

# Fringe of Colour Films 2023: Art & Environmental Sustainability

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With Alaya Ang, Yvonne Blake, Jessica Gaitán Johannesson and Carmen Thompson

Carmen Thompson: My name is Carmen. I'm one of the co directors of Fringe of Colour films. It's really nice to have you here this afternoon on this hot day. Thanks for choosing to be inside with us. Today we're going to be talking about art and environmental sustainability and climate justice and how those things kind of intersect. And I am like overwhelmed by how incredible the people on this panel are. I am going to let them introduce themselves. But just ahead, I just want to give a visual description myself. So I am a mixed race youngish woman. I've got braids that I'm wearing up high. And I've got an orange shirt and black jeans. So I'm going to pass over to Alaya on my left to introduce themselves.

Alaya Ang: Hi everyone. Good to have you here. Just a visual description of myself. I am femme presenting Asian Chinese person with dark hair that is wrapped up in blue floral scarf and yes, with wearing a black singlet yes. And a little bit about my practice. So I'm an artist and a lot of the work that I do is normally thinking about collectivity and about how you find those moments and collaboration with people. And today I'll talk a little bit about this project called Plotting Against the Garden. And also I'm curating, I'm a curator. Thank you.

Carmen Thompson: Thank you.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: Ah, yes, I'm Jess. I am a female presenting person woman with short dark hair, brown woman mixed, wearing a black top and checked red shirt. And yeah, so I'm m a writer, one of my hats and all of those hats intersect and I feel like they're all kind of in this discussion some way as well. Half of my week I spend working as a digital campaigns manager for Lighthouse, the Edinburgh's Radical Bookshop. And I'm also a climate justice organiser nowadays, mostly with Climate Camp Scotland, which is very busy right now because it's happening in a few weeks time, 12th to 17 July. So yeah, just really happy to be here. My most recent book is called The Nerves and Their Endings essays on Climate on Crisis and Response. And a lot of the things that I think we'll be talking about were things that were definitely fundamental for that book. So yeah, just really appreciate the opportunity to talk about that.

Yvonne Blake: My name is Yvonne Blake and for the audiovisual description, I'll do that first. So I'm a Black woman. I have Afro hair that is not really kept today, but it's still Afro. And I'm middle aged and I'm wearing a blue, multicolored blue African print top and blue jeans and a beautiful pair of pink slippers that I really like. So that's me. And in relation to who I am, I am a community development practitioner by profession, and I do a lot of organizing around migrants rights. I am the co founder of our organization, it's Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment, and we're a grassroot migrant led organisation in Glasgow. And we campaign for asylum seeking people access to employment, education, decent housing and

dignity. I also wear semi professional hats where I sit on a Poverty Inequality Commission where we advise the Scottish government around eradicating child poverty. And I do quite a lot of other things. I'm also a community curator, which I do actually. We won an award for this. I feel like I want to talk about this with the curating discomfort. So I don't know if anyone who is listening online or if anyone in the audience ever had any opportunity to visit the Ontarian Museum in Glasgow. We have intervention that is actually on, and we won an award for that. So all the work that I do, like you said just now, it intersects not only with climate justice, but also antiracism and also migrant rights and migrant justice. So that's it for the time being.

Carmen Thompson: Wow. we love multi-hyphenate. I just think everybody that I love is kind of doing a thousand different things and it's really exciting to be in multiple spaces. I just thought we'd start the conversation just kind of like bigger picture, I guess I just wondered to get kind of how you guys feel about I guess the way that things like environmental sustainability, climate justice, the climate crisis, are kind of spoken about and imagined in sort of, I guess, the mainstream, I guess, if we call it that, in the sense that what the work that you're doing is kind of pushing against the mainstream and is kind of on the fringes. Yeah, because I think just speaking, for example, about language, we use a lot of words like global crisis and the we and the human. And I think, those big terms, I think are often not inclusive and I guess often kind of shadow the fact that it's actually a kind of a very small amount of people that are responsible for this. And somehow we're all brought into this. This is kind of all our fault, and we've got equal responsibility. Ao, yeah, I just wondered, what are your frustrations? Like, how do you kind of see the way that the climate crisis is spoken about in kind of more mainstream art? Spaces? Anyone can start. It's a big question to start. I know. Everyone's so polite. Jess, let's go. Jess.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: Yeah, that is a massive question.

Yvonne Blake: Yes.

Carmen Thompson: I guess maybe how it makes most sense in terms of your own practice and the work that you do.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: Yeah, sure. And I mean, you mentioned the we, which is one of the big things that I've been kind of trying to write about and trying to understand better and locate myself in through writing. My essay collection, *The Nerves under Endings*, kind of began with a question about belonging, really and about how this moment in time and how environmental collapse in general kind of defines your sense of belonging. And it was in terms of your body and how it reacts to your belonging with other people across distances and to place as well. And where I kind of ended up with that was more with a question of responsibility. Because if you feel a belonging to something or someone, you also feel responsible for what happens to them or to it. Um, and in terms of mainstream art, or whatever that means, one of the things that I was thinking about was this idea of the climate crisis as an act of self harm which I wrote about, which is really weird and quite insidious. It lies really close to hand, that kind of language of like, we did this, we have emitted this much carbon since the 1970s, and it came with COVID as well, that kind of language. And I think it's a way for people to try to understand, to try to gain a sense of agency, in a way. But the risk is obviously that who is this we and who is talking? And also that I think the leap from that to total nihilism and saying that we are doomed is tiny. That gap is actually very small.

And where in that do you actually find real agency for change? And the other thing that I would say, actually as well, about kind of mainstream depictions of so called environmental issues is that what are you defining as environmental? I think still, at least within the book industry, very often it's associated with so called nature writing. And that is still very, very white. And it also kind of relies on the access to so called nature. So there's a need to redefine what we mean by environment. Like, we all have an environment because we're in the world, and that environment defines us and defines what we have access to and what kind of life we lead. So there is so much literature out there, very often literature by people of color that isn't defined as environmental literature, but it is.

Carmen Thompson: Mmm. Thank you.

Alaya Ang: I think this whole question is, firstly, I think about perception, and I feel thinking about, like, today we did a walk in nature. And often in times like we think about nature, it has been kind of thought of as a very, like white space. But also, like, when we think about the environment, how has it been, like, commodified in the Western sense, so that we can actually then go in and claim it and take it? And when you ask who has been kind of taken out from those conversations, um, and also who has been left out of it. It's then about reclaiming that space. But also, yeah, I'm thinking about this story, about this. I think she's like an environmental justice activist. And her name is called Vanessa Nankate. And it's about how the media perceives who can speak about these issues. And so this whole issue, you can see in this even on YouTube, she basically was taken out from a picture of a group photo, and she was crying and she was saying, I can't believe that this has happened. And feeling like we need to then talk about this disconnection. Do you feel like you have a say in this idea? Firstly, I'm just saying that even sitting here and talking on this stage, it is telling myself, actually, I have a voice in this whole kind of conversation about environmental justice, and then asking myself, what then is my responsibility? Who is my community? And what does that look like? So this discourse about nature is about finding ways. And I also feel like a lot of, um, BIPOC communities and indigenous communities have a very divergent or different way of thinking about nature, about environmental, um, justice that has not been given space or that discourse needs to come in. So, yeah, very long answer in.

Carmen Thompson: No, I think it's, yeah, it's so important. I think that thread runs through so many of the films in this program as well, like, claiming that nature is a space that we, as Black people, as indigenous people, as people of colour can be in, and can we can claim as our own. Yvonne, I know that you'll have much to say because I feel like you're working with a lot of communities whose voices are not heard in so many spaces, and they don't feel spaces are for them.

Yvonne Blake: I'm happy that Alaya spoke about environmental justice, because I think sometimes when we speak about climate justice, the mainstream media sort of co op climate justice to means in a European or Global North context. So when we speak about environmental justice, we're speaking about a broader context which encompasses human being ability to thrive. And all of that encompasses what that encompasses. It encompasses that we need can you hear me, though? We need good soil to plant our food. It mean that we need fresh air. It mean that we need spaces of recreational. It mean that we need spaces to come together like this and to have conversation. It means that we need spaces where we can be grounded in our identity, in whatever culture that is from. It mean that we need spaces where we can practice our cultural heritage, where we can not only just identify, but

we can interrogate the information that has been fed to us, especially for people who BIPOC, people who have actually been brought up in the global north. And, when we speak about environmental justice, the core of environmental justice is ensuring that especially people who are impacted the most by the climate crisis, that their voices are heard, their voices are centred, they are crucial to the solutions. And, what is being discussed, they need to be the centre of that. And you spoke something about how people who sort of run with the narrative. I just give you one example. Something happened to me at Cop 26. And, to this day, I haven't gotten over it. And I felt like at that point, for some reason, I just didn't feel I felt like I didn't have the language. So at Cop 26, I don't know, was anyone around June? Cop 26? So we had Cop 26 in Glasgow about two years ago. No more than two years ago, but like three years ago. Yeah. And it was this massive event. We had people coming from all over the world and we had these summits. We had these summits that we had in the evenings in different places. And there was this particular woman, this white woman who was, she came from London and she was sort of leading the assembly. And I said to her, and in hindsight, I regret what I did, I should have just taken over the stage. I said to her that this is, because one of the things, what they did and what I noticed in spaces where people of European origin seem to colonise these climate spaces, they seem to talk about indigenous people and Black people. However, they prevent indigenous people and Black people from speaking. So that woman is standing on the stage talking about indigenous people, talking about black people, talking about people from the Global South. And I said to her, this is Glasgow. Glasgow is the only dispersal city for asylum seekers. And you cannot speak about climate justice unless you speak about migrant justice. Because of the climate crisis. It has impacted people enormously. So a lot of people have had to fled from their homes. People are experiencing drought, people are experiencing all sorts of things. A lot of the wars that we have that people are impacted by, these are fueled by the climate crisis. And the woman said to me that she do not have space for a grassroots group from Glasgow to have five minutes every evening. I think I was so angry that my response my response was shocked, considering the fact that I was a part of the delegation. My response was shocked that I'm here volunteering, I'm here doing all this. And however, to have people who are actually impacted by this crisis. And I think that stayed with me for a very long time because I felt like I was in a space where I should have taken a more active decision. I should have just stand on the stage. But then, I don't know what happened, I felt like I don't know if something has ever happened and you just feel, like, paralyzed in that moment. And for the entire throughout the entire, Cop 26, because we had so many things doing. But after Cop 26 and I reflected on it, I thought, hold on, how could I even allow that to happen? But when we speak about how a particular group of people seem to colonise the climate, justice space, because two things for them, it's income generation, so they have to make sure that they silence the voice of the people or they speak on behalf of the people. And that is something that needs to be addressed. Um, another thing that we've been doing, after I've kind of gotten over that took me quite a long time, and I've learned a vital lesson that in future, I just stand and I say what I have to say and I don't ask no permission. So that is what I learned from that experience. But one thing, like Alia spoke about environment and who has access to green spaces. One of the thing we have during the Pandemic, we started a cycle club. I learned to cycle during the Pandemic. And what we've been doing since then, we've been cycling to green spaces and a part of cycling to green spaces. Because I don't know if you've noticed, but when you're talking about cycling, it's not normally Black and brown people. You see, even though I'm from Jamaica and we've been cycling, we use cycling as a mode of transport to go wherever we are going, but for some reason, we seem

to be erased from that conversation. But one of the things we've been doing with our cycling, we have a cycle club, it's called Tour, the Glasgow. And we cycle to different places. The last two weeks, we cycle to a place called Los, which is like 50 miles to and from Glasgow. But one of the beautiful thing about that, why we cycle to these places as a group of Black people, is that when we're cycling through these places, we stop and we have a picnic and we claim the space and we walk around and we put our bikes down. And we stop by the loch that we stop by wherever it is, and we go to these places. And I think that it's important that these are the spaces that we reclaim, because a lot of these spaces, especially in Glasgow, we have these massive parks. A lot of these parks, they are built on the back of enslaved people. And I'm from the Caribbean and I know that that impact us. And I think it's important that when we talk about reclaiming these spaces, it's important that us, as people, we enjoy these spaces. It's quite therapeutic and we should not feel afraid that we are not a part of these spaces. I think I stopped now because I can continue forever. Sorry.

Carmen Thompson: No, I know that feeling so well of something being so absurd and so shocking that it just literally paralyses you in that moment. And you think, I can't yeah, it takes you until afterwards. You think, Wait, what just happened? There's so much there. Thank you so much for those responses. I just thinking, if we now think about art and film, how that kind of intervenes in this contest? We're talking about. Jess, you were saying people have been writing about this, and people are writing about the crimes crisis. Maybe not a way that we've kind of framed the climate crisis. It's often framed as something that's in this future it's in the future for us, but it's a lived present and has been for so long, for so many people around the world. So, yeah, I was just thinking about as we're thinking about the role of art in these spaces, I wonder if we could talk a bit about the role of art in imagining alternate futures and imagining alternates to the kind of current system that we live in. I think there's a quote. I don't know who said it, but I think someone said that it's harder to imagine the, uh, end of capitalism than it is to imagine the end of the world. So, yeah, maybe we could talk about the role of art in kind of reimagining alternatives and also how important, I guess, to have people from these communities and kind of elevating the people that are writing about these futures and have been writing about and warning us about these futures for so long. Jess we could talk about you because you'd already spoken about the writers that have been writing about another big question. I'm sorry.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: How to approach, yeah, this is something that I've just I feel really conflicted about it, actually, and I and I know a lot of people who feel conflicted about being being writers or being artists in the way that seems available and possible today because there's no way, essentially, of paying the bills, being an artist without being part of capitalism. You can't step out of it. How do you kind of balance that? And one of the things that I've sort of railed against and been quite vocal about, and I'm sure pissed people off at some point, is this notion of especially the book industry, thinking that it's enough to write about stuff and that that somehow just makes books and art. Activist or a good thing in and of themselves, which I don't think is necessarily the case. And I think to some extent, that was seen in the summer of 2020 with that wave of Black Lives Matter protest all the lists that read these books, and then what happens after that. So I think one of the things that I think might be useful to think about is like, how do you bridge that gap between reading about something and actually making change in your community, actually making action in your life. And how do we kind of address that gap? But also, yeah, we can't allow books about

that, say they are about environmental justice to then make loads of money for Rupert Murdoch, it's about where the money goes.

Carmen Thompson: Mmm.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: I'll stop there for now.

Carmen Thompson: I was going to pass to you Yvonne actually.

Alaya Ang: Yeah, I've just been thinking a lot about what you were saying just now about who gets written out and who I mean, your whole incident about this person not even giving you five minutes of your time, and actually who in this whole narrative feels like they have the solution. And it's always very kind of Western, kind of centric or European centric. But, I mean, just coming from the experience of the walk and we'll reference a lot of the walk where we did walk in Arthur's Seat today, is that I think because when you talk about people being moved from where they are from because of drought, because of wars or different reasons, like ecosystems and communities are moving that when we talk about nature, it's not just like, oh, nature is beautiful. It's amazing. It holds so much of grief histories and all of that. And how do we kind of hold that room to not just talk about we're going to save the world, but also to then acknowledge that there are histories of enslaved people that we have not even really come to terms with. And what does that repair look like, what does restoration look like? And then people can talk about the reparations. Reparations to the land, reparations to what has been taken, that resources that have been taken. But firstly, I think it's about giving ourselves the tools, equipping ourselves to do that. So I think yeah that's why I think we try to work with artists. Going back to the question about art is thinking about working with artists that are socially engaged, thinking about artists that also work within the communities and giving them that space to kind of do that within art institutions. And also thinking about a kind of longevity to those projects as well. I feel like even running programs like, say, Fringe of Colour or spaces like Yvonne, like spaces that you run, like, more. It is about how do you kind of think about going on, like, sustaining, continuing on these spaces that are a seedling of what we want to happen, even in the arts or even in community spaces without tearing ourselves down. Breaking down. So yes.

Yvonne Blake: I think what Alaya said is really profound, especially in relation to sustainability. Some. I feel like this microphone isn't working. Is it working?

Carmen Thompson: It is, yes.

Yvonne Blake: Maybe just can't hear. No, it might be my hearing, it's important because one of the difficult thing is especially for grassroots groups, how do we sustain ourselves? Because you are up against NGOs who have sort of perfect the art of extracting from people when they're at their lowest. They have perfect the art of benefiting financially from people's misery. And they are so shameless that they boast about it. And that has become the norm. This is NGO and this has become the norm. And it's really difficult because what happens is that especially in relation to funding the people in grassroots groups, the other people are impacted by the very same situation that they're campaigning about. So you have a lot of vicarious trauma happening. You have a lot of people who sometimes because for health reason they have to discontinue. And it's really important that you maintain a sense of visibility. And for me, what is crucial is where it's important that we have allies who support what it is that we do. Because you were saying sometimes about bookshops think that okay,

if we sell books, then, or if we stack these books, then that's it. And I think sometimes with Allyships, I think sometimes we haven't mastered what Allyship exactly is. I'm Christian. I'm certainly Adventist Christian. Today is my Sabbath. I should be at church. Actually, I'm here doing this because this is environmental stuff. And one of the thing for us, there is this poem that somebody wrote and this person said that the poem, it says, one set of footprint in the sand. And I don't know if people are familiar with it. You might be, you might not. But this person was going through a really difficult period and they were walking in the sand and they saw only one set of footprint. And it happened that I don't know if they came into contact with God or something, but they were having this conversation with God. And they say, oh, God, I was so low, I was at my lowest. And when I was at my lowest, you didn't even help me because I was just walking in the sand. And God said to them, how many footprint did you saw? And they said one. And God said, that was the time I was carrying you, my child. And I think sometimes as allies, allies don't understand that it's really a difficult work that we do. And sometimes we just need the support. We just need somebody to carry us. Not to make us invisible, but just to be there and to support. And I think that sometimes it's allyship, I don't think allies I don't know what they think. I shouldn't be presumptuous, but what I've seen it seems as if for allies is as if it needs to be them. They need to be speaking for you. We can speak for ourselves. And that is really crucial. Another thing which is important is a lot of our allies. They are of European origin, so they understand this structure. They have enormous amount of social capital. And one of the thing I find OD and I have this conversation with a lot of my friends, is how our allies will come into our space and they wear two different foot of socks and they go bin diving with us, and they pretend they live in our houses with ten of us because, oh, they are so poor. But that is not so, because after these fever Finnish universities, they are the people who get these high flying jobs in these organization and they usually they're buying their houses, which nothing is wrong with people buying their houses and they buy their, I don't know what sort of carbon neutral, jeep, most expensive one they purchase. However, they will never open those social capital spaces even in relation to get funding for the grassroots group to make it sustainable. So one of the thing we have to guard against is, uh, ensuring that people don't come into our community, come into our spaces and extract and extract because they just drop and leave. And then it means that you have to think about replacement, you have to think about so many things. So for me, that is something that I think if we can sort of work around that in an equitable manner, because if we talk about environmental justice, it has to be embedded in equity and if it's not embedded in equity, then it is something different.

Carmen Thompson: Jess, I just seen you both nodding. I just wanted to invite you in case you had any response to what Yvonne had said. Anything that came up for you. Okay, I was just saying I saw you both nodding, so I just wanted to invite you in case you had anything, any thoughts of what Yvonne had said.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: yeah, I think I was nodding, especially when you were talking about NGOs and about extraction and how kind of blatant it can be. And I was thinking about analogies with the art world and connections with what I was saying earlier about the book industry, for example, kind of tapping itself on the back and going, yay, we're publishing books about this stuff. But then who are the least well paid people in the industry and who are the most well paid people? And that uh, I think is just really difficult to make decisions about that when it comes to individual artists, I think, because how do you kind of square that? Like you've written something that you think is important and what's your possibility of

choice there in terms of it doing good, in terms of actually not partaking in a system that is exploiting more people of colour? That's a really difficult thing to think about.

Carmen Thompson: Yeah, that was kind of bringing on to what I was going to ask next. I wondered if we could kind of get a. Bit deeper into your own specific practice, because I wonder if maybe you could talk about your book, Jess, and what that looked like, that combination of the work and the other work, I guess the activism and how you found that in releasing that book and having that book in the world. How do you sort of bridge that gap that you were talking about?

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: I think it's still a massive gap. Yeah, I just don't think that gap has been bridged at all. No. I think for me, especially with the essays it was about finding honesty in how to situate myself within a particular moment. And as a result of that being able to go into spaces and work with people on environmental justice from an honest point of view because I think that is work to do. It's like situating yourself in terms of your vulnerabilities and your privileges in this network of harm that is being done. And that was really important to me, and that's what writing does for me. Which doesn't mean that I'm sort of writing something and expecting it to change someone else, because I think that's the big difference. And so it goes in that way, but also, obviously, it goes the other way around in that I keep learning enormous amounts from fellow organizers, and that obviously informs my writing. But what I always kind of make clear is that I don't see the writing as activism, which doesn't mean that it doesn't change. Like, writing changes our minds and art changes our minds, but because of everything around it, and because it's part of this whole profit making business, there's just such a risk of it being co opted, I think. So I think it is important to keep that difference and always keep asking, okay, well, if I actually do want to change things, then what happens when you put down the book or when you walk away from the artwork?

Carmen Thompson: No, I think that's really and it's really interesting what you're saying about that kind of back and forth, because I think often with art, it's very much about giving out. And I've got this thing to say with this art, and I'm telling you, it whereas just even just having that back, I think, is a step towards a kind of more interesting way to think about how art can kind of, intervene in that space. I wonder if you could maybe talk about I know you were talking about the project you're working on at the beginning. Maybe you could kind of speak about it a bit more and how that kind of works out in your work as well.

Alaya Ang: So the project that I was working on is this idea about it started off with this idea of gardens. And the title is called Plotting Against the Garden. And so we really kind of like myself and a collaborator called Hussein Mitha. We together kind of looked into this idea of the plot, who has access to, um, gardens, who has access to green spaces. And this happened especially during the beginning of COVID And then we realised that only, like, 1% of ownership of land in Scotland, I mean, land ownership only belongs to 1% of people in Scotland. And also this idea of plot, we start to kind of think about, um, what it means to when the garden starts to scheme. Like, we played around with this word, but also this plot, thinking about a different narrative to the histories of, say, for example, botanical gardens, which was all about, like, imperial plundering from other, um, countries to kind of showcase, like, exploration and scientific discovery. And so it became like a writing practice and also a sound work, but also part of it. We started to work with young people from 16 to 25, with a community group called Rumpus Room. And in that, we start to kind of think about what



grows in the gardens. There's a project called for them to think about the dream garden, because at that point, a lot of people couldn't access green spaces. They were stuck in their homes, maybe just looking at a plant thinking about what would this possible dream garden be like, and what would that be if you had access to green spaces and gardens and how to break that boundary and borders and enclosure. Yeah. So that was what the project about? Yeah.

Carmen Thompson: Did you want to play some of the sound work? I know you brought some of it with you.

Alaya Ang: It's a very long piece, so, yeah.

Carmen Thompson: Maybe you can indicate when we can stop, if you want, or we can play the whole thing.

Alaya Ang: Okay. We can play a little bit as three parts to it. And it's meant to kind of represent, how the plant kind of responds in the day to when the sun sets.

Alaya Ang: Shut your eyes. Slow meditative, please. Peace.

Yvonne Blake: There seems to be a silence. So I just wanted to say something about art, because I noticed I haven't mentioned anything about art. And to say that our group so we are migrant led group, and.

Carmen Thompson: To be continued.

[AUDIO EXCERPTS PLAY]

Carmen Thompson: Thank you. Thank you.

Alaya Ang: So, yeah, this is a piece that was installed in the Beacon Tower at the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop. And, yeah, so there are kind of moments for you to kind of sit in the space because it's a kind of very cold concrete space that is then surrounded by nature. So we kind of tried to kind of really think about what that means. And, so there are some writings that we responded as well with the space. Yeah. Which is on SoundCloud.

Yvonne Blake: So this is a beautiful piece of art, because what I liked about it was I like the first sound because it was kind of, like, soothing and I kind of related to that one. So what I was saying prior to being introduced to live art was that sometimes for us, art is crucial. Especially for Black people with poetry. I don't know for other communities, but I'm from Jamaica and we have a lot of, we do a lot of poetry. And I think it was Thursday or one day last week, they they had the 75th anniversary of the Windrush generation. People who came and they were treated so badly included my grandmother, who came also during that Windrush period. But one of the things for us that preserves our history is art. And how we preserve our history is through storytelling and through poetry. And the beautiful thing with art is art is really unique in a sense that it gives you a glimpse into the future where people are prophesying as to what they want for their children, what they want for their nation, what they want for their generation. But it also tells you about the pain of the past, and it also situates you into the present. And that's a beautiful thing with art. And what we do at More, even though we have our psychic club, we have our reading group, but we have theatre of their press, where we do different things to depict what is actually happening. And that is

when the young people really come alive. Because for them, it's easier to speak about what is happening at school, the racism they experience at school. It's easier for them to speak about how it is that the future, what they would like to be while having a conversation, that might be difficult to engage them in that. So the beautiful thing about art, it helps you to sort of frame and to situate yourself, especially in a country that is not conducive to the best, like, for our best well being, the best intention. If you're in a country, say, if you're in an African country or your Asian country, where the entire where everything is geared for you to be your best, both culturally, both educationally, boat, religiously, then that's a different thing. But when you're in a place where you have been removed from your homeland, you're removed culturally, the institutions even try to remove you from your heritage. That is why art is crucial, and it's important. And even though I'm Christian, there is a particular artist in Jamaica that I love too much. His name is Buju Banton. And I know there's a lot of problematic things with him, but one of the beautiful thing I love about Buju is music. And when you listen to his music, you can see that what he's talking about is things that he has seen. What he's talking about is aspirations. And that is the beautiful thing with art. Art captures all of that. And I think as activists, we have to be artists, because if we're not artists, then it's impossible to engage people who have no idea what we're talking about, because artists like the eyes through which people can see about the past, the present, and the future. I think I'll stop because I'll go on and on.

Carmen Thompson: No, I think that's really wonderful, and I think a really nice space to open it up to the room, because I'm aware I don't want to hog the mic. And we've got lots of artists and author writers in the space. Does anybody have any questions or comments or anything? I was hoping, Jess, would you're close enough for the mic? Then it will be recorded, and I don't have to repeat.

Audience Question (Jess Brough): I suppose I'm just curious about, from an artistic perspective, if you feel like you have a responsibility in terms of this discussion about where we're heading with the planet. Obviously, not all writing has to be about climate, and has to be about climate change, or social various social issues related to that. But do you feel like when you are making art, is there a yearning to really talk about that? Is it ever possible for you to make art outside of that conversation or outside of those anxieties? And so, if the answer to that is no, how do you focus on the other stories that maybe you're also interested in telling while this thing is hanging over your head constantly? The world that we're living and the way we're going, I hope that makes sense.

Carmen Thompson: So you all want to jump in?

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: I mean, that's the question, isn't it? That is the big question. And I think that is so I feel like, yeah, you put that into very precise words, because I feel like it's really difficult, um, I don't know. There can be times when almost writing to me feels like a luxury. It's a necessity, personally, but it feels like a luxury in this world with the way that it looks like. But then the other side of that is that what are we actually wanting to keep? What fuels us, what keeps us going? And what are the beautiful things that we want to preserve in the world? And when you start thinking that way, I think you can kind of push out of that a little bit. And also having to write about climate or having to write about the environmental justice all time. You can get yourself in a bit of a tunnel with that, which is the same problem with the climate movement anyway, or the white climate movement, that it's not just about climate, that it is all of these intermingled things. Just very briefly, one of the things that, my

first book was, a novel and it wasn't overtly about climate at all. It was a lot about linguistic identity and it was about uh, community and responsibility and migration and um, kind of the state's response to migration. And at the time, I didn't think like that had I didn't think it was about climate. But of course it kind of is. So I think if you think about it that way, that you are writing about it, but not in a more helpful way, actually, that was very babbling.

Carmen Thompson: But anyone else.

Alaya Ang: I think for me, it's a question about responsibility. A responsibility not only to when you do you make art, it's responsibly not only to yourself, I mean, what is the story that you want to tell and the connection that you have with the world out there, wherever that world is that wants to reflect the stories that you tell. And for me, I think the only way that you can do that is in how much you've done the work yourself of what are you saying I can talk about I mean, I did a whole project about water and it's this project about confluence. And starting with this concept of water, it talks about migration, it talks about the middle passage. It talks about many different things when you talk about water. But a lot of these aspects about water can be touched upon in a way that doesn't include yourself or doesn't include like what are you saying about this? And so I think for me, as an arts, a performance artist, a practitioner, I'm always thinking about where am I with this work? What am I saying? When you talk about art, I really feel like there is also like for me now, I'm trying to access this way of talking about art in a spiritual way as well. There is a spirituality that I bring in that I don't know, but it is like an expression of where I'm going as well, in terms of thinking about the topics that I want to talk about in climate change or, like, social justice, all of that. Yeah.

Yvonne Blake: I'm inclined to agree with Alaya on this one that it's sort of, for me personally, it's sort of difficult for me to speak to engage in any work. If I'm engaging in leisure, that's a different thing. I'm just going for swimming, the swimming pool. I don't necessarily have an obligation to anyone. Well, maybe to the other swimmers, but yeah, but I feel like there are so many great people who have gone before who I know, and I'm mindful that I stand on those people's shoulder. And especially sometimes you get a reminder. And I go back to the fact that I think it was Wednesday, they had the 75th, they had a celebration of the Windrush generation. And for me, that was a stark reminder of how far our people have come and how much we have overcome and why it is important that every single day, every aspect of our life, it's about resilience, it's about resistance, and it's about celebration. And I feel like I have a duty of care. I have been placed in a situation where I am the guardian of something really important. I have something to tell. I have a platform where I can amplify the voices of many people who haven't had that opportunity. And as the guardian of our history, as the proclaimer of our future, each time I open my mouth, each time I put energy into saying something, that is what I will say. And I will say it until I say it. And if you don't want to hear it, I'll say it until you listen. And if you don't want to hear it, I'll say it until you hear it. So every time I say it, you either listen to it or you're going to hear it, but I will say it. And I feel like I have a duty to do that because so many people have, uh, given up their lives so that I can be here. And there's this national era in Jamaica, we have seven national eras. One is a female. I don't know why we say eras, but there's one of them which is my favorite, and his name is Samuel Sharp. And the reason why he's my favorite the story is told that when he was going to be hung and he stood in, um, Montego Bay, where it's called, somewhere Sharp Square. Now, he said, I'd rather die than I'd rather die in Yonder Gallas so that my children children can be free than live in slavery. And every time I think about that, it reminds me of the responsibility that I have, because this man has never seen me. He didn't even

know that I would exist, but he would rather die. So that I could be free. So if I didn't speak about social justice, about climate justice, then I feel like I'll be doing a disservice to not just him, but to all the other people who they have said the same thing, but we just didn't hear their voices coming through. So that's what I have to say.

Alaya Ang: Yes, I have to respond. I also feel like that whatever that you're working towards, I also feel like knowledge is built through the struggle, that even when we're in the midst of crisis, where you feel like it really kind of immobilizes you to not do anything. But that's why I feel I feel empowered when I'm in community, but also being together and working towards something, we find the tools to kind of like then or the language, or to equip ourselves. We don't have the answers, but we're looking for it together. Yes.

Jessica Gaitán Johannesson: I have a fine organ, because that you've both sort of planted in my head, which was something that I was thinking about earlier today before coming here. And that's that one of the type of stories that I think we really need is stories that are about collective agency. Because one of the really ingrained narratives in mainstream culture and in this part of the world is that you follow this one person, and there's somehow the individual story that matters. And otherwise it's not interesting or it's not engaging or whatever. And of course, people who have been oppressed have the experience of collective agency because we've had to those stories are like, they feel really important right now, and they feel like that's where some power is.

Carmen Thompson: Yeah, I've got so many thoughts, but I know that we're running out of time. But I think that's such a beautiful way to end because I think like you say, Jess, I think in this system, this neoliberal system that is constantly making us feel like we're individuals, that we're separate and invisibilising so many. I think one of the wonderful things that art does is it allows us to cross boundaries. It allows us to reach back in time and find those people that are doing the work and feel a sense of collectivity, and that we're doing this together. And I think that's a thread that kind of goes through all the work that you do and is also all the work that we've got in the program and just kind of what we're doing as an organisation. So, it's really special to get together and remind ourselves. I feel really energised and rejuvenated, I think. Yeah, it's really important to be together and know that we're doing this work together. And I just want to thank you so much, all for being here. It's been amazing. And I could talk for another hour. If you could just join me in saying thank you to them as well. Thank you.