

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. When we think of viewing or experiencing art, we're likely to envision some place with cool lighting that prioritizes art by the height of the platforms it's displayed on. We expect performance art to happen in front of a sold out audience in a concert hall, and we flatten the dynamic, multidimensional possibilities of art when we assume that it must be hung on a wall or on international display.

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

Today, I'm speaking with two artists, Jennifer Harge and Joiri Minaya who rework and reimagine the bounds of site-specific art and performance. Hey, y'all! Can you please introduce yourselves?

Jennifer Harge ([00:00:47](#)):

Hello to both of you, and Imani, thank you for the invitation. My name is Jennifer Harge, and I am a dance maker, performance artist, choreographer based in Detroit, Highland Park to be more specific, also a dance educator.

Joiri Minaya ([00:01:09](#)):

Hey, my name is Joiri Minaya. I'm an interdisciplinary visual artist. I am based in New York. I grew up in the Dominican Republic. My pronouns are she, her.

Imani Mixon ([00:01:25](#)):

Beautiful. So, this conversation really is centered about I guess all of the bounds that we put around art that can be extremely prickly and exclusive for a lot of people. And, from what I saw, it looks like you both attended art school, and I'm curious about what you all learned about art standards, especially as it pertains to how and where art can be performed and displayed.

Joiri Minaya ([00:01:53](#)):

You mean as in art school or in life in general?

Imani Mixon ([00:01:56](#)):

I guess both, both is fine, but I am curious about the genesis of what you learned or what you thought coming out of school art could be like?

Jennifer Harge ([00:02:04](#)):

Go ahead, go ahead.

Joiri Minaya ([00:02:09](#)):

I guess the first art schools that I attended in the DR were more conventional in the sense of art as something that hangs on the wall or is displayed in a gallery space. We did have notions of art integrated into everyday life, but it wasn't something that was widely practiced or activated in different ways. I think people that I see coming out of those schools now are way more experimental in pushing boundaries what art is thought of traditionally and how it can be thought of in different ways, but when I was in those schools, it wasn't the case. We were pretty much making drawings, painting, sculpture.

Mostly it was that. Then I attended Parsons here in New York, and that was much more expansive in the way that art was thought about, and applied, and activated. Yeah, I would say that.

Jennifer Harge ([00:03:30](#)):

I grew up dancing probably dating back to when I was five years old of schools of thought that were based in Western European value systems. In those value systems there were standards of how one should use space, how one should use sounds, how to successfully organize bodies in space. So, I've grown up understanding how to not choreograph my body but how to choreograph other bodies in space for a long time based on these value systems that were about... How do categorize that? There were just rules for how to do the things successfully, and I think it hasn't been until the last five, eight years or so where I've consciously been thinking of how to subvert those systems in my own work and also in my own body. I'm thinking, as a movement practitioner, those conventions land on my flesh. They land in my self, and so trying to parch through what is me and parch through what I have learned as a student of Western dance schools.

Imani Mixon ([00:05:21](#)):

Yeah, and it's just crazy because I think being removed from a lot of those institutions lately makes me just realize how white and Western so much of our learning is, and how it feels like a diversion or like you're cheating yourself if you don't work in that same way. So, I'm curious for both of you because from what I've seen it looks like you display and perform your art in very cool, new ways that just are not very easy to describe even, so I wonder what that process is like for you, and if it came naturally, or if you had to push back beyond that traditional teaching that you had? And, whoever feels comfortable can step in.

Jennifer Harge ([00:06:04](#)):

I can go. One thing I'm thinking about in the same vein of I had to relearn myself what my own value systems were and where I learned those value systems, so for me it was remembering cultural value systems of where I first learned... Not where I first learned it, but where else dance had lived in my life, where performance lived in my life, and many times that was, I've said this before, but that was with family members, cousins, neighbors, in the street, in the basement, in the living room making up dance routines. And, I had to remember that is also movement, it's also worthy of being called dance, and not just a routine.

Jennifer Harge ([00:06:56](#)):

There's no separation in those, and so for me, it's been about remembering those places and wherever then I end up for the performance, or the installation, or whatever, is it important to bring that with me so that when I find myself being in that tension of my own aesthetics and trying not be reliant on the Western ones that I grew up with? When I remember other places where the dances happened, whether it had been the neighborhood kids, or maybe it was in church, or whatever, I bring those other values with me. I'm more available, I'm more receptive to them.

Imani Mixon ([00:07:42](#)):

Yeah.

Joiri Minaya ([00:07:42](#)):

I think for me, although there's some similarities, I might be more centered in using some of those conventions and tools of the Western ideology, gaze, construction to subvert them within that recalling. So, whereas in some work I might be trying to do something similar... Well, in all of my work I'm trying to be aware of where does this learning and knowledge come from, and what has been omitted for me to learn this? Why did I learn this and not this other thing? But, in the decisions that I'm taking in my work in the last couple of years, it has to do more with using some of those tools and conventions of presentation, composition, color, I don't know, being aware of what these signifiers make people think about and then using that process of thought to insert some sort of interruption or deconstruction to make other people aware of where those things come from.

Joiri Minaya ([00:09:04](#)):

So, in my visual work for example, I've used a lot of literal deconstruction of breaking things apart and putting them together in a different way, or clash where I'm using some of those archetypes, but then I recombine them in a different way that's making you aware of the history of those archetypes. Pixelation is something that I've used in several of my works to think about disability, and sharpness, and legibility which are tools of control that have been used by the West for a long time, so thinking of this new technology as some way to think about disruption and refusal. Oh, I had something else in mind. Oh well, in recent works that have to do more with engaging with colonial statues, I've been designing patterns based on plants and the botanical research that has to do with what was important and what is important for people of my community and people of indigenous communities in different locations. So, maybe that's the body of work that approaches more a similar strategy as Jennifer was describing.

Imani Mixon ([00:10:33](#)):

Yeah. It's funny that you mention that, Jennifer, because I was just thinking when a new song comes out and I'm not close enough physically to my cousin to work on a routine together, it hurts a little bit? If we're not getting together to learn a TikTok dance, the freedom of, "Oh, we're together for Christmas. We're about to do this whole Destiny's Child album together," we don't really have that anymore. And, I was just trying to figure out... I can't schedule that. I can't call my friends and say, "Come over, let's learn this thing." Or, maybe I can, but I feel weird doing that.

Imani Mixon ([00:11:08](#)):

And Joiri, I feel like what I'm thinking about when you're speaking is just the preciousness of things, this idea that what we learned has to stay in our mind in the same place, and you can't touch it, or once you reach the final draft, you can't edit it. I think that definitely rings true in a lot of the things that I'm working with and working through right now too. And, I'm curious from both of you about how you choose the right container for your work? I've personally experienced, Jennifer, I've seen some of your performances live, and I've watched yours online, Joiri, but I'm curious how you decide whether something will be a performance piece, or something I videotape alone, that kind of thing. Is that something that is central to your practice or do you just figure it out as you go?

Joiri Minaya ([00:12:04](#)):

Well, I can go ahead. I figure it out as I go, and it's also central to my practice. I don't know if that's an either/or. Sometimes it's even confusing to myself because there's so many mediums available. Sometimes a body of work actually lives in several forms. For example, it's funny that you say containers, because I have a body of work called Containers, and that's series exists in photography that

is staged and very neatly composed, but then it also exists in photo documentation of live performances which also have other materials like scripts, and texts, and the performances are also recorded in video. So, there's this wealth of documentation for this series, and then it's about what aspects of the work I want to highlight in what context.

Joiri Minaya ([00:13:06](#)):

For the performance, I mostly show the video, but then sometimes it's been interesting to show the photo documentation alongside text and have that other experience where the audience is unfolding the context of the performance and documentation in their own mind. It's a more introspective process. Whereas with video, you take a seat back and just watch the video, and it's a different experience. So, I'm interested in different aspects of that interdisciplinary-ness. I don't know if that's a word. Those different tools that I have in my work, sometimes I'm interested in very specific gestures, and very specific mediums, and ways of material as in ideas, but sometimes it's flexible and it exists in these multiple ways.

Joiri Minaya ([00:14:08](#)):

For example, I've presented some performances live that I have some, "meh," documentation of it that I never show because I just think, "I want to re-shoot this. I want to stage this for the camera. I want to control light. I want to control movement." I want to control all these things, and until I get to there, I'll probably keep showing just a still image and let people imagine what the performance is alongside a narrative that is provided, but I don't want to show mediocre documentation if I know that I can do it so much better. I guess maybe that could be a hindrance of having all of these mediums available.

Imani Mixon ([00:14:47](#)):

Yeah, that makes sense.

Jennifer Harge ([00:14:53](#)):

A lot of times I feel folks... Well, a couple thoughts about this. But, many times I usually ask what the space options are if I have performance coming up. And, once I'm told the container, I feel like then the things I have been working on, they adapt to the space. I'm thinking site-specifically not always as, "I want something to happen in this location for these reasons," but if the site comes first, then I can move and build inside of it. I think I prefer to work that way of receiving limitations almost, and then knowing how to expand them, and also enjoy the prompt to have limitations just as a way to allow me to work in ways that perhaps I wouldn't have considered if it was just me beginning something.

Jennifer Harge ([00:16:06](#)):

I feel like it's collaborative. If there's a curator, or a producer, or whomever that is commissioning a thing, I don't know something about me, I feel like I'm more expansive. Not more, but it feels expansive to show up somewhere and settle into a place, and be like, "Oh, I could do a thing in that corner, something could happen over here." I'm thinking about the summer during the peak of stay-at-home orders when I was asked to do something. It didn't matter what it was, and I wasn't leaving out of my house, like many people. So, I was like, "What do I have? What's already here?" So, that had me go be outside on the back steps, and that became the site, so I think it's the mixture of what do I already have, how does that place become enfolded, or how does that place become? How can I be with that space and then also if I'm invited to do a thing, how can I either disrupt it if it's some kind of colonial structure, or how can I live inside of it? And, I determine those things based on the energies of those rooms.

Imani Mixon ([00:17:38](#)):

It's literally like, "I got to see what I'm working with."

Jennifer Harge ([00:17:42](#)):

Yeah, it's like, "What y'all got?"

Imani Mixon ([00:17:45](#)):

Show me what it is.

Jennifer Harge ([00:17:45](#)):

And, then I can show up.

Imani Mixon ([00:17:47](#)):

Something that comes to mind for me is that saying that people tell artists all the time which is, "Work with what you have," which sometimes feels freeing, but other times feels limiting where it's like, "I am not going to give you more resources to figure this out. Just do it where you are." And, I wonder what thoughts you both have about that or if there's any examples where you were able to push beyond just, "Okay, I'm here. I'll work with what I have," and maybe that did open up a space for you to work with what you want too or what you desire?

Joiri Minaya ([00:18:24](#)):

I would say that's worked so far for me. There's many limitations in a city like New York City, beginning with space, and I feel that my practice has evolved to be modular or easily folded because of that. I mean, easily folded but then easily unfolded and taking space when provided. And, then also I think back to my years in undergrad and freshly out of school, not having access to necessarily the residency grants that I have experienced since. I feel like I still look back at work that I made there back then that is super generative, and still inspiring, and that I'm still nurturing from. I think that limitations are not really as limiting as they may seem or sound. And, I even think that having work under those conditions prepares you to better administer opportunities that you then have later on.

Joiri Minaya ([00:19:53](#)):

I don't want to promote a model of scarcity either because it definitely affects you to create from a place like that. I guess I'm see the silver lining of it. At the same time, it's funny. I was having a conversation recently because I got a grant and someone else got the same grant, and we were saying, "Well, not we got to watch out for each other that we don't start making bad art." She was making fun of artists that when they have access to resources, they make something big, and red, and whatever, and it's not really their best work. So, that was an interesting comment by my friend. I laughed because it's true. I've seen that, and I recognize that out there, and I want to watch out to not fall there. But, I feel that having developed ideas without all of the ideal conditions serves perhaps as a sketch or... Not a sketch, but you get to... I'm forgetting the word, but you get to... I want to say hone in, is that a term? Does that fit there?

Imani Mixon ([00:21:16](#)):

Yep, you got it.

Joiri Minaya ([00:21:19](#)):

Sorry, ESL, English and a second language person. To hone in those ideas, and then when you do have resources, and space, and opportunities expand and develop those ideas in that ideal form that you dreamt of before.

Jennifer Harge ([00:21:41](#)):

Hearing you speak, it makes me think about the infrastructure in Detroit. I'm not really sure how this is for visual artists necessarily, but I'm thinking for time-based artists, there's a lack of infrastructural support. So, there's really a DIY version of support and then the opera house. There's very few structural models in-between, so what that has really meant for me is that I can create a model to work in that really suits the projects, the practice, and all the in-between, versus if I was in a place like New York City that has various scales of infrastructural support for movement based folks. There are several residency programs, several different kinds of monetary support things.

Jennifer Harge ([00:22:51](#)):

Without that as a sustainable resource in Detroit, it has allowed me to work underground in a particular way because I think about when you are in certain residencies or in an institutional mode of support, there's certain check ins, and benchmarks, and things you have to produce to prove you were in the space. But, anybody watching you... The things that I'm working in, the way I was able to build out, I'm able to build out a rehearsal studio practice, it's just happening in a warehouse, and people only know about it if they're invited in.

Jennifer Harge ([00:23:47](#)):

Something about that underground way of making has been a way to hone in to those value systems I spoke of earlier and to be really clear on that I'm moving from me and not moving from some expectation to show a thing on march 30th with these funders in the room. I'm showing it to folks I trust, and folks who will challenge what I'm doing with care. So, I do think that particular kind of lack, while I complain about it, it has been useful for my own making. It's me and the people I bring in which is then a way to clarify certain parts of my practice that I wasn't really thinking I could access when I was in school. Even when I was teaching more regularly, I didn't really know how to access these things. I'm able to now spend time without so much visibility.

Imani Mixon ([00:24:59](#)):

Yeah, and I think it's just a mind game. If you are in that place where you don't have all the resources, and you're thinking about all the resources you have, it's going to disrupt the work. And, I think what I've been trying to think about is like, "Yo, that was actually cool. The flow was easier, I knew who I wanted to work with, I didn't have to check in," like you said, so just trying to appreciate every part of the process feels like a "duh" thing to do, but it's hard. It's not the most natural feeling ever.

Jennifer Harge ([00:25:29](#)):

Right.

Imani Mixon ([00:25:31](#)):

Yeah. And, I actually did want to go back. Joiri, you were talking about your piece that was called Containers. Are you able to speak a little bit more about that?

Joiri Minaya ([00:25:42](#)):

Yeah, so Containers started because I was living in New York, and I at some point Googled Dominican women because I wanted to see the imagery that would come up on Google Images. Because I was having a hard time understanding, as someone who grew up in the Dominican Republic who was then here, how my identity was... Well, I understood how my identity was seen, but I was trying to understand what informed those ideas. From that Google search, there was another body of work that came out of that, but something that I noticed is that the way that women are represented in that Google search is very formulaic and very monolithic.

Joiri Minaya ([00:26:28](#)):

And, I started seeing that some poses were repeated throughout the way that the women were posing for the camera, and some of them were about making the body available to the observer. Some of them I recognized echoed some poses in our history. Some of them reminded me of specific paintings of white men that went to different tropical islands and painted black and brown women in particular ways. So, I was thinking about this idea of performative-ity and that expectation from the outside of you being something whether you are that or not, depending on how they read you.

Joiri Minaya ([00:27:17](#)):

I started sewing bodysuits made out of fabrics that were depicting a tropical pattern. The bodysuits were sewn in ways that when you put them on, they would force you to embody some of the poses that I was seeing in the Google search, as an ironic and humorous gesture, but also thinking of the discomfort of that embodiment. So, there was a photo series that came out of that exploration through sewing and sculptural, I guess, performance of sorts.

Joiri Minaya ([00:28:01](#)):

And, in the photo series, I then also look at how the poses and the body suits interact with the landscape where I photograph these photos. It's usually me in the photo series, and I'm usually thinking of conventions of depicting landscape, and also thinking of disrupting those conventions, and thinking of the constructiveness of the place, so a lot of the landscapes that you see in that photo series are not actually natural. Even though they might look natural, they're really handmade or man constructed, or intervened by humans in a way or another. From that series of photos, a performance evolved where I was thinking of this labor of putting on and off the bodysuit, as a way of thinking about a shift where during this shift, you're performing this thing, but out of the shift, you get to be yourself.

Joiri Minaya ([00:29:06](#)):

I devised a looping audio track, well several audio tracks, one for each body suits, and it was done by four different Dominican women in a park. It happened twice at Socrates Sculpture Park and at Wave Hill. The logic of the performance is that while the audio is playing, and you're hearing the words, which I can talk more about what is in the script, the performer has to be in the body suit, so performing whatever the pose is that the bodysuit dictates. There's gaps of silence inserted in the loops. When that gap of silence is playing, you have the freedom to take off the bodysuit and stretch, sit down, talk to people, have a rest because it's a lot of labor to have your hands like this for five minutes or 10. Then that goes back and forth for about two hours. During the performance, you have these cycles of going in and out of this mode of labor.

Joiri Minaya ([00:30:30](#)):

Then the scripts have to do with a variety of things. The ones that I am recalling the most right now are, there's one called Camouflage or How to Lose Your Native Accent in Five Quick Steps, so that one has to do with ideas of camouflaging or becoming one more, and this external something that calls you out as different. So, that one has to do with camouflaging and hyper visibility whereas there's another one that is called... I can't remember the title, but it says something like, "I'm here to entertain you, but only during my shift." So, it's addressing those ideas of that expectation of performative-ity and entertainment. Some other scripts have to do with our historical things, the history of pattern making, me growing up looking at Discovery Channel as something that was talking about this external, exotic thing, and then finding out that I was that external, exotic thing for someone else. The scripts are going in different directions like that.

Imani Mixon ([00:32:11](#)):

Yeah, there's just so many layers to it too. I feel like it also, just as a woman in the world, I'm like, "You're right. It takes a lot of work to put some stuff on," or even the phrase where they're like, "You wear the outfit, don't let it wear you," but in the stuff that you made, you have to let it wear you, right?

Joiri Minaya ([00:32:30](#)):

Yeah. Totally, yeah.

Imani Mixon ([00:32:33](#)):

That's beautiful. And, then something that came up that you mentioned about discomfort is actually a question I had for both of you all because from what I've seen of both performances, I'm always curious about which audience you're performing for and their reaction, and I feel like you both make very brave and bold statements through motion and also so through your speech and your statements in these moments. Do you think about the potential discomfort or comfort of your audience in differences spaces, either of you?

Jennifer Harge ([00:33:16](#)):

My number one concern is to make sure that I'm not taking care of, but considering black folks in the room, knowing that it's not a monolithic audience. I think I made choices in the past where I thought while my approach or my response to certain... What am I trying to say? For instance, I have this work called Mourn and Never Tire which was made in response to the number of unarmed black people being killed by police in the US. And, I started making the meditation ritual in 2015. I was having a certain physical reaction to the way the information had transformed to being on social media timelines. Right now, there's a content warning before certain videos are shown, but back in 2014, 2015 they would just be scrolling, and it'd be so-and-so's baby, and then there would be someone being killed by the police. That reaction, I was feeling that on the physical level.

Jennifer Harge ([00:34:47](#)):

So, I started thinking through that, meditating on that, moving through that, and it translated to this series of choreographed pieces. There was one section in those works, where one person on stage would just run while reading the names, ages, and locations of folks who have been killed since 1999. And, you couldn't stop running until you got to the end of the list, the most current date and time. There had been times when I would show up, or the ensemble would show up to do this work. We had done a lot of work among ourselves to prepare our bodies, prepare the space to then enter this kind of work, but I wasn't always considerate of who was always going to be coming to watch.



Jennifer Harge ([00:35:45](#)):

It felt very much like a protest dance in the very beginning iterations. So, it was like, "Listen to us read these names," but there was an instance where I did it once in this really small space in New York. Actually, one of my family members who had come to watch a rehearsal version of that, and she was just like, "Next time let me know that you're about to do that. You just told me it was a showing. You kind of gestured to what the content, but I needed to know before I come in that you're about to read 100 names without stopping." And, so that really shifted my own understanding of how to even approach that and how to take care of folks who I'm asking to be a witness.

Jennifer Harge ([00:36:40](#)):

So, that since then has been making me really mindful of how do you take care not only of yourself and the performers who are a part of it, but how do you also take care of the space and frame it so that, especially black folks in that space, there's an exit plan if you can't be in it. How do you hold and be mindful of all of that? Some performances, I don't think, require that, but that one in particular I'm always just like, "Before we go, who all going to be over there?" You know what I mean? I just need to know all of the possible variables, so that I'm not in my own processing. I'm just re-triggering folks in the audience.

Imani Mixon ([00:37:34](#)):

Yeah, I think that makes sense, and it feels like the value systems that you mentioned before are informed by the spaces that you're in, so it's one more lesson to add to the book.

Jennifer Harge ([00:37:46](#)):

Yeah, not just shock factor which were some things that used to happen when I was in school. Not just in school, people do it all the time still, but not just doing it to be provocative or to show that I have some ridiculous endurance to this kind of loss. I'm not trying to prove something, so I'm always trying to check in to what is the objective of this in this context?

Imani Mixon ([00:38:20](#)):

Yeah, for sure. Joiri, do you have any examples of stuff like that?

Joiri Minaya ([00:38:24](#)):

Yeah. Before I heard Jennifer talking, I was thinking of my positionally as an immigrant and as a person from the global south who is making work in the global north, and how I'm very aware of those things, and how a lot of the symbols, and signifiers, and imagery that I use in my work is that language of Western culture and trying to break that down and subvert that. So, for sure I've had white people be uncomfortable in some of my works and installations at points, and I didn't think much about it because decolonization is not comfortable.

Joiri Minaya ([00:39:22](#)):

I've been doing a series of collages using ethnographic photos and combining them with more contemporary imagery, thinking about identify places, and gestures, and images where contemporarity is that extension of coloniality and trying to again deconstruct that. Some of the ethnographic photos that I have found... There's one photo that I used once in a collage where one of the original photos was taken in a human zoo in France of a woman that is made to pose for the camera, and the way in which

she's posing is that exact way that I found this image from the Google search of Dominican women. One women posing, and juxtaposition of those images is very stark, but the way that I cut out the different parts and made them be juxtaposed, I feel are from a place of care for these two subjects and their different levels of agency or lack thereof.

Joiri Minaya ([00:40:50](#)):

Someone in a panel asked me if in this recent body of work, there were limits to the imagery that I used, if there were some images that I found out there that I chose not to use because of what the image is. And, I guess unconsciously I was making this choice. When this person asked me that, I was like, "Yes, there's stuff that I've seen out there that would be interesting to use, but I'm not going to reiterate this type of trauma. I'm not going to perpetuate the existence of this image in this way." I think recently I've been made aware of those decisions that I've been taking in my work subconsciously.

Imani Mixon ([00:41:31](#)):

Yeah, that makes sense. I feel like, for me, there's a certain level of trauma that we've grown to expect in spaces, especially as a woman of color and working visibly, so I'm always just like, "Whatever's going to harm me the least and give me the most time to stretch out, that's what I'll do." But, there is this weird, "Don't you want to talk about trauma? Don't you want to be traumatized?" It's like, "No, not today actually. Thank you." I really noticed, especially in your work Jennifer, you're using your body. You're using your body in ways that sometimes we use in an everyday basis, and other times we probably just don't tap into it. So, I'm curious since so much of your work is rooted in performance, how do you prepare your body for that, and does it change based off of what you're doing?

Jennifer Harge ([00:42:25](#)):

I'm feeling very disembodied these days, so you even saying that it feels like an abstract thing right now. I think it depends on what his happening. I think as a practice, it's not always happening daily, to be 100, but as a practice I'm always really concerned about the places past the edge. So, if this is a gesture, how can I move beyond that space? It feels like a constant mapping on my ways that I'm interested in. I feel like there's that juxtaposed against a glitchiness that I'm always trying to smooth out for whatever reason, but it's inherent in how my body is always remixing itself or rerouting something, so that I don't stay in some kind of habitual patterning. That feels like the constants.

Jennifer Harge ([00:44:01](#)):

Then when there is a particular performance, then things are layered on top of that. For the running piece for instance, I usually am barefoot when I'm moving, but for that piece it was sometimes as simple as being in a studio in gym shoes, just to remember another kind of training mechanism that would put my body into a space of conditioning rather than something else. Then for FLY DROWN in particular, most of that work was really about strategies towards flight and ways in which to find flight in the body, so I created a lot of movement scores and containers of questions to be practicing. There's this base practice always at bay, and then there's a layering on top of that.

Imani Mixon ([00:45:27](#)):

Yeah, so I was there for one of the FLY DROWN performances, and it was right up the street from my house, so I was like, "Okay, I can just..." I thought I was going to be driving for a long time. It was two minutes up the street from me, and when I walked in I was just like, "There's obviously people I know here. We're all gathered around. I'm not quite sure what's going to happen," and I felt like I suspended

in a different world for however long it was. It was a familiar world, but I knew it wasn't mine. Can you talk a little bit more about what FLY DROWN is, and was, and how it came to be? Because it felt really perfect to experience, and not in it's not messy or glitchy, but just it was cool as hell.

Jennifer Harge ([00:46:14](#)):

Thank you, and thank you for being there. I feel like I'm still learning what FLY DROWN is. Whenever people ask that question, I'm just like, "Uh." I know it was a collage of ways of being. I'm trying to think of the not long route to talk about this. It started as Taylor Aldridge was asked to curate a show at Detroit Artists' Market which is a storefront art gallery in Detroit, and she had approached me about doing some solo work in that space, create an installation, and do some solo work in that space which I had never done. I said yeah, but also I was like, "I don't even know what this means."

Jennifer Harge ([00:47:08](#)):

We had been talking about our shared research interests and questions about domesticity, and mundanity, and black girlhood, black women, black archives, and body archives we all in those conversations. So, FLY DROWN became this immersive, installation that was thinking about the black domestic space and ways black women have used black domestic spaces to declare sovereignty, to expand their breathing, as a place to keep their shit in order and declare agency, and then the rituals inside of that space that make a lot of those things happen. So, one of the things that became really important for me to create a little distance between this is the work and then I am Jennifer was the face masks that was in it, mainly because I felt like if it was me, you'd see a black person, in a domestic space, in a house coat, there was a Mammy thing beginning to happen.

Jennifer Harge ([00:48:31](#)):

So, I was having trouble finding some distance from the thing, so the masks came from a work I had created on some university students a year prior. So, it became a way to move into a folklore, the folk talk version of the black domestic space. That way, it gave space for things to suspend in time. It gave a way for the imaginary to take over, so it was based in a familiar setting, but it allowed it to wander into other territories without really having to question it so much.

Imani Mixon ([00:49:23](#)):

I had never seen anything like it, and I remember trying to tell my friends to go see it, and they're like, "What is it?" I'm like, "You just got to go see it. I don't know what to tell you, but you should go see it." And, I think part of that is when you're in a performance space, for some reason there always feels like there's a moment where you see something that you're not supposed to see, or you're like, "Am I supposed to be here for this, the witnessing of it?" I'm curious for both of you, how you discern between what is an intimate space versus what is public, and do you ever blur those lines in your work?

Joiri Minaya ([00:50:00](#)):

Yeah, I feel a lot of being an artist has to do with that vulnerability of using what you've meditated on and sharing it with the world, as if you're this filter or reflective machine or something. I feel that's a role in the world in a way, so for sure there's intimate vulnerable stuff that I have not shared, but I feel like a lot of my work comes from intimate vulnerable stuff that I have shared. I have to dilute my own experience in the world.

Jennifer Harge ([00:50:48](#)):

I feel similarly, and I think thinking back to FLY DROWN because I knew that part of that work was thinking through black women's interior-ity, and I knew I was choosing to make aspects of that visible, and I think the masking was a way to create distance from that as well. So, it wasn't like telling family business or telling all of my business, but it felt like something where the folks in the room who knew the coding inside of that just know. I was trying to create enough space that if it went over your head, it wasn't meant for you to know.

Jennifer Harge ([00:51:41](#)):

There's body codes and body rituals that are a part of a particular black cultural tradition in the US particularly, and I think I was hyper aware of when to conceal, when to reveal, and then when to offer things. I was like, "So-and-so, my cousin going to know what I'm talking about if she watches this performance tonight, but so-and-so from somewhere else who didn't have a shared cultural experience won't understand that." I think that is a part of how I work. It's embedded with those kinds of codes, so that when black folks do come into the space, and when my family comes to the space, you are welcome. It's not a separation from some arts experience that you can't access. It's penetrable, or the hope is for it to be penetrable in that way.

Imani Mixon ([00:52:48](#)):

That sounds good. I'm very fond of the memory and also thirst to be around art again, so it's rally good to hear the way that both of you have moved past museums and exhibits and stuff that nobody can touch. I'm curious if there are any current works that you have right now or upcoming things that people should know about?

Joiri Minaya ([00:53:11](#)):

Yeah, I have some... Sorry, I literally made a list, and I sent it to someone the other day, so I'm like, "Let me look this up."

Imani Mixon ([00:53:23](#)):

So, you really know.

Joiri Minaya ([00:53:25](#)):

I'm just so immersed in the things that I have to do right now that I forget what's coming up sometimes. I will be covering some monuments in Germany, in Hamburg with a group called Imagine the City in June. I'll be part of an art fair online called Atlantic World Art Fair that is showcasing art from the Caribbean. I'm really excited about that, especially because a lot of the artists that are there are people whose practice I'm somewhat familiar with, but I feel that they don't have some of the opportunities to showcase their work on a larger platform, so I'm excited about that. I'll be showing some of those Container series photos are Riverside Park this summer, and I'll have some work in a show called Absence Presence Latinx and Latin American Artists in Dialogue in a place called Another Space here in New York.

Joiri Minaya ([00:54:47](#)):

I have some work right now at the Kemper Museum that I'm excited about, and it's coming down in July, so there's a few more months to see that if anyone has a chance. And, then other shows that are

outside of the country. There's one in Puerto Rico that is also engaging with the monument covering and in the Dominican Republic also in the conversation of covering monuments.

Jennifer Harge ([00:55:22](#)):

[crosstalk 00:55:22] All around.

Joiri Minaya ([00:55:25](#)):

Well we are, but again with this type of art that I make that is digital file that they can print remotely, you don't have to go so crazy about shipping stuff. I also have work that you can ship. Traveling somewhere with the pandemic, it's been interesting how a lot of opportunities froze or were canceled, but then all of these other opportunities came up in ways that are taking advantage of the what the digital world can offer. For example, that exhibition at the Kemper Museum was all designed on my computer, and they printed it, and it's a huge wall of works that are hung on top of a wallpaper that I designed, but it's all made in my desktop which is so mind blowing to me still, again thinking about space and how New York has shifted my ideas of space, for sure.

Imani Mixon ([00:56:23](#)):

That's good. That's good news. That's a good way to use it.

Jennifer Harge ([00:56:28](#)):

One longterm project is this dance film that I'm working on with my film collaborator, Devon Drake. Devon has been serving as a resident documentarian of my performance works since before 2018. There's several pieces and processes that had been archived just on our hard drives that have never been used for anything, so we are returning to that archive to A, just recall what's in there, and then to see what it's saying back to us, and then to begin this experimental webbing of film making of this partially archival... We plan to introduce a lot of the collaborators and folks who were inside of these processes across time and see then how the pieces begin to form a, not new relationship or conversation, but allow the pieces to speak to one another through film, and to even see what pieces are asking to be developed further, so that might look like recasting some of them, and shooting them in a different context. I don't know. So, that is a longer term work.

Jennifer Harge ([00:58:11](#)):

I'll be at Yaddo this summer in upstate New York, so I feel like I'll learn a lot about what is going to happen next when I have some time to be in a residency space.

Joiri Minaya ([00:58:23](#)):

I've heard a lot of great things about that residency.

Jennifer Harge ([00:58:26](#)):

Me too. I keep thinking, I leave in one month from three days ago.

Joiri Minaya ([00:58:36](#)):

That's exciting.

Jennifer Harge ([00:58:37](#)):

I have to get ready. I haven't left Detroit the entire pandemic, so I'm just like, "What's the day again? What time is it?" It's time to go.

Joiri Minaya ([00:58:49](#)):

That's so exciting.

Jennifer Harge ([00:58:50](#)):

Yeah, so I'm excited just to be in that world and allow some new things to show up that I'm not even really considering right now. And, then the most immediate thing is I'm choreographing a work of the dance students at Northwestern.

Imani Mixon ([00:59:08](#)):

University?

Jennifer Harge ([00:59:09](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Imani Mixon ([00:59:10](#)):

That's my alma mater, that's cool.

Jennifer Harge ([00:59:12](#)):

I go there this week on Friday to do an in-person...

Imani Mixon ([00:59:19](#)):

That's so exciting.

Jennifer Harge ([00:59:20](#)):

We've been working over Zoom for the past few months, so translate that information into film, so one of the students will be another ensemble member basically, translating it to film. Those are my immediate things.

Imani Mixon ([00:59:41](#)):

Beautiful. Thank you so much for speaking with me.

Jennifer Harge ([00:59:44](#)):

Thank you.

Imani Mixon ([00:59:45](#)):

I can't wait to spend more time with folks in person, but this was really warm and welcoming, so thank you so much.

Jennifer Harge ([00:59:51](#)):

Thank you for having us.

This transcript was exported on May 25, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Joiri Minaya ([00:59:52](#)):

Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

Imani Mixon ([00:59:54](#)):

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