

With Opened Mouths: The Podcast

Transcript of Episode #6: Embracing Synergies in Other Worlds

SPEAKERS

Qanita Lilla (host), Amy Malbeuf (guest) and Jessie Ray Short (guest)

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Hello and welcome to *With Opened Mouths: The Podcast*. I'm your host Qanita Lilla. This podcast runs alongside Agnes's exhibition of the same name. The show *With Opened Mouths* interrogates conventional museum practices. It asks if objects that originate outside Western knowledge making systems can find their voices in new ways. In this podcast, I sit down with artists, spoken word poets, musicians and curators to discuss the expression of their practice and to find out what inspired them to open their mouths and to be heard.

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Today I'm lucky to be joined by the creative team, Jessie Ray Short and Amy Malbeuf, who curated and are also exhibiting in the show with Agnes called *Lii Zoot Tayr (Other Worlds)*.

Jessie Ray Short is an artist, filmmaker and independent curator of Métis, Ukrainian and German descent. Jessie Ray's practice involves uncovering connections between a myriad of topics that interest her, including, but not limited to, space and time, Indigenous and settler histories, Métis visual culture, personal narratives, spiritual and scientific belief systems, parallel universes, electricity, aliens and non-human being(s). Jessie Ray explores these topics using mediums such as film and video, performance art, finger weaving, sewing, writing and curating. She has been invited to show her work nationally and internationally, including at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre here in Kingston, at La Chambre Blanche in Québec City, Art Mûr Berlin (a satellite exhibition of the Contemporary Native Art Biennial/BACA) in Germany, and at the Wairoa Maori Film Festival in New Zealand. Jessie Ray is deeply grateful to be based in Pile of Bones (also known as Regina) in Treaty 4 territory.

My other guest Amy Malbeuf is a Métis visual artist from Rich Lake, Alberta, Treaty 6 territory currently living on unceded Mi'kmaq territory in Terence Bay, Nova Scotia. Through mediums such as animal hair tufting, beadwork, installation, performance, and tattooing Malbeuf explores notions of identity, place, language, and ecology. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally in over forty shows at such venues as Art Mûr, Montréal, Winnipeg Art Gallery; Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; and Pataka Art + Museum, Porirua,

New Zealand. Malbeuf holds a Native Cultural Arts Instructor Certificate from Portage College and a MFA in Visual Art from the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

Thank you very much for joining me today Amy and Jessie Ray.

Amy Malbeuf: Thank you for having us.

Qanita Lilla: And, I just have to say, you know, I had this idea planned on what I was going to talk to you about, but after reading your bios I was just completely blown away because of the complete scale of the kinds of things that you work with. Like, you know the idea of aliens, Jessie Ray, and animal tufting, it seems like a whole kind of universe of experience. Could you both just talk to me about that please?

Amy Malbeuf: I think we need to start with the aliens.

Jessie Ray Short: [Laughs] Oh, thanks Amy. Well I mean I guess I just put that in there to be a bit tongue in cheek, but I mean it's funny because I completely left Facebook a little while ago. I just found it like way too stressful to be on there, and then I recently had to rejoin Facebook for work, you know, because you need to do a lot of work stuff through Facebook now. So, I started a brand new account, and you know, I think people are always suspicious like that it's not actually me. And so I didn't really know what to say because, you know, what do you say to a whole bunch of random people who know you, you know, in varying ways? I just put this funny thing like, I was like I'm not sure how to prove that it's me except that if you had met me in real life I probably talked to you about aliens at some point, which seemed to be proof for actually a fair number of people. [Laughs]. And I'm not really sure that, I mean, I guess I've always been kind of interested in like science fiction, and fantasy, and things like that. I really like the X-Files in the '90s, you know that kind of stuff. You know, and then also I think it's interesting because, you know, the more I learnt about, you know, some different traditional teachings that I've been told from different First Nations people, Elders, you know there's a lot of a lot of unseen, and I guess I'll just speak broadly here, because I don't want to say anything I'm not supposed to say, but, you know, it's very common, I think broadly speaking, that there's, you know, these sort of unseen things are just a given. So I'm not sure exactly why I've had a fascination with it my whole life except that I think often we're kind of drawn to those things that we can't quite get a hold of, right, like that's part of what drives you. And I guess also I think a lot too just in my own practice as I sort of move forward with things like, and it's been said before, and I remember there's this Métis artist, Rosalie Favell, who did this really cool piece in 2010 in Winnipeg where she actually projected like this film piece about like Métis going to space in a planetarium. So you know those like domed buildings that have those strange projectors with the big ball, has many cameras, right, so it can project onto the whole dome? So she actually got to use that thing, and she projected sort of this idea of Métis people you know, being Indigenous people going to space. Like what does that mean, you know, as people who've experienced [inaudible] being a part of colonial processes. And so I think about that a lot, too, I guess. You know, somebody who's had connections to like has family connections to colonial battles, right. Ancestors who fought at Batoche, and, you know, we have family stories about that. Yeah. It just seems all connected in my mind. I think it's very arrogant to assume that human beings are the only like, "intelligent" beings, not even which totally discounts like animals and the way that all sorts of different beings exist on this planet. But then also, just more broadly in this whole wide

universe, like there's no way. There's no way in my mind, that you know we're the only ones or whatever we think we are. And then I guess as, you know, space exploration becomes more real I mean ultimately we're colonizing space. Or you know, Elon Musk is colonizing space, right. All these billionaires are colonizing space, and what does that mean? Like we can't even live amongst ourselves on Earth well--should we really be going? Anyway, yeah, I guess there's a lot of different connections to these things for me, but also I just think it's really fascinating to think about what else is there that we don't know or see in these ways that are like sort of science approved. Like we can measure it in this particular way, therefore it's real, and then anything that's not measurable in that very specific way doesn't exist, despite the fact that people might say, "Well, no, it's real to me because of this interaction and how I understand it." Yeah. So I don't know. I guess it's a really interesting thing to think around especially with everything that's going on right now.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And thinking more broadly it expands everything, it expands our possibilities, and our connection with each other. I think like Amy's practice of animal hair tufting, and like, you know, tattooing of the body and of people and each other. It seems as if it's part of the same conversation. Do you think so, Amy?

Amy Malbeuf: Yeah, I do. You know Jesse talked a lot about things that you can't quite get a hold of and are intangible. I remember being a kid and seeing caribou and moose hair tuftings and not understanding how they could come to be, like thinking that they were so magical, that like some sort of magic must have had to have happened for these beautiful art forms to exist. And for me, there's a lot of magic in that art form and it's because of the things that you can't see, the incredibly micro things that you can't see. So inside of a moose hair or a caribou hair, the shaft is hollow and that's what allows a tuft to happen, is when you pull tight on the thread as you're setting it in, because it's hollow, it creates a perfect bend. And it allows the hair to expand upward and outward creating a sculpture essentially. And then you go and any relief carve it is how I describe it with a pair of scissors. And if you don't know those things it looks like magic. So I think that you know, I'm very much also interested in sci fi, and fantasy, and those kinds of rounds. But I see a lot of Jessie too, I see a lot of parallels between those forms of storytelling and our traditional forms of storytelling as Indigenous people. And I think, you know, the art form of animal tufting is very much related to animals of this earth. And I think that, you know, our relationship as Native people to the plants, and to animals, and to the beings of the earth, you know, it's a very kind of close relationship of understanding. So I think all of these things are very related as well.

Qanita Lilla: The fact that you work together on your artistic practice is very unique and very amazing because it does allow for like a much richer understanding, and experience, and practice. Could you tell me how this came about? And how you met and decided this is a fit because I think a lot of people would be interested to know how can you meet somebody who can compliment you?

Jessie Ray Short: Well, I think it was loneliness that brought us together [laughs] from my perspective. Although we've met before, we'd met before. Yeah. The first show I ever curated was in 2012 in Toronto and I co curated thought with a person named Vanessa Dion Fletcher in Toronto. And we curated together Amy into the show, and Amy came and did a performance for

the exhibition, which was like the first time I guess we ever met in person. And I think you stayed at the same hotel as my parents.

Amy Malbeuf: Yes.

Jessie Ray Short: Because they came to visit, and I don't know, had breakfast with them or something.

Amy Malbeuf: Yep.

Jessie Ray Short: So then I ended up getting this job, this curatorial short term contract in the BC interior in a super tiny town called Grand Forks. And it was good, but it was just that I was so out of my element. I didn't know anyone. It was kind of like mini-Kelowna, which is, Kelowna is like where a lot of people, I think in western Canada go to retire, especially from Alberta, cause it's warmer, it's much warmer than Alberta for the most part. And so I guess there are a lot of retirees is I guess is what I'm trying to say in Grand Forks as well because it's even smaller and it was like 4000 people. It was a very quiet town. Yeah. I didn't know anyone, and I was like out of my element and I just remember -- I don't know how I knew this, but somehow I knew that Amy and Jordan were going to UBC Okanagan, which is the UBC satellite university in Kelowna. And I think I just started showing up at your house, just something along those lines.

Amy Malbeuf: Yes. [Laughter].

Qanita Lilla: Are you serious?

Amy Malbeuf: Yeah. Jessie would call or text and be like, "Is it okay if I come over?" And I'd be like, "Yeah, sure." And she'd be like, "Great. Well I'm already halfway there." [Laughs].

Jessie Ray Short: I was just so lonely. I was like, I just want someone I kind of know who's close to my age who is doing cool art stuff. Yeah. It was a three hour drive. I would go at least once a month.

Qanita Lilla: Jeez. Woah.

Jessie Ray Short: So that was the power of my loneliness.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. I think also it kind of sprung out of necessity, you know. It wasn't like a calculated choice. It was as if you cannot actually come together with this creative force, things are not going to work out the way that you want.

Jessie Ray Short: Oh yeah. No, it was like I would have kind of lost my mind a little bit had I just lived there that whole time. But yeah, I just kept showing up which was really nice of Amy and Jordan. They had like I had my room in the back of the house. I knew the cats. Yeah, the more that I started to show up -- well because Amy you were in the middle of doing your masters, and I had like, you know, maybe four or five years before that finished my masters, and I think we would talk and we were having very similar difficulties.

Amy Malbeuf: I think we were sharing our frustrations with each other around kind of a lack of critical, both critical exhibitions and writing around Métis art. Of course there are, you know, many Métis artists and scholars that we were aware of who were practising, but it was still

difficult to find any information, and so we just started talking about that frustration and it somehow turned into us taking on a very large research project. But I think before kind of talking about that research project, I think one thing that had maybe guided us together, I think, our ancestors brought us together. We figured out through, you know, these many visits that we are related. That we're cousins. [Laughter].

Qanita Lilla: Oh my – no way.

Amy Malbeuf and Jessie Ray Short: Yeah.

Jessie Ray Short: Which is like pretty typical. You know, there's lots of ways that people become disconnected from their culture, right, through no fault of their own. But one of the things that I think a lot of people don't understand is like you know, generally speaking Métis people have like really pretty good thorough knowledge of their ancestry, you know. I think, Amy, you were telling me it's like we're some of the most researched people. Or like there's a lot of documentation about us and our families because I think because of the way that we sort of, you know, came into being alongside like the colonial mercantilism of Canada, so like the Hudson Bay Company and stuff. There's actually a lot of records about our families. I haven't done enough research into my tree. Like I just kind of got back to a certain point and stopped, but I could keep going. Yeah. We literally got out our family trees and started like, oh looking, and we were like, “Oh yeah. Those people, oh yeah.”

Qanita Lilla: You felt that intuitively? I mean, like your parents, or your grandparents, or somebody who didn't say, “You know, I know you know who...” It's really interesting because you'd never met before, you know, and yet you were kind of and I think, Jessie, I like that idea of, you know, like an invisible kind of pull, that you don't have a choice. It was definitely at play here.

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah, yeah. I know. I think had I not taken that job like I don't think that we would be here right now. I think we probably would have known each other, but maybe not in this capacity, yeah, which is kind of funny to think about.

Qanita Lilla: So your family trees, you opened it up and you found a connection.

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah, pretty much. I think Amy, I think you knew already. You knew that you had Shorts in your tree.

Amy Malbeuf: Yes, yeah. I knew that I had Shorts in my lineage somewhere. Yeah. I became curious about that, [Laughs] so I started asking Jessie questions. [Laughs].

Jessie Ray Short: So that was really cool and fun, and then, you know, it was just because Amy was in the midst of doing her MFA, and, you know, like I had come up against a lot of the same frustrations when I'd done my MA. We were almost doing like doctoral level of research because there just wasn't enough written. Don't get me wrong there are some really amazing scholars, artists, and academics who are Métis who have written and contributed to that field, but like it's so small, you know like, it's not like a big body of work. And, you know, they are only a handful of people so they can only do so much. They've done important things, but I think that's what we kind of wanted to keep moving on from because you know, surely if we're having

this issue, like other artists, other Métis artists especially must be finding this kind of frustration. And yeah, I don't exactly remember how, but we just started talking about like, "Maybe we should just curate a show, or see what artists are doing." I think that's how it started. We wanted to just because we just started counting, like just on our fingers, you know, like we just started naming artists who we knew that were Métis, who were practising, and we realized just off the top of our heads, I think we came up with like a couple dozen artists, and, you know, we figured there must be more, and we should go talk to them. See what they're doing. [Laughter].

Qanita Lilla: But hold on. Hold on. Before we get to this conversation because that's an amazing conversation. But what I wanted to know from both of you is how did you get into the visual arts field at all? What lead you to that? Because it is such an elitist, closed off space. It's incredible if there's any field that, you know, differentiates between like its own and other, this is the field. What drew you? Amy, why did you decide to do this?

Amy Malbeuf: Oh my gosh, I have no idea. Well I guess ever since I was a child I knew I wanted to be an artist. Of course, as a child, I had no idea what that actually meant, but that was kind of a path I was drawn towards from a very young age. And, I just ended up, you know, as I got older pursuing that, and I went to college. I went to Alberta College of Art and Design. It's now Alberta University of the Arts. And so that's kind of where I started onto that path.

Qanita Lilla: And your parents were cool with this? They kind of had an idea of what this entailed?

Amy Malbeuf: I don't --- [Laughs] They were supportive of me. Me and my siblings were all very creative, and I would say my parents are as well. But certainly a very different path from their own. I think they were I think they were supportive of what I wanted to do. I think they had a difficult time like seeing how I would make a living. [Laughs]. Even, you know, it's been a decade now and I think they're still not sure. [Laughs]. But yeah that was kind of where, you know, my education began. And, afterwards, I went and I did what was called a work study at the Banff Centre for the Arts. It was like a practicum placement. I think that period of time I also did a residency right after that, like an arts residency at the same place, and I think that period of time was really formative. For me, in terms of you know I got to see how a lot of artists worked and functioned in the world from all over the world. And so just witnessing that I think was really a powerful [inaudible]. And so I think that that's kind of where I got a start into the arts, and I think my role as an artist is always evolving and always changing. And I've pursued further education since that time. I did a native cultural arts instructor certificate in my hometown, and I did my MFA as well. And so I've, yeah, I've been drawn to all different types of mediums, and art forms, and curation, and I kind of see it all as all very much related and all a part of a continuum.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. I think, I find it very interesting how we always kind of come back, you know. We come back to ourselves or to like some kind of essence to why it is that we do what it is that we do. And you Jessie?

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah, I was going to say I guess I kind of forgot about this, but it's like -- Amy I feel like it's -- [laughs] -- like it was going to happen eventually that we would meet because I

also did that work study practicum in Banff, and I did the same position that you did. I was the person before you. And then you moved into that position when I left. [Laughs].

Amy Malbeuf: [Laughs] That's amazing. I forgot about that.

Jessie Ray Short: Right. Yeah. I don't know that I thought I would be an artist, but it just seems like something I would probably do, probably because I was always a bit of a weird kid. And my parents, when I would just do, like, I would just like get up at night and I would draw a mural on my bedroom wall at like 2 AM.

Qanita Lilla: Woah.

Jessie Ray Short: I don't know why I did I was just like, "I think I need to do this right now." So I think when I did weird things that were like vaguely creative my parents didn't totally get it, so they'd just say, "Oh Jesse. She's such an artist." [Laughs]. I don't know like if it was destined or whatever. But I actually then tried – I enrolled at ACAD, now Alberta University of the Arts, as well, and then I didn't even make it through a semester, I dropped out so – and here I am today. So you can be an art school dropout and be an artist. Just at the time when I think back to it, it just wasn't the right place for me: I liked it, but I really hated being forced to like draw boxes for eight hours. I know those are the foundation things, but it's just, sometimes it's hard to understand why you're doing that.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. But just having an institution of art is so problematic in many, many, many ways especially when you're kind of raring to go, and you want to do stuff, and you know they're kind of trying to push you into a curriculum. It's just tough.

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah, yeah. And it just so it wasn't a good fit for me. But I did, you know I went and did a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts but not Fine Arts, like I was doing more social sciences kind of thing, but always like skirting around art. [Laughs] And then after I finished my masters which I wrote about contemporary Métis visual culture because I was just curious. It was partially auto-ethnographic, so looking at myself and my family. And then I also interviewed three other Métis artists, Rosalie Favell, Christi Belcourt and David Garneau just to try and wrap my head around this more, and like see if there was some kind of connection. Yeah, I was definitely heading in that direction. And then I curated this show after that in 2012, that Amy was in, and that was the first show I ever curated. Then I became the Director of the now Indigenous Curatorial Collective. It had a different name back then for a while. And I think that really got me started on wanting to do my own work. It's like sort of umbrella organization to broadly promote the work of Indigenous artists and curators around the country. And because of that I got to see so many artists, so many really amazing Indigenous artists and what they were doing, and curators and arts writers, and like it was just this whole world that I didn't even know existed. And, you know, most of them are functioning within that sort of contemporary art gallery circuit. I got to learn a lot about it through their experiences. You know, I'm trying to navigate that to help other artists. Yeah, just as I saw the amazing depth of work that you could do you as, not just an artist, but like as an Indigenous artist. I was really inspired. But also being the director of an organization like that means that you have like zero time to do your own work. So sequences of events happened. I ended up leaving. I was in Toronto doing that position for a little bit. And I'd lived out east in Ontario for like 13 years at that point, and I had my own

project that I wanted to start doing about an Ancestor, and I just knew so strongly that I needed to move back to the prairies to do that. Like I just knew I needed to come home. And so I got this opportunity to come home. Well I got dumped. My relationship of eight years.

Qanita Lilla: Oh boy!

Jessie Ray Short: But you know it's fine because I think the only way I would have come back right my ex really wasn't interested in moving to the prairies, and I just knew that's where I needed to go, and there were other issues whatever So I was very, very sad. My dad drove back from Ontario with me and I cried a lot. But like it was totally what needed to happen. And so when I got back to Calgary, I moved back home with my parents. Thank you parents. [Laughs] for a bit. I was there and it was just like it, something just opened up like, like I wanted to get into filmmaking and I kept applying for these like mentorship programs in Toronto, and they were so competitive. You can be an emerging filmmaker, apply. And then I would see who could get it. I never got called, never even got close. Then I would see who got it as an emerging filmmaker. It's somebody who had already made like ten short films, and I was like, "What? What is "emerging" even?" So, I guess maybe the skill is just a bit different. I don't know, but when I moved back to Calgary that's when I really started to make work publicly. I got a few mentorships, so I got to make a few films. I started to learn finger weaving. I found a teacher there and I started to do that, and I was incorporating it into performance art. And it's just like the doors just kind of opened. And so really I didn't start practising as a public artist until I was like 35 I would say. And I'm 40 now. So yeah. I don't know.

Qanita Lilla: That's incredible. And thank you so much for sharing that because, you know, people think that there's one life trajectory, like one way of kind of doing what it is that you need to do. And I think from both of you there is definitely. It's just like, you know, what you need to do. So I think what I would find very interesting is if you could talk a bit about your creative process together. Amy and Jesse. How does this look? Like how does it start, and how does it get initiated. What are the kind of the processes and thinking takes you through?

Jessie Ray Short: Like when we're working with each other?

Qanita Lilla: Yes.

Jessie Ray Short: Hmm,

Amy Malbeuf and Jessie Ray Short: [Laughter].

Jessie Ray Short: Well I guess it's pretty familiar. I don't know. We talk a lot about everything.

Amy Malbeuf: Yeah. I think we have a very, a very organic working relationship and it's been very intuitive. And it has been quite some time. I think it's like 2015, 2016.

Jessie Ray Short: '15, like something like that.

Amy Malbeuf: So at this point I feel like sometimes we just share the same brain. [Laughter].

Jessie Ray Short: Which is the best place to get to -- yeah.

Amy Malbeuf: But I mean I think it's definitely been a journey to get there. I think in the beginning it really started with simply having a lot of conversations with one another, and that's always been key is that we probably talk about things too much. [Laughter]. But I think because we're able to talk so openly with each other, it makes, you know, when things really need to get done, when we have deadlines, we really know where the other stands. It's kind of, I don't know, I feel like we've become this really efficient, well oiled, well I don't if well oiled. [Laughter].

Jessie Ray Short: Sort of squeaky. [Laughter].

Amy Malbeuf: [Laughter]. Sort of squeaky. But I think we've certainly come to this place of trust as well where if one of us isn't capable to, you know, carry their workload for whatever reason, the other carries it. And we reciprocate that for one another. And so I think that has been a key element to working with each other.

Qanita Lilla: For example in *Lii Zoot Tayr (Other Worlds)*, that's on at Agnes, you are both exhibiting and curating. How did this kind of evolve? How did the process evolve?

Amy Malbeuf: I think that came really early on in our working relationship. We wanted to do that. We wanted to both create and make. You know, this is the third in a series of exhibitions that we have created together, and the first two we were curators only. And I think as creatives and as makers, we really felt compelled to contribute to this conversation visually through making and not just curating. And so, I think you know we had done the two kind of conventionally curated shows, and this time around we felt like, you know, expanding on that a little bit for ourselves.

Jessie Ray Short: I was just going to say I think too a lot of it has to do with where we are and who we're working with. We started working with Emelie Chhangur when she was still at the AGYU, and she has been so incredibly supportive of like she actually came out, like flew herself out to Edmonton to see the second show that we did. I think she's one of the only people who came from eastern Canada which was so amazing. And she came to the two day symposium we did. And she was just like really supportive, and really just present, and it made such a big impact. Because I think we were both quite like burnt out. We were like, "I don't know if we can ever do this again." But, you know, when she approached us about creating something new, and she was so flexible about that structure and what we could do. And so, typically speaking like you're it's kind of like a "no-no" to curate your own work -

Qanita Lilla: Which is weird.

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah. But I think we both just had yeah. Well I think we both have just been so like again, you work with all these artists, and that's something that you're also passionate about, and like you get thoughts, right. I think we're both like, but I have something to say too. So, Emelie was really open to that. We didn't have to be just curators necessarily, and was just really supportive of our vision. You know, this will be probably our last show together and to do something really interesting and unique, which is, you know, why all the works in this exhibition are, they're all brand new, made for this exhibition to kind of, you know, go beyond curating

what's already there, and, you know, create as we're creating a curatorial vision. It's sort of like this holistic thing.

Qanita Lilla: What is your ideal understanding of like curation versus production? It's a very, very close kind of relationship.

Jessie Ray Short: I don't know. It's funny. So, I guess, curators are becoming more professionalized. Right. Like there's now master's programs with curatorial studies and things like that, where it used to be, from my understanding, like something that you more it was almost like a work placement, you just start to do it and that's how you kind of figured it out. I'm always curious I always ask curators like because curators often do have creative practices. Not always, but I find it to be more rare to meet a curator who really does nothing, like has no creative practice of their own outside of curating, you know, than vice versa. So I always like to ask other curators, like art, do you make work? You know, are you an artist? Because I always find that really fascinating. I don't know, like, my goal was never to be a curator. I remember in my position at the Banff Centre, I guess because it was more of an administrative sort of one versus like a studio based position, people would ask me a lot, you know, do you think you're going to be a curator? A) I had really no idea what a curator was like until I started working there. I don't know. There are those people. They wear all black. [Laughs] Back in like 2010 or whenever I was there, Blackberries were still popular. I remember suddenly being like artists have iPhones and curators have Blackberries. That was the difference [Laughter].

Qanita Lilla: Oh god [Laughs]. And certain hairstyles, and quite kind of forbidding. And, you know, you wonder like what is it, you know, about like the figure of the curator? I think that today, in a way, curators have superseded the figure of the artist. And you you know, because, I mean, this kind of like postmodern idea of like the artist is dead. You know, the author is dead. So you kind of need, like this other figure to kind of guide you through this unique vision, you know. Hopefully it's kind of breaking down now because it's complete, I mean it's just based on ego in the same way, you know, that kind of individual male ego artist.

Jessie Ray Short: I also had a curator who is like an older generation, like maybe in her 60s, I would guess, who I think was more of a strict curator, tell me once that, oh, what did she say? Oh. She didn't want me to write like a statement. Or I think she was saying like she didn't like artists' statements because that was the curator's job how to interpret the work,

Qanita Lilla: Wow.

Jessie Ray Short: Which I was like, "Oh. Really?" I also could never imagine maybe this is just because I mostly work with Indigenous artists, and, you know, and I cannot speak for any Indigenous person, you know, but myself, really, and so I would never think that way. But I mean she kind of followed up to say that she thinks too much is being demanded of artists, you know, in exhibitions today, and I appreciate that, but I also think it's kind of wild to just be like, well, you know, be totally silenced as an artist. Like you just give over your work and you're like, "Here you go. Figure it out."

Qanita Lilla: It's completely awful and it kind of impinges and is almost abusive, because you're actually taking somebody's voice. And you're saying, you know, this is what they, instead of, you know, kind of perhaps working together with artists. Make something concrete that people can

convey to an audience. I think so. But I know that like the process, like the artistic process is not always seamless at all. There are always challenges. What are the kinds of challenges that you two face? You're not based in the same city. What are the things that you kind of encounter?

Amy Malbeuf: [Laughs]. So many. [Laughs]. Yeah. I think, you know, not being based in the same place wasn't such an issue before the pandemic. We met up a lot in person – and frequently. We both used to travel a lot. And so, I think you know that's kind of been a challenge we've had with the mounting of this particular exhibition at Agnes, it's been difficult to not be there for the install, and difficult to not be with one another making decisions in the same room.

Jessie Ray Short: I think we've literally been installing this show for like six months now.

Qanita Lilla: Jeez.

Jessie Ray Short: Yeah, because it's just, you know, for a while only one person could be in the gallery. So it was literally one person installing these like very large pieces by themselves. And then things kept getting shut down, and then, you know, shipping was delayed. So because these are all new works, we had to get very specific materials for some of them. And suddenly there's like supply chain issues, right. People would have something one day and then it would all be gone the next day. And you'd be like, well when can you get them back and they're like, we don't know. That happened a number of times with a lot of the pieces. So yeah, it's been really challenging. But I mean also it's like we're lucky I guess too, because so many artists have just had their shows cancelled, and you know, we even get to put this up for hopefully some people are seeing it. We haven't seen it yet.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, I know. I've seen part of it because the install has been staggered. It must be really difficult to communicate to people who you've never haven't met, or you don't have a personal relationship with to, you know, kind of express ideas about a conceptual show. The last time I encountered your show was actually in the entrance hall, and it was crazy. It was completely crazy. The pool was going up. It was incredible. Like the pool was going up, and those enormous like stainless steel drum like tubes were being placed, and water was gushing out, and it was this cold day, and everybody's hair was standing on end – because you know it was anyway – I mean it's just it's a show of a lot of energy, you know, which is phenomenal. It's just got a lot of energy and movement and people are interested in that. But here's like a last question, what drew you to the show and why is it close to your heart?

[Laughter]

Amy Malbeuf: Oh my goodness. I think it's close to our heart, I mean my heart, I can't speak for--

Jessie Ray Short: Our heart, yeah! [Laughs]

Amy Malbeuf: I feel like we have the same brain and heart at this point. [Laughs]. I feel like it's close to my heart because it's something that we, you know, I almost see it as the culmination of our years of research, and I see our years of research basically as a labour of love for our people, and for our fellow Métis artists. And, you know, it's just felt like a really long time coming. And we met with so many artists early on in our journey when we first started doing

our research. We met with over 50 artists. And so, of course, we haven't exhibited all of those artists because it just wouldn't be feasible.

Jessie Ray Short: Or even half of them.

Amy Malbeuf: Yes. But kind of that getting to know those artists and deeply engaging in conversation with various artists, and creatives, and curators over the last however many years it's been. You know, it's been such an honour to work with all of those people and then to be able to kind of showcase and support these works. So these, as Jesse mentioned, they're all new works, and so to be able to support the artists and developing these new projects. And kind of work with these themes that we were talking about in the beginning, you know, pulling together, not only the work of, you know, Métis artists, but pulling together these various themes that seem like they're kind of all over the place. You know, I'm really excited that, you know, the show is finally up, and it's finally here, and we're finally sharing it.

Qanita Lilla: I can totally feel your love, like, you know, looking through those works. Completely. It's a fantastic show, Lii Zoot Tayr. I really hope that you'll be able to see it. I hope that you can come to Kingston.

Jessie Ray Short: Me too.

Qanita Lilla: Are you planning on coming to Kingston sometime?

Jessie Ray Short: I think maybe in November sometime, you know, assuming things don't get shut down again but hopefully.

Qanita Lilla: Please do. Please come and meet us. Yeah, it's been such a pleasure Amy and Jesse. It's been fantastic. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for talking with me. I could talk with you for the whole day. But that's not possible. Thank you so much.

Jessie Ray Short: [Inaudible] either.

Amy Malbeuf: Thank you.

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Thanks. Thank you for listening to *With Opened Mouths: The Podcast*. Special thanks to my guests, Amy Malbeuf and Jesse Ray Short for speaking with us today. The podcast is hosted by Dr Qanita Lilla and produced by Agnes Etherington Art Centre in partnership with Queen's University's campus radio station, CFRC 101.9 FM.

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[Music]