

SPEAKERS

Kelly Lloyd, jina valentine

[00:00:36] **KL:** You're listening to *This Thing We Call Art*, a podcast about how, "we're thinking about who is informing the structure of the institutions that we participate, or choose not to participate in, and how we as artists can encourage, force, help, push, catalyze a different kind of thinking around those structures, right? And how much of that work we want to do ourselves."

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 29 November 2022 with jina valentine.

jina valentine is a mother, visual artist, and Associate Professor of Printmedia at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (S.A.I.C.). Her practice is informed by traditional craft techniques and interweaves histories latent within found texts, objects, narratives, and spaces. jina's work involves language translation, mining content from material and digital archives, and experimental strategies for humanizing data-visualization. She is also co-founder (with artist Heather Hart) of Black Lunch Table (B.L.T.), an oral-history archiving project. Her work has received recognition and support from the Graham Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, and Art Matters among others. jina received her BFA from Carnegie Mellon and her MFA from Stanford University.

I met jina valentine at Ox-bow School of the Arts in the Summer of 2021, although we agreed we looked familiar, and so we probably met one another, or at least saw one another at the Black Artist Retreat (B.A.R.). I

spoke with jina over Zoom while we were both at our homes. The audio quality for this season is varied, so remember that the transcripts for all these conversations are available on the project's website thisthingwecallart.com.

Our conversation was 3 hours and 15 minutes-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 about 6 minutes in...

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[00:02:41] **KL:** I'm interested in the Black Lunch Table. I'm really interested in, um, like specifically this moment of transition. You know, stepping away, um, as Executive Director, as hiring a new Executive Director. I'm interested in that. So, what is the Black Lunch Table?

[00:03:01] **jv:** I'll give you the official, the official line and then I'll tell you more about it. So, the Black Lunch Table is at base an oral history archiving project that was founded by two artists who do not have backgrounds in library sciences or oral history or art history. We're just artists who felt that we didn't see ourselves in, books when we were growing up. I wanted to like, be Pablo Picasso, or maybe, like, Andy Warhol when I was little? Um, because I didn't know! Um, because, you know, Faith Ringgold, for example, should have been part of what we were taught in art history, but not so much. Um, yeah, I could make that list a whole lot longer, but, um. I guess I can give you the origin story. So, it started off as, uh, an intervention in public space when Heather and I were at Skowhegan. Um, I think... so we were in the sculpture quad, which is kind of dirty. We were - it's notorious for having like the best parties, um, and [LAUGHS] um, we would, like, hang out and talk in our studios just about what we were doing and about life and pranks. But we also talked about, uh, appearances and preconceptions about who we were, and I was really interested in how I, um, I think what Tina Takemoto

described me as in grad school was like a conspicuously othered person, conspicuously Black person. like, "I look Black". Um, versus Heather, who is biracial and... I mean, she looks Black to me, but not to everybody, I guess, right? [LAUGHS] Um, but then we talked about like how we are expected to perform our Blackness, right? Um, how are we expected to talk. That moment when you've talked to somebody over the phone for a long time and then they meet you in person and they're like, "Oh! She's Black." [LAUGHS] "I had no idea!" Um, anyway, so we also talked about, um, you know, these spaces like Black lunch tables and how we participated in them or didn't participate in them in different school settings. Um, and also how at Skowhegan, even though there were like a dozen of us that summer, we never all sat together. We liked each other, but we just never - there was no reason to make that happen.

So, we made it happen. And because we were uh young uh, we decided to do it by invitation based on who we determined was Black. We got, we invited one person who did not identify as Black, and skipped one person who was like, "What the hell?" [LAUGHS] Um, and so that lunch, it was all of us kind of crammed together at this little table. We invited the Dean, who was Steve Locke, and [the] Director who was Linda Earle, and Whitfield Lovell was there that summer and so he joined us too, but we just talked. Um, there wasn't like an agenda for that day, but we kind of just talked about all the things. Like I think, um, Hank [Willis Thomas] and I were gonna be in *Frequency* later that year, and we were just talking about how, you know, survey shows, if you have that on your resume, that automatically changes the whole character of your resume and the way that it's read. Right? Um, people were like, "Do we show in February? Like, all the shows are in February. Can we talk about that?" [LAUGHS] Um, what else did we talk about... I think it was just good, and then, you know, of course there were all these conversations afterward, because it was like during lunch and everybody else was sitting at all the other tables and was like, "What is going on?" Um, our white friends had some questions for us about, um, you know,

self-segregation and about, um, pulling what they felt was kind of a stunt, um, in a public space. But it did open up a conversation that I think needed to be had about those spaces and about inclusion and exclusion and choices made towards self-segregation. And the purpose of the, uh, significance of affinity spaces, importance of affinity spaces.

So, let's see. We left, and then Heather and I both went to grad school. I went to a couple grad schools. [LAUGHS] When I was at CCA, and Heather was at Rutgers, we staged like an intercollegiate Black Lunch Table. So, we had seven different schools, I think, with, you know, who had two or three people in the grad program come together over like very early Skype for video call where we tried to create this community. 2014 we hosted our first like official round table event at the Black Artist Retreat in Chicago at Dorchester Projects, um, which was kind of the model that they're in now. Um, so we curate people into tables, and there's- it's recorded, and we give them question prompts, and it's just artists talking to each other. B.A.R. for anyone listening who got to experience it in those first three years was like a homecoming reunion, family reunion, and also conference all wrapped up into one. It's like, all these folks that you'd showed with or like you went to school with or had read about, were just there. And having a party. And kind of just loving. [LAUGHS] It was so good. And then it changed into something that's not that anymore.

Um, let's see, in 2015, we collaborated with my friend Hông-Ân Trương, who is in North Carolina, to produce our first People's Table (back then it was called the Black Lunch Table: Black Lives Matter, or Black Lives Matter Black Lunch Table, one or the other). And we wanted to bring together people from across the community in the Durham/Chapel Hill area who we felt were invested in conversations or actions around Black Lives Matter. And that included activists and [members of the] community, artists, academics, high school students and teachers. Um, just like everybody's talking about this, but in very different ways and we need to bring everyone together, and so, since then, that's become what we now call the People's

Table, which is another suite of tables. Um, also around that time we started our Wikipedia initiative, which is its own Wikimedia Project so recognized that the foundation. Um, is one of a very small handful of projects that focus on, um, the lives of Black folks. Uh, yeah. There's less than half a dozen projects like us in the Wiki-verse. And but this is our, oh my gosh, it's like eight years I think, that we've been doing the Wiki project. But basically, when we were trying to figure out where we were going to have all the audio for these round tables, we started looking at other larger archives and thinking about who was missing and thought, well, you know, Wikipedia is the most used encyclopedia in the world. Surely, we must all be on there. And I am still constantly surprised by who is missing. For example, Fred Moten was missing until 2020... Yeah. ...Yeah. [LAUGHS]

Fred Moten, Valerie Cassel Oliver, Demetrius Oliver, Yashua Klos. I mean, we have a very long list of folks that we have added in the past couple years. So, our project basically does what other Wiki projects do, which is teach folks how to edit Wiki. The majority of, like, you know, 90% of people that engage with Wikipedia engage with it on a read-only basis. Um, so the first step is like, "Hey, you can also contribute to this!" Um, we also think about how we are shifting the demographic of editors. The vast majority of them are white. I don't know, they're like, between 22 and 40. So, like how [LAUGHS] and so how do we, how do we, through focusing on a particular subject matter, invite a different demographic to come and contribute. Because people, you know, they contribute with their time, that's it. They don't have to have any specialty knowledge; you just have to know how to like research and know the general rules of adding content to Wikipedia. And you know, there's, uh, there's a whole lot on Pokémon, World of Warcraft, World War II. There's, you know, there's Star Wars. Um, [LAUGHS] there's a whole lot of Black artists still missing. Anyway, so that project has been happening.

In 2019 we became a nonprofit, um, which meant that we did a whole lot of paperwork, and filed with the government, and now we have to

do a whole lot more paperwork to continue to be a nonprofit. Um, but we hired a whole fleet of people. Now there's - including the proxies that we have that host Wiki Projects as B.L.T. in other countries, mostly on the continent of Africa. I think there's about 20 folks on the team, uh, which includes three Directors. We just hired an Executive Director. Um, we have a small board and a somewhat larger advisory council. We have multi-year funding from folks like Mellon (Foundation) and (Andy) Warhol (Foundation for Visual Arts) and the Wikimedia Foundation. And Heather and I, in the past year, I think, realized that as much as we love this work, the administration is not the work that we love, and we're not the best people to do it. And I think it was really kind of heartbreaking for both of us. Cause we're like, you know, we're caretakers, we are artists, we are faculty, we are tired. [LAUGHS] But we're always like, we could make this work. We will do whatever we have to do, we will work all hours. And I think we just, we... it's impossible.

Um, so we have had a really amazing nonprofit advisor for the past three years, Brooke Richie-Babbage, give her a shout out. If you need help, call Brooke, she's got templates for everything. We worked with her through the process of, you know, letting go, but also of conducting a nine-month search for an E.D. (Executive Director). And we had a lot of really amazing people who applied and were interested, and ultimately, we went with Eola Lewis Dance, who comes to us from the National Parks Service, a cultural division within it. One of her recommenders, uh, I think the question was, "Can you speak to the candidate's weaknesses, particularly in the area of communication?" And after a pause, the recommender said, "Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm just not familiar with Eola's weaknesses." [LAUGHS] And I said, that is the best response I have ever gotten from anybody giving you a recommendation for a candidate. And she is amazing, she's, um, the youngest of eight children and a mother of three boys, and is finishing her PhD, and is, like, on boards and councils, and is just killing it so far. This is month two for her. And so, we have a little bit of overlap as she's getting her

feet under her.

But it's all good. I think Heather and I are excited to go and be just, you know, art makers, where, you know, we've got like a soft date for getting together and talking about other art that we could make that maybe doesn't require so much paperwork.

[00:16:16] **KL:** I feel like, um, I read somewhere, um, "We've always cultivated Black Lunch Table with the intention of creating a legacy project. One that would outlive us and foster discourse, (jv: oh yeah) fill holes in art historical canons and inspire creative production beyond that which we could ever imagine." Could you kind of speak to, yeah, like understanding this project as a legacy project?

[00:16:40] **jv:** I think collaboration may be at the root of the legacy part. I had never really been a collaborator until I had a child. And I realized that my child was actually taking up more than half of my brain. So, I needed other brains [LAUGHS] to work with, and I needed other people to hold me accountable because I was so exhausted for like a good three years. [LAUGHS] Um, but to have people who, you know, I met with who continue developing this thing, and I think B.L.T. in its present iteration, you know, kinda was born during that time also. Um, but yeah, collaboration is, you know, part admitting that you don't know everything. That there are ways that your ideas can be cultivated through conversation with other people, and there's ways that you can- there's ideas that they have that should be cultivated and tended through you, right? Um, and I think that a legacy maybe is, like, creating a space that thrives on that, right? So, um, you know, having an E.D. is huge, and that we - I think we recognize that there is actually, there's this room for this other specialist. There's the person that can run a nonprofit and raise money and develop strategic plans and, cultivate a board and do all these things because they have experience, just like all of our other specialists on the team. And I think maybe a legacy project is having that

idea, and growing it as much as you can, and putting the best people in place to, to tend it, right? Take it to the next level. So, yeah.

I feel like this is a good place to be. Um, it's weird not to have days that are full of meetings every single day. [LAUGHS] I'm also on sabbatical, so it's like, you know, 75% less meetings than last year. [LAUGHS] So, I think it's good. We also have been talking with Eola and the audio team about, um, oh my gosh, our 20 year anniversary? Which would be in 2025! The archives team and Eola are really excited about doing, um, like an organizational archiving project. So, looking at how all of the administrative structures have shifted and creating narrative around that, and also organizing it in a way that can be sort of a model but also a historical document unto itself. And also, um, like an administrative archive, so, the administrative archive, looking at all the processes, and then also an org-wide archive looking at how the org itself has changed. But having, you know, these two things kind of create one document that, uh, is a history of B.L.T., which is interesting. I mean, yeah, it is funny to say that my medium is email and meetings. [LAUGHS] But, um, there is an administrative art, right? And there's arts administration but I think that, yeah, the question of how to document those processes is really interesting to me. What does it look like? How have things changed? Yeah, if there was a way to go into Google and look historically about how your file structures have changed in the past two years. That's like, incredibly nerdy, but it's so exciting to see like, "Oh wow! This is so much more logical to have this way and this way and this way, and this is a shared folder, but- right, yeah." [LAUGHS] So, yeah.

[00:20:55] **KL:** You said to me earlier, like, the first question that you ask at Black Lunch Table is "How are you commonly misperceived?" (if I remember that correctly). And, you know, you mentioned that earlier in terms of kind of that being a starting point for you and Heather Hart's conversation and collaboration. So, if you don't mind sharing kind of, what are some of the questions that are asked at Black Lunch Table of the people who are

invited? And then also how do you come up with those questions?
Obviously, you know, research. [LAUGHS] Um, but yeah....

[00:21:39] **jv**: Yeah, [RUSTLING] there is research and there is also, um, there's also a set of questions that we have tried to include at every table. I'm opening a little bag of cards here. Okay, here we go. Here's the ones from the artist table: *How do we continue to critique the institution while hiding in plain sight? Does a sense of civic responsibility affect formal decisions made in your studio? Is it possible to make artwork that's not tied to notions of identity or legacy?* This one always gets a lot of conversation. *Discuss support systems for your art practice.* So, you also have to keep in mind that these are questions that are asked in Brooklyn and Chicago, but also in, like, Boise and Greensboro, North Carolina. And everyone has something to say about how they support themselves.

How is cultural memory passed down through the generations? Discuss legacy, intergenerational advocacy and mentorship. How do you maintain spiritual, physical, and mental wellbeing as an artist or arts administrator? Describe the local arts community, and how you and your work relate to it. Discuss ideas for ensuring equity in compensation. Um, some of these questions used to be more specific. I think this one used to be about, um, diversity hires in academia. Or there was also a question about survey shows as well. Um, *What kind of public art do you find valuable here?* This one also gets a lot of responses: *Discuss the spectrum of artists who co-op aspects of Black culture for personal gain.* We used to also have a question about Rachel Dolezal, but we took it out cause we don't want the entire audio to be about Rachel Dolezal, which it will be. Um, *White gatekeepers for Black cultural producers.* Uh, *Discuss the local gallery roster and museum record. Do they reflect the city's demographic?* That one always gets a lot too. *Who writes our art histories? Discuss self or community-led authorship and archiving.* This one is a fun one: *What does it mean to identify as Black?* Um, *Could you do your work anywhere else in the*

world? What keeps you here? And again, a question that goes kind of everywhere. Like, why do you live in New York where your rent is \$4,000 a month? People have reasons. [LAUGHS] *Who else would you like to see at one of these tables? What would their voice contribute to the conversation?* That's also something we always ask.

And then the, um, People's Table ones are more specifically politically geared: *How has your community changed since you became part of it? (Maybe you can talk about gentrification if you want, or not). Talk about microaggressions, historical legacies, defining race in class that are unique to this area. How is Black life part of your daily life?* And of course, the People's Table are everybody from the community. *What monuments are in your neighborhood? Whose history do they represent?* And then we, like the ones that are more specific to a place that we do do research on, here's an example, one from Canada. So, *Pope Francis recently toured Canada, apologizing for the abuses waged by missionaries against Indigenous youth at residential schools. Discuss apologies and reparations. What prevents coalitions from forming between local communities? Discuss possibilities for defunding the police and unarmed mediation in our communities. How has political polarization affected you and your community? What forms of self-segregation exist today?* There's always questions about K-12 education and the rising cost of education. *How do you support Black-owned businesses?* Um... carding, which is another Canadian one.

Um, yeah, and then there's always like, blank ones. So, in case, we're like, "If we missed anything, and you guys spent the whole time talking about this other thing, write it in." So, yeah, so, we cover kind of the gamut, and it's another way that the audio team is *really* integral to the process. Yeah, the whole project, is that, you know, they spend hours listening to these conversations, right? And they're like, "Ohhhh, they picked that card!" [LAUGHS] "It's about to get heated!" Or "They picked that card" and like, "Wow, that was a fairly tame conversation compared to everyone else's from that card." And I think, also, thinking about how they are doing the metadata

tagging as well. You know, it could be that three different tables have picked the same card, but what they're talking about is something unique. I think also about how that affects tagging those conversations, right? So, I mean, it would be easy to just go through and say like, "This is about this question" but they're really invested in being nuanced and also capturing, the energy at the table. So, yeah...

[00:27:14] **KL:** Should we talk about something else? Or not talk about something else, talk about, I guess specifically like a transition from, like, Black Lunch Table/ you thinking through kind of organizational practices and stuff, and then how that relates to your broader practice and art practice in, like, data collection and archiving?

[00:27:35] **jv:** Yeah, um...could be. I mean [SIGHS] uh, I think it's a, it might be a whole other conversation. One way that it could be related in a positive way would be, um, in 2020, in the midst of everything that was happening in the world, I got an email from another faculty member, and they were. It was an email to Black faculty, um, requesting a meeting to talk about ways to support all of the concerns and critique that had been lobbied at the administration by Black students. How do we support them? Um, and so it was myself, Martine Whitehead, SHAWNÉ MICHAELAIN HOLLOWAY, Andres Hernandez, and Leah Gipson who's in art therapy, and AJ McLennan. Um, and we met frequently to talk about what kind of letter we were going to write. So, we wrote a letter, which was the Black Futures Letter. I'm glad that happened, but I mean, our meetings were... [LAUGHS] were a lot of sharing space, primarily. And also, we made this thing happen. Um, but I think about that as an ethic, or as a way to build conversation consensus community, and also do the work, um, as it relates to Black Lunch Table. Um, that, the, you know, checking in and acknowledging the space that we're sharing and holding that space in advance of getting into whatever the work is, is as imp- or maybe more important than the work at hand.

It was also about having a place to... I dunno, just to share updates, to share gossip, to share information about the administration, to, um, vent [LAUGHS] to be heard, right? Um, and to know that, that place was also for that, right, I just, I dunno, I feel like I learned a lot from watching how other people create space and how other people hold space, and um and invite...a kind of participation that ensures that everyone feels they can be heard and feels that there are no dumb questions.

But yeah, I think, um, I'm also interested in how these spaces exist despite institutions, and for an institution to be held accountable or to be worth anything, it requires the existence of those spaces too. There has to be the collective of people that are somehow invested in the institution who continually hold the institution to account, right? And it's exhausting. [LAUGHS] And as I'm on sabbatical right now, I was talking to some friends who are faculty in other institutions, and like, I'm already thinking about how I'm going to come back and how I'm not going to come back. How do I participate and not participate as a citizen of this institution? Like it's, I can't participate in a way that isn't fully engaged, but I also can't be completely worn out like I was for the last... how long have I been at S.A.I.C. (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), [LAUGHS] I can't come back like that, I just um, I don't, I don't think it's, um... sustainable. So, yeah, I guess also those conversations are about like, um, [SIGH] collectively understanding how people come to participate and to what degree they're capable of participating, right? Um, I ran for Senate that Fall and am in Senate, and while I was on the break just now, I was reading an email asking if I would be-consider a nomination for Chair of Senate. I was like, I think two years ago, definitely. This year? No, I don't want that life for myself or my child or my studio. Nope. [LAUGHS]

Heather and I contributed an essay to a book called Out of Place, which was a project conceived of by Zoë Charlton and Tim Doud, who are in Maryland. Um, and our text, it begins with, "Our relationship to the institution has always been fraught." Um, and it is a kind of a meditation on our reliance

as artists and non-profit directors, about our position of always relying on some relationship with the institution but being deeply skeptical of institutions, generally. Um, it is an essay that is also a meditation on this idea of hiding in plain sight, so, you're an insurgent in the institution. And it was also a musing on [SIGH] what we were doing, we were building another institution, or are we building an organization, is that different? How do we not, um, replicate the same structures that we're attempting to dismantle? Um...

And our other essay, which is in *Wikipedia @ 20*, which is also a critique on that project and on the Wikimedia project writ large. Which, you know, the Wikipedia project intends to be as a democratically authored and maintenance, uh, public encyclopedia. However, when the encyclopedia is largely written by white cis men from Western countries, um, how democratic is that? And when the encyclopedia is written by people who have education and time and don't mind taking agency for themselves to tell people what facts are, [LAUGHS] how democratic is that? When how many people in this country don't have high speed internet? Or don't have access to libraries? How democratic is that?

And when, you know, one of the things that we've really pushed as a project is what is considered notable? It used to be that artists, in order to be considered notable, had to have at least two museum shows. [LAUGHS] And, *and*, you know, a sufficient amount of coverage in noteworthy journals in order to be considered notable. Now, think about who gets museum survey shows, politics of the art world, and who is included and who is discluded, it gets really complicated to include anybody, right? So, I feel like that has been successful. So, I guess all of this is to say, you know, we're thinking about who is informing the structure of the institutions that we participate or choose not to participate in, and how we as artists can force, encourage, help, push, catalyze a different kind of thinking around those structures, right? And how much of that work we want to do ourselves.

[00:36:20] **KL:** I saw that you were in, um, *Citing Black Geographies*, (jv: oh yeah) a show curated by Romi Crawford at Richard Gray Gallery, was in Chicago and then in New York. I'm just wondering if maybe that could be an opportunity to talk about like one of your works specifically? (jv: yeah) And then also I kind of wonder what space this is that has been created for you in this particular exhibit. I'm just interested in kind of you talking about how, like, Black people can make space for one another, like particularly in these separate institutions. And it seems like maybe this exhibition was such a space?

[00:37:04] **jv:** Yeah, it's, it's kind of incredible to be included in that show. Um, so, the work that I have included in the show, um, was originally shown last year at Columbia College and I worked with Meg Duguid (who I love!) for like a year or so. Mostly it was just us having conversations, or like we'd go meet at a playground and our children would run amok and we'd try to talk about art. And, um, we worked on an essay together for *MIT Thresholds*, the architecture magazine, which was really fun too. Um...wow, man, that project actually had been percolating for a really long time...

So, the work that's in the show is, um, a remaking of data visualizations, data portraits that were created on the occasion of the 1900 Paris Exhibition. And I think that book, the series had been digitized, all 65 of these plates, plus all of the photographs, had been digitized and put on the Library of Congress for open access in like 2016 maybe? And there was this big write-up in *Hyperallergic*. I think around that time I was making these drawings of weather reports. I was like, man, I can't believe anybody would ever be interested in looking at those little visualizations of the weather that you see in local papers. I think they're beautiful. [LAUGHS] I was like, has anybody done anything like this? And of course, the *Hyperallergic* article had just came out and I was like, oh! Ok. Well, this, I'm validated. But maybe also there's something there too. Like these are from a hundred years ago. How

much have things actually changed?

Um, and so I, I think back then I had been in conversation with Nicole Caruth who was at the McColl Center, and we'd been talking about doing a project. Um, she left the center, I left the project and did something completely different, and I think in conversation with Meg, we, um... yeah, I think through conversation I got excited about doing it again. And I produced 20 out of the 65 drawings. And those were on view at Columbia College, of course, on view during a pandemic in an institution that was mostly closed. Um, so when Romi and I had coffee and she said that she had actually seen it, I was very surprised and excited. [LAUGHS] She was like, "And I would like to include these in this show that's coming up at the Gray Gallery." And I think, you know, largely because it's Romi, and it's not sufficient to say that she is a visionary, but I trust her vision. And I was excited about, um, the other work that was going to be in the exhibition too. And in the framing of the project.

So, the work, um, it's called *Exhibition of American Negroes Revisited*. The original, of course, was *Exhibition of American Negroes*. I have basically gone through a lot of census data, both contemporary and historical, to pull in new relevant data to reframe those data visualizations. There are a lot of places where the context needed to be changed. So, there's a couple plates that are enslaved versus free people, and so I recontextualized that to mean incarcerated, or people who are disenfranchised because of felony convictions, um, and the incarcerated versus free. Um, let's see. There's one that's a statistic on the conjugal condition of American Negroes, [LAUGHS] which is interesting. So, it shows the conjugal condition of Black Americans. And one thing that was/is interesting about that drawing is that, um, as I was doing the research, I noticed that there was no visualization for divorce rates. Divorces just weren't reported. Right? Or they weren't legal, (KL: oh, yeah) they weren't counted by the census. Um, another one that was interesting was the illiteracy one, which is now titled "Literacy." Um, in 1979, that was the last year that the

Department of Education counted literacy versus illiteracy in such a binary way. Um, the past 40 years, um, there's been more of a nuanced look at degrees of literacy, right? Which makes a whole lot more sense but is way harder to illustrate, right? The one that was on farmland I also reframed with updated information about the approximate wealth lost by Black Americans in the past 80 years because of all of the racist ways that we have been kicked off our own land. Or had land taken away, or Redlining or, um, farm closures because of any number of reasons, right? Um, but it is in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Um, yeah, so those are just some of the things. And I worked with a former grad of the print department, who's an amazing painter, who worked tirelessly to help, to help translate these, these mockups that I did in Illustrator onto paper with gouache and colored pencils. So, we're gonna be working together again this year, which is exciting.

Um, the other project that's related to data- I mean, I guess a lot of them are. I didn't really mean to get into data, it just kind of went that way. [LAUGHS] My other project that I'm wrapping up this year is, uh... it was originally called *Irene we wa*, "she speaks the regular way." *Irene we wa* is one of the original, I guess, Ojibwe words for a person of this region, and how they speak. It is likely going to be called, *a murmuration*. So, a murmuration as in a flock of starlings. And that piece is a massive public art artwork that is going in the T5 Terminal at O'Hare (International Airport). Um, in brief, it is a data visualization of two hundred years of immigration to what is now called Illinois. The support structure for it is a sort of abstracted map of waterways through the region as recounted by an Indigenous person to a European map maker. And if you can imagine like a, a scattered dot graph showing different colors for different continents of origins, and different sizes of these points for the numbers of people coming in from specific countries, um, it's kind of like this like a flock. That floats across 330 feet of space.

[LAUGHS]

Um, and I guess the other part that we're just wrapping up, mercifully coming to a close is, um, me and my studio assistant have been

reaching out to approximately 80 different immigrant communities and getting quotes from them on what is considered home. So, thinking about home being here in Chicago and being home as in home that's in Iceland or home in Czech Republic or home in Korea. Um. And also thinking about what kind of, what kind of words of welcome someone leaving or coming would want to see. And also, the sort of, um... taking into account the response, or this moment of surprise and feeling recognized at seeing words in Estonian in Chicago, in the airport. Our Estonian community partners were really excited to be included. [LAUGHS] They were like, "We don't see Estonian anywhere! This is so wonderful. Thank you." Um, and so those texts are going to be etched onto about a 10th of the discs. And then the other part of that is going to be a companion website, so a digital version of it. So, as you're walking through the airport and you want to know what countries are represented, you can scan the QR code and look at your phone and find out which countries are which, but then also get translations into English. For now, it's just English; hopefully 2.0 will have other languages. But we weren't able to get translations of other languages to onto each of the discs. So, it's assumed that the vast majority people passing through that space won't speak all 60 different languages. Which is probably a fair assumption, but we did do a lot of thinking about how, how including that volume of "foreign" languages (for listeners, I'm doing air quotes) - that volume of "foreign" languages creates moments of opacity and inclusion, right? So, while you can't read most of what is up there, those places where you can read it feel special.

And I'm not really sure what comes next. There are a couple of other projects I'm thinking about revisiting, um, works related to Gerrymandering. There was a series of 35 drawings that I did... oddly enough on my last sabbatical, which I guess that makes sense with the way redistricting works. Um, that we're looking at the 35 most heavily gerrymandered congressional districts in the country, and it's called, um, *Literacy Tests: Rorschach*. So, thinking about literacy tests and the ways in

which Black people have been disenfranchised historically, thinking that a Rorschach test is as good as any other test... counting soap bubbles on a bar of soap. But the, the shapes themselves, they kind of look like they could be Rorschach tests. And I know that we're going, we're undergoing another redistricting at present, so it would be a place to update some things too. Um, yeah.

Maybe, yeah, maybe a question for part two is like, how, how did I end up looking at data? I actually don't know, maybe we should talk about that. [LAUGHS] I think it's not unrelated to previous work, which used a lot of text. Thinking about what is translated, what is left untranslated, what is made available to a public as a fact. Truthiness. Yeah...

[00:49:50] **KL:** So, I've got one more question for you before you leave. (jv: uh huh) It's the only question that I ask everybody in these interviews. Um, did we talk about what you thought we would talk about? [jv: LAUGHS] Or do you have any questions for me? Or is there anything that you'd like to say?

[00:50:12] **jv:** I think the only thing that I would talk more about is materiality. I'm not a painter, but I do enjoy how painters have more license to talk about like, the sensuousness of the paint, and that they paint because they love painting. Like, who else gets to talk about their materials that way? [LAUGHS]

[00:50:40] **KL:** The problem is that I'm a painter and a ceramicist and, and both of those materials I feel like we're allowed to talk about like the sensuality of the material. But like printmakers, like, information people, scul- sculptors a hundred percent could do it. Anyways...

[00:50:58] **jv:** Yeah. Yeah, I guess so. I feel like there's less, um, less constraints, right? Or maybe I put those constraints on myself. I feel like you need to talk about all of the concepts and content up front, and *then* maybe we get into talking about the materiality. Like why do you make your own ink? You can go to the

store and buy ink. You also can buy paper these days too, [LAUGHS] you don't need to do it this way. Um, I think about those things, but I don't really talk about them as much. Um, yeah. Um, thanks, uh, for asking all these questions. [LAUGHS]

[00:51:41] **KL:** Yeah, thanks for answering them. And, um, I'm glad that we have more time.

[00:51:48] **ju:** Yeah, me too.

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[00:51:56] **KL:** jina valentine currently has work in *GRAY at 60*, an exhibition open now through the 11th of March 2023 at Richard Gray Gallery's Chicago location, "commemorating six decades since the gallery's founding in 1963 by Richard Gray (1928 – 2018)."¹ A separate interview I had with jina valentine for BOMB Magazine will be released online and in print later this year; and, *a murmuration*, jina valentine's installation in the Terminal 5 Passenger Level Concourse at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, will also open later this year. You can find more information about jina valentine and her work at jinavalentine.com. Links to what we spoke about today, as well as other interviews with people in the arts, are available on the project's website thisthingwecallart.com

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¹ "GRAY AT 60", Richard Gray Gallery, accessed online 19 February 2023, <https://www.richardgraygallery.com/exhibitions/gray-at-60>.

Moroni. This podcast was produced by me, your host, Kelly Lloyd.

Thanks so much for listening, and tune in next week for my conversation with Cecilia Wee.