JOY IS A PROTEST
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A zine & film by creatives from Wellcome Collection’s Youth Programme, RawMinds.

Part of a season On Happiness at Wellcome Collection.

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In the midst of a pandemic, 18 people meet online to shape a project on happiness.

Given the current state of the world; a pandemic, racial reckoning, climate change and never-ceasing oppression, it seems hard to come by. However, every two weeks a group of people led by young creatives convened online to create an experience that would bring just that. Joy.

We laughed. We cried. We played games. We felt the pressure of deadlines and exams and all the stuff that life throws at you as a teenager. We made content. But most importantly, we vibed in a space that was warm and kind.

By sharing our gloomy Thursday evenings through a lockdown winter, we brainstormed how we can bring joy to our viewers. We hope our embarrassing filming in the middle of a public area hasn’t gone to waste and can bring some smiles.

We’ve learnt that happiness can be built from an exhausting and difficult journey, but it is in this grind that we find joy and pride. Enjoying the process of what you do is paramount, because even if you don’t ‘make it’ (success is subjective and defined by you) at the end of the day you enjoyed the journey.

Let’s celebrate our success. Think of all the people you are constantly judging and critiquing. Are there any? Exactly... The same way you aren’t living in anyone else’s head rent free. So live for you.

Remember - you have the power to define your happiness.
DEPRESSION
is your BODY TELLING
you it's TIRED of
the CHARACTER you're
TRYING to play.
BE happy. BE YOU.

IT'S BEEN
A loong
YEAR,
LET ME
DANCE!

LET ME
LOVE
The
LITTLE
THINGS
The following is a transcription of a conversation between the RawMinds group and Harold Offeh which took place online earlier this year.

Hetal: What do you think was the turning point where you really started enjoying your work? Or you felt like you're really doing something that was true to yourself?

Harold: I mean, wow. You just got straight to the heart of it! Brilliant question. Um, I mean, this project really, because it's had such an extended timeline. Just before the pandemic hit, I felt like I'd reached that point where it was like, 'okay, this is what the work is going to be'. And then, it was like, 'oh, I can't actually do that'.

It sounds too dramatic to say, because many people have actually dealt with real trauma and suffering in this period, but I think it was a real adjustment. I had to grieve that initial idea and then reconfigure. And so for about six months, I just didn't do anything. I was like, I don't know what to do.

I literally had booked spaces, I'd booked time, I'd booked a film crew, you know. I was always holding out for this moment where we could all be together, because that was what I was seeing in the historical material - the energy that was generated from bodies physically in proximity. And I think I just reached the point where I was like, You know what, I just can't wait, you know, there's a moment here, there's this context.

Fawaz: As creatives, we tend to have, like, really good ideas, and then we try to make it into something real. And it doesn't end up being...
anything good. Well, first of all, the question is, do you get that a lot? And the second is, how do you sort of detach yourself from the idea, or just make it work?

Harold:
Um, it’s partly fear with me. But also just having to remind myself that failure is part of the creative process, which is maybe a weird thing to say. There’s always the fear that things won’t work out, and that they’ll be bad. Ultimately, you’re like, ‘Oh my god, I don’t want this to be awful’. But I think risk and failure are a really good part of the creative process, a necessary part.

I always learnt much more when things went wrong. And I have to qualify failure. I just mean, that failure for me is the gap between your expectation and the realization. And sometimes, it’s just that adjustment. And often that sense of failure is just about an emotional reaction in the way that you’re invested, like, I really want this to happen. And when it doesn’t, you’re like, ah. It’s a disappointment. It’s the sadness of that loss. But what is the value in it? There’s always something of value. And many times, it’s sometimes better. Because you get to discover things through it.

Often in that shift you’re problem solving and you’re the most creative, because it’s like, damn, I don’t have that money anymore. I don’t have that time, This person has walked out. But I’m saying that now, but I’m 44. And it’s taken me a long time. So experience has been part of that, you know?

Tumi:
Why do you think in history and society there is a trend towards people having their right to happiness oppressed by others? Sorry if this is too deep of a question.

Harold:
Woah, okay. It’s not too deep at all. I mean, please don’t ever apologize for that. One, I think you’ve got to define what happiness is. I’ll use America as a very obvious example, because in the founding of America, it’s built with this idea of a pursuit of happiness. And so there’s a kind of aim within this American project, for people to be happy.

And I think, one person’s happiness is a threat to someone else’s power.

And, ultimately, if we’re talking about societal or collective happiness, that can be seen as a threat to power or authority. And you can then see why there are these instances of people’s access or ability to happiness being oppressed. So, yeah, I mean, we’re dealing with really structural kinds of issues, you know? I mean, is it possible to be in a society where everyone is happy? What does that mean? There are other measures that you can use, around economics, around education, access for people to be happy.

“Tumi: Why do you think in history and society there is a trend towards people having their right to happiness oppressed by others? Sorry if this is too deep of a question. Harold: Woah, okay. It’s not too deep at all. I mean, please don’t ever apologize for that. One, I think you’ve got to define what happiness is. I’ll use America as a very obvious example, because in the founding of America, it’s built with this idea of a pursuit of happiness. And so there’s a kind of aim within this American project, for people to be happy. And I think, one person’s happiness is a threat to someone else’s power. And, ultimately, if we’re talking about societal or collective happiness, that can be seen as a threat to power or authority. And you can then see why there are these instances of people’s access or ability to happiness being oppressed. So, yeah, I mean, we’re dealing with really structural kinds of issues, you know? I mean, is it possible to be in a society where everyone is happy? What does that mean? There are other measures that you can use, around economics, around education, access for people to be happy. “I always learnt much more when things went wrong.”
to food, water? I think that systemic things, like social justice, are contingent on people’s happiness.

I think I’m rambling a little bit, but it’s really an amazing kind of question, it is the ultimate utopian question, I think?

Malika:
Harold, I wanted to ask you, what advice would you give to your 20 year old self?

Harold:
Oh, my goodness [laughs] Um, wow. Okay, I can’t even remember being 20, this is the problem! Just to have faith in, you know, your ability to see things through. I remember being very unconfident as a 20 year old and being very unsure. And very nervous about my position in the world.

And I feel like there was a consistent thing that I had as a teenager or early twenties, which was, I don’t wanna say going with instinct, but just going with the things that I enjoyed, that’s it. But I realized that there was a permission structure for me to do that, that came from school. So I had, like, teachers that encouraged me to do creative subjects.

And, crucially, my mum just let me do what I wanted to do. She was never like, ‘Oh, you need to do this’, and I didn’t realize it at the time, but there was a permission structure for me to always do the things that I enjoyed. And I think that’s something I’ve carried through. And even at school, I was like, ‘Oh, I dunno what I’m doing’. And I would say to myself, ‘have more faith in that’ because I spent a lot of time angstop about that.

Lorena:
When you’re going through new work, or something like a creative process, or
whatever. Are there times that you feel unmotivated? And if you do, what gets you re-inspired?

Harold:
Ooh, yeah. I mean, there are always moments where I feel kind of stuck. Um, I think there are a couple of things I’ve learnt over time that help - deadlines. Like the less time that I have, the more resourceful and creative I end up being. So having loads and loads of time, I get lost in it.

I’m not very decisive. So what I realized now is that I often engineer drama and deadlines. But also, I realized that everything is research. So I spend quite a lot of time just diving into popular culture. I have my favorite go-to things, like I’m obsessed with American daytime talk shows.

I’m a huge fan of Wendy Williams. Or I’ll just go down these old movie wormholes. Or yeah, just listen to music, watch music videos, that kind of thing. Erykah Badu talks about being either in an upload or a download phase. Downloading is when you’re making work and you’re producing stuff. And upload period, you’re just consuming. You’re watching TV. You’re like, on the bus like Jordan looking at people having an argument or whatever [Jordan was logged into the call on the bus]. So I think I just embrace the upload period.

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Nate:
I’m literally just sitting here just like clicking my fingers the whole time and cackling. I think one of the questions we had was, what’s your favorite rule to break?

Harold:
Rule to break? Oh,

Nate:
This is being recorded...

Harold:
Probably jaywalking. Do you know what that is? You know, crossing the street. Don’t ever do it in Scandinavia.

Nate:
It just gives you a little bit of oomf to your day, doesn’t it?

Harold:
Particularly when you’re in a situation where like, there’s no cars coming. We’re just standing here for the sake of choreography.

Fawaz:
Why?

Harold:
I mean I know in America there’s a whole thing where you get fined or arrested, obviously with the craziness of the police over there...let’s not go there. But I was in Copenhagen and literally, somebody shouted at me. They were giving me daggers, you know? Oh and

Ayumi:
In Japan, as well, yeah. Yeah, jaywalking. I think that’s my consistent rule breaking. Just running across the road.

“Failure for me is the gap between your expectation and the realisation.”

Fawaz:
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eat or drink. So it’s a pretty rebellious thing to do. You get a bit of a thrill if you’re like eating some crisps and walking at the same time.

Harold:
You never see people eating on the road, that was one of my biggest mistakes. When I got there I was excited about buying some snacks. And I was just munching and then a friend told me that I was really bad.

Nate:
You can see everything’s so clean there so I kind of get it.

Fawawwz:
I was just gonna say they have no trash cans or rubbish bins, but it’s immaculate.

Harold:
Yes. Gotta carry that trash home.

Fawaz:
That’s such a good rule. We need that in this Western place.

Ayumi:
Oh, there was one more question around what your ideal Friday night would be.

Harold:
It’s funny, I was thinking about this. I mean, maybe it’s just to do with my childhood. It’s not actually a very good lifestyle endorsement or brand endorsement, but Friday night was always KFC bucket night for me. And I have not done that in like, seven years. And I saw an advert the other day, randomly.

Anyway, it just sparks a lot of memories that I just always associate that with Friday night comedy on Channel Four as a kid growing up. And yeah, munching on some corn on the cob and stuff. Yeah, it’s not the most glamorous reference.

Harold:
And everyone cleans up after themselves.

Ayumi:
There you go. You might be doing that this Friday night since you’ve been reminded.

Harold:
This has been amazing. I mean, you’re like an extraordinary group of people. I mean, I want to be part of this. So thank you so much.

Ayumi:
I’m so sad to have to do this. I think we might have to round this off.

“Just to have faith in, you know, your ability to see things through.”

Harold:
It’s been so entertaining and enlightening and just everything to talk to you.
FAILURE IS THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND REALISATION
The following is a transcription of a conversation between the RawMinds group and Stefanie Posavec which took place online earlier this year.

Fawaz:
Where did the drive and the love of data come from?

Stefanie:
That's a good question. So, um, I thought about it. And I, there's two really strange things that don't make any sense from when I was young. So the first one, and maybe I sound more Canadian, but I am American. I grew up in Colorado, and I used to go to baseball games a lot when I was a kid with my dad, and we would score baseball games together. So, with like a baseball scorecard.

It's got two sides, so one for each team. And then you use these, like notations and abbreviations in this grid of squares. And, you notate each play that happens in the game. And I just remember, I just found it really exciting. Like, every single thing that happened is compressed into these two sheets of paper. And this idea of compression, and my dad would even write the like, the weather for the day and any additional notes. So that idea of personal documentation, like on a sheet of paper, is probably really influential. And then I don't think you guys have this out here but sentence diagramming?

It's just something that you did in school where you had to draw these diagrams of subject and verb, and an object and direct object and then like - oops, I...can you still hear me? Okay, cool. [My microphones] are all, they're starting to die. Oh, my God technology's
really ruining my life. I tried to upgrade it, it all just goes wrong. So yeah, this is something that you do in school when you’re a kid. And again, I just like this kind of, taking a sentence and turning it into something visual. So that’s where it came from - weird stuff. Nobody knows what influences them until later. And you’re like, ‘Oh, that’s it’.  

Hetal:
How much has data collection affected the way that you see things now? So like, if you’re feeling an emotion, do you see it as like, a piece of data?

Stefanie:
Um, I think it’s changed because, maybe my data friends and I, (people in my world) might talk about, like, the eyes of a data collector. I guess it’s that I’m curious about, the world. And then I would want to collect data to find out answers like, if I give an example, I live on an estate with, I don’t know, 100 small houses. And so you always wonder, how many children live on this estate?

Well, you could figure it out. You just have to go collect the data. Data is this really good way of answering questions. So yeah, I guess I do see the world in that way, though, I don’t collect so much. It’s a bit. It was such an intense project, that theory data project, that I just don’t really do that anymore. And then I had, I had a baby, you collect a lot of data when you have a baby, like when they sleep and all this stuff. And so I did that. But yeah, I think my relationship with it has changed, because I’ve just overloaded myself.

Fawaz:
You said there were certain rules that made certain things translate into a certain visual, and I was wondering if you had an example of that?

Stefanie:
Yeah. So, I guess there’s always a rule behind everything. And then I always just try to make sure that somebody knows that there was data behind something, and maybe there’ll be a little legend tucked away in a corner. Or for the Wellcome Collection for the website that it’s on. There’ll be like a page that just has how the design works in case somebody wants to know more. So I always make sure that someone can figure out what the rules are. Wherever possible.

Hetal:
The work which you do just sounds like it would be perfect to design a board game because you’re working with like, data and like, infographics and everything. So I would buy it, putting it out there.

Stefanie:
Yeah, I think it’s really funny because I like board games, but I wouldn’t even have thought of it. I’m doing another art residency at the moment. And another person on it was talking to me about like, making a board, data from a board game, and I have no idea how to. It’s like a whole other different way of...
design, I wouldn’t even know how to begin it. So I like to play ’em. Maybe someone else can make it.

Fawaz:
Cuz um Stephanie, do you know what Guess Who is?

Stefanie:
Um, oh, that game? Yeah, like, there’s loads of people.

Fawaz:
Yeah, yeah. I feel like something like that could work in terms of this? of like a data game. Yeah. Well, it’d be like a Guess Who plus Top Trumps, like, a combination thing? That would be cool, actually, to think about that.

Hetal:
I think one of the questions we’ve been asking the artists who have come is, what is the rule that you like to break?

Stefanie:
That’s a good question. Um, I think, I think the rule that I’m breaking is data visualization, there’s like hardcore data visualization people, they maybe come from a data science background. And they’re like, you can only visualize data for insight.

“Appreciate your lives while you’re young.”

Maybe some Top Trumps, I don’t know, card games even. But that’s just the vibes I’m getting?

Stefanie:
Yeah, I guess cause, in a way Top Trumps is kind
That’s the only reason they use it, anything else doesn’t count. So there’s like really hard line people who see a chart and it must communicate. And it must sell stats effectively.

Basically, it’s like more of a data scientist perspective. And they’re basically saying that anything else that you do with data does not count. And so that’s the rule that I think I’m breaking. I was talking to a professional colleague, he says, I’ve used your work as an example that this all counts as data visualization. But some other hard core guy says it doesn’t. Because it didn’t give them actionable insights every single time. And I just think that’s like the most boring way to look at the world. I mean, you’re just making data visual, and you can do whatever you want with it, you can make a textile design, you can make a wallpaper design, you could use it to inform how you plan to garden. So I think that’s why I like to break this idea that it can only be like, statistical insight, you know, in a very rigid way.

“Every single thing that happened is compressed into these two sheets of paper.”

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Fawaz:
What’s your ideal Friday night?

Stefanie:
Oh, well, I have a baby. I think before I had a baby, it would be going out but now it’s probably chocolate and a beer and Netflix. It’s because I don’t eat sweets during the week. So on Friday, I buy a bunch of chocolate. But um, yeah, that’s my life. Appreciate your lives while you’re young. Go out for me, please.

Ayumi:
That’s a very lockdown friendly Friday night.

Stefanie:
Yeah, it’s very lockdown friendly. So I need to learn how to spread my wings and go out into society again.

Ayumi:
And there was just one more question. How do you get inspiration when you’re feeling uninspired?

Stefanie:
Well, I suppose I do a lot of walking. And I think that the walking helps. I try not to only read data related stuff or stay in that world. But instead, just try to make sure that I’m always looking outwards, out of it. Again, some data people can’t handle it. You know, it becomes an echo chamber, like people talking about my pie charts are bad. So I try to go look outside of my field, in the hopes that there’s something there that I can then bring to it.

Stefanie:
Lovely to meet you all.
WHAT DO THESE LOCATIONS SAY ABOUT ME?

JORDAN

What do these locations say about me?
Self described as a wanderer
Yet because of the strain of commitment
I am confined to one city

Not a lone wolf but an introspective mind finds it odd
To ask someone if they want to go on a journey
For the journey's sake.

Fun exploration with no need for a destination
To see where paths lead is not the point,
But to in joy seek peace in fading moments
with the people that both love and hate you

LAURA

Joy is a protest
It is awakened by a new rage for change
Its stomach rumbles with the hunger for revolution
It's tired of the bland taste of complacency
It wakes up and pours bureaucracy in a bowl
and devours it for breakfast
It slips into the places we least expect it
It squeezes itself into cracks and small places
Paint blushes like roses on the faces of strangers
Pours light into shadows
And hollow spaces
You have the right to be happy
Even in a world where the existence of happiness
is threatened by division and death
Joy will not be silent
The sound of joy beats to the rhythm of your pulse
It is in your blood
It has written its name in your DNA
Joy is your birthright
Happiness is fighting for justice,
Especially just in this world of injustice which we live,
Happiness is hope, to hope is to dream,
Happiness is to believe.
Happiness is gaining knowledge,
for the purpose of knowledge is to seek,
Happiness is to love,
_to love is to be free_,
Happiness is forcing yourself to laugh until you laugh completely naturally,
Happiness is posing for the camera, just for the chance it might be on,
Happiness is assuming you look good until proven wrong, that’s how I live my life..
And I think that’s how you should too,
_This is what happiness means to me_,
tell me what it means to you.

IF JOY REALLY IS A PROTEST
LET THERE BE NO RESISTANCE.
Jasleen came to rip up the rule book and kept it absolutely 100%, giving us a truly open look at what it’s like to work with institutions, her honest take on making authentic art, and generally got us all rallied up to do better and make our own community!

The following is a transcription of a conversation between the RawMinds group and Jasleen Kaur which took place online earlier this year.

Tumi:
So a lot of your statues were by rivers, do you think this is symbolic, or helps support an artist’s message?

Jasleen:
I was definitely thinking of the water. And in fact, that commission was one of seven sculptures along England’s coastline and all of the works are cited by the water and the title on the brief was, Waterfronts. I was thinking about it as a carrier, something that kind of, allows things in and lets things move across to new places. I think about this a lot as someone who has a child and thinking about where knowledge lies, and how we’ve been taught to un-know a lot of things. With the sound piece, created in collaboration with artist Ain Bailey and Kent Saheli Women’s Group, a lot of the vocals were of the women singing Punjabi folk songs. And Sharan, one of the singers, would say to me, ‘this folk song is 100 years old’. Those folk songs carry histories, right?

So I’m thinking about the sound as a form of knowledge. Coming back to the water, what is it that comes over? And what practices come over? And how are they sustained? There’s one thing around, like, maybe keeping culture alive, but there’s also something about resistance or trying to not let go of something.

Ayumi:
Is there like a format, a thing that you want to create art with, that you haven’t really tried yet that you want to do next?
Jasleen: I think if I was to show you everything I’ve made over 10/12 years, objects and sculpture would be the thing that really carries through. And then when I get to collaborate with people like Ain Bailey on sound, it is really liberating and it’s lovely also to just not be making solo sometimes. I really enjoy working with people.

I attempt to edit footage together and stuff. But I’m not a filmmaker, and I’m not a sound artist, I’m not a composer. So I think those things come in very occasionally or when I can collaborate with someone. Actually what I’m trying to do at the moment, to answer your question, is to go back to making in a way that I was making 12, 13 years ago, when it was really playful. And it was really intuitive.

I think there’s a lot of doubt that comes with overthinking and things can become really academic. And so at the moment, I’m making some work in the studio for a show in October. Yeah, weirdly, I’m going a little bit ‘backwards’ which I’m really enjoying.

Ayumi: I thought it was really interesting when you’re talking about archives and how they feel like something that you shouldn’t be able to access unless you’re in a certain space. Do you think there’s a way of changing that, making them more accessible or more interesting for people?

Jasleen: In the structures that they are in, no. These institutions, they’re colonial, right? Like their structures are colonial and how can they possibly move and shift? I think people sometimes hear that kind of language as quite a performative language. But I teach in an institution, and I know how impenetrable they are and how difficult it is to make them move and shift and how power operates in those spaces. So I think an overhaul or dismantling is where it’s at.

Like I was describing, about working with Jasdeep at the National Army Museum, it was literally like sneaking in the back door, right? He gave me access. And there’s always this proximity to whiteness that allows you to be able to be in a space. I’ve like, yeah, I think even just calling yourself an artist, and having a certain education behind you allows you into spaces that others wouldn’t be able to get into.

Jasleen: Yeah absolutely, what histories do we want to remember? How do we do remember things that are lost?
Fawaz:
Is there any specific individual or organization that you’d want to collaborate with, in your ideal world, based on values, based on vision based on what they’re trying to achieve?

Jasleen:
I think at the moment, it’s friends I want to collaborate with or work with. So I’d love to work with Amanpreet Sandhu again, who’s a friend of mine and an amazing curator and writer. Yeah, I think not so much big organizations, but rather individuals that would be able to care for your work and the ideas in it.

Let me just give you an example, that literally happened in the last few days. My work in Gravesend was described in a Guardian article as “a celebration of immigration” and I was like, ‘what the fuck?’ How? How is the work reduced to that flat description? They’d just totally reduced it down to something that’s clearly how they see me making that work. When actually, the work was more about resistance to assimilation and other forms of knowledge held in community groups on the margins.

And so yeah, Fawaz to answer your question, when you work with people that are not going to do that to your work. I think it’s more likely to be an individual or collective rather than like a big, flashy arts organization.

Fawaz:

Ayumi:
What is your favourite rule to break?

Jasleen:
Oh, my goodness, you’re good. Again, like what we were just talking about, about perception or how that white male journalist sees me and decided to write about the work. There’s something about breaking rules when it comes to being perceived, on a bodily level, like how someone views you. And there’s something about rule-breaking or unexpectedness that I revel in, or that I’m trying to be more comfortable with doing.

I grew up with a lot of having to be a certain thing, or having to fit into a certain space. I definitely don’t think I’m the most non-conforming person in the world because of that.

“There’s something about rule breaking that I think is actually essential for your own mental health.”

Breaking rules when it comes to being perceived, on a bodily level, like how someone views you. And there’s something about rule-breaking or unexpectedness that I revel in, or that I’m trying to be more comfortable with doing.

I teach at Chelsea College of Art and it’s a new job for me and I’m going to have to start going into the building post-pandemic. And there’s something that takes over my body when I’m in those types of buildings. And I’ve like, gotta act in a certain way. There’s something that’s very automatic about being
around ‘professionals’, and mainly white professionals, white male professionals. And there’s something important around rule-breaking in that moment, and I think, ‘lean into your accent, Jasleen, lean into the way you speak, lean into the way you dress. Everyone thinks you’re a student, it’s okay.

Don’t try to be any other way, you cannae be it!’ There’s something about rule breaking that I think is actually essential for your own mental health. And it’s a practice, do you know what I mean? Even in some meetings where you’ve got something to say because they’re ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ or whatever and you want to say something, but when there’s 30 other white people there, it’s quite terrifying to speak up or feel heard when you do. I think that’s an ongoing journey for me, in like, coming into a voice and just being okay with being yourself, because ‘you’ve got a contract now, Jasleen, they don’t have a choice! You need to come back the next day to work.’

Fawaz: Come on!

Hasina: I felt like you’re talking about my life at Wellcome.

Jasleen: I can see the nods.

Fawaz: This is the energy we need! We need this up in corporate jobs, nine-to-fives, you need this all over the world.

Hasina: I have one last question if no one has any other questions. I mean, obviously, we’ve spoken a lot offline about your commission. And I’m really excited about it! I just want to know, what was your experience with the artwork that you do? And you know, the things that
you're interested in, thinking about post colonialism and being radical and you know, not whitewashing your identity, and then coming into Wellcome Collection, I don't know how much you want to share in this as it’s being recorded but..

"Don’t try to be any other way, you cannae be it!"

Jasleen: You know what? At Wellcome, no. I have been working with all white staff. I think there's one thing that I'm noticing and this is again, Fawaz, what we were talking about wanting to work with friends and people of colour. It's also about like, wanting to grow your work with those that understand it more intimately perhaps through lived experience.

What I find myself having to do a lot of the time, not so much with this commission but with other commissions, is spend a lot of time rewriting exhibition texts, saying 'No, I don't want you to write about the project in that way'. For example they'll want to use words like 'diversity' or 'multiculturalism' when they are not words that I am even thinking about. That 'polite' language is really obfuscating and makes me feel like a token artist making palatable work. They want you to be unpicking these histories in a nice way that's not too difficult or uncomfortable. Sometimes you end up having to do work for them, and I wonder how much that stunts what I end up making.

The thing that has been great about Wellcome is that you've got money. The Wellcome has money! When I took on the commission I was pregnant and so you know thank God I was being offered commissions which had enough money. For the first time in my life we could employ someone to fabricate it for me because I don't know how to make things at that scale, or I was going to be taking time off to care for my child. So the Wellcome really supported that. The Wellcome introduced me to that book by Sara Ahmed called, 'The Promise of Happiness', which was so fundamental for my thinking, and I've never ever felt like I'm being edited in what I want to say.

I felt like they really want visitors to be confronted by the work and asked to unpick something that’s sticky and messy and so it’s been good. It’s been good, with the Wellcome.

Ayumi: Thanks for being so honest.

Jasleen: That's okay.

Fawaz: It’s actually really interesting to hear this, like this, honestly, this rawness. It’s inspiring. It’s really inspiring. Every time we'd be having these sessions,
they inspire me in one way or another, and for you to be challenging the status quo? Or going against and questioning everything, it just reinstills my personal being to question everything. So thank you.

Jasleen:
I wish I grew up with forums and youth groups like you are all part of. When I talk about these friends and networks of incredible artists and thinkers I want to work with and learn with, I really believe it’s your friendship group or peer group that helps you thrive. You learn from them in a way that you’re never going to learn from any art world, any art education, anything that is mainstream and structured, you’re not going to get it from them.

You’re going to get it from your peers and your friends and your loved ones. I think anything I’m learning and seeing right now comes from beautiful friends that I love that are teaching me through texts, through sharing podcasts and seeing the work they are doing—that is often difficult and never compliant. So yeah, this feels like where it’s at.

Fawaz:
Do you think the incentive of money or being commissioned for your work, can affect the integrity and sincerity of the art?

Jasleen:
Yeah, I think definitely. Something that I try to do is make your money elsewhere so that you can be picky about what you take on and so that you only need to say yes to the things that you align with politically, or want to do. Especially like with what’s going on in Palestine and Gaza and Israel. We know that arts organizations are in cahoots with Israeli armed companies, and not every artist will say no to that, but I think somehow you’ve got to draw your lines and your boundaries of what’s for you and what’s not for you.

And that might mean your stable income is from that bar job, that cafe job, and then maybe you run some workshops with young people on the side, and maybe over time that changes and becomes art commissions with community groups. Things build up. And it’s also why I teach, it’s a financial need. I love teaching, but I also hate the institutions. Some artists use two names so that they can get away with doing stuff on the side. Sometimes working collectively or setting something up with like minded people can create the spaces and conditions you actually want to work in.

But you know, you never know someone’s financial situation. So that’s also quite a privileged thing to say that you can be picky because not everyone can be. It’s a journey. And you’re gonna make stuff that you don’t like, you’re gonna make stuff that you kinda like, you’re gonna make stuff that you love. And that’s okay, I think.

Hasina:
Thank you so much for coming.

Jasleen:
You’re welcome. Are we gonna get to, like meet each other at the commission? Can we make that happen?

Hasina:
Yeah. So I think I don’t know how it’s going to happen. But yeah, I think we will meet.

Jasleen:
So great to see what you’re working on.
ALL YOU TOUCH YOU CHANGE

JOY IS PORTABLE

JOY IS PORTABLE

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