely. That must be lonely. Because you travel to a different city, and you do this thing, you get these audiences together, you talk to them, you ask them about their deepest desires, what do they want. He would do these things where there'd be a big group, and he'd ask you your desire and ask you what you needed. You'd state it, and then he'd find someone in the audience who could satisfy it for you. And I was like, that takes so much energy, and then you're just in your hotel room, and it's just you, and maybe the assistant curator who might help you get some water or something. And then like, you travel to another city, you do it, and then you go home, and you have to figure out how you're going to make money.

And so, when I interviewed him, it was in his flat in New York, he just got back from somewhere, and there was like boxes and stuff that that were there from him traveling. And, like, we were talking, talking, talking, we were like, winding our way to that question. You know, and I posed it, and he's like, 'Yeah, I'm always alone. Always, always...' I was like, it wasn't about exploiting someone, it was about having mutual trust. Me being vulnerable, him being vulnerable, and that's getting somewhere in the conversation, you know? Yeah. So that's why I did it.

Kelly Lloyd 28:24

Why did you stop? Or like, not why 'why did you stop?' But yeah, like...

Morgan Quaintance 28:29

Exhaustion. Like, I wasn't being paid. Like, I mean, payment is not the thing, but it's like, it just took so much energy. And then when I started to see other people doing it, and like getting more play, I was just like, oh you know what... this is the thing that happens when you're, like, on the periphery, so to speak. You're like, I'm happy here, but I'm pissed. You know, I'm pissed. I'm not, you know, why don't I get support? Why don't I, you know,

nobody's like giving me the props that I deserve for the work. And you know, it's like, rah, rah, rah, you know?

And so, I was like, you know, I did over 100. And I was kind of like, once I've done 100, I'll stop, you know. And even now, like, I'm supposed to do this interview with Adam Farah, and it's just the website saying, 'interview coming next month'. [Laughter] And I'm gonna have to update and be like, this series is over. But like, there's enough interviews out there and some really special ones, people who have died. So, it's like, that was really, I felt really... privileged as a weird word to use, but just like, it just felt great to be able to talk to some of these people and for them to share time with me, you know? Yeah...

Kelly Lloyd 29:33

Yeah. Yeah, I guess. Yeah, to pose this question again, you know, I'm just wondering how, like, your particular material conditions like influence, you know, what you decided to do, I guess, especially with The White Pube. You know, like, how that influenced the way that you work, like, you know, the way that you work collaboratively, the way you work with Gab, but then also like, you know, how you choose to work with other people, like residents on your website, obviously, like people that you interview, you know? Yeah, like how do your personal material conditions affect the way that you choose to work with other people?

Zarina Muhammad 30:15

I mean, oh I think it's a difficult question because I'm not sure... I, I kind of wonder if the way that we work, like, I don't know if I have a choice. Like it kind of just is collaborative, because I don't think I could, like, I don't think The White Pube would exist if we were both doing it on our own. Like, I don't think it would work in that way. It's just quite nice to have a friend.

And I think it's really interesting to hear you say that, like, it's just nice to have a chat with people, because I think that's often when I feel most kind of excited about the work that I'm doing. When I'm just, like, I just really, like, having a natter. Yeah. I'm really, I think I'm just nosy. I really want to know what people are up to, on what their lives are like. I used to, kind of when I was a student, I used to go to weird things like this. And I'd kind of be sat at the back not really paying attention because I was too busy thinking about like, how much you're being paid... like how much you've been paid? What does your life look like? Where do you live? What do you do in a day? Like those, that BBC...

Morgan Quaintance 31:12

What do artists do all day?

Zarina Muhammad 31:14

And it never asked any question [Laughter] that was interesting. It's just like what does Polly Morgan do for lunch? Kind of, I think there's... so maybe there's so much, like, mystique and like glamour and like the magical aura of like being an artist is so like, romanticized. Like I spend so much time on Tik Tok looking at all these like French girls like living there, like best Parisian life, and I'm like, that feels very artist-adjacent or like the way we think about artists, right? Like, it's so kind of romantic from the outside, but it's like really crummy on the inside. It's like difficult. It's a slog. It's horrible, grueling, like no one pays you. And I just can't... I kind of, I think it's a really nice easy way to get to grips with like... maybe that like, maybe like that, like, discourse level for me is to access it through just being nosy about someone's actual real life. So, I kind of, maybe it is about material conditions, maybe... I mean, I'm not sure. I've not thought about it in that way. Basically, I'm trying to say, I've always thought about it as something that's, like, quite particular to me as a person. Like, I don't know.

Morgan Quaintance 32:26

Can I just add something? I think one of the things that kept me doing the show, and I was just thinking about this in relation to something that you were saying, was like that, you know, I was sort of addicted to novel ideas. And I feel like I'm involved in art, because really, like, it's enriched my life more than anything else, being exposed to the imaginations of artists. I know, sounds pretentious, but it's kind of like, it's as basic as seeing a film and being like, I didn't... you know, like I was, when I was a kid, I watched this film called *Farewell My Concubine*, a film about opera singers in China. And I was, like, 12, on an estate, bunking off school, and it just blew my mind. Like, I never knew there was this stuff happening, or had happened. And it obviously made me think differently.

And I think, doing the radio show, it's like, every time I interviewed someone I'd like to enter into their world, and it would expand my mind. And it would... and I'd also come away with, like, more ideas and be informed on a basic things. Like, like, I remember I interviewed Carolee Schneemann, right, and I used to think it was *Schneemann*, right? I mean, I remember before we started, she was like you do know my name is Schneemann,

right? And I was like, thank fucking God, she said that [Laughter] because I was gonna come in, and it was nice to just have that firsthand knowledge of someone saying, 'Oh, it's Allan *Kaprow*, not Allan Kaprow.' You know, you're like... you know, yeah, it's just so cool to get primary knowledge. I just wanted to add that, yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 33:55

Yeah, I mean, is it okay, if I like step in a little bit and talk about myself... semi-unprompted. Um, yeah, no, I think, and my interviews are quite, you know, I do talk about myself a lot. And I think it is important to, yeah, to be in this place of vulnerability with somebody else. And, and I think I also started, yeah, like, I had a really rough time when I was in the US after we graduated school. You know, like, I worked at this one school, which then got defunded, full of, like, all these really incredible, like Black and brown kids then it got defunded. It's still going on, it's totally fine, but it was like a third budget cut. So, for a while, I was just wandering around, didn't know if I or anybody else had a job. And then I worked at a coffee shop, and it was like robbed at gunpoint a couple of times.

Morgan Quaintance 34:45

Fuck.

Kelly Lloyd 34:46

And so, then it was just this moment where I was, like, this is bad. Like, is it any better for anybody else anywhere else? And so, then I started just yeah, like having these... just doing these interviews as an excuse really, you know.

Morgan Quaintance 35:00

Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 35:01

Because it's like, and then traveling around going on residency is like, yeah, for sure you can. It's almost like I need an excuse to ask the questions I wanted to ask. And just to like bypass entirely that whole like, 'So, what do you think about Vienna?' You know... like, we could just get like, straight to the question, which is like, 'I feel fucked. Are you fucked?' Like, I'm like, 'Okay, we're both fucked but you have social welfare, so like what's going on there?' So, I think, yeah, like it's not some something about you. I mean, I guess maybe it's

a curiosity that we share or something but then also a way of gathering knowledge by just having these primary conversations with people, and then of course doing, like, a lot of background research beforehand. Anyways, but like...

Zarina Muhammad 35:35

No, no, I kind of that's really interesting to hear you both talk about doing research because every time I go into these like quite... I kind of maybe, maybe this is just the way we work. Like, I think before the pandemic we used to... kind of 2019 was The White Pube on tour. We went to like a million different countries, went to Oslo four times (nearly bankrupted myself). Really love, I love Norway... so expensive. And we'd come, we'd have these conversations where I was like, 'Are you fucked? We, I'm fucked. Are you fucked?' And they're like, 'No, we have loads of money.' Like, Norway's the only country that operates at a deficit because they got oil money, they're fine. So, everyone there, living life.

Yeah. But like, it would kind of be the, those conversations where we'd kind of, I don't know, like, maybe our identity as critics which would allow us like a certain polite nosiness or like a kind of kind of different way of accessing that. Yeah, those questions that maybe feel impolite or nosy, or like intrusive, but like under the, under the guise of like, critical. I'm a critic, ooh, I'm thinking intelligent things so like, tell me, 'What is your rent?' Like, those kinds of questions feel normal in that, in that context. But then when it comes to like, interviewing someone for a text, or like, we've done like, one... two, two podcast episodes, where we've, like, interviewed people for like, in maybe a different way that the both of you but, like, had a chatty podcast episode. We've not really done any research, just kind of gone in and been like, 'What do you do?' and, like, found out on the fly. Now... I wonder, in the scope of that research, like, how do you... do you not go into these conversations kind of thinking that you know what that person's gonna say?

Morgan Quaintance 37:27

Well, the thing is, it's like, well you can't really because like I... So, for example, I interviewed Alanna Heiss, she's the person who founded PS1, and like, her career is, like, 40 years-long, so I had to do 40-years' worth of research. And really, you can't predict what someone's gonna say. If you say, like, if I know, for example, that one of the things that inspired her to do PS1 was actually come to England, and was influenced by like... I can't remember what the title of it was, but there was a period where they were using, like, disused spaces to put on shows. Like that, like the first instance of this happening, and so,

she took it back to New York, and obviously, New York was like running a deficit at the time, so they had lots of space. So, I could be like, in knowing that knowledge, I could say to her, 'Oh, Alanna I know that you spent time in England doing this and influenced you go into New York, could you talk about that?' But she's not just gonna say, 'Yeah, I spent some time in England and it influenced me, so I came back and PS1.' What she's gonna say, 'I was in England, and it was cold, and I was afraid, and I was lonely, and... but then I went I saw all these buildings and they're really interesting. And you know I thought, I was gonna come back. And New York was on fire, and people were saying buildings and light to get the money.' See, that's the difference.

It's like knowing the touch points of somebody's life and things that might be quite interesting maybe to you because I guess I... maybe to me, maybe, maybe I always think on different registers: so personal interest, like, sector interest, maybe wider interest. And just allowing small prompts for them to expand and unfold biographical points about their lives, not only biographical points about their personal lives, but sort of socio-cultural and economic points and details that are not in books. I think it's really, really important.

I'm a massive fan of people like Studs Terkel, like, Oral History. It's like this thing called the History Workshop Movement, which is about like, working class communities coming together to construct their histories. And I think if we don't... like to do research or not research, it's everyone's prerogative, but for me, it's like it's a way of understanding the world, and a way of gaining autonomy from people who write official histories. Because the more you actually understand from primary source material, and from people who've done research outside of like the official funding networks and things like that, the more you can construct a counter narrative to the more sort of normative authoritarian one that gets supported and maintained. Because we all know that the stories that are passed down for generations are the ones from the top.

So, you know, those that's a sort of like, a noble political reason why maybe I do research, the other thing is I just love reading. I just love reading. I come from a working-class background, people did not do it, you know. And so, the fact is, I'm where I am today because I read. like I said, a very basic thing, but it's like... and again, one of my lecturers, Jean Fisher, who's passed away, but was like an *incredible* woman said to me, like, 'Your power comes from having all of the arguments at your fingertips.' I was like, fuck yeah. It's gonna come from me being able to go wherever someone else goes and be able to understand what they're saying. Not just because I want to be better than you, but it's just like... And maybe it's to do with being a musician as well, like I have... I'm a guitarist, and I

had the relationship to the instrument, which meant I wanted to operate a certain level level of proficiency, so that I can express myself properly, and it's the same with vocabulary. If you have a limited vocabulary, how are you going to think complexly? Because your language, is somewhat like your resource of expression, is so small, and... I'm not dictating everyone has to have this sort of like real [Inaudible] level of verbosity, but I'm just saying, for me I found it's liberating when I find new ways of expressing things and nuance. You know, I mean?

It's like, because the more you say stuff, the more you're going to say similar things. So, it's like, if you... I mean, not you, sorry. [Laughter] I was just like, the more I talk, the more possible it is to me to repeat stuff. And so, I was like, the way I'm going to try and avoid doing is to constantly be evolving the way that I speak and express myself, in the same way that when I work with film, I would never... I try not to do the same technique many, many times. Because I don't want to be like Tony Cokes, you know, the guy who just does text on a screen. [Laughter] Like wicked, but like, that's not interesting to me. It's almost like a kind of spot painting Damien Hirst.

Zarina Muhammad 42:01

You don't want to have a shtick, right?

Morgan Quaintance 42:00

Well, yeah, I guess, or a shtick or a gimmick, right as Sianne Ngai's book, which everyone should buy, on affect, on the gimmick, it's this new book, it's really good. But like, and it's like, but I just don't feel like that as a person, as a person living in contemporary society. Contemporaneity is heterogeneity, right? That's my, that's my belief, and I feel like, I'm a different person, I'll be different tomorrow. That's what I said, well, I've reasons why I used to avoid saying these things. Because you kind of feel, you feel a version of yourself, don't you that can sometimes be recorded, and then people say you said that, and now you're contradicting yourself. And just like, I contradict myself every day, you know.

Zarina Muhammad 43:11

That's fine. I feel like there's something in that, like, just following a thought that can be quite nice. I, I know you're saying I don't know if I agree. But I find that really interesting. Because, but I wonder what you think about research and the conversations you have... sorry this is my interview now. [Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 43:27

That's alright. No, no, you're sitting in the middle. Well, no, I'll go into that, but first, you should ask what, what about what Morgan just said is what you found interesting? That you don't necessarily agree with, or what did you say?

Zarina Muhammad 43:41

Oh, I just kind of I think it's interesting because, yeah, I, I find it really, I don't wanna say productive, because I feel like that's the wrong word. But I find something quite satisfying about doing something again, and again. Like you don't have dancers, when they're rehearsing, they're like, 'Okay, alright, yeah, good, that was good. But like, do it again... but like maybe a bit more emphasis on this.' I feel like there's something really satisfying and maybe this is maybe I'm just really stubborn, maybe that's what I'm discovering, live on the spot now. This is new information to me, but I'm about having another go at something again. Like, I feel like I've written the same text, maybe five or six times just slightly differently, a different like font, a different flavor.

Kelly Lloyd 44:29

And, well, I wonder if that connects to what you were saying in terms of like music and, like, building a craft. And it's like, you do have to do your research. You do have to do the things over and over and over again so that once you go out there, you know, you can, you can make it your own. But then also, I feel like what, what you're talking about is like maybe this goes to, you know, my way of researching, but yeah, you could do the same thing but then if you involve other people, you automatically have more information. And so then after that you can like go into it again.

So, I mean, with the podcast, I ended up playing it in chronological order in part because it felt like it was, I was like chewing on something that you could, at least I felt like I could listen to throughout all of the episodes that I did last year. And, and I think I was still chewing on it after I talked to somebody, but I'd like to hope that I was introducing new information into that thought. Or, you know, seeing it from a different perspective, or I was seeing if it was like a big issue, if it was a me issue. If this is systemic issue, if it was a regional issue, or you know, if it was an issue, because we both went to the same school or something. So, I feel like there is a way, yeah definitely to just, like, keep going at the same thing, but then, and then also the value of keep keeping, you know, keeping at it for craft.

But then also what it means to kind of along the way, yeah just, like introduce more information.

Morgan Quaintance 45:56

But it's also a way of accumulating skill. And like for example, when I did this article, and I was looking at accounts, if I didn't learn how to read accounts, I wouldn't be able to write about them authoritatively.

Kelly Lloyd 46:15

Financial accounts?

Morgan Quaintance 46:15

Yeah, like, so I can't just speculate my way into some sort of conclusion, I need to be able to look at, look at it, and understand it as a text. So, I think I think that excites me excites me about the legibility of the world and how that's accessible via research. For example, if you learn about interior design, you can read a room, there's no way to intuit that. I mean, you can, you can be like, to a certain point, we can intuit facts about this space and why it's designed the way it is, if it's in a kind of contemporary setting. But the further back you go, the less literate you are, and the less sure... I don't know, for me anyway, the less sure I feel of the world. You know, it's like I, yeah, I don't know. I just like it. [Laughter]

Zarina Muhammad 47:09

That's fine.... You're making me question that like a lot, because my immediate reaction is to be like, no. I kind of, like, I can speculate my way towards a conclusion, but I don't think I can. I think I'm being dishonest with myself.

Morgan Quaintance 47:18

You just can't.

Kelly Lloyd 47:21

For the sake of argument though, continue it.

Zarina Muhammad 47:23

No, I don't...

Kelly Lloyd 47:24

I can speculate my way to a conclusion, because...

Zarina Muhammad 47:25

I feel like I'm very attached to my identity, like, an identity as a novice, like, I'm new here, I don't know. But I'm not. Yeah, like nearly six and a half. I've got skills. [Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 47:37

Yeah. Yeah. And also, I feel like people are like, when you ask them these questions in these interviews, like they know what your work is. Like, they've done research on you, they can like, read what you've done. And I think they can respect I don't know, like, or maybe trust you or respect you what you've learned more about you through the work that you've done. So yeah, no, obviously, you're 6 years in, if not more, yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 48:06

But it's like, for example, like there's this thing called Cape Dutch architecture.

Kelly Lloyd 48:10

Cape Dutch architecture.

Morgan Quaintance 48:10

Cape Dutch architecture, there's a particular type of window that's like, was used by Herbert, Herbert Baker, and other people who in something called his kindergarten, basically, there are these people who used Garden City architecture and exported it to Apartheid South Africa, as a way of segregating the city.

Now, because I did some reading about Cape Dutch architecture, I can look around the city and read it and understand that that's where that window is from, or that window was exported. That's a colonial remnant, that... and when I go to Cape Town in South Africa, I can be like, 'Oh, my God, that's the exportation of British town planning to this country.' So, I think that's what I find exciting about that, because it allows me to have a level of analysis beyond just like, a kind of phenomenal reading. What I mean by phenomenal is just reacting to what people are doing in front of me, I can have a knowledge of the sort of like, architectural grid, or lattice that we're existing in. But I can, I don't have,

this isn't me to being like people should research or not research, or agreeing or disagreeing with the approach is just sort of vocalizing what I find so liberating about it. And also, to be like, to divorce it from this sort of imposed edict that you must do research in order to be intellectually legitimate. I don't think you need to. It's up to you. But I just feel that there are certain things that doing research will furnish you with. And it's not really a qualitative judgment, it's just... it's just the fact, isn't it?

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Kelly Lloyd 49:56

If you are interested in hearing more excerpts from conversations I've had with people in the arts over the years, head over to the website thisthingwecallart.com

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