

Light+ Collective Imaginings - EP2

Jamila Prowse [00:00:32] Collective imaginings as a light plus podcast series from Lighthouse, curated and hosted by me, Jamila Prowse, the roots of the series were planted in January 2020, although the thinking behind them predates even that. In the time that I have planned them, research them began dialogues with the collaborators. Whose words form them. The world we exist within has changed significantly during the eight months before we came to record the first episode. My thinking and approach as a curator has unravelled entirely due to my own learnings and reflections, as well as harmful experiences I have been through in the sector. I am no longer sure if I wish to curate. I am no longer sure of the value of having conversations in public. As I share these conversations with you, I have unravelled and doubted the meaning of them and there were so many times as cultural workers we are routinely bound and compromised in what we can share publicly. Although in this series I was given free creative control, a rare thing. Many of us are still bound by contractual clauses. Even as I make a series about our embodied experiences of harm, I cannot explicitly name the beast I refer to. So where does the value in the series stem from? Throughout the series, I'll be speaking to cultural workers, including artists and curators who have been through and continue to think through their own processes of learning and unlearning resistance and radical imagining. Their work and ideas have helped me to better understand the reasons I was originally drawn and connected to art making and cultural organising. The conversations that follow are not complete, exhaustive or final. They are snippets into possibilities and imaginings which have helped me to better understand myself and my positioning in the world. I hope they might help you reach insights and learnings of your own. This series was originally intended as an open resource for people interested in or entering into or working within the arts of personal accounts of navigating the sector and strategies for resistance, self-preservation and survival. In many ways, a series I wish I would have had when starting out in the sector as someone who has continually felt lost, overwhelmed and squashed, and one that would also be invaluable to me today. I have come to realise through these conversations and my wider research that survival is not and will never be enough. We need to be able to do more than survive. Even still, I hope that these personal accounts come together and a collective radical imagining for the art world we hope to bring into fruition, Collective Imaginings stems from and is a continuation of thinking which took place in and around Eva Rowson's 2019 curatorial residency at Lighthouse. Who's doing the washing up? Where's the sink? Which included a light plus podcast of the same name.

[00:03:35] In this episode, I'm joined by Jemma Desai, whose research *This Work Isn't for Us* was shared earlier this year via a Google doc and explores her experiences of working in the film and public sector for the past 10 years, as well as collected oral histories with BIPOC cultural workers who, in Jemma's words, are embodied in difference within the sector. We'll be discussing how to find the space to protect our hope and imagination after working in hostile and harmful environments in the arts. Thank you for joining me, Jemma. It's really nice to have the chance to have this conversation with you and kind of hold the space with you.

[00:04:15] I've been kind of sitting with your research over the past few months and kind of throughout lockdown, which has kind of been like a guiding force for me in that time, actually, and helped me to really understand myself a lot better and my positioning in like the Arts, but also the world so much better. And something I keep being drawn to in your research and your kind of wider conversations, teasing out the researchers, this idea of it being a way of kind of exploding capitalist's productivity. And it's something you've talked about and I've been thinking about in relation to Tina Campts, theorising around slowness

and the way that she discusses slowness not only as being a change in velocity, but also this idea of it being a way to take care, to shift our attention, be aware of what we're giving our attention to actually being attentive, which feels so antithetical to the structuring of the arts, which has this kind of self-proclaimed fast paced nature to it is, you know, something you come across. If you ever apply for a job, they always ask you to, like, be able to work under these pressurised environments and in this fast-paced environment. And it's something that's continued even in spite of the pandemic. And the government ordered lockdown in the U.K. over the past few months with this kind of shift, almost instant shift to online programming in this huge abundance of online programming. So actually, this business has maintained, even in spite of us being kind of unable to see our families and loved ones and maybe even go outside. And so, I'm wondering that in relation to this, in relation to the ways you've been trying to situate yourself in that slowness, how you think those methodologies could open up things for us in the arts, so what resisting capitalist productivity might do in reshaping what we give our attention to and the arts?

Jemma Desai [00:06:26] Yeah, first of all, thank you so much for inviting me. And also, like, thank you for what you said about This Work Isn't For Us and how it made you feel. And yeah, I think. It's really difficult because as much as the process of This Work Isn't For Us was about slowing down, and in a way someone said to me, actually, Amal Khalaf, who is like this brilliant creator and friend and beautiful soul said to me the other day, you know, like it was kind of a way to, like, break a cycle of productivity. So, it was like this. It came out of this period of stopping, of taking myself outside of paid employment because I'd been awarded this fellowship and slowing down and really connecting to what I had been feeling rather than disconnecting from what I'm feeling.

[00:07:22] And I know we're going to talk a little bit more about that later, but that was an effect of slowness, was just when I wasn't constantly like producing and broadcasting, which is what deep study is like. It's about reflecting and thinking. And you don't get to say I mean, you can share bits and pieces, but you can't say I did this. You can only say I read this, and I felt through this and I sat with this. So that's what the process was. But, you know, when you talked about the way that institutions have moved to online programming, I mean, I've contributed to that in this period with this piece of work. And I really have had to reflect on that and think about that and think about how I've actually found my body in this time. Like, actually it hasn't been super generative for me personally because I was kind of also living some of the realities of how entrenched these practises are in the arts and how process and sharing of process are kind of at odds with each other sometimes. Right. So, if the process is reflective, how can the broadcast be reflective? Like, I don't I don't know the answer to that. And I've tried to create spaces that are reflective, but I've also just shared a piece that has been consumed in a way that I couldn't control.

Jamila Prowse [00:08:59] Yeah.

Jemma Desai [00:09:01] And in a way that I cannot. I can never express in a in a document that people read that it's still unfinished and it's still moving and because so much of it is me that I am still changing, and the arguments are shifting and that I'm not presenting myself as like an authority on it. This is just a thought in time, you know, and the way that I wrote it was like it was never edited. Like, this is like so raw. And I had readers, but they were kind of people that I knew. So, they didn't really edit it. So, there's a lot of mistakes in it. There are things that I would write differently. And so, yeah at its heart, that was the intention, but I've also seen how difficult it is. To truly live by those principles of, I think, your phrasing, which was really beautiful about exploding capitalist production. I mean, but where can we do that? Like, what does that even mean? The way that I tried to

do that during the period of the research was just to have conversations in private. And there were very few conversations that I recorded. Actually, there were only a few. And just trying to like to sit with what people said to me and let it live in my body rather than in a recording. And just see how that changed, how I moved and the ideas they instigated. So, but yeah, that's unless you are an artist and I didn't approach this work as an artist although I see that the processes that are used were the same processes that an artist would use, but I wasn't thinking I'm approaching this as an artist. I was just trying to do something that I could feel connected to. And what that told me was that the ways that I was working before as a programmer, as a writer and as the recent academic research really don't account for your body and how you feel. So, you have to do something quite radical outside of production in order to feel that and connect to that.

Jamila Prowse [00:11:30] Yeah, I mean, it's interesting that kind of that comes up a lot, this idea of the way that this work, this work that we engage in, in the arts, this kind of programming, production, public engagement, whatever it is, disconnects us from our body. And I think that lack of slowness that exists in the sector is almost designed to and not just the sector in like a wider, capitalist society in general is designed to connect us from our instincts and our body because if we were aware of the ways that it was impacting our body, the real harm it was doing to our body, we might resist it more actively or try and put our energies elsewhere. And you know, you've talked before about the ways that this kind of work has had impact on your health. And that's certainly something I have encountered to this, the sense that actually you almost don't become aware of the harm until you're completely burnt out and you're completely debilitated by that harm. And even in these conversations and being made aware of research around slowness, it becomes very hard to. Kind of disengage with those processes, they're so ingrained in us and there's also this bind I suppose that we're tied to certain modes of work. And, you know, you talk about This Work Isn't For Us having to have that that public dissemination as a requirement of the research. And we also this is all this is the field of work. These are our jobs. So, we need to get paid and sustain a living. So, I suppose it's interesting to think how we listen to ourselves in that way.

[00:13:24] And it's very interesting to me that what you might be giving to us as viewers, as readers, as people engaging in your research, this really what feels like a contemplative and generative kind of state is not necessarily your experience of putting it out, because, of course, we don't see all of those behind-the-scenes kind of processes you're going through and organising and actually like what that takes from you and the energy it takes from you. So, have you found ways to kind of ground yourself in that slowness and like protect yourself and your energies as you're doing this work?

Jemma Desai [00:14:10] Its a work in progress, I think, and I think my relationships that have actually grown really beautifully out of this work are the things that ground me. It's really difficult. It's so hard, like in the period of sharing it, obviously we all went through like. This state sanctioned murders like that has been the pandemic that has been. You know, the uprisings and the grief that kind of brought forth for many people in different bodies in different ways, but also at the same time, for me personally, in addition to all of those things, was a return to work, a return to an institution and a return to work, supposedly with this document that I thought would help me to navigate those spaces better. Right. And being confronted really clearly with how that was not a tool that would help me navigate these spaces better at all, actually, because in order for me to navigate those spaces better with that tool, that thing would have to be heard and listened to and understood by people who don't have any lived experience of my experience. So, so much of this research was about explaining myself to people.

[00:15:42] And letting go of that has been a process that I'm not sure yet, and I'm like totally out the other side of it. And I think one thing that we've talked about like outside of here is that, you know, I'm part of a mixed heritage family. So, like, my partner is white, my daughter's mixed heritage. And so, these are just conversations that I'm having at work. These are conversations that I'm having in my home. These are really difficult conversations where you're not just asking for institutional critique or institutional reform. You're asking for someone to hear you and understand you and understand how you move through the world, that is different to them, so I don't know how to protect yourself in a setting that can't contain that and in a way like. Yeah, you're asking for care from people that are threatened by giving that care and that's a really, it's a really difficult set of circumstances. And during the period of sharing the research, I tried to explain that to my family, to my boss, and got really quite difficult, like disappointing responses back and ended up like resigning and making like that resignation like public. And at every stage you think, oh, I've explained this, I articulate this, and you think you'll be met with understanding and you're not. And what do you do with that?

[00:17:24] Actually, I kind of explored some things around. You know what we want when we express ourselves in these really personal ways about these structural issues in this performance, what do we want from each other after we've told our stories? And really that piece was so much about. Yeah, this whole process of having tried to resign or resigning and having tried to share and be transparent about that, which is kind of what an institution never does. It never makes clear the conditions in which we work, and it never makes clear the ways that it fails certain people and not others. And, you know, that was the urge was just like it wasn't about sharing my trauma in public. The urge was to be like, this is actually what's happening and in that urge is this hope that if you shared that, then everyone would realise, and something would change. And yet to see that that hasn't happened. And I think we see that actually as we're recording, like just yesterday, another statement came out from Evan Ifekoya, who worked at Goldsmiths, who was reflecting on the fact that their letter, their statement of withdrawing their labour at Goldsmiths 100 days ago hasn't impacted anything. And they've decided not to work there anymore. And, you know, like just how little impact those sharing's, those real searching sharing's, kind of pleadings to be heard affects anything and that's a really tricky thing to navigate. I can't remember where we started this conversation, but I feel like, you know, those are the ways that make it difficult for slowness and pleasure to exist in these processes.

Jamila Prowse [00:19:33] Yeah, I mean, I was thinking about Evan's statement, as you were saying that. And I mean, it's heart breaking in a way when this happens, because your work, Evan's work, you know, whenever I see these kinds of the sharing of these experiences, which, of course, that they're painful to go through, it's not a simple thing to share publicly. And there's a generosity with which you share your experiences anyway and kind of helped share your learnings, help kind of build these collective learning spaces. And they are just completely misheard and mishandled within the kind of public sector. But at the same time, you've talked before and we've talked in separate conversations about breaking the cycle and what it does. And, you know, in a way, it's disappointing that there is no institutional response. But it doesn't surprise me because what we're seeing is a public slippage of that facade that the institution holds of presenting as progressive, presenting as caring constantly. I've kind of just been thinking about how I distrust this word care now because it is used so, so freely in the arts, but not with any consideration of what that word actually means. And I've entered into institutions time and time again that describe themselves in one way publicly, but they just are not what they say they are on the tin. And you get into that internal environment and you go through

those processes and you have all these experiences of harm. And it's like, wait, but this isn't this isn't what I was told I was getting into.

[00:21:31] But what your experiences, your research making that public does, even if it doesn't garner a response or any kind of change in the institutions themselves, I think it does provide this hopefully this protection for other people in similar positions. And you've spoken to me before about not wanting people to go through the same experiences as you, because if you could prevent that harm from happening, of course, you would want to like who wants someone to go through those experiences that are so difficult, so painful and have this really lasting impact. I know that Evan's statement, I was considering applying to study at Goldsmiths apply for a Ph.D. there, and that completely no longer will not happen any at any point, regardless of actually their response. I know some people have said depending on how Goldsmith handled the situation moving forward, they might consider giving their time to it again. But actually, I think that that what we are ultimately seeing is a revealing of what those internal structures are like and people are really good at covering them up and hiding them. So, I want to linger on that that idea of actually this public sharing of complaint and refusal, which feels so pertinent now but is no means kind of unique to this moment we find ourselves in but has been happening within the arts with the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, support or public support for the Black Lives Matter movement. And these public accounts coming out from our work as cultural workers and artists of their experiences of institutions. And simultaneously we have these sharing's of the places where we are actually unable to disclose our experiences publicly. The White Pube recently shared a confidentiality clause which is contained in the Southbank Centre's redundancy contracts. They are in the process of making large numbers of their staff redundant as our Tate and other cultural institutions. And there was this public sharing of this confidentiality clause contained in those redundancy contracts, which is shocking and really not OK, but it is quite common practice. I've had them in lots of my contracts and there are certain experiences I've been through and of leaving these institutional sites where I haven't actually been able to disclose my experiences publicly.

[00:24:19] So thinking through what ways you think this component of critique occurring in a public forum needs to be strengthened? So, I suppose thinking through those ways that we may be prevented from disclosing our experiences publicly and why that's important to do, why it's important that you sharing this research potentially breaks that cycle for someone else.

Jemma Desai [00:24:45] Yeah, I think there are lots of things in what you've said, which I just really want to touch on quickly, because you talked about care and, you know, like the institution saying that they care, but they don't. I think we as a society like haven't censored care for a long time, and so I think also we need to think about how we don't care, we need to really reflect on that and that reflection is kind of related to this other word that is being used really flippantly at the moment, I think, which is accountability and this idea that accountability is just something that you can just do now. But actually, accountability requires you to reflect on the harm that you've enacted, to think about how that relates to what you're doing in the present, and then decide how you're going to change your behaviour in the future. There's a time like historical and future like part of accountability. It doesn't just happen by making a statement, as we all know, but it doesn't seem like institutions know that right now. So, in a way like sharing these things is a way of making the sort of past come into view, like, you know, Evan might not work at Goldsmiths. I might not work at BFI and British Council anymore. You might not go to Goldsmiths, but when we share those experiences, we talk about what has gone before and what is

happening now, and that makes it more visible. And also, that relates to your earlier question about burnout. Right. Burnout is like something that Farzana Kahn said who runs Healing Justice London an event that I attended during lockdown was burnout is their thing. So, us burning out. Is the institution doing what it was set up to do, it's set up to look after some and not others.

[00:27:01] And so when we burn out, we are doing the institutions work for them. So, what are strategies to not burn out? Is it not important that we talk about what is going on so that it doesn't stay in our bodies, it exists somewhere else? So right. There's this thing, which is about your body, and then there's this thing about, you know, politics and standing in solidarity. And I think those two things are really interlinked because when we are burnt out, we can stand in solidarity with each other. Right. We can only really heal individually. So, I think that's really important. And then this other thing about. You know, my ideas about complain and critique and refusal are shifting all the time because I am learning all the time and during this period have been gifted, this education on abolition as well by so many people who have been doing this work for years. Like, I don't know what the use of complaint and critique is, if it isn't going towards dismantling, as, you know, everything that is harmful in society, that the arts is just a reflection of. So, the arts and the industry, so-called industry around it is just a reflection of the harms of wider society. And we know that in the UK because our funding comes from the government.

[00:28:29] We are a reflection of what the government wants. The public to see about society, that's what the arts are. And so Rabz Lansiquot, who I was in conversation with couple of weeks ago, speaks about this, that really incredibly and their work with Languid Hands has this real deep study around abolition and Lola Olufemi is it also like speaking about this really like directly in terms of the arts as well and I think that we need to listen to those things as well as the complaints and critiques and the unionising and the workers at the Tate. I think we also need to think like, yes, people need to, like, earn money. But also, how are those struggles moving towards the abolition of these structures, not just of these industries, but of the wider structures that create harm. So, for instance, like, it is not understandable to everybody why I can't remember the name of the theatre, but there's a theatre who is now using some of their private space as a sort of emergency courtroom, because they've got so many courts, court cases, backlog, and they're presenting this as like a community function. But that's totally at odds with what we know that the justice system is doing to many people in society. They can't say black lives matter and also use their space as a courtroom. They can't do that. But I don't think that's immediately obvious to many liberals who work in the arts. And I think it's important that when we make these complaints and enacts refusal, that we're also bringing those things into view, if that makes sense.

Jamila Prowse [00:30:35] Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's interesting how all of these things just compound, because you talk about, you know, that the arts that we work, and the publicly funded arts sector is just that is publicly funded. There are other means of funding, but much of it comes from the government. And we are under this government that is incredibly harmful, has really, really hostile policies around immigration, trans rights, you know, the list just goes on and on housing. We know that. And probably a lot of people that work in the arts who consider themselves to be quite left-wing kind of see this, see the arts as being kind of detached from that. And it's something that you talked about in your conversation with Rabz as well, this idea that people see the institution as kind of being separate and like cushioned from the rest of the world, which is just not the case. Like we can't make those detachments. And actually, all of it is intrinsically linked, the ideas about the justice system in this country and the US and that's another institution. All of these

institutions operate to uphold each other and to maintain this, you refer to it in your research as the sematic norm of whiteness. All of it is there to maintain that and to ensure that continues to be upheld. None of it none of it wants to be dismantled. So, nothing is ever going to be so challenging within that sector while it is structured in that way, because people don't want to lose that power that they have, they might lose and not real ways, I suppose.

Jemma Desai [00:32:40] Yeah. And I think the one thing that I kind of wanted to like, go back to, which is that this really like foundational thing that is just like this idea of like radical and what that means and how Angela Davis defines it as like grabbing something at the root. And when you talk, when you were just saying about, you know, the ways that these structures are functioning, I've recently had the honour of like being in a workshop with Jack Tanne, who's an artist who thinks about legal frameworks and had worked as a lawyer for many years before he was an artist and he led us in a workshop talking about the roots of our organisations. Right. So, most of our arts organisations are charities and the charity structure and the company structure also has its roots in the East India Company, so it is all about colonialism, it's all about benevolence for difference, but it's also about extraction and transaction. And it is about people, you know, like the board structure. The fact that board members don't get paid is because of the people that were on these boards. They were privileged people who had some spare time. So, all of these ways that power is withheld from people is written into the ways that these, you know, these structures were originally conceived of. And so. It's really how far do we want to go with these broken things and how much energy will we spend on trying to make these broken things better when ultimately, they were conceived of for us not to thrive in them and actually for us to be diminished and sold and extracted from and used and only can we participate if we become colonial administrators and, you know, like this idea of assimilation and changing yourself. And that all has its roots in this colonial structure. And that was something that actually when I was doing my research, I was only just starting to hint at, you know, I was thinking about my own genealogy, but Jack's work has really kind of like solidified that for me. Like, this is why it's not working, because it was never supposed to. And, you know, in dialogue with Rabz's work, which is like, you know, the system is functioning absolutely as it is supposed to in terms of Rabz's research into like, you know, spectacles of like Black Death, et cetera. And I think bringing that interview is also really important and seems really powerful at this time.

Jamila Prowse [00:35:35] Yeah, absolutely, and because, you know, we are talking about the ways that the legacies of colonialism, the fact that these systems never left us, they completely structure the whole of society today. And when you start to pull back that curtain, that idea that, you know, slavery was abolished and that colonialism ended, when you actually start to think about the ways that it very much has still upheld and in existence, those systems have just shifted and changed. They've almost become smarter, more insidious, less visible so that it's harder to name them, it's harder to dismantle them. But in that conversation, you had with Rabz, they talk about this idea of, you know, exceptionalism as artists as well. The idea that you are a pioneer and like the first of your kind and Rabz really eloquently talks about the fact that's a colonialist mindset as well. So, it's like it's not just in the systems that we're working within. It's also within our mindsets and the ways that we are conditioned.

Jemma Desai [00:36:40] Absolutely. Yeah.

Jamila Prowse [00:36:42] Yeah. But I kind of I want to think about. You know where you've come to through, because you've been in this period of really deep study, the

research that we refer to *This Work Isn't For Us*, you know, it happened over an extended period of time. It's now come into the world in this this moment of the pandemic. And you've continued to think around it, have conversations around it, have kind of learnings around it collectively. And one of the things you think about and one of the things we're kind of talking about is this idea that the more you become aware of the structures as they really are, as they really and truly are, you have to go through this process of grieving the thing that you thought you were getting into, which actually doesn't exist, which I very much, you know, find affinity with and that's been my experience of this world as well. And it just, you know, something that Lola Olufemi talks about in the sense like of when you first go through this abolitionist thinking, when you first come across these abolitionists' kind of arguments and research, it undoes everything your entire world view you everything you thought you knew is exploded. But I want to know you you've talked about this idea of hope and the research coming to an end. You coming out of it, no longer being something that's in front of you or that you're kind of in the midst of. And I'm wondering now you've been or are going through that process of grieving the thing that you thought you were getting into, which doesn't actually exist, where you find yourself now or see yourself in the future, putting your energies and finding ways to actually protect your hope and your imagination.

Jemma Desai [00:38:52] Yeah, and I think, you know, there's stuff around when you begin to know and then the point where you can't unknow is really important to this question. And how it relates to the thing that you were talking about that Rabz said about exceptionalism. So, part of the practice of moving through this is to really continue to resist any sort of accolade for having done it, if that makes sense. So really resisting the idea that I in any way have done something unique, like I have to honour the fact that this was like a personal journey for me of learning and unlearning and kind of liberating yourself from this idea of institutional critique. And I'm being this person that just moves in the world like critiquing all the time. So, for me, it's like moving it out from the intellectual argument into where I live, like, how am I going to live differently now as a result of all the things that I have learnt, not just through doing the research, but having these conversations and understanding how it has been consumed and ignored and listened to and not listened to. It's really about consolidating all of that and really not being what the industry now wants people to be right when they make a piece of work. So, moving and making something new that really senses pleasure and doesn't censor the institution or censors learning or gross or so I'm really trying to think about that, about, you know, really having an idea about what I will say yes to what I will say no too. The ways that I will refuse those kinds of ways that the arts industry, the film industry, all of these creative industries want to put you in a box and want to contain the ways that learning is a journey. And the ways that it is inherently political and should change how you exist in the world. Right. Which is this idea of, you know, you can learn about abolition, but when you're learning about abolition, I think I can only speak for myself.

[00:41:23] But like learning about this logic is has exploded everything, as Lola says, but like. It's also been like almost like finding religion, so you like you have these conversations, and you speak so passionately about something and you realise that the other person isn't a believer and you almost become this person, you know, like kind of like with Sara Ahmed talking about feminism, you know, you become that feminist killjoy. And I don't know what the equivalent would be for like this abolitionist. But yeah, I realise that you're in an argument with people over a dinner or like whatever in a social setting. And I have recently just thought, you know what, this isn't what it's about either. It's not about having conversations at dinner parties or like with people, you know, it's about finding the people where you can actually move forward with. So, I'm kind of thinking about my

daughter and how I can make that journey shorter for my daughter. So, I'm thinking about, like alternative education spaces for like the younger children in our lives and how they don't have to unlearn something and how they will teach us a different way of knowing and seeing the world if they don't have to unlearn a whole load of stuff. That's where I feel like I want to put my energy, and that's where I feel like I want to put my imagination. And we talk a little bit about this with Rabz in that conversation about just. Not only unlearning that exceptionalism, but also unlearning that kind of, I don't know, like the paternalistic way that we move in the world, like as in only the person that's older and more dominant can learn from, can teach and really thinking about how we can learn from those that are just experiencing the world for the first time. That feels really incredibly important and antithetical, actually, to the way that institutions function, which is about, you know, historical volumes of knowledge being the only way that we can learn.

Jamila Prowse [00:43:36] Yeah, I mean, it's just beautiful to hear you talk about that and actually because reading the research and I actually I kind of came to the end of it the past few days and it's like as I'm coming to that conclusion and epilogue and you're rewriting of that conclusion, I'm like, I'm wanting to see you go that next journey and like through to that new imagining, and I think that it's yeah, it's thinking about the future that we want to enact. And that's something that, you know, people there's research around kind of black feminist future being about the future that must come into being. And it's something that Lola talks about as well. I mean, I know we've thought through this kind of, you know, a little bit around the ways the abolition kind of undoes everything, you know. But it's also about what it brings into fruition, what it makes possible. And one of the things that Lola talks about is that when you're envisioning a future in this way, that a future that you want to enact, we shouldn't limit ourselves. We should ask for everything. That's a phrase she uses, ask for everything. And so, kind of us as a kind of closing thought and in keeping with ideas around sort of protecting your imagination, protecting your hope. If you were going to ask for everything in relation to art making, a cultural organising. But I suppose as we've touched on, you know, this is about the world we want to enact as well. In a way. I know this is like a huge question, but I just I wonder if you have a sense of like what your radical imagining of the future might look like.

Jemma Desai [00:45:35] Yeah, it's like. I guess I wonder, you know, just really simply there are so many things and I think the thing that I just talked about, about really seeing a beautiful possibility and my daughter like is and I hope that doesn't sound like a projection. I'm not like trying to mould her into something, but like just, you know, that she is like this portal into so many possibilities. It's like a beautiful thing and an honour to like to be her mother and to think through these things. But I'm really just thinking about a really small thing that I think is really possible but would make such a radical difference is how can we help each other to ask for more and how can we not punish each other for asking for more like and I think that's what's getting played out in this moment of sharing and these statements and people are ultimately just saying what you're offering us is not enough. And actually, what we're asking for isn't that big and can we just have it and not be told that we're unreasonable or don't understand. Can we just talk about the fact that what we're asking for is not out of reach and that and when we say radical, can we just actually focus on what radical means? Like radical is an unreachable radical who is absolutely the root of something.

[00:47:13] It's like possible and imagination is completely limitless and expansive and beautiful and why are we constricting that in order to limit ourselves and be practical and get through this difficult time, which is the pandemic? Right. So how can reconceptualize the way that we are talking about this moment just and on a day to day, how can we help

each other to do that? That feels like something that we could all take part in. Right now, and, you know, obviously, the dismantling of white supremacy is like the ultimate goal in that, but that feels that really, you know, this idea of helping each other to demand more feels like a really important thing that we all need to reflect on.

Jamila Prowse [00:48:12] Amazing. Thank you. Thank you so much. Yeah, I think that's a really a really beautiful place to end on helping each other to ask for more.

Jemma Desai [00:48:22] It was such a nice conversation Jamila. It was so nice. Thank you so much.

Jamila Prowse [00:48:26] In the next episode of Collective Imaginings, I'll be speaking to curators and artists Rabz Lansiquot and Deborah Joyce Holman about the intersections between an artistic and curatorial practise and how having their work commissioned and displayed as artists has helped them devise methodologies for caring for the artists they collaborate with.

[00:48:49] Thank you for listening. If we are to leverage real, meaningful change within the cultural sector, we need to begin from a place of collectivising in order to dismantle and oppose the hostile and often inhospitable institutional landscape which has long been the norm. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe and rate us on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. It helps other people to find us. You can find out more on Lighthouse's website, Lighthouse dot org dot uk, thanks to Platform B and our producers Elijah Peart, Nats Spada and Ed Apivor.

[00:49:32] Special thanks to David Richards and women for providing the music, the music featured is I believe you live by.