

INTRO

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Jess Brough: Welcome to Before the Applause - an audio programme for hybrid arts festival Fringe of Colour Films. We are going to be hearing from the filmmakers and artists who are behind the films in this year's festival programme. Some of these films will make you laugh, many will challenge you, and others will be thoroughly dismantling in their ability to find their way straight to your heart. Please enjoy hearing from the people behind these remarkable films and this continuation of their stories.

DIALOGUE

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Ofem Ubi: My name is Ofem Ubi and I created the film Back On Home Soil. The film starts in a dilapidated building, which is my grandmother's first home, which has been raised down due to war from the neighbouring community because they had war with the next village. So everything got burned down. And I had been there before. Last year, I took the portrait to places that she's been to and people that she's been with. And for me, it was more a tribute to her because I never wrote a tribute when she died. She died in 2016. So it took me the whole time of having to do something about her and also exploring what grief meant to me, because every time I say this, she's the most influential person in my life. I had to interrogate what that meant to me. So going back and doing that, for me, was so huge. I took the portrait to her church, which is basically opposite her house. I took the portrait to my grandfather's house. I applied for a residency in Lagos, Nigeria, and I got selected. And I was looking for what topic I wanted to talk about, what was the focus of my residency. And I decided it had to be this work that was already ongoing, this ongoing project. So I took the time and I wrote a couple of poems as regards to the pictures that I had taken. And at the end, I realised that I'd produced a poetry pamphlet out of the poems that I had written. So we had an exhibition at the end of the residency, an exhibition of pictures and photographs. And these photographs were hung on the ceiling as regards to the poems as well. But the poems were all printed on canvas. But I wanted to take that work a step further. And I knew for somebody who always wants to find ways to tell stories with the artforms that I have honed over the years, which have poetry, photography, and film, I knew the next step for me was going to be film. And also I wanted the whole process of this sequel project to be a bit more communal in nature. So I took the images and I took the poems back to my grandmother's home. So that's why I stemmed back on home. So because I'm going back now, I had the poems and the photographs exhibited in my grandmother's room, and I had people come see. I had residents who knew her, so it was more for remember, some of them would ask me, are you doing the remembrance one? I will say yes, because I wanted them to see and relate. Because most times we only think art is for the elite. But art is for everybody. Art is for everyone. Even those in communities in the villages who would never be able to witness something that magnificent. So having them witness the whole thing with me was amazing. And also because initially when I went there, I only had the photographs exhibited. And I was thinking, nobody wants to read from in a space like this. Not until I brought the printed copy of the book. Because I had the book with me. And one of them asked me, Can I see that? And I showed them. And then they started reading the poems from the book. And I asked them, can I make a video of you reading this? And they were like, yeah, sure. So I went back and I took the canvases, the poems themselves, and I hung them now in the exhibition site

and I had them read, which was filmed, which is also part of part of the film that's going to be showcased very soon.

[FILM CLIP]

It's always been in the back of my head to do something in my hometown because that is where I was born. But I'd always been waiting for the right time, the right event to make that happen. And, uh, in as much as I was so excited to take it back, I was also unsure of what the reception would be like. Because on getting there, I realised the place had changed from the last time, from the time when I last saw it. And what I told myself was that you're here now, so you have to do something. Do not look at the space. Look at what brought you here from the beginning. What was the intention? What was the inspiration? And people started coming. Some of them were scared because they hadn't seen something like that before. But some who knew me brought other friends of theirs, like, come and see something. And they started reading. Some asked questions, which was very personal to me. Some who didn't know me were like, I know this lady. Who is she to you? And I tell them that's my grandma okay, so you're this person and I yeah. And, you know, to the whole communal conversation, I think it was even more than I imagined. I wanted to see their response to the whole project and what it means to them. It was more than I could imagine. Back on home cell is more of an acknowledgment of loss, but also being very conscious of the fact that even in loss there's a bit of presence that we carry along with us and also knowing that when we talk about loss, there are so many different spectrums that concerns loss. Even though the most prominent is when we lose people, but also we lose emotions, we lose things, we lose possessions. People who lose houses still grief, people who lose body parts are very much in the process of grieving every single time. And even talking about memory, there's so much in memory that we can always pull from. I think in a larger scale, memories are the currency of life, because things would always happen and you would always lose people. So there's so much stories in there that you can always go back to um and explore. The role of a grandson for me in all of this is having to trace where you come from. Because sometimes now I ask myself if I know the things I know now, then I would have had more conversations with my grandma. Because now I know a lot of things I want to ask and I want to find out about. What? She's no longer here. And there are very important stories that only she can tell you. And there's a reason why I appreciate the presence of my grandfather now more than ever, because inasmuch as he's the only grandparents I have left, there's still so much that he knows that I can tap from as well. So going back and seeing the journal he had the journal is as old as 1970, and that's like, 43 years. And when I went through the journal, I could see records of payments he had done for the building of his house or purchases he made for, like, [inaudible]. And when you go back in time and realise how much he's had that record, it just makes it so vintage and so important. I went out and saw him, and he was going through this book. He's 96 years old, but he somehow manages to see so well. He didn't have his glasses on. He was just going through the book. And when he saw what he wanted to see, he called me and I went in. He pointed at my mother's name on this register. So the register is the tablet documentation of his wives, because he was a polygamous man, his wives, the children that bore him, the grandchildren that came after, and their dates of birth. And then he asked me, do you know your mother's dates of it? And I was like, no, I don't know. And then he pointed it to me on the register, and it was so profound and had me thinking at some point, do we ever think about the heritage that comes with documentation? Is this something genetic? Because even in my only two spaces, I try to keep track of things.

I hate to forget things or memories, so I always want to have them stored, most of them stored in my film, because I realised that most of the film I make is hugely about documentation. And that's because I want to remember things. I want to know where this came from or where that came from. So the only possible way to have that stored, I think, for a lifetime for me, is to embed that into my work. So it's always easy. The more I learn and understand my genealogy, people that have come before me, the more I have a greater standing to talk about any other story. I really need people to hear, all people to hear, first and foremost, is that artists for everyone and do not think there's a particular set of people that have the ownership to whatever form of art. What I've learned from the whole process is that people react to art differently. And it's not up to you to decide or dictate which art is good for them. And then secondly, I think document your life as much as you can, because even in this where you feel deflated, you can go back to the old times and find joy in all things, things even past. You have a way of becoming present when you look at them.

OUTRO

09:45.050 --> 10:41.000

Jess Brough: Fringe of Colour Films 2023 takes place from the 23rd to the 29th June, but this audio programme will be available in perpetuity. If you are listening to this before the festival, we hope you can join us either online or in-person in Edinburgh, and if you are listening after the festival, you can stay up-to-date with our work at fringeofcolour.co.uk. This podcast was brought to you by Fringe of Colour Films, a hybrid arts festival for Black people and People of Colour. This series is presented by me Jess Brough, produced by Halina Rifai and Fringe of Colour, theme music by Xavier LaCroix and is supported by Creative Scotland. Thank you for listening.