

**Subject Matters: Episode 1 | *Making a Name for Yourself* featuring American Artist, Darryl DeAngelo Terrell, and Salakastar; Hosted by Imani Mixon.**

Imani Mixon ([00:00:00](#)):

I'm Imani Mixon, an arts and culture writer and host and this is Subject Matters, a podcast about artists, the worlds they live in and the worlds they wish to create. Today, we're joined by American Artist, Darryl DeAngelo Terrell and Salakastar. Each of today's guests have been chosen to not only answer to their artistic calling, but also to name themselves. They make art and change from that place and I'm so excited to be in conversation with them. Hey, y'all.

Imani Mixon ([00:00:29](#)):

Oh my God, this is an event.

Salakastar ([00:00:31](#)):

I'm so excited. [inaudible 00:00:40].

Imani Mixon ([00:00:39](#)):

Socialization.

Salakastar ([00:00:42](#)):

I know right.

American Artist ([00:00:42](#)):

Hey.

Imani Mixon ([00:00:46](#)):

How you doing?

American Artist ([00:00:49](#)):

Good you see y'all.

Imani Mixon ([00:00:49](#)):

Nice to see you too. This is going to be a very chill conversation. We want to just spend some virtual time together and none of the questions I ask should be too crazy or something you have to think too hard about. Thank y'all so much. American Artist, I don't think we've met in real life before.

American Artist ([00:01:11](#)):

We have not.

Imani Mixon ([00:01:12](#)):

Which is wild.

American Artist ([00:01:16](#)):

It's exciting nonetheless.

Imani Mixon ([00:01:18](#)):

It's exciting nonetheless. I know Darryl and [Asia 00:01:22] pretty well, but when we thought about this podcast idea, I was just thinking about... Well, it wasn't even a podcast. It was just artist conversation. I'm just thinking about the conversations that I've had with folks over the last few months and I feel like the tone and the stakes of those conversations have gotten a little bit more intense and there are things that we just need to address that probably weren't even on our minds when we were out in the world before. For starters, how's everybody feeling today? What's some good things happening?

American Artist ([00:02:09](#)):

[crosstalk 00:02:09].

Imani Mixon ([00:02:10](#)):

Is everybody in Detroit? Is everybody in the Midwest or where?

American Artist ([00:02:13](#)):

No, I'm in New York. It's starting to warm up. It's still kind of cold, but it's sunny today.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:02:21](#)):

I was just there a few weeks ago. I was happy. The one weekend I was there it was really nice and warm.

Imani Mixon ([00:02:27](#)):

I feel good too because the sun is out and I'm very excited to have friends in front of me instead of just computers, plain computers. Far our conversation, kind of like how I said in the email I really do want to focus on this idea of naming yourself and how different parts of your art contribute to that or encapsulate that idea of choosing who you are and what your art will be. I also want us to get into a conversation about the alter ego because... I don't know. Something about that doesn't sound too black to me sometimes. I just want to hear a little bit more about what that means, but we'll go into the actual factual questions that I have. I'm speaking with you all because each of you make art using either various or different names and I'm wondering how embodying your art creates a distance between the art you make and your actual self.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:03:34](#)):

What it does for me, my alter ego or my renaming, comes from this space of feeling like I couldn't do certain things as Darryl. For people who have never been in a physical space with me, I'm six foot seven, I'm like 340 pounds. I'm a big person. I've always existed and maneuvered in this body, however, I've always found myself drawn to some things that are socially considered feminine. My alter ego allowed me to really delve deeper into my more feminine interest versus my everyday life I'm still like, wow, I am very loud, very in your face, very bubbly. I do hold back a lot of other stuff. That's what it is for me, at least as of right now.

Imani Mixon ([00:04:45](#)):

Can you say your renamed name again one more time?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:04:51](#)):

My rename is Dion. D-I-O-N.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:04:55](#)):

Hey, this is Dion. Being a big bitch in a world of small hoes. I can consider energy and an identity that don't completely fit into the binary. I exist in a void, but we have an alter ego named Dion. I explore what it means to be desired, more than just fit in, but to feel fucking included. To exist in a place where my body and all of its blackness, queerness, fatness and feminist is the norm.

Imani Mixon ([00:06:03](#)):

Salakastar, American Artist, anybody else?

Salakastar ([00:06:05](#)):

I can go next. I was born Asia Salakastar Dier. My mother named me Salakastar, my middle name because she knew I would be on stage. I don't know how she knew, she just knew. I'm an actor and I was performing under just Asia Dier and then when I moved back to Detroit and started singing, I was performing under Asia Salakastar and then I just dropped the Asia and just took the Salakastar because that's enough. I feel like once I really embraced Salakastar, I really felt that was my truest self as an artist. I just think it's something really cool about my mother knowing and about that being in the stars and me really accepting myself as an artist.

Salakastar ([00:07:26](#)):

There were times where I felt guilt about being an artist, especially being black, being a woman, being from a working class background. It felt sometimes luxurious. I think people would project their fears onto me and it was so funny. I actually went, when I got into Purchase, I went back to my elementary school music teacher and I said, hey, I got into a Purchase. I'm going to acting school. She said, "Well, you know, you really should do something more practical." I was so hurt because I was so excited to tell her, but I realized for me that was the most practical thing that I could do. I think just taking Salakastar was really taking my identity as an artist and also knowing that maybe it is luxurious and maybe that's okay. I think that for me, my ancestors have made space for me to bring their stories forth and I'm honored to do that.

American Artist ([00:08:49](#)):

I changed my legal name to American Artist and for me similar to Darryl and Salakastar, I felt like it was this manifestation in one sense. I really felt like I was an artist, like that was the most true part of my identity and I didn't really know how to make that my reality, like how to be a real artist, so to speak, at the time that I changed my name. If I just made that my name, then it is true, was kind of my thinking around it. I'm also a pretty shy person because a lot of people ask me, why did you change it legally? Why don't you just call yourself American Artist? I was like, if I had to just insist to people that's my name, I would not have the strength to reinforce everyone. That's my name, that's my name. I felt like if I just make it my name, then even if I can't stand up for it, it's just a fact. There's no way you can challenge it or question it. For me, that's why it was important to do it that way.

Imani Mixon ([00:10:10](#)):

It's just crazy that in each of your naming origin stories there's this resistance that you have to push against, which kind of makes me a little bit sad. If we want the world to be full of artists then they should be able to claim that and not necessarily have to show for it or prove yourself for it and I think there's also a weird dynamic of oh, you're an artist, you're a musician, show me your stuff. I feel like that also negates what we're talking about. Where if this is a manifestation, if this is a calling, if this is what

my mama named me then this is not something I have to show evidence for. I really love that you guys are able to pick up with that.

Imani Mixon ([00:11:02](#)):

Another thing I'm thinking about is that artists have all kinds of alter egos and I'm only calling it that because that's what they call them. I'm thinking about Prince and his symbol or his womanly counterpart, Camille. I'm thinking of Beyonce as Sasha Fierce. I'm thinking of Nikki Minaj as Romans Zolanski and even with all these, alter egos have this secondary-ness or a fakeness to them, but it feels like all of your works are way more deep and authentic than this. I'm wondering how you learn to imbue your name with meaning or if that feels too heavy. It's normally like-

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:11:48](#)):

I don't think it's too heavy Imani, I just don't know. It just comes. It's just how it is. I'm not overly thinking about it, you feel me? For me and I practice as Dion... What a lot of people don't know was I probably do like one Dion photo a year. Unlike a lot of my other work that's separate from Dion, it's not based on research. It's not based in academic jargon. It's based on life experiences, right. It's based on how [inaudible 00:12:33] hookup culture, how I maneuver being an extremely large black queer person. It's based on my conversations I have with friends and when we are hanging out at Kickbacks and drinking and listening to music and the conversations that we're having and I use all of that to really bring forth everything that I do with Dion.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:13:02](#)):

For me, I don't think about it. I get to a point where I'm looking like, oh, [inaudible 00:13:10] just pissed me off or just heard a poem that also related to that. That Cardi B song got me lit. Okay, I'm going to take these photos and really that's how it works every time. It could be a blunt, for example, there was this Danez Smith poem that I... I listened to it frequently and that poem was what sparked a series of four photos. I was irritated, feeling very undesirable. Unlike a lot of my other queer contemporaries who are heavily reading queer theory, I'm not. I have the books, I've read the books in grad school or undergrad. Do I feel that they inform some of my work, yes, but they're not always in the forefront of my mind when I'm making [inaudible 00:13:59]. I feel like that kind of answers your question.

Imani Mixon ([00:14:05](#)):

What was the name of that Danez Smith poem that inspired that series?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:14:09](#)):

In their book *Homie's*. The name of the poem is *Self-portrait as '90s R&B video*. Yeah. It's page 30 in [inaudible 00:14:21]. I heard the poem almost two years before this book came out because they did it in Chicago at the Chicago Poetry Foundation. They also had a video that you deal with blood and poetry, that I watched them perform it often.

Imani Mixon ([00:14:40](#)):

Beautiful. That's the power of a fricking poem title. [crosstalk 00:14:47] so hard because we need to inspire the folks to take some thirst traps.

American Artist ([00:14:55](#)):

That's a great title too. I love how you mention the other people like Prince and people who've had these alter egos, wherever that word comes from. I was also thinking of Malcolm X because with that one it was also like I'm going to remove my name and I think with Prince there's also a little bit of that... Prince was like, I'm going to make you say this thing you can't say, so that I think there's also this amount of resistance. A lot of people ask me why I changed my name or what it means and I have like a million answers because I've had a lot of time to think about it and I have some that I feel more strongly about, but I think a lot of times it's also like, that's just what I was feeling like doing at the moment. It was representative of how I was feeling. It wasn't so thought out, but then it's like afterward or a process of I guess growing...

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:16:04]

American Artist ([00:16:03](#)):

Afterward or a process of, I guess, growing into that role or what I think it is and what other people think it is. And for me, it was very much almost like a question I'm putting out into the world. Let's see how people respond also. So I don't know. So I don't feel like I have such a specific idea of what that's going to be or what it's going to mean. Part of it is also a question, an open question.

Salakastar ([00:16:32](#)):

Yeah. I think becoming just Salakastar marked a very important time in my life. When I moved back to Detroit from New York, about five years ago now, and I was really sick. I was very depressed, and I was really embraced by a community of black women who were healing, including you Imani. They were healing. And I got on that vibration and kind of never looked back. So I think also being Salakastar for me symbolizes going from being depressed, to being ecstatic, from living in fear to living in love, from living in lack to living in abundance, and really marking that part of my spiritual journey where I really, really began to heal myself and also was able to extend that healing to other people.

Imani Mixon ([00:17:46](#)):

That's beautiful. And I think there is a certain way that the art world in particular wants you to be legible. You need to have your artist's statement. I need to know who you are, where you're from, where you're trying to go. And in having this sort of duality or just fluidity in your art, there's a little less to that. And I also think it feels like we celebrate so many invisible made up things. We celebrate so many random holidays, so many random gatherings. So yes, this is my landmark. I have a new name. I was depressed, now I'm ecstatic. That is definitely a moment to rename yourself. That's definitely a moment to say, "I'm actually going to choose this for myself." So I'm all for that. Do you all identify with the term alter ego? And if so, how?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:18:41](#)):

I've been using alter ego, honestly just because I don't know what other term to use. I've actually just been saying that Dion just a whole different person, right? I've just been saying that Dion is like this... I would say for of the past five years that I've been making work as Dion or thinking of Dion, I've been saying that Dion is a separate entity from Daryl. I can say that as of recently, they're starting to emerge. So their world's starting to collide a bit, which is why now it's starting to feel like an alter ego more than it did in the past. Because when I think about alter ego, I think of it just the same person, two different personalities. Same person, two different energies. Like they maneuver in two different ways, just in the

same body. But when I was thinking of Dion, at first, it was this is two separate entities, two different universes, two different worlds. Right? So yeah.

Salakastar ([00:19:53](#)):

Yeah. I think as an actor, I've always kind of been obsessed with the idea of transformation and taking on a role and being someone else with my body and with my instrument. But I think with Salakastar, I think I'm more of myself or more of the part of myself that is willing to share publicly and to be vulnerable and to publicly make magic and to have people witnessed that. I think I have my private magic and I have my public magic that I do on stage. So I'm not sure. I'm not sure if alter ego would be the term because I think it's just more of myself.

American Artist ([00:20:58](#)):

Totally. Yeah. I agree with that. I haven't used the word alter ego, but I think there's a funny playing around this phrase real name, because everyone asks me, "Is that your real name?" And I'm like, "Yes." And they're like, "Is that your legal name?" I'm like, "Yes." They're like, "Is that your birth name?" I'm like, "No." Or they say, "Did your mama name you that?" I'm like, "No." And it's only at that level of questioning that they figure out what they were trying to figure out, whatever it was and why. But as far as it's a real name, yes, it's my real name.

Imani Mixon ([00:21:34](#)):

Yeah. And that's crazy when people show you what they want to know based off of what they ask you. And the other thing is you probably don't even really want to know the answer. The mystery of it is good enough. And if I did tell you the details, or if I told you what was on my birth certificate before, it wouldn't answer what you're asking me right now, so what is even happening?

Imani Mixon ([00:21:57](#)):

I think there's also something about this present moment where we all have been really left to our own devices, where it's maybe a little bit harder if you were trying to separate the two, because you have your body, you're doing your work. You're probably in the same place. So what may be would have worked in the past where you're like, "This corner is American Artist. This is my personal stuff. This is my private and public magic. This is my masculine and feminine." All those things are kind of mixed in together right now. So it's way different.

Imani Mixon ([00:22:35](#)):

And I know I asked each of you all to send a certain piece of art that you think particularly embodies the work that you do with your renaming instead of alter ego. And I wonder if we can do like a little round robin and talk about that work. So whoever wants to go first, I have everything pulled up here. So I'll be viewing it with you. But each of you all sent something, so if you could tell us the name of the piece and why it feels particularly like a signature piece of art for you.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:23:09](#)):

All right. So I actually sent you the piece that was influenced by the Danez Smith poem. The photo, it's a series of four photos. They are titled Trophy for an Award Show Only Niggas Know... Source Awards '95. So I was just interested in this idea of Dion being this trophy, right? So the 1995 Source Awards is, I think it was one of the last years it was shown on television. This is in the hype of the East Coast versus West Coast speak. This is around the time of both Biggie and Tupac's death. I think both of them were

nominated for best rap album of the year, but so is Outcast. And this is Outcast's first ever award nomination. And Outcast have won that award. Everyone was mad as fuck because it was like, "Who are these weird black niggas from Atlanta making weird music?" Right?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:24:17](#)):

So I was just thinking what if at that award show, everyone was up in arms, angry and fighting over me, over Dion. What would that be like? Right? So yeah, I feel like that is a really important piece when thinking about my work as Dion because my work as Dion, as I expressed, started off with me wanting to explore a more feminine, more soft side of myself, but also has a lot to do with me processing desire for myself, but also how I maneuver within queer spaces and this feeling of being not desired at all. So yeah.

Imani Mixon ([00:25:07](#)):

That's beautiful. I love hearing the inspiration behind something because the title and the images alone are amazing, but just knowing where it came from makes a lot of sense. Can you also maybe describe the images for people who aren't looking at it right now?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:25:23](#)):

Definitely, definitely. So I will say this is one of the Dion photos that I did. I will say when I do Dion photos, I do do some like visual references a lot, looking back at some black photographic history. So in the photo... So the background is pretty much split in half, so it's half black, half white. I'll be honest, it's literally just the edge of a black velvet backdrop. I bought four yards of black velvet fabric, and I tacked it to the wall. It was like, so what happens just the bare wall and what happens to black fabric?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:26:06](#)):

I'm wearing my really large black tulle skirt, a large Afro. I'm wearing gold lipstick, gold bamboo earrings. I am topless. Actually, it's not super visible in the photo, but my body is covered in Shea butter and this gold pigment to make my skin look a bit more sun-kissed, so it works a bit. I would say it's probably one of the last times Dion has actually had facial hair because I for the longest thought it was important to... I wanted people to know that Dion is not male nor female. Dion is everything. So there's that.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:26:51](#)):

And then, the references, one of them is actually here is on Construction Number 10, and the other reference is this beautiful image of Josephine Baker. I don't know the name of the photographer. I know it was photographed in the... I think it was '32, 1932, in which she's covering her body with pearls and silk because she's standing on an apple box, which I thought was funny because a line in the poem by Danez Smith, they say, "I'm covering my goodies Ill Na Na just so." And thinking about that line, and thinking about the way that Josephine Baker was really covering her goodies, like Ill Na Na, I it would just pinpoint. And then thinking about Ill Na Na as a hip hop reference and thinking about how that brings everything back to the Source Awards. So yeah.

Imani Mixon ([00:27:48](#)):

Yes. And thinking about and thinking about and thinking about and being, that is the way it is. And I just love the idea of these people are fighting for me because that is so powerful. I think if we all were fought for the way that we want to be, the world will be way easier to move through. And that's also not something I'm trying to take off my affirmation poster. Yes, still fight for me. I'm still a trophy. I love you so much.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:28:16](#)):

[inaudible 00:28:16] Ignore the bullshit. They'll give to me when they're ready.

Imani Mixon ([00:28:23](#)):

Exactly. That's beautiful. Thank you so much. It's good to know where all this comes from.

Salakastar ([00:28:26](#)):

So I sent you December 22nd for Sean Michelle, and that is the first single from my album All Blue: Part One (Majorelle!).

Salakastar ([00:29:07](#)):

( music).

Salakastar ([00:29:09](#)):

And I guess I can tell you about All Blue. It started a few years ago. I was hanging out with a friend, and we were driving around and I began to see the color blue very vividly just all of a sudden, and I felt this just kind of deep love and a transformation really. And that night, we actually shot the video for not December 22nd, but for another song on my album, Tea Time. We shot it improv. And then the next day, I went to my friend Donald's house and we wrote the song. And then, Ahya Simone comes through the door with her harp and she puts harp on it, and then it all went from there.

Salakastar ([00:30:05](#)):

So December 22nd, that's my birthday, and I also share that birthday with Basquiat. And probably it's interesting that I released it on December 22nd of 2020, and it's probably the most experimental, least pop record, which is I think a little, I don't know, maybe some people might think that's risky for the first single because it's not something that's... I don't know, maybe it is accessible. I don't know. But I think it's one of the least accessible. But what does that mean? What does that mean?

Salakastar ([00:30:53](#)):

So when I write these songs, or when I wrote these songs in the album, I wrote them from the blue space. So I would wear blue, had blue lights. My studio's blue and I would have blue objects around. And the night that I wrote that song, I had a really terrible session where I just felt kind of artistically abused, and I've been in that space also, and I've experienced abuse in a lot of ways, so I think that night, I was just like, "I'm done. I'm done with being a victim." And so, I just sat down and I kind of plugged out that piano line. And Ian was able to turn it my very primitive piano into something really beautiful. And then I just wrote a few lines and used my looper and just repeated.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:32:04]

Salakastar ([00:32:03](#)):

Just wrote a few lines and used my looper and just repeated over and over and over again. It's interesting I'm having a hard time thinking about how to explain to you those lyrics, but I think in the tradition of the Negro spiritual, my songs are coded and I think sometimes they're coded in a way where I'm not even sure where they're coming from and I don't sometimes understand where I'm coming from, until long after I wrote the song. Then I thought about... On that same night, where I saw all the



blue, I saw my first Basquiat in person. I had actually seen this exhibition in New York a few years before that and it was these gigantic photos of Basquiat nude and I guess some... Did you see that? I can't remember what it was called or who the photographer was.

Speaker 1 ([00:33:21](#)):

[inaudible 00:33:21] smoking a cigarette

Salakastar ([00:33:22](#)):

Yes. He was fully nude and it was big and I saw that and I was like, "This feels wrong. This feels wrong." I saw that before I saw an actual Basquiat. So when I saw the Basquiat in person, I was like, "Oh." I was looking at the strokes and I was like, "Oh, there you are. There you are. You're there, you're alive." There's two parts of the song. In the second part of the song, I began to think about what would it have been like if he healed? Who would he be? But I think, I mean, he's still there. When you actually see the Basquiat in person, and it's just so funny that now that he's... Just the thought of an artist being worth more dead than alive, and he just lived in...

Salakastar ([00:34:44](#)):

Toward the end of his life, I imagine that he was in a lot of pain and I want it to just sing to that part of him that was... Just that spirit of what was on the canvas and not how much a Basquiat painting sells for, and not someone making these, printing out these gigantic nude photos. I'm not sure if Basquiat would have wanted his I mean, fully nude. I don't know if he would have approved of that. So I think I was singing to those parts of his spirit that is not capitalistic. I feel like that is what is kept alive on some level. I did it for the Capricorns. Start of Capricorn season. Also, this past winter was so hard because we couldn't gather, right? Because I'm always living somewhere cold and I don't know why. Maybe in the future I'll stop doing that. But I realized this winter, the way that we get through the winter is gathering with people and we weren't able to do that. I think just vibrationally that track is all about healing and also healing depression. I'm going to go after this, get some sunshine.

Imani Mixon ([00:36:40](#)):

Yes, we need it.

Salakastar ([00:36:41](#)):

Yeah.

American Artist ([00:36:44](#)):

Yeah. That sounds amazing. I mean, they really did Basquiat dirty. I don't know. They're always trying to find new ways to expose him or mine some new art out of him. I think about that a lot, but yeah. So to tell you a little bit about this piece that I shared, it's this piece called a Refusal, and I think of it as a performance, even though it was something I did do online through social media and it was over the course of a year where all the images I would normally post or share, images of me or friends or family or whatever. Every time I went to post a photo, instead I would post this blank blue image that was the same size of the photo, and I would just save those photos just for myself. I would just post the same blue image in their place each time.

American Artist ([00:37:48](#)):

I did that for a year and it was really trying to push back against how we're expected to perform in a certain way online, and also just experimenting with this form of redaction or removal of an image and the choice you have over that. I think that tied with my name and having this choice over how I circulate myself or how I operate or how I'm visible in online space, and it also just really gave me this really introspective period to think about how I'm engaging online, because I wasn't liking or commenting or anything, but I was still look at stuff. So it just totally changed how I was seeing everything. It was really an interesting experience. But then on the webpage I sent you, the first thing is an email I wrote to my mom where I'm like... Because my mom lives in California and I live in New York, she really relies on social media to see what I'm up to and stuff.

American Artist ([00:39:04](#)):

I was just like, "You're one of the people that might really notice what's going on, but I want you to know why I'm doing this and we should still communicate in other more real ways than just through social media." Then there's some images of what my web pages looked like during that time and then there's also this conspiracy videos, YouTube video that's talking about how I'm, I don't know, a corrupt figure in the social network trying to destroy the network.

Imani Mixon ([00:39:44](#)):

Wow. I mean, I feel like that's so relatable right now because I've seen a thousand people deactivate and reactivate over these last few months, and I really think that's what gets down to it. It's just like we are not in control of how these messages land, who's talking about what, who's saving what, commenting what, so that feels very necessary and probably a little bit like you thought about this way before all this was happening, which is wild. I also love that both you and Salakastar have this blue that's very intentionally used and I feel like that's not just a coincidence. So I wonder what drew you. I know, Salakastar you were saying you just saw it, but I'm wondering what continues to draw you toward blue itself.

Salakastar ([00:40:33](#)):

Blue is this light house, is something that I can always depend on. I can always create from that space and I love it. It's just so beautiful. There are a lot of artists who had that same connection. Obviously, Picasso had a blue period and I love the work of Lina Iris Viktor. She uses blue really beautifully, really beautifully. When I get rich, I can not wait to have a Lina Iris Viktor and Maggie Nelson with Bluets and Joni Mitchell with blue and Miles Davis. Also, the really Majorelle comes from the Majorelle Gardens in Marrakech, and that is on my vision board. I want to go and I want to perform all of my songs in that garden. So it's just a place of beauty and safety. Also, I feel like as a black artist, when we talk about color, a lot of the times it's always about blackness, right?

Salakastar ([00:41:53](#)):

On some level, I am fatigued. I am fatigued at talking about blackness because there's so much more. I mean, I'm not saying that... I mean, that's something in itself, but I think looking at blueness and also just in the tradition of black music, the blues and I think I'm taking that tradition and going forward with it, which is the tradition of black music continuing to move music forward. I think also when I think about the blues and also black people's depression, I think with black people in America, especially those of us who are descendants of slaves or enslaved people, there's this built-in depression just from being here. I'm interested in the ways that we transform that, because there's that deep depression, but

there's also this deep joy. We laugh the loudest. We experienced life, we experienced joy so deeply. So I want it to look at not only the sadness of blue, but the ecstasy of it.

American Artist ([00:43:32](#)):

Yeah. I think that's really on point. I'm interested in blue because it's such a controversial color. Like you said, both the depression and the joy that encompass and the black experience and thinking of the legacy of blueness in your relationship to black people making art and expressing ourselves. I think about that claim to ownership over blue or the right to use blueness as a place of expression, but also then at the same time, seeing how it's used by the police as they try and identify as blue. I'm interested in a contestation around that color, but I think where I arrived at it originally, I was thinking about my name and thinking about the American colors, so to speak and this blue that associated with the American flag and wanting to push back against that or think about what another blue could be.

American Artist ([00:44:44](#)):

I started using this blue you see on a computer screen, blue screen of death blue, and I liked that because it's like a femoral. It turns on and off at your discretion. It's much brighter. It's also the color you see on a screen before an image shows up. So I felt like this could be an image that represents the possibility for another image. So this could be a signal that says that there's another thing possible. That's how I started using it and then seeing how many different ways it's used, how many political ways it's been instrumentalized, I just got really interested in all those different forms that it has. I don't know. That's remained something that I want to keep looking at and unpacking.

Imani Mixon ([00:45:42](#)):

Yeah. That's great. In talking to you all, I'm just in awe of the possibilities of what we can imagine. If we have to respect the police as blue and the blues is blue, then of course, we can assign our own meaning to any other color or any other things. So I think that has definitely been an exercise that I've been personally trying to practice throughout all this. It's like, "Well, if I say it's this, then it's this," and this is how we're going. So who's going to tell me otherwise? It's just me. What are you talking about? I think something else I'm really curious about is that in popular culture, when you hear that somebody is making a name for themselves, there seems to be a very deliberate tie to capitalistic success. So I'm wondering, because you all have made names for yourself in certain ways, how do you engage with your motivation or what do you think is tied to it for you?

American Artist ([00:46:47](#)):

I've been thinking about this a lot actually, because I feel like in the arts, there's really a lot of push for you to just make a lot of money. That being the way to tell if you're successful is how much money you make. I'm like there has to be other ways of creating value and, I don't know, that are not capitalistic or monetary. Not to say that you can't use that money to do great things, but I don't think that should be the metric by which you determine someone's influence or significance. I've started to think maybe it's about your, I don't know, impact on the field. What new ideas that you bring, or what people did you touch and change their ability to enter into that field or something like that? I'm really trying to think about what other forms of value we can use to, I don't know, say that we're making...

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [00:48:04]

American Artist ([00:48:03](#)):

I don't know say that we're making a name for ourself, I guess. And also which of those will be as respected as money. I don't know. But that's something that I'm trying to figure out too.

Imani Mixon ([00:48:17](#)):

Yeah, for sure. I definitely think there's a space for cultural currency, but even that can be exhausting too in the same way y'all were talking about Basquiat.

Salakastar ([00:48:29](#)):

Yeah. I think I'm excited for people to know how to actually pronounce my name. [crosstalk 00:48:38] That's when I know

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:48:39](#)):

Which name? Aja or Salakastar?

Salakastar ([00:48:42](#)):

All of it. All of it.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:48:45](#)):

[inaudible 00:48:45] on time we were hanging out, and I said, "Hey Aja." You was like, "You saying my name right, thank you." I was like-

Salakastar ([00:48:51](#)):

Because people don't listen.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:48:54](#)):

[crosstalk 00:48:54] pronounce letter?

Salakastar ([00:48:56](#)):

No, it's because people skit, people see A-J-A and a lot of the times they say Ahja or they'll just say Asia, and they can't hear Aja. The way I pronounce my name, I'm named after The Steely Dan album. And they go, "Aja", if you listened to the song, you'll know how to pronounce it. But it's so funny. My brother used to say that my name sounds like a spell, Salakastar and I'm like, "It is baby."

Imani Mixon ([00:49:31](#)):

And what about it?

Salakastar ([00:49:34](#)):

And I think too, for some reason, making a name for yourself like that, I've been seeing a lot of my friends become verified on Twitter and Instagram and things like that. And well, now that's how, you know, [crosstalk 00:49:54] it's literally like, "Okay, what is that?" What is that like little check mark?" It's like, okay, someone has now legitimized your name. And what does that mean? So I think that's interesting and I think there is some kind of currency that goes along with that, because when you get that check mark, you can start to monetize. I don't know. So I think that, now that getting verified, that also means making a name for yourself.

Imani Mixon ([00:50:28](#)):

Right. And I think there's the rule of thumb is just the person who you're trying to talk to, see how they say their name. What do they call themselves? So that is the key. My name is Imani, which I don't think it's that hard to pronounce, but you would be amazed at the "Iminis", the "Imans", the "Omini," the just whatever. And I'm just like this, "You could say in, you could say Imani, let's not play games."

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:51:01](#)):

Did you say people pronounce your name "Imini"?

Imani Mixon ([00:51:04](#)):

Yes. Yes. [inaudible 00:51:04] And it's just like, [crosstalk 00:51:04] it's so much harder. That is way harder than anything I ever told you.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:51:08](#)):

This sounds like Finding Nemo when they couldn't say-

Imani Mixon ([00:51:11](#)):

Anemone. (Laughs) Basically.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:51:16](#)):

Yeah. I guess for me, I don't think [inaudible 00:51:22] proud of me I'm good. She, when my mom and a lot of my family did not, they honestly kind of still don't believe that being an artist is something that's realistic, that's logical. [inaudible 00:51:41] working class family, but I'm like all the men in my family work and [inaudible 00:51:47], family are caregivers to some capacity. So for me, it was really just, call my mom and tell her something happened. And she like, "Oh shit, that's good, baby." For me it was okay, I made a name. Or like when she calls me and say like, "Oh, I saw you had an article out." That does it for me. I mean, of course I'm here to cha-ching on my phone when a deposit hits, also things that I have. [crosstalk 00:52:22] But my mom, her acknowledging and growing, and understanding of not only what I do, but that being an artist is a [inaudible 00:52:38].

Imani Mixon ([00:52:38](#)):

Yeah. I love the idea of what you're cha-ching notification. (laughs).

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:52:44](#)):

Let me tell you, I got one this morning, I was like, " [inaudible 00:52:48]"

Imani Mixon ([00:52:49](#)):

(Laughs) I will be completely open to that. But I do think that in this moment, what has been a lot harder for a lot of the artists that I've spoken to is just like trying to figure out what the new measurement is of success or what is the thing you're reaching for. If it's not a show, if it's not a exhibition, if it's not necessarily that in-person big, sexy thing that we all want. Like, what is your validation slash what are you verified to do at home? What are you verified to do in your life and your art, and who are you doing it for? So it feels very comforting for me to hear you all create these spaces through your names, for it to be like a sacred container for all the work that you're doing. That feels very exciting to me.

American Artist ([00:53:35](#)):

What's was funny to me about the blue check mark is the point of it is supposed to be so people can't fraud you or make a fake account. Right? But they won't give you a verification in order to protect you from being frauded. So that's why it's become this other thing, or that's not why, but that's part of it becoming this social status thing. But I don't know, I'm just a little bit bitter because I've had other accounts trying to impersonate me and getting everyone I know to report them and they still won't delete the account. And I'm just like, "What are y'all doing?" And so I'm just really bitter because I'm like, "If you verify me this isn't going to happen."

Imani Mixon ([00:54:21](#)):

I will be American Artist and we don't have to fight about this. Yeah. I completely forgot that that was a thing. We've gone really far from that, well, it's a lot of verify frauds.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:54:35](#)):

[crosstalk 00:54:35] I also find it funny what these things verifying what apps. I don't know how true this is, but I saw an article in which influencers are starting to get blue check marks on their house, on their houses, on the west coast. So yeah, if I find it, I'll send it to y'all, but I could swear I saw something like they're putting blue check marks on the exterior of major influencer houses. Say for an example, Jackie Aina may have a blue check mark above her front door of her house in California, because she's a major makeup and [inaudible 00:55:09] or some shit like that. Honestly, that terrifies me, especially [crosstalk 00:55:15]. I don't want you knowing what I do, especially not people outside, I don't know them, but like [crosstalk 00:55:22]

Imani Mixon ([00:55:22](#)):

It's getting Black Mirror for sure.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:55:27](#)):

[crosstalk 00:55:27] The episode of Black Mirror where they have to [inaudible 00:55:29] everybody and with her brain went down, her life was just in the gutter. That's what it's giving. It's scary. I don't want that. At least not while I'm still on this earth. So at least not for another hundred years.

Imani Mixon ([00:55:41](#)):

For sure. And I think it came out that that was like either Dr. Damage or like a social experiment, but either way, there are still these things, right? These material things that you have to have once you reached that certain level as an artist or as somebody who is verified by the powers that be. And I think a lot of what we're talking about is trying to push against that or invite it in when you want to. So I don't want to keep you all for too much longer, but I am curious about any upcoming or existing works that you are excited about and ways that people can keep in touch with you if you want them to.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:56:25](#)):

So I'm always working on something. I have a performance coming up this weekend at [inaudible 00:56:32], which I'm pretty excited about. It'd be my third iteration on my performance as Dion, honestly it'll be my last time doing this specific Dion performance. I wanted to end it here in Detroit because Detroit's so influential to Deon. Outside of Dion, I'm working on some really interesting stuff. I'm exploring sound in painting and of course, photography and site-specific installations and stuff like

that. I have a few exhibitions coming up. Two here in Detroit, one with [inaudible 00:57:14] Detroit, one with Detroit Artists Market. And then I have a show opening up in Germany and A-K-T, which I'm excited about because two of the artists who are in the show were artists that I could teach to my students. Well, one of them, I teach my students, one of them is just a artist I [inaudible 00:57:29]. Two of the artist is named Golden and Vaginal Davis, which is really exciting.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:57:33](#)):

Oh, and I will be going to Senegal in October for the Black Rock Senegal Residence.

Imani Mixon ([00:57:42](#)):

That's major. I love that you kept that at the end. I was waiting to hear. Thank you very much. (laughs).

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:57:49](#)):

Honestly. I told somebody yesterday, they said, "Why do you sound so calm about it?" I was like, "Girl cause I've been telling people [inaudible 00:57:55], Oh he's the one who painted Obama's portrait." "Oh, okay, that's cool." They don't get excited. So I don't get [inaudible 00:58:05] excited [crosstalk 00:58:06] [inaudible 00:58:09] but please believe when September comes, y'all going to see me walk around here with-

Imani Mixon ([00:58:13](#)):

Senegalese twists?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:58:17](#)):

[crosstalk 00:58:17] you're laughing upstairs. I might get four lanes box sprays, [inaudible 00:58:22].

Imani Mixon ([00:58:23](#)):

[inaudible 00:58:23] come on, Dion to the continent. Like, what.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([00:58:25](#)):

Yes, yes. Oh, that's it for me.

Salakastar ([00:58:31](#)):

I'm dropping my first album, All Blue: Part One, Majorelle! on my label for like studios. I'm so excited for that. And I am an ensemble member at a host of people and we're working on our next theatrical piece, Fire In The Theater. We've been doing all of that virtually. So everyone is getting vaccinated. So hopefully by the fall, we'll be in the rehearsal room again. And oh, you can find me on Instagram at Salakastar.

American Artist ([00:59:09](#)):

Both y'all's announcements started [inaudible 00:59:12], congrats on Senegal. I'm working on a project. It's going to have different parts. But this first part I'm working on is online project, but hopefully it'll be exhibition at some point, but I'm looking at Octavia E. Butler's is writing and her life. And I found out pretty recently, I mean, I knew we had grown up in the same town in Altadena, California, but I found out we went to the same high school too. And I was super stoked about that. And I'm trying to do this project where I'm just looking at her family's migration to California and my family's migration in

California. I'm looking at the history of rocket science in Altadena and Pasadena. I'm looking at science fiction as it took place in Los Angeles and also just black people, making their place there in the second part of the great migration. So I'm trying to pull together all these different historical lines to make something new. And the project is called Shaper of God. And you can find me on Instagram to keep in touch about it. And my Instagram is ivorytower\_headass.

Imani Mixon ([01:00:34](#)):

(Laughs) Y'all so cheeky.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([01:00:38](#)):

[inaudible 01:00:38] your social media is headass. (laughs). When I first followed you, I was like, "This shit is funny." Also my social media is just Black Boy Shine. So B-L-K Boy Shine and on Twitter it's just spelled out on normally.

Imani Mixon ([01:00:59](#)):

Beautiful. Thank you all so much. I felt also anxious and excited to like be back out in the world and talking to people, but you all made it very easy. So that is it. Thank you so much. I'm so excited. I cannot wait to see this out in the world.

Salakastar ([01:01:15](#)):

Yes. Thank you Imani.

Imani Mixon ([01:01:16](#)):

Thank you. I'm happy you had fun. Nice to meet you, American Artist. I hope I can see your stuff in person.

American Artist ([01:01:23](#)):

Yeah. Hope I can come to Detroit like I was supposed to.

Imani Mixon ([01:01:27](#)):

Right, exactly. Everybody's reality.

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([01:01:34](#)):

The rebel artist supposed to be up at studios.

American Artist ([01:01:37](#)):

I was looking forward to that so much. I was so bummed.

Imani Mixon ([01:01:47](#)):

It's still here. I'm here right now and you fine?

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([01:01:48](#)):

[inaudible 01:01:48] American Artist, how do you think I feel? I'm here in Detroit and I'm like, [crosstalk 01:01:52] I'm like, "Really? Like, what the hell?" [inaudible 01:01:55] three months. [crosstalk 01:01:59]



Imani Mixon ([01:01:58](#)):

Well, I'll tell the people. I will let the authorities know that y'all want to be here. [crosstalk 01:02:06]

Darryl DeAngelo Terrell ([01:02:07](#)):

[inaudible 01:02:07] all the time, so-

Imani Mixon ([01:02:07](#)):

Good. Well, thank you all so much. I hope you get some sunshine.

Salakastar ([01:02:12](#)):

Thank you. Bye everybody.

Imani Mixon ([01:02:14](#)):

Shout out to the artists who joined me. I'm your host Imani Mixon. And this is Subject Matters. A podcast presented by Kresge Arts in Detroit and Red Bull Arts Detroit. Thanks for listening.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:02:27]