

## **Illustrating Safety Without the State: a conversation between two queer of colour artists on arts-based activism during COVID-19**

Transcript | May 6th, 2021

### **Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:00:00] So, I'm more than excited to introduce our speakers. The person who will kick us off is Sunanda Mesquita, also known as the Decolonial Killjoy, pronouns she/they. Sunanda is a visual artist, curator, and co-founder of Anti\*Colonial Fantasies and WE DEY X SPACE in Vienna, Austria. Their artistic practice focuses on the possibilities of a radical, utopian, queer feminist collectivity of Black people and people of colour, and centers around community, solidarity, and belonging, and you've probably all checked out their illustrations on instagram and on their website.

[00:01:00] Our second speaker will be MZ, also known as Fu-Fighter Arts. Some of you have had the pleasure to already work with MZ in September. MZ is an artist based in Tkaronto, who works with traditional media such as ink, gouache — is that how you pronounce it? — brush, pen, and watercolour. More recently, they have been experimenting with digital art. Their work features portraits of Aotearoa, New Zealand, and international activists of colour working on decolonization, gender violence, prison abolition, anti-fascism, anti-capitalism, trans and queer rights, anti-racism and feminism. Their work aims to make radical politics more far-reaching and honouring activists working to build movements for total and intersectional liberation. Their work has been featured in the We Are Beneficiaries Project, Out Loud Aotearoa, Three Words comic book and Mellow Yellow zines. Currently they are co editor of the blog Te Tangi A Te Ruru (“the cry of the ruru”) with Kassie Hartendorp which features voices of Indigenous writers and people of colour who are signaling warnings in a time of colonial capitalism, and calling for other words to be birthed. What a beautiful expression. They are a PhD student in the gender, feminist, and women's studies graduate program at York University, and the topic of their research is on Indigenous and Asian diasporic solidarity in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Canada-occupied Turtle Island in grassroots communities and organizing, seeking to understand strategies to bridge pedagogy and social movement practice. So we'll start by each artist presenting some of their current work to you. So over to you Sunanda.

## Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)

[00:03:00] Thanks so much for introducing me and also inviting me to this space. I would like to start off by showing you some of my current works, and I will start screen sharing. So, *Tracing Belonging*. Can you all hear me well? Yes? Okay. *Tracing Belonging* is the film with which I graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna just a couple of weeks ago. *Tracing Belonging* features a group of Black queers and queers of colour sharing moments of collective care and tenderness. I will show you some of the stills. The whole film is about five minutes and 50 seconds long. *Tracing Belonging* is a result of years of exploring questions around archiving, memory, and belonging. In my film I focus on the fleeting moments of bliss and togetherness. I stretch, transform, repeat, distort, and overlay images and sounds. I remember. I play with the concept of time and it's supposed linearity. I investigate how our collective memory works and how we can share it with each other and future generations. The importance of these moments are coming painfully to light, right now, during the global pandemic that is increasingly hitting QTBIPOCs worldwide. These moments of belonging are even more precious. So tracing is a technique and method which is the basis of my visual and curatorial practice. Tracing allows me to get closer to the people in the images to recognize, capture, and reframe details, while exploring questions about belonging. I use belonging in the sense of being able to feel at home as a state that is temporary and fluid. The footage that is used for the film is part of a larger collection of footage that I shot over the past five years, during QTBIPOC community festivals, gatherings, and includes interviews with artists, organizers, activists, as well as snapshots of moments that we share together.

[00:06:00] The next project that I would like to share with you all is called *City of Diaspora*. I would like to share some of the links<sup>1</sup> after the presentation, and then you can also check out the projects in more detail. So *City of Diaspora* is a performance piece, that was initiated by Stefanie Sourial, bringing together three QTBIPOC performers and myself, and what we did was we shared stories of our experience of living within the diaspora, and we started to weave together those stories and create a performance piece of an hour altogether. What was really interesting was that we started during the pandemic, so we had to rethink how we want to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://brut-wien.at/en/Programme/Calendar/Programm-2021/04/Stefanie-Sourial>  
<https://cutiebpcfestblog.wordpress.com/>  
[https://www.instagram.com/decolonial\\_killjoy/](https://www.instagram.com/decolonial_killjoy/)  
<https://decolonialkilljoy.com/>

rehearse together, how we want to share space, how we can take care of each other during this time. Also, to dream and envision this city that does not exist in a tangible way was very exciting. We had to be quite flexible, also, with not knowing if we can even show the performance piece or not. Until, I think, the last week of the rehearsals we were not sure if we'd actually have a premiere, and it was really stressful because we already went to the location, we had technical rehearsals, everything was done, and then the government decided that, the arts scene which is still kind of shut down since one year, in Vienna, and they didn't make any moves towards negotiating under which circumstances it would be possible, and things like this. There was also this idea of making a film out of it and streaming it live, but then we would have lost all our performance fees, which is a third of our income of this whole project, so the decision was made that everything is done but it's on hold for one year. That's also a new situation for me, basically, to revisit a project after a whole year. Now the premier is planned for February next year.

[00:08:45] The third project that I was involved in was the CutieBIPoC Fest, which was in November until December 2020. I don't know if, maybe, some of you know the festival, it's [inaudible] a festival for and by Black queers and queers of colour which was, pre-pandemic, organized in Berlin and one time in Copenhagen. So in December or November 2020 was the first time that we took it online, and we had to rethink a lot, if not everything, about the structure, how we can make it more accessible, how we can also spread information and bring new people into our network. I would say that it was quite successful. We had over 300 people present and we had over 40 sessions that were offered by QTBIPOCs from all over the world in different time zones. We had weekly hangout sessions and parties, and it was a really important space to hold during this specific situation of us being distanced in so many ways. Maybe we can also talk about this a bit later, what it means to be together in different time zones in all of this. I think it's really an interesting space to be collectively in.

[00:10:45] Last, I would like to talk about my crush series that I first created in 2016. It was a way for me to connect to QTs outside of Vienna, because I was very isolated. I couldn't really leave my house, even back then, so I connected to organizers, artists, friends, people that I didn't know to join them, and this year, or actually last year, I started to draw my friends with masks with political messages. So the first one is Faris, who was also part of the performance piece *City of Diaspora*. The next person is Vasanthi, who is also a dear friend and fellow activist, and the last one I prepared for today is actually my quibling. Thank you again for the invitation,

because it gave me the chance to look through my calendar, actually, [laughs] and see what I've been up to because I always forget. So, thank you, Jin.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:12:15] Thank you so much for sharing your amazing work with us. I'm sure people have questions. Take a note of them. MZ will be next to share their work, and then we'll have a panel discussion with both of the artists, but please write down your questions for both artists for the Q and A afterwards. So over to you, MZ.

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:12:45] Thank you Jin. Thanks so much for organizing this panel as well, it's really exciting to hear about Sunanda's work. I've mostly seen your drawing so it's really interesting to hear about your film project as well. I'm also going to try and share screen. I think this comic might have already been sent out to everyone, but I wanted to talk a bit about the background behind it and the kind of context in which I drew it. I did this around the beginning of the pandemic, and at that time there was a lot of violence against East Asians, especially East Asian Women who were wearing masks. I would be hearing reports about it happening around Toronto, around Vancouver, even Indigenous women were also targeted and mistaken for being East Asian, and I want to talk about this in the context of some of the research that I've been doing with Professor Haritaworn in relation to anti-East Asian racism and Maskophobia. I started drawing this when I was kind of feeling quite homesick, being in Tkaronto, and I was looking over old videos of my friends, and one of my best friends, Kirsty, I had a short clip of her demonstrating how to put a mask on. This was in 2018, or something, and so she is kind of the reference for this, you can see her kind of down there, how to put on a mask. It was in the context where I think the mainstream White middle-class population and anti-maskers also didn't really seem to understand why people even wear masks, and it's not just one reason. There could be several different kinds of reasons, so I kind of wanted to show why people wear masks, what it is, and the correct ways of wearing it, and I know some of you have probably walked around and seen people kind of wear a mask under the nose, and this kind of defeats the purpose of even wearing it. Since then, just in doing the research, I've been seeing more and more discourses and themes around why people wear masks and, especially in the context of COVID, it's not always just about protecting yourself. It's a form of care and solidarity, and about protecting others because we don't know if we have COVID when there are chances of spreading it when people are asymptomatic. So, you know, always kind of operating under the assumption that we

should wear masks, even if we don't feel sick or have no symptoms of COVID. So that's a bit of the reason behind this comic, and it was also around the time when the solidarity direct actions were happening around stopping the pipeline going through Wet'suwet'en territory.

[00:16:45] I wanted to show some newer work which really relates to the reading that you all had today by Robin Kelley<sup>2</sup> on surrealism. This was done earlier this year, where, I think, being in quarantine for so long, for over a year now, it's been interesting what's been happening to my dreams, and how often I've remembered them, and how vivid they've become. The dreams that I've had have often been super vivid and I've started kind of drawing them out to tell these kind of stories that I've had, and I think there is a lot of knowledge and theory that we can get from our dreams, and this was one of them about the future being underwater and what human survival and the climate crisis could potentially look like. It was actually really validating reading Robin Kelley's work on surrealism and how our unconscious or subconscious can inform our political ways of being and thinking as well.

[00:18:15] This is some of the other work that I've previously done which were portraits of activists. This, the one on the left, is my friend Ahi Wihongi, who does a lot of advocacy around gender minorities and sex worker rights, and this is a quote around refusing respectability politics and how all trans people deserve respect. The one on the right I really like showing, because Teanau Tuiono, he is now an MP in the Green Party, where he says "capitalism wasn't born here;" "it grew out of a barrel of a gun," "it came by ship from England." These are the kinds of art that I started doing in around 2015 to, I guess, highlight some of the local activism that was going on in Aotearoa when the Internet space is often very dominated by U.S. politics. Oh, and this is new work that I haven't released yet, and it's of your Professor, and I have learned so much from: Jin. So I really wanted to honour their knowledge and the intellectual labour that they put in creating spaces, especially for queer and trans Black Indigenous people of colour in academic spaces, and this is a quote from one of their latest articles on #NotGoingBack, and it's also kind of about genealogies. Even this quote kind of pays tribute to the genealogies of concepts like pods and care collectives and bubbles, and how disabled queer people of colour have come up with those practices and concepts. I maybe hope to release this sometime this week, and this is also an example of my experimentation with digital art. That's the end of my presentation, thank you for listening, feel free to ask any questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Kelley, "Keeping It (Sur)real: Dreams of the Marvelous," in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 157-194.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:20:45] Thank you, both. Beautiful, amazing work. Actually, should we open up to questions now, before going into our panel? So anything that's fresh on your mind. Does anyone have a question now? Otherwise you'll have another opportunity forthcoming in a bit. Okay, so let's start with the questions. Oh, Snjezana does have a question now, okay go for it.

**Snjezana Pruginic (She/her)**

[00:21:30] Hi, thank you both so much for coming and sharing your work. Such beautiful work. I had a question, maybe this is something you'll talk about later, for Sunanda about the tracing. You said it's a technique and performance, I was really curious if you could speak more on that.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:22:00] Yeah should I answer now? What do you think, is that a good time? Okay, so for me tracing, it started with this, I wouldn't call it performance, but a method, and a technique and I started it in 2016. This is also how I got into illustrations. I started to literally trace faces of my loved ones, in a way, to also connect, to feel closer to people that I was distanced by location, in a way, and then it started to become a way to voice thoughts and, I don't know, it really started to be my form of expression. It became more than just tracing what I see or tracing what was there, but to also imagine and to create a new image. I don't know if that makes sense. With the film, it was also a way to trace moments that are not here any longer or memories that I would try to hold onto, realizing that it's not possible and this ephemerality of this moment. I could trace it, I could try to find ways to reconnect to it, to rewatch it, but I had to let it go, in a way, to actually be closer to it, if it makes sense. So the film, for me, was also a way to trace moments that have been, and also create new ones, at the same time, and this was the first time I used film to also create multiple layers.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Amazing thank you. Are there any questions or comments right now? So we'll come back to you. Oh there is one by Ruth.

**Ruth (she/her)**

[00:24:30] I wasn't sure if now is the perfect time to ask or later, so maybe you want to answer later, I don't know, but, for both of the artists, I was interested in your focus on drawing individual figures who are maybe activists, or friends, or community members, and I was

wondering if you could speak a bit on why you chose to do this and, I suppose, Sunanda you've already kind of touched on this, but how you are sort of spending time with that person, maybe, as you're creating that art.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

Do you want to go first, MZ?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:25:15] I don't mind. That's a really interesting question because I had thought about that towards the end of the series, as well. Is this kind of participating in celebrity culture, or kind of elevating certain individuals over others? I guess I started as a way to amplify the messages that they had, and also to promote some of the groups that they are a part of. So, originally when I had done these drawings I would add the other movements that they're a part of to kind of promote that, through them. It is, I think, also relational because these people are also my friends and it's a way to kind of honour them and their words, their activism. I hope that answers your question. But I do reflect on whether this is kind of making it about individuals rather than collective movements and I haven't really had a perfect answer on that, but I think also people tend to, with images, having one focus is easier to absorb than having multiple people in an image which can be hard to kind of focus on.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Sunanda.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:27:00] So, for me, it was a way, as I said, to connect, but also to dive deeper into the work that those individuals do. Also, as part of my research, I have a visual memory as well, so I think I was also rewriting it for myself again to remember certain parts. I also think that this was also a time where instagram was just kind of blooming up a little bit for me. 2016, I think it was when I started, it was the first time that I was able to connect to people that I followed over the distance in a way, and to really be in contact with different people was amazing; to be able to tag each other, to be like "this is an appreciation post," in my case, a crush series, and "I really love the work you do," and to even get responses was just amazing. It worked really well and, for me, this was the time where I was longing for these kinds of connections as well. I think everything has also time and a place for things, and I think I move on to different techniques or strategies, but I don't know yet where I'm going so I also like to continue some of the things and

find a new purpose. For me now, I have this one gig in this street magazine in Vienna that is supporting people without shelter, and they asked me to give them one illustration every month, and that's how I came up with the mask crush series, actually, because the people who read this magazine are mainly *white* middle-class, and those are the people who actually put a lot of people in danger at the moment and I was just trying to, I don't know, communicate how I was feeling.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:29:30] Wow, which is a great transition into my first question to you both. How COVID-19 impacts your/our communities. MZ, do you want to go first?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:30:00] Yeah, I guess it's obviously been a really rough ride from even December 2019 when the news of COVID-19 just started coming out. My family and I here were really worried about our family in China, who were under strict lockdowns and, around the same time, there was a revival of anti-Chinese racism. Even wearing masks at that time was stigmatized. Like, just down the road from where I'm living there was a group of Asian women who were kicked out of a supermarket for wearing masks early on in the pandemic before they kind of changed the rules. So from that time on there was the rise in overt forms of racism and the very physical violence that was happening as well that kind of created this double fear of going outside. Both fear and anxiety about COVID and also anxiety about racism. And, I guess, personally, also as an international student being here that's also quite hard being away from home, so there is a lot of feelings of homesickness, and I guess the the general anxiety/grief/rage around everything that's happening against Black people by the police, and against Indigenous people in the medical system and by the police. Just the very raw revealing of the violence of colonial-racial-capitalism that is happening all around us, all the time, and I guess kind of being more online and seeing more of that and being more exposed to everything that, yeah, this kind of constant feeling of crisis and grief and rage.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

And I love the public education that both of you have done around masks. Sunanda, do you want to go next?

**Sunanda Mesquita (she/they)**

[00:32:45] I think you said already so much about the underlying situations or feelings that are also around. I feel it's so strange to be in this pandemic when the first time we were in lockdown last year in April everything slowed down and it was a strange feeling of time in a way. But I feel now everything's even faster than it was before and we're still in a pandemic, so I think, also, how we feel time has completely changed in a way. For me, I can only speak to the communities that I feel most part of. For example, during the CutieBIPoC festival, I felt that it was really important that we create these different spaces, there were healing spaces, there were movement spaces, there were spaces where we talked about the situation in different locations as well, but there were also times where we just hang out and we didn't talk about these things, or we had parties where we move together, even though we're so far apart, and I think this was also a great impact on our communities. How we dealt with this situation, and different experiences of the situation, and being together at the same time, even in so many different time zones and we try to make things work. Also, I feel like it was the chance for so many people to be part of this festival that was before very inaccessible by location, because it was only in Berlin and Copenhagen and not everyone was able to travel. The dates were always communicated really late so some people would need more time to plan ahead, and all these things, it felt like, were created in this completely different space and time. This was also an impact on our communities and I don't know yet how this will bring change in the future of how we organize also across and despite.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:35:15] Thank you for highlighting that learning around accessibility, and as a lot of disabled QTBIPOC have said, especially, that everyone else is catching on with methods that have long been innovated and demanded as well. I think you've already been jumping into what are the strategies for safety and inclusion that have come out of our communities, but, first, could you say a few words on the other side that we're trying to get away from. You've already highlighted racist responses and also capitalist responses of kind of continuing as if nothing is happening as long as the markets can stay open. You know, "People can get sick and die if they want to" kind of thing. Could you say a little more about how you see the role of the state in creating safety from COVID-19. MZ, do you want to go first again?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:36:30] Sure, I mean, the state has obviously been failing in creating safety, especially in Toronto. I don't think I have to tell many of you who are living here about that kind of failure. I

did want to briefly talk about how, internationally, New Zealand is kind of held up as this beacon of the perfect state response to COVID-19, because I've seen that kind of discourse circulating a lot but there's also a real danger in doing that because, actually, a lot of the responses that were really effective in containing COVID weren't just coming from the state. It was also coming from communities, coming from Māori, who are the Indigenous population, who set up these voluntary checkpoints around the territories and monitored the kind of movement, and they were also criticized for doing that by the state, and I think there are many practices that are happening outside of the state that create greater forms of safety. It is helpful, I guess, for the state to take these things seriously and to listen to experts, and in the science around it, in making their policies, and making sure that there are resources being redistributed to people who most need it. That's not really what's been happening, in terms of state responses.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:38:30] Yeah, I mean, I have to say I don't trust the government. I didn't trust it before, I will not trust it after this, it's clear that they have different goals in mind than myself or the greater society really. I have to say, I've tried to distance myself also from the Austrian news. I get my information second hand, so I have people who need to watch it, and who need to know it, they decide for themselves that that's something they want to do, and then I get the filtered version from them, because I don't see why I should even listen to this bunch [laughs] basically. But I think also, which is part of the question of the role of the state, for me this would be the perfect moment to think about if we need states, if we need borders, if we need nations, if this is really how we want to build in the future, because this is really affecting us globally. I think it's not a surprise that everyone is for themselves and that Europe, and, I would say, North America, is in control of the vaccine, and how they distribute it, and the whole apartheid that they create also in this moment. I think, unfortunately, we are led by fascists, and all over the world, actually, at the moment they are creating problems for all of us. For me, I'm not an expert on safety. It's very difficult because I think people are aware that it's not working, they are aware that they should continue to work but there's no play, and they realize something is weird, like, why is it safe for me to be in a factory, in an office if I'm not an essential worker? Why do I have to be present at work, but at the same time I cannot meet outside a group of friends? So, I think the issue is that all this anger and fear is not directed in the way of "Okay, how can we collectively create safety and what does it mean?" And that's what's a bit scary for me, I have to say, because in Austria, if you oppose the restrictions of the government, because, yes, you're supposed to go to work, or if you're in home office you also have to take care of children at the

same time, so it's not a solution, really, and at the same time this would be the perfect moment to rethink all of it, but I don't see it happening because we don't have the time. I mean, the machinery is going so fast, there is no time to pause and to create new futures. I think that's the very sad part of it, that's also really stressful to watch in a way.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:42:30] It's interesting how there were a lot of horrified but also optimistic responses to the first wave, when a lot of folks were: "this is the moment," right, and Arundhati Roy's, you know, there's issues with her and her casteism et cetera, but her famous speech on the pandemic portal. The third wave is such a different moment in a way, because everything has gone back to normal, but it's a worse normal than before, and, like you were saying, we don't have the time to vision, and I feel like a lot of us are so desperately trying to kind of understand the ever-changing measures and to fit ourselves into it, and to go with the hope that the vaccinations are offering while also being an apartheid system like you're saying. In Germany, certainly, race and class weren't even an issue in the prioritization program of the vaccinations. In Ontario, similarly, but at least Indigenous folks were prioritized, the postcodes came up pretty quickly, right. So here they are just debating having postcodes and prioritizing poor neighbourhoods, but they're doing it in this completely racist fashion where working class people and people of colour are infectious bodies, just like in your mask comic, these infectious bodies that don't speak German, that don't follow the rules, that are too reckless, and too stupid, and putting everyone else at risk. So, it kind of ties in with that same medical racism that leads to people of colour never being a priority any way, right. Like, even before triage. People of colour often avoid going to the doctor because there's medical racism, and a lot of people that I've interviewed for my research project that MZ is also a part of, on queer of colour communities and COVID-19, say they'd rather die alone than go to hospital, almost, right? Like, they'll do everything to avoid seeing a doctor.

[00:45:00] So thank you for starting to talk about that and I've also been wondering, I mean, this would be such a perfect moment for transformative justice and abolition, because clearly the safety measures by the state aren't working, aren't in everyone's interests, are about middle class people hiding while working class people bring them stuff, as the meme says that's been circulated in social media, but do not really care about populations that are already deemed disposable. So, do you see any alternative understandings of safety that you've been inspired by? That are community-based responses, and both of you, in a way, embody these strategies already because both of you have made amazing public education art in response to that. Can

you think of any other examples, or do you want to maybe talk more about the examples that you've been a part of as well? I mean, Sunanda, you've drawn your friends and family with masks, for example. Are there any other examples, or do you want to kind of go further into that?

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:46:30] So in Austria at the moment, we have to use this specific mask, the FFP2 mask, so that also changed the optics.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

I was almost sad. I mean of course they're safer, so I definitely want to wear them. At the same time there were such beautiful cloth masks, like, what is happening to the cloth masks? Maybe double masking will bring them back, that's my hope. [laughs] Sorry, continue.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

For me, this was also a way to show up, was to sew masks and distribute them in my closer circle. But now, for me, it's just important to talk, and I think it's this kind of consent conversation that we're having now, that maybe we should have had a long time ago as well, and again, as you said before, there have been a lot of communities that notice consent conversations very well and it's part of everyday to talk about who has which needs and how they can be met, and that it's not only, like, if I have preconditions, but also how am I feeling? Am I scared? Am I lonely? Like all these things, to combine them in our conversation and also see that some of the rules we set for each other's interactions change over time. Some might feel like they should loosen up, or some feel like they should be even tighter now. I think it's a constant renegotiation process in a way, and I think this was a very important lesson for me to be more confident in having these conversations, and I think they can be applied to many other conversations as well and topics, and also to be more aware of my own needs. Like, how can I communicate what I need and become more aware of when they change.

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:49:15] I really like that you brought up consent and consent culture, because I think the pandemic has totally changed the way we do that and the kinds of questions you might have to ask someone before meeting up in person, like, "make sure that you're going to be wearing masks, you're going to be social distancing, and who else have you visited? What is your work situation?" When analyzing the risk, that kind of informed consent goes deeper than it used to

when just organizing to meet up with someone. I also wanted to bring up your point about abolition, Jin, and transformative justice. I think there was a point, and I think it's still ongoing, but I think there is a lot of momentum to push for abolition. Especially what's happened with Black Lives Matter and the kind of movement that was going on, and is still going on in Toronto. I just remember the protests last year, in terms of safety and COVID safety practices in those protests, masks were being handed out, they were being donated, people were walking around with hand sanitizers, and there were social distancing chalk on the road, so people know the kind of distance they should be apart. I think those are all really beautiful practices that have been incorporated in protests and activism to ensure people's safety, and also not pressuring people to go out to protests if they're immunocompromised and being able to participate in other ways. I think that is something that has gained a lot of momentum during the pandemic, because police brutality is also really being highlighted across the world.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:51:30] Yeah, thank you for putting that in a nutshell, because demonstrations have also been treated as another site of infectiousness, right, and it's been the opposite. So on the media, and if you listen to the politicians, it's like "Black Lives Matter or anti-fascism and anti-racist demonstrations in Europe, like [inaudible] are putting the nice White middle-class people with kids at risk," essentially, like the examples given, "you know, there's law abiding citizens and it's your right to demonstrate, but it's your fault if the schools are going to be closed again, because there's people who are actually following the rules and these people will not be able to send their kids to school," as if white people were the only people with kids as well, you know? And it's the opposite right, demonstrations have been sites of care, and of modeling, again, a disability justice that's grounded in Black, queer, and trans organizing. So thank you for bringing up that really important example. Which kind of brings us to our last question. Do you think BIPOC communities and QTBIPOC communities have legacies that will help us survive this crisis, as well as the earlier crises of racial capitalism that produced it? Sunanda, do you want to go first? Oh you're, like, sitting back. Maybe MZ, do you want to take it, because you're already in there?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:53:30] You can go first, Sunanda, if you want. Oh, do you want me to go first? Okay, [laughs] yeah, I think actually, this week I've been re-watching Pose. I don't know if any of you have seen that show, and just the kind of care, and collective care, that happens within

QTBIPOC communities. The models of transformative justice, the ideas of pods and pod mapping, these are all things that have already supported people during this crisis and can support us beyond these crises, and I think one thing I wanted to kind of bring in is how climate justice is also linked to abolition and QTBIPOC liberation. I remember quite vividly a group of queer feminists and trans people from Fiji speaking at a global queer feminist conference a couple of years ago, and they were talking about how cyclones have significantly increased in recent years, compared to what they remember even 10 years back, and how, in the disaster responses in the country, queer and trans people are left most vulnerable because they have these gendered shelters. So, I just want to bring in that we need to, and have been, connecting all these different movements together and being in the leadership of a lot of these social movements for radical transformative changes that will actually tackle the roots of these problems. Reading some of the work on Marvellous Grounds it's very clear how there are local histories of that. You know, decades of experiences movement building and grassroots organizing that can really propel us to a new kind of world and a world that we don't have to live in with states, or capitalism, or police and prisons, and I think prefigurative organizing is one of the ways that QTBIPOC communities have kind of brought the future to the now.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:56:15] It was so beautiful, I don't even know what to add to it. Yeah, I think you said it there. Like, our communities have been surviving through so many different crises in the past, and I think that there's not even a question of if we're going to do it again. I don't know, I think that marginalized communities always find ways and find creative ways, especially to support each other.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[00:57:00] So, we did agree on the final question: what is the role of the artist in bringing about this change and helping us get through this crisis, or the next crisis as well? And both of you have engaged with surrealism, I really loved that, and MZ, you read our recommended reading for today and we talked a little bit about it earlier, but then Sunanda's work also references surrealism. One of your collaborators has it in their name, right, as well? Or did I misunderstand?

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

Yeah, but it's actually their birth name. [laughs]

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Wow, [laughs] wow. Do you want to talk a little about the role of the artist before we open it up to the floor?

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[00:58:00] Yeah, I think that our role, or roles — I think there's so many different ways to be an artist at this moment, in this time — but to make aware, to share thoughts, to share ways of looking at things, but also this role of translating in a way, translating between different contexts, between different times, spaces, and to also connect to each other. I think that's what art is also there for, to connect not only to what was before, if there is this linearity of time, what's before, what will come, and what is at this time, I think that that's a very important power that lies in art and expression in this way.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

I think re-envisioning, yeah. Thank you. MZ?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[00:59:00] Yeah, I agree with all of that, and always kind of go back to that quote by Toni Cade Bambara on “the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible” and, yeah, I see it as a form of communication and expanding of imagination.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Wow, amazing, thank you both so much for sharing your thoughts with us. So we have another 24 minutes before Sunanda has to leave. We had prepared a hands-on exercise doing art together, but I did want to give people a few minutes to ask questions. I know Debby already wrote one in the chat, and I don't know if you want to unmute yourself or if you want me to read it out.

**Debby Wong**

[01:00:15] Sure, I can read out my question in the chat. I wanted to ask MZ, do you have any comics or plan on doing any on the violence against Asian elderly?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[01:00:30] I haven't done any on the elderly, but that is a great idea and I will definitely think about it. I have seen other people do that work. That particular kind of violence, I find that really

hard to fathom. While I was kind of doing research with Jin on this, this was one of the hardest things to confront. I would definitely think about that if you think there's a space for more discussion, and it's a great idea.

**Debby Wong**

Thank you.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Kafia and Jo have their hands up. Kafia, do you want to go first?

**Kafia Abdulkader (she/her)**

[01:01:15] Thank you. Thank you both, both of your work was spectacular, and powerful, and cultivated a lot of social change, and resisted hetero-patriarchy, neoliberalism, all of these things happening during times of crisis, but, I guess, my question is: as someone who does art in times of crisis, what brings you joy and fuels your creativity? Because I've been feeling quite burnt out, and I would love to hear how you've been navigating through that.

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[01:02:00] That is a great question. Thank you so much for asking that. I can totally relate to those feelings of burnout as well and, some days, just not wanting to do anything. But I guess what motivates me and what brings me joy is actually feeling like I can contribute something at this time. Even just online and through art it kind of feels like participating in the community, when we are currently so distanced and disconnected physically from each other. It's my friends that brought me joy, and going outside, being in the forest whenever I can. Food. [laughs] Food has been a source of joy. Yeah, it is those things and indoor gardening, I would say, is part of it too, bringing the plants inside.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Jo, do you want to ask your question?

**Joanna (she/her)**

[01:03:30] Yeah, sure. It might be quite similar to the last two that were asked, but I was wondering, in terms of, people make art for so many reasons, you could take aesthetic practices in different ways, but what drove you to create art in community or to create art as new world-making? Because, in terms of what drove me into aesthetic practices, or music, or

whatever, is that I feel like a new way needs to happen, you know? What drove you into making art in community or part of that building/

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

And Jo is an artist as well.

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

[01:04:15] Thanks for these questions, they're amazing. I think, actually, the last two questions work really well together, because, for me, healing is art, art is healing, and sometimes, when I have my imposter syndrome going really full on, I think that I'm not really an artist because I don't have one medium. It's also part of what is taught at the Academy, maybe you can relate, and of course I know that this is not who I want to be, this is not how I want to create. I think to find healing as the center of my art practice really helped me, because then I don't have to only use one medium, but I can use the medium as a strategy for this particular moment, and it makes me so much freer in my expression, and I think that in the beginning what drove me was anger and rage, and that's also where my my alias Decolonial Killjoy was kind of born was in this rage. To be in this *white* institution, to be silenced, and all these things, and then, to also move what you said Kafia, about the joy, I think this rage is sometimes what drives us, what brings so much change, because it has to happen, there's no other way, we have to do it. But at the same time, it can totally burn us out. Then, this moment when I realized I don't want to be a killjoy anymore; I cannot be a killjoy anymore. I actually moved towards joy now, or I try to centre joy in my life, and I think this also is this kind of turning point in my art practice. To be like, "okay, but if it's not rage, how can I generate this energy from joy?" It's very different, it feels like a different texture, if that makes sense, to create from joy instead of rage, and I'm not saying that rage is not present anymore. I still acknowledge rage, for what it can bring and how powerful it is, but I don't want it to consume me anymore, and the film, for example, was the first time, where, yes, it can be totally an act of resistance. Like, I wanted to use this footage, I wanted to work with this footage for years, but I couldn't. I couldn't find the angle to it, and this joy and this moment of isolation really was the moment where it had to be created, in a way. To hear our laughter was so powerful, it brought me so much joy to see these everyday moments with each other being so amplified in this moment. So, joy definitely is the driving force for me now.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

[01:08:00] Which reminds me of the colour meditation that Jaye led us through yesterday where we were encouraged to visualize a colour and anything that goes with it for us that we want more of, and a colour that no longer serves us and those were the exact emotions that I picked, Sunanda, [laughs] so thank you. Okay, do we have time for one more question? Alright, okay Jenny a quick one.

**Jennifer Donnelly**

[01:08:45] Hi, thank you both so much for coming today. I'm interested in hearing, I guess, about your perspective on digital communities of care, and in the moments where we close our laptops, and I'm so interested in what Sunanda said about fleeting moments of togetherness, and how they can end so abruptly when we hang up the phone or close our laptop, and what do you do in the moments after?

**Sunanda Mesquita(she/they)**

Sorry, I actually have to answer my door. The home office feeling is being disconnected sometimes. MZ, do you want to take that question, maybe?

**MZ Fu (they/them)**

[01:09:30] Yeah, okay sure. The fleeting moments of connectedness is interesting because I feel like sometimes even though I've been here at home, I also haven't been here, psychologically or mentally. When I've been in contact with my friends back in Aotearoa, for example when they're in a different time zone, and the kind of connections we have is usually right at the beginning of the day, or right at the end of the day, and it's interesting how that kind of structures your your sense of place and kind of messes up time as well. But it's been such an important support system for me, having digital communities and having online connections with people, because otherwise we wouldn't be here, we wouldn't be able to even learn together in this space. It has been a learning curve, in terms of how to create safe digital communities as well, and having to adapt to different modes of being together. It's definitely not the same as being in person, and, you know, sharing food together, but at least it's something, and it's something that's kind of helped me through these difficult times.

**Jin Haritaworn (they/them)**

Thank you so much, both of you, and everyone for engaging so deeply and vulnerably as well. Wow I don't know what to say, so much to think about. Thank you, let's give them a round of applause.