

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
agnes.queensu.ca

Migratory Routes: Jill Glatt

With Opened Mouths: The Podcast

Season 3, Episode 4

7 March 2025

SPEAKERS

Dr Qanita Lilla and Jill Glatt

KEYWORDS

Botanicals, natural dyes, Kingston, Belle Island, pedagogy, ecology

TRANSCRIPT

Qanita Lilla: Hello and welcome back to another episode of With Opened Mouths the podcast, I'm your host Qanita Lilla. Today I'm happy to sit down with Kingston based artist and teacher Jill Glatt. Jill was born in London, Ontario and is one of the artist in *Ukutula: Our Timeless Journeys*, the Agnes show hosted by Museum London. Informed by ecology, community and sustainability, Jill's large textile pieces emphasise the pathways and airways that *Seeds* and people navigate before they settle. Her work weaves together storytelling and botanical dyes in ways that brings the outside world into the museum space in lively ways.

[Music]

Qanita: Great. Awesome. Great. Thank you, Jill, for joining me today. It's lovely to see you.

Jill Glatt: Thank you. Yeah, it's been a minute since we've seen each other in person so.

Qanita: Yeah. That's really cool.

Jill: Trying to be, you know, able to absorb your presence here with your beautiful red blouse which we've been talking about. Yeah.

Qanita: I've been listening to you talk and I realize that you love colours and you love colour theory, you know. And I wonder where that came from. What kind of child were you -- like did it start in childhood?

Jill: I suppose, yes. I know that my sister and I -- I have an older sister, Erica. We were very crafty kids or encouraged to be. And my parents they set up like a little craft table in the basement of my family's first home. And we would just spend hours there, markers, you

know. My grandma's old Bingo Daubers that she gave us, like doing whatever the heck we could with whatever was available. And yeah, so we always enjoy doing art. I don't know if I have a lot of colour theory expertise, however, even though, you know, I do teach that sometimes when I teach art. But I wouldn't say that I'm an expert.

Qanita: But yeah. But you always -- you're kind of drawn to certain colours, for sure.

Jill: Sure. Yeah.

Qanita: Yeah. So that's really interesting. So you feel that you were just encouraged as a young child?

Jill: Yeah. I always -- like we did so many crafts and activities and, you know, my favourite show as a kid was watching Art Attack. And yeah, we didn't have a lot of kind of disposable income growing up. But whenever my parents would buy us things, it would always be, yeah, for creative pursuits which was really fun. And then, I remember -- I forget how old I was. I was maybe 10 or, you know, kind of preteen, precocious, and I had learnt about abstract art. And I had decided, like, I maybe saw it in like, I don't know, some sort of like style at Home magazine or Canadian House & Home, and I was like, abstract art. Okay. And I took a Dollar Store canvas, and I just did like circles and then stripes on another one. And I went to a local, like small art gallery in town.

Qanita: Wow.

Jill: And I just was like, would you be willing to have these in your space? And I don't remember exactly what the person said but obviously, it was no. And I'm sure they let me down very gently. But I remember just being gutted, like my hopes and dreams crushed. I'll never make it in the art world.

Qanita: Wow.

Jill: And then, you know, obviously that, you know, I ended up making more art, but --

Qanita: But like what led you to pursue it? Like you know, at school and after school?

Jill: Yeah. I don't know. I guess, yeah, it just felt very natural. My dad was, he's like a very kind of like hands-on person, but more so like cooking and baking and that sort of thing. And we would always do a lot of that. So I don't think I really settled on like, visual arts as being my creative output per se, until later on, you know, in high school or even university. I never took art in high school even like visual arts. I took band, which I regret. Like I played the clarinet, not very well.

Qanita: Wow.

Jill: Yeah. So yeah, so no visual arts in high school. And then I think, I don't know how I settled on it, but I got interested in block printing when I was in university during my undergrad. And first, I really don't know why, for some reason, it just was like really the aesthetic I guess of it, or the look of it, or the process of it was really appealing to me. So I did a lot of that on my own. And then, when I was in my final year of undergrad, my fourth year, I went to the printmaking professor and I asked if I could take the printmaking course, even though I didn't have any of the prerequisites because I wasn't in the visual arts program. And she was so kind and arranged -- we had like a little meeting and we went through my portfolio and she let me in the course. And then, I got to take it. Yeah, for my final semester of university, I just had printmaking, you know, a couple of hours a day, which was the best. I loved it so much.

Qanita: Wow, that's amazing.

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: So at university you actually went to study something else?

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: Like what were you enrolled in?

Jill: I was doing French and English literature.

Qanita: Oh, wow.

Jill: That's like not art-related, you know, visual arts-related at all.

Qanita: So which was something kind of that you could teach that was, you know, like afterwards. Wow.

Jill: Exactly. Exactly, yeah.

Qanita: That's incredible.

Jill: Yeah. So it kind of fell into doing all of this, like very accidentally, I think.

Qanita: Yeah. But I don't feel that it feels accidental because it feels so familiar. It feels so familiar. And I think it's almost as if you've always been doing this.

Jill: That's a good point too. Yeah. Making art or making things or, you know, engaging in like sort of creative activities definitely does, yeah. It feels very familiar. And it's something that I was always, yeah, encouraged to do, and always received a lot of support when I

wanted to try these things. So yeah. It sort of progressed naturally. Yeah. It's not something that was like out of the blue per se.

Qanita: And I think especially your work with botanicals, with dyes, with block printing, you know, it's kind of, it feels familiar. It feels, you know, like natural for you. So you've mentioned before that your artistic practice is based on, you know, ideas that come from ecology, but also your community, you know. What drew you to these particular things to like botanicals and sustainability, for example?

Jill: Yeah. I think with regards to like ecology, I, again, going back to my family. My dad was, he went to university for like forestry. And he doesn't do that at all anymore, but he knows like you could see any tree across Canada and point to it, and he would immediately know it, and the Latin genus and probably some tidbits about it. And so, I always thought that was so amazing to just be able to recognize and identify these things that other people, many other people don't, you know, consider, yeah, or take notice of. It's not something that's common currently, you know, in our culture. But I thought that was always really interesting and really valuable. And then, I just sort of started to practice that with trees. I started trying to identify lots of native trees in Ontario. And so, my block printing, my lino printing that I first started doing it was all just like different kinds of trees. I was very fixated on like, just like, you know, like fir trees and pine trees and, you know, walnut and whatever else. And then, that eventually progressed. Like, once you start noticing, you know, different species, you notice how they work together. And so, I became interested then in other, like companion plants and, you know, lower ground plants and flowers and things like that. And it just, the world kind of opened up for me. Understanding like how so many things are delicately balanced and connected with one another. And then, I guess building off of that, in terms of connection, like all these plants are connected and then humans are connected because, you know, ideally we should be stewards of these plants and having relationships with these plants. So you know, the emphasis on, you know, community and personal kind of accountability is like woven into that interest in the natural world because we're part of the natural world. But I don't know if that makes sense.

Qanita: Yeah. [multiple speakers]. But I also think that like tied up with that is just like the love you have for your father. And the love you have for, you know, having just grown up the way that you did, you know.

Jill: Yeah. My mom and my dad have always been, yeah, so like supportive of whatever pursuits I wanted to go into. And so, whether it's, you know, languages or artistry or whatever. And so, I feel, yeah, the sense of like, community holding me and that's what really interests me in extending that outreach of community into other facets of my life. Yeah.

Qanita: Yeah. I think that's beautiful. So could you describe one of your works for us, please?

Jill: Oh. I guess the work that I could describe the best because it's sort of fully put to -- you know, it's completed and I spent so much time with it, is my work that I did last year in 2023, I guess it was *Who is Belle Island* with Billie Kearns or Billie the Kid. And that was for the final exhibition at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre before, you know, the closure and renovation. And it's my component of it. So Billie also did a component, but my component was a kind of, you know, 30-foot by 7 or 6 or 7-foot sheet patchwork hanging. And it's this patchwork that it's been quilted with pieces of fabric that have been dyed with buckthorn which is what we identify in North America as being an invasive plant. But originally comes from across Eurasia, you know, the continents of continent. And was used historically for dye and has this, like, such a rich history in terms of this, you know, sap green comes from buckthorn. And then now, it's been transplanted over the years. It was brought over, you know, with the colonization of North America, you know, for decorative purposes or otherwise. And now, it's just really taken off here in North America. It loves it. It's doing too well. So now it's invasive. And so, Billie and I were thinking, what does it mean to be in a country or a place where you are not, you know, native to that place per se, and you come from elsewhere, and what does it mean to -- can you integrate with, you know, the land that's there? And then, you know, if you can, how can you integrate or how can you have a relationship with the land? So I have these -- so the piece in question has three main colours. It's green fabric from the berries themselves. And then, pink you can get this really lovely rosy pink from the bark of the buckthorn plant. And then, the leaves give this sort of muted kind of buttery yellow. So yeah, pinks and greens and yellows. And then, I've painted on other kind of white pieces of like reclaimed cotton fabric words from interviews with community members about Belle Island. And so, you know, some fragments of conversations or poetry. And then also, some images of some of the plants and like the flora and the fauna on Belle Island too that we had learnt about through stories, again, with the community members. Yeah.

Qanita: So could you explain a bit about what Belle Island is?

Jill: Yeah. That's a great question. As I'm sure you know the question is not what is Belle Island, but *Who is Belle Island?* So thank you for that Qanita. Yeah. *Who is Belle Island?* Who is she? So Billie and I were, you know, we had lots of really fantastic conversations thinking over the idea of personhood or land as person, and kind of like, you know, the land having its own identity. And so, we have in Kingston, you know, Cataraqui now known as Kingston, like this island, beautiful island which she's been significant to the local indigenous population for, you know, hundreds of years. Portions of Belle Island are like sacred burial sites. And then, you know, other areas were just, you know, generally used and enjoyed. And then, the city of Kingston sort of decided that she was not of any particular use to them. And so, it hasn't been taken care of by the city of Kingston. But

instead over the years, there's a Belle Island Caretaker Circle. And they've, you know, been checking in with her and making sure that, you know, buckthorn, for example, doesn't completely overrun the other populations and are cultivating this very personal, intimate relationship with her, with Belle Island. And I think it is like a very, very personal relationship. Yeah. So the question is like, how do we engage with land while respecting the land zone kind of bodily autonomy and what the land needs and wants from us? Yeah.

Qanita: But also, kind of celebrating it in an unexpected way. Because buckthorn, you know, as you said is invasive. And then, to use the natural dyes of the entire plant is very special because it makes something that's beautiful but also, you know, brings in all those community voices, you know.

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: So if people see it, they won't be able to, you know, you kind of have to sit with it.

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: Because it's, you know, a large banner piece of fabric. But it's also got these voices, you know, coming through.

Jill: Yeah. The hope definitely when creating that piece was to have, yeah, like a moment of like celebration and appreciation for the island, and then extending to for the people that, you know, have a relationship with the island and also are part of our community, part of that patchwork of our community as well. And that was why we used sort of the, you know, the quilting, the patchwork technique was sort of tying in all of those voices and stories. And yeah, this like, uplifting way, hopefully, that comes across.

Qanita: Yes, and kind of flying high. Because it needs to be high and needs to be like in the wind and things. Yeah.

Jill: I love that we were able to, yeah, put it so high up on the wall and it's just like very, you know, and slightly floating and moving a little bit and kind of breathing in a way.

Qanita: Yes. No, it was beautiful. And so, I was wondering how you moved from using quite small pieces of textile or paper for your printing work. How did you transition into using dye in that medium to go kind of expanding? And I feel that you're continuing to expand and get bigger and bigger.

Jill: Yeah. I'm wondering when I'll reach that limit of, you know, size and dimensions. But yeah, I think a lot of -- part of what really drew me to block printing is just that it can be done on such a small scale. You only need like a tiny amount of desk space to do the carving. Or often I would, like, when I first moved to Kingston, I'd go out to different, you

know, cafes for example, and like bring my tiny little like three by five block with me and do some carving. And then, you know, you can print it anywhere basically by hand. And so, that's why I started off with block printing. But over the years I was thinking about the waste that I was producing because, you know, the blocks that I would use for the printing are made out of these you know, whatever polymer, like some sort of plastic rubber otherwise. And then, the ink itself, of course, is also polymer-based, you know, acrylic ink or whatever. And so, I was thinking, how can I do this medium or something similar but, you know, invent or create or find some way of making a substance like an ink out of natural materials that will be more likely to biodegrade successfully and also aren't produced in the first place in ways that are really extractive and damaging. So I was interested in natural dyeing. And then, I happened to -- Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre had a summer residency for I think the summer months a couple of years ago. And I was lucky enough to be accepted. And they had this whole, you know, I could use the whole corner of their main gallery to do whatever I wanted. And I didn't have that space at home because, you know, I was just renting, right? And I had roommates at the time. So I was able to, I had all of this wall space to work with, and I had all of this like, you know, table space. And so, I just experimented with doing dyeing and I tried making inks and paints out of, you know, the fixatives and whatever else, the mordants, and found some success with that. And sort of was working on the scale of maybe like maybe maximum like 16 by 20 inches kind of a thing on fabric. I was doing these painted works that were dyed. And I wasn't necessarily planning on going any bigger. And then, Sunny Kerr approached me about the Agnes exhibition, and was like, "We have this entire atrium that you can fill." And I think that was just like the push that I needed to go, yeah, to go bigger and try to do things. And again, I was still renting. I didn't really have that much space. And so, I guess that's also part of the patchwork was good for that because I could dye these slightly smaller pieces of fabric and then sew them all together. Yeah. So it just sort of has seemed to naturally, these opportunities have presented themselves where it's either, you know, thankfully providing me with workspace which is hard to come by or with enough of like an impetus, like enough of a kind of a reason to push myself to go even bigger. Yeah.

Qanita: Yeah. That's interesting.

Jill: And it's been fun. Yeah.

Qanita: Yeah. Because it's your small-scale work and your large-scale work are kind of like from *Who is Belle Island* to your earlier work that seemed quite different. But now, you're kind of starting to incorporate more of those like, you know, more delicate elements. So the interview that you sent me with Haley Sarfeld was very interesting. It was great. And in that interview, you talk about the role of the community in your work. So why do you say that like the community is important? Like an important part of why you do the work that you do?

Jill: I think, until moving to Kingston, which I think is maybe about 7 years ago now -- until moving to Kingston, I had lived at home with my parents and, you know, it was sort of my life was very insular and I didn't have a lot of like opportunities for like meeting new people and getting new perspectives and trying new things. And then, when I moved to Kingston all of a sudden, I felt, you know, I had to expand as much as I possibly could and spread out and stretch out and say yes to everything, whether I should have done that or not. But you know, and say yes to everything and try new things. And so, that led me to working with the Skeleton Park Arts Festival. And I was in teacher's college and I did my alternative practicum with SPAF organizing like a monthly kind of sing-along for community members at the local - at like a church, Calvary Church, I think close to the Elm Cafe. That especially we're working with KEYS Newcomer Services to involve newcomers and kind of have like an opportunity for them to, you know, make new community links and just have fun. And so, I started doing that, and then I moved into working as volunteer coordinator, which I've probably done now for staff for about like 4 or so years. We had a brief pause during COVID, like the beginning of COVID, like 2020, 2021. So volunteer coordination. And then, now since 2020, I've also been on the board of directors for SPAF. And that, in particular, was we had a huge overhaul of, you know, our systems, the way that we're running the festival and, you know, the organization, are we being equitable in terms of outreach to artists, in terms of community partnerships, in terms of, you know, how the board is comprised and all these things. The answer of course was no. The answer was no. And Kamryn Marsh, delightful person, who was working at KEYS at the time, helped us do an equity audit. And we had so many conversations as a board talking about, you know, the role of art in community and, you know, how art should serve community and build community. And you know, it's useless to do anything if, you know, we don't have input from the community. Because how would you know what people want to do or to see or to be involved in? So since those conversations, that's been kind of always in my mind. Like, yeah, like, you know, community-centred art and the importance of it. And that's sort of where I've wanted my art to be kind of progressing, is making it more and more integrated with, you know, values or, you know, questions that are occupying the communities that I'm a part of.

Qanita: So which, you know, just thinking about *Who is Belle Island?* Which specific communities, you know, were engaged in that project?

Jill: Yeah. So I was, again, I'm so thankful to have been working with Billie on this who is a spoken word artist living here in Kingston for about the same time as me. But originally, you know, is from the Northwest Territories. And Billie already has a lot of community connections to sort of the Kingston, like urban indigenous community. And of course, being that Belle Island is so significant for Indigenous people, and I think specifically Mohawk folks -- don't quote me on that. But Indigenous people in Kingston and Cataraqui, Kingston, she was able to reach out to people that she knew that had some experience, like, you know, either part of the Caretaker Circle on Belle Island or, you know, just went there for

ceremony or there's been different, you know, events taking place there for Indigenous folks. And so, she was able to reach out to them and she interviewed them and put together these beautiful kind of collections of these recordings about Belle Island. And then, we also decided to reach out to folks at the Integrated Care Hub, which is right beside Belle Park, which connects to Belle Island, of course. Because there's plenty of folks that live on the island or close to the island because they have nowhere else to go. So there was one gentleman that we spoke with who had been camped out on a part of Belle Island for I think over a year he had said during the winter as well. And he was able to tell us all sorts of things about all of the animals that were around. And you know, he particularly loved like the ducks and the duck families. And like, he had, again, this like really personal relationship with Belle Island because he was living there. And so, he had really lovely stories. And you know, obviously, it was not a walk in the park for him, like it's brutal weather constantly. But it was really valuable to have his perspectives of the island. And then, we also had an event that Billie organized that was sort of like a storytelling event, talking with folks about the process of storytelling or where to get inspiration from or you know, how to share these stories with people. And then, we encouraged anyone that had experiences with Belle Island to like put together a poem or, you know, a short story and then share that. And we used some of those recordings for the final work as well. So we had a good smattering of different, you know, perspectives and walks of life.

Qanita: So it sounds almost as if the process was kind of more important and, you know, definitely enriched. But you know, was kind of fuller than what people saw, you know, like when we saw the exhibition.

Jill: Yeah, absolutely. I was thinking actually too about, you know, the process and whether it should be like more evident to people. But I think I'm okay with, you know, having all of this like very, very sort of lengthy process-based work if it results in something that is meaningful. So even if, you know, you couldn't necessarily glean at first glance all of the, you know, the hours of, you know, conversations that Billie had to edit through and whatever, whatever. And all of the different conversations that we had and the time that it took to source the materials and whatever else it is. I think it's ultimately so much more gratifying on a personal level as an artist to know that we took the utmost care to make something that was significant, not just for us, but for other people. Yeah.

Qanita: So *Who is Belle Island* and *Seed* is coming to London. It's kind of going back to where you came from in *Ukutula*. But for *Seed*, you chose different botanicals. Whereas *Who is Belle Island* was all buckthorn, you know. Could you talk a bit about why you chose those botanicals, why they're important to you? And just a bit more about the inspiration behind *Seed*.

Jill: Sure. Yeah. I guess starting off with the botanical component, this time I focussed on marigolds specifically French marigolds and you know, what's now known as like African

marigolds. And I chose marigolds because of sort of like, I've been wrestling with for years now, like the role that my own identity plays in my work, or should play in my work and how to acknowledge it. So my mom's side of the family is all from India, you know, Goa and Mumbai and sort of like, yeah, like Goan and Maharashtra. And my grandparents were born and lived there for most of their lives. And then I guess now it hasn't been most of their lives, but for their young adult lives. And then, my mom and her brother, they all moved over to Canada when my mom was just like 3 years old. And then, my dad's side of the family is, you know, sort of like English, Scottish, German, settler sort of lineage. And I've always either been identified by other people. In London especially when I was growing up was just, it was so White. It was so White. It was barely any, you know, non-White kids at the elementary school. So I always had people asking or trying to guess like, oh, where are you from? Or I personally had a lot of hang-ups about that in my head about being this other. And you know, obviously, now Canada had so much more immigration over the past, you know, 10, 20 years that there's a lot less questions like that, that I have to field. But yeah, I'm conscious of the fact that I can represent something as a person of colour to a lot of different people for different reasons. And also, the fact that you know, I had a very kind of classic, you know, White North American Canadian upbringing. And I didn't have a lot of cultural ties to India at all, other than like the food because my grandmother and my grandfather made, you know, the most fantastic Indian food, of course, of course. And my dad actually, funnily enough even though he is the sort of like White Canadian one, he also made all of the curries in the family. So yeah, so food was our main link. And then, there wasn't really anything else. And it wasn't something that was like, talked a lot about. And I also know too that my grandparents sort of grew up in kind of post-colonial India. And you know, also were, you know, they were brought up Catholic. And so, we had a lot of Catholic influence on my mom's side. And so, there isn't a lot of like "culture" that naturally is a part of my life as, you know, as a person of colour. So while I am, I want to have this deeper link to, you know, half of my family, I don't want to invent something that's not there, and I don't want to, you know --

Qanita: Appropriate.

Jill: -- yeah, exactly. They would be complete appropriation if I were to, you know, I think, if I were to start, you know, even the act of like wearing a sari, I would feel -- even though I'm sure many Indian people would just be like, oh yeah, we love that you're wearing one, whatever. Like, everyone should wear saris. Like, I would feel this like such intense discomfort if I were to do that. So I've been thinking for a couple of years about yeah, like how to visually represent that kind of tension. Yeah, that tension and discomfort. And so, in *Seed*, I've chosen to represent it by kind of integrating some smaller elements of like iconography or flora that's identified with India. So the marigold, for example, I thought was kind of a perfect flower to use for this piece because it's identified with India and it's used for, you know, religious celebrations and ceremonies, and it's very iconic, but it's not native to India either, actually. And I think the specific marigolds that are used in India would

originally come from like Mexico and what's now like known as Latin America. And so, I thought that was really interesting too, that you could have this like iconic cultural item or this plant that is so deeply associated with a culture or a country, and it would also come from somewhere else. And it's also a product of global trade or colonization. And so --

Qanita: Just movement.

Jill: -- yeah, and movement and yeah, and change and people flowing, you know, to different places around the world so. And it just so happens also to be a very potent dye plant. So yeah. So I chose the marigold for that particular reason. And I just used it in as many ways I could possibly think to highlight the flower and the sort of, yeah, and the colours and the warmth and yeah, and the visuals. Like I did a print, a repeat print that's inspired by like Indian block prints and, you know, did some dyeing that was used with the petals and sort of is evoking this idea of like these *Seeds*, you know, the flowers and blowing through the wind, which is how the *Seeds* would spread. Yeah.

Qanita: Thank you. Thank you for that. I think that, like, I love your use of the marigold and the African marigold which is also, you know, that they're all these different varieties. And also, that they're such an interesting flower because they proliferate everywhere. They're such a kind of like a daisy, like an Indian daisy. And yeah, there's such a variety, you know. And they've got all these healing properties as well, you know. You plant them around, you know, and they kind of, yeah, like flies don't come. And mosquitoes don't come.

Jill: They're perfect companion plants for other plants you might have in your garden. Like they work to protect other plants.

Qanita: Yeah. So I think that's beautiful. But also, what I want to talk about is your dyeing process and the way that you deal with plants. And for me, it seems as if you've got this. And looking in from the outside, it seems as if it's like an alchemical thing, you know. Like you've got all these different chemicals and like, you know, you kind of put these cloths in different pots and, you know, you add different things and yeah. But also, I mean, besides that, and I think almost more importantly is that you've got this very, like, loving relationship towards dyes and botanicals. Do you agree with that? And could you talk a bit about that?

Jill: Yeah. I definitely, when I work with the dye materials, and I think especially now that I've been able to, like with the marigolds, I've been growing marigolds all summer and harvesting them and drying them to use them for the dyeing. I have this, like -- you have like much deeper relationship with the plant itself and, you know, identifying like when it needs to be cut. And marigolds are also one of those like cut and come-again plants, where if you cut off the flowers before they go to *Seed* before they start wilting more will pop up.

Qanita: Oh, wow.

Jill: It's fantastic. So you can have like limitless supply of marigold flowers, which is perfect so.

Qanita: In the summertime.

Jill: Exactly.

Qanita: Yeah. In the summertime. In the summertime, exactly. So limitless supply during the growing season. And so yeah, I was spending a lot of time with these plants and I was getting to know all of the little insect inhabitants. I found that earwigs love to hide in the folds of the petals. And I don't love to find them there. Yeah. So my technique for that was I would cut the flowers and then put them in a pot of water and then leave it outside, you know, for a minute or two until the earwigs start to realize, oh wait, we're in water, this is bad. And then I would fish them out with a mesh strainer to save them. I don't know if they, you know like I just felt bad I was taking their home. So I have a little rescue operation for the earwigs. And then, I could --

Jill: What did you do with the earwigs afterwards?

Qanita: I just put them back in the garden because they would then, you know, they could stay sheltered and dry in the next batch of marigolds that would be growing. So yeah. So you know, that was time-consuming, but again, I felt it was worth it because I was taking their home. Anyways, so yeah, getting to know the soil and the insects. And then, once I had the flowers, I would thread them with a needle in embroidery floss, and then hang them to dry. And you know, I'd have to make sure to like rotate them so they don't get, you know, to like bleach from the sun also because it's slightly light-sensitive. And also, making sure to move them into the sun enough that they get fully dry. And so yeah, spending a lot of time with the plant itself before I even dye it. And then, I know a lot in so far as like the alchemical portion of things. I think it's very common with natural dyers in as far as like, you know, in North America or kind of like artists who use natural dyes and then like maybe teach about it. They love to be super precise with their measurements. And like, I'm using X grams of this mordant and I'm using like, you know, X amount of this flower to get this specific hue that I've gotten in the past and I've done tests on. And I want to get this exact shade for the next time.

Qanita: What is a mordant, sorry?

Jill: Oh, yeah. Thanks for catching that. A mordant is basically some substance that will help to alter the fabric. And this is cellulose fabrics, so cotton or linen, plant-based fabrics. Alter the fabric so that they will accept and bond with the dye. Protein fibers like silk or wool are much more ready to bond with the dye particles. But cellulose fabric needs just that little extra thing. So the mordant and I've been using aluminum acetate, which is a metal salt, which I'd like to get away from. I've been using up a large amount that I bought a couple of

years ago. But I'd like to get away from it because, you know, it has to be mined. It's extracted from the Earth and it's, you know, done in irresponsible ways. So there's ways of mordanting using soy milk even, and you can dip and then dry and dip and dry and then use that. But regardless you need a certain amount of mordant for your fabric. Basically, I guess the process of dyeing is you. You have your fabric. You have to scour it to get any residue, any waxes or oils or, you know, if it's thrifted fabric, any detergents off of it. So you boil it basically in water with some soda ash, and it's completely clean. And then, you can mordant it. And then, you put it in a bath with the metal salts. And you keep it at a high temperature, but not boiling for, you know, maybe 24 hours. And then you dung it.

Qanita: Dung?

Jill: Yes. And originally would have been with dung, but I don't have readily available dung, you know, that is safe for usage. There's no cows near me. So instead, I use wheat bran and/or calcium carbonate like chalk. And this is the part where it's like the magic, the mystery of dyeing. I've been looking it up and I don't know why the wheat bran does what it does. But it does something so that you're helping that mordant to like firmly bond to the fabric. And it's also kind of, you rinse it off and it gets sort of any excess that you don't need that hasn't bonded with the fabric. So you do a little -- you steep the wheat bran in hot water. You have a nice little wheat bran tea, and then you dip it in there. And then, it's ready to be dyed into your final dye at. And I've just been chucking in like a couple of handfuls of marigolds until it feels right. Like I could weigh it out and lots of people will weigh out their dyestuff, you know, to be a certain percentage of the weight of the fabric that you're putting in. But I like just letting it do whatever it wants to do, and --

Qanita: So you kind of fill up the pot until it feels right or?

Jill: Yeah. Just you know, basically for marigolds, you often have to use like half -- no, 30 to 50% of the weight of the fibre that's going in. So if you have very thin fibre, you don't need that much, you know. If you have this thick heavy, I have this like, very thick embroidered cotton, you need a lot more. So yeah. I've been putting in, you know, say like, if it's thicker cotton and I have a lot of it, then I'll do like four big handfuls. And if it's, you know, lighter cotton, then just one handful, for example. And I'll just add more as I go until I've got the right hue in the pot. So I'm just kind of waiting and simmering it until it starts to transform.

Qanita: And then do you stir it while --

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, you can like --

Qanita: -- it's bubbling away? Is it on the stovetop?

Jill: Yeah. I mean, yeah, I have it on the stovetop. And then, you would ideally kind of like steep the marigolds first. You'd like boil them a little bit and then sort of extracting that dye

into the water. And then, it doesn't matter how much water you put, as long as there's enough to cover up your fabric so that it can move around freely. Yeah. And you'll agitate it for a little bit while it's boiling. And then, you can take out the marigolds at that point, or leave them in while you integrate the fabric. And then again, it just depends on like what shade you want to get like how much colour you want to get with the fabric before you take it out. So it would really just depend because I wanted to have a lot of different shades for this piece. So I have no idea how long I put some of them in for.

Qanita: It was beautiful. And I think they complement each other, you know --

Jill: Thank you.

Qanita: -- different like patchwork pieces. I think that like the dyeing process itself has to do with movement and, you know, cycles. And I think that's generally what is important to your work, you know. But I also feel that your work is very grounded here like in Kingston. So what does it mean to be going back, like with this practice back to like show in London?

Jill: Yeah. That's a very good question because I'm not sure what it means for me because you're right. I think a lot of my involvement in, you know, in the arts and, you know, in my work in, you know, community organizations and sort of the overlapping of the two has been exclusively while I've been living in Kingston. And I've put so much of my life into this work in Kingston. And like, again, like very place-based, very land-based, very like, getting to know Kingston and the surrounding area like so well, and being inspired by that. London for me almost has become quite foreign. I only go back, you know, a handful of times a year because it's like a 4-hour drive, if you're lucky from Kingston. And usually, you're not so lucky. So it's, yeah. So it's a long trip. And so, you know, sometimes I'll visit. Sometimes my family will come visit in Kingston. But I know London so little now and what London has, like, how it's evolved over the past handful of years is like very mysterious to me. So I feel like it kind of -- I feel like I'm in that. Like, it's kind of heightening that sense of like discomfort and uncertainty and, you know, also like possibility being back, having this work in my hometown and like, I don't know how it will be received. Like will it be like impactful for the people in London? Will it be like, will it resonate with people? Will they be able to relate with it? I don't know. I did reach out. I was interested in maybe having a conversation with folks from -- there's a cross-cultural learning centre in Kingston that my sister actually volunteered with, I think when she was in high school. And they do, I think very similar work to what KEYS here in Kingston does, KEYS Newcomer Services. And so, I'd reached out and I've been like, I'm doing this, you know, project and it's kind of about, you know, movement and migration and, you know, things like that. And I would love to chat with either, you know, employees or newcomers. And I think they're just so busy. They're so overwhelmed. London is growing at an incredible pace. So we weren't able to work anything out. And I think that also too -- like, I think that also just reinforced to me, you know, how removed I am from London because you --

Qanita: Like a different person.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah. And you know, if I had been living in London, you know, could have just showed up in person and maybe had some conversations, but it was so much more difficult to do from afar. Yeah. And yeah, I do feel the sort of, I am kind of a visitor now, right, in many ways.

Qanita: Which is fine.

Jill: Which is fine, yeah. I just have a different relationship with the place now than I did. And yeah, my parents and my sister still live there, so they're always telling me like, oh, we just, you know, there's a new bike path or you know, there's like, the library has moved to a different location or whatever, whatever. And so I get like little snippets of London's growth. But it's more of a visitor's experience for me currently. Yeah.

Qanita: So in your mind it's kind of changing. But thinking about you today and your role as an artist and an art educator because you always speak very fondly of being an art educator. So how do those two roles kind of fit together? Do they fit, do they draw on each other? And like, more importantly, how do you physically find the time to do those two things at the same time?

Jill: How do I find the time? I neglect sleep and rest which I think is something that I'm going to -- I've been chatting with friends and family about this. And this is something that I think I'll have to prioritize more going forward. Because again, like I -- and I have down-skilled slightly from when I moved to Kingston. Again, I was saying like, yes to absolutely everything. But with regards to education and you know, how that relates to my practice or, you know, who I am as an educator. Like, I originally moved to Kingston for teachers college at Queens. And it was for French and English, my teachables for high school. And that's currently what I'm doing. I teach at Kingston Secondary School, and I am teaching core French this semester to Grade 9s. And I have got an 11/12 photography class which is very fun. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And last year I had been teaching French immersion art also to Grade 9s. And so, that for me is just really, really rewarding because of the way that art can let me get to know the students in a way that they usually wouldn't be able to express to maybe other adults within a school or even in their home lives, maybe. Or even to themselves, like being able to find their style or their voice through visual art. It's a really fantastic process and I love doing that, especially with Grade 9s because there's just being in high school and, you know --

Qanita: It's just beginning.

Jill: -- their future has just begun. There's so much potential and they don't even know what to expect. So it's always really fun teaching Grade 9s. And then also, you know, if I'm teaching French, integrating the arts into the education again, as another way of making

things relevant and interesting and fun. And you know, exposing them to like francophone cultures that they otherwise would never be able to, again, through music, through these things is really fantastic. And then, outside of school, I used to do a lot more workshops like line a couple of workshops and things like that through The Tett Centre or the Kingston School of Art. And I've done a lot less of that now that I'm working full-time. But yeah, I think what I like is just like introducing people to things that they hadn't necessarily ever considered as doing something that they could do or could be interested in. And sort of just like expanding their worldview or like, sense of self or kind of like capabilities is what I like the most about education. Yeah.

Qanita: I think you probably make a good art teacher.

Jill: I hope so. Yeah.

Qanita: So Jill, any new exciting projects that you are working on? Or are you just kind of like winding up, taking a breath? There's so many things happening in your life.

Jill: Yeah. I think I will be taking a bit of a breather after this exhibition at Museum London, *Ukutula*. But I have like, okay, one thing. There's not a concrete project, but I'm just identifying this so that I follow through, is the idea of a makerspace and a creation space in Kingston. I don't know if you're familiar Qanita, and I wasn't even in Kingston at the time when it was still going on, was the ARTEL which was this community space. It was this house in like, I think like Sydenham in Kingston that was rented out by a collective of artists for, I want to say like close to 10 years or something like that for a while. And people were renting their living there. And then they used the living space for these regular-like events. It could be art exhibitions or concerts or like, just like creation space or whatever it is. And then for, you know, whatever reasons, mysterious reasons or life reasons, it eventually had to stop. And I feel like Kingston just really needs more kind of DIY spaces or flex spaces that, you know, are kind of run by, you know, like ground-level artists and community members. And so, this is like a vision that I have in my head for something that I would really like to work on over the next year or so. Am I equipped for that? Maybe not. But I know people that are. So yeah, that's like --

Qanita: You do know a lot of people.

Jill: Yeah, [multiple speakers]. So yeah, that's something that I hope will come to fruition. But other than that, I'm going to just be like hanging out at home.

Qanita: That's great.

Jill: Yeah, with my cat and my partner.

Qanita: That's amazing too.

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you for speaking with us today. It's been amazing.

Jill: Yeah.

Qanita: Thank you.

[Music]

Qanita: Thank you for listening to *With Opened Mouths*. Special thanks to our guest Jill Glatt for speaking with us today. I am your host Qanita Lilla. This podcast is produced by Danuta Sierhuis and Agnes Etherington Art Centre in partnership with Queen's University's campus radio station, CFRC 101.9 FM. Episodes are edited and mixed by Chancelor Maracle. The music is composed by Jameel3DN and produced by Elroy "EC3" Cox III. Episodes of *With Opened Mouths* are released monthly, and you can find them on Digital Agnes, CFRC's website and on your favourite podcasting platform. If you liked what you heard, please leave us a review and subscribe now so that you don't miss a single episode. We'll see you next time.

[Music]