

SPEAKERS

Kelly Lloyd, Jesse Malmed

[00:00:36] **KL:** You're listening to *This Thing We Call Art*, a podcast about, "when you saw the thing, when there was only 10 people at the show and it was freezing cold and like the, the thing broke." 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 14th of September 2022 with Jesse Malmed.

Jesse Malmed is an artist, curator and educator living and working in video, performance, text, installation, events, occasional objects, their gaps and overlaps and Chicago. His works play in sub- and counter-cultural histories, like a joke that's a poem that's a song covering itself, a shadow puppet interfering in the broadcast beam, having déjà vu for the first time, or watching a time travel sequence in reverse. Engaging with a range of publics, his entanglements and propositions include instigating the poster platform Western Pole, co-driving artist bumper sticker project Trunk Show, directing the Live to Tape Artist Television Festival, programming with ACRE TV and the Nightingale Cinema, hosting the Artists' Karaoke Archive, permanent guest hosting contemporary art radio show Bad at Sports, slinging wares and wears via Jetsy Merchblatt, and recording and assisting the kindergarten a capella noise ensemble Huskies Floorchestra. He attended Bard College and the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he teaches alongside Chicago Public Schools and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

I met Jesse in the Summer of 2012 at Ox-bow School of Art when I was taking Shannon Stratton's *Party as Form* and he was taking Oli Watt and Michael Andrews' *Swag, Merch, and Souvenirs:*

The Printed Object; and we have brought one another into each other's projects since. I spoke with him over Zoom when we both were in staying in homes that weren't ours. 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 three and a half 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 at the beginning ...

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[00:02:49] **KL:** Um, and then you said you're not gonna be funny anymore. Do you wanna tell me more about that? [LAUGHS]

[00:02:52] **JM:** Uh, that was a joke. Um, I'm actually, I'm just getting funnier. I'm getting, or, or like, uh, I dunno if this is actually a good... why not, maybe it's a good enough place to start, but I do feel more and more committed to and less and less, um, defensive about, or, or a hundred different things about, um, about comedy being central to the things that I'm doing and the sort of like the, the logics of, of, of comedy being, um, integral to like the kind of work that I'm into that I'm doing.

And maybe more, more unapologetic is maybe the way that I would just say that. Maybe I was never especially apologetic but was maybe was occasionally obfuscativ about it. And not that I, um, ever didn't fully believe in it or whatever, or also that I don't still use sort of like theoretical ways of describing its validity.

But I do feel now, "now more than ever" (as we say during COVID) that, um, like the things that I'm doing don't need to be justified within a context of whatever, uh, academic approaches to how to have fun or how to, how to pretend that you aren't having fun or something.

[00:03:59] **KL:** Was there like a notable shift or something, like, that in terms of like, did something happen and then you were like, "No..."

[00:04:06] **JM:** I think there was, there was like a period of time when I thought that, um, there were like these split inclinations and that the sort of idea of something being funny somehow took away from its seriousness as art. Yeah, and so then like, like that I would do things, but then they had to be sort of like slightly more corralled into different spaces.

Um, and maybe just, I don't know, but I feel like that that's, that's lessened and lessened and lessened. And then also related to that is like the feeling more and more comfortable with the ways that like, uh, keeping different parts of a practice separate are as useful as they are useful to me as part of, like, a way of theoretically shifting the way that I'm thinking about things, as well as for other people.

And so like, it's funny when sometimes an object is an artwork and sometimes it is a piece of merchandise and sometimes it's none of those things and, like, the way that I'm thinking about it in terms of value also feels shifting. Like, I like the idea that something could cost \$200 or \$10 and would be the exact same object.

Um, and like, why would somebody opt it to be the more expensive one? And that's funny and that maybe like indicates other things about that. Um, Yeah. So, I don't know. So, I feel, I feel like I'm like, I'm like endlessly opening things up more and more. Um, but, but definitely in terms of like the sort of like the, the, the joke value of something, the humor value of something, feeling like that as a... uh, that it can point to all these other things, but also can be enough. That, that, that is the thing that it's doing is something being funny is, is also enough for an artwork to perform in that way. In the same way that sometimes it being beautiful is enough.

Um, and that I wanted to do these other things, but also like, those are enough. And sometimes we, I think that there, there can be like, discursively a way that, that feels like, "Well, sure, I mean, *it made me feel great*, but, uh, what else?", you know? And you're like,

maybe that was the right amount. You know, maybe that's, we can be modest in our goals sometimes. As if humor is modest.

[00:05:53] **KL:** I feel like we started a conversation at Ox-Bow [School of Art] about lore cause we're talking about world building or we're talking about um, yeah, like the possibility of the space of a joke, you know, and at Ox-Bow I was teaching *Party as Form* (which you guest starred in, thank you for that). Thinking about the party as a, as a space for world building, thinking about the forum as a space for world building. Um, and um, yeah, lore. Why, why did you wanna talk about that? What does that have to do with like yeah, like, the stories that we tell ourselves about the things that we're doing and like how we commit to those potentially also, like, in the face of like a more complicated reality.

[00:06:41] **JM:** I think part of what was, um, really like, so, so just for further context for the listeners of the future, um, I was, I was at Ox-Bow earlier this summer also teaching, co-teaching a class with Breanne Trammell called *The Expanded Field in the Expanding Field*, um, which was about, um, it was about two weeks long, but it was about zines and ephemera and events.

And we were thinking a lot about lore there. So, I, that, you know, through my, through my summer, um, and probably through my life, but just like partially because, um, I think from the perspective of, let's say like countercultural, subcultural histories, um, it, it just like is an important part of the way that we understand those things and to think about like the- like maybe from like an art historical standpoint, um, thinking about a sort of like artist-run history, artist, artist, run, art history or something like that. Like if the things that I, that I engage with that you engage with this weekend and in Chicago was the MDW, um, artist-run alternative to an art fair, was the way they're describing it. And so, it was just in, um, convening with, but not creating conventions. Or maybe convening conventions with, you know, people who have- like a hundred different artist-run spaces,

cinemas, zine presses, foundations, things that of all kind of different skills of like institutionality and age, and some schools and different kind of things.

So, like throughout the Midwest, and it ruled. It was so great. I had such a wonderful time and, um, they really had this great feeling of, of kind of like togetherness and the organizers did a really great job of, um, reminding the participants of the part of how, how and why we were here was because of sort of like our self-sufficiency and desire to be in community.

And I think that that kind of like intention-setting in the like truly in like the organizing emails being sort of like, how, "What time did I get here?" That kind of thing created- in addition to just, maybe it was being natural, but I feel it also was like a useful, one of the only useful things I've ever seen in email. Um, just kidding. Lots of great emails. Um, was sort of this thing of like people showed up and they were like, "I'm ready to do my thing and I'm ready to help other people. And if someone needs a thing, I'm ready to help." Like, just remembering that it's not, there were no, no bosses, no servants. Um, no. You know, like, like you do what you can to make this thing happen in a cool way together.

And that seems really obvious, but it's not the way that like, um, general art fairs are organized, right? It's, it's a non-competitive, non-hierarchical thing in which a few people are getting paid. The organizers are getting paid, but not much. And the idea is more that like, we're, we're building a cool thing together and we're doing it together. And I, I saw so much of that energy. Bahbahbahbah.

So also like, so artist-run spaces are massively important to me, and they are the space that I'm... You know, I'm interested in showing stuff in a wide range of contexts for the different things that they provide. Um, but that in general, those are the places that I found to be most interesting, fulfilling and like generative for me.

Um. Yeah, so then part of that also, and that's like very much related to, in my mind, um, histories of sort of like sub- and counter-cultures, and so... whatever, independent presses and record labels

and DIY cultures, and those are the places that I come from, but also the places that I'm sort of, like most interested in, in terms of like a kind of concept of art history. Those are the books that I'm reading, those are the like packets of ephemera that I'm still wanting to look through, the cultures that I'm trying to kind of, like, mine and be excited about and, and feel in concert with, or feel like, you know, we, we sort of were, we're allowed to build our own sort of like the, the historical families are like the, the lineages that we're a part of, right?

And so that's, those are the, the ones that excite me. Um, so then with, with lore, I feel like it's, you know, the way that some of these things are known about with, with some exceptions, you know, um, with people who are sort of like specifically playing with ideas of invisibility in general, the way that we know about a lot of these things that happened is because they, like, made flyers and because they made fan zines and because they were, their friend had a radio show and because they wrote about it in their diary, because Charlotte Moorman collected all the stuff in her archives, and because this person has this thing and like, you know, whatever, like the, the zine library in, in Iowa that has all, you know, like those things are- it's because people made material and other people collected it. And that's kind of simply the, the thing that the way that these things are perpetuated is through that.

But also, then lore, as a part of that, of like the oral traditions of being like, "Dude, I heard this fucking band, this like this guy, just like, dude, this..." Like, I remember just hearing so many stories about that. And, uh, and being excited by that and often that as a kind of performance documentation, to hear that somebody screamed for 20 minutes straight until they passed out, um, is often more interesting than the version of what, like, actually happened.

Um, and you know, like you think about the seventies performance art that we see like a single, still black and white image from, with a short paragraph description and how much more interesting that is than like somebody live streaming and being able

to watch like the four-hour version of that contemporaneously and being like, "Whoa, I am not gonna watch a four-hour video if you're doing anything. Like literally anything. Um, including watching, um, a movie that I wanna see and the camera's just on the movie", you know, like in a fine way, but like, uh, in terms of documentation, lo-lore as, as a part of documentation that is sort of like interesting and flexible and useful, and also fun to see the way that it is. It, it has at its center, its, um, kind of unreliability. And I think that's kind of cool of that, you know, whatever, all, all kinds of documentation and these things are unreliable.

And so maybe to have the unreliability be like one of the factors that's interesting to play with. Like, it's more interesting when you're-somebody mis-says the name of what you were doing or when it was happening. And then it builds up and somebody else kind of miscues a thing in like a small game of telephone than like the experience. We've also had of the newspaper, getting it wrong and being like, well, that's not interesting, t's just like a bummer that that person's name was misspelled, you know, but like somebody in a different city getting like key parts are wrong, it's like, "cool, now it exists in two ways." You know? That's what I'm thinking.

[00:12:37] **KL:** I remember, um, when I moved to Baltimore, I like moved away from Chicago. Didn't have a job, didn't have a place to stay, whatever. I ended up getting a place to stay, getting a job at Baltimore School for the Arts, like, that worked out for, you know, a year or whatever. Uh, and I remember talking to you and you saying that you had overheard somebody that was like, "Oh yeah, Kelly moved to Baltimore for this great job." And then you laughed to yourself, and you were like, "Lols, no, no, she didn't." You know, so, I mean, I guess that like...

[00:13:06] **JM:** But they just had the order wrong, you know...

[00:13:09] **KL:** They did have the order wrong, but they also had the sort, you know, I think, um, yeah, I guess I'm not necessarily concerned with like the

truth, but I am concerned with the kind of... honesty or a kind of memory that includes the difficult parts as well, or that, um, that includes the things that didn't work or includes like the attempts as well as just the, the triumphs. And I wonder how lo- um, how lore also records the, um, yeah, like the, the boring logistics, the, you know, um, the order of events, things like that, that do radically change the way that we understand what happened.

[00:13:52] **JM:** Mm-hmm, I thought maybe sometimes even more so than kind of more official, like, art histories, there's the, there's the part of why people are telling lore is because they, maybe there is like a, a different kind of failure built into it that it's like, there there's much less of people being like, "and then this painting, it had like this really interesting impasto" or whatever, right.

Like, the assumption that thing is in there. And so, like, you're more likely to hear somebody tell you slightly incorrectly about like, uh, you know, Chris Burden getting shot, as I like, was, have been told like 12 different versions of what happened with that. And that's, um, [LAUGHS] you know, like that's, which is much more likely to have sort of be, yeah.... something where, where something interesting can happen, um, in the telling of that. Even if it is- so then I think of that, and it has like built in failure inside of that potentially. Um, like people are more excited to talk about the thing where when the thing was not going well, when you saw the thing, when there was only 10 people at the show and it was freezing cold and like the, the thing broke is like a more likely story than sort of like, "Yeah, I went to see their triumphant retrospective." And, or "I saw them at whatever festival and they like sure knew their songs at that point. So... yeah. They had like some guitar techs and sound was good", you know?

Um, so maybe I, I mean, so maybe it's not the exact, like, I mean, that also is something where it's like, right. Like the ways that things worked and didn't work, there's still a level of maybe, like,

heroism inside of some of those things that is different than some of the sort of more boring failure, parts of things.

Um, but I think it, it does, it does have the potential for more, more of what, more of the imperfections, more of the struggle to be a part of that.

[00:15:45] **KL:** It's, it's interesting. Like I, um, I attended the speaking of art seminar at University of Chicago a couple years ago. The seminar that they've had, I think up until last year about artist interviews and it's mostly, um, art historians that are participating it and it, but they're also artists, you know, I was an artist, there were a couple of art, other artists there. It's interesting.

One of the people (I won't talk about specifically) in it, was really grappling with the fact that the artist had one narrative that they had put forward of their own life. And there was all this additional [archival] material that they found that didn't fit in with the thing that the artist was pushing in terms of their story about their own life. Yeah, how is it that we, as artists are constructing this, um, oversimplified, triumphant narrative of ourselves at times?

[00:16:38] **JM:** It seems like it's related to the questions that are inside of like arts journalism generally, which is to say like, what are the, the ethics feel different to me than other kinds of journalism, um, or they're like more squishy and they become kind of stranger as, also like... Well, first of all, as, as, as it like makes less and less sort of like sense as like an actual job for someone to be an arts writer means that necessarily somebody who is like, you know, a music journalist is also going to write press releases for a record label and also work for Spotify as somebody who writes the, the blurbs before the playlist or whatever, right?

Like that, that's the thing is that they become a person who produces language for music, as opposed to somebody who is working in a specific side of it. And that's filled with problems in terms of becoming, like what functions essentially as, like, a PR person and

inside of realms of, like, a pay-to-play situation in which naturally the, whatever is reviewed in whatever town without naming name (okay I don't have any names - without, without, without [LAUGHS] saying words, um) is it like that those are probably more indicative of the, galleries and museums that give advertisements to these people that fit them in various ways, whatever those kinds of things are? It's like it's inside of a certain infrastructure, but that's also, I think kind of understood that in a, not ne- in a definitely not positive way, that that is part of the sort of way that that works, right? And so then, I mean, that's awful, you know, it's, it's really, it's, it's not great. We should have, it would be great if somebody who, um, who is theoretically being like in, in the role of, of journalist or critic is, is not also writing things for the monographs, for which they're paid by a big gallery to, um, you know, create like this sort of intellectual framework for why this artist is gonna be collected by these people is important, right.

Um, definitely at the same time, there's also like the strangeness of that existing inside of both like the world of make believe of, of art and then simultaneously, or it feels very different also. Maybe, maybe here, maybe here's the way that I feel about this is, is that like these different contexts require different things, and that context often is sort of like about the level of the economic footprint and the level that it actually does talk about real power. Um, and so it's like kind of actually exciting and interesting when somebody who's working in whatever space, and it's not sort of like using their self-mythologizing as a kind of like marketing tool. That, that is a space that actually feels like a really interesting place to play with in terms of identity and whatever these other kinds of things are. And then that's obviously like completely disastrous when it takes place amongst the sort of like wealth criminal class...

[00:19:14] **KL:** How do you think about kind of, what kind of art journalism you do, I guess specifically with your interviews, um, with Bad at Sports. And then, and then maybe I'll ask you a broader question about, um, how you're thinking about creating this constellation of, um, of what did

you say, like subcultural spaces for yourself, for other people in your art practice?

[00:19:47] **JM:** Um, yeah. So, I mean the Bad at Sports thing is like, is something that I've been, I've been doing some on and off with them for... well, oh my God, like a decade now. But I, I still don't feel, I, I, I feel like that it was more like writing at one point. And then it's been on, on air and a sort of podcast for a couple years as a thing. There are now, it's sort of like the amount of people are involved change, but right now there are four people, and I sort of think of myself, still describe myself as like a permanent guest host, um, instead of- which I don't know if they with that or not, but I like kind of my role as being something that's less central to it.

But I remember like, you know, a couple years ago, like there, there, there, they were like, "Who wants to be on mic for this show? It's very casual." And I was like, "I don't think I should. I know these people too well, like it's about this thing, and I have like a piece in the thing" and like, feeling really like that it was, it was transgressing these sort of, like, art/journalism boundaries, and then Dana [Bassett] at the time who was, who was doing more of, it was sort of like, "It's not like that, you know that, right? Like, first of all, you're gonna know, we know almost everybody that we talk to because, or whatever, an amount of people, because there's just like only so many people in this place." And, and not that we necessarily know them well, but like that kind of thing.

Um, and also that, you know, shifting the idea that like, I, I don't know that necessarily think that it, it functions at the level of sort of like journalism at this stage (maybe it did at other points) with like a kind of like capital J. I don't think that it's doing the same thing that I want to be being done by proper journalists.

Like it's not, um, it's not investigative, it's not, um, yeah, it, it's doing something different. I think, I think there are definitely people who like in, in art are doing that, but this is a different kind of thing. And so, the way that I think it's really thought of by certainly the

founders in particular is thinking of it more in the lineage of like the fan zine. And that it's like, we are art fans who are here to like, have a conversation with, with, with artists. And that, that is, uh, that's the idea.

And so, so for me, it's very much about sort of like, I just wanna have an interesting conversation with a person and sort of, like, give them a platform to talk about their things, at the same time, doing it in a way that is, like, hopefully more interesting than just a series of things we have/ that I have experienced in other places, which are like basically the same six questions in different orders.

And that feels much more truly, I mean, like the, like the best part about when Bad at Sports is working at its best, it's something where the artist is saying things that they didn't expect, but are maybe more honest as opposed to sort of like, uh, a space for performing the artist statement, you know? And, and sometimes you'll have that if like the first question, which it should never be, but sometimes is sort of like, "So, what's the show?" And then people will basically like, as best as they can just recall what they wrote in the press release. And it's like, *this is bad radio*. This is, like, hard to listen to for everybody involved, you know? And so, it's like, you know, just like having a real conversation with these people. And I feel like also as you, as I think we mentioned when I interviewed you for Bad at Sports, there is something that can be cool, can be interesting, can be valuable, can be funny—whatever the thing is about, you know, like, like, like the context of, of an interviewer conversation that has some sort of like, uh, implied audience at some point when it's not in your head that there's an audience, but rather it's like the specific form, not formality of that can allow for different kinds of conversations than what happen in other places. Like it kind of, like, both keeps you on task and allows you to go, to go on drifts, but like it's different than other kinds of conversations, right? And that's like a cool thing to be able to do with your friends is ask them things that you wouldn't ask other times, and to hear them say these things.

And then also, like, maybe just the last thing that I also experience sometimes, is like sometimes with the interviews, I know the answer in a certain way, and so it's also the funny thing that, like, we don't do that often when we're in conversation of being a surrogate for somebody else, you know, for like whoever the audience is.

And, in some version, I think that's also like an interesting role to play sometimes. Um, and then the understanding that the person is responding and not in a way where they then think that I'm, like, rude for forgetting that [LAUGHS] or something. But rather that there's this understanding that it's like, I'm both me and I'm a little bit of a surrogate for other people, and we're kind of, like, thinking about how to make this interesting conversation, but also in a way that isn't too linear or directed, but still feels sort of like conversational. And I'm saying all this, but I'm mostly like just talking and not, not thinking that much about sort of what can happen in there.

Um, but my hope is that that, you know, I, I, I'm like a very small part of what will be an enormous and immense archive. And, you know, so I'm like, I'm like glad that I have a small role in what will be, I think like a really important archive of, of this sort of like of all these different artists that have done things and, and, and it's, it is messy. It's like, sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not very good.

And that is also I'm sure infuriating for a listener, but, um, is the way that it's been allowed to continue is because there's, there's no money, there's never been any money to do this thing. And so, it's like people like, like the, the format has been built so that it could continue moving without too many interventions.

And sometimes that means that it's like, the quality is not as high as if you were working for NPR or a podcast that has sort of like a production staff where they even have editing, you know?

[00:24:56] **KL:** In listening back or looking back, or, I don't know, just thinking back on the conversations that you've had, are there certain kinds of questions that are things that you ask repeatedly?

Like, can you identify a certain thing in terms of like, oh, like, this is what I'm chewing on, or this is something that I just like, keep on asking people about that. Um, that is maybe central to, yeah, the questions that I ask about myself and my own practice, but then also just like something that points to something that's really important to me, even if, for a time.

[00:25:34] **JM:** Yeah. I mean the first one that jumps to mind, because I realized that I was asking it of most any- but I think it actually like is a question that's valued, valid for most artists, most people probably, and essential to sort of a thing that I think about all the time. And I'm just sort of curious how people talk about, it is about the spectrum of composition and improvisation—to me is a question that I'm curious about with just about every artist. Um, and then certain people, it kinda like makes more sense where they specifically are people who like have performance practices that also include improvisation, sure. There's also people that are painters, printmakers, whatever kind of thing that, like, have different levels of that.

And, and to me that always feels like a really interesting thing to kind of go into cause I think that people are also thinking about that maybe more than they're talking about it. Um, and it just is like a central thing in my thinking about how you make things. Um, and what is the point in which something like moves into a space of instinct, and so, it looks like improvisation, but it also something that is like, so thoroughly honed that actually, like, it functions more, it functions closer to composition through convention through having done it long enough that it becomes like... you know, like anything can become a beat, you just have to start repeating it, Right. And so just, like, from a rhythmic perspective, any utterance can... has the potential to become something that is just, like, actually straightforwardly rhythmic from, from that point on. You know, so, yeah. So that's the thing that I seem to ask everybody just about. Um, I dunno, there's probably other things, like I I'm, I probably ask people things about humor more often than some people do.

Um, I don't know. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm curious. I mean, I'm, I'm always curious about- maybe these are things that are related to my own interests of course, but like the impact that people's other roles maybe have what they're doing. Um, so how having a curatorial project impacts their art making or how teaching or how their writing practice, whatever, I feel like that's the thing that I seem to be interested in.

Um, and then when it's sort of like a thing where I'm able to be the, I don't know if I were more fully in the driver's seat and, and when I did kind of more like text based articles, there was like longer, I'm usually pretty interested in like how people became interested in, in art making or the sort of like the, the, like when they knew, which is often earlier than when they like, thought that they were allowed to be the one who knew or like, you know, like, I think that, that, that sort of version of... there's sometimes, including that I like in these interviews, we're doing this week, like that this was mentioned by one of the people and that I was remember other friend who said this years ago about this thing where they were like, "You know, I mean, for a lot of us, like for artists, it's like, we're at these things and it's kinda uncomfortable because deep down we're like introverts, like we got into this because we were like really into drawing, you know. And that's how we became artists."

And I was like, "Not me, nope. I got into this- like I am into drawing." I'm not an inter- innervert, I can't pronounce it, I'm not introvert, but I like, I like drawing. I like doing stuff by myself. That is, is a part of my life. And I definitely was, like, a drawer as a kid. And I still am now constantly drawing but it's like, no, I actually much more came into this through sort of, like, through ideas of counterculture. And then, so it's like the stranger thing is that I'm at an art fair right now, looking at a drawing than, than that I'm like at, at the show afterwards, or that I'm talking to people about ideas or that I'm trying to be in a scene of, like, sort of, people that are interesting to me, and we're talking about art, and we're sort of, like, building things together.

Um, and not to say that I don't, like, care about this sort of the things that I'm doing in those other places, but like, the community thing actually is, is central to what... um, and blah blah blah. So, so I think that like, there's a way that, uh, tho- those questions are very interesting of like, "Were you," I dunno, "were you, were you in a, in a band and that's how you got interested in this?"

Were you, like, the kind of the literary star? Or you were in debate and then you realized that you actually, like, performing, which means you actually like doing this, which means you're actually a photographer." Like, like those in a non-limiting way, what are the sort of like the ways that a person got somewhere I feel like is often sort of interesting and elucidating.

[00:29:32] **KL:** You do so much, Jesse, you do so many things and, um, and I mean, I just wanna kind of connect it back to what you said about the importance of community and also the centrality of, um, like, coming into your art practice through these countercultural spaces, like, has that impacted the way that you have always made art as... a person that, uh, makes objects, and then also curates, and then also, um, writes and obviously speaks to people and, and curates shows and then also curates spaces. And I don't know, it's really hard to even like, list what you do, cause I've just always seen it as just, like, like a full-frontal attack or something. Um... [LAUGHS]

[00:30:20] **JM:** Attack? I guess that's better than decay... Yeah. I mean, I guess that I, there's a lot of ways that I answer that, but maybe the thing that is feeling most, um, honest in this exact moment, cause I did just have like, uh, I'll say like a very busy couple weeks in which I had two shows open in one weekend, which was like, a really fascinating thing to be kind of installing back and forth with different parts of the city and also cat sitting for someone during this. So, I was like, like every part of my life was like, where is that object? Like I remember it being, where is my shirt? Like, where, you know, and just like, it's one of four different places right now. Maybe it's in my car. Okay. One of

five different places. Being like, this is too many keys for me to have. Um, and then like the week after doing this site of like organizing this curated show and then also starting teaching.

So, it was like, it was, it was an interesting moment of like, in 10 days, whatever. So, it was like, like all many of the things that I do were happening kinda at the same time. And mostly, I was actually like, loved it. Um, like the, the real thing is that like I, uh, thrive off of a certain amount of activity. And I find that when I have sort of, like a variation of different things that I get to do and have to do that, I'm better at doing all of them. When I have to, like, do computer work, I just like resent it and I will just, like, leave the house and like try to not pay my WIFI so that I can like, not have to do that.

And if I just have to do one thing, it's just like, I mean, it's a little bit of an ADHD thing, maybe, I think it's a Sagittarius thing, there's a lot of different things that are going on... Um, but, but I, but it actually, like, it makes me really happy when I get to be doing, like, five things at once. Like having that it also is, is it becomes part of like the, the idea machine when there's a lot of things to kind of consider that, then all of a sudden there's like a, kinda like a clarity of, of decision making in a way that you can sort of like spend hours on a really small thing.

Like, I don't know, you know, like one of the ways that also that I've, that I work in particular sort of like gallery-y shows is that there's like an additional four or five pieces that may or may not make it in at the end. And there's sort of like little secrets and there's like, when that's hidden over here and that kind of thing.

So, for those kind of things, like, I mean that, I just love, I love that, but it also means that then, like this thing that I've already shown in a different context now has a new title. For instance, like, I love titling things, but also that if you're just sort of like sitting at me, like ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch title, title, title, title, title, you know, they're like, they're kind of better than if I, if I had to spend three hours pacing around the room, trying to figure out the title, right?

And so, the same thing hap- happens when you're like looking in the room and just like installing somethings, like, okay, this seems to go this over here and this over here. And then like, come back, move it around a little bit if you need to. But that, that actually can be like, we can become, there's kind of like paralysis that can happen with too much time. A mixture between like paralysis and like deep avoidance is how, I would describe that. And so, when there's like a ton going on, I have like, it feels actually much clearer to me.

Um, and it feels exciting in a way that it's sort of like the, the way that, you know, like, for better or worse (which that's the phrase I use often um, which I don't know. I don't know. Or it's just a way of like making a statement without being like, I think this is correct, it's just what my life is like).

Is that the way that I'm sort of like thinking often about some of the choices that I've made that have led me to this, do whatever to the conversation we're having right now in which I'm also like in a rented, affordably rented plant-sit situation in the city I don't live in, so that I can do this, but I'm doing this other thing, whatever, all the different ways that I exist where I am are like more, more of those choices were based on sort of like what would feel like an interesting way to be in the world. And what are the ways that, like, with this one precious life with this, this one experience that we have, that we can sort of like, not dwell too much on that. Though certainly, that's present, but also like do things that feel exciting or interesting. And so, to me, it's like, as an artist, it's like the, I, like, want, I just, like, want, like, a ton of stuff to happen.

I just wanna, I like, I love when there's a lot happening. And I wanna like make more work so I can be in more places and I wanna go somewhere else so I can see more things. That's the whole thing. And so, it's just sort of like that, that, um, and not that not, like, in a I'm into people who also move slowly and like, people have different needs.

Um, but for me actually, like moving fast, um, feels, feels good. And it feels like, like that's where like ideas come from, you know?

Like it feels, like, it feels generative and generous. Um, and yeah, and then also I feel like, you know, those different interests sort of like allow for different things to happen.

Like there's, there's just really wonderful things, you know, I come also, like, I don't know. I, I, I, I was, I've long been kind of interested in those... like, beyond interdisciplinary, but like this mess-i-disciplinary, um, approaches where the person, like... like the reason why scenes are able to continue and to exist is that there is not a sort of, like, one artist historian throwing their flag onto one artist, as you said, with one, whatever, but like, um, somebody who is organizing shows and also making their own work and then writing about doing other stuff, it's like, that's where... that's where these things come from, right?

And that's where, that's like, why we know about certain, like, independent music scenes at different times is because of that exact energy that happened in places, literary scenes, whatever, you know. And I think also there's like, like just as a, I don't know, button to that, there's like a way that I think when... when you and I were in our individual grad schools, grad school in Chicago, back in the, uh, early teens of the century, that was like a, people wanted to talk about a lot, I think, was sort of like interdisciplinarity and like artist-run spaces, artist/ curator, things like that.

And so, so that seeped into my mind, even though it was already happening, but it sort of like felt more formalized. But I remember they're also being like, I don't know, like the, the thing, the thing that's weird about it is that like, it's, it can lead to people feeling the pressure to do these things. It can lead people who like have an apartment gallery but what they really want is to just like have a medium scale job at a regular institution and just like be in art, you know? Um, as opposed to the sort of like borderline problem of some of the people that I find I cherish most deeply of like the, the, the immensity of the immersivity of the immersiveness of being inside of that, you know?

Um, so it's like, so like it's cool people try a lot of different things on it and I'm not bemoaning any part of it. But I, I know that I recognize that applying that same kind of, um, those expectations are not the same for all people. And again, not in a way that is hierarchical. Um, but that is just like different, different kinds of things.

And so, there are people for whom that becomes like a really stressful thing. They actually don't like working with other people. They hate writing they, whatever the thing is. It's really painful. It's whatever it's like, I, I, I, I, I don't think that this is like a one size fits all approach. I think that for certain kinds of minds and beings that like makes perfect sense, and then for other people, it's sort of like the construction of this, like impeccably made painting away from the world is a thing that makes sense. And that's like, great. And I, I can't, you know, that that's not the thing that I'm doing.

[00:37:19] **KL:** You know, I think (I guess) constantly about the different ways that parts of my art practice, like can be co-opted, you know? (JM: mm-hmm) Um, like you are busy, you are productive, like you have a lot of things going on at once, but at the same time, it's like, you have to show that you're hyper productive, but you also have to show that you have a long-term investigation in one thing, and you are going somewhere with it.

So, I think that's something that's interesting about your practice, Jesse. [LAUGHS]-I'm not saying that you're not going anywhere, but it does seem like it's kind of like you're pushing so many things at the same time that, um, this idea of like you, yeah, being triumphant in one of them, um, seems kind of irrelevant or something from the outside.

[00:38:08] **JM:** Yeah. I mean, I think that there's probably like, yeah. I mean, the, the, the, my, my practice, I think that you could definitely like, see really clear through-lines and hope that it is kind of like moving in, in interesting directions, but I don't necessarily believe in that sort of like, progress idea that it's like, uh, apartment gallery to small scale

gallery that has a little bit of this, to this, to this, to like then, you know, solo show at whatever museum or something like that.

And, and so like that, I feel like that's often how those things are considered with maybe like deviations to something that is like a, a the Neubauer Collegium or something like that. Like, sort of like there there's like acceptable places, like off ramps along the way that are, um, that, that kind of like bolster the, that this is like an interesting practice or something like that.

Um, so I don't, I don't, I don't, that doesn't make sense for the things that I'm doing, but. But I do feel like there are like, there's these different strains you can watch how they're sort of like moving and pushing different directions... now I wanna make, like, a backwards moves. Like this is like making me, I made me feel crazy to even have this in my brain. And I was like, I only wanna show in, like undergrads', uh, shows. Like I'm not [LAUGHS] I don't even wanna be, I didn't even wanna have, like, I wanna nickname. I wanna be, I wanna be 11. I want, like, I can't... I was so, but... Well, the other thing I think is maybe it was on my mind this week. So, if you'll indulge a mom[ent], so one of the things that, um, anecdotally I was doing this, uh, so like I have, I have this ongoing project called Gallery as Form. The basic thing is that for like a certain amount of exhibitions that I'm organizing, in addition to organizing this show, I'm also org- it's like a new gallery, not just a new show. So, a new gallery produces a new show. And with that, they have their own website, their own social media thing. And more than that, those are more like almost, I mean, they're, they're real, but they're more like props or something like that.

And that the, this sort of like inside of a play in which this place exists at the same time, the shows are, the shows are real, which is to say like, they have like different ideologies, different history. So, like, this is the kind of gallery that is a commercial gallery that would exist in the X part of town of X kind of place that has this kind of like way of describing exhibitions.

Uh, and then so some of that is like a super scrappy DIY place. Some of that is something that's like a slightly out of touch, but august space, something is like a University gallery or one that like takes itself really seriously in a specific way. Another one is one where like, they don't even use words in the press releases, cause there's just like too many colors in the show.

All these different kinds of moves as being, like, interesting kind of cosplay things at the same time, the shows are real. The work is good. I feel good about them. It's this funny thing where I like generally try to do, um, as part of the theater of it, like, lies of omission instead of commission, which to say that, like the first one of these was a gallery that was called Selected Works Gallery.

And it was a show called the, *The Long Goodbye*. And it was a show that was all about how this, how the gallery, it was their final show. And so, like works that were about that. But then also commissioned 12 different art historian writer types to, like, write remembrances of the space, which of course were entirely speculative as it had not technically existed before they received that email.

And it was great, like, they wrote funny things. There were interesting things that were very heartfelt. It was also like a lot of kinda like displacement of other things in their lives, obviously onto this. But then also there were like things, there were resonances between their remembrances of an un- non-extant place. [LAUGHS]

Anyway, so then like people came to the show and had to be like, "Ah, its actually the last show?" And be like, "Yeah, it is the last show." Like, that, that is a, that is a true statement. And being like, "Yeah, I I'd never been here before. Like I, I think I'd heard of it." And be like, "People have been saying that", you know? Um, and then sort of people being like, "Do you, do you work here?" And being like, "Well, you know, I organized this show."

Um, I don't know. So not like, trying not to, I dunno, maybe that last one was some more people, but so with this one being like, how do I get people to come to this thing? But at the same time, not let

them know that it's one of mine. At the same time, like, when people figure that out, that's okay.

It's not like I'm trying to like fully... but more that like that, it will be interesting for them in the interstices between them discovering that the thing is happening and then knowing that I'm somehow involved in that. But not in a way where I wanna like become, I don't know, it's, it's not about deception, but it's about sort of like, moment-momentary fantasy or something like that.

It feels sort of like the artist-run space, the kind of like the, the opportunity of DIY in a, a different era kind of describing what that means, um, is about being able to re- kind of imagine what these things look like, right? And so, like, why are so many DIY house shows, do they maintain so much of the same thinking that is happening with like at a club? Why do (micro) cinemas look like movie theater? Well, like all those things. And the answer is like, in some cases there's like, you know what? It actually does make sense to have the entrance to the show, be at the back so that you don't walk through the stage, that we don't have people walking through the screen, "Okay. That was a good, that was good. You know, we should have the lights out during the movie. Got it." But the other things where it's sort of like inheriting these really stupid things from other forms, right? And I think it's a really strange thing of, like, somebody who is producing radical work in whatever form, and then how, the ways that it can often be almost indistinguishable from the other kinds of places, right? Like why, why are so many film programs of kind of, like, difficult, whatever, critical work do they, people, still try to make them about the length of a movie? The programs of shorts, of being sort of *like that's what counts as a night of stuff*. These short performances will be like, like what it feels like to go to the theater, you know?

And it's like a very strange thing because, like, and shows happen at this time of night, et cetera, in a way that like, if you're exploding the, the, the model with this thing, then, like, like way more

bands should be playing in the morning, right? Obviously. Way more things should be happening at different times of day.

And more screenings should be 25 minutes long or six hours long, or should like, take into account the things that can happen there. Um, yeah. So anyways, so I feel like, I mean like that, that sort of consideration, or, and then also kind of really related to that also is the sort of like artist-run space of like, why, if you can do whatever you want in, in this space, you got this little room and you can do anything you want, why would you make it so, it's so similar to this other thing? It can feel a little bit like being the resentful younger sibling or something like that.

Um, in a way that like, of course, like for, you know, for like a painting exhibition, it like, yes, put them on the wall and light them. Well, don't put 'em on the floor or whatever people step on them. But in other situations, it's like, if you're allowed to do whatever you want and what you want most is to do this thing, maybe we could just like do that thing, you know?

[00:44:32] **KL:** You know, in this kind of way of making art of changing forms and that being quite important, you know, like a really important reading for me was like Amiri Baraka's *Technology and Ethos*. He talks about, right, like the, um, the morality of the makers being in the technology that we use. And then how kind of imagining like what, you know, like, yeah, what would, you know, technology look like if it was made by somebody else. And then also the importance of breaking form and reinventing form, and yeah, I guess that was quite important for me and my journey, like, away from being a figure painter into another kind of figure painter, like, thinking about playing around with form, as I know you do as well...

But you know, how is it that people are experimenting with form, but then maintaining a kind of conservatism of, um, um, some of the things that make up the form (JM: mm-hmm) in order to still be recognized as being in the same conversation, identified as in the same genre or whatever. (JM: totally) And if you stray so far out of

conventions, that at what point are you no longer a part of the conversation? (JM: mm-hmm) At like what point are you no longer a part of the archive? At what point are you no longer remembered as a deviation from, this larger conversation from this form that you theoretically care about cause you're participating in it?

[00:46:03] **JM:** Yeah, totally. So, you know, like, the Chicago Public Library has this really cool thing, they have these like the Artist Files that are, um... oh, it's great, it's like, you should also send some stuff there.

It's just, you know, these like, um, files, folders, like, it takes different shapes of people, but it's like different people's collections of ephemera, show notes, all different kinds of stuff. And it's something that I haven't done yet with any of my things in part, cause I haven't felt a particular urgency to, but it is a thing where it's like, they have things. It's about things that people have donated specifically about somebody and the collections of other people.

So, it's like, you know, there's, there's like, I'm sure that in the thing it's like Ray Yoshida is next to somebody whose name is Roy Yoshida, who is just like, "Yeah, it was like, I did these three things and here's the flyers from it." Like, you know, like, that kind of thing which I think is really beautiful to imagine those objects being in that space that can both, that can be usable as an archive for people if they wanna activate it later or even just like, that it's, it's in the record.

And I think there's something kind of nice about that. And I also sort of like the ways that that can exist as something that is, um, I don't know, there's something cool about. Certain kinds of archives that are sort of, like, non-hierarchical, or less hierarchical or something like that. Like, the way that you're next to something because of your last name is, is sometimes kind of a cool thing instead of the, the scale of your (and our, our names would be pretty close to each other) um, you know, among the ways that things can be organized.

And so, I was seeing, actually a couple days ago, this is like a little zzzup, but, um, I saw a flyer for a show at this place called the

Orgone, which was like a microcinema in Pittsburgh that I never went to. Knew people who knew, but it was, like, after the fact and whatever. But like, sort of like, again, lore, slightly legendary. I remember a show they did as soon as I saw a flyer from it, from like the nineties, maybe, I remembered it and then realized that like five years later I had done something, not the same, but, like, related. It's the same thinking, different show, but they had... it was a flyer for a show that they did, that was all prints from, um, Filmmakers' Co-op in New York, but it was all stuff that none of them had seen.

And it was just based on the descriptions and things that they, they, like, didn't know about, but that seemed interesting. And so, the, the first time anybody saw it, the curator, anybody saw it, the audience saw it was simultaneous. And I thought that was a really cool idea.

And then, like, years ago did a thing where it was like, ha-asking, commissioning people to make, uh, films based on the catalog descriptions that I'd found in these things. And that was based entirely on, you know, looking through like Canyon Cinema or Filmmakers' Co-op, like, their catalogs. And seeing, like, people inside of the sort of, um, or thing that I also find myself doing from time to time when describing a thing. Of doing it in like a sort of poetic way that doesn't actually give much away about what's actually happening in it.

And that's very different for somebody who then has like a long career and that film keeps getting shown and you're like, it is cause they didn't give too much away, you know? And then other times where it's like the only thing that that person made before they had moved into a different part of their lives or whatever.

It's just so wild this thing will, like, never be watched because it is the, the paratext doesn't sell, or something like that, you know? I think it's also, like, really cool. And actually, it'd be great if more organizations that have holdings like that did do more interesting things with those things, right? Um, anyway, so when I die, I hope somebody does something like that with me. [LAUGHS]

[00:49:17] **KL:** Okay. So, the last question that I always ask everybody is, um, um, did we talk about what you thought we would talk about? Or is there anything that you would like to ask me? Or is there anything that you'd just like to say?

[00:49:34] **JM:** I mean, I guess one thing that I'm curious for you is just sort of like, um, how, how is this way of doing research, let's say, which is to say that's also very much related to the social and things that you're doing anyway, in other parts, your life, or certainly were pre-pandemic and will continue to do whatever, like being in relation to artists. Um, how is this particular form, and then also thinking about it in ways that can be sort of like structured and considered in research, how has that changed your own practice now, having all these different voices in your head? Lateral voices, not professor voices, not student voices, you know?

[00:50:14] **KL:** Yeah. Um... It's funny... having... teachers. Because from a young age, you know, I learned, um, and thankfully I, you know, was aided in this realization, um, by my, by my parents, um, that teachers have to be taught by somebody. (JM: mm-hmm) And so, it's funny to have this kind of relationship with so many people throughout my studies. Um, but then also, you know, like people that care for you, whatever, you know, giving you advice, things like that.

And then it's really nice to kind of see it as a drop in the bucket rather than, as like these five people who, um, you know, were in positions where they were either paid or felt a responsibility to like, give me some kind of advice or like guide me, or like, tell me how the world is. (JM: mm-hmm) So, it's been really nice to, like, I do feel like I've learned, like, so much from all of the people that I talk to. So, it's been really nice to, um, be able to have yeah, more voices in my head. Because I feel like it lessens the degree to which any one of those voices becomes a bit too dominant...

Like I always learn a lot and I'm so thankful at people's willingness to talk with me about some stuff that, um, can be quite difficult. Or their willingness to be present with me in this moment. And so, like you said, right, with these interviews, like, that you do on the radio, um, like what does it mean to, yeah, talk to people that, you know, but like, um, like have them be kind of not giving you a rote answer, but like rather thing- that they're kind of thinking through in the moment, you know? Like, I feel very thankful that people are willing to do this with me. And I think that, um, you know, understanding of the art world as full of people that are, like, willing to help (JM: mm-hmm) is, like, something that is so hopeful. Um, and I feel like I always could use a bit more hope in terms of the way that I understand the art world.

[00:53:00] **JM:** Yeah. I love that. Or like art *worlds*. Of course. That that's an easy one, but I think it's always worth that uh, the thing of, just like the reminder of these as being like multiple overlapping things, you know? Uh, cool. Love you, Kelly.

[00:53:22] **KL:** I love you. I'll talk to you soon. Thank you, Jesse!

[00:53:24] **JM:** Yeah. Bye.

[00:53:24] **KL:** Bye.

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[00:53:32] **KL:** Epilogue. On the 30th of December 2022, Jesse Malmed wrote to me, "I've had a busy and mostly lovely few months. One show I want to highlight is *Clique & Claque*, at Folio, an artist-run gallery and bookshop in Green Bay, Wisconsin. For the exhibition, I asked a dozen artists — including you [meaning me, Kelly Lloyd] — to furnish me with prompts for individual works. It was a joy — a sometimes stressful one — to think through my approaches to these directions, sometimes I

was combative, sometimes I offered more exactly what was asked, sometimes I went sideways. In a moment of commiseration this happened alongside my students' final weeks, which alongside the material considerations — most of my materials from the show came from the University of Wisconsin Madison's Surplus Non-Store — heightened the playfully pedagogic. It feels related to a lot of what we talked about in the interview — artist-run culture, lateral structures, humor, education, collaboration, lore, etc.— which was fascinating to think about anew.

Since we spoke, the world lost one of the art lives of my life, Mikey Rae. He worked primarily in drawing and music, but also made painting, sculpture, outré performance art and was a tremendous writer and person. It would mean the world to me for our listeners to look at his work and, as one of his songs went, contemplate their days.”

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[00:54:58] **KL:** You can find more information about Jesse Malmed and their work at their website jessemalmed.net. Links to what we spoke about today, as well as other interviews with people in the arts, are on the project's website thisthingwecallart.com

This podcast was funded by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities. If you would like to help make the next season of this podcast a reality, please consider rating and reviewing this podcast on Apple Podcasts, becoming a Patreon member, or donating through the Paypal link on the project's website.

The logo was designed by eva duerden, the episode artwork was created by Giulia Ratti, and the theme song was made by Alessandro 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 eva duerden and Lou Macnamara who, along with myself, most recently formed 12ø Collective.