

studioELL

Chloë Bass

February 2021

“As a person who’s used to living in a metropolis, I love the feelings of being alone public, the interstitial spaces that are a necessity when we spend so much time get from place to place, mostly in view of / in indirect contact with other people. I recall during the pandemic, the feeling of being in some random location and getting the a major event.”

Chloë Bass (born 1984, New York) is a multiform conceptual artist working in performance, situation, conversation and installation. Her work uses daily life as a site of deep research to address scales of intimacy: where patterns as group sizes expand. She began her work with a focus on the individual (*The Bureau of Self-Recognition*, 2011 recently concluded a study of pairs (*The Book of Everyday Instruction*, 2015–2018), and will continue to scale up she’s working at the scale of the metropolis. She is currently working on *Obligation To Others Holds Me in My Place* 2022, an investigation of intimacy at the scale of immediate families.

Chloë received an MFA in Performance & Interactive Media at Brooklyn College, CUNY, and a BA in Theatre Studies at New York University. Her projects have appeared nationally and internationally, including recent exhibits at The Studio Museum in Harlem, Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven, BAK basis voor actuele kunst, the Knockdown Center, the Kitchen, the Brooklyn Museum, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space, The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, the and elsewhere. She is an Assistant Professor of Art at Queens College, CUNY, where she co-runs *Social Practice Q*



Image courtesy of the artist



Wayfinding, 2019

Laser Printing on Aluminum

5 x 8 in.

Image courtesy of the artist

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work investigates the potential of the everyday as a catalyst for intimacy. I'm captivated by the common, dense human experience: the things that people do always. I highlight the seemingly normal as a means of questioning. Originally trained as a theater director, I still embrace aspects of Brecht's idea of alienation: the discomfort that is created by calling attention to structure through naming or pointing. That disconnect appears most clearly for me as a rupture in ourselves, and what we do without thinking. These usually unnoticed acts serve as my primary method of production and inquiry. My work evokes the particular state of attention produced by being alone in public: the sudden sense of being seen, the fascinating, the strange anxiety between feeling invisible and suddenly becoming aware that you are seen.

Now I engage theater's collaborative, multi-disciplinary form through various aspects of myself. Everything that I create – situations, installations, performances – leads my participants through interconnected layers of considered engagement. Bringing these forms together, it is my desire to build a unified and multivalent world with a variety of entry points.

serves both as translation and as layering, manifesting a density of inquiry while maintaining a flexibility for new information to change the story. My hope is always that this continued questioning will encourage audiences, over differently – not in a grand sense, but simply and enduringly.

I have many influences, divided here into rough categories. For rigor, connection, and creep factor: Adrian Piper, Vito Acconci. For use of language: Claudia Rankine, Frank O'Hara, and Stanley Broun. For structure/archiving: Charles and Ray Eames. Additionally, as so much of my work draws from immediate experience of the world, I'm people I watch on the street, the group behaviors that manifest through internet culture, and signage in public places (when meant for private eyes). Some elements of my projects always already exist, and it's just a matter of finding familiar structures —bureaucracy, social rituals, therapy, and games — to inspire participation and destabilize as I am full of questions that I answer through shared play.

I study the depth of what is already at hand. My work is not seeking to invent, but to reveal. I believe in performance, participation, and installation as scrutiny. If I succeed, I will become the world's most invisible performance artist present, but unseen. Without you, my work is nothing.



Chloë Bass: work in progress
Image courtesy of the artist

IN DISCUSSION

john ros / As I wander through your website, which is a beautiful archive of your work, it's exciting to see everything together in a culmination of the everyday — every action — all interactions — regardless of how grand or minute or simple. Moments reverberate off one another and illustrate an exhaustive commitment to reflection, surroundings

— but also pause. There is a timelessness, which might be odd, because your work happens in real time — here which is present then past. There is also rhythm — moments click metronome beats as movements sync between participant-turned-performer. Text follows us consistently — through spaces, public and private; it envelops and keeps time and key.

I settle on your statement, which is where I would like to start: “the potential of the everyday as a catalyst for intimacy, I imagine a viewer’s connection to the work/experience; our connections to space, place, connections to our specific past/lineage; and our connections to each other. Are these the intimacies you are reflecting most in line to your thought process and aim?”

I also love the notion that your work is “not seeking to invent, but to reveal.” This feels concrete yet lyrical. Would you say that YOU are also not seeking to invent, but to reveal? Your choice of “My work...” in that statement is very interesting. I imagine as a multiform conceptual artist ‘the artist’ and ‘the work’ may share common space? How much connection between the self and the artist — the everyday and the studio practice?

Chloë Bass / Well, thank you first for this description of my website, which has certainly never, to my knowledge, received a poetic response before. Something I reflect on a lot, often when talking to students (my own, or when I’m a visitor at other schools), is some feedback that I got about an old version of my website while I was in the AIM program at the Museum. The late, great Jane Farver had come in to give the cohort of artists advice about our websites, which she discussed carefully in advance of her visit. When it came time to discuss mine, she said, among other things, the very succinct “pictures of people talking are boring.”

I think there’s a tendency in the fields of social practice and performance to offer documentation of a work as a record of an experience that’s really only experienced by those who were present. Of course other artists document their work and sculptors offer installation and detail view images of pieces that are certainly very different in all kinds of ways (texture, to name a few) when they’re experienced in a physical space. But I think Jane was right: there is something boring about documentation of bodies doing something together that you, the viewer, were unable to share or participate in.

None of this is really an answer to the question that you asked, which is the connection between the everyday and studio practice — or, really, the connection between my *self* and my work. When I did more performance-based work that featured, me as a performer, I sometimes got funny feedback like, “I don’t really know where you are in your work.” My answer seemed obvious: *I’m right here*. Like: literally, my body and voice are right here in front of you, that’s what that’s not what people mean when they say things like that; what they mean is more, like, “I didn’t get that you were present in this piece you presented,” or: “the emotions of this piece that you presented didn’t quite connect for me, so they must have been absent.”

Now, when I produce more text-based, conceptual and public work, I face a different, interesting problem. Because of the relative intimacy of the text — words that, regardless of the scale on which they appear, speak to the inner parts of us that often remain secret even to themselves — viewers often feel like they know me, or know something meaningful about me by seeing/reading a particular piece or project. And honestly, although the text is based in feelings, I never said to you that they were my feelings. I never promised that these words were about me. But because they really do seem to reach you, viewers assume that I am highly present in them. Which I am, but maybe not in the ways you might think.

Nat Trotman, who has spoken with me about my work a few times, once joked that my practice is “inter-studio” or post-studio. I took it upon myself to come up with a definition, as follows: *inter-studio, adjective: the being between things. “I moved out of my previous workspace and I don’t yet know where the next one will be.” studio, noun: the ability to work from anywhere. “I just made art progress on the subway,” or “I get my best work done on the subway.”*

from the public.” In the inter-studio reality, the separation between art and life can be thin, for sure. But that doesn't just because I'm the artist, it's my life that becomes the material, or that all life is subject for inclusion in the work. As another creative practitioner, I edit, refine, select, reject, and shape through my work's intentions; I say “my work's intentions are not always, or even often, synonymous with my own.



Kat V.

Chatsworth, CA

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★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆ 1/12/2013 · 🔄 Updated review

Came here today to see an exhibition on break-ups upon invitation from a friend. Having recently gone through one (I did it through calling), this exhibition provided a little comic relief. At one point, I had to use the bathroom. Quite stark & clean. And only 1 toilet! Seriously, seriously! I have a GI disorder where sometimes I have to use the bathroom at a moment's notice. Sometimes, you don't know what's real in an art place like this. There is a gorgeous outdoor endless pool that looked like there was water bubbling. Only, it was raining. Quite an illusion. You don't realize it's really raining until you look outside the entrance.

👍 Useful 2

😄 Funny 4

👌 Cool 3

Chloë Bass: studio

Image courtesy of the artist

Example of bad automatic captions (that cause a fire)

Spoken text:

"Broil on high for **4 to 5 minutes**. You should **not** preheat the oven."

Automatic caption:

"Broil on high for **45 minutes**. You should **know to** preheat the oven."



Chloë Bass: studio

Image courtesy of the artist

jr / Yes, the website is a great example of the conundrum of documenting something meant to be an active experience with the possibility of being boring — which I'm not sure is necessarily wrong in the right context — representing my work risks not only allowing the image to become a stand-in for the piece, but also allows for the possibility of it becoming fetishistic as something that becomes contained in a more digestible form. I wonder how these images functioned and how they might have occupied your site before? Perhaps we get a glimpse in the documentation from 2012, in the [Interactions & Play](#) section of your projects?

Inter-studio is a good word. Your definition is on point, while revealing the very thing it is describing. I think of it as while in the studio. “Making” involves all modes within this idea of inter-studio — or is omni-studio more fitting

practice? Basically, depending on your type of studio practice, you might always find yourself in your practice, not at hand. A thin line for sure! Is that in-between space activating for you or something you think about throughout

I am also interested in your “editor” here. As you “edit, refine, select, reject, and shape” how does life push against? Does life ever become fully materialized? I imagine many things come close during the process or even through *Obligation To Others Holds Me In My Place*, 2018, comes to mind. How do you decide between the nonfictional and the fictional? When does the editor persist? Is there a counterpart to the editor? When do they persist?

CB / It’s true! Boring can be right in the right context! But I think the internet is, perhaps, not that context — or the website/social media element of the internet, which is mostly used for attention-grabbing, aka advertising: of your “brand,” of your *self*. What you say about the fetish of the image is also very real. Since many experiential works as a small handful of regularly circulated photographs, these images of what happened (a single still shot from a particular perspective) become many people’s “memory” or knowledge of what the work was. When in fact, as we know, it’s a false representation: it’s a frozen moment depicting a moving (in space, and/or in time), changing thing. If you look at it a moment later, or a moment earlier, or from a different place, it could show, and therefore mean, something quite different. And then of course it depends who’s doing the looking. We don’t all see things in the same way.

I’m not sure that I’m always in my practice. I have been very resistant to the “anything can be art!” dialogue, and not interested in the “what is art?” question anymore. Not because it’s an unworthy question, but because I think of fairly belligerent responses that trend towards generalization. I do, however, definitely find the in-between space activating. As a person who’s used to living in a metropolis, I love the feelings of being alone in public, the interactions that are a necessity when we spend so much time getting from place to place, mostly in view of / in indirect contact with other people. I really miss, during the pandemic, the feeling of being in some random location and getting the news of what’s going on. Now we have this endless parade of major events, but we’re always at home when we receive them. It’s a different experience for me. I’m not sure how to make meaning out of it yet.

That said, when does life materialize? Life materializes in the living of it. It’s materializing at a faster rate than we can see or remember. Most of the materialization of life is being lost as we live it. I don’t mean that in a bad way: it’s just that years ago, I did a performance piece at Glasshouse called *Archiving the Now*, 2013, where I tried to write down everything that was happening around me in the space for the duration of the performance; of course it was impossible, that’s the nature of time as you make the record of the current thing, a next thing is already occurring. Whatever is lost, forgotten, unnoted, or unrecorded is already a kind of imprecise “editing”: although it may not seem to have the same intention, it can still result in a record.

I’m not sure how to answer your question about the nonfictional and the imagined. I don’t work as a journalist or a writer (although those professions also create their own kinds of fictions — or let’s call them narratives — in the service of making complex things digestible, or messy moments more linear). I work as an artist. That doesn’t mean that I’m free to say whatever I want as truth, but rather that there is a flexibility between the different kinds of voicing I use, whether in direct language or in a combination of language, image, object, and situation. I don’t promise that anything I’m saying is the truth. The truth is that the editor is you, the viewer: it’s your job not to assume that something that’s not the truth is also not a lie, but to engage in interpretation, and to figure out how that interpretation rests with you, and your own lived experiences and knowledge.



Book of Everyday Instruction, Chapter Eight, 2018
 Dye Sublimation Print on Aluminum
 16 x 20 in.



Chloë Bass: *Wayfinding*, 2019
 UV Printing on Acrylic
 36 x 24 in.
 Courtesy of the artist

jr / I, too, miss just being in the city and stumbling onto something new — being activated and invisible at the same time. It seems connected to “the materialization of life ... being lost as we live it.” I also often think of interstitial space and how it relates to the speed at which experience becomes recognizable in the brain, as we are basically seeing the world milliseconds past. Somehow we are always in between moments.

Archiving the Now, 2013, seems like such a great practice in being present — or maybe not being fully present, as it is impossible. A sense of archive seems present throughout your work. Do you see archive as a means to archive more a way of thinking through experience by way of accumulating experiences and memories?

CB / I feel, in some ways, that archive is a form that’s been cast upon me: it’s a popular zeitgeist thing right now, not necessarily opposed to, but not necessarily directly leaning into, either. I think I need to do more reading about what constitutes an archive. Wikipedia just offered me, “records that have been naturally and necessarily generated as a consequence of regular legal, commercial, administrative, or social activities.” I can work with that, but it also sounds a lot like just the consequence of living. If we’re lucky — and even sometimes when we’re not — we live, we acquire things, they can be taken later, can be a kind of form from which we extrapolate other meaning. But is that the meaning that was meant?

kind of reverse narrativization? How much of the archive is actually made into meaning by its reader, and not by “writer”/collector? (One could ask the same question about art, to some extent.)

So right: answering your question, I definitely don’t see the archive as a means to an end, but more like something we cannot avoid. Maybe what we can avoid is making it visible, but not making it in the first place. The archive is a something that happened but is no longer happening, or completely capturable (because no experience is completely capturable, except by living it together, and maybe not even then). I think the gaps are telling, too. What is missing couldn’t be written down or photographed or remembered or recorded? How do we learn from what’s left out, or ourselves into those absences? Are the absences invitational, or hostile?

jr / I might take absences even further by asking: what goes missing in what *is* written down, or photographed, or recorded? — which again, you’ve hinted at. Our inability to be fully present in the now reflects our efforts to use the tools we use to attempt presence. I am specifically thinking about social media and the fear-of-missing-out result from its use. Your question of interpretation and intent is also poignant in this understanding or comfort in-between — as viewers and as artists.

As presented, the in-between shapes itself around us. Maybe as threshold? Maybe as intermission? Maybe as sigh? Which brings me to the search for intimacy in your work. It seems the in-between reveals so much about ourselves and our respective processes. Has this been your experience in how your research has materialized? How has the in-between spaces moved you into new directions or discoveries?

CB / I think some of the “tools we use to attempt presence” are actually fairly well accepted, at this point, as tools that prevent presence. They allow for the capture of the moment, to some extent, and documentation certainly impacts the presence and attention of the people who are being documented, but I’m not sure it counts as presence in and of itself, already, even as we attempt to experience what we experience, know what we know, and remember what we remember. It’s a kind of implied in-between. Maybe that’s the in-between of ourselves in the moment (experience), ourselves in the past (knowledge, or how knowledge is built from past experience), and ourselves in the future (memory, or the present being remembered by a future self).

What moves me the most as an artist is taking into account not only that any individual is experiencing, perhaps these multiple in-betweens, but also that we can experience our own multiple in-betweens in the context of others. We even hold collective in-betweens, as a group. These in-betweens often go missing: we can’t always understand ourselves alone each other’s. Yet even in their absent or unknown nature, they have an impact on what exists between two people, a family, or a group. Collectively, shared in-betweens are also used to construct larger narratives, which in turn cause things that appear more like truths: history, laws, culture. There’s a lot of instability underneath those things — but it’s not necessarily negative; I don’t necessarily say “instability” and mean that negatively. But it seems worth it to always consider that the fact is oftentimes built up from explored and unexplored, known and unknown, collections of *feelings* that impact and interpret our experiences.

I guess that is my new direction at the moment: feeding back what I’ve sussed out in attempting a fine-tune of presence towards something larger than just what it means for us to be together. How is being together reflected in other things? It’s not called being together anymore? What does it mean if we forget or lose those connections while maintaining relationships with others across many levels of daily experience?



publicinvestigator



February 5th

Three dead and hundreds injured after an Istanbul plane, operated by the regrettably named Pegasus Airlines, rips in two. In Eastern Turkey, the ground, not the sky, brings down human lives as 38 people die in an avalanche. Trump unsurprisingly acquitted; snow unsurprisingly expected. We may be escaping the coronavirus, but America boasts 1.5 million homeless public school students; those Americans with homes increasingly rent, not own, and even the state of rental is risky.

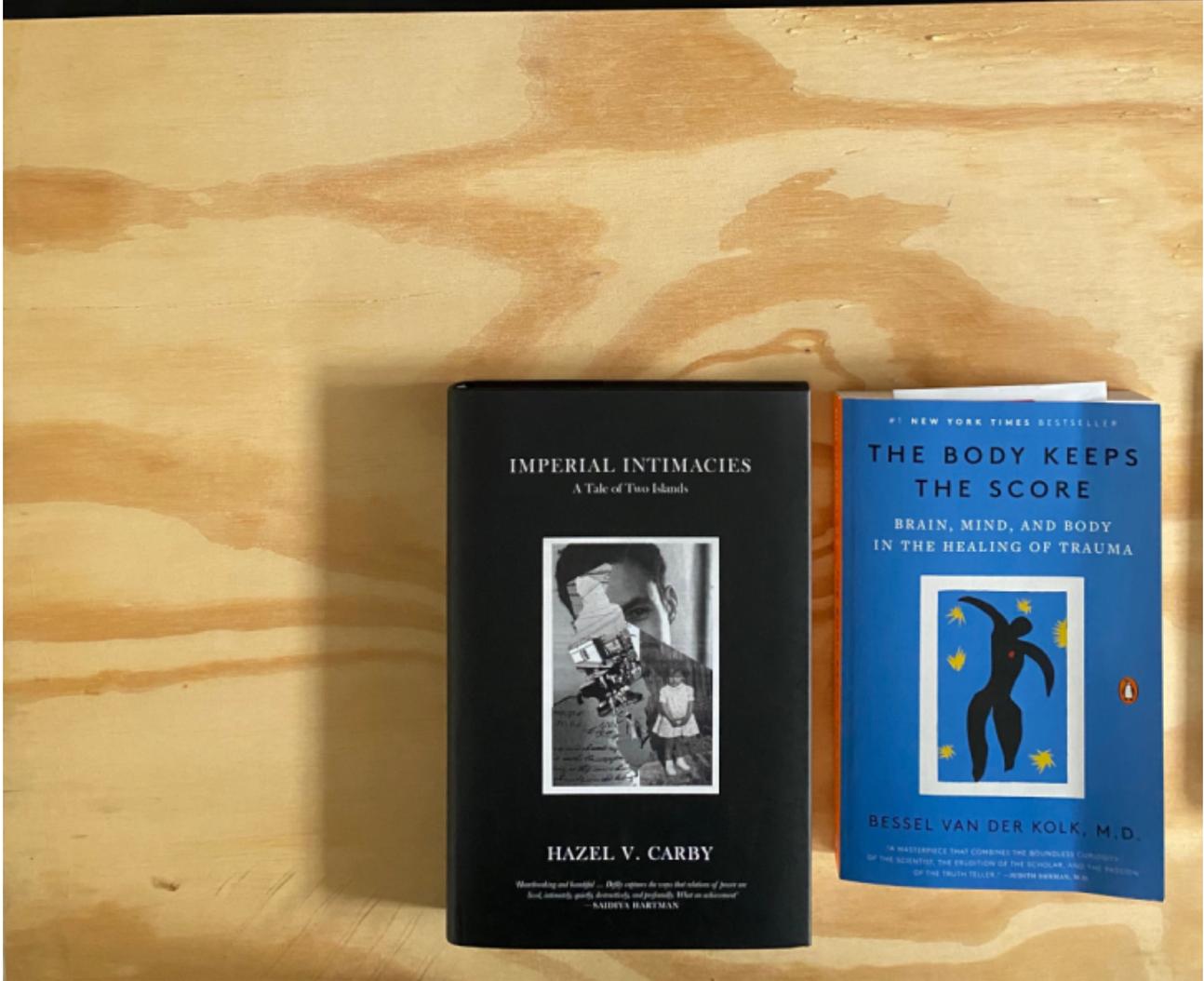
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Chloë Bass: studio

Image courtesy of the artist

jr / I am very interested in the visual-created thinking about the multitudes of in-betweenness — past, present ; existing as individual and collective reverberations. The in-between as a culmination of experiences — seen and and unknown. I probably see the in-between as more of a continuous, whole entity, free from time constraints — but these layers you point out heighten the complexity of appreciating moments and our abilities to be present,

In your process of determining space and building on your research of presence and togetherness, has your bac Theatre Studies found itself embedded throughout your practice? Your statement, “documentation certainly imp presence and attention of the people who are being documented,” although true throughout our social interact connect an awareness to stage performance and maybe performance more broadly? I wonder what tools have sta

CB / The secret about the theater is that you can never get free! I think that’s the good news, actually. I don’t wa in theater in a standard way anymore (except maybe as an audience member), but I also don’t want to get free. T tremendously informative to any number of other practices, some of which are not necessarily art related at all. T informs how politics operates. The theater can train people within business contexts. The theater is helpful whe fields of trauma. The strategies of the theater appear all over the place. I don’t want to say “everywhere,” but ma On the lowest common denominator level, that’s the basis of the field of Performance Studies: that performance impacts everything.

And yes, I can say that specific skills and strategies from the theater have also stuck with me, or continue to surfl life and work. I will say very directly that within artistic fields, I believe that the theater offers the best format for and is not shy to state the absolute necessity of building a team, wherein people have particular and not necessa skills, if you want to make an artwork. The fine arts/visual arts, and even social practice, seem to be catching up idea, like “oh right, I need other people, and not just as witnesses.” The myth of individual greatness is less prev theater. There are stars, for sure: star performers, star directors, star writers — but they’re nothing without each mention without the other people who make a production happen.

Tools of language use from the theater have also stayed with me. My development as a writer happened almost i theatrical contexts, which means that I necessarily consider language to be something that is heard in addition t something that is read. We write very differently when we stop to think about listening, and who is listening; whe about speech and tone of voice alongside word choice or rhythm or meaning. The theater offers a tremendously potential of language. So does everyday life! But my theater training maybe allows me to recognize that more, or particular ways.

“This is a period of time that’s going to echo in our lives for a long, long time, to th where we may not even be able to recognize how to trace those echoes back to thi moment. So it seems worth it to take the time to sit with its repercussions at every time and connection.”

jr / The collaborative sensibility seems connected to a support mechanism — both personal and professional. I think the connectivity of language can foster a fertile environment for developing a symbiotic space of sharing and you mention, the function of language may vary depending on how it is delivered and how it is received. This is paramount to a viewer's ability to access a work. To complicate things, audiences in this current cultural moment exist on many different though simultaneous levels. At the same time, we are able to reach more people with the click of these added layers of communication and distance have an effect on where your research takes you and/or how it takes place?

CB / I think the support mechanisms inherent to theater can be a little abstract, honestly. In certain working conditions, like in a highly unionized environment, that can be helpful. However, outside of those conditions, much of the support that arrives at theater is, as you indicated, interpersonal. If you have to communicate not only as part of your artwork (a play, a production, whatever), but also in order to achieve that artwork's creation, you start to consider language with a little bit more attention. That attention to language as a means of presentation and a means of production doesn't fundamentally change how you have access to diverse audiences both in person and online. I am still trying to figure out how I'm considering group sizes, in a more distanced capacity. That's an answer I don't have yet. I know it's important, though! I'm optimistic there — and I think whenever I get there it will still be relevant to the world, or informative to my other work, even if it's "back to normal" at that point. This is a period of time that's going to echo in our lives for a long, long time, and we may not even be able to recognize how to trace those echoes back to this moment. So it seems worth it to sit with its repercussions at every scale of time and connection.

THE SIX...

Six questions asked of all our guests.

What are you currently reading?

Rachel Zucker's *SoundMachine*

What are you currently watching?

My partner and I have been joking that we are the worst at pandemic-t.v. watching, but it's one of those jokes that's true because it's true. We recently finished *Small Axe*, though, and succumbed to the Britney Spears documentary.

What was the last meal you made?

I made yasai yaki udon last night with the wrong kind of udon noodles (the smooth, thinner ones that are better but just don't get the same kind of chewy char as a thick, fresh udon noodle!).

Can you share a recipe?

It's pretty easy: take the veggies you have in your fridge — you can use anything, but allow me to recommend onion, cabbage, carrots; and suggest: mushrooms, bell peppers, corn, broccoli. I used red cabbage, yellow onion, bell pepper, and frozen kernels of white corn. Have a patient person thinly slice the veggies (that person can also finely chop about an inch of peeled fresh ginger, and two cloves of garlic. Heat a tablespoon or so of sesame oil

medium heat. Sautee the ginger and garlic until they have a little color, then add the vegetables (I usually do onions, carrots, and then less “hard” veg) and turn up the heat slightly.

While veggies are sauteeing, make a sauce: if you have udon soup mix from the package of fresh noodles, use that as a base, and then add soy sauce, mirin, sugar, black pepper (lots!), and dashi powder or bouillon until you like the taste. Add about a quarter cup of warm or boiling water. Add noodles (“uncooked” if fresh, or parboiled if dry), fry, throw in the sauce, and toss it around with tongs until the noodles and veggies have absorbed the sauce and look shiny and a bit sticky. Serve topped with freshly chopped scallions, sprinkles of bonito flakes (if you have them) and furikake (or just sesame seeds, but the slight seaweed flavor is nice here), and a dab of something spicy (I use sriracha on the side of the bowl to mix with the salty-sweet noodles as you go. Pickled ginger slivers are also great as a garnish if you didn’t have that either.

Whose studio have you visited recently that really excited you?

Last week I made studio visits with students at the University of Minnesota’s MFA program, and was delighted by the quality of work I experienced. I will say that I am not a fan of digital studio visits for myself, or with others, for that matter. I am unlikely to schedule any unless I have to, or am conducting them for pedagogical reasons. With other artists, I’d rather spend my own time and money (and spirit!), I’d rather just talk on the phone.

What have you seen recently (either art; performance; film, music; stage; etc.) that had a significant impact on your work?

It’s been a strange year for encounters with art — for all of us, I think. There are two things lately that I’ve really found inspiring recently: I went to a reading by Anaïs Duplan last week where he shared recent ekphrastic poems and video art while simultaneously screening one of his own videos. I loved this as a cracking open of what the online world *allows* rather than an emphasis on what it *prevents*.

Separately, I got to spend a fair amount of (socially distanced! mostly solo!) time at the [Terry Adkins exhibition](#) at the [Arts Foundation](#), and it was amazing to be surrounded by epic-scale sound works in a silent duet with the muse

A sincere thanks to Chloë from john ros and studioELL — thank you for sharing your practice with us.

[john ros](#) is a Brooklyn-based, multi-disciplinary artist, professor and curator. They obtained an MFA from Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and a BFA from the State University of New York at Binghamton. john is the founder of studioELL where they currently serve as an assistant professor. They have over 15 years experience in higher education and 22 years experience curating exhibitions and developing digital programming.

This interview was conducted over a series of emails which started with an question and led to a responsive conversation. The text was slightly edited for this publication.