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Artist Talk: Grace Ndiritu

Live transcript

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SPEAKERS
Grace Ndiritu, Rebecca Nestor, Canan Batur

00:00 Canan Batur
Hello. Welcome, everyone. Thanks for joining us today. My name is Canan Batur. I'm the curator of Live Programmes here at Nottingham Contemporary. It's a great pleasure to give you a word of welcome and to host today's talk between Grace Ndiritu And Rebecca Nestor. And it's an also added pleasure to be doing this within this temple that Grace designed with Setworks. If you had the chance to visit the galleries, and see our exhibition Our Silver City you'll notice a map accompanying the space which I'm holding here. Grace came up with this concept called spiritual overlay, to think of a building as a kind of spiritual technology in order to question what it means to create an architecture that is embodied. From a similar threads, she created a space within the space, museum within the museum, a journey within the journey amongst many journeys that you will find in Our Silver City, to take the audience members through all the galleries, starting in the east to the south from the west to the north, to offer an attempt of transformation. We start with time of change, we go to time to understand, time for inner knowledge, and we end the journey in time to transmit wisdom. We're gathered here today in this space dedicated to inner

Talk

knowledge and healing, inspired by traditional architecture as well as indigenous knowledge through Grace's childhood memories of visiting her grandmother, and also the research she conducted in African Adobe houses and sweat lodges. Some of the various skills and knowledges Grace looked into during the process of developing and materialising the segment of the exhibition. As I mentioned, in today's talk, we will explore Grace's artistic practice further drawn in conversation with climate psychologist Rebecca Nestor. Grace will also discuss the practice of healing in her work, as well as her experiences of living in alternative and indigenous communities as a way of thinking through issues of climate trauma, and ecological activism. What we have decided to do tonight in terms of format is to start with a meditation led by grace, and that will only last for a few minutes, and then start the conversation afterwards. Halfway through, Rebecca will lead us through an exercise and the q&a will begin around 8pm. We will try to create an atmosphere of meditation but also discussion, so you're welcome to ask your questions then. And now I'm going to read a bit about the Grace's and Rebecca's bios. Grace Ndiritu is a British Kenyan artists whose artworks are concerned with the transformation of our contemporary world, including the impact of globalisation and environmental justice. Through her films, photography, paintings and social practice projects with refugees, migrants and indigenous groups. Works including The Ark: Center for Interdisciplinary Experimentation, COVERSLUT, Fashion and economic project, and performance art series, Healing The Museum, have been shown around the world since 2012. Recent group shows include the British Art Show in 2021, currently in Wolverhampton and Coventry Biennial in 2021. Recent solo exhibitions and solo performances include Bluecoat gallery in Liverpool in 2019, Eastside Projects in Birmingham in 2018, CAG Vancouver in 2018, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2014 and Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2013. Her debut short film Black Beauty has been selected for prestigious film festivals including 72d Berlinale in the Forum Expanded section and FIDMarseille in 2021. Ndiritu

has been featured in TIME Magazine, Art Monthly, Elephant magazine, Phaidon's The 21st Century Art Book, and her work is housed in museum collections such as the Contemporary Museum of Art in New York, British Council, and Modern Art Museum in Warsaw. Her writing has been published in her critical theory book Dissent Without Modification, in 2021, The Whitechapel Gallery in the Documents of Contemporary Art anthology series, Animal Shelter Journal, Semiotext(e), The MIT Press, Metropolis M, and the Oxford University Press. And Rebecca is an organisational consultant, facilitator and coach with a particular focus on supporting people and organiSations with the emotional impacts of the climate and ecological crisis. Her consultancy specialises in helping people process the feelings that are evoked by working on the climate crisis, whether as sustainability professionals within organisations or as campaigning groups and NGOs, or simply as citizens. She's a board member of the climate psychology alliance and has recently completed postgraduate research into leadership in climate change organisations. Before I give the floor to Grace and Rebecca, some very brief housekeeping notes, our live programmes of talks, performances and screenings, seek to create challenging environments where open mindedness and respect for each other's approaches and perspectives can foster growth. So please be mindful to and respectful of each other's opinions and views.
Our appreciation goes to University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for graciously and generously supporting our events. I would also like to acknowledge the staff who are supporting us this evening, Helen, Jim and Shannon and Ruby. Lastly, as with all events here at Nottingham Contemporary, today's talk is free to attend, but all donations are greatly appreciated to help support future free programmes. Without further ado, Grace and Rebecca, the floor is yours.

06:03 Grace Ndiritu
Okay, well that was a very big introduction. So now we're gonna come back down to earth. And we're gonna do a little

meditation just for a few minutes. So it's nice if everyone closes their eyes, and they get comfortable in their seat. You close your eyes, start to connect with the breath, as it goes in and it goes out, focusing on the breath, just below the nostrils and above the upper lip. Not changing the breath, letting the breath be natural. As we notice the breath going in and going out we notice slightly it's warmer and it comes out it's cooler when it goes in. Feeling into the silence, letting our thoughts fade away as we always go back to the breath. Focusing a little bit more to the last few moments, bring our energy into this room, into this space, into this temple. And as we sit here as one, as a group of people today we should remember or think at the back of our minds, How are we related to each other? How have we come together? Why are we here? Why have we chosen to be here today? Let's come back into the room and open our eyes. So I hope everyone's feeling a bit more grounded. So the reason why I wanted to do this talk today is because this project began in 2019. I got a strange email in 2019, from Nottingham saying, hey, we'd like you to be part of this project about the future. And I was like, Okay, what do you mean, and then I quickly discovered that this was going to be a new adventure. And one of the parts of this project was always when we started to have in our workshops together as a team, what it meant, what the future meant to us, you know, and one of the themes was always about the climate, you know. And so the climate for me, was always, I'm always fascinated with what how that affects us, not just in our bodies and our technology, but also in the psychology of us as humans. And at that time, in 2019, I was already saying, Oh, those people in 2094, you know, they'll have so much trauma they'll have, they'll be experiencing a lot of climate trauma. And some of the team were like, no, there'll be used to it by then. But I still always felt like no trauma will become more and more embedded in us as a species, because we'll all be experiencing this climate phenomena. And so I always wanted to speak to someone who would have some knowledge about that. And that's how I managed to find, the team managed to find Rebecca, and how we began having our

conversation and our relationship. So today, we're going to have like a conversation. I'm gonna ask Rebecca questions, Rebecca is gonna ask me questions. And yeah, see how it goes. So I thought it'd be nice first for you to kind of talk about your background. So maybe some things about where you're from. And yeah, what you think could be interesting.

12:05 Rebecca Nestor
Okay. Thanks, Grace. And it's great to be here. I'm going to be a bit careful what I say about my family, my background, because my family are here at the back there. Hello, mom. Hello, Martin. Hello, Jen. And it's lovely to have you here. But yes, so my family is partly of British Indian origin. So my mum was born in India, during the war came over to Yorkshire, after the end of the war, and that family has its roots in colonialism, missionaries, and kind of managers of the Indian railway and absolutely kind of part of the British in India and all the colonial implications of that. So that's part of my origins. My dad is from a Methodist family in Yorkshire, much more kind of white working class origins and the kind of, I suppose what you might say, Methodism, and the meaning of that in the history of this country, and how it arose during the Industrial Revolution, and kind of working class people coming together. So that's part of my heritage, too. But I live in Oxford, I'm middle class as they come, I'm white, middle class woman going to be 60 this year. I've led a fairly kind of predictable, if you like, middle class sort of professional life. But part of the kind of Indian origins and the working class origins were also then kind of amplified in early experience, because in the late 60s, when I was like four or five, as a family, we went to live in Iran for three years. And that was really kind of foundational experience, I think, for all of us, and certainly for me and my sister. And part of what we've kind of carried into our adult lives from that is the sense of how we are part of that post colonial project as well as the colonial project. So the sense of what are the British doing in Iran? Well, it's about the oil. And whether or not you were part of that, and we weren't, we were part of the British Council in the educative project. It's

still absolutely part of our heritage. So I'm kind of sitting here acknowledging that that's in me, my experience of that is part of me, as well as my good intentions and my work on climate, which is also part of me. And I'll just finish by saying that about 15 years ago, I came to a realisation that climate change was a real thing, was not going away, was not going to be all right, and became a climate activist in a fairly kind of localised his sort of way, focusing on what we could do locally, not particularly protests, but practical work. And through that I came up against climate psychology and understanding, gradually, all the emotional impacts of climate change on people, especially guilt and shame, and the kind of silencing and disabling effects of those feelings, but also, you know, grief and fear and disconnect, and sense, perhaps, of like, What's this got to do with me? Lots of, it's a messy area, and we can talk some more about it. But that's how I got there.

15:41 Grace Ndiritu
Interesting. So yeah, I wanted to talk to you also about, maybe you could explain, first of all, what is climate trauma? Because I don't think many people understand that term. And maybe you can explain how does it affect people, individuals, and also maybe groups of people?

15:59 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, I can try. So trauma, the word, of course, comes from the Greek and it means wound. So it means something that absolutely kind of breaches the skin, makes a hole in you. And it is something that you can't accommodate, you know, there's if you think of the idea of a wound, this is something that has done the damage almost before you realise it's there. And this is the thing about trauma, I think that it's this sense immediately of a kind of reaction, to close up, to be frightened, to kind of hold yourself against what's going on and shut it down. And this is a completely in a sense, a kind of appropriate reaction to something that's is a serious attack on the integrity of the self. And then there's a kind of other side of thinking of this, which is you know, I'm talking about

the integrity of the self and the way trauma is about that being breached. Well, you could say I think, and many people do, say climate psychologists that there is an original trauma for the human race, especially those of us in the global north, and the wealthy countries, which is this idea that we are, this misleading idea, that we are somehow separate from the natural world and from each other. And that myth that we've kind of, some of us have bought into and our societies have bought into, leads us to deny our interdependence. And so that makes us lonely, and it makes us feel uncared for, and sometimes it makes us uncaring. Because we're kind of buying into this idea that we're somehow like, on our own in the world, and that is meant to be kind of who we are. And so the idea, then, is to think of climate trauma, as the recognising that it's a collective experience, that part of understanding and working with trauma is to recognise that in fact, you're not an individual, you are part of the collective. And the fact is, though, that we treat climate trauma, as though it was just a kind of mental health problem for individuals. You know, people, when they're suffering from climate trauma, people may feel overwhelmed, they may feel unable to face things, they may feel, unable to think about anything else except the trauma. And that can apply, I think, to people in this part of the world where we haven't yet really experienced the full exposure to climate change, where we're having floods, and it's horrible, but it's not, it's not yet the kind of catastrophes that are happening in other parts of the world. So we, the the climate trauma that we feel here is real, it's not the same as a climate trauma that may be felt by someone in a country where houses have been swept away, or where the temperatures are unlivable. But the fact of the trauma is real for both kinds of groups of people. And so people feel here, they may feel anxiety, they may feel guilt, they may feel overwhelmed, and they feel they're alone with it, and it's somehow their fault. And this is terrible really, you know, it is both what's got us into this mess in the first place - this idea that we need to be alone with difficult things and it makes it impossible to manage. And so part of what how climate

trauma people think about trauma is at any opportunity to bring people together to work on it together. And that's the kind of basis for a lot of the work. There's a little story that I might just, I saw a cartoon the other day, I don't know whether people have seen this. And it's kind of, it's sort of funny and not funny I think - it's a it's an image of a load of trees cut down to there, right almost down to the ground. And there's a small koala holding on to one of the trunks right down here. And the koala is kind of shaking a bit and there are two people with clipboards standing over the koala saying this koala is suffering from mental health problems. Its whole world has been destroyed, that's not mental health problems.

20:22 Grace Ndiritu
Yes, it's a bit more. Yeah, exactly.

20:25 Rebecca Nestor
And I think that's, that's the kind, almost like the dissonance that we have.

20:31 Grace Ndiritu
Exactly. People oscillate between anxiety and despair and then hope, you know, like, they go from being totally optimistic thinking we've found a technological solution to everything, and then totally just willing to fall apart. And, you know, especially kids, I think, like, for example, in the pandemic, that we've just experienced, you know, that kids have not, you know, not wanting to get up in the morning, you know, and because of they're feeling too depressed that the worlds and, you know, like this heavy weight. Yeah. And then yeah, so that people are like, going like this seesaw. Right? With their emotions.

21:08 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, absolutely. And that's a feature of trauma, isn't it? That it, you kind of, you're either really, really, really hopeful, and also, perhaps also really, really, really connected with other people and kind of clinging on or you're flipping the opposite

of both of those. And this is really kind of exhausting, because that's that is what trauma does to us.

21:31 Grace Ndiritu
Exactly, because it's like, you have to have enough resilience within yourself to be able to get through the trauma, like to kind of coach yourself to get through the trauma, but not deny it, because that's where climate deniers come into it. Like in the sense of, they're denying a reality, the fact that this thing is actually happening, you know, and then it's like they're trying to dissociate, which is a form of mental illness in a way you're trying to dissociate from a real thing that's happening to protect yourself. But actually, you know, that's really unhealthy as well, but just as much as like, the other gung ho people who are so in it 24 hours a day trying to fix everything, and then that's also impossible, because it's like, then you're getting a burnout. And I guess, you know, in my past, I would say, how I kind of got into climate trauma.

22:28 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah tell us about that.

22:30 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, like, well, climate trauma, how I got into it. No, I think it's because, you know, since well, my family they grew up, I grew up in rural Kenya, and also in working class Birmingham. So also, the two contrasts. But I've traveled a lot in many different places. And I think, I've also been lucky to be able to experience places where there's a lot of wild nature. So in Kenya, with like, wild animals, you know, and seeing that, but also, I traveled with some Tuareg nomads, in Mali, I went there, and I filmed them and things and then, you know, seeing how they lived and, you know, lived in those conditions very simply, very happily, you know, but also, this was in the Sahara and seeing how, and it was before the war that's been going on in Mali. So just the year before that began, and seeing how, like already, like the the US government, were already trying to intervene, even though there was nothing

going on. There were like, many soldiers undercover doing reconnaissance for like, you know, water sites and mining sites, you know, so this kind of this idea of, you know, how we experience the environment and the connection, like seeing the earth as just one big resource, you know, whereas the Tuareg nomads that's their home, even though it looks like there's nothing there, you know, and you can drive for days, you know, in the desert and not see a tree or a mound, they know exactly where they are, you know. And then I've also spent some time in Alaska, in the summer and the winter, and in the top of Alaska, so Barrow, and I went there to make a video, because I'd learned to do Mongolian throat singing. And I had this idea to make a video to go as close as possible to the North Pole. And to kind of like sing a song because throat singing works on electromagnetic energy. And the idea was to send a song around the world, so like to sing from up there, and it would go all the way around. And so I stayed in this place in Barrow, which is like a small village. Well, there's about 5000 people that live there, and there are no, you can't drive there, you have to, like fly there. And then there's kind of people that work in the oil fields. But then there's really like a lot of climate scientists there because it's, you know, it's in the Arctic Ocean and things and you can see, you know, you are seeing over to the North Pole. And that was fascinating being there. And like also seeing, like, polar bears still being there. And like coming to town, and also, you know, people still, Inuit people still catching whales and things. And this was in 2008, or something. And then, but seeing how the climate how people would talk about the climate and understanding, okay, yeah, we're starting to see changes, not just the scientists, I mean, indigenous communities there, and then talking about how it's affecting, like, how many whales they can catch and things like that. But I guess the most shocking thing I've ever seen climate wise, I was in I lived in Texas for a year in Galveston, and this is an island, it's like a tropical island, but it belongs to Texas, it's in the Gulf of Mexico. And it's five hours from New Orleans. And so being in this area where it's been affected by hurricanes all the time, Hurricane Katrina, like

the island has been decimated and rebuilt and then affected and then, you know, going to New Orleans and still seeing, you know, 10 years later, whatever, houses with crosses, you know, uninhabitable houses and because, you know, with the news cycle, you think, okay, they must have dealt with Hurricane Katrina by now. Like, it's been two years, three years, everyone must have their house back. But no, there's whole roads, whole streets, where it will never go back to the way it was and I think that's fascinating. Because, you know, in terms of thinking about time, you know, and deep time, we just don't understand the consequences of what we're doing. You know, we think, okay, yeah, five years, ten years, we'll fix it, whatever. But those people's lives and their children and their children's children, it's completely changed the trajectory, you know, that hurricane has completely remapped them. Yeah, you know, it's really interesting. So yeah, I wanted to ask you, also, because I know you work with individuals, but you also work with organisations. So how would you work with like, say, for example, someone comes to you, and they feel like they have climate anxiety, and they're feeling burnt out, you know. How do you work with them compared to, you know, leaders in organisations, people who are trying to change the world let says.

27:55 Rebecca Nestor
And that's really hard, I think, because that sort of work, you know, in an organisation where they're maybe campaigning on climate, or they're, you know, trying to get social change around it or changing perceptions. There's, has anybody here seen the film Don't Look Up? Yeah. So I mean, that film came out in December, and I thought, okay, so I've nearly finished my thesis. And it was like, okay, I don't know why I'm bothering this is kind of a description of what it felt like, I think it's like, you know, I know what I'm doing. I understand it, I need, I know how to get it across. And nobody's listening. And this is huge, I think for people. So there's a sense of, people in that kind of work are in touch with the sort of environmental damage you were talking about. Because they

may be studying it or they need to understand it in order to communicate it. They're also of course, part of this massive polarisation, so they feel attacked by other people all the time. And they feel the sense of hugeness about the work that, you know, we've got 12 years or 7 years, or whatever the current window is. And so the urgency is really overwhelming. And those are aspects of the trauma, I think. And then of course, there's also, there's something really kind of intellectually overwhelming about the climate crisis. I don't know if you find this, but the sense of it, like, how do we even get our heads around it? How can we even understand what humans have done? Really, the you know, there's, it's 30 degrees in the Arctic?

29:38 Grace Ndiritu
I think with numbers, it's difficult. I think it depends how your brain works. If you're a very rational person, scientific person, then yeah, maybe the numbers mean something, you know, but I feel like visualisation of the numbers helps you know, when I was in Patagonia, just before the pandemic I was doing a project where I got to work with climate scientists and anthropologists and one of them showed this map of the world from two degrees to eight degrees. And it was just like, red, red, dark red, you know, and only Patagonia was kind of orange, you know, and that was like, really, that image is burned into my head, literally, you know, like, I'm like, Oh, my God, you know, once I saw that, you know, I really got it, you know, in terms of, but yeah, but one question, I always wonder for you, like, as a individual, like, how do you balance working, you know, because there's a difference working with a group like extinction rebellion, you know, which is like, you know, obviously, everybody knows what they're like, they're very active, but versus working with, let's say, an organisation that's a more local organisation or more governmental organisation, how do you balance that?

31:00 Rebecca Nestor
Well, I guess it's different you know, you're working, if I'm,

so I do a bit of work with extinction rebellion in Oxford, and I convene a group where they come and, people who've got jobs to do in extinction rebellion, come and talk about the challenges and share thinking with each other. And that's helpful, because very often, people doing that kind of activism have no space for thinking, you know, it's even extinction rebellion, where they're actually working quite hard to create a sort of supportive culture. The work makes, gets people very kind of traumatised focused on the next thing, so that that's helpful I think, for them. I think for for group for people working in the kind of organisations I mentioned a minute ago, you know, campaigning, sort of NGOs, and that kind of organisation, they are, I think often feeling that it's really important to stay connected to the establishment, you know, they don't want to seem too kind of aggressive or polarised, extreme, yes. And so, and that's really, that's hard I think for people working there to hold that sense of the need for that, because, and it often leads people,other pressures, too, but it often leads people to feel that they have to be very positive, you know, they have to be very, there are things we can do. Yes, it's bad. But we've all got to pull together, and then it will, and we can fix this. And so underneath there is a sense of actually, we may not be going to fix this. And what do I do with that feeling because it's not allowed somehow. And so my work might be much more about just allowing some of that to be said, you know, acknowledging the despair or the, or the sense of weirdness, you know, I'm saying all this positive stuff in public, but behind the scenes.

32:54 Grace Ndiritu
I mean, I can relate to that, in a way because in my own background, actually, because I studied textile art first, I didn't study fine art. And then I went to do like a post grad like MFA kind of thing in Amsterdam. And I started teaching myself how to make videos.

33:11Rebecca Nestor
You have just lived everywhere haven't you?

33:14 Grace Ndiritu
And I started teaching myself, like how to make videos. But then at the same time, I already had a very deep, esoteric practice. As a child, I was doing spiritual activities. But then as a, I don't know, at 19 I'd have been to India, you know, I had gurus, I was doing retreats and things. And I always felt like I had to choose between, let's say, well, especially in the art world, then it just wasn't open for anything spiritual, you know, when I'd say, you know, to my teachers, or my friends, oh I'm going to meditate, people would, you know, they just laughed, they wouldn't understand what was talking about. Whereas now, there's been a huge shift, you know, everybody does yoga. And, you know, we all just meditated right now. And it was everybody kind of understood what that was meaning. But then there was also another kind of polarising thing between in myself, because I grew up in an activist household, you know, my mother and her friends, they set up this group, in the 70s, 80s, called Women in the third world, and they would like have film screenings and do anti apartheid marches and things and, you know, and so there was always this thing about, you know, a split between spirituality and activism, you know, and like the fact that, like, activists always looked at spiritual people like, Oh, you're not doing anything, you know, you can't meditate problems away. And then spiritual, some spiritual people would look at activists and say, You're just too caught in the real world drama, you know? And so, how to balance those two things, because I mean, I've always thought those two things go together very well. And it wasn't till 2012 actually, when I made a decision to kind of quit and leave and go off and live in nature in the countryside. But during that time when I was going to make that decision, in a, like, two, I think in a two month period I met, I managed to meet the Dalai Lama. I met another spiritual teacher, but I also met Marianne Williamson. So the thing about Marianne Williamson, she had always been an activist in the 80s, during the AIDS crisis and things but she was most well known for being a spiritual teacher. And she'd like be Oprah's spiritual

teacher, and she's written best selling books and stuff. But she's always she's, but she's a real fierce activist. And so I happen to meet her at this like conference, and I was in a phase of like, Oh, my God, shall I give up art because nobody understands what I'm going on about this spiritual thing, and blah, blah, blah. And then, you know, talking to her and hearing how, in the political world, you know, in her own life, let's say, in the spiritual world, people were like, you shouldn't go into politics. And at that time, she was already wanting to run for Senator and, you know, real life politics, you know, and she ended up becoming the presidential, one of the presidential candidates nominees in the last election in 2020 for the US, you know, and so it was really fascinating seeing how this very deeply spiritual esoteric person went right into the lion's den, you know, and she was the one who I would say, in the mainstream world, was the one that was going around on CNN, and all those talk shows, talking about healing. You know, I mean, I was doing it in the art world, talking about healing, and healing with music, but she like went out there. And that's where Biden got the healing thing from, and that's where Trump got the healing thing. They got it from her actually. Right. You know, and that's, I think that's quite fascinating to see how the world has evolved, you know, so much that people understand the two things. They're not like, contradictory anymore. You know, you don't have to choose, you know, but I did, I wanted to ask you, when these organisations, you know, because we've been talking privately about culture and race and things, do you think these organisations are too white? You know, because that's one of the criticisms about extinction rebellion.

37:30 Rebecca Nestor
Absolutely. Absolutely, too white. And they know that and acknowledge it. And that's not enough. And so yeah, I think it's, you know, I don't know what the answer is to that. But I think it may well be this very, this perhaps quite narrow approach to thinking about kind of fixing the climate crisis, you know, I think XR did a brilliant job with opening up the idea

that, you know, extinction is part of their vocabulary. But it's still very much kind of government needs to do this simple, these three simple things. So I think in a way, it is quite binary. And that makes, and split. And so, you know, in psychology, of course, we talk about splitting, as a coping mechanism. You know,, if we can't manage, we'll just look at one thing, we'll just say, we are one thing rather than the other thing. And so you're talking about integration. And I think that's wonderful. But I do also think that is quite likely with climate trauma, that there is going to be more splitting, more polarising, and that this is, it's not an accident, this is happening now. You know, yes, it's to do with the climate, and it's to do with racial injustice. And so those things come together. And I don't have an answer to the extinction rebellion question. But I'm really, you know, really interested here we are a white woman and a black woman sitting together in this space, with all of the kind of complexities about our identities as well, and what we've brought, what's brought us here, but you know, can we try and think about it? Is it possible to talk about it?

39:08 Grace Ndiritu
Well I think so.

39:08 Rebecca Nestor
Or do we get kind of over, do I get overwhelmed by shame and just go, oh, whatever you say, I'd better not say anything.

39:15 Grace Ndiritu
No, I, for me, it's really important to talk about but I think the most important thing that's also missing is to talk about indigenous, you know, cultures and indigenous knowledge and, you know, how the, you know, because it's easy in, you know, the global north and global South, we know that, you know, in the Global South, the people are much more vulnerable to climate change because of, you know, the consuming of the global north, but everywhere in terms of indigenous populations, you know, the question of their relationship with nature, and relationships with nations is

really complicated. For example, okay, so the, in the Green New Deal, you know, in America, there's the Green New Deal. And this is about solar farms, blah, blah, blah, you have an issue of the fact that most of these things are being put on indigenous lands. So like on Native American reservations, and there isn't necessarily visibility and transparency being done in those deals, there isn't necessarily because, you know, I went to visit the Hopi, okay, in Arizona, and there's a lot of places where people don't even have electricity, or running water. And you know, and that's America, okay. And then you're going to have all these solar farms, which is going to obviously help the people in LA or New York or, you know, and so it's really complicated. And then, you know, it's also complicated by the fact, you have a, you know, Kyle White who's an amazing professor, Native American professor, he talks about the fact that there's these kind of, we've come to the point where there's kind of two choices, because a lot of indigenous people think we've gone past the point of no return. Okay. And obviously, they have been experiencing extinctions forever, you know, in the sense of ever since they've been in connection with Western people, you know, there've been genocides and land dispossession, and, you know, exterminations, and, you know, changes in their cultures, but, especially at this point, you know, in order to not have the two degrees rise in temperature, you're going to have to have a lot of these solar farms, you're going to have to have all this infrastructure, you know, we have to have a lot of technological innovation, but most of that is done, like I said, without having these conversations. And then, so you've got that, but then you've also got the history of distrust, you know, and the fact that, you know, so many times the, you know, the, their connection to land, like in terms of like, the feeling of kinship, and reciprocity and stuff is kind of still suppressed. So, you know, the point of environmental justice, it's not just about the land and nature, you know, it's also about people and animals and different species, and we're one, we're just one species, aren't we on the planet. And so in most indigenous cultures, there's that recognisation of that

kind of, you know, balanced relationship. But in order to stop the two degrees, you know, you're going to have to kind of like, either you've spent many decades rebuilding trust with indigenous people, and then learning about their traditional techniques. So for example, you know, all those forest fires in California, you know, they're happening, because all the traditional burnings that used to go on, got stopped, you know, because of law changes. And, you know, in the last 100 years, where Native people couldn't just, you know, naturally burn forests. And now you have these huge out of control burnings. And so either he talks about this idea of like, either, you're gonna have to spend decades rebuilding this trust, so that you have some sort of, you know, equal power and empower these indigenous communities and things, or you're spending time and you're finding this fix short term solution of technology. But to do that, then you have to kind of override this indigenous way of thinking about the long term and seven generations. So it's really interesting.

43:52 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, and it's really difficult, isn't it? Because I know, I keep saying this is really difficult, really hard. It is really hard. And I think that's absolutely right. There is this question - Is it too late for any kind of climate justice for indigenous peoples? Because there is, as you say, it's either you override needs and cultures and perceptions in order to prevent the two degree rise, or you spend ages doing it and meanwhile, the temperature is going up. And so I don't know again, I don't know what the answer to that is. But I do think so then, and this is very complex, I think, because the I do think there's a, it's so important for the world to be able to learn from those principles of reciprocity and gratitude and taking what you need and no more. But I also worry that some of the way that gets talked about in the Global North is a kind of a bit colonialist in a way it's sort of oh, we committed genocide on those groups and we really learned a lot, so we could learn from them. So a bit more kind of taking more than what we need from those groups. And I don't, I don't know how, I mean

you have got massive experience of working with groups of indigenous peoples and working alongside them and being supportive rather than kind of taking and taking. That must be a dilemma I guess in your work, but it's, I'm interested to hear a bit more about that.

45:25 Grace Ndiritu
Not really, I haven't found it, because it's not like I work for a pharmaceutical company, and I'm going and I'm learning all the secrets of the Amazon, and then I'm gonna make millions off it. It's much more about having an equal conversation. For example, when I was working in Vancouver with some First Nation groups, we were actually they'd built like, they call it a watch house over the pipeline. So they're building a pipeline, and this is a protest place. And so we did a pipe ceremony there. But what was really interesting, the idea was that everyone from different tribes, but also from different parts of Canada, and, you know, whatever, would talk about their point of view, you know, so, you know, I was telling them about my point of view, but not just from Africa or Europe, but also about, you know, because of the tribes that I've met in Argentina, and I think what's really interesting is that some people think they're alone, you know, still and that, you know, there is the internet, but there's this idea that you have this huge struggle when you're like fighting, you know, multinational corporation, you can feel really, like you're in your own struggle. And then I feel like, it's kind of my job to say no, I just met those people, you know, in Patagonia, and they're fighting the exact same struggle, and, you know, so you have this feeling of like, solidarity, you know, and it's an informal solidarity. It's not like, when you go, I've been, when you go to UNESCO and it's like, the UN conference for indigenous people. You know, it's much more just informal, but that informal thing matters, you know, it's much more powerful. It's like, grassroots, isn't it? Yeah. You know, and you swap information? You know, for example, what's been interesting, because I've been working around restitution of objects in another project, you know, so not just back to

Africa, it can be to any source community, and how, yeah, like all, you know, let's say, non western countries have this issue of wanting to get their objects back. So when you go, and you're in a museum in Vancouver, or in Argentina, or in Belgium, or in England, the British Museum, you can have the same conversations, because most museums, you know, are still quite closed and narrow, you know, about not wanting to give their objects back. So it's like, it's a global issue, just like the climate, you know. So, yeah, talking of the climate, we want to do an exercise with you. It's an exercise that Rebecca does in these things called climate cafes. Maybe explain first what a climate cafe is about the exercise. Yeah.

48:26 Rebecca Nestor
So a climate cafe is a space where people come together to share their thoughts and feelings about the climate crisis, it's really, that's, that's it, it's really simple. We call it a cafe, because part of the experience is to share food and drink together and it might take place in an actual cafe. And the, but one of the ideas is that it's a space that may feel a little different from an ordinary cafe, because we're trying to create a bit of safety around the idea of sharing what might be very difficult feelings. And I'll maybe say a bit more about climate cafes after we've done the activity. But that's, I think, that's, I hope that's enough to be to be going on with and I want to ask you to take part in an activity that we do at the very beginning of each cafe, which is part of this intention to create a little bit of grounding. So Grace, and I have both got a basket, two baskets each of, I'm not going to leave my microphone behind when I stand up. What we've each got is two baskets of natural objects, they're mostly stones and shells because she wouldn't let me bring the other stuff because it would have made a mess.

49:47 Grace Ndiritu
No, no, no.

49:48 Rebecca Nestor
I did have pine cones and things but no. So the idea is that you take the basket if you would, and take one object from it and pass the basket round, and just sit with the object in your hand. Feeling it, feeling it's cool, or it's warmth. Feeling it settling into your hand. Looking at it, maybe wondering where it came from, what it is. Looking at the colours, the shape, what does it remind you of? What connections can you feel with it? I hope we have enough.

50:39 Grace Ndiritu
Does everyone have one?

50:41 Rebecca Nestor
If anyone doesn't have one, yes please pass the baskets around until they're completely empty. Okay. So, sit with your object, hold it in your hand, because the feeling is important. Get to know it. Say hello to it. As I say, remember what it reminds you off, what memories come up, what feelings are you aware of? And then turn around so that you are facing two or three other people, don't there's no need to get up and move but just wriggle around a little bit so that you're in a small group, no more than four will be good. So when you're settled, I understand it's not necessarily easy to find the right place. But when you're settled with a group of two or three other people, just then take it in turns to speak to each other, we're not going to ask you to share any of this in public. So it's a confidential group. And each of you take a minute or so to say something about your response to this item, this object in your hand, you may like to say something about what it reminds you of, perhaps it reminds you of going to the beach as a child. I've been in climate cafes where people have said, this fossil gives me a bit of hope because it reminds me of deep time and the huge changes that have taken place in the universe over that period. But it also makes me grieve because it make reminds me of death. And this object, this creature died so that I could hold it in my hand. So there could be all sorts of different feelings. It might be

completely, you know, playful and perhaps a little superficial. And that's completely fine. Anything that comes up for you, and just we'll just take five or six minutes, maybe for you each to speak to each other about this, and there'll be no feeding back afterwards. I'll just say briefly then, in a climate cafe, which would normally be a, you know, a much smaller group of the number of people who could fit round a table, we would go from that kind of introductions using the object to a discussion about or to a sharing of what are the feelings that I'm bringing to this space. And the idea of the use of a natural object is, and especially holding it in your hand, is that it has a kind of grounding and holding effect. Now it may not, not always, and it may not have necessarily been like for, been like that for you today. But the idea is that there is the fact of holding on to something from the nonhuman world is comforting in a strange way. It also brings up emotions and for people who are not used to talking about their feelings that can be helpful. So that's the idea. And I'll sit down now and I can see I'm louder than I meant to be. I'll sit down and we can we can say a bit more about climate cafes if you like.

54:52 Grace Ndiritu
Yes, yeah. One of the questions I had for you is yes, maybe you can explain a bit more about climate cafes but also the importance of group process, like why you're interested in group process and this kind of rites of passage and yeah how that comes into your work.

55:09 Rebecca Nestor
This is a big area for me. So shut me up if I'm going on too long about it. But I'm so I'm really, really interested in this. I think that just at a very straightforward level first, about three, four years ago, there was a big awakening to what's happening about the climate crisis in the parts of the country that I'm in touch with. So lots and lots suddenly of conversations about we've had this drought this summer, the trees in the park are dying, how can that even be possible, and perhaps that's about climate change, rather than just it's a hot summer. So

people really beginning to join up the dots. And of course, there was this is nearly four years ago, this was also the rise of extinction rebellion. So people were hearing these messages about, you know, this is really serious this is, we're facing extinction. And that applied also. So there's lots of people who maybe hadn't thought very much about climate change before, who were beginning to think about it, there were also loads of people who've been working on climate, all their lives, you know, in the environmental movement, for example, or just, you know, trying to do stuff about living more lightly on the planet. And those people too often, there was a real surprise that suddenly feeling how painful it was, you know, they've been working in this area all their lives have been not, I mean, feeling passionate and feeling energetic and feeling worried, but not feeling swamped with emotions, with fear, or with anxiety, or with rage, and that I think that was starting to happen. And so both of those groups of people, I think, benefit from climate cafes, up to a point, there are loads and loads of other different things we can do. But this is the thing that I do. And the idea is that it's a space where we can normalise talking about climate feelings, we can say, this is a collective problem. This is not somebody's individual mental health issue. So this is not the koala. And perhaps also, through talking, we can start to imagine what it might be like to work together on this stuff, rather than feeling, you know, I've got to, I'm the one who's got to cut down on eating meat, or I'm the one who's got to make sure that I turn the temperature down by one degree. And all of those things are important in our homes, but they're not the, they're not the scale of work that's needed. And also, they're very lonely and very isolating and individualist. And so it was, the idea was to create a space where we could feel that we were a collective. And also, and we'll come maybe come on to a bit more of this, the idea that for many people, it's like, I do not wish to be associated with the environmental movement, I do not wish to be seen as something to do with extinction rebellion, or my local green group, because that's not who I am. So that those feelings may have been a real part of the awakening in 2018, 2019 for

many people, it's like, but I've been leading this kind of life that assumes this isn't a problem. And I don't know that I really want to suddenly become an environmentalist. That's not me. And so a climate cafe is meant to be a really open space, where you know, you aren't going to have to do meditation, you might have to do a weird thing with a rock, but it won't last very long. And it will be an experience that's kind of familiar, you know, you're sitting around a table in a cafe, having a cup of coffee and a slice of cake. And you're talking about climate feelings. So you're kind of making it okay, for people in that kind of, it's part of their existing identity in a way.

58:57 Grace Ndiritu
And how does that connect with group process?

58:59 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, sorry, I missed that. Yeah, thanks for reminding me. So part of what we do in a climate cafe is to notice, so as facilitators, we will try to notice what's happening in the group. And we would say, it seems that we're very grieving today, or we're very full of anger today, you know, people might be really going on about how much they hate the government and loads of you know, those kinds of things might become noticeable. And so we would comment on the group process in that way. And that helps people to feel more again, you know, this is not just me, that my feelings are part of what's going on in the group.

59:40 Grace Ndiritu
But you're not re-traumatising yourselves, each other. I mean, how do you avoid, you know, because I've been working with trauma as well and how are you avoiding to not that you're not retraumatising yourself?

59:52 Rebecca Nestor
That's difficult and, and it doesn't, it's not always possible I think. So you might have a group of people who come together and a couple of them are really in the kind of

extinction zone. And they're really kind of despairing. And for some people joining a cafe, there may be that they've not really thought of that before. And so that's a real shock. And what we say is, all the feelings that are brought only feelings, they're not, we're not trying to persuade anybody of anything. And we're not trying to change anybody's mind or get or persuade people to do something. And so it's only a feeling, we can name a feeling, it doesn't mean we have to act on it. Okay. And that means that there is, and also because it's a lot of people, or, you know, say 10 people, you've got nobody's taking up all the space. And so nobody can kind of insist on this is, I'm going to tell you all about my trauma, or my really terrible feelings, because we know that we need to share, we have a process of taking it in turns. And so it's, I mean, it is really gentle. And it's not meant to be going very deep. We say at the beginning, this is not a therapy group, but you bring the feelings you want to bring. And it's a question. It's just putting them into words. And then moving on, and we reckon that is, it's not perfect, but it's a good way to start perhaps for some people.

1:01:20 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, I mean, I can relate to it, I guess, in my own practice of working with groups of people. So I started this project well, series of works called Healing The Museum in 2012, because I felt that museums were kind of dying, because, you know, they were very disconnected with what was going on outside, you know, politically, and also spiritually, so I started bringing different energies and different types of people into art spaces, through using shamanism and meditation, and one of these performances was called A Meal For My Ancestors. And this was done in Belgium, actually in Brussels. And it was I did a four month residency there. And it was just after the bombing, remember, there was the bombing in the airport there. And so the city was quite tense. And it was just at the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis. So remember how that was. And then I worked with two sets of groups of people. So one set of people were like, refugees

and migrants, and activists and I, like I'd go to where the refugees were, I'd meet the doctors and the psychologists, and then I invited them to come to free meditation classes for four months. And then and that was because you know, when people are very traumatised physically, it's much more about quietening the mind let's say, whereas I then also went to the parliament, and I did a little talk. And then I got people from the EU Parliament and from NATO, and from the UN and other people who work in different agencies, to also take part in the project. And for them, I did a creative visualisation, workshops, performance for free as well. And then at the end of that I brought the two groups of people together. And what was really interesting, because my idea was about how the power dynamics would be, because like, when you've got like, all these people lying on the floor, you know, you've got like, someone that works in a terrorist department next to a refugee next to, you know, a high court judge, you know, it really changes things, because in the end, you're just a body lying on the floor. And so this kind of idea of you said it was quite gentle. But this kind of gentle interrogation of oneself within a group and within the group, let's say, the group mind, it's a really powerful experience. And so the idea of this actual performance was to kind of think about how we can heal trauma. And what was interesting is that most people saw things on their shamanic journey that was about climate change. Okay. And so that was really fascinating because I don't prescribe what they're going to see, you know, I'm in the trance and they're going into trance, and you see what you see. But most people saw things to do with climate change. And then, in the project, there was a woman who works in the foreign office, and she kind of, she saw something really difficult to do with climate refugees. And then she decided to do something really, which I really thought was amazing and really very practical. Because of what she'd seen during this like, you know, spiritual performative moment, she decided to write this paper, about changing the law. for climate refugees, because at the moment, you know, if you're a refugee and you come to Europe for war or genocide, then you can, you know,

ask for asylum. But if you come for climate, you can't. So she started this think tank in the parliament and wrote this paper on the and you can read it. It's like, it's very formal. It's got graphs and things, but it comes out of what her vision was, that she saw on the shamanic journey. And for me, that was like, really important to see how like something so abstract and you know, non rational, these non rational methodologies can inform the practical, and, yeah, that's in terms of group process, I feel like those elements of you know, you could say, the sacred, but also the practical or the profound or the profane, it's important to come together, you know, it's not one or the other.

1:06:02 Rebecca Nestor
Indeed, and we'll talk in a minute about this space as perhaps as a representation of those things coming together. But I am really interested in this question about, how to put it. If you're getting people to go quite deep, and you know, in climate cafes, we are trying not to re-traumatise people, but there needs to be some kind of opportunity to share feelings, because otherwise kind of what are you there for really, because you've got to normalise it. So how do you, in your shamanic work and in your projects, which bring people together from all over all over the place, how do you manage that non re-traumatising work? What are you doing do you think that is good learning?

1:07:00 Grace Ndiritu
Well you have to you have to prepare people before they come. So for example, you know, there are certain protocols like here, we did this performance, you know, part of the idea of the temple is that we do performances, and events in it. And we did, I did this performance called Labour: Birth of a New Museum. So we asked 10 pregnant women in the second and third trimester to come and to go on a shamanic journey, and it was about finding the soul name of their babies, their unborn children. And my idea was, like, by connecting with the unborn, who are coming to this planet, you know, and having

to, they'll get a shock, when they come out, and they realise how messed up it is, that it's good to warn them, isn't it? You know, and also understand how the art space is a place for yeah, learning on all levels, you know, and that's the idea of the temple. But yeah, to answer your question, so for that, you know, there was a lot of preparation done in terms of like, telling people, well, they're pregnant, so they shouldn't be smoking, or drinking or taking drugs. But that's really key and making sure that people are psychologically ready to go on a journey, because it's a real thing, you know, real emotions come up and real, you know, it can be very cathartic. And it can also be very beautiful and very healing, you know in a gentle way, but generally, people feel transformed afterwards. And with the pregnant women, what's amazing, you know, is because they were in that moment of just, you know, just getting to know, their children, you know, before they come through, and by finding their soul names, that they start this relationship to them, you know, in the journey, but for me, what was key was talking to the children as a whole, so talking to all the 10 unborn, you know, children kind of like, telling them about how what the planet's like, what to expect, that their mothers are going to look after them, you know, it's like, yeah, it's like a preparation and, but the key to the preparation is this idea of when you come in a space, so whenever you go in a spiritual, like, even at a church or a sweat lodge, you cross the threshold, and it's the crossing of the threshold that begins the transformative part, you know, and that is part of like, when I was thinking about this idea of a spiritual overlay for the building. So what Canan was talking about, that the idea that you go through the different galleries and you change, you transform, and, you know, even in the titles of the galleries, I was thinking about what kind of journey the viewer would need to go through in order to kind of somehow be affected. And like, for example, in the space next door in Celine's space, you know, there's a lot of AV, there's a lot of film. And but in here, it's like, usually there's nothing, it's dead silent, it's quiet. And so how these differences, visual differences, and sensory differences can change you. Yeah, I

think in that way, it's the same as holding space. And I think, you know, when you work with healing and shamanism, the key is to hold the space, you know, so to make people feel that they can let go. And, you know, I only ask people to do things that I've done hundreds of times, I don't ask people to do things I've never done. Because it would be unethical, you know, but yeah, and I'm really proud of everybody that has participated in these things. And I, you know, people write to me after and they say, Oh, I experienced this, I saw that, you know, and it seems to work.

1:11:05 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, it's amazing. And it sounds to me, like, if you took a climate cafe, that would be a very first step towards, I mean, for many people, it might be a really significant step towards the threshold of the kind I was talking about earlier, where people might feel okay, I'm now somebody who talks, who worries about climate and wants to do something about it. So at a very, kind of fairly straightforward level, it's still a big threshold. But it's a very, in terms of a kind of continuum of what feels ordinary, inside, close to me, part of ordinary day to day life, it's fairly at that end, whereas for many people, I think your work may feel quite a big step. And so I'm kind of, I'm sort of interested in where that line is, for people, for different people, you know, what feels like a real step into the unknown, or, perhaps a step into something that feels like a bit weird or a bit strange or a bit difficult. And I'm interested in where that line was for you, when you started doing this kind of work, and how you work with it.

1:12:19 Grace Ndiritu
Well, I think I'm a person that's enjoyed being in difficult spaces, because, you know, like, since, like I said, since I was a kid, I've been in many different cultures, but I've also put myself on many, like long retreats or very difficult, you know, silent, you know, when you can't speak, you can't read, you can't write, or you're sitting in a cell for hours and sensory deprivation, and I kind of enjoy that, you know, because, you

know, you're learning something about oneself, the bigger self than you do in you know, I mean, it's the balance of going to Tescos, isn't it, and, you know, being in the monk's cell, you know, but, and, but for me, I guess one of the biggest tests was when I yeah, in 2012, decided to give up living in London and go and live in the nature and in these rural communities. And, you know, I've been, before that I'd gone to Burning Man festival, by myself, I've been in New Zealand, Wolfie, I dipped in and out, but I hadn't, like committed it. But then in 2012, I just threw most things away. And I was like, okay, I'm doing it, I'm going off. And so that was like, fascinating to be, you know, because sometimes I'd be like, in very strict disciplinary places, like a monastery where you literally live by the gong, 4:30am you're up, you're meditating, six o'clock breakfast, 7.30, you're cleaning something, 8 o' clock you meditate, you know, like, it's really structured. And then sometimes I'd go and live in completely opposite places. I went to live with the Hare Krishnas to see what they were like, and they drove me nuts, because they had no discipline, you're laughing. They've got no discipline, and they don't even have locks on their doors. You know, there's no privacy. You know, it's like the complete opposite. And that to me was way too much. You know, but it was really interesting to go as an experiment. Like, I really thought there's got to be a better way than living in the small, flat in London, you know, what's it going to be like? And there were good things that I learned about, you know, being in groups, but there's also what was fascinating is to see how the same problems in the city are reflected in those communities like racism, sexism, classism, you know, because they're mostly white middle class people living in those communities, and how, you know, this especially communities that started in this 60s, you know how they've peaked? You know, because they had like, they galvanised the ecological communities and permaculture communities, you know, they set themselves up. But now they're like super expensive, luxurious, you know, like Findhorn. It started in a caravan. And now it's like these amazing designer buildings. And so yeah, that was really interesting to see. But also

this constant negotiation of, yeah, let's say, a thresholds of whether to go to the city or not, because I came up with this rule of, I'd only go to the city when it was necessary. Like I wouldn't. Yeah, so if I had an appointment, or I really had to go there, otherwise, I didn't want to go there. And so sometimes I'd ask curators to come, you know, to the countryside, and it was a real hassle. Some of them didn't want to get on the country bus, or, you know, sometimes it was a real drama. But like, yeah, I was really like, and also my ideas about economy changed, and these ideas about gift culture, and a lot about sacred economics, you know, and that filtered down into my artwork, because then I start doing more social practice. So yeah, things like The Ark, the project where I kind of started my own community and invited scientists and artists to live off grid in the outskirts of Paris, and then, and COVERSLUTS, as well, which is about fashion and economics. But this is all informed from living in these communities.

1:16:37 Rebecca Nestor
And it's sounding to me, like there's a kind of coming together with the discipline, and then drifting away from the discipline, and, you know, power structures and class structures come in somehow, and it becomes as you say, becomes privileged, and then maybe something comes around again, and you recreate it as a community. I'm thinking, I'm reminded here, and I hadn't thought about this before we were speaking just now, but thinking about my dad, who is who's a follower of Gurdjieff, and who has been part of a Gurdjieff farm for about 50 years now. And watching him with that experience, and the way he kind of the way they all kind of come in and out of it, and people leave and come back, and how they hold the question of staying with the truth, but not being fixated by it, I think is really, really, really difficult. And he goes through phases of not being involved, because it's too hard. And then he kind of goes back in and maybe that's sounds a little bit like your patterns of trying it out and experiencing it in different places.

1:17:58 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, so going in and out, but also sometimes really committing to it and also being jealous of people who just, you know, like, because mine was, my issue was always like, okay, that means I have to give up art, I really, you know, like, there was a point when I was in the forest community

in Argentina, and there's no electricity there. So to do an email I have to walk to the town, so there was this point where I'm gonna have to choose between one or the other, because you can't reconcile them at that moment. And so, yeah, it's been an evolution of like, trying to decide, you know, how to put those two things together I would say.

1:18:43 Rebecca Nestor
How we doing?

1:18:43 Grace Ndiritu
Yes, I think I think we're doing okay.

1:18:51 Rebecca Nestor
There's something I wanted to say about defenses just briefly, because I think this is a big part of climate psychology work, that we need defenses because we've got to cope, and they are, you know, defenses against the really painful feelings. And just wanting to say that I think when we're faced with a sort of line of, can I go over that line? Can I could I really see myself in that other space? That perhaps what we might need to notice is what are the defenses that are coming up that stop us doing that, and that are getting in the way, and it might be to do with identity, or it might be you know, I'm it might be feeling really anxious that something is just going to come out and we won't be able to control it. And I think that's, you can imagine that with the idea of sharing feelings in a climate cafe, but it's also about the kind of bigger questions about who I want to be in the world.

1:19:55 Grace Ndiritu
But is that about, you know, because we've been talking a bit about food, you know, like and how, in terms of the relationship of food to the climate, you know, like, not just food malls and kind of, yeah, thinking, oh, I bought this avocado and now I felt really guilty, because I know the avocado again from there. So then having a grieving period before you eat the avocado or just blatantly going fuck the avocado, I'm just gonna eat the avocado kind of thing. Yeah, like, you know, because, yeah, but then this idea of like, where, because food is an everyday thing that 99% of the population eat food every day. So how you deal with that, you know? And is it, you know, as a defense mechanism? Or is it like,

you know, eating disorders, it's about control, you know, like, you're controlling your environment, you're controlling your body.

1:20:52 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, yeah. And I think food and those kind of dilemmas about, am I going to eat this avocado are really, food and climate is of course, as you say, it's the kind of there's a kind of factual thing about do we, what do we need to eat? And how do we manage that? And then there's the very individualist, you know, I am going to make these choices. And this is going to help me control things. And I think for somebody who's really struggling with climate feelings, often a way of managing those is to say, you know, I'm going to eat these things, but not these things. And it has echoes of struggles with with eating difficulties with with food generally. And so, I have a bit of a dilemma about climate cafes, because, you know, the idea is, this is a space where we might have a nice slice of cake together. Well, for some people, that's not okay. And for other people as well, there may be a question of what kind of cake, you know, is that going to be a vegan cake. Yeah, and this was a, this was quite an issue, when we first started doing them, I may have got a bit more relaxed about it, and I'm kind of, I'm not, I'm just the cake is cake, you know, eat it or not. But and because I think the other point of this is the hospitality and the sharing and the coming together over food, which is so which as you know, is really important, that for me kind of takes precedence over those questions of control. But the I suppose the other thing about those issues of control is we're allowing our shame, to stop us doing things, you know, we feel really ashamed about what we're eating, and whether we're keeping up. You know, whether we're eating meat and all of those things, and it kind of, it takes our attention away from the bigger scale of what's needed, it seems to me and of course, we need to take individual action we need, we can't just say it doesn't matter what I do, because it does matter, because that's a defense too, but to be able to say, okay, I'm not gonna let these feelings stop me being who I need to be, doing what is needed for climate.

1:23:09 Grace Ndiritu
I mean, I've had different phases, like when I was younger, and I had a guru, and, you know, we did a lot of fasting a lot of 10 day rice diet, you know, and it was very strict. I even used to make my own toothpaste

out of clay and, you know, sea salt and stuff. And then I went, I then I normalised again, because that was also the thing about living in nature a lot of time. Then I started to think, what about the people in the city, there needs to be a dialogue with the people in the city, you know, you can't just escape, you know, run off, the I think those days are gone, like we just escape, you know, there has to be this relationship thing. And, yeah, in terms of food, I think, you know, part of the project, A Meal For My Ancestors was this idea of commenciality, because the idea of the meal was that it was a physical meal, and also a spiritual meal. And so like in terms of the physical meal, I invited the general public because I organised this conference, where I invited a doctor from Texas to come and talk about commenciality and the health benefits of eating together. And also, I invited a shaman to come and show scans, brain scans, because she was working with the Savant to show how, you know what happens when you're in trance. So the effect on your physical body, and so that was kind of part of the conference, and then I invited the general public to bring food. And it was really funny because with the patrons of the place I was doing the residency, they didn't believe people would bring food. They were like, no, we have to organise, we have to have a schedule, we have to have this, you know, and I was like, no people will bring food, people will bring food and like 90 people came and they brought so much food. And we had too much food in the end and from all cultures and things, and it was like really fascinating, you know, and so that was like kind of the physical meal. But then the spiritual meal, like I said, I was working for four months giving free creative visualisations, lessons to like the people who worked in these staff agencies. So people that work in UN and NATO, they have very, their physical safety is really high. You know, they feel, you know, they have enough money to live, they have a nice life, but their mental anxiety and confusion is crazy, because the ones that I was working with are generally you could say good people, but they're stuck in these kind of bureaucratic jobs, which means that they have no creative abilities, you know, in terms of like, bending rules, getting round things, you know, more human-ness, let's say, and so I started doing this, it's a Tibetan Buddhist technique called feeding your demons. And so we would get the people who are like, let's say, in those agencies, so for example, there was a guy, he was a high court judge in Lille, and he does all the terrible asylum cases. So people who are trying to, refugees who are trying to get to England,

but they get stuck in Lille, or Calais, he has to deal with, like, so he's changing people's lives every day, isn't he? And he's not doing it just like, nonchalantly, he's like, thinking about everybody, like, he's trying to do it properly, you know, but imagine the pressure of trying to do that job properly. And knowing that you're ruining, you know, yeah, and so yeah, so he was part of this, yeah, these classes that I would give on feeding your demons. And then, and the idea of that is trying to find the part of you that is kind of dissociated, or feels guilty, or trauma or shame, you know, and that can come out through over smoking or over using your computer or your social media, you know, it can, and then using that part of you and kind of taking it out of your body and kind of personifying it, and then you like, basically have a conversation with it, and then you absorb it back. So then you re-eat it, let's say, and so this idea of having a spiritual meal, and a real meal was really important to the project. Because when you talk about healing trauma for me, there were like, you know, you can use meditation, you can do shamanism, but food is key, you know, within this art context, you know, which I work in. And but what was really funny as well, in the conference, I invited some people that work at the parliament to come as well. And we had like a panel discussion. So with the doctor, the shaman, me and a guy from the parliament, and to debate whether shamanism can become like a new healing modality, you know, like mindfulness and meditation is quite normal nowadays, you know, if you go to your doctor, he might prescribe for you that you should go and do meditation, you know. And so, like, how shamanism also has big health benefits. And so we kind of had this debate whether in Europe, you know, it could be part of the health system, you know, I mean, it isn't so far.

1:28:47 Rebecca Nestor
But maybe there'll be a paper written in the way that there was about the refugees.

1:28:50 Grace Ndiritu
There'll be a paper, exactly. Maybe it's nice to open to the public. Yeah, sure. Yeah. Has anybody got any questions?

1:29:01 Rebecca Nestor
What questions do you have?

1:29:04 Grace Ndiritu
If not, we'll just carry on talking.

1:29:08 Rebecca Nestor
We'd love some, we'd love some questions. And thoughts, there's Sam.

1:29:19 Sam Thorne
Thanks so much, first of all. Grace, so you left? You made this decision 10 years ago, to say goodbye to cities. Right. And you came back to cities, you live in Brussels now. What, why did you come back? What changed your mind?

1:29:40 Grace Ndiritu
Well, it isn't what changed my mind. It was more that when it was that choice of whether to stay, you know, in let's say more spiritual places, like monasteries or whatever, or having to give up being an artist. You know, there was a point where I really wanted to do a project called COVERSLUT. The fashion project - COVERSLUT is about working with different local communities and making fashion and selling it as pay what you can, and using that money to make ecological collections. That's the basic. And it's like, democratic in the sense of like it, we have an anti sweatshop so everybody gets paid something. And, you know, it's we work issues with class and race and gender, and this idea of like, who has the right to be fashionable? And so in order to do that project, I had to kind of stay still. Because before that, for six years, I was very nomadic, I just had two bags, and I was like moving around between communities and different countries and whatever. But then for that, I kind of had to embed myself in this community. And I found like a local textile studio in Ghent that was kind of on the, you know, against a very beautiful, touristy place, but there's like a Turkish neighborhood, which is a bit poorer. And that's where the textile studio was, and I thought, I've got to, I'm going to have to live here for a bit to get to know, otherwise COVERSLUT won't work, you know, because otherwise, you're just coming in, you know, hovering, and then you know, doing something top down and then leaving. So, I ended up being there, like 18 months, and we did like five collections, all different fashion collections and different events. And, you know, one of those things was, like, I would see, like, most of the ladies were, like old Turkish ladies, and I'd see them at the

bus stop, and I'd see them in the park, you know, and so, I started to understand how, really test my theory out about what fashion can be, you know, it can be obviously, you know, haute couture and you know, high catwalks and everything, but it can also be this other thing. And, yeah, and so that's why I came back to the city. And then Brexit and the lockdown happened. And so I was like, okay, you know, I happened to be there, you know. And then I moved to Brussels, but you know what I mean, I happened to be there. So I just carried on, you know, but before that I had planned to go back to the countryside, you know, into nature, but now I've kind of tried to set it up where at least two months, one to two months a year, I go to different communities because I'm still in touch with a lot of people in different communities, like last summer I was in Romania, in well Transylvania in the forest there in a spiritual festival. And, you know, so I have lots of connections with people. This summer, I'm hoping to go to Australia, because a friend of mine, he's Brook Andrews, he's an amazing artist. He's an Aborigine. And so we're going to go and we're going to do a lot of work with Aborigine women, like his family and his ancestors, and work with them in terms of healing techniques, and, like stuff that you can't, you couldn't do, you know, you just couldn't do without a local person, you know, you just wouldn't have that access. And I think that's really key. For me, it's really still important to, you know, especially with indigenous communities to be learning knowledge, exchanging knowledge. And yeah, maybe one day, we'll just go back and live in the countryside or nature.

1:33:28 Rebecca Nestor
But it sounds like it's to do with you go partly, you go where the work is. And partly, it's not I am this, or I am that. But at the moment, I'm doing this, and so I'm here. Yes. And that, so that's kind of something that will constantly be shifting.

1:33:44 Grace Ndiritu
And I think it's fluid.

1:33:45 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, absolutely. And of course, that's getting more harder, isn't it?

1:33:48 Grace Ndiritu

Yeah, right now.

1:33:50 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah, absolutely. And we and whether we will continue to be able to move around in the way that you have, we've got to, we have to face up to that being getting harder and harder. I don't mean, because we've got to be good and not fly. But because the because increasingly national borders are going up. And yeah.

1:34:09 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, but the whole flying thing is really interesting. Because about five years ago, I made a calculation, I sat down and I literally wrote the calculation of my flights versus because I don't drive and I don't have any children. So versus my carbon footprint. I worked out and I worked out that if I fly, the amount that I think will fly, and I tried to reduce some food miles, it will equal the same as if I had two children and you know, and drove a car. So yeah, I think that I think everybody should sit down and try to work it out. Like because it's fascinating, you know, not to feel guilty about it, but just to look at what you're doing as a human being like, you know, you sit down and do your taxes, you know, you have to do practical things, this is just a part of life like just sit down and go, okay, I do that, I do that, maybe I can do less of that, maybe I can do more of that. But just do it in a very guilt free dissociate, you know what I mean?

1:35:13 Rebecca Nestor
Straightforward kind of way. And understanding the numbers, because it's so easy for defenses to come into that isn't it, it's kind of not actually realising that there's a big difference between one thing and another thing in terms of you can't equate turning the temperature down a bit to transatlantic flights or whatever. So it's so how you work that out needs to be accurate and number based. And while of course, at the same time, we're all dealing with the inherited guilt and shame and anxiety. And so that makes it more difficult and just allowing, creating yourself a bit of space to do it, treating it like the taxes. Well it was a really interesting metaphor.

1:35:55 Grace Ndiritu
No but like because you have to do it. It's just a function of life.

1:36:00 Rebecca Nestor
And its numbers.

1:36:01 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, yeah, exactly. But also, I think what's important is to understand what you can and cannot live without, like, I don't think because of the way I grew up, like, in an airport, going to Kenya coming to, you know, like, to me, that's a second home, like, it's a normal place. You know, so when, let's say, without the pandemic, if I haven't been to the airport for like, three months, six, I start to feel weird, I do start to feel, whereas somebody else they might feel that about their car, if they don't go on a car trip, or they don't, you know, drive for once a week, they start to feel, so you have to figure out what kind of person you are. Yeah, really, and what you can live with and what you can't live with, live without.

1:36:49 Rebecca Nestor
And what you might need to grieve the loss of? That seems to be really important. So sometimes, we kind of go through a process of saying, well, for a while, I'm not going to give that up. I can't give that up. But then we maybe kind of find ourselves thinking actually, maybe I do need to give that up. And so that process involves a bit of grieving, I think.

1:37:09 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah, and changing as well and understanding okay, I need to adapt, you know, so like, I think most people have well, I know, in the art world, most people have decided, okay, I mean, because now we can do so many things by zoom. You know, you can do zoom talks, you can have zoom meetings, you don't, you know, you don't have to like go, you know, go to the place all the time. So it's like, I mean, the reason why we could have done this on zoom, I guess. But the reason why I wanted to do this is also because of this idea of being in this architecture, and having the shared energy.

1:37:46 Rebecca Nestor
So tell us about this space.

1:37:48 Grace Ndiritu
Well, yeah, so basically, I've always been looking at traditional

indigenous architecture, like, like we were saying sweat lodges, but also my grandmother, she used to live in Adobe huts, you know, where you like crawl through, and like, there's a fire in the middle. And so I have those kind of memories in me and, you know, also visiting different types of architecture, like in permaculture places and things and thinking about what that means to me. But also now in this, we've kind of mixed it with this idea of a modernist display structure. So how you know, art can be, we can live with art, and sit with art, and, you know, have it but we can also still use the space as a communal space. Like in a lot of traditional indigenous communities who have meeting halls, you know, you can have, like, I was telling you earlier, I've just been invited to this, I'm not, going to go there, to this indigenous Film Festival in New Zealand, and it's taking place in one of their traditional meeting houses, and then they have the films and they, and like, yeah, that's really amazing that you can have a ceremonial space that is flexible, you know? And has meetings and groups of people and how is that that's embedded into the architecture? Because I start to think about this idea of spiritual technologies and how the building is kind of you know, at the beginning of the project I started to think about how the building is a kind of mothership, you know, that we're in and you know, how that feeds down and it literally fed down to doing that performance with the pregnant women, like being in a mothership. But this also yeah, how this can be this, this type of how architecture is a type of spiritual technology.

1:39:45 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah. And the the ordinariness of some of the objects in here seemed to me to be really part of that, you know, the little figure over there that I just loved. The clay, what's the, oh yeah, the owl, there's something really

1:40:02 Grace Ndiritu
Yeah Chiara's.

1:40:02 Rebecca Nestor
There's something so kind of ordinary and the ordinariness and the kind of almost grandness of the shape, I just think it's really important and for me that just connects with something that I think is important in my life

is to be able to manage both the ordinary and the day to day on the one hand and the spiritual.

1:40:28 Grace Ndiritu
Yes, yeah, yeah this grandeur.

1:40:30 Rebecca Nestor
And you've got more kind of depth of exploration of bringing those two things together. But for me, that's kind of an ordinary response to an extraordinary place.

1:40:43 Grace Ndiritu
Is there another question?

1:40:45 Rebecca Nestor
Yes, the lady there, the mics coming.

1:40:51 Audience member
So half question, half comment, wasn't quite sure what I was coming to tonight. I sort of knew, but I didn't know if you know what I mean, and I think I've been slightly surprised by the focus on trauma. And I understand why that is. But I'm just trying to think it through. And you've also mentioned quite a lot about motherhood and a number of things associated with that in terms of symbolism. And then you also mentioned being in New Orleans, and it's quite interesting because I was reflecting back in that arc of time, I have had my daughter, and she was born at the point of just I had her and then 9/11 happened like a month after, when she was 18 months, we went to New Orleans, a year later, Katrina happened, we happened to go to Egypt on a lovely holiday, you know, blah, blah, blah. And the next year was the Arab Spring. All I'm saying is for her,

1:41:59 Grace Ndiritu
You're doing it, you're ruining the world.

1:42:02 Audience member
So I'm thinking more from my daughter's point of view. And she's grown up in the last 20 years, and every person who's gone through, you know,

20 years will always have those seismic things. As an adult, with a daughter, I could never allow her to, not allow her, I tried to find lots of ways that she never experienced life traumatically. And what I find this coming across to me in what you're saying is, and I don't know how you deal with this, there's obviously you've got an audience coming in here who don't necessarily agree with the particular way that you're looking at things, it's a public funded place, and all the rest of it. And I suppose the way that I see it a bit more is that what we experience is contradictions of a society that is both creative and destructive. And it's in our ability to solve problems. And I think that's the reason why I'm slightly reacting to experience everything in this sort of way of trauma, cause I don't feel guilt. Because I think the fact that we've got, you know, 7 billion people living in the world, the fact that many, many more people live in cities, the fact that people don't live in abject poverty, but we simultaneously have not solved the problems we need to solve. So I'm probably, it's not like I'm cup half full versus cup half empty. I just think there human problems we have to solve. And I think art is a connection that you have with the world around you. But I don't feel disconnected from it, it's a problem we have to solve. And so I, I think it's my responsibility as an adult that my daughter doesn't feel traumatised, that you have conversations about what you can and can't do. And I'm, there's a lot of her friends who are traumatised by the pandemic, and all these sorts of things. And I think we've got to take some responsibility here. So I've just, I'm having quite strong reactions to what you're saying. So I just needed to weave it together a little bit to say, there's an arc here as adults, that we need to have a slightly different relationship to this discussion and how we have these conversations. So an Annie Albers, love her, so it was lovely to come to the exhibition for that, so sorry, if I went on a bit, but I've just, it's not a question, but it's a whole experience of the exhibition, which I spent quite a lot of time at, and, how you're relating to a person versus how I'm relating to the problem.

1:44:35 Grace Ndiritu
Yes, but it doesn't sound like there's an issue, like from what you're saying that you've found a balanced way to be able to be in the world and to be a constructive person and to deal with things.

1:44:47 Audience member

Yes I think I don't see a climate emergency and that's the difference.

1:44:51 Grace Ndiritu
Ah okay that's what you mean. Yes.

1:44:56 Rebecca Nestor
And so I think it's that thing of is there a risk of something happening and how likely is it. And I think a lot of the things aren't going to happen in the way that everything's lumped in, and there's going to be this catastrophic disaster that's going to come like a meteorite, there are lots of individual things, and a lot of them are very unlikely to happen. And that's how you then for me, deal with the problems and how you then relate to the world around you, and the art encompasses your fears and feelings and experiences. But I think there's a very important thing that I think we're in danger of me leaving people unable to deal with what are things that you can deal with?

1:45:42 Grace Ndiritu
No, I mean, I would say, yeah, I think that's the joke of that film, Don't Look Up, there isn't going to be just one catastrophe, one big catastrophe that's going to happen, and, you know, wipe everyone out and mess everything up. It's more that these there's little things, it's step by step, step by step, and then you go past the tipping point, and there are two tipping points, I remember was talking about, there's the tipping point of climate tipping point, you know, which we haven't, to, for some people, we haven't gone past, for some scientists we have gone past. And then like, for example, with indigenous cultures, they think that there's already been a relational tipping point, you know, that went past with slavery and colonialism. And you know, and that does affect how, and why we because if we you see the earth, not you personally, but people see the Earth as a dead object just as a resource in which they can just excavate and take things, then you're completely undermining your own humanity, because you're killing your own home, you know what I mean? And so if we carry on down that route, then there's no way of us kind of resolving anything. And so what I was trying to say earlier, yes, we can resolve things with technology. But we also need to resolve things in conversation with groups of people who have been around for longer, you know, because a lot of indigenous groups have

been around for thousands and thousands and thousands of years and have experienced extreme weather changes, you know, already. And so and have experienced extinctions in terms of human extinctions like smallpox, you know, which was a kind of a pandemic, you know, it's the same kind of thing. So, how and why not, you know, understand and learn from that.

1:47:37 Rebecca Nestor
Yeah. I mean, I would just add that I think the, one of the difficulties about climate in particular, but all the interlocking things, the intersecting things like the pandemic, where we hope we're coming out of now and maybe the possibility of future pandemics, the war that is taking place in Europe and the wars that have been taking place in other parts of the world that we don't pay quite so much attention to in this country. And really, crucially, the uncertainties about all of those things. And I think people have different ways of responding to uncertainty. And I completely respect what you're saying that this is not one great big emergency. We don't know, we can't say this is definitely happening or and we're not also in a position to say, humanity and the earth will be wiped out. It's the how we how we respond to the changes and the way as Grace puts it, there's kind of step by step and interlocking things. So how we deal with that, at a human level is for me, like the big work of our time, and you've just put your finger on it. So thank you.

1:48:52 Grace Ndiritu
Okay, well, thank you for coming. And yes.

1:48:57 Rebecca Nestor
Thank you Grace.