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PIERRE BOWINS
HEATHER HART
KRYSTAL MACK
ALEXY-ALANI OKIE
GINA LEWIS
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Preface

The following conversation was hosted virtually over Google Meet, facilitated by Heather Hart, in collaboration with University of Maryland. Consent was given by the participants to have their conversation recorded and transcribed.

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START OF RECORDING

HEATHER HART: Hi, Pierre.

PIERRE BOWINS: Hello, how are you?

HH: Good. How are you?

PB: Doing well, thank you.

H: Great--,

PB: Good.

HH: I'm glad to see you. Um--,

PB: Pleasure to meet you.

H: Yeah. So I normally don't [Inaudible - 00:00:15] join the tables for a conversation, but because we had a no show, I'm gonna pop in here—Just try to keep it rigorous. But I'm going to try to, keep a backseat and not--,

PB: Oh no it--,

HH: And just join the--,

KM: Okay.

HH: Conversation as needed. But um, [Pause] let's see, everybody's got the um--,

KM: [Inaudible - 00:00:31]

HH: The artist's roundtable cards [Pause] opened? I'll put the [Pause] link again.

PB: I'm on my c—I'm uh driving on-with my phone so I don't have access to them.

HH: Oh okay. Um, Okay, we'll go ahead and maybe somebody can read the-the cards out loud--?

PB: Okay.

HH: And then we can just decide what you guys want to do, how you want to read, answer, respond.

KM: I can um, I can read some if that would be helpful. Yeah. I have them pulled up right here. Just let me know when to go and I'll do it.

HH: Great. Um, let's first let's introduce ourselves, so that we can—The transcribers will hear your, your voice. So I'm Heather Hart. Um--,

KM: Uh, I'm Krystal Mack. [Pause] Oh--,

PB: Pierre Bowins.

[Pause]

AAO: Um, my name is Alexy-Alani Okie.

HH: Great. Thank you. Okay Krystal.

KM: Yes. *What kind of public art do you find valuable here?* [Pause] Um, I would say I think that public art that—Because Baltimore is such an old city with a lot of history, I think site specific work is really special. I also think that work that um, encourages um, people to be a little bit more interactive with the work, um and engage with the work is a-powerful. That's-that's just my personal preference. That's what I like to see.

[Pause]

HH: What you guys think?

[Speakers intermittently agree]

PB: So I-I totally agree. I mean, it-the interactive all part of it. Um, I'm from Maryland as well; I'm living in Cambridge at the time. And uh, the mural of uh-Harriet Tubman, with the hand coming out and reaching out at you; that is just so strong. As well as in downtown Cambridge, they painted the street with Black Lives Matter, you know. And they asked volunteers to come to make it more interactive, and to help paint, um that as well. So I lo-I love, uh public art that's, you know, interactive.

AAO: Um, I haven't really had much of a chance to go out and see much public art because I'm kinda young. But um, like I also agree. Like, I've seen pictures of like, art that's kind of interactive. But I also think that, um, like, art that kinda represents, like

the artists like culture or like, the movement that they're in, like, kind of the community that they're in. Like, I think that's really important. Because a lot of times, like, when you first see it, you kind of like question. Like, "Oh, like, what is this uh-about?" And then like, basically, the art, like it kind of makes you want to like, look more into like, the community or like the culture in itself. So, yeah.

PB: Yeah, that's a good point.[Clears throat] The culture.

AAO: Yeah.

KM: I feel like, when we have a lot of um—I love that you brought up murals here, which is we have a lot of—I mean, we do have a lot of blight in the city. So when I do see murals, and I do see—You know, it's easy to be pessimistic and think that people don't care. Um, whether that's people in the community or people in local governments don't care. So when I see artists coming together, to kind of bring light and joy into the neighborhood, it feels good. And also, especially if it's expressing a message or celebrating people who live in the community—Like I know, in um Marble Hill, like a neighborhood over from where I'm at, there's a mural with Thurgood Marshall. And it's just like, all of these murals of like influential historical Black fifth-figures who lived in the area. So it just feels good to know that like, even though, you're in a community that may not necessarily feel the brightest, as far as like the aesthetic of the buildings and stuff like that, you can know that legendary people have walked these same streets. So it's kind of like, you know, taking pride and joy in that and knowing maybe I can be the next one, you know? Feels good. [Pause] Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

PB: Yeah, seeing-seeing is really knowing what you can become.

KM: Right--,

HH: Yeah.

KM: Exactly.

PB: Eh, yeah-eh, and it also may bring people--just artists or people in general--to that neighborhood that have never been to that type of neighborhood, or are scared to go to certain neighborhoods.[Chuckles]

[Crosstalk ends]

[Sound of digital beeping]

KM: Right.

[Pause]

KM: Um--,

[Sound of digital beeping]

KM: Okay. *How do we continue to critique the institution while hiding in plain sight from within the institution?* Ooh, that's a deep one. [Laughs]

PB: And say that ah-heh, say that again?

KM: *How do we continue to critique the institution while hiding in plain sight from within the institution?*

PM: Whew. [Exhales]

KM: Yeah. [Laughs] Um, ugh [Exhales]. I feel it's so funny. So for me, uh as a food-based artist, and like a food designer, um I feel like I'm always in the fringe of the worlds. Like, I have--especially as someone who did not go to college--I did not. So everything that I've learned is like, from me reading and studying and doing my own

thing. So, I often feel comfortable critiquing institutions. [Laughs] 'Cause I'm not necessarily a product of the institution itself. I'm more of like a community-made person in that, like, you know, I couldn't afford to go to college, art school. And I couldn't—You know, it's-it's just interesting to me to, even in this experience, it's interesting for me to be someone that gets invited to come to museums and schools, when it's like, "Why?" You know, there-my work is very much like not the typical thing that they would encourage their art students to do. Because, you know, it's not necessarily... [Pause] I don't know, it's not hittin' the heart of what the artists is supposed to be according to many institutions, which I feel is like, [Pause] Uh [Exhales] a tool uh, to create capital. [Chuckles] And I don't necessarily think that that's what my work does. Um, so it's—I don't know. I think that there are things that you learned for sure, especially as someone who has not gone to art school. I think there are things that you can appreciate about the-about art education, that it's like, wow, if I—If I had gone to school, I would have learned these things, and I wouldn't know how to do these things. So, in that regard, I would never cr-critique, um arts education. But at the same time, as someone who did not go, um and has a lot to say about institutions, I feel that just by continuing to do the work that I do—if that makes any sense—Because it's kind of like living by example, and showing people like, "This is an option for you." Like, you don't necessarily have to, you know—I-I feel like in Baltimore--and I talk to friends like about this a lot--there is different types of—There's different types of artists. There are like, artists who are like, "I just want to make the work. And it's all about the work." And then there are artists who are very much like, [Pause] very much tied to institutions; very much like creating work it-that they know that the institution will love. And that if they can't necessarily find work

outside of-like, as an artist on their own, right. They can always fall back on like their connections at like MICA, or their connections at UMBC. And like, just end up, like kind of being on boards and stuff like that, and not really living in, like on their own path. Um, it's like I'm rambling a little bit, but...[Laughs] I continue to hold, [Chuckles] critique institutions while hiding in plain sight, by doing my work and being allowed to come into spaces like this. It's almost kind of subversive in a way depending on like, what the subject matter is, and by who. But, yeah, that's how I continue to critique; through my work and not being so relied upon them. I'm [Inaudible - 00:08:46].

[Sound of slapping surfaces twice]

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

PB: So, wh-it-it's-it's hard to to critique the institutions when you're traditionally not seen as part of the institution that by being a Black American. Um, I went to MICA [Maryland Institute College of Art]. Um, I have no connections to the people that I went to school with. But now since um-since my research, I have connections with faculty there. Um, none of the faculty there that I have connected with are Black. [Chuckles] Um, [Pause] that-that, So that's the hardest part. And-and I can critique the institutions because I am—I teach at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, um which is a historically Black college. I've also [Inaudible - 00:09:34] at predominantly white college, and [Inaudible - 00:09:36-00:09:37] Rock University. Um, you know, [Inaudible - 00:09:42] in Slippery Rock, it was-there was very little [Inaudible - 00:09:46-00:09:47]. So, you know, when I [Inaudible - 00:09:50-00:09:51], I'm introducing them to people all

the time. Artists of color. Graphic designers of color that they would never have never [know of. It was never] taught, up there. Um, and [Inaudible - 00:10:03] I came to find out it's the same problem at the historically Black college. Um, they're not really—their history--their design history, their art history--really doesn't focus on um, the Black American diaspora. And it's because you're teaching from a book. Um, the people that I teach with now, at that at UMES [University of Maryland Eastern Shore], th-they really go away from the book and find the parallel narratives that connect people of color--of Black Americans. Um, [Pause] so, you know, the-these young students are inspired by them. Well I may've, like-say, I may have rambled a little bit too and got off subject here a little bit--,

HH: No, I think that's okay. I mean, that's natural. Right? I mean--,

PB: Yeah.

HH: I'm also curious um, Alexy-Alani, you're a student, right? So thinking about that, like, [Pause] you probably have quite literal cr-critiques of the institution right now. But I'm curious, like, how do you continue that dialogue from within, like, an institution?

AAO: Um, [Pause] Kinda hard to explain. Um, [Pause] it's like--,

PB: [Inaudible - 00:11:23-00:11:26], Alani.

AAO: Um, I've-I [Inaudible - 00:11:30-00:11:32], I go to [this] school.

PB: Okay. [Pause] So have you taken a design history or art history course?

AAO: No I haven't--,

PB: At-not yet--,

AAO: Right now, yeah right now I'm in a drawing one, though.

[Crosstalk ends]

PB: Okay, [Inaudible - 00:11:46], that's cool. That's cool. Freshmen. So, I-I-I can see where it's hard to draw from, where—You're new there. So when you get those chances--when you take that design history, or that art history--question your professors. If you-if you don't see people that look like you, and they're teaching to people that look like you? Question them. Say, you know—Do a little bit research yourself. Say, well, you know, “What about this person?” You know? “What about Jacob Lawrence? What about Ramon Beardon [Romare Beardon]?” Ah-ee-and you might teach them something. I always, um ask my students, you know, “I want you to teach me something before this semester is over, that I don't know.” You know? So—You know, sometimes they have to go out and do their own research. And, you know, I get shocked, you know, I've—Uh, every now and then it's like, [Inaudible - 00:12:39] tell me about people, and I'll go research them. Like, “Wow, thank you so much.” You know? “You've just educated me.” [Pause] So I-I challenge you to do that at UMBC.

[Pause]

[Crosstalk]

KM: Have you had any moments Alexy--,

AAO: Again?

KM: Where-Have you had any moments where you, where you felt the need to critique? Or I mean, I know you are a Freshman, but have you had any of those moments?

[Pause]

[Crosstalk ends]

AAO: Um, so far, I don't think I have. Like, I'm thinking specifically back to like, ch-uh,, my eleven and twelfth grade art teacher...because um—Like, he was, he was, I think like had Caribbean, like Island-type roots. And so, um like me, like, I'm Cameroonean-American. So, even though like, we're like, kind of, like, ethnic-ethnic-wise, like different, we still kind of, like, related in some sort of sense like that. And he was very good at, like, trying to include, um artists that were—Yeah, like, pretty much like Black and then...Like, even like, the filters that we have--that we would have during school--like he would work with, like, you know, like, uh certain coordinators at the schools to where like, we would go to certain museums to look at specific exhibits. Like I remember we had--we went to the African uh Museum--like African American Museum. And, like, that was like, my first time going there. And I enjoyed like, going there because it was just like—It felt [Chuckles], it felt fun for me, cuz like it was—My dad works in uh DC. So everyone saw like—I've been in there and I've passed the museum. And I was like, “Oh, like, it'd be really cool to go in there.” Like, you know, maybe I would see like, you know, some Cameroonean artists, or just like other like African artists in there. And so like, being in there, like I was really excited. And like, I kind of kept it to myself because I'm like, shy. But, I was like, really excited and like even at one point, one of my teachers came up to me, and she's like, “Oh, like, how are you feeling? Like how does being in here make you feel?” And I was like, “Oh, yeah, like I'm really like, appreciating everything.” And like, typically, in our museums, like, I've learned to spend more time looking at the art rather than just like the typical like few seconds they like pass on. And so like with that experience, like I was just more like,

interested to see like, the background information of like the artists and then like, you know, their art themselves. And it just—It made me really happy. So, yeah. [Laughs]

[Pause]

[Inaudible - 00:15:15 - 00:15:16]

PB: Uh, how many people of color did you have in your class, at that time?

AAO: Um, can you say that again?

PB: How many people of color did you have in your class at that time in high school?

[Crosstalk]

AAO: Oh um, [Pause] in—Pretty much everyone was [Chuckles] a POC except for like one, yeah, except for like one person--,

PB: That's good. That's great--,

AAO: Yeah, so--,

PB: That-that's wonderful. Take that with you. For the rest of your life --.

AAO: [Chuckles]

PB: A lot of people don't get--,

AAO: Yeah.

PB: A lot of people don't.

[Laughter]

PB: Definitely.

[Crosstalk ends]

HH: Um, we have-we have Gina joining us. I—Um, the question we're responding to is, *How do we continue to critique the institution, while hiding in plain sight from within the institution?* So please feel free to introduce yourself.

[Pause]

GINA LEWIS: Okay. Hi, I'm Gina Lewis. Um, online as Gina Marie Lewis. Um, and I work at Bowie State University, Associate Professor of Art, Program Coordinator for Studio Art. I just gave up being the chair, because I actually want to have a life. Um--,

[Laughter]

GL: And um, I-I liked the question, because I also just recently uh, joined a board in the middle of a really kinda big controversy that the organization is having. And, um—So I joined the board of stable. And I joined the board of stable because they need people on there, who are artists, who are Black, who are women--who understand um, what it is to walk in the world every day that way--to help them do the things that need to be done right now. I know'd you all probably saw the, all the Instagram stuff there. And, so, someone introduced me to them and said, "Yeah, Gina would be a good person to do it." [Laughs] Um, and I'm all, " 'kay." I mean, I like troubles. So why not? You know? But, I-I think about that, i-in terms of, you know—I believe that you can change institutions if you're inside them. But you can't really change them if you're outside, you know? Because if you're an outsider, you're just another outsider trying to critique what's inside. The other thing about becoming an insider, is you understand--especially if you're an insider, within the administration of a thing--, [Sound of digital chime/ring] you understand what the um, what all the bits and pieces are of

um, how, how the institution works. And sometimes you can really help with understanding why something is broken. You know--,

[Speakers intermittently agree]

GL: Um, like, as a department chair, I understand now why certain things as, just a faculty member, just always seemed crazy to me, you know? And um—So, I mean, I guess I definitely believe in, you know, hiding in plain sight. I actually don't believe in going in guns blazing shouting--um, even though I was a Marine at one point, and I can do guns blazing and shouting--.

[Laughter]

GL: Um, You know, I don't think that that's the most effective way to really um, change the world. And I do m-and I do believe my mission is to save the world. I know you do it one person at a time, and you get other people to also do it. And then eventually, we save the whole thing. But, um, I think you have to be very strategic. And strategy of-often happens quietly, and often happens with a lot of diplomacy. So, that's one end.

HH: Yeah, um [Pause] yeah, I'm probably not really supposed to be joining in. But I guess I-I wanted to just say a little bit. Um, the—I always find this question tough, because I don't really-if-I don't feel like the institution is my home. And I-I think that only this year, have I had to admit that I'm part of like academia. [Chuckles] But then I'm thinking about um, institution--uh, you know that kind of system in, like a broader sense in a way. And I feel like it's almost impossible to not be in-in a institution some way. Because like, we're all using Zoom, right? So that's some-some sort of structure institution, system. Um, like I'd have to be a hermit in the woods, if I was really going to

kind of buck that structure. Um, so I guess I just always think I-I try to be—I guess, like Pierre [had] said, just-just try to question everything along the way and be as vocal as possible. Um, yeah, I love Krystal, which you're doing. And I feel like, like, maybe as a-advice to Aleyi again too is like, you know, if you find your path, it might not necessarily be carved out already. Like the innovators, the people who are in the history books now have maybe stretched outside of the institution a little bit, or the system a little bit, or found some sort of innovation to create a new system. So, um, yeah, I think that's kind of like—I try to keep my feet, maybe more than two feet, but try to keep my hands and all of the--,

[Crosstalk]

KM: Yeah.

HH: The conversation, I guess. Uh--,

KM: Mhmm.

[Crosstalk ends]

GL: I-I'd like to say one more thing about that, because that's something that I ended up dealing with, in my practice, which was, you know, at a certain point, I-I thought that all of the systems--you know, the, you know, kind of running the courtship with the collectors and the galleries and all of that, and-and trying to get the grants--I felt like all of those systems were failing me. And it's interesting that you just said what you said, because I thought about it. I said, "Well, that would be a time when I opted to work from outside of the system to do what I'm doing." Because I decided that if I find ways to define my own art practice, however I want--no matter how many times people said, "Well, what are you working on Gina? You to kind of get back down there and paint

some more.” If I'm not painting, I'm not painting. You know? But I'm doing other things that are creative, that are aesthetic, and even looking for ways to fund myself, or to get other people to cooperate with me in funding my projects. Because I don't like that exercise we do. Where, you know, the schmoozing thing--.

[Laughter]

GL: Talk about smile at everybody. And I mean, I'm good at it. I have really good friends. You know? I have good friends who--you know, African American--art-wise are at the top of the heap. But, you know, I like having them as friends. I don't like networking, where I'm actually trying to schmooze, so that I can get favors or money or whatever. You know, I like just being friends with people and having other ways to do—I still haven't figured out social media. So, I'mma throw that out there. Anyone who wants to be my social media mentor? [Laughs] I'm down for um-I'm like, just a--,

[Crosstalk]

PB: That may be a blessing.

GL: I'm-I'm 'bout--,

[Laughter]

KM: That is a strange beef. [Laughs]

HH: [Inaudible 00:23:14]

KM: Who like and engage with, on social media? I don't know. I think that's a good thing. I'm always res-I always love and respect people that are not on social media, to be honest. I think that--,

GL: Aw, people [Inaudible - 00:23:26] heard about it.

[Crosstalk ends]

KM: Aw, I have a really weird view of like, when I think about like, [Pause] social media in the future, and identity. And especially as a black woman, like in like, pop culture--and like all these other things, I think about all the time when I think about social media--and I often think about is my presence more harmful to the-to Black futures than it is, like beneficial, right? It's-it's my, I don't know, that's a whole nother conversation.

[Laughs]

GL: [Inaudible - 00:23:58 - 00:23:59]

KM: But, very interesting view about social media because I--almost at this point--sometimes feel that is an extension of my practice, because I could not find the space to do the things that I do. Like, my work is not necessarily like work that can be presented in a gallery. And the work that I do for food is like people are like, that's not really what we want to do at a restaurant. So I always have felt like this weird in between. So I did have to create my own space. And the space that I found a home, so to speak, was the internet. But now with um—I don't know, just the like insidious nature of the internet, and the way that it can-just can truly disconnect you from people—It was meant to connect people, but at the end of the day, it is you know, to be talking about like “Decolonizing,” and like you know, “Anti-racist.” Like that is one of the largest tools of like oppression, but at the same time, it is also a very good tool to form movements and um, disseminate information. So I-that-I just-I don't know. It's a whole conversation that we are not talking about. [Laughs] But I always struggle with um, I struggle with that. And I think that that should be explored more. Like Black art, Black people, and the

Internet--and the ways that like digital Blackface, like all those other conversations, things like that um--,

[Crosstalk]

PB: [Inaudible - 00:25:24]

KM: That we should be exploring more. Because I really, ah—Yeah, I have many feelings. [Laughs]

PB: Oh man. That sounds like some good research there.

KM: [Sighing while speaking] Yeah. [Laughs] It's a lot. I mean--,

PB: It is.

[Crosstalk ends]

KM: As someone, like you said Gina, I have a Patreon, which is like, um a-a patron-based membership, where people pay me monthly, and like, get to see like, behind the scenes of my work and my practice. And it is good. It is great. Um, but at the same time, it kind of creates a new level of intrusion almost, to me as an artist of like, "This is like a virtual studio visit. Y'all gotta see what's going on." And sometimes my work is very private to me, even though it seems like, "Well she just playing with food. Why is it that?" But, [Chuckles] you know, like, "Why she-why she not tryin' to share something," you know? "Other people share stuff online." And I think some people see it as like an extension of like a blogger or something like that. "So why is she being so weird about the things that she shares, and like the level of output?" And I feel like oftentimes, there is a, a level of accountability to a point. Like when it gets close to the first of the month, which is when everything rolls around, and I'm starting to be like, ooh, like, now I have to make sure that—It's looking at my work in a different view, and I don't

like it. It's changing the output, you know? Before it was more-it's more thoughtful? I feel like it is still thoughtful. Um, but it takes away the um, the attention and the depth and the like, fine-toothed-comb-ness of it for me in the very personal aspect of it for me. Because I know that I'm going to be sharing this with 250 people [Laughs] that like, pay me monthly and like literally helped me pay a significant amount of bills. So, t-it's just-it's a different—It is different. So sometimes to me, I think it's great. Again, when people are not-for-fully like online--I understand having your word seen--but having eyes on you in that way—Like I had 14.6K on Instagram. That's not always good to me. I think it's kind of slightly disgusting at times. 'Cause a--,

GL: [Laughs]

KM: Kind of. But, you know, I think it-I think there's a different way, which we just have to be more intentional now with everything happening. But there is a limit to how much social media can carry, like social engagement, true social engagement, interaction. And I think, as someone who grew up, like in the time of like AOL, and stuff like that, like I was there in that in between, you know, so it's- it's a very interesting transition to go from, like, having like a Black Planet page, and having [Laughs] all that other stuff--.

[Crosstalk]

GL: Yes.

KM: Now being like, “Oh, social media is like, for real now. Like we're really doing this.” So--,

PB: [Chuckles]

KM: It's just, yeah, it's interesting. And I'mma leave it at that, so we can move on the conversation [Laughs].

GL: [Inaudible - 00:28:21] gonna say. I sent you my phone number [Inaudible 00:28:23]. Because I think some of what you describe that you do, is what I envisioned my practice would turn into. But now that I have a-a social media mentor, what--,

[Laughter]

GL: [Inaudible - 00:28:40 - 00:28:41] a mentor who's also doing, um food because mine had, you know, it had to do with organic gardening and food and all of that and where I want to be. Um, you can help me figure out the things that are going to be on the list of what you wish you knew before you started.

KM: I think it's a constant reminder, just constantly learning every day. Like not really--,

GL: Right--,

[Inaudible - 00:29:04 - 00:29:05]

GL: I could learn from your best practices.

KM & GL: Um.

GL: [Laughs]

KM: We could really write something. That would actually be interesting to learn from my fellow-too...Um--,

PB: [Chuckles]

[Crosstalk Ends]

KM: I'm gonna move on to the next question if that's okay. Okay, cool. *Who writes our art histories? Discuss self-auth-Self Authorship and Community Authorship.*

[Pause]

PB: Oh-a, you want me to take that? [Pause] I can speak on design history.

KM: Mmm.

[Speakers intermittently agree]

PB: Most of my-most of my research is done on graphic design history. And out of the top five books used today in graphic design history, um they're either written...[Pause] They're all written by white Euro Americans. Um, I'm trying to think—The most popular one is um-Megg's *History of Graphic Design*. Um, I—If they're trying to form a committee, to look into incorporating more people of color, but that hasn't come to fruition yet. But yeah, 99.9 percent of the design history is writ-is written by white Americans. There is one—I guess-I guess she could be considered Hispanic American. But, it-it the book that she participated in, there are zero, uh Black American graphic designers referenced. Whereas at least and the other ones, might see one or two. Um, and speaking on Megg's again--which is the most popular one that people use--there are only three Black graphic designers mentioned. And it's very limited text. It talks about who they worked with; The other white famous designers that they worked with. You know? And they're mentioned as working with them. [Pause] So, so, yeah the design canon--graphic design canon--is at this point, uh for people of color, very void.

[Pause]

KM: Gina?

GL: So, Eh-so, I did my MFA at Howard University, after taking nineteen years to [Inaudible - 00:31:30 - 00:31:36]. [Chuckles] A non traditional program. But um, the thing that they always told us is, "Write it yourself, or someone else will write about it, and they won't write what you wanted to write." The Howard has this whole concept-artists scholar. Um, And this idea that um, you, you know you do have to know how to write about your work, how to write about the work of your colleagues, and they've really pushed it. I got to [Inaudible - 00:32:09] and, I um, [Pause]... You know, I'm there on campus, with-with all these people in other fields, and first of all, they think that we can't write, and that we don't write. And, you know, I found that highly insulting. Um, they don't actually understand where our artistic production and exhibition, and you know, all of that actually fits into the um, the concept that they have with—You must publish in peer-reviewed journals. You must have a publisher. Um, [Pause] but what I am happy to say is, as I've gone out to more conferences, that—There are publishers-publishers out there who do want to know what we're writing about ourselves, specifically. And um, they um, you know—There are journals where we can publish—I don't know, if you all are familiar with *The Association for the Study of African American Life and History* [ASALH], that was founded by Carter G. Woodson. But ASALH has a conference every year. And even though people think of it as a conference for the history professionals, I've been showing up as an artist for the last three, four years. And, you know, I have to say that, you know, in-in terms of publishing, there are opportunities there. And I know who does write most of the art history. It's the same people who run most of the art world. But, my parents raised me in such a way that I actually believe that I shape the world I live in. And so most of my

interactions--most days of the week--are shaped by how I choose to be in the world. So I just say, you know, whoever's right, and that that's good, we need to write it. You know? And we need to help each other write it. So, that's my--,

[Crosstalk]

PB: Yo that-that's, that's a-that's a wonderful point, because uh, during my graduate study, um one of my advisors--and she-she'll call herself the "whitest of the white person in the world,"--She told me, you-you know, you need to write it. So um—Oh, and I'm gonna make a plug. Um, fall of 2020, me and two other colleagues, um should have our book complete. Um, we haven't titled it yet, but it's going to focus on uh, the Black American diaspora in graphic design.

KM: Wow, wow.

GL: Okay, make sure I know about it, so I can make-for students that [Inaudible - 00:35:01] have it.

PB: Okay. Oh, I'm sorry. Did I say 2020? I meant 2022--.

GL: Okay, well I'll just--,

PB: [Laughter]

GL: [Inaudible - 00:35:07] 'cause our-our--,

PB: Yeh. Oh--,

GL: Our [Inaudible - 00:35:09] want our students to have that book.

PB: Oh, definitely. Definitely. So yeah, so we're working hard on getting this out--,

[Pause]

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: [Inaudible - 00:35:20 - 00:35:21]

PB: 'Cause, like you said too--...

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Pause]

KM: I was gonna ask Alexy 'cause I'm curious about her eh—I know we keep like framing your view as a student... [Laughs] But I am curious as someone who again, did not attend university. I'm curious about, you know, when you look at our history books, do you feel like they are talking to someone else other than you? Do you feel like they are talking to, um like white students? Or do you feel like they are talking to non-Black students?

[Pause, with some breaths]

AAO: So, so far, in the art class I'm in now, we haven't really gone into that part yet. But in high school, like when we would have to do [Inaudible - 00:36:06] research--and then like, read, like, certain like, articles, or like journals from like, artists--like it did—I did have kind of like a hard time, like, relating to what was written. So like, there was a lot of times where I had to, like, go up to my teacher and like, aks [ask] him, like, "Can you like, explain this to me?" Because a lot of times, it was just like, I didn't really understand what they were trying to say. And I feel like, if—Like I feel like a lot of times, if-if it was more catered to me, like, there'd be certain like, parts of it, I'd be able to, like, be like, "Oh, like, I-I get where they're coming from with this." And so a lot of times, it was like, they [Inaudible - 00:36:50 - 00:36:51] included, like—I don't know, like situations or just like, this—Included things that I didn't know. Like, I wasn't um, exposed to or like I haven't experienced and so like, a lot of times, I will find myself like looking up like, like the writer of the um, the like article, to try to like figure out like where

they're coming from; like what they're talking about. Because outside of that, like, I would really be just like, confused. And so a lot of times, it's like, it's really hard for me to kind of like, try and apply what is written there to like me. Because like, I've always done art, and then like, for a while, I kind of stopped. And then I like got back into it. Like in high school—So around that time when I was like, trying to get back into it--and like, also, like, still trying to learn as well--like, I had a lot of like, doubts of myself because I've f—A lot of times I felt like I was comparing myself to like other people. And I was having like a really hard time. Like, all the times it was just like, “Oh, I've seen a lot of people do this and like, I don't really do that. So like is-am I the problem?” type of like mindset. And so like, even with like my teacher, like, a lot of times, like I would question and doubt myself and he would be like, “No, you're fine. Like you're doing good.” And I just be like, “Euh.” Like I don't feel like that. So, [Pause] yeah, it most definitely was kind of like—Like it didn't really feel that directed to me. I kind of felt like sometimes I kind of had to like, force it, to like apply to what I was doing.

[Pause]

[Crosstalk]

KM: I mean [Inaudible 00:38:36] --,

[Crosstalk Ends]

HH: Yeah, so it's like—It's beyond even like the content right? So it's beyond like, who you're including. It's also like how you're writing, and what you're assuming about your readers.

[Pause]

HH: So...

[Pause]

KM: Um, I'm gonna go to the next one. [Inaudible - 00:38.54] twice, hold on.

[Pause] It's loading. Here we go. *What do you think about this [the] Philip Guston*--or is it Phillip Guston?--*exhibition delay*? Is an-anyone familiar with this artist? I--,

[Crosstalk]

PB: No.

[Crosstalk Ends]

KM: Know of him but I did not know his work. I know that there was like-because his—He had a, an exhibition at a museum in New York and there were KKK paintings in this collection, or this like body of work that was supposed to be shown. And they postponed the exhibition because of that, and people were like really upset about it. Um, lemme me see if I can pull it. Uh--...

PB: What museum was that?

KM: Umm...

GL: One of the museums that were gonna show his work had postponed it.

HH: And y'all are welcome to like navigate through the cards and skip some if you want—Whatever you-whatever you--,

[Crosstalk]

KM: Do you guys want to skip this? [Pause] Oh, it's four host museums: London's Tate Modern, The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

[Crosstalk Ends]

PB: Look, and they all postponed?

KM: Yeah. It was a retrospective titled *Philip Guston Now*. It was due to bring together 125 paintings and 70 drawings by the American Canadian painter who died in 1980. Um, he painted these paintings--these artworks of the Klansmen-- um, as part of his commentary on racial violence and American identity. And he was the son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants.

GL: So wh-I-I guess just glancing at it, [Inaudible - 00:40:45], I've-I believe that they stopped the work from doing what it's-what it's meant to do.

KM: Mhmm.

GL: You know, because when people create work--,

[Inaudible - 00:40:55]

GL: That's like that, they're creating the work to start conversation, add to conversation, and freeze the critical dialogue around an issue. And, that's the purpose of it. And, it-it's really interesting to me that at the moment when it's needed most, that it cut that off, and [Inaudible - 00:41:21] we're not doing that. Um, especially when you look back at Black Power movement, and how instrumental art was in telling the story--and, um, you know keeping people aware of what the issues were--I-I think that it-it's—It would seem crazy to us from where we're sitting. But, if you understand how museums work, and who makes the decisions at the museum, or who influences the decisions at the museum, then you know that the boards are very rich people--mostly white people who are very rich--who benefit from everything being exactly like it is now. Uh, some of them who probably have their own [Inaudible - 00:42:04] at home, who don't really want to talk about that right now. Because see, we pass the point where it's

trendy, tantalizing and cheeky. We're at a point where people are in the street over there. I mean, and I even believe a Kara Walker, would not rise to the level of fame that she has, in this environment right here--,

[Speakers intermittently agree]

GL: Because they would be afraid of her. You know? An-and that's—And it was a fear move. It was definitely a fear move. You know? It was fear--,

[Crosstalk]

KM: Of fear—Do you think it was a fear of the conversation around race, or a fear of um, the ways in which institutions like these museums are responsible in a way for um conversations?

[Inaudible, digital artifact/VOIC overlap - 00:42:59 - 00:43:00]

GL: It think it, you know, by that confrontation, and even the possibility that, a doubt that—In-in this day and age, direct confrontation is becoming very physical and in your face. And even from within social media--um, back to that, again--direct confrontation is becoming very damaging. And if they don't have—If they're not ready for the conversation, then it won't go well for them at all. You know? Um, so maybe, from that point of view, it's not so much, when it's a better time to do it. It's more, okay, we need a moment to develop the right programming around this to make sure that, you know, it's-the impact is constructive, as opposed to destructive. That would have been a good statement. That would have been a good goal. That's not what they're saying. Then—kind of implicates fear, you know? Fear of direct confrontation. Um, you know? Okay I mean people are going after institutions right now for sure.

KM: Yeah.

GL: You know? Um, and I don't think it's, that they were afraid of having the images there. I think that, that-that they're being more cautious about how they po-how they join in that conversation. When [Inaudible 00:44:35 - 00:44:37] performative, performative but it's actually expected to get something done.

KM: Yeah.

[Pause]

GL: So...

KM: I'm gonna move to the next... [Pause] No name...[Pause] This isn't a question. It's just a statement. Like thoughts? [Chuckles] *White gatekeepers for Black cultural producers.*

[Pause]

KM: Whoo, okay, so uh [Laughs] --...

GL: Fact. [Laughs]

KM: What happened?

GL: Fact.

KM: Yeah.

[Laughter]

KM: It exists. It's well-well-well very much alive. Um, any-any personal experiences or observations? Anyone wants to contribute to that?

PB: I'm not sure I heard the-understood the statement. Could you say it again?

KM: *White gatekeepers for Black cultural producers.*

PB: Oh.

[Laughter]

PB: [Inaudible, digital artifact/VOIC overlap - 00:45:39 - 00:45:41]

KM: What' that?

[Pause]

PB: [Inaudible, digital artifact/VOIC overlap - 00:45:45 - 00:45:46]

HH: You're choppin' up a little.

KM: Yeah.

[Pause]

PB: [Inaudible, digital artifact/VOIC overlap - 00:45:51] [I was] saying in today's society, I think, there's the gatekeeper to alm-almost anything, and everything. You know? They-they-they're the 2%, or that-that over-that holds the money and, and hat-and hand it out.

[Pause]

KM: Yeah.

PB: Yeah, so I mean—And that just goes into the whole uh question [Inaudible - 00:46:16 - 00:46:18]

[Pause]

PB: Because of...

[Inaudible - 00:46:22 - 00:46:24]

KM: Can't hear you.

[Crosstalk]

PB: Well my feeling anyway. Can't hear me? I'm sorry [Chuckles].

KM: No it's okay--...

[Inaudible - 00:46:29 - 00:46:31]

[Pause]

PB: Uh-it-it's uh--,

HH: Breaking up a little--.

PB: Going back to the uh...the uh, about...alright. I'll hush up until I get to a better area. So I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

GL: I-you know, I used to say, I'm glad I'm at an HBCU, but over the years, I've learned I'm at an HBCU--that's a part of the University System of Maryland--that is run by in-IMPACT [Insurance Mentoring Program Advance Career Track] and the Board of Regents. And we are the stepchild. We and Coppin State, and you know...[Pause] --,

PB: UMES [University of Maryland Eastern Shore]. We're across the bridge. Everybody forgets about us.

[Crosstalk Ends]

GL: [Inaudible - 00:47:08 - 00:47:10] UMES is—And I think that [Pause] if we would change our name to the University of Maryland, at Bowie, we might get a little kick in the arms. You know, like a little shot of something for doing it. But we want to be Bowie's university. [Chuckles] But yes, that is-you know. So we can't get out from under that umbrella. You know? And I mean, you know when you think about the Howards and the Hamptons, and you know how they're run? Um, I mean, Howard is in a lot of

trouble, over, you know, like financially, as a result of some people playing games with, you know, the money running around with, you know, the same gatekeeper people playing those games. And-and-and it's... Yeah, and it's funny, because we keep referencing capitalism. Every time we talk about this, we talk about the economics of it. [Pause] So, [Pause] that piece, um Krystal about, you know, having your own funding sources, it becomes important, but I think that it's important, also that you've pointed out, even among your funding sources, they have expectations--.

[Laughter]

GL: But, what you do is you keep from having anybody who's buying such a big chunk, that they have a controlling interest in your enterprise.

KM: Right. [Pause] I think um... Yeah, I-I yeah, I hear everything that y'all are saying. I wouldn't [Inaudible - 00:48:52], when you were talking about um, HBCUs, and being under the larger university system, and I'll be thinking about Black-owned banks, um and smaller banks. And it's like, everybody put your money in a local bank. Everybody put your money in a Black-owned bank. And it's like, well, a lot of times these Black-owned banks are a part—That they report to like a larger white-owned bank. I know banking is—The-banking is white. It's a very white, um system. I don't know. So it's just—I don't know, it just keeps me thinking like, sometimes if I'm in a pessimistic mood, I'm like, “Dang are we ever gonna get a break?” [Laughs] S'like, where is the liberation? Like, we gotta keep doing everything under, kind of like whiteness at the end of the day. And even like, white gatekeepers for Black cultural producers. I think that—I don't know. Like, I remember going to Morgan [Morgan State University] to do something, and it was like all these white professors at Morgan--which

I was very shocked by someone who, like—My parents both went to Morgan, um and then like coming there--and I believe it was like for the architecture program--and like most of them were white. And I was like, “What is going on?” Not that that's like, [Laughs] I mean, they can be there. But it's like, what if we look at the history of, like, white educators--and how they have learned, and their learning style, and the texts that they choose to present to students oftentimes--like, I don't know. It just made me think like, damn, like, damn, just damn. Like, it's like you think you're going to a HBC; you think you're gonna have this, this very, very like, hashtag very black education. And even then sometimes like, it seems as though there's this, I don't know. I don't know, it-it... Yeah. Again, as someone on the outside looking in. [Exhales]

PB: Yeah. We-yeah, and that's a whole nother question there. I mean--,

KM: Yeah. Yeah.

PB: There aren't enough--there aren't enough Black educators.

KM: Right, right. And it made me think--,

PB: [Inaudible - 00:50:48-00:50:50]

[Speakers intermittently agree]

KM: And go back to what Alexy was saying, a kind of like—In my mind, I was listening to what she was saying, and I was like, “This is on purpose. It's on purpose.” Like it's on purpose that the-the texts are presented in a certain way for people to think like, “Oh, well, maybe it's something wrong with me because I am not getting it.” Right? “Maybe I will not be able to become a professor.” Maybe that's something that you really want to do. Maybe you want a school for art, but you end up wanting to become a professor and teach other people or things that you felt were missing. Right? I think it's

one of those things where, [Pause] yeah, it just-it-it is, it is systemic. All of it is set up that way on purpose. And it's really easy to see how deep it goes sometimes

PB: Yeah. Ah-and it's, what a young Black student sees. You didn't see professors of color. So that was something that you were probably thinking, y'know, it-it-t's not a goal for-for Black Americans. You know? So, you know, if you can't see it, you can't be it.

HH: Yeah.

KM: Exactly. [Inaudible - 00:51:55] what you said, yeah.

[Crosstalk Ends]

PB: So yes. Eh-and that-that helps a lot. And-and then that's what pushed me to get into education. You know, I wa-I served in the field for 20 plus years. And [Pause] after that, you know, I-I-I adjunct for a little bit. I loved it. And I'm like, you know, we need to get more minorities in this field. And I forget, you know, that they can see people that look like me. Not somebody's hiding behind a desk. I could help.

[Pause]

[Crosstalk]

KM: Alright.

HH: Can we do question sixteen instead?

KM: Sixteen? Sure.

HH: We only have like five more minutes or something. So I wanted to know about this one.

KM: Okay. [Pause] *Could you do your work anywhere else in the world? What keeps you here?*

PB: [Laughs] I don't know if Trump gets elected, I might go somewhere else.
[Laughs]

KM: Wow.

PB: Um, As an educator, I think it's wide open. And I say yes. And what keeps me here? Fa-you know, family.

[Crosstalk Ends]

[Pause]

KM: I would say for me, um sure, yes, I could do my work anywhere else in the world. Um, but what keeps me here is knowing that I didn't see anyone that looked like me, that had a similar story to me doing what I'm doing. And I want to show, um other young women that look like me that they can do these things, that-and like, have had a similar life path as me. I mean, you know, I don't have a, like I said, I don't have a degree. I barely graduated high school. Um, I have a trade. I'm a licensed esthetician, like beauty interests me. [Laughs] You know, these are very common um, I think it's a common Baltimore path. And I think that, you know--even though it's a lot of like, self-directed study involved, and a lot of work and discovery and putting yourself out there--I think that it is important for other young people, especially in a city like Baltimore, where when you travel people are like, "Ooh, like 'The Wire,' like, you know, like murder?" --,

[Laughter]

KM: Like, that-that-that's the vibe it always is. And it's like, "Oh, such a dirty city. I went there and I didn't like it." And I was like, "Oh, where'd you go?" And they like, "Fell's Point." And it's like, "Okay." Like, [Chuckles] like that's the you know, like—Or the Inner Harbor like, that's all that we are. And I think that to show people um, you know, there are other pathways outside of—If you want to do that, that's fine. But you can also—Like, you don't have to just like ,get a good job for the city with benefits. You know? You can do things, and you can um—You not gone be ballin', but you'll be at peace and find joy and happiness for yourself. So I think that's the thing that keeps me here. And while I couldn't do it anywhere else, it wouldn't have the same impact on me personally. And also on my work; my work is influenced by my experience as a Baltimore-based person, and a Baltimorean at heart, like being born and raised from here. So, yeah.

[Pause]

GL: I'm curious Alexy-Alani, li-why did you choose this place? And could you do your work other places?

AAO: Um, Um, so, actually, it's funny because you UMBC wasn't my first choice. Um, it was, the-my decision to come here was more of like, in some kind of ways, it was kind of like the um...Tch, what's the word for it? Compromise, I think. But um, like now that I'm here, like, I'm like, actually happy with the decision. Um, yeah. Basically, like, I'm fre-I'm happy to be here. And then earlier to what um, Krystal said about, like, representation. it made me think about how, like, whenever I like, see, like certain like, mm, like, well-known--or just like artists like, just not-not only artists, like, even like celebrities and stuff, and are like, from like this area--because I've only ever traveled out

of the DMV area [District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia] like, once--and this is like, last—This is the summer, like, before Corona hit--like, I only went to like, Massachusetts, and that was the first time I've gone out of this area. So I've always been here. And so like, um, whenever I see like, people that are doing well--and like doing things, because—And also specifically like doing like, more art-related things from this area, because like, coming from an Afghan family, a lot of times, they kind of focus more on like them, and specifically like medicine, and stuff like that. So for me to kind of be like, the one that's like, “Oh, I like art. I like painting. I like stuff I don't-like even for a while, like it can caused like, some like problems between me and like some family members. But, um, during that time, like one thing that I kept, like, looking at, that kind of like just kind of pushing me like, “Whoa. This is something you like to do, so you can't stop.” It's like, I will get people like Krystal and be like, “Oh, well, this person is from this area, so just to say that I can't also do what they did.” And so, like—And even like, um, because I—When picking like a lecture to join, I [Laughs] I actually specifically did pick it because of her--because like I was reading her [Laughs] I was reading her, um, I was reading the little um, like, background of like this area, then also I was like, “Oh.” ‘Cause, I have a family that lives in Baltimore, too--So I was like, “Oh, like, that's kind of cool.” And so that's why I was like really interested. And then like, I also thought it was really um, like cool, ‘cause like even I like also like, outside of school like, one of the things I'm trying to do is like, learn how to cook too. [Laughs] And so--,

[Crosstalk]

KM: Yes.

[Crosstalk Ends]

AAO: [Laughs] Yes. [Laughs] And so it was just-it's just-it's really fun to see people that are like, from the area you're from that also, like follow the same path that you are aspiring on. And so like I really see people like Krystal as like, motivation and like inspiration to like, continue with what I want to do. So--...

KM: Ohh.

HH: That's amazing--,

PB: [Chuckles]

HH: That's amazing. That's a really good place to end. I know we could go on much longer than this, but it's 1:30, so--,

[Crosstalk]

KM: Thank you.

HH: I'm gonna pop us back—Go ahead and press “Leave Room,” and go back to the main room and I think Gina’s got some more for us.

KM: Okay, it was great talking to everybody, and thank you so much for that.

GL: Yeah.

KM: Yeah. It's like...I mean that was...

PB: Yeah. Nice to meet you all.

GL: [Inaudible - 00:58:59-00:59:00]

HH: You too. Thank you.

[Crosstalk ends]

00:59:04

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