

Artists in conversation: Jasleen Kaur & Beverley Bennett

Transcript

Natasha Howes 0:00

I just really wanted to give a very brief, sort of welcome to the gallery and an introduction to the fact that, we're really interested in collaborative practice here. And it's something that we've been doing for the last few years. We're in the process of re-hanging some of our collections. We're working with people, to bring people's life experience and curators' expertise together to co-curate and co-produce displays. And what we hope is that those displays will be really relevant to people's lives. We've also been working with the artist Suzanne Lacy, who has worked on an amazing project, in fact, all through lockdown, and since the start of COVID, with a group of 40 women from across Manchester, really amazing, inspirational women. The project is all about, work and women over 50, looking at the barriers to work, difficulties with the menopause and caring responsibilities, access to work. What has really inspired me about that project, is that it's been a real true collaboration. It's not just been a case of, the artists that have paying lip service to it, and no one gets to actually hear your opinion, actually, every single decision on that project has been collaborative. That that has been amazing to see. The final project I just wanted to mention briefly is we've been working with Jade Montserrat and she has made some new works for our collection and she has collaborated with people not just in Manchester, but also artists from around the country, to really investigate the issues that she's interested in, which are to do with care and care of people as well as objects. You can see both of those displays the *Uncertain Futures* project, and the Jade Montserrat project their both on display at the moment upstairs. If you get a chance after the talk, please do go and have a look at them. So, thank you so much to UP Projects for organising this event. We're delighted to be collaborating with them. I think it's the first time that we've worked together, but hopefully not the last. I'm going to hand over to the curator of UP Projects, Elisabeth Del Prete. I hope I pronounced that properly who is going to introduce the artists and tell us a little bit more about the format for the afternoon.

Elisabeth Del Prete 2:27

Thank you so much Natasha for that introduction. My name is Elisabeth Del Prete. I'm the Curator of Learning and Live Research at UP Projects which is a public art commissioning organisation based in London, but active nationally. I'm a white woman with long brown curly hair. I'm in my mid 30s and I'm wearing a pink shirt. Yeah, so we're really pleased to be here today and to talk about what constitutes

collaborative practice with Jasleen Kaur and Beverley Bennett. This event will also expand on Jasleen's commission at Touchstones in Rochdale. Which if you haven't seen it already, it will be open until the 13th February 2022. The works in the exhibition have been commissioned by UP Projects in partnership with Touchstones Rochdale. This new commission forefronts the voices of migrant communities within the social history of Rochdale, which have historically been marginalised and misrepresented. Jasleen has been working collaboratively with women and gender nonconforming people from Rochdale's Pakistani, Bengali, and Punjabi communities examining and responding to the content of the Local History Archives, Touchstones. And the collaborative process has culminated in a book and a series of films, which meddle with traditional archives and approaches. So, this work has been four years in the making. Initially, UP Projects reached out to Touchstones to see if they would be interested in developing a commission that would engage communities in Rochdale, and this was welcomed by Touchstones because there were links with local communities. So, UP Projects initiated the commission, as part of its ambition to create opportunities for artists to have time to develop genuine engagement processes that inform the outcome of the work. So, several aspects of this commission will continue to inform the work that we do. Fore fronting ideas of collaboration and co-creation, which are further investigated in other parts of the programme. *Constellations* is one of the programmes that UP Projects produces, which is an annual development programme for socially engaged practitioners. But it also happened to have created the opportunity for Jasleen and Beverley to meet for the first time in 2017-2018. So, we're really pleased that encounter has culminated in this event today. Now, just a few information about the structure of the event. So before engaging in a wider conversation, Jasleen and Beverley will do short introductions to their work, showing some films and some videos. Then there will be a wider conversation about the topics of today's event, followed by a Q&A so around three o'clock, give or take we will open up to the room for questions. Also, the event is recorded by Alina Akbar and her collaborators, Alina is a filmmaker based in Manchester who has also a collaborator of Jasleen's during the project. And if you don't want to appear in the recording, even though, actually you won't. The last thing, today we're also launching the second episode of the UP Podcast about the project. So, there are some, postcards on your seats. Just follow the link, and you should be able to hear Jasleen and some collaborators talk more about the project. By mid-week, next week, there will be a written transcript of the podcasts available on UP Projects website and accessible via the link on the postcards. Now without further ado, I'm pleased to introduce you to Beverley and Jasleen. I will briefly read their bios and then I'll pass on to them. Jasleen Kaur is an artist based in London. Her work is an ongoing exploration into the malleability of culture and the layering of social histories within the material and immaterial things that surround us. Her practice examines inheritance, diasporic identity and histories both colonial and personal. She works with sculpture, video and writing. Recent and upcoming

commissions include the Wellcome Collection, UP Projects, Glasgow Women's Library, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Eastside Projects and Hollybush Gardens. Her work is part of the permanent collection at Touchstones Rochdale, Government Art Collection and Crafts Council. Jasleen is also a recent recipient of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Awards for Artists one of the most significant philanthropic awards for visual artists and composers. [Clapping] Beverley Bennett is an artist filmmaker whose work revolves around the possibilities of drawing performance and collaborative experiments with sounds. Beverley's practice provides a space for participants to become collaborators and provides a point of focus from where to unpick ideas around what constitutes an art practice and for whom art is generated. Beverley has exhibited and worked internationally including at the Cinema Africa Film Festival in Stockholm, Wysing Art Centre, Peckham Platform and is currently a fellow at Serpentine Galleries. [Clapping]

Jasleen Kaur 8:34

Thank you, thanks for coming on this rainy Saturday afternoon to witness a very candid conversation between Beverley and I, and thanks to Nasrine, Rahela, Bushra, Alina, the group participants. We never end up really knowing what language to use; participants, people, groups, collaborators, we will talk about that, for being here today, that was a surprise, so thank you. I'm going to really, I guess, Beverley and I are going to share and let you into projects. Specifically, I'll be talking about *Gut Feelings Meri Jaan* which is a project in Rochdale, and Beverley be talking specifically, about another project of theirs to let you in a little bit so that we can then frame a conversation around this kind of work. And we're going leave enough time for voices in the room. So please feel like you can... yeah, it feels like quite an intimate setting. So hopefully you can join in at some point as well.

Beverley Bennett 9:46

Basically, it's going to be like a conversation that we would have over tea, and you wouldn't necessarily be here. If there's any swearing, then I apologise. [Laughs]

Jasleen Kaur 9:56

Yeah. And that's how we brought this together, through like voice notes that have been exchanged and text messages even right up to this morning. Beverley was on the way to Manchester from Birmingham, and I've been coming up from London and still beautiful notes going back and forth. So, yeah, I think we're both really thinking this whole topic through, if we can call that a topic. But I'll quickly share a little bit about the work in Rochdale at the moment. Oh no it's a film! So, I'm going to show you some films now as well. But this is, the work in Rochdale, which is titled *Gut Feelings Meri Jaan* is a culmination of four years of work, not with the group specifically, but actually setting up the conditions to bring a group together was all of that time period, including a pandemic, including having a child and getting funding together. And finally, the magical bit, which is like working with

these incredible individuals. I guess I invited them to, I was drawn to the archive at Touchstones. And I invited them to go looking for ourselves in the archive. And to discover what we noticed there who's looking for who? And how is this notion of like cultural memory? Or are these ideas of history preserved? And how is that collective memory formed? And what could an archive look like if it was separate from this institutional structure? Or that methodology, that format? So, we throughout lockdown, we were meeting on Zoom and we, I think I was seeing those conversations or gatherings as like study groups, I was taking part in a lot of, I think it was that moment in that first lockdown, where online gathering was a thing. And I was participating in incredible radical teachings led by friends and reading groups that were self-formed by friends and artists. And I think I was experiencing this like what felt like such a profound kind of thing to be taught and to learn with friends, that I was borrowing and sharing some of that experience with the group. So, bringing, we were reading texts together and reading bits of Edward Said, no we didn't we did Stuart Hall. Amrit Wilson, bits from the archive, of course, listening to podcasts, and reading blog posts, and they were all centred around allowing us to have these conversations about our embodied archives and our relationship to this place to this land. What healing might look like and what ancestral knowledge we hold on to in this diasporic life that we have, that we might be able to yeah, share, lean into, talk about. And this work, this these months of Zoom conversations, which would go kind of like always extend the time that we were meant to be talking for. They went long into dark evenings of the winter. They became the series of works, which are these, these film works. And then this book, which is it's actually different to this book, but still, maybe I'll talk a bit more about it's a seed book, which kind of holds together, just for a moment in time within the exhibition, it holds together some things that were spoken in these sessions. And the film's which I'm going to show you a few excerpts from. They were filmed by Alina, are these like, I don't know, like these re-enacted or enacted rituals that they feel like they're kind of like re- mixing something that's traditional, to create something new. So, we eat bits of the archive, we wash things kind of ceremonially in yoghurt. And they're all situated in sites that are bound up with, you know, there's histories with endless sites, whether that's Empire, the Industrial Revolution, and so there's something that felt kind of cleansing or like renewal, something cathartic that was happening in these enactments. And then the work together, I guess it's like, and we'll talk a bit more about this, I hope. It's trying to resist some kind of archival logic like not just create something for the institutional archive, we talked about that quite a lot. And I was very transparent about what it might mean for us to come together and do this work together and not to just gather what feels like this urgent work of like collecting oral histories and voices of elders but trying to resist that in some way and kind of complicate the singular narrative of who was in the group. So, these women of colour, nonbinary people of colour, who are often these shared but very different heritages. I'll stop there.

Audience Member 15:45

I just want to ask a question, the film, is there a lot of dialogue in it?

Jasleen Kaur 15:49

We are just going to show one minute.

BSL Interpreter 15:53

Do you have a lot of dialogue in it?

Audience Member 15:54

Are there subtitles?

Jasleen Kaur 15:57

Are there subtitles in these ones, I am trying to think? There are subtitles in the one-minute archive scene, yeah!

Film Audio 16:16

[Film plays, immersive sounds] Endless pressures. She came to Britain from Pakistan about 12 years ago and had taken British citizenship. About three years ago, she met a man who was in Britain on a six-month visit. She agreed to marry him and then moved to Manchester, where they had lived together happily, he applied to the home office to stay permanently in the UK with his wife, a procedure which is perfectly legal and provided for in the immigration rules. His application to stay was dealt with by the agency in Manchester. But the Home Office showed little concern of urgency. They went to their Manchester MP who took up the case with the minister, time went by but the vital procedures from the MP nor decision came from the home office. In the meantime, their difficulties were mounting because of the conditioning pause when she arrived as a visitor, her husband was unable to seek work. And because he was not a permanent resident in the UK, he could not claim supplemental benefits. After long correspondence between the MP and DHSS, it was eventually agreed that in view of the long delay by the Home Office, he would be paid as a special case, she had been able to support them by going out to work. On the one hand, I feel like I'm losing my culture and heritage because I feel like I have become anglicised in lots of ways, you know, but we need to hang on to it. And I think now I'm hanging on to it but for a long time I suppose I wanted to fit in. But now that I've got my own children, I feel sad because I feel like they don't have what we have. My parents told the stories, and I feel like at the moment I haven't got the patience to tell my kids those stories. And like, the cost to take them abroad now...you know? Just for me and my two kids to go to Bangladesh the air fare is going to cost about £4000. I can't show them that culture and I can't show them their heritage. Even though Rochdale is home another part of me feels like it's never going to be home. But when we were in Bangladesh, they were

making fun of us because we were from England, so it is scary to go back there but then I feel like I'm not being wanted there either, so where do I fit in.

Beverley Bennett 19:38

Hi, I'm Beverley. Gosh it's a bit nervous to follow on from Jasleen and I don't have any people around me. I see the stars here. So, I'm going to adopt you for the moment. Yeah, so, yeah, I'm an artist based between London and the Midlands and maybe I'll talk a little bit how me and Jasleen, like, first met. So, I'm fortunate I'm part of the alumni of *Constellations*, which as Elisabeth said, is a project where 12 different artists can come together and have aspirations of working with communities and creating socio political work. Yeah, and that was my kind of first foray into it. And I was fortunate enough to meet yourself through a mutual friend called Elizabeth Graham, who was part of *Constellations* as well as Helen Nisbet who's the director of Art Night in London. And yeah, you kind of go in a little bit blind but you're supported by the likes of Jasleen, Rehana Zaman, Helen Cammock and I'm very fortunate enough to call them friends and people that I look on in terms of being inspired by their work. Maybe I'll just flick through my slides and that might give a little bit more of an insight into what I try and do.

Technician 21:06

Do you want to show the films first?

Beverley Bennett 21:07

Yeah, let's show the films first. So, the first one is called *Amine* and there's a little bit of audio transcription but funnily enough at the start of it you'll hear Jade Montserrat's voice which is so, kind of, serendipitous but yeah...

Film Audio 21:28

Inaudible I'm currently proud that I can say these things and I'm really thankful that you've got me to do them, you've brought this out in me and other people it's really special...stuck and sensitive is sort of something to do with time.

Technician 22:29

Second film?

Beverley Bennett 22:34

Yeah. This piece is called *Simon Says/Dadda*

BSL Interpreter 22:38

It's called what, sorry?

Beverley Bennett 22:40

'Simon Says', and then slash 'Dadda'

BSL Interpreter 22:42

Okay.

Film Audio 22:51

Then she gets pregnant with Pam. And then after Pam was one years old, they got married then, they had me and the rest of the brothers and sisters. So, twelve children. But he was a good Daddy. He worked hard, he did carpenter work, and he would go to the Woodlands and look wood pack it up under the cellar where wood, cool. Plant his corn, raise his children raise his pig. He was a good Daddy, until another lady took him away from our mother. But when we get sick now him come right back in the house now looked after him, Brenda come and look after him. And then he died. Eleven years now since he died. Mommy is dead fourteen years. You see the house where we were living into...

Beverley Bennett 23:53

So, the first bit is from a piece called *Amine* where I was fortunate enough to be commissioned to make a short film. And at that time, I had no idea how to create film I was also working full time at National Portrait Gallery. Yeah, and then was approached out to nowhere and so I kind of took it upon myself to go up and down the UK and talk with friends of friends, other creatives about what it's like being a Black woman today in the UK. And kind of setting the story straight as opposed to what is featured in stereotypes. I'm not going to say a certain newspaper, but they might have used certain terms. And yeah, I'm giving them space to share their stories and to kind of connect with me. We'll probably talk about this later on. But then forming testimonies that was probably the first time where I made a conscious effort to create that space and to also learn from other individuals. So, *Amine* came first and that little snippet that I chose from the kind of introduction to the project that I'm doing, which is taking probably about the same number of years, as Jasleen's work, called *Simon Says/Dadda*. So, Simon, is my father and Dadda was my grandfather on my mother's side. And within this project, I'm looking at what we inherit through our histories, and basically finding out who you are, like, you know, half and half of your parents and I'm starting to get an okay relationship with Simon. But you know, I'm wanting to find out more. So, in turn, again, working with women around the UK, and London, Birmingham, Newcastle and Liverpool, with different partner organisations, forming these, what would traditionally be known as workshops. But me and Jasleen have been talking about this. I don't like calling them workshops, I call them gatherings because more often than not, people that I work with, I learn more from them than they probably learn from me. And sharing space, so we do this over like, four weeks and form a community And, yeah, the attempt to try and heal from each other. So maybe I'll stop there.

Jasleen Kaur 26:34

I mean, I think we just continue because now, like...I'm - I was just thinking about when I...we went for lunch when I was pregnant with Claude.

[Video sound] 26:48

Beverley Bennett 26:49

Yeah, sorry that's my mum. No, that's my auntie but pregnant with my mum.

Jasleen Kaur 26:54

Is that what she just said?

Beverley Bennett 26:55

Yeah, Pam was my mom.

Jasleen Kaur 26:58

And we were walking to the train station, and you were going back to work. And you were telling me about the gatherings that you were holding in these various arts organisations to get to the point where you might create film from that is now this kind of beginning, understanding? Like, it's an ongoing thing, right?

Beverley Bennett 27:20

Yeah.

Jasleen Kaur 27:21

But for *Simon Says/Dadda*. And then, like, I guess, I'm thinking about, like, what our first little point is, like, how and why we work with people or groups, and maybe want to like, frame that context. And, well, you've just done the framing, actually, because it's like, this is not arts engagement. This is something else. And I think we both from that moment of speaking to you and understanding that this work, is born out of some other kind of need, and desire. And then like, I just want to read, there's a quote that you put in *Simon Says* by Judith Rich - Dr. Judith Rich, and it says: "Whatever healing work we do in our lives, heals the ancestral lineage of the previous seven generations, and the seven generations to come." Which I think is like a framework out of context for us to now speak about our work, which is, you know, not ticking arts engagement boxes, but it's coming from somewhere else, but I don't know, should we talk a little bit about the how's and the whys we work with?

Beverley Bennett 28:50

Yeah. Definitely also people who have decided who've been so generous about coming on the journey with us in that work so I'm looking to the superstars over here. Yeah, because it's just I guess for myself one I'm really nosy. [Laughs] I like working with people and I'm interested in the idea of stories - we were texting

about that today. But just that kind of yet, it's this feeling like that intangible kind of ethereal, feeling and that connection that we have to each other and trying to unpick it and explore more. And I guess time like, you know, saying four years it's exactly the same and it's still continuing, it's kind of cyclical in a way befitting and then going back and finding out some more but yeah, I'm going to go off on a tangent I tend to do this.

Jasleen Kaur 29:52

Did it begin with your, with kin with family, like I think about like, I kind of loathe the term "social practice", I never ever describe what I do as social practice, even though that's the kind of art speak for this work, or, yeah, it's the category that would come under, but like I was just a naive student in this art school, making jewellery like the first people that I started to turn to were family members, whether that was like, and I know Alina is like doing that too, right? It's like if there's like an urgency to document oneself and whether that started off as like photographs in my nanny's house or like recording/starting to record conversations or starting to ask the questions actually, because and that for me comes back to this thing about being attracted to and I find it quite boring and sometimes limiting where I keep coming back to the archive, like in the project in Gravesend, I went to local studies archive again and found these incredible books written by this feminist writer who grew up in Gravesend but I'm attracted to like, I think when you exist in a, whether that's a family structure or a wider like community structure or a mass of diasporic community, where there's so many silences, like it's something that I am, I can't quite get away from being in dialogue, and being in dialogue with very specific people, right? There's a reason why the group is six women and non-binary people of colour, right?

Beverley Bennett 31:42

I think you also kind of like reframed the idea of the archive, like we were saying that that kind of embodiment, using that as a starting point to then unpick what you're happy to collate from it or divert from so I think that's quite an interesting thing to have as a starting point, me myself, when I first started making work, it was all about my family, because that's the most accessible thing that I have. And funnily enough, I still keep going back to them. And rethinking what a family is, like, I'm fortunate enough to say that, you know, I definitely consider you as part of the family. Yeah, how we create it together?

Jasleen Kaur 32:32

I've got, like, written in my notes, which I don't want to overlook, because I think it's really important that we were just chatting before we started about how like the knowledge that is spoken by family, or like other kinds of kin it's a body of knowledge, and like, what is it that you are then like, what hierarchies do you put in place? But then I talk to my students about this that I teach, if you're going to

research, do you hold the library or that book authored by that writer, but whoever is that theorist as being of higher values, then something your nanny told you, right? So, for me, it's like that that knowledge is equal or above, right? What could be penned or printed or held in a formal kind of academic text, whatever that might be?

Beverley Bennett 33:38

Bringing that kind of work within an institution, what kind of hierarchy does that have within itself? Maybe that's me posing a question to you, which is a bit mean actually. Yeah, so yeah, especially with this project here, like placing it in Touchstones. You know your first reference was to go into the archive and to unpick, and now you're, within that area, how does that feel with this particular piece of work?

Jasleen Kaur 34:11

I think this kind of comes back to like how – the how of like what it means to invite someone into that work. And yes, that institution or that structure? And I think I was quite I'm just trying to remember the question so that I actually get to it. I think I was quite open and transparent about that, we could see in the archives, like in the “ethnic minorities”, section of the I'm using speech quotes for “ethnic minorities” by the way. In that section of the archive, I could see this like, evidence of arts funding. It's cyclic, right? And I, the sceptic that is me, I also know that this work is, that's a whole other, that's a whole other conversation. But there are conditions that allow it to happen. And that is money, right? So, I could see in the archive that after some kind of like, societal social rupture, race riots, 911, there was like a pot of money that enabled an artist to reach out to community and I'm sure this is not this is not new. This is not new, like, stuff to say that, like, the arts are often like, a sticking plaster for the deficit that is state welfare or like. Yeah, so I think I'm always wanting to like, if I'm working with anybody, whoever that may be, like, you got to let them into the conditions that is the way where you do that work in the arts, in this situation. So that, letting, being transparent and allowing the project to then be political. And that enabled us to like, have kind of sometimes disagreements to write about, like how this work might exist in an exhibition or live on in the archive, there is this book, that's a seed book that is going to get planted, it's not going to exist by January, we're going to read it and kind of create another piece of work out of like, us reading these testimonies, and these things from the workshop, and then it will be planted back into the grounds of the community centre in Deeplish, which is like a typical working class South Asian area of Rochdale. So, there's, it's painful, because the book is stunning, right? Everyone was like can we just get a copy like under the table? Just get a copy for us! And I'm like, yeah, we could probably do that. But the archives did not have this, like what feels like an answer to a problem. So, we spoke a lot about resisting. How do we want to speak back to the archive? Or how do we want to speak for ourselves? And

how do we want to resist these, formal methodologies of like, you know, HLF funding to do oral histories is happening in Southall now with this first generation who lived through partition, right? There's this desperation to gather that voice and I understand it. I understand and I want that too, but I want the legacy of this work to be a question rather than like, an answer. Here's six voices for you. But how, when you work in like very intimate and, clearly just hearing Jade's voice, which I knew was Jade's voice. When you are inviting somebody to when you work with testimony and the testimony of your own, because that's, in these films as well, that you there's a vulnerability I think to what you are doing, and then what that enables maybe someone else to be part of, I think that's clear in what Jade says, but how do you, when you're working with testimony, how do you set up the conditions? When you're when you're responsible for another, for individuals, like there is something private? And then there's public? And how do you negotiate that? That's complicated, but you can try.

Beverley Bennett 39:04

Yeah, that is a complicated one, I guess, when I'm working with different institutions, for example, when we do these gatherings over a period of time, we set up the condition so that no curators or directors are part of that - that sharing as well as have individuals who can offer people within the group space to share so I always have like a therapist on hand because you know this - not everyone has great relationship with their fathers and yeah, they're available during the session and after the session. Yeah, and there's still quite a lot that we're unpicking individually as well as collectively are the conditions that I'm just really honest about my own...yeah, about my own experiences, which, and I try to be really genuine as well.

Jasleen Kaur 40:22

I can't imagine you being anything else [laughs]

Beverley Bennett 40:26

To certain people [laughs] - no I'm joking! Yeah, because I hate that phrase, like creating a "safe space", and you try really hard, but I think there's something more than creating a safe space. I don't know, maybe just that terminology, because it's like, co-opted, we spoke about that before. That idea of like, you know, self-care is co-opted, and but yeah try and make a space where people have that agency and to really have like, a kind of deep dive and, but to also feel really protected within it. So that's what I try and create. And we were talking about this, it kind of goes on after the gathering, you know, I guess the life of an artist, you know, you wake up, think about your work, go to sleep, think about your work, but with this kind of work, it never stops, you know, you're still like texting people to see how they are checking in and because then they become, part of your extended family and you want to do what's right by them and protect them in whichever way you possibly

can. But that equally, you have to, well maybe this is a question for you. How do you navigate that...that space where you're supporting the individuals that you're working with as and how do you support yourself? Because it's quite a lot. It's heavy work, basically, we don't really talk about how heavy the work can be. But we try and create - that we hold that space for.

Jasleen Kaur 42:08

I mean, I do therapy?

Beverley Bennett 42:10

Oh, you're good now. [Laughing]

Jasleen Kaur 42:14

I'm not sure you know, and like Lisa, who's, been in as well, who is no longer working at Touchstones. But was working at Touchstones through this entire period, and pre that and does a lot of work on them. And so, there's, the reason why the 10 people that were invited 10 or 11 people that were invited to have a conversation to see if they wanted to be part of this project that came through myself and Brian's like, existing contacts. And that felt really crucial, because there were so many questions about, like, who's the group? How do we then group together? Like, it's complicated, and then that became like, six, seven, including myself. And that was enough, right? And yeah, I'm digressing a little bit, but Lisa, would check in and, you know, check in on me, and then also offered therapy to the group, and myself as part of that work. And I think like, I think that's, it felt like we were kind of like, working out as we went like, how to best, like, what is best practice? Or like, what's the right thing to do here? What are the needs of these individuals? And...but I'm not sure I'm very good at what you're just asking me actually. Because I think there is a lot of holding and negotiating. You know, working with arts organisations, doing that work on the ground. Many desires in the room, and really wanting to listen to them, and not always been able to fulfil them. But like, yeah, it's, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I've got an answer. What do you think?

Beverley Bennett 44:22

No, I don't have an answer, which is why I was looking to you. Yeah. Yeah. I think when I first started the *Simon Says*, with the gatherings, I had a therapist at the end of the session, and now we're revisiting. So, I'm going to all those locations, and they came, because we're going to start things up again, and hopefully move forward. But yeah, I don't have that therapist anymore. And yet, it's like negotiating that space where someone said: "that was a really special moment where we were able to come together", and one group called themselves "the sisterhood" and they didn't realise how important it was for them to come together and, now that it's kind of gotten quiet. They're realising that need again, and I've

kind of got that particular hat on where I'm like okay, so let's see if we can try and support them in this way, but it's equally really hard.

Jasleen Kaur 45:27

I think that's an important thing to note that like, in this, even just in this last week, I've turned down a commission, which was an invitation to work with, in a community setting in like the outskirts of Glasgow. And I was clear about why he was turning it down; I was turning down not because I don't need that money. But because I'm not done with like, working with the group. I hate the language, the language is insufficient with the group in Rochdale, but also the Saheli women's group in Gravesend. And the group in children centre in Serpentine, these are three, slow, long, very specific, incredible individuals that are part of this work and, I don't have it in me. And I also don't want it like, I thought about it. I was like, what would a series of workshops look like? Workshops? [Laughs] What would it look like? And I was like, I don't have it in me to make these connections, and I can't hold them. So, like, I'm not going to do it. Because it's not a methodology. It's not something you can apply. But the conversations I'm having with the Saheli women's group are really different to the conversations between Bushra, Rahela and Alina. I kind of want to like, secretly be Alina's mentor and like, make sure that Alina keeps making her own work. Like that's I'm going to try and help raise on a project with Touchstones. It might not be a formal group, but like you say there's like relationships formed that you want to care for. So, like, isn't there some kind of a rule of how many people you can have in your life or something, anyway I think I've reached my max. [Laughter]

Beverley Bennett 47:29

I think I'm still going but maybe I should have reached my max, yeah it made me think about trying to, at the end of *Simon Says* trying to involve? Yeah, it's like it's hard, with same groups. And then also at the same time, I don't want to say their names because, you know, I don't want to give consent and everything. So, I'm going use the term group. But yeah, I can say one person, Baby Oracle because we nicknamed them. Yeah, so at the end of the *Simon Says* project, hopefully, it'll come in the form of like, multiple exhibitions, and that the participants in the project will be curating the public events, as opposed to having curators within the institution, curate them. And that's probably the idea of saying, a kind of way into the institution, which in your own terms, and feeling that you have the space to negotiate, but also continue with that collaboration, after you've left, and I think the whole reason why trying to decide to use this kind of methodology is that they, you know, represent the community, it wouldn't make sense me saying like, "Oh, yeah, we'll have like a curator from London, based in Birmingham who doesn't know anything about the area." Yeah, for them to have that ownership and to also bring people in when it comes to events like these. Because it's, you know represents them.

Jasleen Kaur 49:09

Yeah. Can I ask you about...archive? I want you to ask about, because when I was watching, *Amine*, I was really aware of like, I think the thing that struck me was that this conversation between, and I've forgotten the individuals' names, but there's a conversation that's happening around like, between these two individuals who are talking about music industry, and like not deciding to not be, one of them kind of opening up and saying, like, I've decided to not be part of the music industry, because I saw how you struggled as a black woman. And it struck me because it made me think about...like these, what you were saying at the very beginning around what that film was about kind of its autoethnographic right, and it makes me think of Jemma Desai who is a shared dear friend. Who had this event at the ICA in London, it was called *Autoethnography As Refusal*. So autoethnography, like my definition of it, it's like you, you speak your own story, you narrate your own story. So yeah, speaking for oneself, right? And what I saw in *Amine*. Is lots of black women speaking for themselves. And that feeling, for me, that's archive. Do you see your film or the work you do as that, it's a quite a big cumbersome word, I kind of hate. And it's being used a lot at the moment. And it's, it's gone a bit trendy?

Beverley Bennett 51:03

Yeah.

Jasleen Kaur 51:04

But like, do you see what you do as archival? And what's your relationship to embodied or formal archives?

Beverley Bennett 51:15

I guess, yeah, I see it as an archive as a small 'a'. Because it's away from the formal kind of setting of what organisations or institutions would consider as archive. This conversation that we're having as a form of archive, like, the breath that we have is a form of archive, those traces. Yeah, and like with my earlier work with photography, it's like documenting a certain period of time that's definitely archive, but also, with that, and I guess that's also a with language that it can also evolve. So maybe there's certain sections within *Amine* that I might change. And probably, that talks to how long the projects are, because I'm still thinking and trying to figure things out. Yeah, I would definitely say that it's linked within that. But yeah, where it sits is very different. Fortunately, for myself *Amine* is part of the collection in Jamaica, the National Gallery of Jamaica, it is really nice, because both my parents are Jamaican, and it's also in my mom's name, my mom passed away last year. So, it means like a great deal that she's, you know, kind of gone back home. And so yeah, that's a kind of like archive as well.

Jasleen Kaur 52:53

That's beautiful.

Beverley Bennett 52:54

But how do you feel in terms of that idea of archive and those traces and...?

Jasleen Kaur 53:01

It was like years and years ago, like probably 15 years ago, I came across this book or lecture or something that was talking about Gramsci and like, there was this quote it's like it said, "History evades in us an infinity of traces." I was remembering that on the train up because and what we were speaking about when we were having lunch like I'm trying to I'm on a personal level, like outside of art and making or whatever that is. I'm really trying to think more about the body as, and you said that in *Constellations*. It was you that said body as archive at some point, and I was thinking about like, the flaws in this colonial archive, right? This classifying documenting, labelling like the flaws in that and something that we spoke about in the group and actually yeah Nasrine like, who brought the title into being because you messaged me saying that like you were surprised *Gut Feelings Meri Jaan*, my idea, you were surprised, like your body was reacting to stuff that you thought was done and fine and like or being of diaspora done that. You know what I mean, so I'm trying to think about like, what am holding this book as if it's some kind of like, a book called *No Archive Will Restore You* by Julietta Singh. They talk about that use illegitimate messy unauthenticated body archives, and that's where I'm at and like the stuff that can't be said or written or documented or something that's more magical like that quote by Judith Butler that talks about this kind of magical ancestral, we don't even know how its functioning or operating but like. Yeah legacy, I guess, maybe a better word for archive in the way that I'm thinking about it right now. [Inaudible] I'm just aware it's just gone after three. I just want to thank you.

Beverley Bennett 55:20

No, thank you.

Natasha Howes 55:24

So does anybody have any questions for Jasleen or Beverley?

Beverley Bennett 55:29

We can continue to rabbit on?

Natasha Howes 55:32

I have a question actually, and it's a bit unfair me asking it because in a way I ought to really ask you all...[Inaudible] My question is, I've been really thinking about the sort of the integrity of this work in practice and how much time it takes. How it has

to be really democratic. It's kind of very sharing and everything. It also requires from the people that are involved a lot of time and commitment over a long period of time. So, my question is, I suppose about what, you know, when you're trying to sell a project, to people. I think that is the wrong expression, you know when you're trying to? Yeah, sorry, that was completely the wrong expression. I'd really like you to be involved in this project and we're going to do it together, I suppose. You know, it's sort of like, what do you have to think about? What the people will get out of it? You are asking people to commit? So, it's a sort of question, partly to you but also partly them. To those of you who have been involved in it, what do you get out of being involved in a project like this? What made you say yes that you would do it?

Audience Member (Rahela) 56:51

I remember when I spoke to Jasleen, the very first conversation? I think we just talked about what we were interested in, I was talking about, I was interested in the histories, our experience with my family that had never been spoken about at all. Under-representation within the arts, those kinds of things, I was thinking about doing PhD over time, obviously in arts. I was looking at these things with my masters. And we just started off the conversations, didn't we? And we kind of evolved from there. And I didn't know anybody else in the project. And we've just kind of become, through working through the project become a really close group. And we didn't know each other at all, and we live in the same town, we don't know each other.

Natasha Howes 57:40

How about you?

Audience Member (Nasrine) 57:42

Well, my experiences are completely different, firstly I'm a very loud person anyway, by nature. I'm really arty myself, but never thought art is for people like us. And I can't remember who reached out, it may have been Lisa. And I would just, arts - you know you're going to be involved in some art project. And that was the in for me, and then Touchstones is like, well, that's really bizarre. Maybe I'm the right colour for a change. That's the thought that came to my mind and that's me being honest. I don't know how else to be. So, I was just intrigued that somebody wants to talk to me. I'm like someone's interested, someone actually is going to spend some time with us and listen to us. And for me, I think it's been an absolutely amazing journey. I'm still reflecting upon my own reactions and how it's probably altered my vision and the way I see my life and how not see my life, but an alternative form of capture. And yeah, so yeah, it's been, I think I'm still on the journey Jasleen.

Jasleen Kaur 58:52

Yeah, me too.

Natasha Howes 58:54

What about yourself Bushra? [Laughter]

Audience Member (Bushra) 58:59

Well, when I was on a panel four years ago and I love Jasleen's work, and I'd love to meet her, and I love to just hang out with her when she comes. And I didn't think I would be involved in the project or asked to be involved in the project. But I would just sort of hang out with her. Like Nasrine said we live, I live down the road from her and I've never met her or spoke to her. And like when you were saying before, it's not like, we're like family. It's weird. It's kind of like you said, it's that connection. It's not just art with this project. We're all family, I believe.

Audience Member (Nasrine) 59:42

Yeah, I think going back to your question, the original question is, I think people like us or from my communities and I feel like I can talk for my ladies - is ask us. Look at us, you know, just validate us and we're there we've always been there, but never from here, we've been asked. So, when conversations took place, I had nights where I cried. Because I was not re-living my own. I was like, I ain't got time to do that. But, God, can't believe what mom and dad went through. And we just talk more in depth about it. And I still kind of sidestep it, because it stops me from trying to maintain some sort of quality in my life. And that's where you're on your resistance line. Should I delve any further? Can I, you know, but I see things differently.

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:00:41

I think it's also like, we were from different backgrounds to tell our authentic stories, you know, initially, when you said it, we weren't adopting the project, it was just these stories, and we kind of had similar stories, but very different. What you were seeing before, you know, some of them were quite similar, we had different backgrounds. You guys would speak a lot of Punjabi, and I can't speak Punjabi - I don't understand, please speak in English.

Jasleen Kaur 1:01:09

I think that felt important to hold that in the space where like. So, and we talked a lot about language, and I did with UP Projects as well. You know, like, we cannot say South Asian, we cannot say marginalised, we are not saying 'ethnic minorities' unless it's in quotes. And then that was also the I didn't have the language either, right, like, so it was trying to find it, and it's all. How do you identify adopting Bengali, Punjabi, Bangladeshi right, that's what we say then always, that's what we

say then? And it was like, yes, there are shared connections, but there's so much difference in the six, seven of us. So, it's like, obviously there would be, right.

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:01:55

I think it was the trauma, that connected us. But it's been a beautiful experience. I'm really fascinated with these art things like [Inaudible] in an arts gallery [clap] and now I think I've made it. [Laughter]

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:02:12

We went to the show, and for the preview. I was just like; I'm still working in the arts. So, I'm just really excited. I can see Asian kids in an art gallery. That was brilliant, you know, and there's another show on, but it is fact that I can see people who look like me in the art galleries. And this is what I've been kind of striving for because I've worked in education and art for a long time and our community is super talented. But we don't get given that platform, once we were and it was it felt genuine. It wasn't just tokenistic, and I think that was really important.

Jasleen Kaur 1:02:51

During the platform, whatnot, as well. But I've got down here, which I haven't said, we talked about how handing, like working in this way, if you're interested in doing this work, right, it decentres you as this voice of authority, and it holds you accountable, always right, we talked about how, up until the last minute up until something goes to print. Even now, if somebody was unhappy with the benefit. Pull it, right? This is not material gathering. It's - you're not making art from this group of people.

Beverley Bennett 1:03:27

With all the material?

Jasleen Kaur 1:03:30

Yeah, yeah. So being held accountable, also asking the organisation whose funding must also be held accountable. Yeah, I think it's a dialogue and there's always asks, and one of those asks was we need to pay people?

Audience Member 1:03:50

Yeah!

Jasleen Kaur 1:03:54

Like people are spending two and a half hours talking to me on a Monday night, we need to pay them for the time. What should you pay them? What should you pay me?

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:04:01

But it's something we, sorry to interrupt you Jasleen, but it's something we take for granted. Somebody would ask us to, you know, do something, we'd go the extra mile and not think anything of it. Because we don't value our own time have never been taught to value, and how do you value something? How would you value care, compassion, and just being there in meeting the person where they're not meeting your need? You lost me in life. I felt lost through this project. Because I thought I was [inaudible], I knew my identity and how this perceived identity I have. And then with all this I don't have a clue who I am anymore. You've broken me Jasleen! [Laughter]

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:04:50

Do you remember one of the conversations I was talking to you about? We were saying, you know, and it's actually opened up me looking into my own history, my own family, things that I've heard about. And also, one of the things that I was talking about was when my dad bought my mom a knitting machine and she would knit jumpers, and now I'm doing my own research. Like, I found that those old knitting machines and my old jumpers from my mum.

Jasleen Kaur 1:05:16

Where was it?

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:05:18

It's going to be at the university.

Jasleen Kaur 1:05:19

Oh, my goodness.

Natasha Howes 1:05:22

Thank you so much, it's really amazing to hear your voices. It's really powerful actually what you just said.

Jasleen Kaur 1:05:28

You should be talking for an hour!

Natasha Howes 1:05:31

So, does anyone else have questions? Yes.

Audience Member 1:05:32

Yeah, I have a question, I just want to say thank you so much. And like my heart, and my head is so full in such a good way. And I wanted to bring up the fact that these exploring our own family, you know, people in our own families and stuff, and my nanny was 17, at the time of partition, and I feel like, her experience is

embedded in all of my work. And there's so much that I feel this urgency, because we're losing that generation to try and preserve. I'm a creative, but I also work across the square, at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre where I work as a producer. A part of my work is to archive, Black, Asian and global majority community stories. And it's so nice to sit in this space and be reminded that art is heart. And its intimacy and its connection away from this, market the selling, extracting industry. And when you were saying that you've got this book that you were going to bury in January, my heart was that my mind was blown and I get it, I get why you wouldn't want to do that. But how else can we preserve these stories, these, and I say, the sacred stories of our families, so that in 100 years' time, you know, generations will still be able to experience those as well. Like, what are those other ways? I don't have an answer. I'm just throwing it out there. Like, how else can we archive or make sure there's a legacy? Yeah, that's, you know?

Beverley Bennett 1:07:12

It's a good question. We just keep talking. [Laughter] Keep talking, keep just keep, yeah, keep it going, keep sharing the stories, and then generations, and generations will learn from that, and remix the stories - evolve the stories. That's it, you make sure that you listen to each and that's what I would.

Jasleen Kaur 1:07:35

I was just thinking about, like the body of this book. The reason why that came about was like thinking about, like really wanting to embed the work with a certain type of politics, like being really aware that at some point, this work was going to be in an exhibition setting. And we were going to be gazed at and then like, talking to the group about like, in my cumbersome lines that I really want to complicate. And I really want to like make that eating of the archive seem over an hour long, I don't want to lose any of the eating, but I don't care if somebody sits there for one hour, the point is like it shouldn't be consumed. And we spoke a lot about how to have, I normally speak to Beverley, but to also try to work out like how does an artwork have agency when it's no longer in your control? And so, we're filming the eating of that and that will go back into the archive as our film. And Shakra who's part of this work, she works in the local studies archive dropped me like a panic voice mail saying: "I don't think we should - I don't think we need to have that in the archive." And I think it's just, I mean, who knows they might print it again and put it in the archive, I was talking to Alina about but like how? Yeah, speaking for oneself, we were given the archive and we were reading some narrated version of someone else's life into lumber. And it's like they are completely have no power or autonomy in that document. So, I really wanted to like hold on to like, this cannot be read by anybody else, people are listening to someone's voice who said that thing. So, trying to play with that, I guess so.

Beverley Bennett 1:09:29

Also, that kind of like makes me think about Helen Cammock's work and how they create film. And that they there's one piece which is own by tea where there's fragments of Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall, and obviously, it's through her voice, but in some ways, if you didn't know the text, you think that it's literally her kind of diaries. It's really interesting to me, which she uses that methodology and how she creates really important work. So, it kind of makes me think of that too. Like, with the archive scene, yes, you kind of like ingesting and kind of like regurgitating but also re-mixing it at the same time. Especially with that, that breaking up, like you know, anyway.

Jasleen Kaur 1:10:14

Thanks for mentioning Helen Cammock in this room. [Laughs]

Beverley Bennett 1:10:18

Always been a fan girl with her.

Natasha Howes 1:10:21

Was there another question from the back?

Audience Member 1:10:23

Yeah, I'm just kind of thinking about what my question is really...it's so nice to work in the field. Jasleen that you're articulating so much experience, I'm currently working with a group in the context, which is a bit strange of trying to break down hierarchies between artists, institution and communities. So, while working in a group, paid by an institution, as a practitioner, but also in a, you know, in an almost two way with dialogue with a group of Pakistani heritage mums who have grown up together, since they were about four years old, and that interaction, actually, it's a very complex situation with you know, we're constantly thinking about, you know, kind of all of the stuff that you've talked about. So, I feel it's wonderful to listen to you speak and articulate so well, a lot of the things that were on my mind, but my question, I suppose, is, in attempting to do the things that you've described, how important is it actually to create a visual or aesthetic outcome in a form of an artwork or an exhibition? Or when does the work actually kind of finish?

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:11:42

Another great question Jasleen.

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:11:48

I think you always asked though didn't you, you always asked are you okay with this? How do we all feel about things, and we all have different, we're very strong women and we all have different ideas. So, I think that was, you gave us that space, I think to kind of, I mean navigated and negotiated, as well, different.

Jasleen Kaur 1:12:14

I don't know, I'm like a person that's like, I love materials. And like Alina's sensibilities with filming was like, you know, we felt like we were working from the same vein often like, and like leading on Alina to like, decide on the archive shot as well. So, there's like, we care about that stuff, too. So, there was a care within the group, but there's artists within the group, there's activists within the group that was like, we all had this shared like maybe that didn't feel like just aesthetics, it felt like I don't know, like part of how we were thinking.

Beverley Bennett 1:12:57

Can I just jump in? But I really love the fact of those, those aesthetics as well, because it's like a way in. And it's something that's the shots are just beautiful. I've been fan-girling before about them.

Jasleen Kaur 1:13:08

Yeah?

Beverley Bennett 1:13:09

And the way in which it's centred, but then it's like you're literally the focus, but and then you could kind of unpick what could happen at either side, especially that scene when you're on the steppers it's like the past and then the future and what's happening now in the middle is just extraordinary. It's so beautiful. I could talk more, but like I love the dresses as well, and that you know, anyway.

Audience Member 1:13:37

Sorry to interrupt, but I think part of my question...[inaudible]

Jasleen Kaur 1:13:46

I think what you've seen at the exhibition, is a snippet, it's edited. We we're chatting, Alina and Bushra and I were chatting until two in the morning at Bushra's house. A day before the opening - I don't even remember when it was.

Audience Member (Alina) 1:14:00

Day before filming!

Jasleen Kaur 1:14:02

Yes, yeah. And you were just, what were we filming the next day?

Audience Member (Alina) 1:14:08

The hair washing!

Jasleen Kaur 1:14:10

Yes - the washing. Bushra, you cannot forget that! We're talking about how like, all the stuff we talked about that night isn't in the work, so it is an edit. And that's I think that's power to for a group to decide what is made public and what is not and for everyone to be okay about that, I wish we could have taken longer to do all that too. I did feel rushed towards the end, going to print you know, the subtitles are not in these edits because we were pushed for time, so it's not perfect. The conditions we were working within are not perfect. Not brilliant.

Audience Member 1:14:49

Not the filming scenes - we were freezing...

Jasleen Kaur 1:14:54

With the storm coming in. as well [Laughter]

Audience Member 1:14:58

In the field...

Audience Member 1:14:59

Was that with the yoghurt in the hair?

Audience Member (Alina) 1:15:03

Cold yoghurt. It was quite chilly!

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:15:06

But because we had to get this filming done. And it was just like we all kind of...yeah.

Audience Member (Alina) 1:15:12

I guess we did as many takes to get it perfect. We did. This is what's done, and we'll make something out of what's there.

Audience Member (Rahela) 1:15:21

I remember you asked would you like to have pieces first especially when you memorise everything, and then you said you're not actors I'm going to just give you the pieces of paper just read from it and that was just so much easier.

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:15:36

I didn't understand what I was doing with paper.

[Laughter]

[inaudible]

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:16:42

I think I want to add this and for me, I think it's very important. I was raised, my father and mother both were born in India. So, the way I speak my maternal tongue Punjabi is how they spoke in India, although the Pakistanis and Muslims. So, I was born in Huddersfield, and we had a vast number of Indian friends. I then came to Rochdale, there's no Indians to be found. It's like, where have they all gone? Jasleen I was looking for people, do you know any Indians, I miss them, the way I speak my language. Then I met Jasleen, and it's just really touching.

Audience Member 1:17:26

I remember you left a voice note for my nanny. Yes, I can't tell you how happy she was to hear your Punjabi.

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:17:32

Oh, bless you.

Audience Member 1:17:33

And she knew exactly where you're from and what village I was from.

Natasha Howes 1:17:42

I don't want to interrupt this, but do you have a short question?

Audience Member 1:17:48

Nasrine, has your perception of art changed?

Audience Member (Nasrine) 1:17:51

I see everything differently. Everything that I do, I'm trying to think okay, got on the evaluation questions. How do I capture this in an alternative form? I see everything differently from a different perspective from a different lens. My lens has changed. There you go my lens has changed.

Natasha Howes 1:18:15

That's a great question! Thank you so much. Thank participating. Thank you so much, Beverley and Jasleen it's been really fascinating to listen to you both. You know, to hear from the women and just everything about it. It's been its really kind of made me rethink, I suppose, what I thought I knew about collaborative art practice, so I hope you have all got something out of it. And yeah, go and see the show in Rochdale. [Clapping]