

00:00:31:02 - 00:00:35:19

Speaker 1

Thank you so much. To be honest, I'm here is a case of. I'm not going to lie.

00:00:36:03 - 00:00:37:12

Speaker 2

No, no. I just wanted.

00:00:37:12 - 00:00:46:05

Speaker 1

An opportunity to ask some questions and to find out more. But thank you so much for having us. And why should we stop?

00:00:46:16 - 00:00:47:11

Speaker 2

Should we? We look.

00:00:47:11 - 00:00:47:20

Speaker 1

At that.

00:00:48:04 - 00:01:21:21

Speaker 3

Yeah. I mean, we need to do interviews, pronouns and all that stuff as well. You know, be good. So yeah, she, her Keesha I. And for anyone who needs the audio description, I usually say I'm 160 centimeters. Lady Brown. Lady Usually we braids big brown eyes and I'm wearing a kind of snake, pretty black, red, yellow top and some black jeans and some black DMS.

00:01:21:22 - 00:01:25:09

Speaker 3

Dr. Martin's. Leave it that I am.

00:01:25:17 - 00:01:27:03

Speaker 2

Thank you. 100.

00:01:27:03 - 00:01:29:16

Speaker 1

And 67 To me as I'm like, I'm quite far from that.

00:01:29:16 - 00:01:30:06

Speaker 2

To be honest.

00:01:30:07 - 00:01:50:13

Speaker 1

And am I am a black woman. Long black hair. Off the shoulder, black and white. And also secretly admiring black desiring Tariq's trousers from this morning. I wish I was wearing them and. But yes. Really? Really. My pronouns are she her.

00:01:52:05 - 00:02:16:09

Speaker 3

Cool. Okay, so we've been asked to talk about dynamism but friendly with everyone knows. Yeah. I was really intrigued actually, when I was thinking about the word and we were just talking about should we start with the definition that's in the Arts Council documentation? We may as well as you may. You just read the owl. So we'll read the owl.

00:02:16:17 - 00:02:28:10

Speaker 3

But also I because I'm a geek and I love words, I did a little Google because I was like, What does it mean actually? So I'll share that as well. After got a.

00:02:28:10 - 00:02:28:23

Speaker 2

Gift.

00:02:30:13 - 00:02:33:21

Speaker 3

So should I read the Arts Council.

00:02:33:21 - 00:02:35:15

Speaker 1

Thing with your beautiful radio voice?

00:02:37:12 - 00:03:04:14

Speaker 3

I don't know what this is about. I don't know. I don't know. Okay. So the Arts Council guidance says we are looking to governance and leadership to inspire and embody an approach that is self-reflective and creative, but also outward facing and responsive. We are looking for organizational cultures and structures that enable change inside by sensing changes externally. MM.

00:03:05:15 - 00:03:07:21

Speaker 3

So do we feel like we know what that means?

00:03:10:11 - 00:03:12:01

Speaker 1

Why have we come today?

00:03:14:07 - 00:03:21:12

Speaker 3

It's that, isn't it? That's what happens. Like you. It makes you feel like you're in school again and you, like, read something in an exam and you're like.

00:03:22:00 - 00:03:23:07

Speaker 2

Oh my God, what does that?

00:03:23:07 - 00:03:45:24

Speaker 3

Well, what does that mean? Yeah. So and I've worked for the Arts Council for a year, and I was in the mix when this was happening. And it is is really difficult to figure out what language to use to communicate what you want to see and so that's why I took myself to Google, because I was just like, Well, what does it actually just mean?

00:03:46:11 - 00:04:14:16

Speaker 3

And and the symbology of it comes back to a Greek word, which I can't remember what it is. I'm not going to try and say it, but it means power. And it's about instigating change and being a force, which I thought was quite interesting because I think when you read it from the remit of the Arts Council, it can almost sound as if you're needing to be like reactionary or just kind of be a victim of change.

00:04:14:16 - 00:04:38:04

Speaker 3

Like just be aware that things change and you just need to be ready for that. And it's like, No, actually, how about being the change? How about demonstrating change and modeling it and knowing that that is what inherently the sector is? It fluctuates. So how are you a part of that or how do you like show your mastery in that?

00:04:38:20 - 00:05:01:11

Speaker 1

It's so refreshing. We were like, we didn't want to plan because we wanted this to be an emergent conversation. We're going to find out together what the right conversation for this room is. But even as you were talking, there, I said earlier, I pick up black feminist for any given moment. But as you're talking, it reminds me of Octavia Butler, who says the only lasting truth is change.

00:05:01:20 - 00:05:21:10

Speaker 1

Sometimes I feel like we position change as though it's this thing out there that we all kind of we know we want it. And then when we reach the thing, like we'll be there. And it's like, actually, if change is a constant and I acknowledge that, how then would I organize? And as someone who am I? I'm really excited.

00:05:21:10 - 00:05:40:23

Speaker 1

But the premise of like creating definitions for ourselves and finding out what, what, what does our work mean to us and how do we how do we practice that together? I talk a lot about my work as like rehearsal. Our mission, Maya, is a work towards liberation. Now, I don't know if anyone else has lived in a liberated world.

00:05:42:24 - 00:06:02:23

Speaker 1

I definitely haven't. And the idea of we don't know, we don't know what that looks like. All that we can do is practice it into being. So the bit that I'm really interested in as organizations, the forms that we take to practice the world that we want to be, how do we have to do that reimagining. And we've talked a lot about imagination today, but how do we do that?

00:06:02:23 - 00:06:26:00

Speaker 1

Reimagining every scale from how we think about and understand good governance, How when, when Arts Council, for example, say, access, how do we feel about that rather than just kind of saying this is the standard, Can we constantly be in that dialog, in that exchange? Can we constantly push the boundaries? What do we need to practice and who to guide that direction?

00:06:26:04 - 00:06:44:18

Speaker 1

That's the bit that I'm really interested in. And at the same time, when you were talking, I was thinking about the spaces that we navigate through and that we move through and the journeys that we're on. And I would love to ask you of like your origin story. I'm like, How is Keisha Thompson? Because I'm like, I did my Googles on you.

00:06:45:18 - 00:06:57:08

Speaker 1

And I remember seeing like the first spoken word artists, which is how I was first familiar with you, was as an artist, but the first spoken word artist.

00:06:57:08 - 00:06:59:03

Speaker 2

CEO of a venue.

00:07:00:06 - 00:07:01:24

Speaker 1

What was your journey, baby? Wasn't?

00:07:04:17 - 00:07:24:02

Speaker 3

Yeah, it's weird when they said that because I was like, I mean, how do we verify that? Because there's so many artists that, you know, they're known for being fair or music or whatever, but they were also spoken word, so I'm sure one of them's already running the venue. All right, I'll take it. I love it. We are.

00:07:24:03 - 00:07:46:15

Speaker 3

So what's my origin story in terms of like getting into the arts? I was one of those really annoying kids. So from like when I was four because I was just energized and just being a thing of energy in my mom's house. I got thrown into so many things. So I was doing like ballet and choir and netball and knitting class and drama and just anything, anything.

00:07:46:15 - 00:08:14:13

Speaker 3

And I'm really grateful that I lived in an area where my school was so like they were advocates for the arts. So we used to have artists coming through all the time and I was doing indie music and steel pans and just, just everything and, and then also had a family that none of them were artists, but they would take me to the gallery, take me to things, take me to shows, and they had loads of art spaces in my area, literally walking distance.

00:08:14:20 - 00:08:40:22

Speaker 3

So I was just going out and just engaging with culture just on a daily basis. So it was pervasive to me. It felt very normal and I'm again grateful that my story, I always talk about the fact that it was so multicultural, so literally at the top, there's a Hindu temple, there's high Christmas and there's like free mosques, there's like four churches, there's a good right around the corner.

00:08:41:04 - 00:09:10:08

Speaker 3

And yeah, it's just just very, very multicultural. And also my mom used to work for a Jewish company, so I used to drive away and off into these other areas as well and meet loads of Jewish people as well. So just my exposure, it's just different religions and cultures was just rich. So it just gave me that sense of just knowing that people are different.

00:09:10:08 - 00:09:39:08

Speaker 3

But that's a really beautiful thing and that you can live harmoniously as well. So it's interesting that you say, and have you lived in a liberated world. I feel like I've got a little microcosm that I have access to. I've seen that reality where people can give each of a respect for their differences and you see fusions, but also kind of boundaries where you're like, Well, this is my culture and you don't mimic it, you understand it and you appreciate it, but you don't.

00:09:39:20 - 00:09:44:04

Speaker 3

And yeah, we don't need to go into appropriation. I don't need to do that.

00:09:44:13 - 00:09:45:10

Speaker 1

Maybe, you know.

00:09:47:18 - 00:09:50:23

Speaker 3

I so that's my origin story. Essentially in terms.

00:09:51:04 - 00:10:11:13

Speaker 1

Of Yes, yes. I love that. Even the idea of that we get these glimmers almost of like the possibility of of what like what it might be to live in that type of harmony. And it's not about like perfection. I feel like perfection is a way that's come up a lot today, but it's like, what might it look like that we get these glimmers?

00:10:11:18 - 00:10:43:05

Speaker 1

I speak a lot about the precedents for the work that we do. Maya Um, a key thing for us is we never looked to the cultural sector. Sorry, not sorry. We never look to the cultural sector to say, what is it that we want to model? Because you know, the reason. So I'm sure my, my co-founder is here today, but the reason that we came together as 21 ish year olds over ten years ago was because we couldn't access opportunity in the arts.

00:10:43:10 - 00:11:07:04

Speaker 1

And so we knew that literally we couldn't get a job, we couldn't get a job in a venue, like we couldn't get a job as artists. We just couldn't get any work. So we were like, We have to create the infrastructure that can support our needs, our livelihoods, etc. And we know that that's the journey. We know that there are so many people who share the experiences that we share and we were like, What's the type of organization that we want to grow?

00:11:07:04 - 00:11:25:10

Speaker 1

Like, what does that look like? And because it didn't look like the cultural sector, which at the time was a pressing people like us, and I say at the time, it's still oppressing people like us. We didn't want to say that. That's our starting point. So for me, dynamism is like, where are the precedents for the work that we're actually wanting to create?

00:11:25:14 - 00:11:52:20

Speaker 1

And the Spirit and you've talked about your story, and for me it was my granddad's house. I look at my granddad's house and I'm like, Oh, look like people who might have seen me or met me before, you know, any chance I get, I'll talk about my granddad. But my granddad's house is like alive and convivial and jam packed with people and furniture and like, plastic on the couches and mahogany and, like stories and all and culture.

00:11:53:00 - 00:12:11:05

Speaker 1

Now, the cultural sector might not acknowledge this as like a cultural venue, but for me, unlike everything that I know about how I want to organize the ways in which I want people to feel invited, the sacred space. It was actually a quiet space. If you needed a break out, you know that front room that you're not actually supposed to go in like you might have to go in there.

00:12:11:05 - 00:12:32:07

Speaker 1

Like, I started to understand that my granddad's house was infrastructure. I was having a conversation with a couple of people earlier today about gaming. And gaming was another introduction for me of spatial politics. So people always say, like, you're an artist. Like, how did you get into like land and buildings.

00:12:32:07 - 00:12:33:06

Speaker 2

And the law.

00:12:33:06 - 00:12:55:23

Speaker 1

And like, how did you get interested in those systems? And I said, I'm going to be really honest. Like, as are you. I love Grand Theft Auto, I love GTA. Those maps on GTA, I became obsessed with like I started to design my own series and from designing my own cities, I said, Well, what like what's the bits in the city that make a livable place?

00:12:55:23 - 00:13:14:01

Speaker 1

Where's the social infrastructure? Of course I didn't have that language. It like ten years old. But what is the social infrastructure? What makes a place? What needs to exist there? What would the theater be like? How would it work? What would the economics of the place be and where would the waste go? Like, how do we treat people?

00:13:14:07 - 00:13:31:02

Speaker 1

And then this is so geeky, I can't believe I'm saying this here. I had like another textbook, a TV, all these books from like maths, like I use, I have all these like maths textbooks. We all are little squares. I used to write column like draw columns and write the people who lived in the city that I designed and I would write out their story.

00:13:31:02 - 00:13:52:14

Speaker 1

Look, I can't believe I love them. I would write out their story and then I would write like I would build worlds for these characters. And that at the same time, I fell in love with theater because I watched Roy Williams little sweet thing finger like 2004 or five. And I was like, I think this is a way I was like, set design, story, narrative.

00:13:52:14 - 00:14:12:18

Speaker 1

I think this is how I'm making this connection between like the world building and that's that sort of narrative that I was like, I think as artists, we're more than people who make others feel good. We're more than like the energy. It's more than wellbeing. I think there's something about artists that is how do we design the world that we're dreaming about?

00:14:12:24 - 00:14:34:21

Speaker 1

Can we take our ability to give ideas, form, give materiality, give nuance, give context? Can we build liberation? Can we rehearse that into being? And that's the thing that I never see artists uplifted for. So to me, when I saw spoken word artist as a CEO of a building, I was like, of.

00:14:34:21 - 00:14:37:00

Speaker 2

Course, of course.

00:14:37:00 - 00:15:08:04

Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. I love everything that you just said then. And also I love maths as well. I was trained as a maths teacher, so I would like to throw that in there because they're not like we were saying, they're not separate. These things you get asked like, oh, how are you into maths but also into this and it's just like if you're someone who is been encouraged to be creative from a young age, the whole point is that you make connections and that you join things or in play.

00:15:08:04 - 00:15:48:07

Speaker 3

You just play with whatever you're given and so yeah, I think coming back to the topic of dynamism, another thing that appears to be a kind of binary, which is definitely false, is this idea that you can't be formal, that you can't formalize



your systems for change. So it's like I'm so much an advocate for encouraging people to play and be radical and creative and be and fluctuate, but you need to have things in place to allow that to happen.

00:15:48:18 - 00:16:12:06

Speaker 3

Um, and yeah, when I was working at Contact as a young people's producer for six years, that was my thing the whole time. As I need to create the structure, I need to put the things in place so that my young people can flourish, so that my artists is safe, so that everything is in check, so that you can then go into the middle and do your thing.

00:16:12:24 - 00:16:39:03

Speaker 3

But so often and when I'm when I was I'm engaged with our is for the Future Ventures Foundation and I mentioned in my intro, I'd say, you know, I'm the chair of this radical funding body and people would be like, Will you just give me the money now? Then that's radical. And I was like, No, that's just deeply problematic.

00:16:39:07 - 00:17:09:01

Speaker 3

And I'm also an advocate for poverty. I mean, like, there's a process. There's a process just because if we instigate a radical, ah, and support radical artists, it doesn't mean we're just wild. It's just ad hoc and unaccountable. Like, that's ridiculous. And this fairy attached to change this group dynamic very that you can't get away from. And I've been doing sessions on it with my leadership team and my senior management team.

00:17:09:01 - 00:17:29:13

Speaker 3

So looking at, you know, you form, you stole, you know, you perform it literally, you can't get away from it. That's what happens all the time. There'll be a point when you new to a situation friction things will go wrong you figuring it out that system period then you know and then you perform. I mean you might mourn or whatever whatever the last part is this very there's variations on it.

00:17:29:20 - 00:17:36:14

Speaker 3

But if you know that, then like be at peace with that and build that into a structure and you processes.

00:17:36:24 - 00:17:41:07

Speaker 1

I have never heard this before. I'm like moonstone, but yeah.

00:17:41:18 - 00:17:42:24

Speaker 2

Yeah. Save that for the.

00:17:43:09 - 00:17:44:21

Speaker 3

Group Dynamic theory.

00:17:45:18 - 00:17:49:21

Speaker 1

I love this. There's so much in here that my brain is saying.

00:17:49:21 - 00:17:50:17

Speaker 2

Hey, hey.

00:17:50:17 - 00:18:15:11

Speaker 1

Hey. There's something about this idea of, like the the structure or the, like the due diligence and the process that I would love to talk about in this space. And I'm thinking about that. So we have I thought we have a really sometimes when we use the word radical, people like conflate it with like huge. When I think about radical, I think about it in the Angela Davis sense.

00:18:15:11 - 00:18:48:14

Speaker 1

It's about getting to the root of so we have a very radical ambition, which is about getting to the root of like structural change, like getting to the roots of oppression in order to practice liberation. And I had this moment a few years ago where I felt really frustrated by this due diligence. And I feel like this might be a shared experience by people who are like, the bureaucracy is killing our creativity, or I can't get my, my, my everyday practice in alignment with my personal values and the organizations ones.

00:18:48:18 - 00:19:11:16

Speaker 1

And I was really in the thick of this a few years ago, and I was having a conversation with my dear friend Jack Tan. If anyone doesn't know, Jack Tan followed Jack Tan and Jack. We were having a conversation and and Jack was like, Maybe you just need to create a little residency for yourself. He's like, Maybe there's something in.

00:19:12:03 - 00:19:34:05

Speaker 1

A lot of our work is about black imagination. So Jack was like, Maybe you need to think about accounting in the black imagination, because I was like, Jack, I have to account to Companies House and HMRC and I have a legal requirement to do it. And Jack was like, If we think about that as storytelling, that's one way

of doing storytelling to those bodies.

00:19:34:12 - 00:19:55:21

Speaker 1

There's lots of other ways to tell the story of your organization's finance. It's about going's it. It's labor. He was like, Can you think about that? Can you create a residency for yourself to find out what that might be? And I love what you've just said about maths because we we basically created a residency that was how do we account in the black imagination.

00:19:56:06 - 00:20:14:22

Speaker 1

And for that we have to basically create a new language. And we were understanding that maths and number system is another language and it's ones that we all kind of like we subscribe to. But the idea that you can create more languages, as we said, as artists, can we not create our own language of how we do accounting?

00:20:15:04 - 00:20:39:14

Speaker 1

Can it work at the intersection of art and design? So we invited all of these artists and residents to join us. The team were artists and residents as well, and we said like, what would it look like if we co-design this language together? And then can we build practical tools as artists that start to implement our language? And in that way we had a bunch of artists who were like, I've never sat down and looked at a spreadsheet like, I don't do numbers.

00:20:39:17 - 00:20:58:01

Speaker 1

All of a sudden I don't like numbers. No, some people are like, I really like numbers for balance teams, but like we were like, we actually have to think about this as a creative endeavor. And so often when we're doing like we think about due diligence, it's like a thing that we do over there so that we can get back to the stuff that we really want to do.

00:20:58:07 - 00:21:21:14

Speaker 1

And it's always in contradict and sometimes that feels like such a stifling premise. So we stagnate and we get stuck and we say, Oh gosh, well I guess I have to keep doing this. And then the other question is, but capacity and time. So then I'm like, Well, what are our artistic programs in service of? Like what is our engagement strategy in service of who are the partners who might be able to support this?

00:21:21:14 - 00:21:49:19

Speaker 1

We were really blessed, but we had incredible funding partners who were on

this journey with us. One of the critiques that we had, I say this as a caveat we didn't have any core funding. Maya is ten years old this year. We didn't have any core funding until 2019. Arts Council invited us to join the Elevate. We were elevate and elevate recipients, which is the first time, thank God, because then COVID happened.

00:21:50:01 - 00:22:19:20

Speaker 1

But that was the first time that we were able to employ anybody. Like I went on payroll. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Everything changed. I'm going on like all of those things. But becoming that an organization that is accountable to more things, it's so easy to get stuck. And I loved the idea that dynamism for me is also seeing all of the capacities with which within which artists can show up in the work so that we don't start to separate and say, Yeah, but that's our cultural program over here.

00:22:19:20 - 00:22:29:15

Speaker 1

And I take care of finance. We talk a lot about collaboration, but we don't collaborate well within our organizations, so how might we start to grow the capacity to do that more?

00:22:30:00 - 00:22:49:02

Speaker 3

Yeah, So I suppose this is a good opportunity for us to do some of the pragmatic stuff now, isn't it? Because we were saying so many of these conversations can be quite cerebral and like, you know, heady and we're just chatting about concepts and that's lovely for I'm sure you want to like go, Well, actually, what does that mean?

00:22:49:23 - 00:23:23:24

Speaker 3

So just tapping into what you just say. And then one of the first things that I did when I started in this role as CEO contact was did one or two ones of every single member of staff, which was long and tiring, but very important. And I also restructured the staff meetings agenda and made sure that there was a department to speak day in Section because there was that very thing of like the departments are not talking to each other and then I'm just getting all these emails, people moaning at me and I'm like, You just need to talk to each other and you just need to understand how you work.

00:23:24:04 - 00:23:36:00

Speaker 3

So I just said, Serve what I meant. Tell me what you timelines usually are like because you know, you'll get someone from, let's say, the artistic team messages when in marketing and going, Oh, can we just put social media post out for this thing? And they're like.

00:23:36:00 - 00:23:37:24

Speaker 2

No, it takes two weeks and I've.

00:23:38:20 - 00:23:59:17

Speaker 3

Put all these things into what's it called, tweet whatever or whatever, and it's like, Well, we don't know the like, chill out, you know, it's it's just like, let's all put it on one big thing of how we work and then speed day and yeah, we just like separate into our departments and go round, round, round and just go, Oh, you need to know this.

00:23:59:17 - 00:24:19:20

Speaker 3

So I actually cover these things and this person doesn't do that and it takes this person this long and it's like, Oh great, great, great. And just getting rid of the friction. So that's one thing that we do to be more harmony is to be ready for change, keeping it updated in a way that feels fun. So it's not just this boring like the staff meeting.

00:24:20:01 - 00:24:35:15

Speaker 3

Everyone's kind of looking into another one. And um, yeah, so I've just been looking at ways that like, how can we do what we need to do but be fun and be ourselves with it? And so, yeah. Is there anything that you want in speed?

00:24:35:21 - 00:25:01:13

Speaker 1

Yeah, One of the things that so we are, we're a small organization. There's seven of us and again, we've only been, we've only had core funding since like 2020 really. And up until that point we were kind of like piece mealing jobbing, like doing what we could when we could work and with who we could, etc.. Volunteering a lot like, yeah, don't recommend.

00:25:01:13 - 00:25:32:07

Speaker 1

I mean, no, let me delete. But, but thought we weren't like I wasn't working in a way in which I wanted to. It was like necessity. It was survival. That's what I don't recommend. Like the idea that we all we inherit these systems and these structures and that we, we then just sort of like continue. I didn't want to be like growing this organization that sustained a sort of like hierarchical, inequitable power dynamic.

00:25:32:13 - 00:26:02:10

Speaker 1

And so people always said to us, you know, it's all good and well, you say that

as a small organization that's agile. I work in an institution that's like 100 years old, like I don't know how to create change. So I really love this offering for you. It's like, you know, coming into an organization that has been running for some time and being able to make something that technically is small, logistically, it might be a whole other scale operation, but these are like the small invitations that you make to practice that warmth.

00:26:02:10 - 00:26:23:14

Speaker 1

We talk a lot about radical hospitality and that's not just the things that we create outwardly, but it's who we are as a people inside of this thing. But for me, I always remember and maybe this is particularly relevant for people in small organizations or independent who are thinking about how to organize and what we do and don't want to sustain.

00:26:24:00 - 00:26:43:08

Speaker 1

And I had this moment where I was like that the top down hierarchy is not something that we want to model, but also the sort of bottom up approach in which we now have like this uprising, which are a lot of people at the top, but somebody still has to be at the bottom of this shape, this structure to win.

00:26:43:17 - 00:27:12:10

Speaker 1

We said there must be other shapes, there must be other ways of being. So we said we worked with an incredible consultant consultancy called Align and we were talking a lot about a solar system as a model. And we said, What would it mean if we acknowledge that there are ways of organizing that are, that are interdependent? So where that's come up today that erm in which everything is relational, in which everything, it's not about like higher or lower but it's about just being.

00:27:12:17 - 00:27:32:11

Speaker 1

So we said what would it mean if the sun was our mission, a role. So you don't put the CEO at the center of the universe, you put your mission. One of the things that was really important for us is our work is about collective, well, that world building, which means it's a co-creation practice. So we say our vision then cannot be fixed.

00:27:32:16 - 00:27:57:05

Speaker 1

The things that we're trying to build are not fixed and finished. What's fixed is our mission. And I say that because if we start getting mission drift, we start doing the little things that are just a bit off that tells us one or two things. Either we need to reevaluate what our mission is, what we're in service of, go through the whole process and get it back on check, or we really need to sit with

ourselves as a conversation that this sector doesn't like to have.

00:27:57:12 - 00:28:18:02

Speaker 1

And I say this the social sector, the cultural sector is does our organization need to end? If I keep shifting my mission, if I just keep evolving and changing, and in five years time it looks something completely different, Maybe it needs to end. And I want to introduce at this point there's an incredible I should have a slide.

00:28:18:15 - 00:28:50:05

Speaker 1

There's an incredible framework that we use called the Bikaner Institute to lose model. And yes, my people. Thanks, Tom. It talks about this emerging system and the current system. And the idea is that these two loops they never touch because ultimately the emerging system always, eventually becomes the current one, the current one. They should always be pioneers who come from the current system and help to create the sort of the road to the emerging system.

00:28:50:15 - 00:29:09:18

Speaker 1

And what's critical in that is that within that there are always the stabilizers, the people who are holding the ground, who are making sure that those pioneers have enough structure in place so that they can do whatever it is that they're doing to cultivate the new system. There are also people who do the hospice work acknowledging if something is ending.

00:29:09:18 - 00:29:31:20

Speaker 1

Can we do that as generous simply as possible? There are people who are doing the composting. What ends like? How does it end? What do we do after the end? And in that loop, this constant like movement, when I talk about Save Your Butler, the only lasting truth is change. I think as a sector we could do a better job of looking at where in this horizon, where in this system might we be?

00:29:31:23 - 00:29:55:08

Speaker 1

All of us can't be pioneers. All of us can't be stabilizers and stabilizers. Doesn't mean you know, well, I'm a 150 year old institution. We've just got to keep doing. What are you stabilizing for? Like, what are we really stabilizing and why? I think that the key thing for me is we cannot shortcut the organizational development that we have to undertake to do this work with.

00:29:55:11 - 00:30:22:05

Speaker 1

We're talking about compounding crises. We're talking about things like

cascade in the we talked about earlier today. The environmental crisis is not disconnected from the racial justice crisis. Disability justice crisis, like none of this is disconnected. So if we're looking at the scale of challenge, yes, it's huge. No, none of us can do it on our own. But I think the first thing is to be radically honest about what it is that we're maintaining.

00:30:22:17 - 00:30:39:18

Speaker 1

And then are our organizations prepared to tend to any scale of this because we jump to like, gosh, we've got to make these radical shifts and it's like, we haven't done the basics. Like, do I know the rest of my team? Do I? Do I encounter my board? And it's like, Oh gosh, I can't make any shifts here.

00:30:39:18 - 00:31:00:06

Speaker 1

Like let's do a little audit and say like, What do I need to know about this organization? What? Where do I have agency? Where Don't I? What can be reinvented? How? Who do we need to bring in the key thing? Can we stop infantilizing artists and audiences? We're in we're in an art, we're in the art sector, and we treat artists like crap.

00:31:00:06 - 00:31:25:19

Speaker 1

Let's be honest. Like they're they're at the bottom of the hierarchy. Our audiences are at the bottom are communities are at the bottom of this hierarchy. We can't make this change work in this power dynamic. Now we have to be honest about that. Only in that honesty can we actually make pragmatic steps. But I feel like it's that level of truth telling and even the idea of making space within our organizations, we can't jump to like, let's go to the commune and do this work.

00:31:25:19 - 00:31:27:04

Speaker 1

And house is like on fire.

00:31:27:04 - 00:31:49:05

Speaker 3

Yep, yep, yep, yep. Absolutely. See, things just don't tell me when you talk. And then so the last bit that you just had about the relationship with the artists, one of the things that I've been doing is an artist detox. So set up a me in an online meeting and I've also got dinner that's happening in my where I want the ice to just come and go.

00:31:49:05 - 00:32:14:11

Speaker 3

This is how I feel, this is how I've been treated. And it was good, it was bad, blah, blah, blah. And I'm taking that by. I don't want my artistic team to feel



attacked or to become negative or anything like that, but I want it to be a productive conversation. But it will require like brutal honesty. So I said, I'm happy to host that and facilitate that conversation and then let the feedback go both ways.

00:32:14:19 - 00:32:32:02

Speaker 3

Um, but yeah, it was interesting because the online one that I did, it only ended up being one artist that could turn up to one of the sessions. But he was like, This is weird for me. I've never had this kind of conversation with a CEO. I've never had a CEO. Just go, How's the experience been for you?

00:32:32:02 - 00:32:53:16

Speaker 3

Was it good? Was it bad? I'd just be honest. And we talked it through and it was so useful and so insightful. And I was thinking, why wouldn't I can't imagine doing this any of away. Like, how can I move forward and try and put things in place even if I'm not listening to the experiences of people and not acknowledging that we probably got a lot of stuff wrong.

00:32:53:16 - 00:33:13:02

Speaker 3

And I can't just keep I can't push that under the under the table. So, yeah, it just it just feels a bit weird that I'm kind of doing stuff that feels intuitive and just whatever. I'm not trying to make any kind of statements, but I'm being told that I'm being radical and that feels weird, but I'm like, whatever.

00:33:14:20 - 00:33:37:05

Speaker 3

And it was also quite poignant when you talking about endings, because the body that I'm chair of the radical funding body, we're coming to an end this financial year. So I've been a trustee since 2015 and I became the chair in 2018, and we've always known that we'd last for like seven years and that's been so liberating for us.

00:33:37:14 - 00:34:06:18

Speaker 3

So we actually got our funding from it was London House in Cumbria and they got their funding caught in 2010 I think. So then they decided that they would just take that money and liquid eyes and just set up a new organization. And it was this, the Future Ventures Foundation, and there was a very clear remit, very clear manifesto, and they were always just like, We're going to just do stuff for seven years, we're going to fund this fund out and then we're done.

00:34:07:11 - 00:34:25:03

Speaker 3

And like it's been so joy, it has been a part of it and all the artists have loved it.

And we've got a really great network and it was like, Please keep going. And we're just like, No, no, we're just going to do this for seven years. Model stuff. We decided that every single year we tried different way of funding, so we've been able to test something.

00:34:25:10 - 00:34:48:17

Speaker 3

And then when lockdown happened, we created some booklets and shared our learnings and invited funders and did some online events and that was great. As well. And again, just tried a different way of funding and put just funded loads of ideas as many as we could because we were just like, that's what the sector needs right now. Freelancers just need space and time for.

00:34:49:16 - 00:35:04:23

Speaker 3

Yeah, it's just been really amazing to just know that we're coming to an end, but I love that we're coming to an end. We've got our last me and this week we've got our last bit, our crumbs of funding and of what we do with art. And then I say.

00:35:06:00 - 00:35:24:17

Speaker 1

They're so powerful because even that like knowing something is going to end and orienting as though endings themselves can be generative, it shifts like practice. At the same time. I feel like what we reckon with as a country is, you know, in the West.

00:35:24:17 - 00:35:26:00

Speaker 2

We, we, we.

00:35:26:02 - 00:35:55:17

Speaker 1

Tie together legacy endurance like longevity and permanence, like all of these things where it's like that in order to really address other possibilities is we can't do that without having an honest conversation about how we got here. And we can't have an honest conversation about how we got here without talking about things like land, property, wealth, how it's been accumulated, how it's been distributed, how it hasn't been like all of these things for us.

00:35:55:17 - 00:36:17:22

Speaker 1

Like I remember in 2015, 2016, I was on tour with a show and I hadn't been paid yet by the theater I was working with, and I ended up like slumming out on my friend's couch, as you do in South London. And I. I should have. So I was seven months pregnant. Don't recommend being on tour. Seven months pregnant.

00:36:18:13 - 00:36:38:17

Speaker 1

But I was slumming out on my friend's couch and I literally was thinking about, like, what was the infrastructure that would need to help me in this moment or like, what are the economies that would need to help me out in this moment? Because the way things are right now, it's not it's not working and not only that, it's like I'm suffering because it's not working.

00:36:39:02 - 00:37:00:04

Speaker 1

And it led me to think about the types of spaces that we would need to design and also what they would be rooted in. So I always talked about video games and the sort of like my spatial politics, if you like, was being shaped by art, like it was being shaped by other designers, it was being shaped by musicians.

00:37:00:04 - 00:37:43:05

Speaker 1

I'm a hip hop nerd, and hip hop for me was something that introduced me to spatial politics. Like my the earliest rap records were literally critiques of their physical environment. It was a critique of the project. Grime was a critique of the estates like it, and not exclusively so, but that was a fundamental part of it. It was the built environment that necessitated its birth, which means, like I'm always interested in like how could we re-imagine the physical environment if we thought about the poets, the musicians who are creating art as the designers of what would you need for you to not have a critique of your critique, to not kind of respect what?

00:37:43:05 - 00:38:03:17

Speaker 1

How do we think about the musicians as designers? At the same time, there is something really inequitable about inequitable, sorry about space and how space is accessed. And so when I was thinking about this space that we would need to create, I was also like, But what land would it be situated on? And who owns that land and how is that held?

00:38:03:17 - 00:38:31:07

Speaker 1

Because if you know, some institutions are running 100 years because they were gifted land by their local council, then we have to have that conversation. Or if you know, somebody inherited a heck of a lot of wealth off enslavement of African people. And now we're sitting here saying we're underfunding black artists. We have to have that conversation. So I went away and I was thinking about all of this and I was like, the type of space that I am imagining.

00:38:31:07 - 00:39:01:21

Speaker 1

It's like it would look like a hotel. It would work like a cultural space, but it would feel like the spirit of my grandad's house. So I set this out as a vision, made a block because I'm like, we have to like, share our ideas as quickly as prematurely as possible. That's how we grow movements. It's not when we've perfected the thing, put it out and can we grow our ideas together and find people to align with in that journey?

00:39:02:02 - 00:39:18:09

Speaker 1

I put it out and loads of developers got touch. This is amazing. Would you like this building? Here's a one year lease. What? Here's a five year lease. So we would take it on, build it for three years, be in it for a couple of months and then.

00:39:18:13 - 00:39:19:02

Speaker 3

Give it back.

00:39:19:09 - 00:39:48:01

Speaker 1

Or you would price us out or whatever else. So, you know, so we were like, especially as black arts organizations who throughout history, those black arts organizations were the first to go when public money got cut, which means that we were fighting for something different, our right to being. We had to interrogate the economics. We said, we don't want to be public public funding reliant and also in the economy itself, none of us can rely on being, none of us can rely on public funding.

00:39:48:18 - 00:40:09:12

Speaker 1

So for us, thinking about that hotel, thinking about that model, thinking about the spirit of it is like an interdependent struggle. We're also saying, like we're acknowledging how many people are being missed the way things are, acknowledging that the economy right now is rooted in people being able to have at the expense of others not having like these are conversations.

00:40:09:12 - 00:40:22:15

Speaker 1

I just feel like we don't we don't really talk about how do we speak about dynamism without thinking about how are people living right now? Like, yeah, what are what are we continuing? What are we actually sustaining? Look, I'm going off from one now because.

00:40:23:23 - 00:40:54:24

Speaker 3

Now is two. Because the thing that I always say to myself whenever I'm thinking about my role and when I'm in the place of power, you know, as a funder or, you

know, with the role I've got contact is I'm like the arts always going to happen. But I always happens. It's always going to be artists. So I just need to take myself down and take the ego away of thinking that I'm like allowing someone to be an artist or enlightening them.

00:40:54:24 - 00:41:17:22

Speaker 3

No, the hour is always going to happen. So what did they need from me? How do I stay relevant? What's my. I've got a building. Okay. What? What do people need? Do they want to perform right now? Do they want fear? What do they want? They want some food. What they want do. I mean, just like, what does the space need to be for what's happening in the world right now?

00:41:18:00 - 00:41:43:10

Speaker 3

And how do I just create parity? The art that already exists and give it the validity that it deserves and acknowledge those things as we were saying, the dynamics in the power structures. That's what I need to be doing. And so we've got really great relationship with the University of Manchester. The building is on the campus and it does technically belong to them and we have an agreement with them.

00:41:43:15 - 00:42:00:18

Speaker 3

But I had a really great conversation with them that the last time and that we needed to renew our partnership agreement. So it was lit as soon as I started. The role was like, for instance, me and which was great because I could just go, I'm no, I don't know what the hell is going on here, so just tell me what's going on.

00:42:02:05 - 00:42:32:14

Speaker 3

But I was very open with them. I said, You know, I've developed this anti-racism training package for contacts. So we go round and teach each of our cultural organizations about anti-racism. And I said, I've done some work in the university. We've the I've seen that you also have your own thing called code addressing some of these things, but it's not pervasive enough because when I went to that university, I had a terrible time and I'm from Manchester, so how does that work?

00:42:32:20 - 00:42:59:15

Speaker 3

And then I'm speaking to some of my young people there decades on, and they're having the same experience. So there's still not enough happening. So that's the conversation I want to have of you. I'm not really interested in talking about like, Oh, it's going to come here and whatever. Yeah, yeah, yeah, cool. But I want to talk about the fact that I know that there are young people still

going into that university from global majorities and having a culture shock of their lifetime and they're from Manchester.

00:42:59:20 - 00:43:04:20

Speaker 3

How is that possible? Because it's a multicultural city. So let's talk.

00:43:04:20 - 00:43:05:19

Speaker 2

About not.

00:43:06:03 - 00:43:43:18

Speaker 1

Just that structural piece of like and it's interesting because someone asked a question this morning about apologies if I'm paraphrasing poorly, but someone was talking about how do we support the diversity within diversity? So they were referring to sort of East Asian communities, Eastern European communities, people organizations who who are missed, who aren't being resourced, etc.. And I've been saying with that with that question all day, because part of me was like, I think a lot of onus goes to the individual.

00:43:43:23 - 00:44:02:21

Speaker 1

Like as an organization, I think you have to do this and I think you have to shift. And I think and you have to make new work and that's part of it. But we don't talk about structurally, structurally, what needs to change for that to be possible. How do you have integrity and agency as someone who's doing their part in a system that won't shift?

00:44:03:06 - 00:44:23:07

Speaker 1

And this part of me where I'm at, I kind of I've wanted to have a conversation with you still here. I'd love to find you afterwards, because that's the thing that I feel like we don't get to is like, what do we have to shift? What does solidarity look like beyond allyship? Show me what your own and the thing that I loved about what you what you're talking about with this whole anti-racist practice.

00:44:23:07 - 00:44:43:03

Speaker 1

Some of us were having this conversation earlier and that import. And also. So is the proposition work? I don't want to know what everyone's against. There's a space for that, and that's important. I want to know what you're for. Show me what you're on. What do you stand for? Are you pro-black? Are you scared to say that? Like, can we really go there?

00:44:43:03 - 00:45:07:06

Speaker 1

Are you pro-immigrant? Don't. Don't tell me that you're anti. Like, there's a there's a time for that, But I need to see what everyone's on. And we see that in your governance. We see it in your organizational structure, we see it in your budget. We see it in your program. But I saw like in our program, sometimes we make some quick wins or even sometimes in our employee data, we say, Great, look us like we're employing all of these people.

00:45:07:06 - 00:45:25:12

Speaker 1

What's their experience inside of your organization, please? Exactly. What's your turnover? Why do they keep leaving? What are we inviting people into? That is the thing that I'm like, this is kind of entering into that other stage, but I don't think that we can talk about dynamism. I don't think we can talk about anything without speaking about the reality of people's experiences.

00:45:25:20 - 00:45:55:05

Speaker 1

And in that I'm also like, I think that we have to model new possibilities and also as part of that, knowing that what we're modeling might be new might be really different to our organization's history or to current societal thinking. We have to make some mistakes gloriously. We have to make some mistakes we have to make sorry, but we have to fuck up and try to do that minimizing harm as much as possible.

00:45:55:09 - 00:46:27:12

Speaker 1

Because that's the thing. It's not like just don't just go out making reckless mistakes and thinking, Oh, you know, we're learning. No, no, no, no. Yeah, let's, let's learn. Yes, but can we try to minimize harm as much as possible? And through that practice, we will find what dynamism is like. Through that we will find like, who do we need to be and how do we need to organize for the level of challenges that we're facing, that there is no quick fix to centuries long issue like racism in which people have to be dehumanized in order to sustain a system.

00:46:27:18 - 00:46:40:19

Speaker 1

We're not going to overcome this challenge today or tomorrow, in the next few years. But if we think that everything is a practice, then we have to organize as though everything is a practice and commit to like rehearsal level mistakes.

00:46:40:22 - 00:46:41:16

Speaker 2

Yeah, Yeah.

00:46:42:09 - 00:46:44:18

Speaker 3

I think we need to go to questions now, is it?

00:46:45:00 - 00:46:47:23

Speaker 4

Thank you so much Kiesha. Amazing timekeeping and.

00:46:49:14 - 00:47:09:18

Speaker 2

I am super interested in organizational design. We've just had a big change at the top of my organization. And so as a soul leader, going from a casual, so I am moving towards like an evolutionary design and distributing power and the kind of stuff I'm wrestling with at the moment is around how much do I hold tight to and how much should I let go?

00:47:09:22 - 00:47:26:00

Speaker 2

And it's all interesting about like creating a scaffolding in order for that the team to self-organize. And so I guess it's kind of yeah how much how what's the balance between holding tight creating scaffolding and letting things happen like look to nature always. So I'm trying to. Yeah.

00:47:26:00 - 00:48:09:16

Speaker 1

Some of my mycelium nerds. Yes, that's a huge question, but such an important one and I guess I can respond to that. We're going through a process right now, so our our organized national design story is like an ever present, ongoing iterative evolution, right? We what the first thing that we invested in is how do we start? So we had this solar system vision almost of like this might be what it looks like for us to work if the if the sun was the mission and the sort of rings around it were the proximity to who holds that mission really tight and the further away, it's not a value of like, how important are they,

00:48:09:16 - 00:48:29:21

Speaker 1

but how much are they responsible for holding the mission site? And then where else are the roles situated? We kind of move from this vision. I'm sorry because I wish I had slides, but I can share any images and stuff afterwards with anyone. But how do we move from that as a as a vision into the practice is basically what we've been trying to work out ever since.

00:48:30:00 - 00:48:53:02

Speaker 1

But one of the key things that because we didn't want to make a role structure like a value proposition, we didn't want to say like a CEO holds this and then there is something about risk and responsibility, yes, but not value. So we basically had to we've been work with an organization called Dark Matter Labs and a wide ecosystem of people who are asking similar questions.



00:48:53:10 - 00:49:11:20

Speaker 1

So in the first instance, I would say who in a shared space is asking those questions and dealing with those really Nazi bits. Can we do some sort of like solidarity organizing and and wade through that water together? But for us, we kind of said there's a bit in this that we're really interested in. It's about role clusters.

00:49:11:24 - 00:49:47:06

Speaker 1

So we want to move from like job titles and rigid job specs, something that allows fluidity and flexibility, something that gives people enough structure and anchoring, but something that allows people to move and grow and try different things. So we basically designed like a set of rollercoasters clusters and then roll cards. So at any point, someone within the Vision and Mission cluster might hold different cards from across different clusters, and that kind of made it a card game is the idea of like play and, and like finding and tapping into that imagine.

00:49:47:10 - 00:50:07:03

Speaker 1

But we're so early in that journey and it's chaotic like it is not easy because we still this is a thing we're still inside of our current system which is fighting for order. And everybody wants to know and people want to be told. And as much as I believe in decentralized working, we're also carrying the harms of other places.

00:50:07:03 - 00:50:29:10

Speaker 1

But we've worked in carrying the responsibility from this stakeholder and this. We're still having to live in lots of different expectations. But for us, because that commitment is there, that's just our North Star. So we say, again, if we're talking about a world towards liberation and a prototype being what we think that constitutes, then we say, Cool, what is our North North Star?

00:50:29:15 - 00:50:49:23

Speaker 1

What are we orienting towards? And every point that we're learning, what do we keep coming back to? But I'm happy for us to share like our things, and we're going to put out some stuff about our learnings along the way as well. But we're three years in already and it's it's, it's really hard, but it's so generative. And I think that's the bit is like we just have to go through the difficulty.

00:50:51:04 - 00:51:14:08

Speaker 3

I think. And my response is two pronged in that it's about really honing in on

your why and your mission and being informed by that. So just going back to your North Star thinking, okay, why am I even? Why do we exist? What are we trying to do? So then it's like, okay, what am I trying to do?

00:51:15:08 - 00:51:35:15

Speaker 3

What can I do those things? Should I do the things? Would I like to do those things? So kind of separate and out, Just do that, have an audio in yourself so you like, okay, and these are things I need to do. And so I've got t that was one of the beautiful things that I came to embrace when I started.

00:51:35:15 - 00:51:54:08

Speaker 3

The role is it's like I've got an amazing team. And even at the start of this year when we had to resubmit MPO documents, I realize I went into a bit of a hole and I was just doing loads of stuff on my own and then once once, if like my head of finance and my h.r. Manager and they were like, why are you not sharing what you do it as I.

00:51:54:21 - 00:51:56:09

Speaker 2

Was just moving, working on the project.

00:51:56:09 - 00:52:05:17

Speaker 3

And they're like, you don't need to do that, give it to me. And I was like, i like budgets, though, And I was like, like finance. They're like, Yeah, but it's not your job.

00:52:06:15 - 00:52:07:23

Speaker 2

That's like, okay.

00:52:08:04 - 00:52:12:21

Speaker 3

So it's like, What am I doing that? And they were like, Do you see me? Oh, okay.

00:52:12:21 - 00:52:13:09

Speaker 2

Great.

00:52:13:20 - 00:52:28:08

Speaker 3

Well, what five? So is this like now just talk about like the art of delegation, And I'm like, I've got an amazing team and then they need to do their jobs, you know? I mean, if I'm not there in the little corner and go work on this budget, what's the easy way there?

00:52:28:08 - 00:52:31:12

Speaker 2

It's it's like, okay, cool.

00:52:31:20 - 00:52:51:06

Speaker 3

So it's that thing. You can be really lonely in that role and feel like you have to do everything. But actually what you your the strategy or the vision, you, you really you transform and you ever the organization needs you to be at that point in time and you put you are incomplete. So you like everything in nothing all at once and it's really hard.

00:52:51:06 - 00:53:12:20

Speaker 3

I check in with my town manager all the time because I'm just like, I feel like I'm not doing anything that is like you do anymore. You probably do too much. Um, so yeah, it's just for me, just constantly be thinking about what I can offer, who I need to be, and I'm where I need to bring things in and just constantly sharing.

00:53:13:02 - 00:53:22:08

Speaker 3

But just using that Northstar to keep centering it was to just make sure that we were on that we're on track. So yeah, I romance is the guys.

00:53:22:12 - 00:53:45:06

Speaker 1

Add one more so it's just that idea also that again because we're not striving for perfection that none of us like it's not possible so don't even that for us. We started working with a surviving, thriving, let's say book and we started to say like, what does it look like when Maya's like, just good enough and surviving? What does it look like when we're healthy?

00:53:45:06 - 00:54:06:05

Speaker 1

And then what does it look like when we're thriving? And I can imagine, like the scale of transformation that you'll be on, especially moving from co leadership into so leadership and in which that is going to be a really different relationship, but it might be something for yourself. You're like, What does my organization look like? Just get by and what are the levels that I want to kind of, you know, establish?

00:54:06:05 - 00:54:17:14

Speaker 1

What does it look like when we're actually healthy and then what does it look like to thrive and and kind of map out what would need to happen in all of those instances just to give yourself a bit of a guiding framework?

00:54:19:04 - 00:54:23:04

Speaker 4

Fantastic. Thank you. Next question in the middle of that. Thanks.

00:54:24:11 - 00:54:47:03

Speaker 2

I thank you so much. This has been really fascinating. Keesha was really interested in what you were saying about the funding organization having this kind of built in obsolescence to it. Yeah. The kind of seven year duration. And did you feel like that actually allowed you to take more risks? That sense of knowing it was finite and it wasn't going to be about the next funding cycle of where the next money was coming from?

00:54:47:03 - 00:55:07:22

Speaker 3

Yeah, I did. So we just didn't get sidelined to any point of like, where's next money coming in, You know, just that wasn't a conversation. So every year we could just focus on how are we funding ICE this year and just have a really juicy conversation about that and then just go on that endeavor. And that was the sole focus.

00:55:07:22 - 00:55:24:10

Speaker 3

And it also meant that we just gave all of our attention to our eyes and what they were doing in a way that you could tell was also unusual for them because they were just like, I've never had this amount of attention. And at some points they thought it was interrogative. We were like, No, we're not trying to be like, we're not trying to be like what you do.

00:55:24:10 - 00:55:47:17

Speaker 3

We just we just genuinely want to want to know and want to be there and we want to be involved. It's so hard for so many funders to give that level of commitment. We know that. Then when you see that and from a funder aura, it's just felt really, I suppose, just overwhelmed by it, and I suppose that's why they didn't want it to end.

00:55:48:00 - 00:56:12:13

Speaker 3

But we were saying that we've shown you something that you can now take to over funders and say, Look, this is how I was treated and it allowed me to flourish in this way, but also during lockdown. What was really nice was hosting those spaces where we shared our practices with the funders, because so many funders do in a fund in that way, and they do want to have that relationship with their eyes.

00:56:12:13 - 00:56:33:00

Speaker 3

It's just they can't. So it's not is goes back to structures. So again, we're just like if we know what works, then maybe we need to adjust how we, how we fund or what our bodies are that support the work. Because if it's not working for the funders, it's not working for the artist, then why are we doing it?

00:56:33:00 - 00:57:02:23

Speaker 1

That made me think of even over COVID over 2020, when so much structurally change because it had to the level of generosity and speed and care that we started to find as a people and and not like perfectly so. But even that, I remember when I had a silly idea one day and I said, Amber, I think that we need to just crowdfund some money and like distribute to artists that we know are going to slip through the gaps of funder support.

00:57:02:23 - 00:57:27:13

Speaker 1

They're going to slip through the gaps of state support, like what do we do? And and Luke and I is in Manchester, so it was like he'd set up one to support Manchester artist. I am Luke Bonds and I was like, okay, let's do a West one. So we crowdfunded, we were like, Let's crowdfund for £2,000 and let's just redistribute £200 grants back out to is that we know we're going to slip through the net.

00:57:27:21 - 00:57:53:00

Speaker 1

I think, we raised like £2,000 in a day. So we were like, okay, let's, let's raise 10,000. And we raised 10,000 in about a week and a half or something like that. And for me, I just kept coming back to the generosity of people and that there's something also that, you know, in our economic thinking, I don't want us to like, get stuck at what is the funder allowing, because I think that we need to push beyond that.

00:57:53:05 - 00:58:13:14

Speaker 1

And funders can help and they they do help create capacity, but that shouldn't be our exclusive focus. And if we do that, it's not going to it's not going to do it. The funders can't move at the pace, you know, it's not it's not appropriate. We know that funding isn't distributed equitably and that there's loads of challenges and bureaucracy, etc..

00:58:13:20 - 00:58:36:23

Speaker 1

But I never want us to forget the generosity of people across. I'm sort of part of a number of different projects, including some funds. But in 2020 I

crowdfunded £365,000 in year. That was just from people, you know, and we we redistributed it back to people who we knew was slipping through that gap. I don't want us to forget that other things are possible.

00:58:37:02 - 00:59:00:14

Speaker 1

Why? I talk about my grandad as one of the key precedents because he came here in 1960 and like so many migrants when they couldn't access mainstream housing, mainstream banks, mainstream support, they created their own because they knew in the power of the collective. They taught me everything about finance, about economics, through practice. I never went to school and learned about secular economics.

00:59:00:17 - 00:59:23:07

Speaker 1

I grew up with it. You know, I understand donor economics as a framework because I've seen it in my ends like, you know, that's the level of thinking where I'm like, Let us not forget that funders are important, Philanthropy is important, but it is not exclusive. I don't want to shift away responsibility from the more that's needed from funders and philanthropists at all.

00:59:23:13 - 00:59:34:11

Speaker 1

But I don't want us to get into a trap where we're like, Gosh, if the fund to say this or if they don't, then that will determine how we move. People have always been creative. Some people just call it survival.

00:59:35:04 - 00:59:57:24

Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. It needs to be mutual for sure. Um, and that was the thing with the structure. As funders, we were open to being challenged and being told, knowing, okay, we're going to try this model this year and knowing that some bits of it are going to work and some of it's really not. And just being really curious about that and being honest with our allies about that and letting them come back to us and go that bit really didn't work for me.

00:59:58:00 - 01:00:19:19

Speaker 3

Like, Oh gosh, I'm so sorry. In the and then not informing what we did the next year. So one year we for let's just have a open ended. So we'll just share that we are looking to approximately give away in total this amount of money for however many are is so what you can ask for is up for grabs.

01:00:19:19 - 01:00:30:20

Speaker 3

It just depends on the ideas that you fellows and we'll figure out together. But a lot of it is really struggle with to of put in a realistic budget together. And loads

of them were just asking for just.

01:00:30:21 - 01:00:33:21

Speaker 2

To march and suggesting really ambitious.

01:00:33:21 - 01:00:37:12

Speaker 3

Things. So we had to just go back some go just do.

01:00:37:12 - 01:00:40:06

Speaker 2

The do that bit and.

01:00:40:06 - 01:01:07:01

Speaker 3

Pay yourself and pay that person a bit more and. Yeah. We actually think it needs to like this. There are. Oh okay, cool. But some were really angry because they like going in asking for really big amounts and we were like, Why are you asking for that? And it's because, I suppose I know I was advised this way when I was younger going for Arts Council funding, it was like, say the top bit was 15 K It was like Meet You project 15 K and I was like, No, when I've added the OP, it's part seven.

01:01:07:05 - 01:01:25:04

Speaker 3

No, no, Aspas up 50 is like, but I'm just going to ask for seven. The kids. That's all I need so that, you know, there's just this way of this thing of like get what you can get like get go for the biggest amount because you never know if you're going to get funded again or whatever. Well, it's just odd.

01:01:25:04 - 01:01:46:12

Speaker 3

So by on capping it, we exposed all of these cultures and myths and, and issues that our eyes would face and that we could then address and go, Oh, they need more support in terms of what a budget looks like or how they should be, what rates they should be paying people all that time line or and that kind of thing.

01:01:46:18 - 01:01:55:00

Speaker 3

So even though it was annoying for them, it made for some really fruitful conversations. And most of the people still got funded anyway.

01:01:56:01 - 01:02:09:12

Speaker 2

How do you potentially bring people onside? Because this is complex stuff that we're talking about here about about collaboration across roles in

organizations. How do you start to create the space that to have these conversations with people who might not be able to like.

01:02:09:18 - 01:02:11:01

Speaker 3

Speaking the language that we're speaking.

01:02:11:01 - 01:02:16:24

Speaker 2

Right now have the same awareness of the complexities of the issues of facing and like create capacity to explore that properly.

01:02:17:23 - 01:02:44:07

Speaker 1

Yeah, I'm thinking about this in a couple of ways and I'm I'm conscious that I'm the founder of Maya and that that comes with a level of we'll just move it how I think we move it and the and then growing a team around that. Um, but also I keep coming back to this like not infantilizing people and what they can and can't comprehend or grapple with.

01:02:44:16 - 01:03:11:05

Speaker 1

I say that as someone who I run a project that uses hip hop and grime and technology to teach children about architecture and urban planning. And there's something about meeting people where they are, which sounds so like sounds so surface level and so easy. But actually even the idea of developing our accounting system, working with artists was we treat it like how we treat any of our other work.

01:03:11:05 - 01:03:37:19

Speaker 1

We create the framework that makes sense to the work. So creating a residency to explore these things. And for us, we were like, accounting sounds really vast and some for some people otherworldly. But if we look at, um, throughout time, indigenous cultures across the world have done accounting, it's just looked like art. If we think about hieroglyphs as a language that was documenting data, then we start to think about this.

01:03:37:20 - 01:04:06:06

Speaker 1

There are other languages that we could create if we think about braids, if we think about cane rows as mapping, which is what they were, then we start to like our brains start to expand. So we said we'll just create an artist residency and draw on those precedents. So that's the big thing for me is it's around those those new precedents for thinking it's around that knowledge exists in our communities or in our organizations or in the artists that we've been working with.



01:04:06:06 - 01:04:27:12

Speaker 1

But we just saw them as cultural programming, not organizational development. It exists in what we've already been doing, but what can we pay attention to? And I know that that's really hard to, you know, to galvanize a support, to actually slow down, to pay attention. And what are we noticing? What are we learning from what's surfacing? How are we applying that?

01:04:27:12 - 01:04:58:05

Speaker 1

Where can we do like a big zoom out? And that has to be at some point, it has to be an organized organization wide conversation no matter the size of your organization. But there are small things that that we can do. And and I think that there's something key about there are people across organizations that it's like you might feel that you're the only one band up with a person who feels like they're the only one band up for the next person and start to grow across organizational movement that way.

01:04:58:11 - 01:05:20:12

Speaker 1

And I think, again, one more black feminist quote. But Tony Kaye Bambara says the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible. I think this is something about the idea of working with art, working with arts and culture. It's can we make systems change irresistible? Maybe we don't call it system change. Maybe, you know, maybe we don't call it the revolution.

01:05:20:15 - 01:05:37:07

Speaker 1

Maybe, you know, whatever the language is that we need to call it, then we call it that, but we start to connect it to that structural piece so that actually what you're getting and you think this is just an artist residency, we're going to create, we've created a whole fucking language. We've created a whole new way to do accounting.

01:05:37:11 - 01:05:57:24

Speaker 1

Our funding partners, some of them came to our exhibition for for our for our accounting residency. And now they're like, Amazing, Can you teach it to us? Can you do this for your final report? Instead of the accounting stuff? Can you help us teach it so that we can do it for our own organization? Those the shift from like it's possible.

01:05:58:02 - 01:06:19:22

Speaker 1

And coming back to what you said again, like this change work, it sounds huge because it feels like we're at the precipice and there are these huge mouths

that we've got to overcome. What we don't see when we do that is where all of this is happening right now anyway. We don't see in our communities is these solidarities, not these economies, this artistic?

01:06:20:07 - 01:06:28:18

Speaker 1

It's happening anyway. We're just not paying attention. So I feel like there's there's a huge thing in there where it's like, what are we paying attention to?

01:06:30:06 - 01:06:53:07

Speaker 3

I'd say be led by curiosity. So know that you don't know know that you're coming into this space or you're starting with assumptions. But that's not a bad thing. That's just how it is. So then it's like, what can you put in place to address that and let that be joyous and a part of your process? So I'm just thinking of to project as a contact.

01:06:53:07 - 01:07:24:03

Speaker 3

So one of them is the agency and we it's a model that came from Brazil by someone called Marcus Foster, and he brought it to contact in Battersea Art Center. They work in partnership and it's now it's an independent thing and it's brilliant, but it's basically about empowering young people through a creative process to become social entrepreneurs. So they come up with projects that have impact in their community and it doesn't have to be a creative output, it doesn't have to be creative focused.

01:07:26:05 - 01:07:46:23

Speaker 3

But what the beginning of that process is, is we have our producers just go into territories, they get code. That's language definitely from the Brazilian model, but they just let you go and sit. So our producers will go and sit in Harper High in Manchester and just go and chill in a community space and speak to the young people.

01:07:47:21 - 01:08:08:17

Speaker 3

And it's just about building trust. Then not talking about contact, then not talking about the agency, then literally just being in the space and having respect for that space and learning who's the gatekeepers, what's about, what do people want, what do people interested in? And then eventually, then we start to tell them about contacts, invite them to shows, see if they're free, or they're friends of great.

01:08:09:03 - 01:08:28:07

Speaker 3

But you don't go in with this kind of, We're going to help you. We've got

projects and it's great. It's a site or not. Well, they're already doing some of it. And you just like, Oh, we could just give you money tools or we can give you space for that. So that's one thing that I can just give an example.

01:08:28:22 - 01:08:53:09

Speaker 3

And then in over, I was just thinking of why we talk about language. So when I used to manage the young company contact you company, we'd always go out to community groups and researchers and just throw ourselves into situations just so that we would get informed by the theme that we wanted to explore. And we worked. We've had Patel in 2018 to make a show which is exploring masculinity, and it's called Man.

01:08:53:16 - 01:09:14:13

Speaker 3

It was a multi gendered cast, so we didn't want to. We just did a show about the suffragette and the suffragists and that was multi gendered. So again, we didn't want to then explore masculinity. They'd be like all male cast. So I had these two female cast members come with me to a youth zone use and we a bunch of lads and they were called the M15 group.

01:09:14:14 - 01:09:35:16

Speaker 3

So life from and I recall this postcode M15 giving you way too many details, so sorry I'm being removed now. But yes, there were lads that like 14 to 60 years old and I said to the girls I was like, Right, you need to explain what this project is to these guys and just see if they'd be fully informing the script.

01:09:35:16 - 01:09:41:14

Speaker 3

They'd want to come and see the show like you to have a conversation with them. And they started by going, We're doing a show.

01:09:41:14 - 01:09:43:07

Speaker 2

About toxic masculinity.

01:09:45:06 - 01:10:08:19

Speaker 3

And the lads were, well, it's not masculine, it's toxic. I just looked at the two girls and they were like, Oh my God, what do we say? And I was like, Well, yeah. What do you say? They've never heard of it. Like, you know, not everyone sits and reads The Guardian. Yeah. I mean, I was like, they've not edit before, they've not at Toxic Masculinity.

01:10:08:19 - 01:10:09:09

Speaker 3

What you can do.

01:10:11:01 - 01:10:12:21

Speaker 2

To slut and well.

01:10:13:12 - 01:10:38:05

Speaker 3

And they had to like work on the spot and figure out what you want about why have you come into my space talking about toxic masculinity. Well, it was great. Obviously I facilitated the conversation, but it was great to see them struggle and not have to speak to a typical ask audience member who's going to be very polite and come and see their show like, No, you're doing a show about masculinity.

01:10:38:10 - 01:10:52:02

Speaker 3

Go and speak to some teenage lads in a community space, get them to understand why they should come and see the show and they should want to come and see the show because it's about their experience of as it becomes voyeurism, right? So I was like, these Lads need to be on board.

01:10:53:06 - 01:10:53:19

Speaker 2

You need to.

01:10:53:19 - 01:11:14:13

Speaker 3

Do the work. So it's on them immediately. Understanding that privilege and their language in the space had no validity, had no currency, and they needed to do the work. And that's the kind of thing that I like to facilitate and I do. I put myself in those positions all the time with whatever I'm doing and it's not a bad thing.

01:11:14:21 - 01:11:23:19

Speaker 3

Just embrace the discomfort, embrace the curiosity, just like I'm about to get slapped in the face. I don't know where it's coming from. That's what I'm curious about.

01:11:25:06 - 01:11:28:16

Speaker 4

I promise It's not coming from me. And last question. Here we go.

01:11:30:01 - 01:11:57:07

Speaker 2

I'm Dana from Malaysia. I'm based in Manchester and I've been in contact for a

couple of times. Yeah. So I produce projects that combine classical music, visual arts to highlight society's concerns. And I'm still in my early days of the career. I'm just wondering how much of personal financial should I put into an initiative that is meant to commission others because I want to help others.

01:11:57:07 - 01:12:11:15

Speaker 2

By the same time I need to survive? Should I make most of my projects in the early days voluntary base, or should I decide to put in my own money to make it work? Thank you.

01:12:12:23 - 01:12:39:00

Speaker 3

Interesting. Erm, so I'll be very honest in that I used to put my own money into my own stuff when I was younger. I say to my young people a lot, capitalize on what you're good at so that you can then fund what you want to do. So sometimes there's some skills that you might have that allow you to do a job that it's not you, it don't make you sing in the morning, but you could do it.

01:12:39:12 - 01:13:00:22

Speaker 3

So just do that because it's not exhausting for you. So just do that thing so that you have some financial stability and then you can fund your own stuff. It's liberating because as we know, you be in positions where you're waiting for someone to pay you and it takes three months. And then I'm like, I'm not having that.

01:13:01:10 - 01:13:19:09

Speaker 3

So that's why I've always encouraged people to try and give themselves financial independence. But I'll be very realistic about that because we know what the situation is. We know it's not easy for everyone to just walk into a job and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So that's what I say to people that I've done. And if they want to chime, follow that, then cool.

01:13:19:20 - 01:13:49:10

Speaker 3

But I know that it's not that easy to do that. So then I'll also say is is about value. So money and value don't always match up, but people will spend stuff on what they value. So you need to decide for yourself or do it yourself and go, okay, I keep spending more. I keep buying shoes and Primark, maybe I stop doing that so that I can put money where I value to go.

01:13:49:10 - 01:14:22:12

Speaker 3

I mean, so it's just like, where are you values also coming back to what you say and in terms of volunteering and stuff, that's about trust and clarity. So I've

been mentoring someone and I said, That's a part of arts festival recently and we reflected last just yesterday about how it wasn't for them. And they said that their producer basically didn't do what they asked and just they had to end up doing loads of stuff and then it took away from their artistic time and all that stuff and I was like, What was the agreement?

01:14:22:12 - 01:14:36:15

Speaker 3

What was the first meeting that you had with the producer though? Did you map out what you expected them to do? And they said, Yeah. And they said, Did you pay them? No. As a but did you tell them that you weren't going pay them? Yeah. Did they still agree to it. Yeah. Did you out contract. No. No.

01:14:37:08 - 01:14:57:08

Speaker 3

You still should have done the contract I think. But you say that their support is in-kind. You quantify what they do so they're clear. But they've agreed. But you said that you didn't have money. They said they were still going to do it. So it's an agreement. It shouldn't now become this thing of like, Oh, I wasn't going to pay them to their do me a favor.

01:14:57:08 - 01:15:25:17

Speaker 3

But no, it should have been very clear what you expected from them and that they were happy to work in that way with you and they don't get to then turn around and dismantle your process. Like that's not fair. But also what I said to this artist was that I, in those situations, try to find money to pay someone to do the legwork or do something for me, even if I know that my budget is very tiny.

01:15:25:17 - 01:15:46:15

Speaker 3

I'm just always really honest. I just say, Look, I've got this much money. Are you on board or, you know, and just be really clear about it so everyone knows where they stand. But if someone agrees to do something for you for free as a volunteer, then they've agreed. And it shouldn't then become this thing of like, Oh, well, I'm doing it for free, and they know it's not fair.

01:15:47:22 - 01:16:04:13

Speaker 1

I think I would I wouldn't want to give sort of universal advice on like how much money, because I know that everyone has different circumstances. People live and work in different conditions that I could say like, you know.

01:16:04:14 - 01:16:05:17

Speaker 2

I put.

01:16:05:22 - 01:16:29:22

Speaker 1

In everything blood, sweat, tears, pennies like the whole shebang wouldn't wouldn't recommend. And also some people will say, put your money in as long as you can until x Y and Z. But actually, people's living circumstances are different. And some people have disposable income, some people have stable jobs, some people have that sort of ongoing resource they can put in.

01:16:29:22 - 01:17:02:09

Speaker 1

Some people don't. I would say that. And I remember there was a point where, you know, I'd sort of like come into the arts knowing that we didn't want to be grant Reliant because like I say, black led arts organizations and minority led organizations are the first to go when public funding goes at the same time. And once I learned that there are grants that can support every stage of a project, if you want time to think and research and develop, there are grants for that.

01:17:02:09 - 01:17:18:00

Speaker 1

If you want time to like pilot something or try something out for the first time, there's something for that. If you want to deliver a full however long of a project. And once I once I knew that because I didn't grow it like no one told me this stuff when I was coming into the arts, I didn't I didn't know that.

01:17:18:00 - 01:17:37:02

Speaker 1

But once I knew that, it helped me just map out what's my ideal. But I know that I couldn't have grown Mya if I didn't have an office job in which I was able to like Nick a bit of time from my office job to put into the thing that I really wanted to do. I had an amazing manager who actually helped me pick out the my logo.

01:17:37:02 - 01:17:59:09

Speaker 1

Like if I didn't have all of that, I personally wouldn't have been able to do what I've done if I didn't have friends whose couches I could crash on. I know I wouldn't have been able to do. And there's something I remember reading a book about artist economies, and it was something like 100 artists. I'll find the book title, but it was like 100 artists were talking about how they make a living.

01:17:59:18 - 01:18:23:13

Speaker 1

And about 89, 89 or 90 of them said, I teach. I have a lecturing job, I do this on the side. And no one was like, forthcoming about that. Like, you will never see that on their websites. It's kind of like a tucked away thing. So why I want to say we don't talk honestly about what it actually takes to deliver our own projects,

to be artists, to be anything in the field.

01:18:23:19 - 01:18:37:24

Speaker 1

Some people have actually got hold of the jobs, but don't talk about it. So I would say take advice from all the people in their perspectives. But just bear in mind this is for anyone. Bear in mind that people are coming to that work from completely different vantage points.

01:18:38:08 - 01:19:00:11

Speaker 3

Can I just say to you other things as well? So with the side hustle, don't diminish it. I don't get it. Why There has to be this kind of shame if it is not an artist because I'm doing this. So it's like, well, it's just we all understand what the situation is. And if you've got have you got to diversify and get your income from different places, then why not?

01:19:00:16 - 01:19:21:03

Speaker 3

And there's always benefits to be had. Like every job that I've ever done, I'm like, there's something else I can be getting out of this that's intangible, that's not just like the monetary thing. So again, when I speak to young people, I say, If you're interested in the arts, try and get a job in like an arts space, because then you've got access to equipment or you can access the space, so you get access just to artists.

01:19:21:10 - 01:19:38:16

Speaker 3

If you're in a café that's near, if it's a oh you're not working four days, four days. So it's like just freeze off in a strategic position so that you can then get to the next step. You get to see where you get to hear people chatting. People talk about all sorts in cafes.

01:19:40:12 - 01:19:41:14

Speaker 2

Yeah, I mean.

01:19:41:21 - 01:20:05:05

Speaker 3

It's just like, where can you put yourself so that you are closer to the thing that you're interested in? And then the next thing I'll say that we've not said so far is ask people for money. Like all the Arts Council bids I've ever done, I've had a private sponsor because I'm lucky that I've got people around me, mentors who've said, If you ever need at any time, ask me.

01:20:05:13 - 01:20:24:12

Speaker 3



And it might feel weird to do that, but what's the what's the worst they can say? No, you move on. So yeah, I've gone to people and gone. Do you know what I'm putting in a funding bed? Is there any way that you could give like for you and liquid or for and you quit towards it because it would help me do these things and they're just like, yeah, cool.

01:20:26:06 - 01:20:53:12

Speaker 1

Just for the basis of debate. Because I would also say that actually I think a lot of artists do go into venues thinking, I need let me get in. So I've got a foot in the door and they get stuck like no one's looking at the person who does catering and saying, I think you're viable. And as much as it's about like proximity and like networking, that doesn't happen so often to front line workers.

01:20:53:15 - 01:21:16:21

Speaker 1

It doesn't happen to those who are, you know, back office. It doesn't happen to those who are front of house. So often, even though the proximity is there that that may work for some people but for a lot of people and the less connections that you already have, the less feasible that is. So I would say sure. But with a caveat that that doesn't always work sometimes.

01:21:16:21 - 01:21:39:12

Speaker 1

And that's where there's another conversation to be had about venues. Again What do we pay attention to when we say who is in our ecosystem? Who is in our organization? It means everywhere. The person who cleans building. Again, that the point about value, do we notice them? Do we know why they're here? Do we pay attention to what's driving them?

01:21:39:16 - 01:22:04:02

Speaker 1

Did they want proximity because they believe in the vision and the mission of this organization? We don't do that. We don't talk about the people who are, you know, work in front of house and who are issuing tickets and are actually practicing that radical hospitality. I went to the bush there the other day. There was a technical glitch with the thing, the guy on the front desk like he worked his ass off to get me into this jam packed, you know, an auditorium.

01:22:04:07 - 01:22:28:18

Speaker 1

And I just kept thinking there were so many things that people do to keep our experiences, you know, smooth, seamless, accessible, and then never recognize they're never valued. And we don't even know, like, what the vision and mission here. Do you really believe in? How do we champion and uplift you? That's something that I think venues need to do a heck of a lot of a better job,

not just the artists and our communities.

01:22:28:18 - 01:22:32:13

Speaker 1

When we say communities, who are the people inside of the building?

01:22:34:11 - 01:22:38:17

Speaker 4

Amazing. Thank you so much. Let's segway into debatable. So.