

(00:00) Awesome. So JET reflections are a monthly series of conversations highlighting art, design, writing or research that demonstrates how members of our master community have activated and demonstrated the power of Art and Design to transform our world. So little introduction. Amani is an associate professor of photography at Mass art, as well as a photographer and author, and we are here today to talk about your latest work, a parallel road so how are you doing before we get started.

(00:31) Great. It's great to be here with you and excited that you reached out to me to have a discussion, it's wonderful to be able to bring the work that you're doing sort of in your personal life into the program and, and, you know, have it, sort of, I guess, you know, have it inspire dialogues. So, that's the goal right I think of a lot of the art that we do is we just have discussions about it so it's great to be here.

(1:19) Yeah, thank you so much for being so willing to answer these questions. So the first thing was I was wondering if you could summarize a parallel road for those listening who haven't had a chance to pick it up yet and talk about what inspired you to put this book together.

(1:19) Sure, yeah so it's a meandering complicated answer in a sense, but a parallel road is a book that explores the history of the black experience of driving in America. Over the past hundred years or so, and explores this particular metaphor of the road and what the road has represented traditionally in American culture. Very much associated with the American dream and freedom and exuberance, and all these sort of carefree attributes. But you know growing up, from my experience and experience with my family we always have, you know, very different. The road had a very different meaning and symbolized a very different experience, one of protest and struggle of fear violence and you know even death for black Americans as they ventured out into public spaces in a way that America, especially in the 30s 20s 30s 40s was not ready for. So, when I was going through my education as an artist, I found that, you know, it was sort of taken for granted that road yes you know represents freedom and exuberance and that's the, you know, that's, that's what it you know, that's where the conversation ends and so I felt quite uncomfortable in classes where I had to speak up and say, "Well, you know, there are these other points of view that I think need to be represented in our part of the conversation and a part of what this collective, you know, it really is it's sort of collective history that we're talking about. So it, you know, I wanted to really bring in other voices that hadn't been represented into the discussion of this quintessential American experience of the road. And that's kind of, you know, pointed out the fact that, you know in, I went to grad school about a decade ago. So even at that time, there really wasn't, weren't a lot of voices that were for minorities that were included in the history of photography. And I know that you know it's not specific to photography; it runs throughout art history. And so, I felt like it was important to, you know, contribute this work to that conversation. And to have people who maybe hadn't, who hadn't taken the time to think about their privilege or, you know, certain symbols and mythologies of America.

And you know maybe they have taken it for granted, I wanted to, I wanted them to, you know, maybe think twice, and realize that there are other narratives that are important to consider. And really, at the end of the day, the book is, you know, it's about the road but it's also this microcosm of looking at, you know, systemic racism in America, you know it's looking at this, you know singular experience but it is. You know, it really illustrates the ways that black Americans have had trouble, living in the same and having the same opportunities as white Americans have over the years, really since the beginning of our country's founding. So, you know my hope is that this, this book can inspire people to think about their experiences on the road and how they can differ from other people's experiences but also then reflect on the history of race in America.

(5:22) Thank you for answering that I know you've probably answered that like a million times.

(5:29) It's funny, I do get asked that question a lot and I think I've answered it a little bit differently every time because there's, I don't know there's still, you know there's a lot more to say about that in there's a lot to unpack in there so it's absolutely, yeah, a lot.

(5:43) And how do you find that identity, especially racial identity, comes into play with your work as a professor?

(5:52) Yeah, that's an interesting question. I, you know, I grew up in Cambridge, Mass. And my, I'm biracial, so I'm black and white, and, growing up, my mother had a hard time finding books that she could read to my brother and I, to me and my brother about how our experiences books that reflected our experience. And she was upset about that she did a lot of research she found what she could, but she actually ended up opening a multicultural children's bookstore in Cambridge, as a way to really try to have, you know, the experience of different people reflected back at them and so that they can feel empowered and validated. And also you know it wasn't just for those people to expand what other what the general population was consuming and learning. And so, at Mass art, well throughout my, my, my years in school, I've always been really sensitive to issues of curricular diversity cultural diversity kind of conversations around equity and inclusion, because I think, you know, I was Oh, that, that act my mom took to open this bookstore was really seared in my mind. And you know, it really has shaped who I am in a really profound way. So I've always been really sensitive to those issues, and in high school, there was an opportunity for students to talk about whatever they wanted to the school for the whole student body, and the faculty. I chose to talk about the lack of diversity in the curriculum in my high school. So it's always been something I've thought about. And so, when it comes to race. And, you know, it goes beyond race and just identity and inclusion. I'm very sensitive to trying to bring in as many voices into the classroom experience as possible. Different kinds of artists, a space where students feel like they, their experiences are validated and that they want to share their stories, and to know that their stories are important to share. Even if they feel different

than what you know some of the, the history that we're learning. So yeah, so it comes in that way. And so, you know, I don't talk about my, my, my personal work a lot in my classes, but it's certainly, you know my beliefs and my experience are embedded in what we discuss.

(8:45) And do you think that these conversations look different? Oh, well we know they probably very obviously look different, having them with black people or white people are sort of races and communities, outside of that conversation I think a lot of people sort of frame it as just the white and black issue right without sort of acknowledging the nuances between them. So, how do you sort of navigate those different conversations and talking about this work with black audiences and white audiences and then sort of everyone in between and outside of those groups.

(9:35) Yeah that is, that's really a great question and it's, you know, I, there's a lot to unpack there because yeah I mean there are different audiences. Sure, and I think different viewers always get a different experience from looking at, at work, But, so on the one hand I, I looked at it, this project sort of as an education, like I wanted to bring this other experience to a community that may not have considered that there are these alternate experiences in America, especially in the photo book community it is, you know, unfortunately, it is a pretty homogenous community. Just to backtrack for a minute to the first part of your question. Where things sort of get framed as black and white. And, yeah, that is unfortunate, because, you know, there are so many other, you know, experiences and it's not just a black and white issue. It's about inclusion for everybody, but I think we tend to go there because the way our, you know, our country was founded. So, the black and white issue is so instrumental to the building of our country and about lasting legacy, so that is you know, I think there is a particular resonance about how black people were brought into America that is still shaping the way our culture deals not just with black Americans but with any one that's quote unquote other. And you know that this is the work where I didn't really think about that question of audience, the most. Because on the one hand I mentioned I did want it to be this sort of educational experience to bring into this other conversation, or to to bring another voice to the conversation of the idea of the road trip in America or, you know, if you think about photography there's a whole genre that could be the road trip. So I wanted to address that, but I also wanted it to be a testament to my friends and family, who are black, who have had to deal with the struggle for so long, and to show the strength and the dignity and honor, you know, the strength and the dignity, and the way that they've dealt with these injustices over time. At times it's tragic and at times you know through the book it starts with actually archival images of my, my family members. So I asked everyone I have a really big support a family and I asked all of them to send me any picture they can find from their personal archives that had cars in them. And so I amassed this archive of maybe five to 600 pictures, and I curated a selection to use in the book, and it's really powerful to see, you know, like in the 30s and early 40s, these really proud black Americans standing by their automobiles. Maybe they couldn't buy a house. But, you know, they just had enough money maybe that they could own an automobile right. And this is public property and so something

that would give them freedom and so they were all really excited to join this new idea of, that was being sold in America that, you know, this new interstate highway system, and everyone's going to have equal access to this amazing American experience and then you know, we know that's not how it turned out. And so to look at these pictures of these family members standing there by their cars, proud, dressed well. It was almost, it was, it made me proud, but it also was sort of tragic, because I sort of felt like, oh, if they only knew what was coming, you know. So the book starts with a sort of happy tone and then it gets more ominous where you start to see that it is problematic to be on the road, and there's you know it's quite complicated to, to be on the road if you're a black person. It was especially back in those days, you know, it was one of the first times there was a lot of public interaction in some ways between black Americans and white Americans. And so, you know, there's that side of that so the book certainly you know goes from there it gets more ominous you know there's more violence, and, you know, hence the violence that comes up and you know to get to your, the other part of your question, you know, I'm thinking about the audience. Well, as a whole, but also black, black americans. I mean there's this whole idea that I didn't want to use images gratuitously and have negative consequences of, you know, triggering these traumatic feelings for, for black viewers right. They've seen it. They've been through it. So, how to get the point across, but not be too graphic, I guess. And what I was doing. Yeah, so I mean I think I really wanted to create this book that had a this real emotional resonance to it because I think that's something that all humans can relate to. So even if you don't have the same experience, if you get this sense of foreboding or danger, I think, you know, that's what the white people who have looked at the book have resonated with like wow I didn't, I really sense that, that fear. And, you know, have to think about, having to check my privilege. And I know I'm jumping around a bit here because it was, it is a very complicated question and just to say one more thing briefly. So, the other part of it is that my publisher is actually European. They're in England right and so, the discussions about images and what to include and what people would, you know, what viewers would know about the history of driving while black in America. I mean, half the audience is probably European. Right, so they're going to know not a lot less, you know, and you know maybe a 30 year old in England does never has never heard of Rodney King, but you know to some of us in America that's okay, that's obvious, right. So, that was also a balancing act trying to figure out what things people would latch onto or understand, just by seeing the image, and what things they would not, would not register with them. You know the history. So, there were a lot of questions about how to communicate, how to best communicate these things to an audience because it is very specific in terms of it is about a very specific history, right. So, you know, a lot of art maybe is, is more about the aesthetics and there's ways that we can all relate to it, but this sort of required a basic understanding of a certain history too.

(16:53) Yeah, absolutely. And I think my experience of your work was really interesting from two points. One was that I commuted for two years in high school I would wake up at 430, and I would commute into the city, sort of just driving and existing in this car with my black Father,

you know, and sort of existing in this space and wondering why this process and this activity always seemed so daunting right then. And it wasn't just because I was up before the sun and I'd get back when it was already down but there were, you know, more processes sort of looking in these corners for state troopers and, you know, having this sort of awareness of your surroundings that I think a lot of my other peers didn't have to. And the second one was that it was a really interesting experience to see these photographs of family members, and how much of the universal experience that is not right for black people, having access to these images, having access to these family members. I feel like it is quite limited, so to be able to experience that as a reader you sort of turn internally and it's like "have I experienced this much of my history?" as sort of you were able to as you put this all together. A lot, a lot of questions and a lot of thinking.

(18:13) That's interesting yeah so you feel like in your life, you don't have access to like this archive of your familial history in that way?

(18:22) so yeah and not not nearly as far back I think, I think a lot of the images I have are already sort of color, maybe like disposable camera images but to be able to go far back enough that things are black and white and, you know, all of the sort of history that comes along with those images as happy as they might have seemed. There was so much more behind those than I that a lot of us...My family's in Puerto Rico, a lot of them, and they've always been quite poor so even just that access to an automobile, I feel like has, has shifted a lot to right now we just, you know, have these used cars that we can sort of buy and then get rid of and we just use them on the road as long as we can but the implications and the hard work that sort of paid off by even just being able to stand next to one in your, in your best clothes, is not as much of a universal experience I think as it should have been right.

(19:18) Right yeah, that's that that's true. Yeah, I, I got, it's weird to say lucky, but my grandfather was sort of a hoarder. For sure, and an avid collector and maker of pictures so it's pretty, actually, exciting. I have probably two stacks, that are probably, of albums, that are probably five or six feet high. Just of the pictures that he's collected, of our family that I still have to go through and unprocessed film that I'm going to go back, and will, I'm going to develop them at some point. So, yeah, this is a sort of exciting archive where I can dig through this familial history. And that a lot of family members did have, kept all these records, so it's really wonderful. And then throughout the book, you know, there "'s not just pictures from back in the 30s 40s but then also, up through the present day. So, it's a nice through line for me and I was really, I guess, I'm really proud to be able to use my family history to talk about this experience that I think is, you know, it's not a, you know, I don't want to say it's universal but it's an experience shared by many black Americans, and that is important for, you know, I think most Americans to know about. So I'm really happy that I could, you know, that it could be so

personal. And when I started the project I certainly wasn't thinking about it in that way. And that just was part of the journey.

(21:01) Yeah, one of my favorite images actually is that of your mother in the car. What was it like to have her part of this project and what was your family's reactions as they sort of saw all of the photographs and materials they've supplied you with, when they saw that all come together. How did, how did people see it and react to it?

(21:24) Yeah, yeah so that's a great question. Um, it was very special to go to start to talk to my mom about the project I was doing, try to learn more about her experiences growing up, and you know she was just, you know, one example I talked to so many different family members about their experiences, and that was really, that was really special and with my mother and talking about my angle on, of the book and what I wanted to explore, I think it started to shift some of her own memories too. So, she started to think, "oh, so the reason we brought all our food on that trip and camped out and got there as fast as we could, was not because we were going on this fun camping adventure, where we brought all our food, it was because we didn't know if someone was gonna, you know serve us lunch. We didn't know if someone was going to let us sleep in a certain hotel." So she started having to rethink about her own history, right, which was really interesting to see her reckon with. So I have in the book, you know, maybe five or six contemporary portraits of people in their cars, sort of isolated at night. I wanted to get/ sort of emphasize the psychological feeling of how lonely and vulnerable it can feel to be on the road as a black American and so I made these pictures at night, and the picture with my mom, I guess, it's quite easy because we had been having these conversations. And so I just kind of asked her to reflect on those conversations, as I photographed her.

(23:18) And I think that discussion about reframing histories is so interesting and having memories come back even now just as you were speaking of, you know, being big enough to sit in the passenger seat with my father and sort of being pulled over and kind of sitting up straighter and being a little quieter and turning whatever music down it was that we were, you know just seconds before so excited to listen to and to sing along to. Having those memories and being like I just wanted to you know be bigger and I wanted them to not know I was 12, I wanted them to think I was 16 you know all of those things. And now looking back with these new contexts just being like well you know there was a sort of formality in all of those in all of those interactions in a sort of fear and a need to appear as as big as possible, not just because I was 12 but because we were black and it was something that I wasn't as aware of at such a young age and I think I had the privilege to do that right.

(24:23) Yeah and I think that 's such an amazing story and, and one that is unfortunately not uncommon. You know I remember having a lot of conversations with my mother as I grew up she would tell me. Oh, you know, you've got to do things better than everyone else just to be seen

as equal. And so, I mean that's a lot of pressure on a kid too. But, you know, to have that ingrained in you that this idea that just to be on the same playing level that you have to really show up and hit it out of the park right. Just to be seen as an equal and so I think that, you know, that gets to what you were talking about. If someone pulls you over, or you know just the way you present yourself. You want to be made sure that you're given the dignity that you deserve.

(25:14) And you touched on this a little while back and I know that before we started our conversation we were talking about our times in New York and Boston and Cambridge, I know for me personally, I had a harder time adjusting to race and communities in Boston, as they were so different from New York. Have you experienced that distinction at all, and did it change from when you were younger, or what you remember of your time growing up in Cambridge?

(24:45) Yeah, I mean I would say it's complicated, you know, when you're growing up your life and your world is kind of what it is, you know, you don't question it so much as a young person, you know, 7,8,9,10 years old.

It's just where you exist, right. But I have to say, you know, Cambridge in the 80s was a pretty amazing place where they, you know, they still had rent control so there were, it was, it was a place where there was a lot of economic diversity. There was a fair amount of racial diversity, especially for for city of its size, and I grew up in this sort of idyllic situation where everyone was very engaged with the world, very proactive, very supportive. Community, black community where we had groups where we invested money together, a cooperative economics. We had a, an organization where we bought food together to reduce the price and we would all take turns delivering to each other's houses so there was this really supportive community, and thriving community in Cambridge. It was, it was a pretty ideal childhood I would say. And I mean, you know, moving to New York obviously it's a much bigger city in the sense there was an opportunity there to meet so many different kinds of people with different experiences. And so that was, that was amazing and just the way that, because of the way the city is set up you just, you know, you interact with a huge segment of the population every day just walking around the trains. So, coming back to Boston, you know, I definitely, or even before I moved back you know, when I would come up and visit my parents who still live here. You know, I started to notice after getting used to New York I started noticing that in Boston it did feel a little bit more segregated. The sort of dominant cultural influences felt fairly white I guess. Proud of its history of pilgrims. You know, the colonial past, which is great. I mean it's good to celebrate that. But, you know, it feels more like that's the majority of the identity of the city. I was a little ambivalent about moving back. You know, luckily my parents are still here, they still have a really great network that they have and, you know, a special community in Cambridge. But you know, there are a lot of people that have had to move out of Cambridge and the city center because of prices, they've gotten so expensive for housing. So that's a huge, that's a huge issue. But I think you know one of the, one as I was alluding to, I think one of the problem is just the way the cities are

set up. I mean this is much more of a driving culture. So, communities are just a little bit more isolated maybe here than they are in New York.

But there certainly does, it doesn't feel like there's a dominant identity in New York in a sense, right. There's just so many different kinds of experiences happening, which seems to be lacking a little bit in Boston. I was actually recently commissioned by Apple to do this project on your hometowns about celebrating black communities. And, yeah, something I wrestled with a lot and trying to think about what that meant and you know my experience I think was lucky, because I've heard a lot of people who didn't have great experiences growing up in Boston, as people of color or when I have friends come visit Boston. They don't feel as, welcome. I have to say, you know, maybe it's because I'm here at MassArt, and it's really an accepting, wonderful, vibrant community, you know it. It's a good, it's a wonderful place to be. And so maybe that's skewing my perception of what Boston is as a whole. But, you know, I guess I feel lucky that I have the community here at MassArt that is so invested and engaged in making the world, you know, a place that celebrates diverse and divergent experiences.

(30:13) Yeah, I think that's so interesting to think about because I mean it was, it was quite opposite for me that my schooling had went from having no white people except our teachers to high school where it was a little more like 60/40, and then, you know, the only real difference was that white people had to travel a lot less to get to school than our black peers, and then to mass art, which was you know the whitest place that I'd ever been and sort of having this very distinct awakening in a race class where I had a friend who was able to quite easily trace themselves back to the Mayflower right and just be like, I can sort of get my family all the way back to the Mayflower and I'm like, I can get them to around maybe being in Puerto Rico for some time and then coming to New York, right. And this sort of difference of access to familial history, and having to just trace that history as far back as you can go and the sort of mourning and loss of ancestors and their lived experiences that are almost impossible to get back.

(31:17) Yeah that's, it's fascinating. That's a wonderful point and it's also sad to know that you feel like, you know, you have this loss that you can't trace some of your family backwards. There is a limitation to it. Have you listened to the podcast 1619? I really recommend it and I know, I think the school is doing something with that particular project this semester. But it's a great podcast and the, the narrator in the first episode is talking about she's black and she's talking about union school, and having her teachers say okay so everyone talk about where you're from, where your ancestors are and she felt this real shame because she couldn't think about where she, you know, she couldn't locate it. Well I guess my ancestors came from Africa but that's huge. That's not a country, that's not a specific place. She looked at the map in her classroom and just picked a random country in Africa and said okay that's where I'm from. But then you see some of the other children who are able to more easily trace their lineage back as you were describing how she felt this real sort of shame or loss. And in that encounter and that experience then. But

then interestingly she goes on to claim America as her ancestral home as she says in the podcast it's an interesting turn.

(32:44) And shifting a little bit, from a parallel road a little bit, how do you find that it overlaps with the street art that you do? The sort of street photography of people in these quite often urban settings. Do you find that there's any relations there besides you obviously as the photographer, or you know, does the personal aspect of a parallel road sort of set it apart from the other things you're doing?

(33:14) I think with most artists there's sort of, there's commonalities right between projects, even though, you know, when I started making books, so. my work got a lot more personal. I would say so, You know my first book is about starting a family during a time of social upheaval, during the first economic downturn. And then my second book is about looking at this hermit in New Hampshire, but then my dad bought his land a few hundred years later and looking at how they share this experience of this land over time. And then this new book is about, yeah, you know, this comes from a personal place too, you know, my experience and my family's experiences on the road and that thinking about how that relates to the broader American culture. But I started my photographic career at this photo agency in New York called Magnum photos. With all of us, some of our first experiences are very impressionable. So because of that experience that I was shooting, I started shooting very intuitively. I would walk around the street. I would make pictures, try to look at life in interesting ways and make the mundane sort of meaningful, that is still ingrained and the way that I approach my art. So, I don't, I mean a lot of the pictures I make are not set up, right, or if I have a concept for an image, I don't control it too much, I kind of, you know, set the stage for something to happen but then photograph it as if it's an event, you know that I'm there to just sort of figure out the most interesting way to photograph it. So I was saying my photographic approach is kind of a through line but yeah in many ways that work is very different. I mean, you know, actually, you know, doing that street work for many years was exciting as I was learning photography, but it is ultimately what made me want to pursue grad school. Well, that combined with a lot of the commercial work I was doing I kind of felt like, Oh, I don't really know what I want out of the medium anymore. And so I wanted to find a way to push my work forward in a way that was more meaningful to me. And so, that was a shift. Right. But yeah, I don't know how to answer that question that I guess you know, I see some connections, but I also see how they're very different right, but I see myself in both of them, both in the work and especially in the way that I see the world. Just for a formal perspective.

(35:57) I wanted to spend our last couple questions taking it more to current day. A lot of your work, especially in a parallel road, is using images of people who have more recently passed. And these sort of stories we've had enhanced access to because of social media, and especially in this last sort of COVID pandemic year. I know for me, George Floyd died on my 21st birthday

right, so to sort of experience that milestone and then have this mass movement that a lot of people are sort of referring to as this new, another revolution or another, another movement towards recognition and towards equity. So how has COVID affected your practice, going virtual and having so much of our interaction via social media based? Do you think there's pros and do they outweigh the cons?

(36:52) In terms of the pros and cons you're talking about virtual?

(36:54) Yes!

(36:55) That's an interesting question. Yeah, the George Floyd death was really difficult. I mentioned that I had a, I have a very close knit family, extended family, and the day before he died, the matriarch of the family, very quickly died too. About 90 years old. COVID related, most likely, you know, she was in a facility. And that happened and then when, and then with Floyd, so that was a huge loss right. Then it felt like this huge familial loss and then the next day one of the footage of George Floyd came out, I just kind of lost it and I just broke down like sobbing for like an hour. My kids, you know they were kind of hovering around me, not knowing what to do, not sure you know how to fix that. They had never seen me that sort of out of control with emotion, right, that you know I had been working on this, on a parallel road for about five years, like a slow burn researching, making photographs, but I knew that at that moment I kind of had to put all my energy into that project, because I guess I felt, because of the pandemic, you know, isolated, closed off and not physically sort of participating in what I, in the protests that were happening. So I needed to put my energy into this project as a way to deal with those emotions and to get this, and to get it done and to get it out because I felt like it was also very relevant to what was happening with George Floyd.

And it kind of saved me, you know, in a way, like to be able to put all this anger and doubt and frustration into something was, was very important. Personally, just because, yeah, I felt, you know, I live in Newton now, and I just felt so isolated. You know, just seeing the footage on TV, seeing some of the protests that were happening but just feeling so removed from it at the same time. And as we were talking earlier about New York versus Boston, you know, in New York, I was, you know, we were watching the footage and you know like half of the things we saw were like right outside where we used to live, you know what I mean, you know right down Flatbush Ave., whereas you know, we were about half a block from Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Heights. And so, you know, just seeing all this emotion and these protests. And that we couldn't be a part of them, and it just, we felt Yeah, yeah, we just felt so isolated from it and so it really helped. Overall, I don't know about the virtual experience. There's, I think, I think from a curricular level that it's been really interesting to bring in more diverse voices, you know, to be able to bring in artists who we wouldn't otherwise be able to because they don't live in the country or whatever, right. And we can just easily have them pop up on the screen now and that's, that's wonderful. But I think there's something really lost in terms of the collaboration

between the students, the energy that is created when they're in the studio together from, a from a teaching standpoint, there's been some gains from a, I think experience, experiential standpoint it's definitely some losses.

(40:37) Yeah, I agree. I mean, going through my senior year sort of completely virtual, missing out on that illustrative collaboration that happens, commencement and again that sort of distinction that we've had to make a lot of the times between wanting to celebrate, like on my birthday and having all these things happen, and wanting to mourn and wanting to shut down and wanting to turn inward, even more so than we already had you know. When you're inside for a year of your life, I think you start to learn a lot about yourself and your creative process. So, trying to look at some positives.

(41:14) How have you dealt with it. This year, the creative, the creative side.

(41:18) Um, I, it's been difficult. So as you talked about like, I do JET but I'm also president of SGA, and I work in the counseling center. And so I, um, I deal with it by packing my schedule and sort of turning my head down and sort of just doing my work. I think the the word mourning comes up a lot because there is sort of a mourning of this, this senior experience that I had looked forward to right. The ability to finally have a studio space to myself and to have these thesis exhibitions and be able to share all of this hard work with the connections and relationships and communities that I've built, because I've been everywhere on campus right. I'm in this office and this and I'm helping with commencement and I'm doing podcasts and, you know, put so much effort and time and emotion into into forming connections and then you can even sort of see the positive outcomes of those. And you kind of have to learn how to celebrate with yourself and acknowledge the much smaller milestones of, you know sometimes just getting up and drawing for 10 minutes, you know. Before that used to be something we looked down upon. Now I, you know, I'll take five pictures with my iPhone and sketch some stuff up and I'm like, you know what, I didn't do that yesterday and there's a pride in that for sure.

(42:49) Well, that's great that you can find those silver linings. Yeah, I mean that the word mourning is, I think a really, that's the perfect word and what's interesting is that it's you know, it's your class it's the seniors, but there's really this generation that goes from, you know, you graduating college that age group, all the way down to like my, you know, five year old in preschool. You are all sort of connected in this generation now of this period of loss. Right. And also this, this event that is going to really define your life I think in some way that we don't really know, that we don't really know how yet exactly it's going to have a lasting impact, but you know I talked to my 10 year old son, and telling him like, No, I've never experienced anything like this in my life. You know, it's, it's pretty, it's it's really intense and so you know how, how, how is he going to deal with that. How is that going to affect who he is, as a person. It's going to,

it's going to affect you in ways that are going to be really I think positive, potentially and also there's going to be some, some holes.

(44:21) For sure. Absolutely. Another question I think related to this conversation we're already having is: What does self care look like for you as someone creating work around such personal and potentially heavy topics?

(44:37) That's, that's something I need to work on, I guess, maybe put it that way. I've been, yeah, I don't know.

There was a period over the summer, towards the end of the summer and I was trying to finish up my research, get everything done. And I was totally immersed and looking at reading about all these deaths looking at these pictures like you know these videos. And it was pretty dark, I have to say. Not just because I was so immersed in it but just the realization that, this is so pervasive. This issue of violence against black people that's gone back for centuries.

And most of it goes unnoticed. Right. There's George Floyd and that's great, but for every George Floyd, you know there's every you know... that was the thing that towards the end of the project, felt like it was almost, I couldn't stop, it could never end because there's never a good time to say I'm done because every day there would be something else I could put into it. Every morning I would, I would see some new death that was reported. And, you know, how do you, how do you deal with that? How do you do justice to everybody? I felt like this responsibility in a way to try to do justice to everybody who had died, has died or been harassed or had traumatic experiences and I mean obviously it's not possible to do that. There's this one spread in the book where I took this chart that I found about people who died, unarmed black people have died at the hands of the police in the last couple of years, and instead it's meant to be able...it was created so that you could actually read every name and and learn about them. But I like really condensed it so that it's almost illegible, right, and it just almost looks like noise but if you get up close enough you can start to see little individual names. And that's kind of, I mean that idea came from this, this feeling of just that it's so monumental it's like the whole universe right, and it's almost like people become anonymous as a result of this violence.

(47:09) Yeah, and I think going back to what we talked about the question before this, that generation right that might start with me and sort of end with preschoolers that are experiencing this being desensitized to death, and to all of these monumental things now that we have social media and maybe this is a con that we didn't mention earlier but always having the news running and the TV running and getting alerts on your phone as soon as anything happens, I think there, unfortunately comes a point where these things that once had felt so monumental rightfully so, can just be the news of yesterday and last week and they can sort of keep happening. And it's really easy to get this pessimistic view of just, you know, this is going to keep happening, what can I do, as just one person.

(48:00) Yeah, no, that's a really, really great point, and something I was definitely thinking a lot about the role of social media and how it's been a double edged sword, because I think you know they're really, you know, in the photography department and as photographers and professors and students we kind of get jaded a little bit like you know there's so many images out there now right and we know, we talked about is the or the power of images lost, you know, that the image is still hold power that still hold true value. But you know, people knew, have known for a long time that there are these injustices in the world and that black people are profiled, they're killed. But when you started seeing it on social media, that was really powerful. Right. You know, it brought to light in a very real way, you know, videos, almost real time footage of these crimes and these murders really, these lynchings that were occurring and are occurring. And I think that was important, but then there also is on the other side of the sword, what you are talking about the desensitizing right but it can happen as a result. Which is also really dangerous, because we don't want to become complacent or desensitized to violence and killing. And the other thing is it's mainly against black bodies right when we see these clips on Instagram or we're, or Facebook or wherever in

our social media feeds the violence we see of these killings is almost always against black bodies and not a lot of killing, you know white people are killed too, but we don't see that constantly in our news feeds in the same way.

And there's something about the way our country has sort of normalized violence against black people that we have to think about.

(50:04) Definitely, I think it influences the younger you are being exposed to the value that you place on yourself right and this sort of overwhelming feeling of being disposable and just being one of many that absolutely shouldn't take place and I'm sure we'll have some quite large and negative effects as we as we continue going through our careers.

(50:29) So, really important to hold on to.

(50:31) Yeah. And my last question for you. Quite a cliché one but one I'm, I always get a different answer for is, what advice do you have for creatives of color that are coming into themselves and into careers in artistic fields, especially during this massive movement we talked about before, towards recognition and equity. What would you want to tell them?

(50:53) I don't know, I feel like I could give a really really long answer. The short answer is it's a tough one. But, you know, I mean, just to really believe in yourself, and the stories that you want to tell that they're valid, right, that people need to see them and to not worry whether or not they fit in to some pre existing model that you see. To stay true to yourself. To find community that is supportive and sympathetic to what you're doing. I guess those are the main things. Yeah, find that community that's going to support you to give you what you want, the drive and the support you need to be courageous and to share your experiences.

(51:40) That was wonderful. Well, I want to thank you so much for taking the time out again for our JET reflections podcast episode.

(51:49) Thank you so much for having me and, you know, for your wonderful questions and you're amazing insight.