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LENA WHITTLE

KRISTEN RAMIREZ

XENOBIA BAILEY

TATIANA GARMENDIA

Length: 01:04:12

Preface

The following conversation was hosted virtually over ZOOM in collaboration with Wa Na Wari. Consent was given by the participants to have their conversation recorded and transcribed.

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START OF RECORDING

[00:00:00.00]

XENOBIA BAILEY: Hello, how you doing?

Unknown: Hi.

Unknown: [inaudible: 00:00:08.27]

XB: I'm, I'm still running errands but I got a mask on so--,

[laughter]

TATIANA GARMENDIA: One, one of the small beauties of all of this, right, is that we--,

XB: Oh yeah.

TG: Before we do anything--,

XB: Yes, indeedy [inaudible: 00:00:27.11]

JILL FREIDBERG: I'm so [inaudible: 00:00:28.21].

XB: Get my stuff in the day before, you know, cause the -- well, almost the end of the work day. Not my work day but other people's

[laughter]

[00:00:41.25]

JF: Um, so should we introduce ourselves and then -- were people able to look at the cards?

TG: I haven't [inaudible: 00:00:53.02]

JF: I can put that link in the chat again if people weren't able to -- and then when you go to that page you want to click on "Wa Na Wari's People's Cards."

LENA WHITTLE: But not the Artist's cards?

JF: Um, I think that -- so there were two -- uh, there were two tables. The one that preceded this one was for all Black artists. And I thought that was Artist's Table.

[00:01:21.06]

LW: Right, just making sure I wasn't clicking the wrong--,

JF: Yeah. I'm not positive but I think they want--. It's kind of a cool thing that you can like turn the pages.

LW: I like that.

JF: Um, but I have new id--, anyway, we should introduce ourselves maybe.

TG: I want to ask Bill if these cards are going to stay up for a while on the Wa Na Wari site or they're coming down after today?

[00:01:54.27]

JF: Uh, that's a good question. So this is on the act--, they're on the Black Lunch Table site, not on the Wa Na Wari site so I'm not [inaudible: 00:02:01.07] sure. But maybe when we go back into the main room we can click and ask that question.

TG: Uh, just I think, I think this idea of an archives, um, and network is really exciting. And I would love to be able to share it with colleagues who couldn't be here today.

Unknown: Mm hmm.

[00:02:22.24]

TG: Um, because that's something that they could follow up on on their own in the future, you know, like go to the website, get on a mailing list, whatever.

JF: Mm hmm. Yeah. That's a good, yeah, that's a good point. I mean I -- there's, I imagine that at Wa Na Wari we totally have the capacity to, to put that archive on our website or link to it or--.

[00:02:47.19]

JF: Kristen, do you want to start? We can introduce ourselves.

KRISTEN RAMIREZ: Sure, uh, will you give me some prompts, Jill? What should I, what should I say? [laughs]

JF: Um, I don't know. What, I-I, I didn't know I was going to be facilitating this, but, uh, just you know, what are you, what are you into?

KR: All right.

JF: I mean what are you into?

KR: Uh--,

JF: [inaudible: 00:03:09.15].

KR: Uh, hi everybody. It's, it's crazy to know everyone here, but a lil, a little bit. Some people more than others. So, I'm Kristin Ramirez. I'm um, an artist, public artist, studio artist. Uh, I was in higher ed a long, for a long time, a while back. So I know Lena cause, uh, you were sort of my student.

LW: [inaudible: 00:03:33.15]

KR: [inaudible: 00:03:34.19]student.

LW: Exactly. I was in Foundations and we have the same birthday.

KR: And we were born on the same day.

LW: Yeah.

KR: Isn't that wild? As is, as was Mark.

LW: And Mark, as well, yeah. And, and yes. There was a series of -- uh, and Danny [inaudible: 00:03:46.21]. Yeah, there were so many coincidences that year.

KR: And Danny.

LW: [inaudible: 00:03:50.22]

KR: And Carolyn.

LW: Yes.

KR: Crazy. We're all December [inaudible: 00:03:54.29]. Mark and I were born on the exact same day. Same year--,

LW: And you drove the same car.

KR: [laughs] Uh, Tatiana, I know you through like, through various channels. Our work criss-crosses and you've always been kind and championed what I, what I do and you're involved in a million different things at Seattle Central. And anyhow I feel like in a different life I wanted to be a, you know, professor at Seattle Central but now I work at City Government now. I work for the City of Seattle managing public art. Uh, and Xenobia, uh, I'm just like a sycophant. Like I'm such a, like unabashed fan of your work and made a special trip to see your mosaic at Hudson Yards a few years ago when that opened. Cause, yeah, I made a special trip--,

[00:04:40.16]

XB: [inaudible: 00:04:39.25]

KR: It just like blew my mind.

XB: Wow, thank you.

KR: And then, uh, you know, our beloved Elisheba who I partner with a lot on public art projects and who is, you know one of the founders of Wa Na Wari, uh, is my you know, dear friend and very much a muse to me, I would say. And um, uh, the work that she, uh, translated of yours, Xenobia, that went into the gallery at Seattle Municipal Tower, the, in that vinyl, like immersive space--,

XB: Oh, yeah.

[00:05:10.13]

KR: It was like honestly one of those powerful things. I-I reference that. Anyhow, I love that piece. And then Jill, you and I have crossed over in a million ways, too. And, anyway, I'm blathering at this point. It's nice to be here. [laughs] I don't get out enough, apparently. [laughs] Uh, okay, I'm going to like popcorn. Lena.

[00:05:32.05]

LW: Me? Me next, okay.

KR: Yeah.

LW: Um, hi everyone, my name is Lena Whittle. Um, I am also an artist. Uh, my main, um, I guess day job if you will, for [inaudible: 00:05:43.22] antiquated term, uh, is working as an admission counselor at my alma mater which I'm very fortunate to do. Um, so that I've been doing for about five years now. It takes a lot of my time. Um, I've recently gotten more back into my own personal practice and I'm focusing on um, some handmade apparel. Um, I've been involved in various aspects of the arts, uh, in the community since graduating and you know, even throughout my um, undergrad. Um, so you know, working for Sam. Um, doing various art [inaudible: 00:06:13.06] around Seattle. Uh, collaboration, [inaudible: 00:06:16.19] I've met. Yeah. That's, that's -- is there anything else I should share? I'm not sure. I don't know.

Unknown: Whatever you want. [laughs]

LW: I think that's it. Yeah.

[00:06:26.16]

KR: You've been making these sweaters that are so cool. Is that one there with you?

LW: Yes, right. Would you like me to share my sweater? Oh, okay, okay. One second. Let me grab it. I have many but let me grab one.

[00:06:40.18]

JF: I was going to ask about the sweaters too. Curious.

LW: Okay. So, the -- I'm focusing on--,

JF: Wow.

LW: Cardigans. And then I have, you know--,

JF: Oh wow.

LW: [inaudible: 00:07:04.23] So--,

JF: Wow. Beautiful.

LW: [inaudible: 00:07:08.15] you know? Um, so--,

[00:07:09.26] [cross talk]

LW: So maybe, yeah. I think so maybe I won't be an admissions counselor anymore.

JF: [laughs]

[00:07:16.22]

JF: And are you, are these just for like you and friends and family or are you--,

LW: No, actually um, I really ramped up from getting them sold online, which is working very, very well so far. Um, um, yeah. So I'm kind of just trying to move it as fast as I can, which is another one of those weird blessings of this time we're in, that like I'm at home all day and I'm not traveling five to six days a week most of the time as an admissions counselor during the fall. Um, so, yeah, and I've uh, like to be back in the

creative swing fully.

JF: You should put the link in the chat.

LW: Okay. Uh, I'm so, I feel so self conscious about like self promotion right now because I'm like I don't know, I don't know. Uh, but you can see a lot of um, here--, and [inaudible: 00:08:21.01]. I have them on Instagram too if you all use that. I know, I know Kristen has seen them. Thank you for plugging them, Kristen.

KR: Oh, hey, they blew my mind, yeah. I was like I want to crawl in one of those.

LW: Uh, yeah. I'm really excited. I'm, you know, banging them out, you know, to, like actual people now. So I'm proud of myself. But yeah, it's just--,

Unknown: That's great.

LW: It helps to be out in the world, so, yes.

JF: [inaudible: 00:08:49.25] You can pick who goes next--.

LW: I pick, I pick Xenobia.

[00:08:55.04]

XB: No problem. Hey, hey. What'd I miss? I'm running errands. I'm sorry.

JF: You're fine. We're just introducing ourselves. It's--,

XB: Oh, okay. Um, my name is Xenobia Bailey. I'm a fiber artist/cultural activist. That's what I really want to kind of put in front of um, [inaudible: 00:09:18.10]. I'm starting to work on some video, um, uh, cultural propaganda. Supernatural cultural propaganda videos.

Unknown: [laughs]

XB: Uh, and uh, [inaudible: 00:09:38.01] what else to say? Um--,

JF: You say as much as you want and as little as you want.

XB: Uh, let's see. Um, I, I'm, I'm between Philadelphia and New York right now. That's -- yeah, well, I'm public art [inaudible: 00:09:50.15] live for a living. But I'm doing, you know, I have freedom to do my own work now. I don't really like to deal with galleries because they like to direct you into the direction of what the collectors want to buy. And what the collectors want to buy, art, is you know, I gotta be chasing this, the dollar, you know? Because there's a lot of stake right now. It's like lives and communities and the planet, everything, it's, it's at stake right now so we can't really chase the dollar now. So, um, I'm um, working on these different little projects and this, you know, like it's easy that, we're set in and can't really go anywhere but so, you know, but it see, it doesn't stop me from getting out. But, um, I um, I um, my whole mission, well, one of my missions is to um, expose uh, it's like a research, I mean, uh, a search and rescue. Like, you know, when there's a, a, a disaster or something like that, you go in to see how many people you can rescue that have survived. Um, I'm doing a cultural search and rescue um, mission to, uh, Black artists in Seattle because I know that Black artists in Seattle have something extremely unique that the world has never seen and, um, it's just really dynamic. It's just really -- it, it, and it's timely too. It's, it's going in a direction that everybody's trying to go into now but it's, uh, I think a lot of artists in Seattle, Black artists in Seattle take it for granted, uh, how they, um, their points of view and their perspective and everything because they lived in it so long. They don't see how it's like um, a cultural gem to the planet right now, you know? Especially being in Seattle, like, a highly technological place and plus, too, such a beautiful natural place. You know, no place -- you don't want to have too many places on, in the United States

that have a rainforest and the mountains and the, you know, living off the land, that's, you know, has this amazing town and country and aesthetic to it. And pretty much clean air last time I was out there experienced. But, um, in though the artists have -- um, I don't know if um, the artists are uh, [inaudible: 00:12:32.04] back in the day when I was [inaudible: 00:12:34.22] she was so beautiful. It would take you to another place. I don't, I don't experience that on the, on the east coast, yhou know? Not from Black artists. Um, and um, it's, it's something that right now it's very timely. It's, uh, something that, uh, the planet needs. And um, uh, you know, that's -- and, and that's what my aesthetic and everything comes from, is from my, you know, growing up in Seattle. Being able to play in woods. Um, catch fish with my bare hands. And still being in, in, in the city, you know? Still have access to the city and you know, it's a small place. Pretty much a lot of people know everybody. it's like two or three degrees of separation from anybody that is from, from Seattle. So, um, and then I think Seattle is the best place to have an artist's studio because it's so beautiful. It's kind of expensive right now, but that can be changed, you know, cause like the income can be -- the artist could, would be able to make money to afford living there. But, um, I think Seattle is an ideal place to have a studio, you know, with just the scenery and how you could so easily go out into the country and how you can a, have access to natural pigments. There are people that forage for nat, natural pigments, in Washington state where you can get pure pigments for, for your artowrk which makes it more, uh, have that, uh, have different properties than working with synthetics like acrylics and whatever. But, um, my whole thing is just uh, and I think as far as um, uh, I don't know -- I-I just believe the Black aesthetic that comes from Seattle Washington is something that's needed right now and it's Black, you

know? Cause sometimes people will say 'oh, you ain't Black.] I'm as Black as Black can be, you know? Um, but I was raised in the Pacific Northwest. We don't have four seasons, you know? We have rain and cold. I remember one summer I was in Seattle, I was on the beach with my coat on, you know? And that too adds to the kind of work that you do. So, there's a magic in um, the Black artists in Seattle that's, um, I think needs to be incorporated into the whole Black culture, the whole, um, um, not really Black arts community. But it is needed to be cause like a lot of things now that we're seeing is a lot of, it's a lot of the problem, you know? But we have answers in Seattle. You know, we have answers, you know. We have resources that it takes an artist's mind working with those resources to uh, and, and working at the problem to turn it into the answer. So, that's my whole thing. I would like to come back to Seattle but I'm not coming back to Seattle to live and work because it's not, it's not, it's not cultivated properly for Black artists.

[00:15:51.06]

LW: I really identify with what you're saying. You know, a young Black artist. I got my BFA here and, you know, I have this urge to leave. And you know, is this the place for me? The experiences I've had here have been really damaging I feel to my creative process. And um, but then I, at the same time I realize all of the things you said that are such great resources and such great benefits to being in this space. So it is that challenge of you know, do I stay here and do I help rebuild, do I want to be a part of that or you know, do I seek it out somewhere else where it might feel more supported, where I might feel like I have more of a sense of personal community. So, I think, and as well as my biggest challenge is not really those things. It's the financial challenge. It's that I--,

XB: Yeah.

LW: I can't afford to live here. And with that I can't afford to make work here. Um, and, and so it's, it's a, it's a big challenge. It's a really big challenge I think for a young, especially Black artist here in Seattle right now.

XB: Yeah.

[00:16:55.01]

LW: [inaudible: 00:16:56.17]

XB: And my thing for you is I wouldn't want to hear it from anybody else if I was in Seattle but my experience to you is stay there. I'm willing to try to help whatever way I can because people pay big money to, to have a studio space in, in a place like Seattle, you know? Um, and it's, it's not really crowded. You know, I think you should be able to get out and your base should be in Seattle but you know, to be able to go three months and stay in another place out of the country or different parts to the, uh, the country and you know, do artists in residency or something--,

LW: Yeah.

XB: But your home, home base be Seattle. I think Seattle is a healthy place to be. I really am upset that I had to leave it. And I have to stay away because I can't afford to -- and you know, they always say if you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere. That's not true. You can't make it in Seattle. You can make it in New York. You can make money in New York. I can make something right now and I know where I can put -- well, maybe not now because of the pandemic but back in the day before this whole thing I knew that I could make something right now and I knew where I could go sell it, you know? In New York only. But, uh, anywhere else it's not like that. Um, but um, and then there's creative minds to brainstorm without. Getting [inaudible: 00:18:19.12] travel and then come back to Seattle, you know?

[00:18:22.04]

LW: Yeah, thank you, Xenobia.

[00:18:28.10]

TG: I would say in piggybacking with what Xenobia is talking about in the arena, I would say that there's a contradiction there because on the one hand it's true that this is a beautiful space and a very clean space to work in and there is, never mind natural splendor, I say cultural splendor in our BIPOC communities. Not just African American or Black communities, but the LatinX community that just virtually, virtually invisible I think in the United States. So like one of the things that I hear Lena saying is like you're not able to make a living and I hear Xenobia saying like, well, 'it's not a time to chase the dollar but in New York where I can't afford to sell my work and I can find a, a audience and a paying audience for my work, but you can't afford to live in Seattle. Well, Seattle has the ninth highest rents in the entire world. In the world, people. In the world.

So, people might pay for a big studio in Seattle but I don't know anybody who does because I couldn't afford it either, you know? And I teach full time, which devours ninety percent of my creative and intellectual life. And I had to move into Snohomish to be able to afford to keep doing my art. I'm not chasing the dollar because God knows, the three galleries that have represented my work in this, in Seattle have all closed because there's a few galleries that actually opened their doors to people of color. [inaudible: 00:20:06.02] And they didn't have the infrastructure, the cultural ecology of collectors to support the galleries. So, yeah, I, I, I see what you're saying, that it's not a time to, to chase the dollar but my thing is I think the dollar is what's going to keep us afloat. The dollar is what's going to keep a roof over your head and yarn in your sock and paint and canvas. Um, right now I'm working for uh, two solo shows and I have gone through all of my savings. My stipends don't come in until I deliver. So I'm, forget about archives. I'm having to scrape down old canvases and paint on them. You know how sad that is? That the only work that I've kept through the years is the work that I really believe in. And now I'm scraping it down and painting over it cause I have to deliver. And I won't get that money otherwise.

[00:21:04.23]

XB: What about making trends? I think we need to study Andy Warhol.

TG: How about my framing, you know? So, it's, it's not an easy thing. I came here today hoping that, aside from having fellowship with fellow uh, creatives with an interest in, um, networking, but also in creating opportunities. I was hoping -- I, I've been thinking a lot about the Guerilla Girls.

XB: Yeah.

TG: But that--,

XB: And, and Andy, and Andy Warhol too. Study Andy Warhol too cause he was a hustler. Andy Warhol was printing money.

TG: [laughs]

[00:21:44.17]

LW: That's what I'm trying to do with my sweaters. I'm trying to turn these, you know, ten dollar balls of yarn into hundreds of dollars of income, which, so far so -- I, I, this conversation is great and I think it really lends itself, I think to what the, I think the first question on the card is addressing, you know, Seattle dying.

XB: Yes.

LW: And I think that I think o, maybe too often and I'm often too denigrating to my home town is that Seattle is dead and dying. And I say that because not just the pandemic, but the pandemic has exacerbated that dying part and the death that has happened here, but that we lost a lot of the things that made Seattle authentic and that made um--,

XB: Woops, sorry.

LW: Seattle, uh, uh, accessible and that made them, um, you know, even more prevalent, More, more, in more spaces and just pioneer [inaudible: 00:22:35.01] so to speak. And then, you know, moving forward now we see just a place that poverty is having. And we are not addressing that as a city. We, as artists, as, like our role is nuanced at best when it comes to how we should address that as well, um, and even respond to it. So, it's an interesting place to navigate right now. Um, especially when you consider, like you were just saying, like make it. I know that I will not be able to live

here in the next year. I will have to either leave the state, well, you know, to move somewhere else, find residency, do something. I will have to either move to Woodinville, where my parents are, you know? I, Everett, uh, [inaudible: 00:23:14.12], you know, these places that are more affordable. I'm a single person now. You know, I don't have a family that is going to be able to root me. So, do I want to go rent an apartment in Snohomish? Is that going to be stuff -- it's, well, hard.

[00:23:32.06]

TG: It's hard, but you do think twice. Um, I can't apply to any [inaudible: 00:23:37.02] culture funding at all.

LW: Cause you're not in Seattle? Yeah, that's the point.

JF: [inaudible: 00:23:38.18] county.

LW: Right.

KR: Yeah.

TG: I think--, [inaudible: 00:23:44.18] So when you do look outside of the city, cause the city is so expensive, I couldn't even afford Burien.

LW: Well, and I couldn't even afford Redmond. Right? I look at these places and I'm like, 'oh, I grew up in Redmond,' you know? I thought this is just the burbs. It's going to be half the--, no. It's, the, the gentrification that we experience in this city is just development in the suburbs. So, it's just expensive.

[00:24:09.25]

JF: I think, I mean I really, I really, um,

TG: From a practical basis, see -- well, cause like I'm committed here now. We've been here for seven years. Um, cause we, like, we bought, basically we bought our house that was like a squat. [laughs]. We've been, we've been rebuilding it one stick of wood at a time because it was like, owning this little place here in Snohomish is cheaper than renting--,

Unknown: Hmmm.

TG: A one bedroom which was my studio, my husband's studio as well, in Seattle. It's cheaper. It's literally cheaper, but I didn't see, he didn't see. We're like, well, now we can't apply for any public art or any, any artist's projects, any of those monies. And so, and Snohomish has nothing. So, when, so just as I'm saying this to you, the way I would say to any other person, you know? Like, think about, about, you know, an affordable place but that still keeps you in that region cause that's like a pretty large--,

Unknown: Yeah.

TG: Access and when, when you don't have access through the gatekeepers and galleries for and art centers, right, or and, well, anyways, art centers, you can't sell your work there anyway. But if you don't have the gatekeepers opening the doors to you which we know Seattle does not. Like I just said, the three galleries that have represented me have all closed long before Covid 19. So, I'm going, I'm not even going to go there cause who knows how many are going to survive this second quarantine, right? So, outside of that, public art, and, and Kristen would be able to, to attest to the fact that public art is a viable income stream for, for artists and for artist of color it's more than a few spaces where that doesn't immediately close a door on [inaudible: 00:26:15.00].

KR: Mm hmm, mm hmm. I say it every day. I'm like, I am a, I champion public art all day, every day cause I think it's the last viable stream of, of money for artists. And it's, it's publicly funded. It's generated through tax dollars. I mean Xenobia just spoke to that as well. Being able to sustain yourself as an artist on, on public art contracts. That said, it takes a long time to get into the pipeline. It does. And it's not, you know, con, contracts are not that predictable. You have to have a little bit of seed money. you have to balance cash -- I mean, I'm, I'm figuring this formula out for myself and I'm like, I'm almost fifty and it's taken me like twenty years to figure it out. But I feel like I'm getting close. And it seems to me that you have to be able to balance between six and ten projects at a time to be economically viable. And so, do you want to, you know, that's a lot on your brain. It's a lot on your plate, you know, but that's --,

Unknown: [inaudible: 00:27:06.04] the job, maybe?

KR: Of course, the job. I mean I have a part time -- you know, I work now part time at the city. I've been able to strip that down to part time. But, um, but it's, it's ebb and flow of money that you don't, it's not predictable. Uh, but it is a viable source of money. And so I direct people that way all the time. And I think our cultural expression is changing and we are celebrating BIPOC artists in, in public art in new ways. And the field should feel is opening. And, Lena, I think you probably know about the public art group camp that [inaudible: 00:27:34.28] arts and culture puts on. And if you don't I highly, highly encourage you to participate in that and like find a way to make that conversion if it interests you and into the public realm because there's, there's money there.

[00:27:46.09]

LW: I mean as you know I, I got my cert in installation.

KR: Yeah, yeah.

JF: I just wanted to add something about that. Like I thought when Xenobia's mentioned, it said you know, that she's on a cultural search and rescue mission. I really, I don't know, that really resonated with me because this morning we had a Wa Na Wari meeting and we were talking about like fundraising up until the end of the year and I said, God, you know, I sis -- I have some feelings about like asking people for money when another hundred thousand people are going to die between now and the end of the year and it just feels--. And one of the people in the meeting quoted somebody else so I can't attribute this quote but it was from a philanthropist who said, you know: 'I give money to human services so that people can get up in the morning and I give money to the arts so that people have a reason to get up in the morning.' And that, that totally resonated with me. This whole like, is now the time or not the time to be like, to go, you know, go for the dollars? And it was this sort of argument that more than ever because of everything that's happening, people need art to get up in the morning. Um, but all of these things that we've been talking about, you know, affordability of, of space and then, so you move somewhere that's more affordable but in doing you lose your cultural community and you lose, you know, all of that connection. And that's where it comes back to the like, it being a, you know, cultural search and rescue mission. And you know, one of the things that, one of the things that Wa Na Wari's kind of been doing on the side that's less public so far because it's kind of in its like super experimental beginner's stage is organizing homeowners and artists to figure out a way so, that for, like to kind of do what Wanawari is doing but all over the central district or wherever.

Which is taking, you know, homes that are owned by, um, in the case of the central district, Black homeowners who may or may not be using the entirety of their property. Like maybe they own a home and they don't want to let it go because it's a fourth generation Black owned home. But they had to move to Snohomish to take care of grandchildren or something. And figuring out a way to change city polity so that that home could stay in their family but also become affordable space for artists, so it's like, keeps, anchors Black homeownership and also creates affordable space for um, for Black artists so that they don't have to lose community just to have access to space for living and creating. I mean it's a, you know, it's a, it's at the very sort of beginning stages of a project. But it is, it does sort of recognize that affordability and connection can't be separated out. Right? If you take yourself somewhere far away where you can afford a big studio, well, that's great, except now you lose connection to resources like county funding but also the people that inspire you and the work that inspires you. So--,

[00:31:04.13]

TG: Yeah, I mean, um, I think that uh, I-I heard Liz talking about this. We, we worked together on a panel at um, at the [inaudible: 00:31:18.17] conference. And she talked about this, just as you just did as a kind of an outline. And I was so elated. Because I, you know, I think, I think that in many ways, at least when I went to school. And, and I try to -- in, in the capacity that I have, my leadership, aside from my art practice, where I, I engage social justice in my artwork. But in my, as a teaching artist it is my practice to make sure that young talent realizes that their viability, their ability to hang on, because, you know, so Kristen, you said you're fifty. I am going to be sixty next year. Xenobia, I'm not going to even try to guess, uh, because I just see a still picture,

but--,

XB: I'm thirty five. I've been thirty five for many years.

TG: [laughs]

XB: So, I am thirty five.

TG: So you know how important it is to survive, to be resilient enough to not just be an artist for five years and then the attrition of being a barista, the attrition of working your nine to five jobs peels away all your intellectual and your creative capacity because you're just, you just have to juggle so many jobs and so many income streams. And there's just no space for your voice. So, we have to have economic capacity to outlive the barriers in front of us. That's like that search and rescue that you're doing. Digging back to find those people, you know, who may have survived but nobody knows about them. So, money is important. And I see, you know, just like social practice wasn't even recognized as an art form and is only now being recognized. I consider economic planning and empowerment a kind of art for our groups. Because if you, if you're always at the mercy of your landlords, they can just sell the space from under you, right? If you, if you're, if you don't own your spaces or at least have something, cause at, you know, unless you're, unless some economic catastrophe hits you, at least you can always sell that property and get out what you put into it. Right? When you're renting you're paying somebody else's mortgage. They're going to sell and get out what they put into it and you got nothing except you're living there. So if, if, if Black homeowners can rent out those spaces to artists, and keep it in their families and have that be, um, legacy, that's important. That's important and that's an art form in and of itself. I don't see, I don't see financial planning as necessarily being something that uh, belongs to a whole other

field. I see that as very much a part. Just like balancing a budget for your public art commission is a part of your art practice, you know? You can't like spend all the money and then not have enough to deliver. Ha, tha, that that's not, you know, that's not a viable practice. So, I would like to see us create some kind of action group, the way the Guerilla Girls in which members are anonymous. So nobody knows who we are because when you go to the gatekeepers and you say; 'dude, there isn't a single LatinX artist in your roster, ever. Why aren't you representing? We're a part of this community. We think your collectors don't want to buy us? You're not letting us in the door.' Right? If I do that and I have [laughs]. If I do that that door is -- you think that person is not going to be resentful? Of course that person is going to be resentful. I, you know, in-in my, in my desire to create change I've ruffled a lot of feathers. So if we can do something anonymous so that those doors aren't closed, and also so that the focus is not on the person but on the movement, on the desire to create economic stability for our members, for our communities, right? And opportunities. open the gateways, open those galleries. Open the museum spaces. How come SAM has to have a Jacob and Gwendolyn, um, gallery space in it? Because they don't show African American artists any other way. You know? Okay, well, the New Republic but that show came already curated, right? And when have that, I don't know, have I missed it, Kristen? Have you ever seen a show of like LatinX artists at SAM? And I'm not talking about like the Day of the Dead, you know, let's, let's Build the Sand. It's basically a performance for the white audience to see, oh, yeah, we're multicultural. We understand the LatinX community. And then that's erased and then you just gave that artist, you know, their fifteen hundred dollars stipend. But you never let them in the door. You never show them, unless they're

in the, you know pre-Columbian [laughs] you know, like stashed over there. So, I think, I think those kinds of accountability, we can get that if we organize the way the Guerilla Girls organized. We would just have to recruit and get together and put up an action plan, like who do we target first? Do we target corporate collectors and collections to have them be more reflective of their communities? You know, they get all these tax breaks, right? And then they use those tax breaks to buy their art. Why, you know, whereas you and me, we're all paying taxes. We don't get any tax breaks. So, you know, so maybe we can do something like that.

[00:37:59.01]

LW: I, I really appreciate what you're mentioning, um, you know, the beg, beginning half of that, when it comes to property and real estate and property ownership. And how that's, you know, not to bring in the topic of, the hot topic of reparations, but how that's one of the major ways that we are paid. Black people and people of color have been disenfranchised across the country is uh, property that was owned by us, that was predatorially taken from us and you know, how do we reclaim that? You know, the, the building that they're doing, all the development that they're doing is not for people who can afford it. It's not for us, it's not for you, it's not for anyone in this, in this breakout room. Um, and you know, like one of my goals is you know, like my pie in the sky goals is to buy my grandparent's house that, you know, my grandpa bought after he got back from World War II. Is that possible? Will I be able to come up with two million dollars which is what it's worth now, you know? Which is what's also breaks my heart, you know, that these things that we, you know, had as part of our community are now inhabited by completely different community. It's changed -- I

wouldn't say the caliber -- it's changed for lack of a better term, the vibe. But I still want to own that house on Erie Way, you know? I still want that house really bad. Um, you know, and I just, I-I agree that there are, there has to be some kind of ways that we can work towards those things and work towards, you know, keeping things like what happened to my grandmother from happening to other Black families, you know? Right, I should be able to be like 'I want to buy this from you' and they should just give it to me, but you know. No, but yeah. it's, it's, it's a real challenge I think in Seattle right now. And I think for all of us as creatives in the Seattle area, there's a conflict in all of our hearts, I'm sure, as to, you know, do you double down? Do we dig our heels in and say okay, this is, this is my city. You know, I'm going to do this work here. I'm going to continue this here. This is what's helping me. I-I, it's safe here, it's comfortable here. Because we can all agree on that. There is some degree of that, at least familiarity. Um, you know, or is it a sinking ship, you know? And I don't know. And, and I'm thinking now back to the cards, the one that asks, you know, how is our community changed or how has your community changed since you joined it? And you know, for myself, I would kind of [inaudible: 00:40:22.12] that as you know, me coming into art, really, you know, post-grad. You know, so how are those things changing? And would I say it's changed a lot? No, because it's still a very specific kind of person who's in control of, of what happens, you know? For instance, appropriations which used to be collaborations with the local artists, it's still a specific group of people who select those specific group of artists to do a lot of the same work. Fortunately, in recent years we have new organizations that are doing, I think, more comprehensive work that is, I think, more representational of a broader selection of works and artists and content. Which is great.

um, but I think that's been one of my big challenges is being like, gosh, I feel like I'm blacklisted because of the way that people have treated me or because things have been stolen from me or because certain organizations I know, you know, have a certain issue with me. Why would I want to stay here? You know? Why would I -- and, and that, that's kind of also speaks to just kind of the attitude of Seattle. [laughs] Um, and this bit of abrasiveness and, or coldness and that, that like, do I want to stay here? Do I want to try to rebuild those relationships or is that even possible? Um, you know? I, and I think that's one of the, that has kind of change is that I, I don't know that that kind of, um, that hierarchy, like the cool kids in art, like, how, can we, is that dismantlable? [laughs] Rhetorical question. You know?

[00:41:53.23]

XB: But you know something that's interesting. Um, when August Wilson and uh, Octavia Butler moved to Seattle as writers to be writers, you know, they knew that that was a, a nice place to live and write. But they could have never started in Seattle back then. You know? They had to be developed--,

Unknown: Exactly.

XB: And then come to Seattle, you know? And you know, still I don't really have an [inaudible: 00:42:19.27] to me in Seattle, that much, you know? I mean there's some small venues that I really appreciate and stuff but I [inaudible: 00:42:27.17] that have been given, that are out of, that don't, don't even have a history in Seattle, that we've been given so, and everything in Seattle. And I don't get, I don't know what that is. It's not going to bother me. It's not going to bother -- there's a work out here, you know? But, the thing is, to study Andy Warhol, if you even just look at his interviews of him

talking about his work, what, like, Andy Warhol was plenty of money. He knew what he was doing. And he left, left a blueprint for artists to kind of, you know, become fulfilled. Andy Warhol didn't do anything out of his ring of experience. Those soup cans, cans that he was [inaudible: 00:43:11.14]. That's what Andy ate every day. Tomato soup, you know? Like he'd invite people over to his house for dinner and he'd serve tomoato soup. Remember he -- if you looked at his work that he was doing it was nothing out of his, um, circle but he just knew how to do that presentation. I think artists now have to really be personal with their art. Not, really, you know, like [inaudible: 00:43:40.08], that's all that other stuff, but stuff that will advance humanity as far as our specific experiences are concerned. Um, I can then brand it as something from the Pacific Northwest. You, I mean Native Americans don't even, they're not even out there, um -- but, Seattle was named after a Chief, Seattle, a Native American. And like that's not representation for Filipino community, the Chinese community. They're not, they're not really out there. But, um, there is something that I don't, I-I hear what, um, I can't remember your name, was saying about forming the Guerrilla Girl like group. That can be done too. But, um, I don't really like to ask people for nothing, you know? I like them to chase me. You know? I like them to, you know, seek me. I like for them to know that I do something that nobody else can do that uh, they come out cause then, it's more on my terms, you know? Um, I don't, I don't, I don't really know the successes of the Guerrilla Girls. I didn't really follow them that much. I thought they were entertaining and stuff. And I, and I remember when Faith Ringgold was out there, um, trying to get into the Museum of Modern Art, you know, picketing the museum and everything. I thought that you know, like if you have extremely dynamic work, whoever comes after you, that's who you deal

with, you know? And um, we can, nowadays you can stay in Seattle, make really nice money. But, um, as an artist. But just broaden out. But, um, I think you know, studying what Andy Warhol did, he do, Andy Warhol was not an artist. He was a hustler, you know? He knew he was in advertisement. He knew, I turned Andy Warhol down. Cause like he wanted to do an illustration of some of my hats. And already my, my work was being -- a lot of the, uh, downtown kids I was [inaudible: 00:45:47.14] to, you know, um, um, Debbie Harry and all them guys, wore my stuff down, in, in the um, downtown district. And I didn't like how my aesthetic was moving more into that world than the Black, in the African American world. And, and, in, in the Black culture world. And I wanted to, um, take my culture back. And so when Andy wanted to put, do an illustration of my hats in his, um, in his Interview Magazine I said no. Cause that would have been the nail in the coffin, you know? And, um, I said no, um, because I didn't want it to, even though it was a community that was buying my hats. Cause I was selling my hats for three hundred and four, five hundred dollars each. I couldn't do that in the Black community. I had hats that I made specifically for the Black community that was fifty dollars and those are barely selling. But, um, you know, just dealing with those downtown kids, I was able to make a living. But I didn't, they were deal, dealing with me because a very innovative Black aesthetic. But I didn't want to be connected to them like that. I didn't want to -- I didn't want to be part of that community. But, um, there's ways of creating your hustle where you can make your money and still um, do your art. I enjoy making those hats for the downtown kids. But um, I didn't, I didn't, I didn't want to -- I'm not identified with that community today, you know? But, um, there's, but that hustle, studying Andy Warhol and that community, they know how to make money off of

nothing, you know? They're good, good hustle but it was a deadly community. That was, you know, people were dropping dead. They were living unhealthy lifestyles. I didn't want to be connected to that. Everybody that I was dealing with, except for Debbie Harry is dead. You know? So, um, you know, I saw, I saw -- I didn't know that they were going to die like this. But, um, I saw it going down back then and I didn't want to be affiliated with it. I'm holistic and you know, this whole cosmic, um, organic kind of thing. And, um, they weren't about that. You know? So, that hustle, they had that hustle, but um, and that hustle could be studied, even, even with Basquiat, if you study his work, you know? There's lessons in that. I feel like if there's ways that you can get some kind of grant money or something. I know there's some kind of way that you can get money especially now with, you know, people trying to do whatever with this Covid thing and, and artists tap into, not be able to sustain themselves. There's, that, if you can get enough money where you can just develop work for [inaudible: 00:48:43.02] six months out of the year and not really, um, say that you're going to do something specifically for an agenda or something but just develop strong work, so where you can just start putting out a cash cow so you can have time to do, you know, what you want to do. I think that's it. I think maybe, um, I'm not knocking the Guerrilla Girls [inaudible: 00:49:08.08] but I think that works too. But, you know, maybe that can be combined with an intense hustle, you know? Um, uh, even if, you know, folks could get together and just brainstorm about different kind of hustles you could do that really -- I mean there's a lot of things you can do, especially with the internet, um, that you could, um, uh, get some kind of uh, finances going so you can do what you got to do. You know? To be an artist is build yourself up, get a savings going and get your um, signature work together, you know?

You get, you gotta get that together. and then you can go out and um, even start curating your own shows and stuff. But the hustle thing is developing your work [inaudible: 00:49:56.29] and putting your hustle together, I think that's um, the way to go, especially now. But I'm not knocking the Guerrilla Girl thing, but um, I didn't really study them that much. But I think incorporate it with you know, the hustle. I don't think the Guerrilla Girls had much of a hustle. I don't know, I gotta study it.

[00:50:15.17]

KR: I just want to add, like, the hustle is real and you know, I mentioned like the balancing of the projects and sometimes when I look on paper like how many projects I am doing at one time to make my very modest, you know, life work right now is, is crazy but I, I do love it also. Um, but I'm thinking back to you know, Elisheba Johnson and I now as a team, pitch ourselves for a lot of public art projects and have been fairly successful, um, in the last, really just year and a half, two years. And we started that by just completely faking it. So I just, I do think that hustling, the fake it till you make it mantra, like all of that is--,

XB: That works. Fake it till you make it is it.

KR: You know, Liz and I, we're both kind of frustrated public art administrators who are watching you know, a lot of commissions go to public artists we didn't -- I mean, I'm not badmouthing public artists but not all public art is good. [laughs]. And so sometimes it would get frustrating, like oh we, we could do this. And so we just really made up a project for ourselves that we financed to the tune of, like, maybe two hundred dollars. It wasn't a huge investment. Took really good photographs of it and then used that to start pitching our work for, to RFQs, to these, you know, applications.

And it worked. I mean like a lot of that wasn't' actually that long ago. That was just about two years ago that we did that. So, I do think any kind of like you know, the branding yourselves and then it just kind of cre, creating opportunities out of nothing and documenting your work really well, um, in a context that may be real or not real. Like make, you just gotta make it happen. So, yeah. Yes, to the hustle being real. And, and sometimes paying off. And you know, I'm not [inaudible: 00:51:54.26], like I don't even own a car. It's like my life is very modest, but, but I am really, can make most of my money as an artist now, which is kind of wild.

[00:52:03.12]

Unknown: Yay.

KR: Yeah. I also, I think like Jill knows a little bit about my -- I'll just be like I'm a very transparent person about my own finances, but I'm a single mom who bought my own house in Seattle seven years ago. And I did that only because, well, a., public art. I had a big commission so I had a chu, chunk of change that I could put down. But I am part of an intentional community, so Tatiana, your idea of sort of like creating some sort of membership or group, or that kind of thing in terms of understanding property and homeownership, I do think, like in the United States, that's our only sort of like vehicle or avenue toward wealth. Sadly, I think that's gross. Actually that we predicated wealth on the idea, on the notion of home is weird and perverted. But that's true. It's' what it is . And so, um, I own a very, very small home in the heart of the city that I, that I share, you know, seven hundred and fifty square feet but I share, I'm on a lot with three other houses. There's our families that all live here. We're an intentional community. I was sort of 2.0 when I bought in but the original concept was that eight people pooled their

money together and were able to put that money together. And they, they weren't big chunks of money. People had five thousand, eight thousand dollars and bought this property. And you know, again, that was almost twenty years ago now when they could, you know, the prices were very different. But I think we all feel tremendously uh, like we have this very luxurious way of living in community in our very small homes, but we own them. And that was done through cooperation and coordination and, and pooling resources. And so that model, you know, may be hard to replicate right now. I think what we have here is kind of an unusual, beautiful thing, but um, ideas around like community land trusts or, you know, basically like pooling resources among and between artists to be able to invest in capital is a great idea. It's a great idea. I'm not saying I have the blueprint for it but what we have here, where I live has been very successful for all of us. And there have been some changes over the last few years for some families. There was a divorce, someone moved out. There have been some changes and, and sort of the perspective on who we're championing here has changed a little bit too so we've shift a little bit to more of a social justice and like allowing POC artists to buy in. And so the makeup of this group has changed quite a bit to I think reflect the values and ch, changing like moral compass of our culture here in Seattle which is beautiful. But, um, anyhow, I think coll, collectivism always over individual hoarding of wealth is gonna, is gonna benefit more people.

[00:54:37.14]

TG: I could really see something like that. Um, maybe, maybe the Seattle market is not the place to do it. I mean possibly buying into um, industrial space maybe but I just think that -- but in, in the adjoining, still in King County in, in the adjoining areas

where artists can pool together, communities can pool together and do, I mean I'd be really interested -- I'm not going to give up where I am now because I'm invested. You know, I have all my money, all my sweat equity invested into this space and I know that if I hold onto it and keep improving it it's going to be my, you know, my financial security in the future. Um, but I can see how somebody like Lena who's starting out could really benefit and other artists could really benefit from learning about this kind of intentional grouping together, pulling together finances and, and maybe we can, we can create something for ourselves that way, you know? Um, not just depending on public monies. Because we need to be, I mean that ties into Xenobia's hustle. We need to hustle for ourselves. And if we can't, you know, raise up two million dollars, well, you know, I don't know anybody who could. Um, maybe you do. Uh, but, but that hustle of you know, pooling together doesn't necessarily have to be cause even Andy Warhol didn't do it all on his own. He had his um, mid poet, Xenobia, warehouse or--?

LW: The factory?

[00:56:29.12]

TG: The Factory, that's it. Uh, so he had his factory where he, you know, pulled together talents to -- you know, and he, I know was using them, but he still pulled together talents to fuel his enterprise and I, I don't see why we couldn't do something ourselves, ourselves, for ourselves.

XB: Yeah, yeah. He, he didn't use none of those uh, ideas were originally his. Like you said, he pulled, he pulled from his people around him.

LW: He said, oh, that looks great, yes. Works perfectly, print it. That's what he said.

[00:57:06.21]

JF: You know, a friend of mine, um, who's from Seattle, well, I mean she lived in Seattle for decades, but um, she moved to -- she, her background was in the construction trades and she moved to Baltimore and started this project called Black Women Build where they -- and she had to, to go to Baltimore to sort of do the test run of it where she, she raised enough money to get like a whole street's worth of condemned, um, townhouses, you know, brick rowhouses. Um, and they're rebuilding the, they're rebuilding these row houses. They're rebuilding row houses. Like they hire, um, they hire Black women who want to learn the construction trades to rebuild these houses that are like completely you know, abandoned and falling apart. And then when they finish the houses those women that learned construction trade by rebuilding the house become the owners of those houses. So the outcome is that they have--,

LW: That's awesome.

[00:58:08.29]

JF: They have it, they have it, you know, now they have a trade that they can get work--,

LW: And they built a house.

JF: But, but also end up now in this, you know, in Upton Heights which is a pretty, um, segregated and um, neglected neighborhood. A whole street of Black women who own their homes because they built their, like they rebuilt their homes so it's this sort of like recrafting of, of community as a, you know, as a pushback against potential displacement and gentrification. I don't know, it's just a really interesting model for, for building community and obviously, you know, Shelly went to Baltimore to do it because

you could get an abandoned, you know, row house for five thousand dollars. And so she -- cause the city was going to tear them down. So she said, 'shit, let's get the whole block' and did. But, um, but I do think that that sort of model where the investment in the, you know, if, if it's out here and it's talking about you know, somebody has to move to Bremerton to be able to afford a home but that means leaving behind all of their community, what if, you know, six BIPOC artists find a way to you know, buy a compound in Bremerton and, and rebuild it so there's that like sweat equity and investment. And then it's, you're not, you're not forced with this choice of, you know, space or community. But that there's a way to sort of uh, build, build that space with community. That would be cool. I think pretty soon we're going to get pulled back into the main room cause there was a little --,

[00:59:53.02]

LW: Also the time warning. I don't know what time that was [inaudible: 00:59:58.29].

TG: What were some of the other cards? I mean I think that we organically touched on a lot of them didn't we?.

JF: Yeah, totally. Yeah, we never -- I thought how are we going to pick a card and then we just, just basically touched on all of it.

TG: Or like that brings us to the next card.

Unknown: [laughs]

JF: Yeah, um.

[01:00:19.22]

TG: I have a question about one of the cards. What, what do you mean, what is

meant by “performative allyship?” That’s a term I’ve never encountered.

LW: So what I think that I was, um, oftentimes there are individuals who consider themselves “allies” to various movements, be it Black Lives Matter or LGBTQ+. Um, but what they do to demonstrate that is performative and not necessarily genuine in how it affects um, and impact those communities. Um, I’m trying to think of an example, um, but you know, a lot of it may, may manifest itself in social media. Um, it may manifest itself um, in you know, making donations but then also talking to your friend about -- talking to your Trans friend and asking them why they have to use the right pronouns. You know? So, these are people who, again consider themselves allies but the things that they’re doing are actually performative and not truly, um, not truly allyship. Not really actually helping the community. I’m sure anyone else can dovetail and add to that as well.

[01:01:31.24]

JF: Yeah, I mean I think it manifests itself in lots of ways but your, your first example is a good one. Like a person who, you know, goes to a Black Lives Matter march and you know, posts the entire three hours of it to Instagram um, but in their, you know, day to day, uh, behaviors and spending patterns and everything else um, you know, reinforce and um, replicate white supremacy and, and racism. But, can't wait to, you know, put on instagram that they spent three hours at a, at a march. So, that would be an example of performative allyship.

[01:02:16.11]

TG: So, “in acquiring and practicing skills.” Is this, like how do we, how do we manage people like that?

LW: The biggest thing may be asking us how, how do we address that in our, in ourselves? Because I think in, you know, a lot of ways we're all allies to someone, right? Or we all, we all should aspire to be if we're not. Um, you know, like as a Black woman I consider myself -- you know, I don't like to use the term "ally" Because it is so loaded, but you know, I consider myself an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. I'm also a part of that community, but you know, or maybe an ally to the Trans community would be a better example. um, and you know, unpacking, you know, what are ways in my life that I can improve and how I'm genuinely supporting that community. You know? And not just talking about it but being about it. Um, for lack of a better term.

[01:03:09.10]

JF: And how do you, yeah, so how, how do we, um, you know, individually or in, you know, collectively depending on who that collective is, um, work on uh, you know, work on our, our behaviors and our allyship without making that a work of the people that were allies to?

LW: That part, that part.

JF: Not going to Black people to help you figure out why you are and aren't being racist and how to stop doing it. But to like work it out on your own and, and be prepared for all of the levels of discomfort and struggle that come with that. But not making it somebody else's job to, to give you a stamp of approval is having, like achieved some level of ally status or something. But it's sort of an ongoing, personal thing.

[01:04:01.11]

LW: I think they're about to cut us off.

JF: Yeah.

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LW: It's been a great conversation. Wonderful to see you all in the webcam.

JF: Yeah. I think we can stop recording. So I don't know what that--

[01:04:12.12]

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Carolyn Berner 07/19/2023

To be copyedited.