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Participants:
MARIO DEANDRE BROOKS
JONATHAN DEAN
ERIC "SEVEN" FINLEY
R. JOSIAH GOLSON
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Preface

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

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START OF RECORDING

AJA SCARLATO: Right, you are set to go. Enjoy your talk.

JD: All right, thank you.

AS: You're welcome.

MDB: I love your work by the way.

S: Yes.

MDB: Nice to meet you. Mario.

S: Yeah, yeah. Nice to meet you, too. I think I met you before, you look familiar.

MDB: I've seen you around a few times. I don't think I've talked to you, though.

S: Oh, okay. [Pause] Just curious what these prompt cards got on ‘em, ‘cause I’m like what do we talk about? [Laughs]

JD: Yeah.

S: Uh.

JG: Do we just, like--. Are we supposed to do introductions first? Uh--.

JD: Maybe if we’re--.

JG: Did-did Aja mention that, or will it tell us with the card stuff (inaudible - 00:00:36)...?

JD: [Laughs] I don’t know.

S: It’s interesting; the first four were blanks.

JD: [Laughs]

[Pause]

S: Um.

[Pause]

JD: I wonder if we do need to do that first for the mic thing--.

S: Discuss *the local gallery roster; museum record*—I got--. This is a good one. Go ahead. I’m sorry.

JD: Nah, well--. Nah, I- that’s for her, not you. [Chuckles]

S: It’s says, uh: *Discuss the local gallery roster and museum record reflect--*. Wait a minute. Do-Does *the local gallery roster and museum record reflect this city’s demographic?*

JG: That's a good question. SEVEN, before you answer, would you mind introducing yourself, and saying just a-a quick thing of what you do? And then, we can do that before we each talk, just say who we are (inaudible - 00:01:22) get into it.

ERIC "SEVEN" FINLEY: I am SEVEN, known as the artist SEVEN. I'm a local muralist, uh, from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Uh, pretty much street art murals is what I do, uh, for a living and, in addition to a whole bunch of other different types of visual art. That- that good? (inaudible - 00:01:41)

[Laughter]

JD: Sounds great. [Pause] Do we- Oh--.

(inaudible - 00:01:43)

S: Oh, okay.

MARIO DEANDRE BROOKS: Hi, I'm Mario DeAndre Brooks. Uh, I am a professional actor and community organizer. Um, yeah. I'm originally from Memphis, but I've lived in Chattanooga for about twenty years, and learned all of my professional artistry skills here for the most part.

JONATHAN DEAN: Uh, my name is Jonathan Dean. I am the administrative coordinator of ArtsBuild, a contemporary artist, visual artist, um, and also a curator for ArtsBuild. Um, I am still growing. I've been here in Chattanooga all my life, still growing in the arts. Um, but I'm really honored to have been invited to this table, uh, to have these conversations.

R. JOSIAH GOLSON: Hey, y'all. I'm Josiah Golson, a artist and the programs director here at Stove Works. And I'm excited to get into it.

JD: Okay. What was the card you had? That was a really interesting thing about galleries.

S: It was--. And I just found, like, a whole bunch of other ones too.

Unknown: [Laughs]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: These are great but uh it was: *Does the local gallery roster and museum record, uh, record reflect the city's demographic?* Does it? That-that's kinda funny 'cause the demographic is shifting, as we can all tell and see outside the window, but at the same time, if you from Chattanooga, we all know how the actual demographic isn't so visible. It's a whole lot more of us out here than it looks like it is, so.

JD: I guess the question really is, like, the demographic represented properly? Uh--.

JG: In the museums.

JD: Right. In museums, in the galleries. Uh, it-it--. [Laughs] SEVEN is shaking his head. It's, like, yeah. I-I--. It's--. That's accurate. Um, but I do also think it's growing. Um. I-I, uh, worked with AVA--The Association for Visual Arts--for about, uh, two years. Um. And seeing--. Or getting first hand experience as, like, a-a gallery hand, um, I, uh, know what's, um, being represented through the lens of the gallery and what's being neglected. And for the most part, it's--at least when I can, uh, say about AVA--it's not so much the-the fault of like, um, folks, like, a gallery like AVA not getting that information out there. It's what the community actually, um, can get. Uh, like, they don't--. Uh, there's people in the community who don't have access to technology, um, don't have access to resources that tell them about these, uh, things about like galleries who're,

um, looking for artists here in the community to showcase. Um, and it's not-- We're-- we're not doing a very good job at, um, helping the community, um, bridge that gap. Uh, and that-that's something that we-we're, we are severely lacking in, in my opinion. But, um, the community, uh, in the arts is-is trying to-to do different things. I know we-- Uh, ArtsBuild, uh, right now is working with, um, different places, marginalized communities to help bridge that gap, so to speak. Uh, and it's-it's a hard process to do when you don't have the backings fro-from folks who can help you, um, and you're-you're kinda using up your own resources to do it. But, it's the type of thing we, like, BIPOC communities need. Uh, especially here in Chattanooga. I'm-I'mma let somebody talk. [Laughs] I feel like I'm going on. I could go on about this, like-- Wha--.

MDB: Well I'm not a visual artist. So, I'm not really in mu-museums and gallery spaces as much as you guys probably are, but if I were to interpret that in my own medium, I would say, 'No.' Um, as far as, like, filmmaking and theater spaces, the prima- the primary demographic I see in Chattanooga is the white one. Um, and if you are in those spaces there's usually only one or two of us, let alone any other demographics of people. I know that there are lots of us who're trying to do original things, and there's a lot of barriers towards doing that, especially as far as cost and space. A maker space would be a godsend if we could get something that's more affordable; I think we would see a lot more diversity if we had that.

[Pause]

JG: Yeah, working as-- Like, working both as an artist and someone who works like you, Jonathan, also in kind of an artist space, um, I-I definitely think from both experiences you see a lot lacking. Because, um, as an artist, you know, if you're

dependent on material spaces to show work, it--. And- and also you're not only producing work, you're consuming work; you're going into spaces seeing' what people are doing, seeing what's out there. And just in the city alone, you don't see yourself that- I--. You don't grow up seeing yourself reflected that much or other experiences just as importantly reflected. And-and then when you're creating, you're often having to first affirm and see yourself out there and-and believe that you deserve the space on the wall so that your stories deserve to be on those walls, that your experiences deserve that. And, um, that also makes me grateful for artists like Seven, who can work beautifully in an interior space, but also can do it anywhere, can activate public spaces and walls. I think that makes that all the more critical. And, um, and then, now working at Stove Works, which has been a really amazing experience because as we're focusing on contemporary art, part of our mission is to, like, shift those narratives and shape that- shape that, uh--. You still realize how other more traditional spaces operate. And even after 2020, after the-the George Floyd murder, and-and, uh, and the- and that the way those cries for justice kind of shook all the different industries including the art world, you still see how clumsy institutions are in doing that. And, uh, and how the-the bottom line still, like, dictates a lot of it. So it-it I- I think--. I think I agree; I think there's a lot that- that is, like, changing, but also it-it requires all the more energy to keep it moving because it easily just slips back into the okey-doke.

JD: Mm-hmm.

S: I don't know if I put in my little two cents on this already, did I?

Unknown: Uh-uh.

JD: No.

S: Oh.

JD: You got more cents, put it in.

JG: Right.

[Laughter]

S: *Does the local gallery roster museums reflect--*. Um, I--. You know what?

Being that I'm such a public artist now and being so focused on murals and-and outdoor work outside of galleries for like the last ten years, I've kind of almost removed myself from the gallery space because prior to that I was kinda turned off by the fact that it didn't seem like we were really being represented in these spaces. And I know my attempt at trying to, uh, my early attempts at trying to get into these spaces was met with a lot of resistance and obstacles and-and explanations on why I could not or I wasn't allowed to-to exhibit or show in these places. And so, uh, through my prior experience, I would just automatically, just from instinct, be like, 'Nah, it doesn't reflect us.' But I do also notice that shift and changes that are happening, and also the shift in my own work as I've become more popular as a public artist, my access has become a lot more open and-and free and--. And now when I approach, you know, certain places, people kinda know me a little bit already --or my work-- so it's easier for me to maybe, um, establish new opportunities in-in traditional places like this. So, I-I- I'm interested in seeing how it shifts, but there's definitely a-a balancing act going on that we haven't quite caught up to yet, so.

JD: I think it's important, too, that you brought up, like, the connections that you've built, uh, and how that's, uh, helped you grow as an artist, uh, that gives you access to different places, different, uh, gallerists, different ways to showcase your art.

Which many, uh, emerging artists, even like emerging artists myself, um, we don't have as many connections or privy to knowledge, um, off hand. There are artists, uh, who are, like, incredible here that the city doesn't know. Like, if they don't have say, uh, a background in college, a college degree or anything, or, like, even the small knowledge of learning how to hang up, um, their artwork through, like, hanging wire or something like that, that's, um, something that can hold them back unintentionally. Um, but it's also on the community; if we're saying we wanna make it inclusive for all artists, we have to find a way to reach out to these folks and, like, either have the workshop like Stove Works do--. I-I know you guys do like a few things, um, as far as like create opportunities with the residencies. And, um, there's just not enough of that here, uh, as of yet. It's, like I said, Chattanooga is growing. Where it grows? Like, it--. Time can tell, you know what I'm saying.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: Um, you said something I was gonna piggyback off of. Oh, as far as other emerging artists, like, not knowing or having these opportunities or access to a lot of these things. Exposure for an artist is, like, one the biggest percentages of an artist's success, right? Me being a street ar- uh artist or putting murals out in the public, it's like I kinda created an advantage to myself because my artwork is always in the public eye, so people have always got access to it. But a lot of people who don't do public art, that are lesser known artists, it's harder for them to gain these opportunities because they're just not as exposed. So I think that's just the exposure is the- is the biggest part of any aspect of a visual artist's, uh, success or, you know, just, um, just getting opportunities to do- to do more, you know, just be, I guess, paid for what they're doing or just reap

benefits. Ultimately, that's what we're trying to get to: a place where we could sustain ourselves based on our art. And we- that's, that would be the dream job for most artists, you know? And that was mine anyway. Which, you know, it's taking me some time to get there, but I'm kinda there now, so. Exposure is huge in that. Like, if it wasn't for me having basically free billboards all over the city, I wouldn't be where I'm at, you know, as far as the opportunities go and that, so. How do we create those opportunities for other people that don't have that outlet, you know? And this is a huge thing. Like, the Stove Works, the stuff that you guys do and smaller galleries and programs that do things that are more community based, that's a- that's a huge step in creating a dynamic that like because Chattanooga has never been a place that, um, cultivates artists. Usually, most successful artists in Chattanooga go somewhere and come back, you know what I'm sayin'? Or-or whatever, you know what I'm sayin'? I'm saying it's like, this place, we don't have art institutions here that- that develop artists and create artists, you gotta go to Atlanta or gotta go to some other city to go to an art college or--. I mean, of course we got the Center for Creative Arts, but come on it's basically like a high school and it's not really- it's not cultivating beyond just the classroom, you know what I'm sayin'? Or whatever projects they be having, I don't know. Ignorant. But--.

JG: No, but that's fair. Because even with that school, it's hard to get--. There are only so many kids that can go there. If you live up on Highway 58, you're less likely to even know what's out there as a kid, you know-- , ?

JD: Right.

JG: And your parents don't have to (inaudible - 00:15:13 to 00:15:15). That's real, that's real.

MDB: I think if we're gonna talk about exposure, one of the things we really should talk about is the gatekeepers. 'Cause I know personally, when I've tried to create events, when I've tried to pitch ideas to people--. Like, I, personally--. I was in a meeting once--I don't remember the young lady's name, and it doesn't matter--but I was told that my idea was great but I should probably reach out to you, Josiah, and have you present my idea because it would be more likely to be accepted if it came from you. And I know that that's, personally, discouraged me and, like, even with the museum spaces. I became aware of situation recently where an artist that I really respect with what she's doing --it's a little out the box-- but, um, she was going to work with one of the major museums here in town, and apparently the powers that be came down on her and threatened to pull funding from the museum if her event continued to go. And I'm like, if this is the things that are happening once you get people to agree to the thing that you're passionate about, that you worked really hard towards doing, and people are coming down and squashing you when you're at the low level, you're never gonna be exposed to a bigger audience.

S: Too many of these cards talk about gatekeeping.

JD: Yeah. [Laughs]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: No, but what he's saying--. Well, I haven't gotten to- through all of 'em. I haven't even, um, come across that. And you can flip through there if you see any. But as far as that gatekeeping thing, that's-that's real. Because another part of an artist's success is, um, networking and who you know, basically. And that's-that's--. Exposure and who you know is everything in this- in this world. And it's crazy because I was

getting art--. You know my--. I don't know if you've heard about Burnin' Bridges the street art mural jam that I host on the south side. I was doing that for a few years, anyway. It's-it's where I invite about twenty-seven mural artists to Chattanooga and we all paint murals on this warehouse. Well, for the first several years I was getting great funding, right? Well, I got a few ArtsBuild community grants for the first three years, but--.

JD: 'Preciate.

S: I think the third- maybe the third or fourth year, I had gotten a grant through Shane Morrow and I don't know--. Like, I had initially approached the Lyndhurst Foundation for this grant and they- someone had told me like, 'Yeah, just submit this, you know, proposal and we can fund it, whatever.' And when I met with them, they were like, 'Oh, yeah. We don't have any funding for you.' So then when I told Shane about it, Shane went around the backdoor, talked to somebody, pulled some strings, the next thing you know, they were giving me the money. And I was like, 'Wait, what? How did that happen?' So two years in a row, I think. It was two years or maybe one, I got money from this organization that I couldn't get directly myself, but Shane was able to somehow make this funding happen. So, like you said, it's like some gatekeeping scenario was going on and, like, some people were like, 'No, no, no, no.' And then, some people were like, 'Oh, well you told him yes so we gotta, you know--.' It's like, what is it? Is it yes or is it no? Do you have it or do you not have it? But, it's important to know.

JD: Yeah, that's another big problem that-that still--. Like, just living in Chattanooga, growing up here, I-I've always known some of the bureaucratic tape, but,

um, learning it, uh, as far as, uh, in the art realm, it—As y'all know, uh, I work with ArtsBuild, um, I work with James McKissic. Um, you all know he deals with a lot of the, um, re- bureaucratic red tape as-as how I just described it. Um, a lot of people benefit from just hearing his name in a project. And, um, like, uh, a lot of artists, uh, like yourself, SEVEN, they, like, they could've probably been in the same scenario had they known, like, a- a James McKissic or a Shane Morrow. And, like, other, uh, people, um, in these communities, if they don't hear those special names, like it's-it's almost a wrap and that's--.

S: It's not legit or something.

JG: Mm.

JD: Right. And-and that's something that's not fair to, uh, the community as a whole; it's not fair to, uh, artists who're coming up, uh, actors, uh, musicians, dancers, they all have to deal with that. And that's something that, like, needs to be discussed on a deeper level. Like, having it- having this discussion at the table here is good, but, like, needs to kinda go up the ranks. Ho-hopefully, like, maybe this conversation can do that.

JG: Do we want to pull another card? Or you've got a couple--.

JD: I-I'm--.

JG: (inaudible - 00:19:49) Do you wanna pull one next and s--. Uh--.

[Pause]

JD: Okay, it- I like this one. All right, um, *Discuss the spectrum of artists--*. Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah. Go ahea--. Sorry. [Laughs] *Discuss the spectrum of artists who co-opt aspects of Black culture for personal gain.*

S: The big A word: appropriation.

JD: Yup. Yup.

S: That doesn't happen too much in Chattanooga. Well, I ain't gon' say it doesn't happen.

JD: I mean--.

S: Of course, it does, but I just see that happening so much more in bigger cities. I don't see so much.

JG: I think with-with Chatta--. I-I agree. Like, I think what's curious about Chattanooga is that it's more on a bigger institutional level where cooler things that are happening in other cities, Chattanooga wants to do it, and then they'll, like, do—Which I think, if it's gonna be healthy for communities, if it's good for people and it's g- if it's gonna help people live better, then, yeah, by all means do it, but don't pretend that it's nothing that's been borrowed. And don't, uh, um—I think there's so many efforts to, like, rehash programs or events or things that are supposed to speak to a unique identity that Chattanooga has. They don't, because they- they're not involving local people, they're not involving people that are already in the culture, embedded in it, doing it, and merely wants to, like, just profit off of that- the- the people's work in order to, uh, in order to sell something. And I think that's where, uh—But I know that's more--. I'm--. That's more of, like, a-a big picture identity crisis than- than with this where you could look at like music or-or on the stage or, uh... Yeah, I'm curious what-what you all think. Especially what y'all think locally, 'cause I kinda agree. Like, I think it's tricky--. Like, it's not like, you know, Elvis, um, performing Black music, but I think what happens here is that when someone's doing something dope, and then when someone else who has more access --and proximity to power and resources-- borrows from that, and then gets

all investment to do that, I think that's when that's really- that co-opting problem is really a problem.

JD: Mm-hmm. Uh, I--. It's kind of a tricky question when you think about it locally. Um, because I don't think it's something that's- that is broad, like you sayin', but I think it-it--. It's a possibility that it could, uh, start growing, uh, here, because if you're thinking about like, uh, Chattanooga, Hamilton, uh, (inaudible - 00:22:46) community in general, um, we're still growing as a space. Um, there are a lot of, um, different artists who've emerged from here, uh, and the artist that I'm- I've just thinking off the dome of my head is Genesis, right? He's, um, just emerged as, like, a, um, new up-and-coming sensation. Uh, and I can see somebody saying, uh, or, like, accusing his work of being like a appropriated version of like a Basquiat or something. And like, it's- that's- that's the type of thing, uh, that I think of when I think of, like, uh, the Black culture being appropriated in this—especially like, somebody else accusing another up-and-coming artist of, uh, stealing something from somebody who was famous, uh, long ago. And like, if-if y'all- if, um, there are folks who knew Genesis or even, like, kinda understood, like, his headset as far as, like, his work is concerned, it's definitely not Basquiat. [Laughs] Um, and like, it-it's-it's a--. I think he's inspired by, um, his upbringing in the community he lives in, and he shows that in his work, but I wanna say he-he does something slightly different, uh, from that. And, like, somebody who's not privy to, uh, art in itself, as far visual art 'cause I can only speak on that, I can see somebody saying, 'Oh, this-this guy is, um, being a clone of that or-or this,' without taking a deeper look at-at the work. Yeah, or...

JG: No-no--. That-that--. I-I really, uh, I-I think that's a- a really powerful example and--. But I also, I'm-I'm really curious about, uh, Andre, for you, like, working in the- in

the stage and theater, what does that question of co-opting, specifically from Black artists, look like from your experience? Like, plays and cinema and the like. How does that uh- how does that situation come about?

MDB: From a local sense, I don't really think that we have a lot of co-opting of necessarily Black art for as far as theater and the performance and acting. But I do think that sometimes, like, characterization sometimes gets co-opted. Sometimes, you'll see people affect a, uh, a Black voice, um, a Black persona to get popular as a- as an artist. Like, um, just off the top of my head, uh, Awkwafina. A lot of people have an issue with her for seemingly portraying a Black girl as her, you know, comedic persona, and then she starts to get all of the critical acclaim once she starts being Nora from Queens. I don't really see that happening locally, although I have had experiences of, like, doing improv and, like, trying really hard to do, like, highbrow like intellectual type stuff and the thing that the audience responds to is kinda, like, buffoonery that I felt leaned into Black stereotypes sometimes. But, uh, I don't know. I don't know if that is an individual thing, or maybe that was in and of that night.

JG: SEVEN, you ever drive down the street in here or Atlanta or other cities and be like, 'Wait, I know that swan,' or 'I know that line,' or like, 'That looks- that looks strangely familiar,' like--.

S: Yeah, all the time.

JG: All right.

S: I-I see--. Yeah, I see visual- like, co-opting in visual arts all the time, especially from other cultures. But it's, in visual arts, it's just kinda so widespread, it's like it's- it's kind of a tricky balancing act to determine if you're co-opting or if you're being inspired

by this artist. You know, like, 'Okay, I'm inspired by this artist's work, I-I kinda wanna kinda pull from that a little bit and kinda make it my own,' or if I'm just gonna be like, '(inaudible - 00:27:13) this person and let me just see if I could do what they doing, and get the same stuff that they gettin'--.' You know, that--. 'Cause, I mean it's-it's--.

JG: 'Cause when you're learning, you're gonna copy. It's inevitable.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: Right. I mean, every-everybody's inspired by--. I'm inspired by other people's artwork. You know, through my development, I've pulled bits and pieces from here and there. I mean, I'm not gonna sit here and say that I've created everything from my mind, you know, but [Laughs] but, uh, but it's just- it's a difference, though. When you're co-opting it's like, you're not really trying to be creative. You're-you're-you're seeing the benefit of someone else's creativity and you're like, 'Man, I like the-the, uh, how that's manifested for them, how can I make that manifest for me by doing the same thing?' Like, and-and if you see it, it's just straight up copying, it's like, eh [Vocalizes].

JG: That's real. I like that definition.

JD: It think it's a, um, the interesting thing about, like, a muralist's work, um, it's definitely different for you because somebody can see your work, be inspired and, like, do a mural themselves. But other folks, this is not like in those sanctioned quotes, it's, uh, seen as, like, street graffiti versus, like, uh, where yours would may be considered sanctioned, it's considered a mural. And so, like, it might even look like the- almost the same thing that somebody will take it differently in a different context. Um. So, it's--. That's-that's very hard thing to-to call that appropriation if it's like an artist who- who may even just respect you, or respect another artist's work and they're kinda emulating

it through their own language, through their own, uh, version and stuff. Yeah, that's—that's a, uh, good concept to-to think about when- I guess when it comes to co-opting too.

JG: Except--. Oh, I'm sorry.

JD: I'm sorry. I was just gonna uh say like the difference between appropriation and appreciation.

JG: Hm.

JD: Uh but that's—that's just a question I had--.

JG: Yeah, no. That- I'm-I'm literally, like, right there with you. Like, 'cause what I like to- what I like, SEVEN, about the way you describe that is look- being inspired in working with the language of what you see or what you're experiencing from someone's art versus working for the benefit of what you know they get. That- I think that's a really critical distinction to make and—Because especially when you're thinking in terms of like the co-opting of Black artists and, you know, there's a lot of good music out there that-that has been made by white individuals inspired by Black musicians that you can tell they weren't like, 'Oh, I'm gonna--.' There wasn't a sinister motivation, they genuinely found their voice in these voices. But then, when you're- put that in the midst of a record company or execs and A&R people or people that are all about, you know—they're gonna exploit the white artists too. Like, and-and that's where I think what really where the sting of co- uh, co-opting, appropriation without credit and everything, that's how that really gets out of hand. Anyone wanna, uh, what-what about--. What card you got? Uh, what card did you, uh, pick?

MDB: Um, uh, I pulled: *Does a sense of civic responsibility affect formal decisions made in your studio?* Yeah, a hundred percent [Laughs]. All the time. More so on the community organizing side than--. Well, actually, I guess it would be both, really. As an artist, I try to incorporate my culture into everything that I produce, and I also try to make sure that anything that I, uh, create or conceive has some type of public good involved, because it's really important for me to give back to the community. 'Cause I feel like as an artist, like, especially at my age, that I should be a lot further and I would have been a lot further if I had had access to, like, mentors and, you know, the people to open the gates for me. So I try to make sure that anything that I do, I try to lift up other people with me. I try to, you know, present, like, different aspects of Black culture and Blackness in a positive light. Uh, especially anything alternative, because we do a lot as far as the "urban" space but there are a lot of, especially, Black artists who are not "urban." So, if I could give an opportunity for us to do all the things that we say that are-are important, you know, your Black anime people, your, um... Man, I can't think of anything right now—just alternative Black art styles. I'd like to give an opportunity for those things to be seen, because we say that those things are important, especially in the film world, like, people get on to artists like Tyler Perry a lot for doing Black shows, but at the same, we say that if these- if something else were to come out, we would support it, but then when they do come out, we don't. So, uh, anytime I can get an opportunity to, like, empower somebody to do something different and put it in front of people, I think it's important to try.

[Pause]

JG: I'm really interested about that. I-I've this is- this question is, like, involved for me because early on it was pretty clear, like, incorporating my experience from another career in-in law to, like, art and thinking about, 'Okay what civic consequences does this have?' Um, and then, also thinking about even, like, childhood when I got into art because of the-the, uh--. Because of the- the- the desire to just be free. Um, and having to balance that. Like, what is civic responsibility, what is, uh--. How am I being responsible and-and, uh, and accountable and doing things with care and not violence? But also, how am I not running myself into the ground or going in circles, not exploring new ways to get my voice out. Um, um. When it comes to, like, doing work in the community or for the community. Especially when things, like, what-what you bring up, um, about the- about the lack of reciprocity betwe--. When you're pouring into a community and it's not, you know—When-when you need people to show up to this workshop or show up to-to this thing that's-that's for their benefit, but it can be difficult. And so, you have to like--. [Pause] Like, figure out where your-your-your true north is. And um, with saying the things you wanna say and need to say, but also, uh, making sure that the things that you're saying and done in the- in the- not in, like, as an antagonistic voice. And I think that's part of the-the ride, too, of doing this type of work. [Pause] What about y'all

JD: Um, can I go over the question one more time?

MDB: *Does a sense of civic responsibility affect formal decisions made in your studio?*

JD: Well, for me it's kind of an interesting question because like, first and foremost--. Uh--.

ELIZA MYRIE: Giving you a little five last minute warning. Five minutes.

MDB: Thank you.

EM: Last thoughts, then wrap up.

JD: Okay.

EM: Thank you.

JD: Um, for me, um, I-I have to think about it, uh, not only as a visual artist but as a contemporary visual artist. And for me contemporary just means, um, recording what's going on in the- in the history that you know now. Uh, I know that's not the definition but for- that's the definition for me. Uh, and so when I'm doing my- that work, when I'm doing my artwork, I think about it from that lens and that it's my responsibility to tell, not only the truth, but, like, tell my experience living in the history that I'm living in today. Um, I could only speak from that- from the experience of, uh, a cis hetero Black man who, uh, is still growing, not only as an artist, but seeing how other artists, other communities, are, um, working in this lens. And so, that responsibility tends to be heavy for me, but like, I have to--. I-I tend to think of it as motivation, having to use that motivation to tell this story to the next generation, uh, of artists who're comin up and probably gonna be thrust in some other crazy situation. Um, I don't know if my work can become a roadmap but that-that's kinda how I think about it. Uh, I don't know.

[Laughs] Sorry, I didn't mean to--.

S: No, no, (inaudible - 00:36:52) [Laughs]

JD: I didn't mean to pass the mic off like that.

S: And you passed it real quick.

[Laughter]

JD: My fault, my fault.

S: Wha--. Uh, yeah, I remember, I think. I don't... Honestly, now, I don't even know if take that into consideration when I'm doing art. When I'm doing work, I do it 'cause I wanna do it. If I got something to say, I'mma say it. I don't really consider the- if there's a message behind it, per se. 'Cause most of the stuff, I don't necessarily create with a message in mind. Sometimes, a message evolves from it. Um. And sometimes, you know, I have an idea of a message I wanna convey, but I, maybe, just don't get around to conveying it in the artwork 'cause for me, it's all visual more so than it is that I'm trying to tell a story. And I know that sounds, like, shallow, but--.

JG: I don't think--.

JD: No, I don't think so.

MDB: I don't think--.

S: 'Cause a lot of times, a lot of people wanna know, 'What does this mean?' or 'What did it--?' I'm just like, 'It just looks cool, like [Laughs] I just wanted to paint something that looks good,' you know? But I mean, it's-it's- but a lot of times, it can be a lot deeper than that, you know, especially when people are tryna interpret your work as a Black artist. You know, to me, like I don't look at myself in the mirror and be like, 'You're a Black artist,' you know.

MDB: Right.

S: I look at myself in the mirror, I'm an artist, you know? I just create art. I don't necessarily do it for any, uh, social- specific social reasons, or political reasons, even though I might touch on a social topic randomly or political topic randomly, it's not like

I'm making that the focus of my art. So, I don't think that really informs me during the creative process, unless I go into it with that purpose in mind from the beginning.

MDB: So, I'm in the middle of, um, a festival that I conceived of- started conceiving of in 2020 called For the Culture Fest. And I- I was reading an article about, uh, the twenty--. Actually, it was 2021. It was a 2021 Hollywood diversity report that basically said that we have a lot of improvements as far as representation in front of the camera as far as Black actors go, but we are severely lacking as far as Black directors, Black writers, women writers, things like that. So that kind of involves—I thought I should do something to address this. So I wanted to make a Black content creator festival to get more Black directors out there, get their content out there, empower 50 percent of those to be women. So that just evolved into what I'm creating now which has been a- a show piece a vi- an art show, as well as, uh, next week, a food and music, uh, kick out type thing and, uh, a movie night, as well. Um. Thank you guys for supporting that by the way. So, when I say that, like, civically that- yeah, it's a hundred percent involved in my process, it doesn't necessarily, like, dictate what I create, but that does inspire me to do something. So, it pulls me--.

JG: To show up.

MDB: Yeah. Like, the action itself.

JG: Yeah, I think--. I-I mean, in Seven's case and your case, I think it's just as important for an artist who has the talent, who has the skills, who has the vision, um, to just dream on the walls and you happen to be Black and that's enough of your civic responsibility. Showing up and being one more artist that we need out there.

S: Yeah. I agree, I agree. Um, I know we're running out of time. One of these I found super interesting... Ts, ts, ts.

JD: Yeah, I'm intrigued. You're excited about the cards.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: *Ideas for ensuring equity in compensation*. That's-that's--. That would be for the general public, I believe. Um, and I could really speak on that because I've learned how to demand my worth for my- for my work. Um, I guess I'll be real with this. *Discuss ideas for ensuring equity in compensation*. So, one of the hardest things was for me, being an artist initially trying to emerge, was, like, getting paid. Getting paid for my work for whatever it's worth and when you go in these galleries, you go to see these museum shows and you see people's work on the walls selling for thousands of dollars, and then you go to like a little arts festival and you put your canvases up and you put like 200-\$200 on there, people are like 'What is this? This is so expensive, I can't afford--,' you know, whatever. So--. [Laughs]

[Crosstalk]

EM: [Announcing in the background] Thank you so much everyone (inaudible - 00:41:40)

S: Anyway, that's--.

MDB: Aw, that would've been a good one.

JD: Aw.

S: That was a good one.

Unknown: [Laughs]

JG: To be continued

S: Right.

JD: Seriously.

[Crosstalk ends]

EM: [Announcing in the background] But the morning session with the artist table is complete. You really (inaudible - 00:41:51) 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 movin', rollin', goin'. Um, we have something that we do called The Photo Booth, uh, and Jay, it sounds like many of you know, will be taking portraits outside at 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 put them on your website, you can send it to your 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 when you search. So you just gotta 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 get a photograph taken. Um, I'll send you an email after saying 'Hey, it's up. Here it is, go look at it.' Uh, but we would love to have that as a kinda closing token of this session. Give yourselves a little round of applause. Good job everyone.

[Clapping and wooing]

EM: [Announcing in the background] And, um, if you are staying, you may be in a different configuration so act as though you're fully leaving your seat and checking again with Eola and Aja.

JD: Is this something y'all created?

JG: That's all them.

EM: Thanks.

JG: So when you register. Aja, she designed these, I think and then based on everyone that registers, as you put in the information about, 'Oh, what would you like to talk about, etc etc,' she uses that--.

JD: Oh, okay.

JG: To inform the cards.

[Pause]

S: Yeah, the, um, compensation question (inaudible - 00:43:49) earlier.

JG: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] I feel like that could ease its way into the- into the peoples' table 'cause everyone needs to know that.

JD: I mean, I'on know if this is still recording. I'm still down to talk. [Laughs] If there's nobody--.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

S: Well, I mean, yeah my thing--. The only thing that kinda helped- uh, helped me kinda get over that- that obstacle of that moment in my career with being paid or-or- should I say, being paid equitably, is learning the formula in, like, the street art culture, like, that most muralists use in other big cities. For example, most muralists get paid by

the square foot, right? Um, if you know the size of the wall you're painting and you do that calculation based on the square foot and you have a square footage break, it's just easy math. Easy math. No figuring it out, no 'Oh, well, I charge for supplies, I charge this for--.' You know, it's just like, 'Look, I charge this per square foot, whatever that estimate is, it covers everything,' you know what I'm sayin'? Like, when you present that to a client, particularly, one who's commissioning a mural, it-it just cuts through all the red tape, you know what I'm sayin'? All bullshit aside. You know, it's like, either you gonna pay this or you're not, you know? It's like, what're you gonna do, you know? And it's no guesswork or no 'Why's it that much,' or, you know, 'I don't know if it's that- worth that much.' You know, things like that, where it's like you're always trying to fight for your work or your value when you shouldn't have to, like, explain that to people, you know.

JD: I can--.

JG: Especially when you're the expert.

Unknown: [Laughs]

S: Right.

JD: Yeah.

JG: They're complaining about the price 'cause they literally don't understand what's going into the price.

JD: Right.

JG: I'm sorry--.

JD: No, no. That-that--. I was gonna lean into that. 'Cause, a-as far as, like, I'm concerned, I'm not a muralist, um, but, like, just hearin', like—You know exactly what you're putting into when it comes to the work 'cause you have to research that stuff. It's

the same for-for me having to research, like, as curator, like, where something's gonna go to the space, what lighting should go on to the work to-to-to make it pop more to the audience or-or-or whatever. Um, like, people should be compensated for their skill set. I'm sorry, we're going over.

AS: How's it going? That's uh-It's okay. Uh, you can finish your conversation. I'll go stop the other recorder.

[Laughter]

AS: Finish your sentence, I'll (inaudible - 00:46:11)

JD: But like um, it--. For me, being such a daunting question, as far as, like, looking at my work in general and d-delving into social justice issues, knowing where, like, the climate is, some-somebody will look at my work and say 'Huh, I'on know do-deep dive into that, probably pass.' And that's something that a lot of artists who discuss social justice issues have to kinda run into a lot. And so, it's, um, it's kinda w- uh--.

EOLA DANCE: [Announcing in the background] (inaudible - 00:46:54) if you're staying, we're gonna mix it up a little bit, so you're not gonna be at the exact same table. So, if you see me, we're gonna redo our assignments so we can have some more conversation with some new faces. All right.

JD: Um. Just- just thinking about how, like, for some people, it's different for an actor it's different--.

MDB: [Laughs] Yeah.

JD: Um, like, your next event or-or-or stage play may not even happen on the- on the the same time. There may be something small like weather issues that happens for-for something like that. Like, um. You still have to get compensated for what you put

in. I- and even if it-it doesn't happen, like, that's your livelihood. Um, and a lot of people don't know how to compensate that-that livelihood if you don't understand what the livelihood is. It's a- we sh--. We definitely need to do something else like this again.

Unknown: Yeah, it's great isn't it?

JD: Thank you so--.

END OF RECORDING

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