

File Name: CHA_052023_ART3
Event Date: May 20, 2023
Location: Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA
Participants:
KOURTNEY BROWN
NNEKA EBBE
JORDAN SCRUGGS
NICOLE WEAVER
Length: 00:46:30

Preface

The following conversation was hosted at Stove Works, facilitated by Aja Scarlato. Consent was given by the participants to have their conversation recorded and transcribed.

Readers should keep in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word and are encouraged to refer directly to the original audio if possible as some interactions and utterances may not have been transcribed due to the nature of unscripted group conversations. The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the roundtable participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of Black Lunch Table.

START OF RECORDING

[Sound of ongoing conversation in the auditorium throughout]

AJA SCARLATO: And you're all set.

KOURTNEY BROWN: Thank you.

NICOLE WEAVER: Alright, nice--.

JORDAN SCRUGGS: Right.

NW: I love it. I love it.

JS: Game, this is like a game of speed--.

[Laughter]

JS: I love this.

[Pause]

NNEKA EBBE: Ooh, extra... Don't look. Just kidding [Laughs]

NW: [Laughs]

[Pause]

JS: Ahh, ooh. [Pause] Oh I love these. So these are just prompts. These are-these are good prompts.

[Pause]

NE: I got two blanks.

JS: I have a blank too. So I guess this is just like a free-for-all maybe? When it comes to blanks? [Pause]

NE: I'm not gonna do that one, 'cause, not first

JS: I don't think there are, but I think these are just prompt cards so we can just like...Which, which should we say, like the first person to the left or right of the dealer, goes first, picks the card and then we start a conversation?

NE: Sure.

JS: I don't know.

[Crosstalk]

NE: Well, I—What do we talk about, like what forms of art we participate in, and [Inaudible - 00:01:18-00:01:21].

JS: Oh yeah; that'd be nice, yeah. Yeah.

NW: Okay.

[Crosstalk Ends]

NE: Jordan, I think you can start.

JS: Ohh.

NE: I'm kidding. [Laughs]

JS: [Laughs] I could start. I'm uh, I guess I can use this word. I-I just learned that multi-hyphenated um, artists. Like, 'cause I mean, I write. Um, I do-I do spoken word. I do poetry. But then I also do visual art, as well as graphic design. So like I-this was my first art installation here this spring. Um, but usually, the way Josiah got me into doing art and stuff is to just, "Hey, what would your response be to this prompt?" And then I did visual art. So, newly kind of visual artist; really only picked it up in 2020, literally in COVID. Josiah was like, "Hey, can you do something remote?" And I was like, "I can figure it out, I guess." Um, but yeah, yeah. That-that's it for me. How about you, my good friend?

[Sound of background conversations]

[Pause]

KB: I guess I would say I'm a griot. [Pause]

A griot; it's a African term for storyteller. So um, I-I think, I think that's part of my gift on this planet is to uh, create conversations and to um, hopefully provoke some type of change through that conversation. Um, so I guess--like to pillar that out--starts first with visual arts with me. Um painting, mixed media, collage, and using different graphics that really like, I think, tie into like my childhood at first. So um, growing up having a diverse background with friend groups, and being a part of like skateboarding

and all these things, I think allowed me to transfer that into my work. And then I think I found music later in high school. And, and that has given me that gift of just like writing, and, and um... And now it's just like more than you just said; it's like photographs, video, even audio. So um, I think more than anything right now, I'm just intrigued by um, just conveying a story and hoping people can, can relate to it

[Pause]

NE: Feel like that's the original art form, right?

[Speakers agree]

NE: Um, I am a performer. I act, sing, and dance. Um, I also write. [Pause] Yeah.

JS: What type of uh, writing?

NE: [Sound of exhaling]

JS: Is that multi-hyphenated too?

NE: [Laughs] Um, I, like short, like-- It's not short stories. It's like very-like short form prose--

JS: Okay.

NE: A lot of the time. Um, usually just like very visceral um, emotional pieces.

JS: Nice, nice, nice.

NE: It's therapy; writing is my therapy.

JS: Yeah.

NE: [Chuckles]

[Pause]

NW: So I write um, in my job, I write mostly about television. So that's more of like a reporting aspect. But, for my art lately it's come through with screenwriting. Um, and yeah, I mostly dive into Black, like queer um, everyday life. So, yeah.

JS: That was good.

KB: So how should we start? Should we start uh, reading out the cards?

NE: Pull-pu-pullin', everyone pull a card. You just pick a card, and then we just gon' go around. That's what I'm gonna do, yeah. We just gon'...

[Pause]

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: Ooh, snap. Okay, there we go. What's that one say?

NE: Ooh, *Is it possible to make artwork that's not tied to notions of identity or legacy?*

JS: I think like, your-like—art imitates life, and life imitates art. I think it's kind of—like even if you're not writing on your life experience or doing art on your own life experience, like that's the legacy that you're leaving behind. Like--

NE: Yeah.

JS: Can you really separate that?

NE: Yeah. For me, immediately I think like, art starts with your point of view.

JS: Yeah.

NE: And so like, whether you're writing about yourself or somebody else, or somebody in history, it's coming from your point of view. So there's no way to detach your identity from that. I feel like that's why artists take things so personally too. Sorry.

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah.

NICOLE WEAVER: Yeah.

JS: I agree.

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: I mean, [Pause] my-yeah my first art piece was literally me responding to Josiah's prompt on how would Ida B. Wells react to the police brutality state, or whatever that's happening like right now. Like how would Ida B. Wells—what it would her-like-what's, and like—That's how I got started as an artist. I was with like the um—I was with *Echoing Ida* and they were basically Black women and nonbinary po-people around the country, writing on their um, expertise in their own experiences and stuff. And so we had Raquel Willis--who was like a prolific--she's like great. She's young, but she's like a Black trans woman. She goes, "This is my life experience and I'm writing on it." And that's like her legacy. And I don't know how she would detach that type of thing from her work. And, like that's a lot. Like I don't know if that's possible.

NW: Yeah. I think some people, well, to be honest, I think white people, when they make art, they think it's like, they make it like the Everyman or the standard, not knowing what they're making is also from their own identity. And while everyone else, I think when they make their art here in America, it's always put in the category of, 'Well, that's Black art; that's Hispanic, Latino art,' and something like that. But I think all art comes from identity, whether you're conscious of it or not. You know? There's just, your worldview comes from the people who came before you, and your experience now, and

it's gonna show up somewhere. I kinda think, I mean--and this is a question I had for myself because--as a screenwriter, you should h-you should be able to sell yourself in a way of what you do. And that could be just based off of genre. Like Jordan Peele now might just be, like a horror director. And I talked to my mentor about this, of not knowing what mine would be, 'cause my first was a sports movie. My second was a ro-rom-com. But she was like, "You're a black bisexual artist. Like that's-that's the uh, way that you have to tell others to get it, because that's the one thing that stands out, is that that's the perspective that you have." So for me, I'm always gonna see art through that lens of just like--because that's what I, how I'm moving um, as an artist.

[Pause]

KB: I feel like for me at times, it's-it's kinda like I'm in this place where I'm discovering more of my identity through my art. I-I think I've created so many different mediums at times, that like I kind of lose exactly like what approach I'm, you know, I'm kind of aiming toward. And um, I think lately, especially over the last year, I'm just kinda questioning myself exactly on like um, what is it that um--I think like my theme or like my consistent base of like working, you know? Especially when you're talking about like collage. I think it could-it kind of create um, some narrative to lead off with. But then it just really, you just start start kind of like cutting random things and just like creating something. And I-I do find satisfaction in that sometimes. It's like um, I don't really have, um I guess, like a purpose for a certain piece. Like, some people might look at something be like, "What does this mean?"

NE: Mhmm.

KB: But it's like, I don't know. I think I was just having fun when I was just making it. And then some pieces are just more like, 'Oh, well, I-I intended this to say this,' you know? But I think--I go back to skateboarding. I think that skateboarding gave me that freedom to just like be free formed. So like, especially when I'm just playing deep with my collage stuff, I don't really have much of a, um identity with it. Or um, I don't even really think about a legacy, I think. Um, just kind of like an escape and of finding of myself. [Inaudible - 00:11:08-00:11:09].

[Pause]

NW: I would say though, I think you're probably so in it that you can't see--where other people, if they looked at all of your catalog--they'll be like, 'Oh, this is a common thing.' 'Cause even when we're not conscious, I think we all have like signatures. hat's kind of like what people have said about Shonda Rhimes. Of like, she got the swirl on all her shows.

[Laughter]

NW: I don't know what is it about her, but that's very much part of her arts. And you even connecting it to skateboarding; that's like a whole culture. Like if your whole thing is freeform--and that comes from skateboarding--then that's probably what ties all of it.

[Pause]

JS: That's so interesting because now I'm thinking of like, what was—what does my art look like without a prompt? Because almost all of my arts—all of my art pieces--or any work that I've done--is based off of some prompt, and then I-I just get visual things come into my head. And then I start creating; 'cause I um—all of my pieces

I've kind of made--like they've been three different prompts or whatever that I've worked with Josiah on; three different art pieces, three different prompts--but they've all had something that goes through. Like every single one of them is like reflection of the person, that—'Cause all of my pieces so far have been uh, interactive um, in some way. And I wonder if that's like my signature. Without me—like what would my art look like without a prompt? Would it still have that engagement, interactive type of thing?

[Crosstalk]

NW: Yes, I can already tell. Yes--,

JS: [Laughs] Yeah.

NE: [Chuckles]

[Crosstalk Ends]

NW: 'Cause all your stuff— it usually includes—you talk a lot about Black teachers being in your family, and I think that's part of the interactive thing, right? It's like that's what teachers do, is like to get you to think about something. And then you usually have a Black artist somewhere in the background, even if they're not the main focus.
[Pause] Yeah.

JS: Well, there we go.

NW: [Chuckles]

JS: There we go, there we go.

NW: [Laughs]

JS: That was a great card [Inaudible - 00:13:29].

NE: All right, who's next? Nikki, is-are you next?

NW: Maybe. [Pause] No. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

NW: Okay, *Discuss the spectrum of artists who co-ops aspects of Black culture for personal gain.*

NE: Are they specifically speaking about the Kardashians?

NW: Right.

JS: Yo.

[Crosstalk]

NW: But they're not artists. Like,

NE: I know.

NW: L-let's not do that.

NE: Okay, models can be considered artists.

NW: Are they models?

NE: They sculpt their bodies.

JS: Are they? [Laughs]

NE: Okay, I'm sorry--

[Laughter]

NE: So sorry.

NW: Are there--

JS: [Laughs] We can't even, we can't even go, we can't even take that as a joke.

We're like, "Nah." [Laughs]

[Laughter]

NE: I'm so sorry guys.

NW: Oh, yeah--

JS: Alright.

NW: I think Miley Cyrus has been in the conversation lately--

JS: Mm.

NW: 'Cause she's back with some new stuff. And of course she went through her whole disavowing Rap by saying it was misogynist after...

JS: Which is wild.

NW: That whole album of her twerking on a truck, so...

NE: Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: It hurts my heart that Dolly Parton's her godmother. [Sighs] I just...I'm like, "Girl, you was doin'...You was winning." And then you were like, "I'm Miley Cyrus' godmother." I was like, "No."

NE: Do something about that child.

JS: Please, please.

[Crosstalk]

NW: Yes.

JS: Um, [Pause] hmm.

NW: I think if we're talking about the spectrum, Miley falls into Justin Timberlake. They all have that phase and then they're like trying--once they get that attention--they jump away from the Black Culture.

JS: It's so interesti--

NW: Sometimes it can work--

NE: It's fascinating.

JS: It's very fascinating.

NW: 'Cause Miley's doing well, but Justin Timberlake? No one wanted that.

JS: No one [Sigh] Listen--

NW: No one wanted that without, uh--

JS: That--

NW: Timbaland.

JS: Yeah, that site like...*FUTURE SEX/LOVE SOUNDS*. Chef's Kiss.

NW: Yeah.

JS: Chef's Kiss on that album entirely. Best--

KB: I don't know; Justin from Memphis though.

JS: I know, and that's what gets me.

NW: Yeah.

JS: 'Cause he called his back-his backup singers eh—He's like, “And the Memphis Kids.” I’m...”The Tennessee Kids.” And I was like, putting some respect on the culture impact of Tennessee. Love that.

NW: Yes.

JS: Love that. But then I think about how The Beastie Boys— I was like, ‘top notch, chef kiss.’ I—the Beastie Boys were killing the game and I was like...they’re like, ‘We are in...This is our culture.’ Like they weren’t trying to be--

NE: Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: You know, like Black kids. They were like, they weren’t trying to be like, ‘Oh yeah...’ I don’t think they ever even came—The Beastie Boys are the white dudes I don’t think would ever say the N-word. [Pause] I don’t think-I don’t think they ever would have.

KB: But I mean they cross between Rap and Punk Rock--

[Crosstalk]

NE: Yeah.

KB: You know

JS: Yeah, and they cl--

NE: Which was just a part of their culture at the time

JS: Yeah.

NE: And that’s like—And, I feel like, it’s the ones who actually come from the, like— from those areas of

NW: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

NE: Like from those communities that then, like just happen to be white. It’s like-’cause you know how--

JS: Yeah.

NE: And then it feels like there's white people, and there's people who happen to be white.

JS: Yeah. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

JS: That is absolutely it.

[Crosstalk Ends]

NE: Like, I think the-The Beastie Boys are that people that just happen to be White.

JS: Yeah, I'm like, you know what? 'Cause like, I literal-I was like, "Wow." I know--'cause I got my niece and I started playing Vanilla Ice's, you know, 'THE NINJA RAP' from the Ninja Turtles movie--and she loves it. And I was like, "That's what I'm talking about; let's get this culture." And then like the next song that Google played was 'NO SLEEP 'TIL BROOKLYN'. And I was like, "Oh, this is a banger." And then she fell asleep to it, 'cause you were rocking her to 'NO SLEEP 'TIL BROOKLYN.' And I was like, "this is the culture I want you to be raised in." And I was just like, "Please don't play anything else after this that will make me take this back immediately." And then they played 'ICE ICE BABY', and I was like, [Sighs] "Oh no." How do you—I was like, I need her to know all the good stuff and be aware of the bad stuff in the culture, 'cause she is a biracial baby. And I'm like, "What do we do here?" Cause it's like, there is literally--like you said--there's white people, and then there's people who just so happen to be white. And I'm just like, "Where you gon' fall [Pause] in this culture?" 'Cause this is wild.

KB: Right.

JS: It's like, it's, t's wild to be like, "No, they're okay. They're not trying to appropriate our culture. They're just trying to make bomb music." Like, early Robin Thicke, trying to make good music. Later Robin Thicke, [Sigh] I tried. I was like, "Sir, how did you-how did you fall so far?"

NE: There's-it's the producers.

[Crosstalk]

JS: It's the producers. And I'm just like--

NE: And like that's, that's at the core of all these appropriation[s]. The produ-like the people who are producing this music, they know what's gonna sell, and they don't care.

JS: Yeah.

NE: They don't care who they steal from. They don't care who they hurt.

[Crosstalk Ends]

NW: Yeah. There's also some artists that take advantage of other people's ignorance because they associate location with race.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

NW: Like, I think of Awkwafina very specifically. For years people were calling her out for appropriation, and the big repeating defense was, "She's from Queens." And I'm like, "Have you ever been to Queens?"

[Chuckling]

NW: And how big that is? I'm in the suburbs one minute after I get off one stop, and then there's another version of Queens. There's a Jewish version of Queens. What Queens--

[Crosstalk]

NE: It's Awkwafina problem.

[Crosstalk Ends]

NW: Like you have to be specific. And someone looked it up and they're like, "Yeah, she lived in like a very well off place." Like the population of Black people were so low, but that was her safeguard for so long and she still hasn't addressed it. She just doesn't address it.

JS: I wonder if she ever will. Like I'm always curious about artists like that. Yeah. I'm also curious about those people who were like, I mean...[Pause] There was--there was a--I read--I can't even remember the name of this guy--but he was basically like, "Oh yeah, I'm a Cuban, I'm a Black Cuban writer." or whatever like that. And he just lied; he's not Cuban at all. He wrote these books, and I'm just like, "Where did--why did you do this?" And like, like--'cause he basically--the--the way the New York Times wrote out, it's like, he had been lying about who he was and his identity since like college, since he was in college. And then he became like a college professor. And then he was selling these books. And I was just like, "You're a Black man. Why didn't you just speak on being a Black man?" And he chose to speak on being a Cuban Black man. And it was like the wildest journey. And I'm always just like, "What are you--where do you fall on that spectrum of like co-opting cultures and Blackness?" 'Cause like, Afro-Latina is

different than Black Americans. And like co-opting that type of Blackness is weird to me. It's in, I like-I read that article and I was like, "I don't know how to feel about you."

NE: Um, I actually ran into an issue on-like on that subject. Like, as a Black woman, I--like I went into theater school--and all that-like everyone's like, "Oh, you act so white." I'm like, "Okay." Um, and I like-I, I started spending more time around people who grew up in the 'hood, so I could learn how to-how do I act like that. And it's like, I'd never actually like took that upon myself as like-in my like day-to-day life, but I did think to try and incorporate some of that culture so I could like use that for my art. And I just like--like I think it was probably around the time when I had a lot of free time in 2020 that I was thinking about it--I was like, "Why did I have to do that?" I have so-like I have a rich culture to begin with; there was no reason that I had to go and borrow from somebody else.

JS: Right.

NE: But like, I can understand why it like--, 'cause [Inaudible - 00:20:20-00:20:21]. I've-I've heard white people say themselves, "Oh, we don't have culture." I'm like, "You do." It's just like--

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah.

NW: White takes away culture. It--

JS: It does--

NW: It's really that simp--

JS: Oh my god.

NW: Because, just think of like--

NE: [Inaudible - 00:21:32-00:21:34]

[Crosstalk Ends]

NW: How the Irish first weren't considered white. And then to assimilate, they had to become cops. And then finally viewed as white. So they just could keep having the numbers. Same thing with Italians; they weren't viewed as white. And like when those types of white people then get enveloped into what white is, it erases a lot of shit.

[Chuckles] And then they still want to say, "Well, we're Italian. We're Irish."

NE: Mm.

NW: If you went to your Motherland, they'd probably be like, "Nah." 'Cause we don't give about--

[Crosstalk]

NE: Did you see them in *[THE] WHITE LOTUS*? [Laughs]

NW: Did I see it *[THE] WHITE LOTUS*?

NE: Do you-was that *WHI*-yeah, where they're--

NW: I'm tryna think.

NE: The second one, where they go to Italy--

NW: Yeah, yeah.

NE: And they're like going to go find their family and they're like--

NW: Yeah.

[Pause]

NE: [Laughs]

[Crosstalk Ends]

NW: Yeah. But no, that's just a common trait. Like, I've been to Ireland, and just talking to them of how they, like, how—'cause they, they like to say--at least some Americans who feel some tide or acknowledge some route to Irish--they're like, "Oh, there's more Irish people outside of Ireland." It's like, "How could you say that?" First of all, 'cause that's just like—and then there's a disconnect, because I even saw a thread that was like, "You know how many Irish ancestors who would look at Irish-Americans and be like, 'What the fuck?'" Because like the Irish has—they be beefing with England all day, every day.

[Crosstalk]

JS: That was a shock to me, when the Queen died.

NW: They literally were outside the palace, ta-tap dancing through their Irish jig 'cause that bitch was dead.

JS: Listen, they were--

NW: These white people here--

JS: Were mourning.

NW: Who feel like they're descendents of the Irish don't know about that; they were bombing. Like you, you took--

NE: Americans take "Irish Car Bombs" like it's a joke.

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah.

NW: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

NE: And-ay--

JS: No-no connection.

NE: I had an Irish bartender be like, "That's like going into a bar and saying, 'Let's-let's have a 9/11 shot.'"

NW: Yes.

NE: Like that's not cool, like--

NW: Yes. They're so separated from their history--

NE: And so like, there's a huge disconnect, mhmm--

NW: But that's all part of becoming white is, 'We gotta take away that, in order for us to come together, so we can oppress these people.'

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: Which is wild to me. Like honestly, like I—I'm a Black American; I'm already trying to do so much history on Blackness and Black people in the diaspora. I know that-eh—I was like, "Oh yeah, basically white supremacy and colonialism-England did everything to everybody." They-I was like, "We all beefin' with England." But it didn't occur to me to be, "How are the other people who are not from the African"--like how are they—"How are non-Brown and Black people reacting to the queen dying?" And then I saw and I was like, "Oh, y'all really, really beefing." 'Cause I was like, "I don't know anything about Ireland because I'm too busy learning about Black Wall Street burning down." Like I don't-I don't have time to go, I can'-- in my defense--I don't care enough about non-Black cultures [Pause] falling to white supremacy too. Because

there's so many—like every time you find out—like I will never forget, I was like in middle school, and I watched that um--middle school, maybe like Freshman or something--watched that um, that West Wing episode where they look at the map and like they're told that the entire earth and the maps that we're looking at are completely wrong. And it was—and I was just like, “Wow, so I don't know anything and it's because of,”--because I was already reading Angela Davis at this point, so it was not going to go well for them--but I was just like, “I don't have time to care about the other ones, when Africa beating-being treated so disproportionately wrong.” And--like I said, I'd-and like--at that point I was like, “I can't look into, I can't look into Europe, when I'm still trying to focus on getting people to understand that Africa is not a country.” Right? Like that's, I'm like, I can't even, like people when-whenever they do those street interviews, and they're like, “Name the countries in Africa,” and these people are like, can't do, wanna go, “You can't even give us South Africa? You can't give us South Africa? Do you know that that's a whole place?” I'm just like, like, you—Charlize Theron is from-from South Africa. You could have given us that.

[Crosstalk]

NE: Deep personal anger towards South Africans at the moment--

JS: Oh yeah--

NE: 'Cause like, it's disrespectful--

JS: Oh absolutely. We-listen--

NE: It was if--

JS: We couldn't do that.

[Crosstalk ends]

NE: Not even two months ago, some dumb ass dude from South Africa, was drunk at the bar telling me that he was more African than I am.

NW: They love that.

NE: And I was like--

NW: They love sayin' that.

JS: Sir--

NE: Because your idiot ancestors came and destroyed my people's homeland? I'm actually like, "No." Like I-I had to correct him and say, "No. As much as you would like to think so--

JS: Yeah.

NE: "I-my blood comes from Nigeria." Like, I'm not--

JS: Yeah.

NE: I'm-like I'm not just a reg-like, regular old American Black woman.

JS: Right.

NE: With-like I, like I have a-like a rich history and like he was trying to delete that in one statement like--

JS: Yup.

NE: How-ho-who are you?

JS: 'Cause he--

NW: How'd you respond?

NE: Oh, I cursed him out and told him he had to leave the bart's not my bar, but I told him he had to leave.

[Crosstalk]

JS: I love that for you.

NW: Ohh.

NE: I did. [Laughs]

JS: I truly do.

NE: [Laughs] I agree.

NW: I do wanna, kind of--

JS: And see like, I'm too busy unlearning that.

NE: Ugh, it made me so angry.

[Crosstalk ends]

NW: One thing I do want to come-like push back a little bit--

JS: Yeah.

NW: On, like, "I'm too busy learning my own culture." When you do learn about some specific, uh cultures that are non-Black, you still learn--

JS: Yeah.

NW: About our history. 'Cause for me um, I know ancestrally--like I had um Irish ancestors--and there's a long history of specifically how Irish immigrants interacted with Black people. There's like a long history there. So I think it's interesting as a Black American to learn more about that connection specifically. 'Cause yeah, like when most Black Americans have some kind of white in their family--

JS: Yeah.

NW: It's Irish. [Chuckles] And there's a reason for that.

JS: That's very interesting.

NW: Yeah.

NE: I didn't know that at all.

NW: Yeah, um my ex, he-he was white and, um Irish and German--did not care about the German. But I talked a lot to him about being a descendant of Irish people. And he read a book specifically that was about the Irish immigrants and Black Americans, and how they were trying to work together, but they are also white supremacy-pit them against each other.

JS: Of course.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

NW: If you think of—even boxing now, boxing then was like, “We're gonna get an Irish man specifically and we're gonna get a Negro.” And then to this day, there's Irish boxers; they play into that. There's a long history of that.

KB: [Inaudible - 00:28:43-00:28:44]

NW: Yup.

KB: [Inaudible - 00:28:45-00:28:46]

NW: Yeah.

NE: I'm thinking of, yeah--

JS: I'm--

KB: Mayweather.

JS: Yeah, Mayweather. I'm thinking of um, [Pause] my boy Mike Tyson. If Mike Tyson, or Joe Lewis that fell to an Irish boxer and they hyped him up. [Pause] Wow, okay. That's a lot of unpacking.

NW: That's like the fight for work.

NE: Mm.

JS: Yeah.

NW: Like it's all tied to each other, 'cause they were pitted against each other for so long.

NE: Ah.

JS: Man, they did that in the Mafia game; the video game.

[Laughter]

NW: Yes.

JS: I'm literally like going back in video game timeline--

NE: I'm s--

JS: And like how [Laughs]

NE: Like he's so unhappy. I'm not lying. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

JS: Yeah, I was like, "Wait a minute." I'm like, going back into the cultural impacts and like, art also. Because I'm like, 'cause them-the-I went back when you said boxing, I went back to like the artistry and like the performance, like theatrics. Right? Of like

those boxers, like in the promos. And like- 'cause like, I do—I said I was a graphic designer, but then I also do like marketing and stuff like that. And I'm always thinking about communication and the words they use, and the type of symbolism and visual aspects they put. And you said that, and I was thinking about how many times I've thought about [Pause] retro like advertisements and stuff. And how they did absolutely do the big Irish man against the big Negro man. And it's just like, wow. That is like, genera-like different generations of boxing have always promoted that as like “The Big Fight.”

NW: Uh huh

JS: And yeah, I just went-I just went, “Wow.” That was like a whole timeline of just like--

[Crosstalk]

NW: It was an outlet for like the pressures happening.

JS: Yo, that Diddy Kong? Was that Donkey Kong vs Mario? But Italy?

KB: [Laughs]

NW: Ss-stop it.

JS: Listen--

NW: Stop it immediately.

JS: I'm just, I'm doing-I'm tying the art. Okay. It's-its—the visual of my neurodivergent brain is like--

NW: Uh huh.

JS: Rollercoastering right now. Okay, let's change the topic 'cause I will--

NE: Can we? 'Cause I'm getting angry. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

NE: My blood pressure's risen.

JS: Drink some hibiscus. [Chuckles] *Does a sense of civic responsibility affect formal decisions made in your studio?* And I guess like, instead of studio, like your art space, like when you're creating art. I think so for me in particular, because I always try to uplift Black Appalachian voices; especially black women from the South. Um, 'cause both sides of my family are from Alabama. And, we just went to like family reunion and even—that's my like adopted grandparents--my grandmother's family--they're also from Alabama. And I'm just thinking back, I'm like, “Wow, all these Black women who teach-ch-ched me something.” “Taught me.” Teached me something? Ew.

KB: [Laughs]

JS: “Taught me something.” Wow, that-that grammar error really hurts.

NE: Don't let the English make you feel bad about your grammar, okay?

NW: Oh, okay.

NE: I'm just sayin'. [Laughs]

KB: [Laughs]

NW: But Jordan's thinking about their-the teachers [Inaudible - 00:31:50-00:31:51], and how they cringe.

JS: I'm really—my, my grandmother was a teacher. And I'm just like, “Tch.’ I'm sorry, I'm sorry Olivia.”

NW: Yes.

KB: [Inaudible - 00:31:57-00:31:58] in spirit

JS: "I'm sorry; I'm sorry Olivia." Oh.

NE: We don't have to carry that. Just know.

KB: Correct.

[Crosstalk Ends]

JS: I'm lettin' it go. I'm lettin' it go. Wow. But yeah, and they were, 'cause like they were like, yeah, and Big Mama, her-her mother, her grandmother, was like, "You got to do this." I'm like, "Yes, yes, yes." And they're all like, "Yeah, we all remember sitting at her-like communicating and telling these stories and stuff." And I'm like, "That's basically what you-what you describe yourself as an artist." Like how you describe the work that you do. And I'm like, all of my engagement stuff has to do with that responsibility. I feel like to keep the, [Pause] keep their presence? I don't even know like impact or whatever. Like the cultural impact I think of Black people teaching other Black people, or engaging with it and storytelling. I think that's in almost all of my stuff. Um, and I wonder if it's like response—I don't know if it's--it might be in the back my mind--like I feel responsible for keeping this going on. Or if it's like, I want to honor these people by keeping this going on, you know?

NE: Mm.

NW: Yeah.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

KB: I'm gonna bounce off of that, just 'cause um, I think, growing up in Black Council, most times, like you really don't even know your own family and-and the history that-that lies within it. And um, just uh my whole like, past year alone, like I've been so

like deep into that discovery of who my great-grandma was. Um, she died last year, a day after my birthday. And that like, transformed my entire ego. Like, it just, I don't know, it just made me think things in such a different way. Um, and I think I-I was already feeling that-that trance, like had entered my whole spirit. Like, part of her leaving--because I was going through different photographs, um of just family members I've never met before, you know. Um, and I-I remember just telling my aunt in conversation and just like, "I want to keep these photographs." Like, "I want to be the-the um, one that like protects this." You know what I'm saying? Like if nobody else in the family wants this, keep this, and like put 'em um, in frames or in the books, like let me do this.

JS: Yeah.

KB: Y'know? Um, I felt like that was um, that was a mark for me to start really researching, finding more of that identity I guess, and who I am. Because, I think all I know from my experience um, with like my great-grandmother and my grandmother and my aunts is uh, from a certain age;like I think it was I was like being a child, I wasn't really focused on exactly what they were trying to instill in me. But then uh, when I got to my late teens, that the things started to really like kind of hit me in a different way. Like, okay, you told me not to do something, you know what I mean? I understand why you said that now. You know? And um, I think all of those things kind of come back into my mind. I remember it's more than ever now, and what I'm doing creatively. And um, I think I have that same like um, responsibility to uh, you know, speak highly of my ancestors and to be kind of there for them. You know, just over all my Blackness.

JS: Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

PROCTOR: I'm going to give you all about a five minute warning.

JS: Okay. Oh.

PROCTOR: So just kinda, last thoughts.

JS: Thank you.

NE: Oh, okay. Yeh.

KB: It's so important. Like uh, I've-I grew up in a school where it was very diverse, CSAS [Chattanooga School for the Arts & Sciences],

JS: Oh, nice.

KB: Um, So uh, at a very young age, I even tried to just like detach myself from being Black. Because coming from Mary Ann Garber [Inaudible - 00:35:53], in um, CSAS, I had this like, like very small perspective of the world where it was like, "I thought it was just Black people."

NE: [Chuckles]

KB: 'Cause I literally, like, I literally--

JS: I love that.

KB: Yeah, in my community, went to school in my community--

JS: Yeah.

KB: That's all I did.

JS: Yeah.

KB: And even though CSAS isn't that far from Avondale--I grew up in Avondale--like um, it put me into this just melting pot, and made me think like, "Wait a minute. Why-why are they getting dropped off by two parents?" And like--

JS: Yeah.

KB: "Why is it-why my-why's my great-grandma the only one coming to my parent/teacher conferences? Like is anybody else feeling the same thing that I've gone through?" Like you know the absence of my mother--with all due respect; her growing up at a young age and having kids and sh-she was still growing--um, I think all these traumas that I had no idea what they meant--

JS: Yeah.

KB: In my life, that were just playing out in real time. [Pause] I think everything uh, literally made sense [Inaudible - 00:36:52] 'til last year. [Pause] Just to get personal there my life just started.

JS: Yeah.

KB: Facts.

[Crosstalk Ends]

NE: Mm. I um, I resonate with that so hard ' cause like, I-like the last five years of my life--ever since my mom passed away, the last five years--like it's just been like this radical transformation in my life. And like, when I think about civic responsibility, part of why I'm even here today is just because I feel like, I have so much left to give to the world. And like, my life is just beginning. I'm just now tapping into my potential. And like, I don't know where this can go, but something in this world is driving me towards that.

And like, I think the-the more we take care of ourselves, and engage with our art, the better off the world is.

[Crosstalk]

JS: Yeah.

NE: I mean, it's very good.

JS: Yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

KB: Exactly. This is a spiritual thing. This physical whole-we-we always caught-get caught up on time. I need to be doing this at this age. I need to be doing this at this part of the year. It's just like, spirit doesn't really keep up with that. I think when you're called to-to like do certain things, um I think the Higher Source um, connects with that at its own, its own time [Inaudible - 00:38:12-00:38:13].

[Pause]

[Inaudible 0:38:18-0:38:20]

NW: I think the responsibility I feel is more, towards other people like me. Um, yeah, 'cause I-I think with everything that I've been through--with like coming out um, and all of that--it's like I just realized how much farther we need to go. And uh-and still trying to see like other people who, just see what I've been through out there. I think the very like specifics in it can be very universal for like, a lot of other people. So I think it's been very cathartic for me to write my stories, but I'm excited to like somehow just get it out there to other people that yeah, and give hope. I-I think, I try with every story that I write, it's about hope in the end. JS: Yeah. I think that's like also—I-I feel like the responsibility to let [Pause] other queer younger kids know-know that somebody out

there exists just like them. Because I didn't know—I didn't know there were any queer people--let alone Black queer people in Tennessee or Chattanooga until like I was in my early 20s, like late teens--cause I went to like private schools. I went to predominantly white private schools to being like one of two people graduating in my middle school that were Black in eighth grade, to being like one of seven in my high school graduate-like senior year. Like there's like five or six of us and it was just—I was like, like, “Wow, there's literally no one else out here like this, who's also Black, who's also queer, who's also a person of faith.” And I was like, “It's very isolating.” So a lot of my—I feel responsible [Pause] a little bit, to make sure that somebody else doesn't think they're alone. Like a lot of my stuff is to rep--and also this, like the responsibility--like you were talking about not knowing who our families were, but also like representing and saying, “Black people have been doing dope shit for so long, in so many different ways; in the way that our-our successes, are they billionaires? Millionaires? No, but some of them--and it's not even like the struggle story of like, ‘Oh, they raised five kids on one income.’--It's like, ‘No, they actually impacted these people enough, that these people went on to to do what they needed to do,’” --

KB: Exactly.

JS: “To do whatever they wanted.” And I think-- 'cause I-I love like, I love, I love Black girl magic--but it's just like they don't have to be superheroes to do great things, you know? And I feel like that's my responsibility to be like, “Hey, you can impact and do great things that other people see as regular stuff, right?” Like, not everybody has to be Rihanna, Oprah, or anything. They can just be like my grandmother, who started the first Black hair salon in Chattanooga, and taught these other Black women how to style

and take care of their hair. And then raised my mother and then raised my uncles. And it's just like, "Oh, they've all done great things in their own worlds and circles." And like, I think that's my re--when it comes to like engaging and interactive stuff, I want people to see like, "Oh, something's great about something that I've done or something's great about me." And I think that's where my responsibility comes in.

[Crosstalk]

BLT STAFF: Thank you so much everyone. We are wrapping this session up--

JS: Nailed it.

BLT STAFF [Voice is at a distance and echoes in the auditorium throughout]: I know I'm cutting you off in the middle of a thought, but the morning session for the Artist's Table is complete.

KB: I should [Inaudible - 00:42:42].

JS: Oh shit.

BLT STAFF: Is complete. We really hope that you had a great conversation with your neighbors, your friends, your community members, other artists. I know a number of you are staying for the next session, which is great. You know, keep this movement rollin', goin'. Um, we have something that we do called a Photo Booth. Uh, and Jay, who it sounds like many of you know, will be taking portraits outside. And Heather Hart, who is one of BLT's co-founders at the Oracle. Um, these are images that you can use as headshots. You can go on your website, you can send me friends, you can do whatever you want. But what it does for us, is it allows us to populate the category, Black artists, diasporic artists, sculptors, blah, blah, blah, on Wikipedia. So these are public; you will

be searchable as yourself. If you don't have an image that exists on the internet of you, this one will come up with a search.

JS: Dude.

BLT STAFF: So you just got to sign a quick little permission saying you know that you're getting your photograph taken, um and Jay will take the photos of you. So I would love as we transition into the other session if you're staying or going, please, please, please, please get a photograph taken. Um, I'll send you an email after saying, "Hey, what's up? Here're your pics." Go look at it.

JS: [Chuckles] What?

BLT STAFF: Um, but we would love to have that as a kind of closing token of this session. Give yourselves a little round of applause. Good job everyone.

[Sound of applause]

BLT STAFF: And um, if you are staying, you may be in a different configuration. So act as though you're fully leaving your seat, and check in again with Eola and Aja. You have any other questions, you can talk to me. Thanks.

[Pause]

[Crosstalk]

KB: [Inaudible - 00:44:02-00:44:03].

JS: Yeah, this was great. This is great.

KB: You'll all be staying for the next one?

JS: I think--re we still—did you-I--How you feeling? Your allergies have been putting you through the wringer. How ya feeling? [Pause] She's taken two. She's take a decongestant. You know what? You need to take another decongestant. 'Cause--

NW: Not for a while. [It] said every four hours.

NE: Take it forty-five minutes, ain't gonna hurt nothin'; it's close enough. [Pause]
Th-this is your first round of taking allergy meds, so trust me on this.

NW: It's not the first round.

NE: It seems like it; not gonna lie to you

NW: I went through the last year.

JS: So you should be not new to this, but true to this.

KB: I feel your pain, 'cause I grew up with the worst allergies.

JS: The worst allergies. [Pause] Take the hibiscus tea too.

NE: [Inaudible - 00:44:49-00:44:50] vitamins.

JS: Ooh,

NE: Vitamins.

JS: I got the gummies. I got the-I got the--

NE: I do the [Inaudible - 00:44:54-00:44:55].

JS: It's the only way I can take them, 'cause I'm just--

NE: I have like three vitamins that I have to take in pill form.

JS: Ahh, the worst. I have one-I have the vitamin D one, and then my allergy pill.

KB: How big are they?

NE: So the one-the worst one, is the one that I need the most. It's just like--

JS: Is it the iron?

NE: It's like-it's like a full-on horse pill with like powder in it, and you have to like eat food with it, otherwise you will get sick--.

KB: No.

NE: It's so bad

NW: Wait, wait, wait. What kind of vitamin is it?

NE: It's called N-acetyl cysteine. It's for your hormones. It's like--

NW: Sounds awful.

NE: It's awful. So I have that giant one, and then I have my Zinc pill. And then I have my krill oil.

JS: Oh, I've-I had-I had a Zinc gummy, and it was the worst tasting gummy I've ever had-it--

NW: [Chuckles]

JS: It's the mo—I was like, “This is disgusting. I guess I'll do without this.” And I just stopped taking them. I was like, “This-this supposed to be a fruit gummy?”

KB: Right.

JS: “It's supposed to be a fruit gummy? Where's the fruit?”

KB: I was always bad with the gummies, 'cause you would be like—especially like the Flintstones-- 'cause I'll be like so I would just go eat like five of 'em [laughs]--

JS: Listen--

KB: When I was a kid, like [Inaudible - 00:45:58] like--

JS: Those vitamin gu-those vitamins--those Flinstones vitamins as kids--I was like, "It's the only candy I get. I might as well just—it's like, Jordan. This ashy, c-ashy vitamin candy you eatin', stop it" --

KB: Yes--

JS: Stop it--

KB: Don't need that many vitamins

JS: Don't need no—I was like, "I don't know if it's even workin'." [Laughs]

KB: Yeah, that's a dangerous thing right there for kids.

NW: [Gasps]

JS: Like, my God.

KB: So I think we have to tap back in, with--

JS: Yeah

KB: Go outside?

AS: You all done?

JS: Yeah.

KB: Yes.

AS: Have a good--

JS: Oh--

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by C. BAY MILIN 09/25/2023

To be copyedited.