

SHF x ICF_Living Archives_Intergenerational Conversations Between Artists, ep5. Joy Gregory and Anthea Hamilton

Thu, Sep 21, 2023 10:49PM • 1:09:51

This transcript should not be copied, edited, repurposed, or used for any commercial purpose without the permission of the Stuart Hall Foundation. Please email info@stuarthallfoundation.org for further information.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, photography, people, thought, language, jamaica, wanted, big, remember, space, artists, speak, london, left, fact, plants, stuart hall, art, studio, grow

SPEAKERS

Joy Gregory, Anthea Hamilton, Jessica Taylor

Jessica Taylor 00:11

Hello, I'm Jessica Taylor and welcome to the Living Archives series. Co-produced by the Stuart Hall Foundation and International Curators Forum. This Stuart Hall Foundation was established in 2015 by professors Stuart Hall's family, friends and colleagues. It's committed to public education, addressing urgent questions of race and inequality in culture and society through talks and events, and building a growing network of Stuart Hall Foundation scholars and artists and residents. International Curators Forum offers a program of commissions, exhibitions, projects and publications that engage with the concept of diaspora as a critical framework through which to test and explore new innovative curatorial models and create space for artistic and discursive interventions into historical narratives and systems of representation.

Jessica Taylor 01:01

The Stuart Hall Foundation and International Curators Forum have come together to bring you Living Archives, a series of intimate intergenerational conversations intended to develop an alternative history of post-war Britain, as told by UK-based diasporic artists working between the 1980s and the present day. The project will form what Stuart Hall calls a living archive of the diaspora, which maps the development and centrality of diasporic cultural production in Britain. This series is brought to you by funding from CoDE, the Center on the Dynamics of Ethnicity, and Arts Council England. In Episode 5 of Living Archives, I speak with Joy Gregory and Anthea Hamilton. They share personal influences on their practices, the relationship between education and art making, and what plant life can teach us about being in the world.

Joy Gregory 01:55

I just wondered how your jet lag was, first of all,

Anthea Hamilton 01:58

It's still there. It's still present. Yeah. Bearing in mind that you said that you had like a three week one. So, yeah, still a bit fuzzy. You can enjoy that.

Joy Gregory 02:10

I definitely enjoy the fuzziness. Sorry, I've...

Jessica Taylor 02:14

Not at all, I think that's a very good first question. I mean, that's making me question my first question now, and wondering if maybe we should kick off by talking about Jamaica. Since you know, we were just reflecting on the trip.

Joy Gregory 02:30

So when did you first go to Jamaica?

Anthea Hamilton 02:32

I think the first time I went to Jamaica was around 1996 or so. And I think I was 17. So it came at a time when I was really trying to assert some kind of teenage rebellion in London, and then to be kind of pulled out of that, into something which was an inversion of everything that I understood the UK to be actually. Like, where people here would genteel and quiet people there were loud, where it was cool, it was hot, and actually really struggled with it. I think, my father as a West-Indian man, kind of set aside a lot of things when he met my mother, and they were in their relationship here. So Jamaican culture kind of came in through the front door, but in very hidden ways and ways in which I didn't necessarily know were Jamaican. You know, like him having Guinness punch and things like that, I was just like, oh, that's just something he does. I didn't realize it was kind of part of like a wider culture, so much. So it was it was a real, literally a culture shock. I fell into a faint by the third week, because I was so overwhelmed with the relentlessness of the heat, of the physicality of the architecture, of the architecture of the plant also. It was very, very intense for me. How about you?

Joy Gregory 03:45

I went, I think probably, I think it was in '92. It was strange, because it was like my parents came from Jamaica in like the 50s and then never really went back except when people died. Because it was so expensive. It was such a big thing. And like there were six children. And I think my mum went with my sister when I was about 13/14 and I was left in charge of the household. And they came back with things like mangoes, and chocolate. And so like remember this whole ritual about making chocolates or like, like not like the bars of chocolates or like taking the bean and boiling it and then adding condensed milk to it and it was sort of like an like all these different spices in it. So it was like a real foreign thing in some respects. But also it was very much about home. And that the fact they always refer to Jamaica as being home and somewhere, which was really where they were going to go back to and belonged rather than this strange place where they had their children. So when I first went there, I met people

that I'd heard about, but had no idea who they were. So like some of my dad's brothers had died. My uncle's died, but I met his brother Jacob and, and I knew my aunt because she'd lived here and then she'd gone back to Jamaica from Leeds. I don't think I was overwhelmed. I was curious. But I felt also quite bounded. Because it was like they wanted to show me their country. So we went to meet all these artists in the middle of bush, and you know, my mum's aren't who was married to her uncle, who was very, very wealthy and lived up in Red Hills, and like, had like five shops and like, drove a fast car. And it was sort of like, so you had people from different ends of the economic spectrum. And then some people like in where my mum comes from, because they're from Clarendon, and they lived in a place called Black Hills, and meeting her first cousin, who was, you know, obviously very wealthy, but just like, was in rags, because he was a farmer. And like, it used to call him to like Teeing Felton or something. Because he stole everybody else's land. We didn't really steal it, because nobody was there. So he took it over. And I met her aunt, who was her favorite aunt, who was, must have been in her 80s, then, who lived basically in a tin shack and was very happy to do that. Was sort of like, my whole idea about how people lived was completely upended. And also, I think, I think to do with food, as well as and I realized that like, when you buy a mango, in the UK, it was like, it's a mangoes cousin, it's not really a mango. And like all the different varieties of fruit that you thought there was like one sort of banana, because that's all we ever see. And then seeing all these hundreds different varieties of bananas, and people growing these things in their gardens, and then get going to my dad's land, which was like acres and acres of land, which was like, very fertile, because it's red dirt country, and everything's like fresh, like fish is fresh, everything is fresh. Yeah. And then I got the bug, and I had to go back after that, on my own, not with my family.

Anthea Hamilton 06:57

Yeah, still not been back on my own, I think that would be a thing. That's another phase that I need to get to. I think, when I went first time with my father, my mother's not from Jamaica, it was interesting for him, because he left very young, I think he was 15 or 16, when he left Jamaica, and came first to Gloucestershire. And you could see there was this kind of tension in him, not a tension, but a confusion because he had left, pretty much as a boy, and had left, you know, in the 60s, and then came back in the 90s. I guess he had certain ideas of what he could do, like, oh, you know, be able to like shout at people in the street, or being you know, like, just all the kind of playful things he used to do as a boy, he kind of still wanted to do that but going back as a nearly 50/60 year old man, it didn't quite play out in the same way. And I think he could see he was also quite nervous of his vulnerability as a potential returnee. There wasn't an ease. And maybe because the family, a lot of the family had emigrated either to the US or to the UK, or Australia, then there wasn't necessarily this solid infrastructure that existed there. Even though the physicality of the land was still there, that thing of knowing that the textures of things in the food was definitely there, and kind of a big thing for him and my mother, they didn't have that kind of surety. But I think the one thing that really struck me the first time was just seeing people who really looked like me, I grew up as like an only child. And there's still like an ongoing, I don't know, shock I have with my one cousin, Johnny, who's probably in his 70s. Now, so I look exactly like like a 70 year old man with a beard, you know, like, There's no hiding the fact that there are these bloodlines that exist. And I think that was an amazing thing for me growing up in the UK without that, and just kind of feeling quite an individual, and realising I'm not an individual and a part of a community was still incredible. That sense of a genetic or kind of bodily belonging. I realised how much I'm missing that

here in a way. And recognizing that I've been living that as well, was maybe the thing that overwhelmed me.

Joy Gregory 08:57

I come from very big family so there lots of people that looked like. My niece looks exactly like me. And that was quite weird. And especially when I look at pictures of myself when I'm younger. Someone did that exhibition at contemporary British photography thing and I got the self portraits up from '97. And that was when I was in Jamaica, on my own doing this research. And I looked at this stuff like oh, that's Yasmin. Oh, my God. No, it's not it's me! But I think that thing about looking those similarities, actually, it changes as years go by and then comes back again. And I remember going to my mom's Village and this woman, very elderly woman came out of house and then just kept staring at me. And I was like have I done something wrong, have I behaved badly or something? Or have I crossed the road in a way that I shouldn't or something? And she said to my mom, "she looks just like tiny" and I'm like who's tiny, and she's like it's your grandmother, who died like in her 30s. I think she was a bit shocked, like this woman would come back to life again. So yeah, I think those bloodline things that is exciting. But I mean, I spent a lot of my time trying to find people that did look like me to find out where I came from. I went to Nigeria, and I went to, no to Senegal. And I kept looking at people just like, you know, where am I from? What do I look like? And then of course, you go to Jamaica and then you look like the people in the village. Which is a bit a bit strange, but a bit not strange, because I've grown up with so many people here that looked like me. I think when I went back the second time, on my own, I hadn't much stronger relationship with the people that I was there because it was no filter. Because I think the parental filter is a very interesting one, because that obviously, they're very protective of you. But also, they want you to see that world through their eyes. And my parents having left there in the 50s. Whenever they went back, they were always terribly disappointed. Because it wasn't how they dreamed it would be. Because obviously, sort of like you go into Kingston, did you go into Kingston?

Anthea Hamilton 10:56

Very briefly.

Anthea Hamilton 10:57

I've been there previously. But this trip just kind of passing through.

Joy Gregory 11:00

Like previously I've been there to like, go down to Coronation Market or something. And I mean, that is just like a West African market. And it's like, exactly like that. And, but that's so different from Markets that I was used to, but also for my parents. I think when they left there, Kingston was a much more orderly place in some respects. But also that whole of their world had shifted. And it's that thing about sort of imaginary homelands. And I think for me, it came to life when they went back because they wanted to see something which they'd left behind. And I wanted to see something that was there. And I think going back without them as a filter, meant that I could have like a proper relationship with my mom's aunt, who was a very curious woman. Who was like, very powerful in her own way. And for some reason, she really took to me as opposed to my sister, she thought my sister was too good to sort of like goody two shoes, like because she's very respectful and she goes to church and really well behaved. Whereas I was sort of like more like in the mould of what you expected, like child's coming

from the UK. And I didn't, and then meeting my cousins and hanging out with my cousins and driving around. Because like, when I was there with my parents, we were driven, or we get the bus or something. But like me having a car and being able to drive around, made a real difference. And then also going on the buses, I used to go on the little taxi buses, things, which I was told must not go on the taxi buses. In fact, everybody tells you to do that, wherever you go in the Caribbean, that you've don't don't take the buses. Why not? Oh because they're supposed to be terribly dangerous but then I went to Guyana, and Hughe said to me, don't go on the buses. But I couldn't work out a way of getting around. So I just went on the buses. So. And also my work is always about meeting people and speaking to them. Yeah, I have to. I used to have to force myself to do it. Beacaysse I was always very shy.

Anthea Hamilton 11:53

Really?

Joy Gregory 13:04

Yeah! Oh, my God. Yeah, oh my god. I'm just like, so shy.

Anthea Hamilton 13:14

I think the first time I was ever aware of you, as a real person, was probably at a party. And you were so effervescent. And like, you know, like, really the life and soul of the party. I was like, Who is that? Like? Who's that? So the idea that you would say that you're shy to me is a surprise.

Joy Gregory 13:33

Really?

Anthea Hamilton 13:33

Yeah.

Joy Gregory 13:34

I suppose I sort of had to grow out of it a little bit. Well, grow out of it quite a lot. But it does come back at me like every so often, sort of, like I have to go and do something and like really, really don't want to do. I mean, I'm not frightened of like, performing or being on stage anymore. But there are some things I just think you know I'd rather eat dust and do that with pins in my eyes. I remember the first time I had a crit, I had to leave the room. I just couldn't do it at all. And then I think the first time I had to present in public by doing a talk, I had made my boyfriend come and told me had to come. But he wasn't allowed to say anything at all, do not speak! But you have to be there at the end in case I've collapse. Yeah, and I was very shy.

Jessica Taylor 14:23

Do you remember the first time you came across Joy's work?

Anthea Hamilton 14:27

No, I'm not sure actually. I guess we were in the same studio building. Gas Works from around 2005 or so or 6 maybe a bit later.

Joy Gregory 14:37

Yeah, cause I think I was there in 1999. I remember we get in the studio there and getting the really tiny studio because Robert decided that because your photography didn't really need much space. Just like a little corener, basically had the studio. No, it's fine, but it was fine. For me. It was really good to be around other artists. Because I think photography is very weird. Like that it's it can be very solitary. But also photographers don't tend to have studios on their own. They tend to have either big shared studios or one shared studio. It's more like the darkroom or you're shooting on the street. I mean, because photography is so varied in the needs of the practice. So say someone like Sunil doesn't actually really need a studio. In fact, he doesn't need a studio. He just needs a studio somewhere to store all of his stuff and his equipment, because he's shooting on the street or if you're shooting in the studio, you hire a studio. I've had photographers here, and they've shoot very, very rarely in the studios mainly on location. And the way in which I worked as a photographer was probably maybe it was a little bit unusual, because it was all research based. And for me, it was really important just to have a space where I could actually go to and then eventually I should have a darkroom, which is how I ended up here. I don't think I'd ever ended up here if I didn't need to have a dog.

Anthea Hamilton 15:57

Did you build it yourself?

Joy Gregory 16:00

There's nothing here. It was a shell.

Anthea Hamilton 16:02

Because I remember you had, you built the dark room at Gas Works.

Joy Gregory 16:04

I did build the dark room at Gas Works? So when you came? Did I move from the little? No, I

Joy Gregory 16:08

must have already been in the big studio.

Anthea Hamilton 16:10

You were upstairs.

Joy Gregory 16:11

I was always upstairs.

Anthea Hamilton 16:13

You were in the back, the back corner

Joy Gregory 16:15

With Alichandra

Joy Gregory 16:16

on the other side? Yeah. And so I'd moved. So I used to be in the little studio. I like the little studio, but I also liked the big studio because the light

Anthea Hamilton 16:25

I know. I really missed that. Yeah, they had to actually drag me out of Gassworks. No, no, I cannot leave!

Joy Gregory 16:25

was incredible

Anthea Hamilton 16:25

It was incredible. I had a little studio downstairs next to the office working here [inaudible] laughing a lot, which was great. That's a very kind of good rhythm to keep on going for the day. And then I move to a bigger studio with incredible light. And I think having the community I think heaven was across the corridor from me. It was great. And just all these artists coming from all over the world just kind of casually. Brilliant. Yeah, just every three months like another set of incredible people coming seeing them finding their way in the city every time is amazing.

Anthea Hamilton 17:04

Everybody! I was trying to get the record for being the longest person in there. But I think that record since been smashed completely. Yeah.

Jessica Taylor 17:16

What were quite pivotal projects for you both during your time at gasworks?

Joy Gregory 17:20

The language project was probably the big thing for me. And also, I suppose making the handbags. I think that was a big, big project for me when because I'd come back from doing memory and skin. Oh, and the Amberley panels or Amberley Queens was a big project. Actually, that was because it was like my first proper Commission, the Commission residency and it wasn't in London. So I was in Chichester, a lot of the time.

Anthea Hamilton 17:46

It was a very heady time for me, there was a lot going on personally, with family I became pregnant during that period. So that was a huge life shift. But I think it was also at this period, which I think was really encouraged or supported by the artistic community aspect of it was that suddenly that's when a lot of the really big things happened career wise. So I did the Turner Prize there. I kind of had my first kind of big Museum Commission in 2012. I think a lot of things happened there, which I didn't want to leave because I was quite superstitious, and it will all fall away soon as hand my keys back. But yeah, I think a lot of the key projects like I remember beginning work for the commission at the Tate and Davines there. I think somehow it was it was to help that it was so close, it was so accessible to people get it was quite tucked away, maybe like this, it was quite tucked away, but also just really in London. You know, you weren't having to travel out to the back of the East End some how, I think there's

something special about South London for that. It's still, maybe until recently, it was still slightly undesirable. So you could be there. Undesirable for I don't know, certain people. Yeah, it was five minutes from the river, also. So you could be even this kind of threshold of everything else. But very quiet apart from when the cricket matches around very kind of peaceful place. Yeah. So for me, it was very important. I think, it's where I kind of found my language as a as an artist, I think before I just kind of been doing lots of different kind of going all over the place doing lots of different things. And somehow I was able to make sense of it there.

Joy Gregory 19:30

Yeah, I think for me the same. I shifted from being just thinking of myself as just a photographer to actually thinking, well, actually, maybe I'm an artist. I think that that shift happened, because I was around people actually thought in a similar way to me, most people using different media, but it was like I could have proper conversations. And that was the thing about having conversations with people which I hadn't really had the opportunity to do that since leaving college except, you know, like in a teaching environment. Yeah, and sort of like building relationships with people because we've had lots of tea parties and things, it was quite a social space as well. And, and I think it was social because we had people coming from different parts of the world all the time so you had to have some sort of hospitality, make people feel welcome

Anthea Hamilton 20:15

Greet them by the microwave and something like that.

Joy Gregory 20:17

Yeah.

Anthea Hamilton 20:18

It's interesting, because I, even though I know that your work often is based in photographs, I hadn't really thought of you as a photographer, in the terms of, I don't know, thinking of a particular discipline. Yeah, I just thought of you as Joy Gregory, the artist. So it's been interesting thinking about this conversation, or conversations that have been around your work in the past few years, especially that it's really, the photo keeps coming back, because I do differently think of you as an artist in the world.

Joy Gregory 20:46

So I did a foundation course, like everyone. But I'd already decided I wanted to go and study photography, because I wanted to understand how the medium worked. And I was quite anxious about, well actually I don't know why I was anxious about my drawing skills, because I actually used to win loads of prizes for painting at school, when I was like, suddenly, it was, like, I can't draw, because like, where did that actually get ever come from. But anyway, it was one of the things that decided to settle on me when I decided I was going to work with the lens. But I didn't want to go and do the fine art course. Because I knew that if I wanted to do photography, I'd only be given like a gnome enlarger. So basically, like really, really basics. And it would be like my art teacher, who is lovely, the most lovely person in the world. And she taught me how to print. But actually, after about a month, I realized I actually knew more than she did. Because people didn't take photography very seriously. And so I went and did a course I went to Manchester. And at that time, it's only like three or four photography courses

in the whole country. And they each only took like between 10 and 12 people, so nothing like now, what interests me about photography was the crossover between science and art and technology. Because I was really interested in sort of, like, suppose how maths worked, I was interested in how chemistry worked. And I was interested in art, and it was the only thing I could think of that could pull all of them together. Although I suppose in sculpture, it's the same and it's the same in painting. I mean, like, it's just that the my knowledge of those areas was very limited. And and also had persuade my parents let me go to university because I could get a job at the end. Because a photographer, something tangible job. Like, I'm gonna go and be a painter and be like, say you're gonna paint people's houses and and why should you go to university to paint a house? I think it's sort of like the way in which my brain works is I have to know absolutely everything about this thing that I'm doing. And otherwise, I feel like I'm a fraud. And so I could answer any questions that anybody wants to throw at me about photography, and how it works like in optics, and even to like strange rules that you have to, you know, when you when you're working on a five 410, a camera and you've got the bellows stretch, and you've got this bra that tells you what the exposure should be. But you don't have to worry about now because it's all automatic. But like, No, all those things was really, really important to me,

Anthea Hamilton 23:11

I can really chime with that idea of like needing to have deep knowledge, a technical understanding of something, but then applying it in almost like an abstract form, which is the creative act. I think that's something I think my loves when I was at school were maths and science and art. I never really thought actually about what I was doing when I was making those choices of which path I was going on. But it must have been something quite intuitive. It's really nice to hear you say that actually, because I think most of the other people I know have come to like they they just loved art so much that they couldn't do anything else. Or they came around to it in another way, or they really loved art history. And it's like, I didn't have any of that. But I really love trying to be practical, and applying myself and applying like my will to work on something and understand something as a specialist. I think not that I could do any of those things with photography. I was like, oh, depth of field times, and I couldn't do it. But I feel like I've done in other other ways. Yeah. Yeah.

Joy Gregory 24:06

No, I mean, I will say when I didn't, I didn't even realize there were rules with photography as well. So I'd learned all these rules and then and then sort of like then misapplied them. So I was constantly trying to push the media as far as it could go. So I was working a lot with transparency and trying to work out how many times you could expose a piece of film before it became something else and how you can draw with film and so I just like like just played with these materials that I was giving. It was like, when are you going to do the assignment you're supposed to go off? You're supposed to go take a picture of a hill or you're supposed to take a picture of glass and you haven't done it yet.

Anthea Hamilton 24:44

Yeah, I think I remember doing something similar in my undergraduate of just not doing it in the thing but just turning the I don't know what you call it now like turning the projector I'm gonna call it that Like, and then just trying to make things too big. It was always trying to make things too big all the time that they would have to rearrange the whole darkroom. I was. Yeah. We didn't need to be three meters. And I was yeah, this is no. But yes. Also just trying to find ways to make things happen. And maybe that's

the scientific side of sight just trying to figure there is there's always a way to try and make something happen. And it's kind of sticking with your conviction and trying to convince everyone else around you. It's a really good idea. Actually, we should try and defeat the technicians. Yeah. But they can often be your best friend, because they're the ones who hold that knowledge. Maybe the tutors have this kind of theory, but the technician we had At Leeds Metropolitan where I went to study, he was incredible. he would actually take us off for trips around Yorkshire and go to the countryside, even like, oh, it's really nothing going on today. Everyone's slacking, no one's even come in, should we go to Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and then we'll be doing like, bundled into his kind of older state car and then go there. And people who were interested in taking photography would do it there. But we also just understood the idea that it didn't have to happen all in the institution, that being a student was more than simply that and that was, that was great. And I don't think that's something that necessarily would have occurred in the same way if I'd studied in London, I think, yeah, that was definitely something that I was away from my family home, but also outside of, I don't know, the London scene as well, the desperation of the London scene at that time.

Joy Gregory 26:23

Deanna came from London. So it was sort of like. I worked in publishers when I first came to London, and tried to get job at Vogue. I got the job and then had the job taken away from me because because the men in the in the darkroom, I was working in the darkroom, they were a bit worried about having a young woman working because they couldn't have their naked ladies up on the wall anymore. So and that's why I thought I'd look functionally photographer to get to college because there's like, obviously no way of actually getting in through the back door. And also, the other thing about photography was like, photographers at that time, were so weird about the fact that having woman photographers. You need only have a female assistant to make it look nice. And I really wanted to do interiors. I wanted to build things. So I ended up I ended up going to Manchester. So I grew up in Aylesbury and the nearest art school so I had to go back home, that terrible thing of sort of like, leaving home in a sort of like, I'm never coming back here, I'm grown up and then sort of like, can I come back? I need to go to college. And then my dad very sweetly, driving me to the bus stop every day, for a whole year. So I could get the bus to go to High Wycombe, it's South Buckinghamshire. So it's quite well heeled. And it was a bit like a finishing school, really, in some respects. It was a great art school. And the foundation course I thought was really, really good. And I met some really interesting people. But I mean, for me it was one fantastic to get out of the south of England, and go to a city. So I really wanted to be in a city and, and go out, disco dancing. And, yes, I didn't really have to do any work. But I was really, really interested in making my work, but just doing my own thing and not actually doing what I was supposed to be doing.

Anthea Hamilton 28:07

I often misunderstand the assignment on things like that. I'm not even ever sure quite what we're supposed to be doing. But just carry on. Anyway. Yeah,

Joy Gregory 28:16

I can relate to that. Yeah.

Anthea Hamilton 28:18

I think I can also relate to it because when I finished, I'd kind of just gone into doing a fine art degree. So that was like the late 90s graduated in 2000. And that being, you know, the boom of the YBA scene, and then that kind of had obliterated any other type of art that was around. So you had people who were teaching, they're kind of trying to bring in other ideas, which were kind of critical. And that just been kind of completely kicked out. You know, we were just all looking towards the East End and London and things like that as a very kind of dazzling model of success. So I think I was quite taken with all of that. But then I didn't really understand this idea of being an artist, I didn't really quite get that it was a viable career. And there's something about Leeds Metropolitan is it was I always forget the word now, but it was like a vocational college. So it felt very much that you had to go and get a job afterwards. And so I thought I would go into film, or advertising or something like that. And so I tried to then work as a runner in a post production company. And I'm very quiet and not particularly tall and it was full of these big bros all over six foot and I very quickly realized this is not going to work. I think I managed five days and I'm not a quitter. It was just like so evident that there was no way that I was going to ever make it in this industry and it'd be like wasting everybody's time and my whole degree and so I then did a few things but realize that I had to kind of make the things that I was good at work for me. You know, like I could have Good idea. And I could present it on my terms. And yeah, bending to the post production industry was not going to be it was incredibly horrificly masculine. I didn't even know existed. No, it was a Yeah, I think that was it. Maybe I said I wanted to work in TV and probably watch some TV credits, and it said post production. so...

Joy Gregory 30:16

and thought that's me!

Anthea Hamilton 30:20

Pretty sure it was something as straightforward as that, because there was no one else I could go to like it wasn't it didn't necessarily exist in my family, to be able to ask for any kind of advice. The other people that I'd studied with beforehand, I don't know where they'd gone to. And the people that I studied with, wanted to work a lot in art therapy. Yeah. So there was nobody else, I was the only one who really wanted to do it, or who was willing to take a gamble on it, you know, spin the wheel again, yeah, see if it was possible. Sometimes I wonder about that time that I was studying and what I missed, in terms of what we were being asked to think about.

Joy Gregory 30:55

Maybe a bit more of my second degree. But I think at Manchester, it didn't really happen, because it wasn't that so it was more of a vocational course, in many respects, there was no discussion around theory, and we did art history, and we did photography history. But it was more about aesthetics. And I think that's very much colored. The way in which I make work is that thing about the aesthetics and sort of like, being able to get something that you know people can actually tune into. And I think that comes from being in a communication school. So I try and make my work so that anyone can access it. So you don't have to have a degree in anything. Or you just have to be able to walk past the poster. So nothing less from like being around people who been doing copywriting doing advertising, doing graphic design. And so it teaches you to think differently. So I never actually, I don't think I did much in depth reading. And not even when I was at the Royal College and then think, again, because photography was like very separate from fine art. And I had lots of friends that were in fine art. And in something, which I

thought probably would have been the course I should have gone on which was called Environmental media, which is where Keith Piper was, where they basically just did anything they liked, I think was three or four years course and, and they closed it down, of course. But then I didn't know I just think I didn't actually do much reading and much sort of like critical analysis until I actually left college completely, and then got involved in all these different groups like Black Arts Group and morning photography, like a lot of the people I knew, because I'd come down to London, and we're part of all of that same sort of like the independent photography scene, a lot of them had been to PCL, where almost everyone who left that course never took a photograph again, because you had to have a reason to take photograph. And it had to be like a really valid reason. And you have to have like loads of theories behind it. And so it was like, oh my god, it's such a big responsibility to take a picture. Where I was like snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, because I didn't realize you had to have big responsibility. But then I think the responsibility was there because of my interest in politics, and sociology. So if I hadn't gone to do art, I probably would have gone to do social economic history, because that was really my my big love when I was at school. And I think that's a problem with education in this country is it funnels you too early. And so you never ever meet people who think differently to yourself will have a different experience unless you end up working in a university after like a proper University where you're made to go sit in the same room with people from different disciplines.

Anthea Hamilton 33:30

I think that's why I wanted to go to the Royal College. I mean, I know it's still within a completely creative field. But I was aware that already my scene from when I graduated, I had a few years out and then wanting to go back into finally getting like what I thought would be like a more rigorous kind of theoretical space. It wasn't really but anyway, but that's is that I wanted to go to the college where there was lots of different disciplines to kind of be to kind of have this kind of taster experience of everything or to be able to do that. And one thing that I really did do, because I found that the discussion at the time that was happening, the painting course, and this was 2003 to 2005 was was like man alive, you know, it was just about like how to stretch a canvas and like what about the word? like what's happening? and in a very kind of like, philosophical way, there's ways of thinking about what the edge means? or a periphery? or what a touch means? But I was like, what about the world? you know? And so I used to go to all the other courses courses, and I used to go and like, photography was amazing. I remember just like wandering through like the back of the building and J Muse and then going into a room and Isaac Julian was doing a lecture. I'm like, guys, what's going on like photography, some but there's something really critical happening in here. And we're just back at the other side thinking about whether that was the right blue or not. And then going another week, and Mary Kelly was there and it was like it is possible that it could have happened in that space. But it was a very aesthetic, very visual, formal moment when I was studying which is also definitely a key part of my works DNA because I really enjoy that. But also always feel like there's a slight void in myself where all of that is somehow adrift, somehow, I've never managed to tether it to my thinking fully somehow, because my loves were just math, I just loved putting numbers together and getting an answer. And narrative thinking, the idea of history, or really what history is, is only just starting to make sense to me as I get older.

Joy Gregory 35:23

I'm trying to think of those lectures that I've been to for the contemporary curating course, which might have had sort of like a half marriage with photography and film, because was film is still there.

Anthea Hamilton 35:33

It was, and there was [inaudible] who used to do these kind of lectures, every every week that were incredible. There was there was, I mean, there was so much. You had these kind of incredible minds there. But you still had to go look for them, which is still the same now I guess that you have to make an effort.

Joy Gregory 35:50

Like so when I went to the Royal College, it was no photography was very separate and, and married in the design school. So the people I knew were in illustration as, but then you wouldn't know people in other departments. Because again, it was it was really, really small. I think my professor was [inaudible] and they had to get up to [inaudible] to meet with him because he was like, Prorector or something at the same time, used to terrify me. I used to spend most of my time going away, because I could, I didn't know quite how to defend myself. But I think that whole thing about YBA things, is that it had a profound effect on students, and what they thought was success. So when I started teaching, it was really about being a good artist, or being a good photographer, or being a good, whatever, and learning your medium. And then also being able to bring in other other disciplines into that. So bringing in the humanities into it, and sort of like being able to have, like, long and rounded discussions, and there were lots and lots of discussions going on. And then students would come and they would say, you know, how do I improve my practice? That was, you know, like, from when I started teaching, I start teaching 1987. And I think, you know, sort of like maybe around '92 it switched to sort of like, how do I become famous? I'm like going, what? Like, not how can I be a good artists like, How can I become famous? How can I become successful? How can I be like, I don't know Damien Hirst, and you're like, but I think it was very much linked to what was happening in the city and like loads of money, and sort of like Margaret Thatcher's brand of success was sort of like a monetary thing, rather than a philosophical thing. And rather than a humanist thing, as well, it wasn't about the community. It was about individual. And I think, I think things started to fall apart a little bit, because then it was sort of like, we had to then teach the students how to be successful. And it was like, how are we going to measure the success? It's all like, whether or not they're in employment when they leave. But everything had shifted then as well. Because when I left college, I mean, I never did it, but a lot of people just squatted. So and also rents were very low. I remember being absolutely appalled. When I moved from Manchester, I used to pay £6 a week rent, when the that was it. And then I moved to London, it was £25 a week, which was the absolute daylight robbery. But now it's now it's just like insane. And you did have a hope of buying somewhere if you wanted to. But most people actually politically didn't want to buy somewhere because it was like buying into the whole city philosophy of that time, sort of like I didn't want to be a commercial person. I wanted to be like someone who really gave back and was really interested in community. And I think that's why why I became really interested in Stuart actually. I think I met Stuart after I produced Auto Portraits. So that was in 1990. And I don't know when that came out, was that came out in '92, '91 or something.

Jessica Taylor 38:55

TEN8's Critical Decade. Yeah. Because this is '92?

Joy Gregory 38:59

Yeah. So if it came out in '92, I probably met him around that time. And I couldn't understand why he was so interested in my work. And the other thing, I think the big thing for me in terms of the shift in my practice was like, well, not in my practice, but in the way in which my practice was received was because I was constantly criticized for my work not being black enough. And I didn't really understand about a thing of like, not really understanding the world, like, so how do you make it black? Because like, I am black. So my work must be black also. And it was, and it was like no, but it has to be politically black as well. And so I had to go away and think about who was saying that to you. Just I suppose other people around at the time that was sort of like part of a group think about how you had to be and how you had to behave. And what saved me was actually Deborah Willis, who was sort of like well, no, you can just make what you like. It was like oh my god. And Stuart who was like you can just do what you like. and just like, yes! I can actually just make work. And it's mine. And it's about my own experience and my own vision of the world. And not everybody has the same experience. And I think what happens when everybody was quite young. And they played into this sort of like the way it sort of like the way in which you would politically fight back was to actually to build your own territory. But by building a territory, you built a cage. And I didn't really understand that you had to be in or out of the cage, it was sort of like, you can just do what you like, what cage. It's like, for me, it was like, an invisible fence. And I just would like wandered in and out of it. Whereas everybody else could actually see that there was a very firm structure. So maybe I didn't really understand what they meant when they said your work isn't black enough. Except being absolutely outraged. Like, I don't care. I'll sit on my own in the corner. I haven't really shown any of my very early work, people don't really know it. But like, not really playing into what was seen as being very activist.

Jessica Taylor 41:05

But you're speaking quite critically about domestic spaces. You're views on gender.

Joy Gregory 41:11

Yeah. So it was about gender. But that was different. I think

Jessica Taylor 41:14

that not seen as political enough at the time?

Joy Gregory 41:17

Definitely not.

Anthea Hamilton 41:19

Probably not. If you're black female.

Joy Gregory 41:22

And also, because it was about sort of like building an identity. And I suppose a way in which you build an identities, you have to have rules. And I hadn't learned that you had to obey rules. I mean, like, that's probably being a Jamaican. Like, yes, there are rules, but we don't obey them.

Anthea Hamilton 41:42

Or it sounds like you had understood a lot of rules for yourself, which were on the technical, which is already kind of part of the structuring of knowledge. And done a lot of rejection already understood that there's a right way and a wrong way. And so there's a resistance in that which is hyper visible, but it's also kind of under the radar at the same time. When I think about myself on the painting course, at the RCA, I was very aware that everybody else was kind of quite obediently standing at their easel painting. And I was thinking, wow, no way. That's not how to be in the world. And I know that for many reasons. And I can apply that many reasonings of myself to how I'm going to approach being part of the RCA, which was how, willfully, purposefully that was to do with myself as a black student there at the time. And I think I was probably the only one on the course, of course.

Joy Gregory 42:36

That's amazing. You're the only one on the course. But not in the university?

Anthea Hamilton 42:40

No. But on the painting course, my apologies to if there was somebody else there who I can't remember, I remember there was one girl of Indian heritage. I think it was just the two of us. At the time there was 20 odd. So it's not like it's a big amount, but it's still, you know, you're studying in London. And there was yeah, maybe like one person? Yeah, yeah, probably.

Jessica Taylor 43:05

And what was the kind of theoretical engagement that you were having at the college at that time, was there kind of a critical discourse at the tutors were bringing in or that you were seeking elsewhere?

Anthea Hamilton 43:14

Probably there was, but I just tuned out of it, I remember just thinking this, I just went into a space of maybe negation, because what was being talked about, it was probably over my head, and I couldn't deal with it was like very dense, or hadn't been trained in how to read anything really. And I think it is a training or like that is something that you can be taught, I felt very kind of defensive about the fact that I hadn't read Deleuze, and was like, Oh, "the fold", whatever, you know. I tried to read it every night, but could never get passed the whatever. And then, I also then, equally denied myself the chance to learn about Stuart Hall in a good way, which could have brought something else I just kind of put myself in my zone, and then did it all through maybe like a process of osmosis, like understanding everything through the fabric of culture, and kind of distilling it through that. And through my own personal experiences and conversations you would have. I was very I'm still am someone who needs to be in contact with people quite a lot. And you can kind of do it through sampling, like the way that one person will talk about something and have complete ignorance about other things away. Another person would be very much into something but I didn't know how to say it like a collage of knowledge through people. I think that's why I like to go into the other courses because it was so clear to me that it was other than myself. And so it was clear. What was there somehow that you could see. I remember Vivienne Westwood coming once...

Anthea Hamilton 43:15

I remember being really excited and a bit starstruck

Anthea Hamilton 44:44

and that being quite clear what she was talking about because it came from a space of somewhere else outside of my own discipline, whereas this just seemed very much bogged down in... I can't remember talking about because I did zone it all out. I was like, forget about it. You know, like I didn't I didn't necessary have like very good rapport with the tutors. I'm a such a good girl but I think they saw me as like a troublemaker. It's like what are they perceiving as a troublemaker within me, I'm doing all my work. I'm working really hard, I'm in every day so what what's going on there? So, think I was somewhere between the library, the bar, and other departments. There was lots of interesting people on the course as well. It was more about dialogs than theory. I think it was also again, it was still the back end of like this very success focused time, or there was a huge boom in the market when I was graduating. So there was also a lot of space for anyone to do anything. And you could get taken off to Art Basel, and then sell all your work as a student. So that also created, yes, quite a strange climate that if you didn't do that, then somehow you'd messed up. Like if you didn't suddenly get a show at The Approach, like what were you bothering for?

Jessica Taylor 45:53

Would you say that your approach to materials was similar to Joy's in relation to, to wanting to push things as far as they could go, or that kind of curiosity around how to make a material serve what you wanted to do with it?

Anthea Hamilton 46:06

Let's think, I was ready to work really hard when I went to university, I was like, really ready to like, sweat the books and do something and it was just so unchallenging. And maybe I was a bit passive about it, I was like, well, if they're not going to bring something to me that I can engage with, then I can't reciprocate that kind of energy for learning. And I think I found that in a lot of my kind of postgraduate, my graduate and postgraduate learning. But then I still have this, like, urge to know things. And so then you just try and educate with the stuff that's around you. So either it is just the way that things would appear on TV, or maybe it was why I thought I would go into film and advertising because that's where I was trying to, like, draw kind of take some kind of critical engagement with, or whether it's, I don't know, just, I guess I was really one of those people who made stuff, not necessarily from their grandma's, you know, there's always artists make stuff from their grandma stuff And I didn't have a grandma so I couldn't do that. But really kind of looking at other grandma stuff or other kind of cultural artifacts that you would find, of course, in the flea market, which you can't really do anymore, because there's barely any left. But I think there's Vauxhall, which is okay. Vauxhall is still there. But what's interesting is that the stuff that's in Vauxhall now, because we've moved into much more screen based or digital based space, it's just old TVs, and clothing for a construction workers, which kind of just shows what the area is somehow it's all to do with like, labor and screens. It's kind of a very strange space, whereas before used to be able to have other spaces where people would enjoy themselves with like ornaments or belongings or clothing that yeah, now it's it's kind of work has boots and screens.

Joy Gregory 47:45

I haven't been for ages. I haven't been for like, five years or something. I used to go every Sunday.

Anthea Hamilton 47:51

No, I loved it. I used to go to Wimbledon. And they'd see me coming, because I would just, I'd be like, really into buying something of total nonsense. They'd be like, oh, like, wow, look at that, how much is it and they'd be like two pounds, it was worthless, you know, but to me, it somehow had lots of resonances there within within the making of it, I can't think of a particular thing like a, like a Disney toy, or a stuffed toy with these kind of like, things which were embedded with a lot of meaning, which maybe makes me think about the sense of like a visual build on language. But I honestly think about how you've really studied spoken language.

Joy Gregory 48:22

Well, they I mean, like, they've sort of like sound. Yeah, so whistling, clicks, and sign language was the other one I was really interested in. It was more to do with the fact that the language now tells us who we are, but also tells you about where you are. I think particularly with the language in the Kalahari, which I've been documenting, for, like 20-years now. So when you go there, and you look at this desert, it looks like a desert, and there's nothing there. But there's loads of things there. But unless you have the eye and the knowledge, then you can't see them. And the way in which they are recognized is also through the language, but the language is gone. And so although they sort of like efforts to try and continue with that, but it becomes like a performance. So it becomes like performing the native. And they do perform the native for when, you know, tourists come out. So they pretend to they normally walk around and close like this. And then suddenly, you know, put on with like a little loincloth made of antelope or something, and some beads and things and sort of like take people out on trips and go and look for lions. And it was just sort of like the real culture has without real culture because culture is something that shifts the language changing meant that the recognition of things disappearing because of climate change also disappears because you don't know that they've gone and so that was what I was interested in the language. Oh, so I still have all of my documentation from when I first started interviewing these two sisters in 2003. right the way through. The other shift in the language that happened was, so it went from the two sisters, speaking with a larger community of I think it was like maybe 30 people that could speak to them hiding language. So when they got thrown out of the parks, this is in 1936, and they were children, when they went back, they weren't allowed to go back. So they became sort of servants on the different farms. And of course, because of the apartheid system, they were classified as colored and colored was one step up from black. And then Bushman was like below black. So Bushman, you could shoot them as vermin. Up until I think, 1942, or even 1972, you could still get a license to shoot someone, so they weren't considered to be human. So they never told the children who they were. And so to protect their children, they never spoke the language to them. So that's how the language began to die. So there was a big fare in Johannesburg in 1936, on the site of what's now the playing fields of its University, and the fare included like a human zoo. And so the two sisters that I interviewed, right at beginning, they were part of the human zoo, and there are photographs of them in the medical school. And there's a cast of [inaudible]. So the older sister, like a body cast and the face cast in the medical school, which none of the family can obviously access that because it's now closed, it used to be open access. But now it's not open access. But like, if you were at the university, you could go and have a look at it. But now you have to get professional permission, because it's sensitive material, all the photographs are there from the fair. And so I'm trying to sort of like build some sort of bridge between the language that changed from [inaudible] to Afrikaans to English. So the children that I speak to now that are in their teens who were not even babies then so they've been born and, and they've had children and other people have had children, their language

shift is to English, so they speak English as their dominant tongue. So I'm really interested in how that's changed. So it's sort of like so what I need to do is I need to go back and spend quite a lot of time there and work with them to bring the project to an end. And before I actually did that, so this is me sort of like waiting. This is how mad I can sometimes be, is I spent ages like just studying language.

Anthea Hamilton 52:31

What's ages?

Joy Gregory 52:32

Probably 5 or 6-years before I even started on the project. Because I needed to know everything there was to know about that particular subject area. So I could pick out what I was going to look at. As I could have just done this thing of sort of like taking a load of recordings and just going in saying like, that's it that's a project done. But and I went to lots of conferences on endangered language, and I joined the endangered language society. And I ended up going to Broome to a very big conference in, in Australia. But I didn't even realize that I didn't know Broome was in Australia, although it was in Wales. And I rang the people up and I said, like, I'm not quite sure how to get there. But can you tell me which part of Wales this conference is in? Guy laughed down the phone. It's actually in Western Australia, and you need to fly to Perth. And now because it was starting the next week, it was like, whoo, okay.

Anthea Hamilton 53:27

But I didn't put you off?

Joy Gregory 53:29

No, nothing puts me off! I'm a terrible person. In fact, the more challenging, the better. But no, I mean, it was a no, so I couldn't say I wasn't going because I had bought my ticket.

Joy Gregory 53:43

Of course I went. And it was the most amazing experience, apart from being bitten by sandflies. Oh, my God. So yes, I was very determined to do that. And then I went, I was going so I did the first thing which was in La Gomera, which was in the Canary Islands, because I thought, I've wanted to choose language that was from here, and then one from like Europe, and another one that was slightly different. So the Canary Islands is like technically actually part of Africa but it's Spain. But the language actually developed because it's a landscape. So I was really interested in tying the idea of language and sound to the environment. So it was really about the sound developed or the language developed because of the mountains in this place. And there wasn't a road. The first road I think got built in 1970. So you can imagine sort of like in Spain and Rhodes not existing, and then the language was banned, because of Franco because we wanted to have a homogenized society, and definitely only one language, but people kept it underground. And then it obviously came back again. And then with the [inaudible] language after the conference, I rang up the person who did the presentation about it in in South Africa and said, I'd quite like to come and meet the people. And he said Oh yeah, come whenever you like. And then I just bought a ticket and went, had to fly to Upington sub flew to Joburg flew to Cape Town, and then flew to upington. And then drove for like five hours north to the border with Botswana, and Namibia and South Africa, which is very, very tiny community in a dust bowl. Now, that

was the pivotal project for me at gasworks and also building the dark room. Because my practice is about playing with different types of chemicals. I can't I'm nobody will let you into a normal darkroom to do that. Because you have to be and also you don't want to go into dark because of contamination. So if you're working with silver nitrate, no, who knows you're going to burn anybody. Or if you're doing like salt prints or something, if you get one wrong chemical there, the whole batch you have to throw away, like I want to do egg prints my latest thing I want to do these egg prints. So I've got my egg solution been mixed up like five years in the fridge waiting for the moment. And the moment is now. So I'm doing this project at Imperial Health Trust. So I went through the archive, and there were like lots of gaps in the archive. And so I'm looking at long servers. And their stories are incredible. So I'm doing portraits of them. And hopefully there'll be hanging them in the boardrooms of people that are not seen as particularly important. I'm going to say I'm photographing them like normal cameras and things. But then I'm going to make internex and then print them as album prints.

Jessica Taylor 53:43

So you went?

Jessica Taylor 56:33

Anthea can you speak a little bit to how landscape and language might arise for you, kind of similar reflections on how those might have ever influenced your practice.

Anthea Hamilton 56:46

Not in such a direct way. But maybe because I grew up in London, and it's very comfortable for me to be in London, I don't think I could have lived in the countryside. I can't even handle it now when I go to another city and it's not as like racially diverse as it is here. Like I just don't have that robustness I've never had to have it you know, like every space I've been in always has been very mixed. I think I'm maybe quite aware of my own limits in that like I did like go into a faint when I went to Jamaica for the first time I did similarly go into a faint and like really mean like a fainted and had to lie down for two days when I went to the mountains for the first time. Like I think I really need the kind of horror structure of the city around me to kind of make sense of myself. But then I do find it in small things. So I guess I'm thinking about plants in that way. Like I always love to see like the weeds going out between the cracks and a brick wall and things like that that kind of insistence of something which maybe is a native plant or like a invasive species. Yeah, you know, whether it's like this or or something else, I think I do always find real beauty in those things in the smallness of that. And so I guess I'm thinking about the project I did with Studio Voltaire with the garden there. And I very much approached it as someone who grew up with a tiny back garden in South London, and a garden that was used very much by my parents as a space for them to kind of, they would have seen it as just growing some vegetables to eat but getting older I see that very much as a space that was about quite a performative act in a way of being able to grow an extreme amount of onions I remember being mortified of like my parents like filling the whole back garden with onions and some friends of mine coming around and just not understanding why you would ever do that when you could just get them from the supermarket. It's just this idea of sustaining oneself outside of a work system I think was always really important for me witnessing them doing that so when I made the garden at Studio Voltaire, I kind of brought all of my kind of aesthetic training that I got from the Royal College and being a professional artists but also trying to kind of marry or sub write that or underwrite that with making it the planting really not middle class and there was a constant fight

with that, like I just want it to be Let's grow some beans, Let's grow some tomatoes in a grow bag. Let's let's try and make it as straightforward as possible. And that not be anything like at Royal Horticultural Society space that you know, there's no kind of pretty plants, unless they're the kind of obscure things that I find pretty, you know, like the way I like quite like a dandelion that's not good for a garden especially because it crowds everything else out. But I'm really thinking about the next step of how those plants that we use that have here anyway, have all been brought from overseas but then also very much the very recent history of my parents bringing things overseas. My mom's really that woman who's sneaking stuff through the airport that you're not meant to do but oh, why can't I do it? I want to do it anyway. You know, the classic mum at customs situation like unwrapping stuff, and then having it all kind of taken away and being devastated about the yam that you just got sorted out anyway, but so I think that the garden for me is is my kind of mini hidden. And I think for me, it's always quite hidden like if you know it, then it speaks to you quite clearly like if you did grow up in South London or if your parents are of a certain age and from overseas and came to work here as immigrants so if you have ever felt uncomfortable walking around with Lee or something like that, then maybe it makes a little bit more sense. And I think that's my way of doing it, it still kind of pretends to be is playing it decorative nurse, but it's not so much. And so I think then, in the process of working on that project, tried a little bit probably could have gone further into it. But it did make a point of trying to engage with practitioners in that field. And I think the two the two or three that was most key to me, were Claire Ratan on, and Zeki and Mackenzie and Jackie Mackenzie coming from Jamaica also. And then her kind of expertise and knowledge was a huge gateway for me, just to really understand this kind of space that I had previously been kind of overwhelmed by understanding that I was overwhelmed by it, you know, like thinking about when she told her particular tree, which was always used for truncheons, it's like, oh, maybe that's how that tree really terrifies me, you know, because of the strength of it. And its strength being used against us also, just just kind of the back and forth of the spookiness of things is, is really in the materiality of trade, and commerce and import and export. And whether it's my mum importing and exporting plants from her home country and taking them to Jamaica, and then being misunderstood or the other way around, or understand that it's all the same plants, but we use different bits of it in different places, and there's different fluencies around that, I think has been really important. So I think everything with me is always very personal. But I do see myself as a good sampler, a good sample, you know, it's I, I don't, I'm just going to make my work on my terms, because I know that each person is their own biggest resource.

Joy Gregory 1:01:52

Yeah, and the thing with the plants, because I've been doing a lot of work around sort of like where plants come from, because I'm really interested in, like 17th 18th century and the importance of botany, as sort of like almost more important than gold in terms of its value, and how plants moved around the world around trade, and particularly in relation to transatlantic trade. The national dish almost of Jamaica was like, you know, the breadfruit. And the fact that the enslaved people wouldn't eat it first, I think is really, really interesting. And then sort of, and I'm really interested in sort of, like plants that are here that people think of come from here. Yeah. When in fact, they could come from like Mexico or somewhere, like, and I was like, oh, that's from Mexico. A tomato. Are you mad? No, of course not. But those things are really interesting to me, sort of like how plants have their own agency.

Anthea Hamilton 1:02:46

I love that about plants. They just, they just don't give a shit really do they, don't they. What works for them will work for them on their terms. I think that's really just so beautiful. That kind of willful indifference.

Joy Gregory 1:03:01

Wow, I I think that was one good thing about being at Gasworks was people came from all over the place where we have different experiences and different knowledges of of places. I'm trying to think was never a visiting artist from the Philippines?

Anthea Hamilton 1:03:13

Yeah there is a there is a residency. But then I always felt this kind of imposter syndrome.

Joy Gregory 1:03:18

Like what?

Anthea Hamilton 1:03:20

Not speaking Tagalog or Llocano ? No, not necessarily knowing all the foods hadn't necessarily looking like my mother. So this kind of thing of me declaring my ethnicity but then not being able to back it up with the facts of it.

Joy Gregory 1:03:35

Well, the facts of the blood, but I mean, like but that doesn't matter about the language. You're from here.

Anthea Hamilton 1:03:40

And that's it, I'm from here.

Joy Gregory 1:03:42

I'm from here as well. I came to Jamaica, and I'm definitely not Jamaican.

Anthea Hamilton 1:03:47

No

Joy Gregory 1:03:48

They even know from the way the walk.

Anthea Hamilton 1:03:50

Definitely I was explaining that to my kid that they would be able to tell that we weren't Jamaican. And it's definitely a lot in the walk. But I think maybe you know, like I have Afro hair. I have brown skin. So I look more Jamaican than Filipino.

Joy Gregory 1:04:05

That's because Jamaicans from everywhere. Yeah, everybody could look Jamaican.

Anthea Hamilton 1:04:09

Sure. I mean, there's a big Chinese community.

Joy Gregory 1:04:11

Yeah. So if you look at my cousin, look at my niece, actually, who's who? Who looks Chinese. Except she's got dark skin. And curly hair.

Anthea Hamilton 1:04:22

Yeah.

Jessica Taylor 1:04:23

Was this last trip to Jamaica? Your first time taking your child?

Anthea Hamilton 1:04:26

Yes and I wanted to wait till she was old enough to remember it was talking about like expenses of airfare. Like I didn't want her to have a vague memory of that. So that was good for I think she liked it. I think there is that confusion here. But if you say to people, you're going to Jamaica, they're like, "Oh, lovely". It's it's not necessarily all lovely. Yeah. It's quite hard work. You know, and when my parents home was in a very rural place, it's not just beaches and pina coladas. And their home was in Portland. Yeah. My father's family were from St. Catherine. But they they went to Portland. So, yeah, it's like if you say someone you live in London, it doesn't necessarily mean you live in Notting Hill, which is like the image of it. So there is complete disparity between the stereotypes and the reality of it. I mean, it was very nice. We got to see families, she got to meet her cousins. You know, it was it was a really positive experience for her, which I'm glad that she's got. Yeah. And I think it was nice for her to see my mom in her element. That was hilarious. So yeah, I think it's good. And I'd like to take her back, I feel glad that we got it in, when she was eight still kind of semi kind of formative part of her her life. And that it becomes hopefully a normal part of growing up that we can go there every few years and see people and you can see people building their houses and this kind of slow development of places.

Jessica Taylor 1:05:51

Do you both have any final questions for each other? Before we wrap up?

Joy Gregory 1:05:56

Yes. How did you get into performance?

Anthea Hamilton 1:05:59

Oh

Joy Gregory 1:06:00

As a shy person?

Anthea Hamilton 1:06:02

I mean, I don't perform ever apart from the day to day of it. But you know, but I don't, I'm not in them. I think I just kept getting asked, and being confused as to why I was being asked to do performance. I

think I don't like the terms around particular disciplines. I was bored by the term sculpture for ages and installation, and multimedia or mixed media. So I think the idea of being asked to do something in a fixed genre was quite strange to me. But then, maybe then I got a really nice ask from Katherine Wood at the Tate to do something. And that seemed like something I couldn't resist trying. And it was when the tanks were new. And it was to do something in there. And I think it just kind of like a few things kind of came together. I'd also been on a residency program in Paris where we had to do something in a theater, and I'd kind of come together with a civic idea of what being on a stage might be, or what being in movement in front of people might mean. And then it kind of matched at the same time, as I was asked by Katherine and her team and performance at tight to do something. And I think he kind of came from there. I think maybe the lot of the work looks quite performative. Well, you know, like, I studied painting, but I wanted to work in film. So there's always a sense of something happening. So maybe it was just other people's curiosity, what would happen if it did? Because I was still I don't know, amusing elsewhere? I think I've been very fortunate. And people have seen potential in what it is that I'm doing that if then enabled me to kind of pitch for further things. I think that was what took me to performance. Yeah, it's not one of my stronger points to formulate things in advance. I'm kind of just like doing through with you. Yeah. And then it kind of the kind of the terms and the language around it comes afterwards. So if I had to kind of like deliver in advance what performance would be, I'd still be on that first couple of sentences about what might happen, I think 15 years later. So I'm always grateful for those kind of leaps of faith.

Joy Gregory 1:08:07

And I'm very much sort of like, I don't know what it is until I till I'm doing it, which is, I think so it's really important to work with really confident curators. So I think we're working with somebody who's like, not very confident, and you say, you're not quite sure what it's going to be completely freak someone out, especially if they've got a lot of money riding on it all their reputation, right. But it's sort of, it's being able to trust that it will be okay. It took me a while to do to actually confess, that's what I did. So I'd had no idea. I've been busy in the corner planning not.

Anthea Hamilton 1:08:42

I think trust is key, maybe just as well as that thing of not compromising. I think it's to try and foster trust with other people. I think that's I think that's everything. I find it very difficult to form a question. So I think I've just really enjoyed listening to how you talk about your practice. And it's kind of, yeah, spread all these kind of different aspects of the way in which you do it.

Joy Gregory 1:09:05

Yeah, I feel like I'm still developing my practice. But maybe that's a good thing. Yeah, surely. Yeah. It's just it's a journey, and I don't know where it's going. And it's quite good that it doesn't. I haven't got a mat so I'll just keep walking.

Jessica Taylor 1:09:22

Thank you all for listening to the Living Archive Series. Join us in two weeks when we speak with Alberta Whittle and Sakai Machache. about freedom, collaboration, and their feelings about edges.