SPEAKERS (in order)

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Tamlin Blake (TB)
Nkosinathi Quwe (NQ)
Colijn Strydom (CS)
Vivien Kohler (VK)

HOSTS:
Gabrielle de la Puente (GDLP)
Zarina Muhammad (ZM)

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Member of the Public 1:
We love a Nando's, we've come here for years!

Gabrielle de la Puente (GDLP):
Do you go to galleries?

Member of the Public 2:
No. Just no time.

GDLP:
Did you know that Nando's is one of the biggest collectors of South African art in the world.

Member of the Public 2:
No!

GDLP:
It's actually a South African company and all of the art in the restaurants gets commissioned.

Member of the Public 2:
Oh, wow! I didn't know that.

GDLP:
Well, no one knows. And I think it's really good that they support art. Yeah. And as you say, for people like yourself, you might not have the time to get galleries, but you might have the time to go and get some chicken. And get to see some art!

TWP INTRO JINGLE!! very cute very cool and funky

GDLP:
Welcome to this week's episode of The White Pube podcast. My name's Gabrielle de la Puente.

Zarina Muhammad (ZM):
I'm Zarina Muhammad.

GDLP:
And welcome to this special edition where we've actually partnered with Nando's. Guys, can you believe it?

ZM:
We've made it.

GDLP:
We've partnered with Nando's to discuss their absolutely wild relationship with art. So before we get to that. What is Nando's? For anyone who doesn't know.

ZM:
Nando's is a restaurant chain, it's a staple part of literally every British high street up and down the country. They started up in 1987 in Johannesburg -- Jo'burg.

GDLP:
JO'BERG! Which is what we learned to call it today, when we were speaking to the South African artists.

ZM:
I thought of it as like quite a specifically British thing. Yeah -- *Cheeky Nando's*, you know what I mean?

GDLP:
Yeah, but it's not even British. Zarina had her first date there.

ZM:
I had my first date in a Nando's, yeah.

GDLP:
That's so cute! We used to also go there all the time, when we were in uni. We went there once and there was a group of lads of all different ages and styles on the table next to us. We were eating our food, but we were also like: Who are they? How do these people know each other? And I just remember in the end being like, we've got to ask. We can't just obsess over this, so we spoke to them and they were...

ZM:
Bus drivers!

GDLP:
And it made so much sense.

ZM:
Off duty.

GDLP:
So satisfying, as an answer. But whenever me and Zarina are traveling, as two art critics on the go, if we ever need to stop somewhere and eat and do some work, get our laptops out, we always go to Nando's. Which is why this is such like a dream collaboration. We're really happy! We'll get to that involvement with art in a second. But I just want to ground everything that we say with this: the reason I call that relationship with Art *Wild* is because it's so unnecessary. *Laughs* Like, in business terms like it makes no sense, as a business, to give so much of your money away to art and artists when, as a restaurant, you could just do whatever the restaurant does. Which is: print off pictures of tomatoes and peppers and carrots and get some like... mass produced stuff on the walls and frames.

ZM:
Loads of grayscale photographs of someone making bread in slow-mo. Like those action shots of people throwing flour.

GDLP:
Oh, my God. Or, like vague Italian countryside pictures. Even if the food's got nothing to do with Italy.

ZM:
Vintage photos of Rome. *Laughs* You'll see them like the prints of animals made out of sliced vegetables. That's as creative as it gets. You know what I mean?

GDLP:
I know the type. Yeah, that's like high restaurant art, isn't it? But, that category is kind of exploded by what Nando's does.

ZM:
But those prints of tomatoes and, like, vintage Italy, bread in slow-mo.

GDLP:
Bread in slow-mo! *Laughs* I know exactly what you mean.

ZM:
They're all very well and good, but they are set dressing. They're there as a vibey way to aesthetically signify that this is an antique Italian experience. Even though you're in East London and not in East Rome. And that's what you're trying to subliminally, you know, communicate that. And the thing about Nando's art is that it's made by an actual artist. All of them are made by actual artists, they've got whole practice, a whole creative, critical understanding of what they're doing.

GDLP:
And it's like it doesn't necessarily feel like they're doing it strategically to make the place seem authentically anything, because the artwork has no theme. Every artwork in a Nando's is completely unique because, as you say, it's just being produced by like an artist as they make their way through their practice. And it just so happens that Nando's has at Some Point, acquired one of those works and placed it in Kings Cross or wherever.

ZM:
So it's a rewarding place to have lunch if you're *Us*.

GDLP:
Especially if you're an art critic. *Laughs* It's like the best place to go. And as we learned today when we spoke to Spier Arts Trust who administrate this Nando-ean love of art, a lot of the artists they work with wouldn't be able to produce art without that specific patronage.

ZM:
Hello? Who are you? What do you do? And where do you do it?

Tamlin Blake (TB):
I'm Tamlin Blake. I'm the chief curator of Spier Arts Trust. We work out of Cape Town in South Africa. We run a not for profit that supports contemporary Southern African art. And so long as people are residents in Southern Africa, we try and support their art making practice. So Nando's is one of our main patrons, and -- can I say we use them? -- as an exhibition space?

So they've been fantastic for about 20 years in buying original contemporary South African art, putting it on the walls in their restaurants and exhibiting it to the public. So it's very much using their restaurants as open gallery spaces. We love it. It gives the artists exposure constantly in parts of the world that they, especially at a younger age, just wouldn't have access to.

GDLP:
Hi, it's Gab. Just quickly jumping in from the editing suite because I feel like this is an important footnote. When Tamlin uses the word exposure, I feel suspicious and stressed and defensive and like, ready to fight someone. But that's only because in England we have been so traumatised, that when we hear the word exposure, we know that it's like some person in a position of power who is saying, Oh, there's no payment, but we will give you lots of great exposure, as if exposure could like make your tummy feel full or house you or shelter you from the rain and like, that's not what Tamlin is talking about because all the artists that she works with are paid when she mentions exposure, she is just literally talking about what it means for an artist to be introduced to new networks of people and to grow their audience and to be thrown into the context of all these different countries. It's so pure. I'm not used to it.

TB:
Regularly. You know, we get inquiries from people all over the world --- Who's this artist, what do they do? Can we find out more about that? We're trying not to act as agents and we definitely don't talk about Nando's artists or owning the artists at all. You know, we see ourselves as people who

support the arts, where we can, but very much encourage artists to run their own careers and try and give them the support with that rather than a sense of ownership.

GDLP:
If you've been to a Nando's before, which I'm like, just completely assuming every single one of our audience has been, because like, you know, you're like us, we might get on. You might have seen massive oil on canvas pieces that are like two meters wide. You might also have seen that panoramic mosaic that's in the York Way (Kings Cross) Nando's made by Clive Vandenberg. You might also have seen blocks, like small wooden blocks, that are ordered very neatly along the wall. And they depict, you know, any number of things or they don't depict anything because they're abstract or whatever is. They might also feature mosaics, they might be paintings, they might be drawings, they might be prints, whatever it is -- those have all come out of the entry program that Spier Arts offers.

And I'm stepping in to explain it now because I think the piece that we recorded with Tamlin was just like a little bit too humble, and maybe she's so used to it. But as a critic who's interested in how artists make a living in this country, I'm like, Oh, Jesus Christ, someone else has found a way for artists to do the thing that they want to do in a healthy setting. Why can't we have that as well? So essentially, Spier Arts selects artists in their locale, specifically people whose artist statements they find interesting or people that they feel are really intent on being an artist and they're making art as much as they can, or they're really trying to hone their workmanship. It's people who very obviously care about art, and they'll join this program, where Spier will give them, you know, a monthly income that might cover some materials and studio rent or whatever it is. And then they're given these 18x18cm wooden block and they're told to go and do whatever they do on this block. You know, it's only small and that's a very deliberate choice because they don't want people to be too intimidated and they want to be able to see, you know, kind of like the essence of the artist, when everyone is given the same base to work on.

And then there are moments when all those artists are invited into the trust to show their blocks to the curators. If the curators maybe aren't completely sold on something, then the artist will be given some feedback and something that they can go away and work on in the studio. And if the curator is like, Yeah, this one works, we want it, then they'll just buy it on the spot and they'll give the artist like an extra bonus fee on top of the money that they've already gotten to cover their time and effort and conceptual labor in producing the piece. Those blocks are what you end up seeing in those Nando's, all over the world.

TB:
We use that as the entrance point into the ecosystem of programs that we run. The Creative Block itself is designed as a feedback program. Because we realised years ago, that artists very seldom get honest feedback. You know, you go to your parents and they say 'oh it's lovely!' You go to your friends and they're either supportive or pretty critical, but not necessarily helpful. So we try and provide a space where we can give artistic, critical feedback. And I look at things like use of materials -- really get pedantic about professional finish, making sure that the artworks are clean and neat and presentable, because I think there's, especially in young artist they get very playful and experimental, and forget that, it actually would be nice if it lasted more than a year or two. So, you know, you want to go, that's great, that's lovely. But is there another way of either using a better quality material or finishing it off so that people don't see the terrible workmanship but actually see the gorgeous concept, idea and art making practice.

Once that's developed, then we look at introducing them to other programs like the Nando's Creative Exchange. We've got the Union Fair where we buy directly from artists. Nando's Creative Exchange is quite exciting because they're encouraged to put an exhibition together. Nando's Artists Society is similar and we give them canvases. They're not large they're only about 60x60m or 80x80m, and then we'll have the same sort of thing. We'll have two or three feedback sessions on one canvas for one artist. Again, just sort of looking at technical challenges, maybe? maybe they're trying a new medium or looking into a different concept in their work.

GDLP:
Why that order? Why give someone like the exact dimensions or material for them to work with rather than just let them do anything.

TB:
Mainly because we can source the materials relatively cheaply and the artist doesn't have to pay for it. So for them it's less on their output. We then set a limited price to what we will pay the artist. So it doesn't matter whether you've been working for 20 years or 2 years, the program is run the same way for all artists. That goes for the Creative Block as well.

So, you know, we've got very established artists actually who've been working with us for 20 years still coming back to Creative Block because they enjoy the interaction and the challenge. They get paid the same amount as someone who's just joining us. It's that sort of equalising factor for us there.

GDLP:
In terms of that development, if that's one thing Spier can offer an artist. Where else might they get that in the area, like we're not familiar --

TB:
Yeah, look, we've got some very strong universities in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Pretoria, and we get some some artists coming through those systems. Obviously not everyone can afford university. It's very expensive in South Africa. And so because of that we have a lot of self-taught artists. So for me, what's really important is to not sideline people because they haven't had the opportunity to study. Tricky as you're going on more of a sort of idea of raw talent, people who've been able to figure out how to think for themselves without too much direction and that can be difficult. You want to get them to a place where they're strong enough as working artists to develop a professional career.

ZM:
Why this is related to us, and right now, why this is opportune, is... We recording this on Thursday, 12 October 2023. It is Art Fair week in the UK. In London specifically, we've just been at Frieze and we are currently sitting in Somerset House because it's 1-54, an international African Art Fair.

GDLP:
What's an art fair?

ZM:
Oh my god. I'm so glad you asked. It's almost like we scripted this! *Laughs* An art fair is different to an exhibition. Each commercial gallery that's agreed to participate in the art fair, they sign up and get their own little space and they represent artists and they fill the booth with the artist's work in the hope of selling it. So whereas with an exhibition, it's more about display for a more general public, an art fair has kind of... a general public element to it too, but maybe a more specific aim of trying to sell the work to collectors.

GDLP:
And we're recording at 1-54 art fair today because Spier Arts Trust and Nando's have brought over some artists to try and give them the art fair treatment, as they have done many times before. So for the 2023 edition, they brought Vivien Kohler, Colijn Strydom and Nkosinathi Quwe. And I say give them the Art Fair Treatment. But that's kind of almost not what's happening? Because the art fair treatment comes with a lot of risk, comes with a lot of like, 'Oh God I hope we sell because we've put on this big show, we really need to sell the work, we've come all this way from South Africa, Oh, my God'. But then I read something and I was like, 'Wow, I really need to confirm this with Tamlin before I put this in the podcast'. So here we go.

It was also reported on the art newspaper that if the works that Spier and Nando's brought over to 1-54 don't sell to other buyers, that they'll go into your collection, you'll buy them anyway.

TB:
That's right. Yeah.

GDLP:
That's incredible. That must be such a relief for the artists!

TB:
For all of us.

ZM:
Like it's just a testament to a level of support that they, I don't know... Can expect at this level through the creative ecosystem that you're working with. Yeah, yeah.

GDLP:
Yeah. It's kind of a really interesting system to create for artists because a lot of artists exist without any system at all.

ZM:
It's just eliminating that precarity, isn't it? That's also a backdrop to so much artistic --

TB:
We're incredibly lucky to be supported by Nando's. They're a solid support, they're constantly there for programs like this and they're supportive beyond just sort of providing sponsorship. They've got a fantastic team of photographers and they get involved with the media. They really try and do promotion, so it goes quite sort of deeply into giving support.

ZM:
I do have like a slightly terrible question. So, since 2002, around 14,000 artworks have been bought for the Nando's UK collection for more than 625 Southern African artists. Do you have a favourite? *Laughs* And have you ever wanted to buy something just yourself rather than for the collection?

TB:
You know, I can honestly say I don't. And the reason that --- people ask me all the time, I kind of get cornered. I think living in the art world, I think you constantly have your temporary favourite, sort of like, Oh my goodness, this is stunning. You got to get involved and whatnot. But I think I fall in love, I suppose, with different artworks for completely different reasons. And a lot of it has to do with understanding the artists themselves, and knowing the challenges and changes and growth that they've been through. So, you know, it's not as easy to say, yes, I love their art. For me, it's far more deep from that, it's understanding their practice and how they've developed as artists. You know, what I would do is just absolutely support the people we have here today at 1-54, because, you know, we've been on a journey with them. They've all been creative block artists. And yeah, these artists: Vivien, Colijn and Nkosinathi, are just some of my current top favourites, temporary favourites.

ZM:
Of course, you must see so much art coming through. Like, of course it renews and you get new opinions and new things and favourites that come along. I know the feeling.

GDLP:
It might be like an obvious answer, but because it's something that artists here face as well, but. Why is international exposure important for an artist?

TB:
Your prices go up! *Laughs* And you just get a bigger audience. You know, South Africa is a limited market. There's a limited art-educated audience. And, you know, we don't have a compulsory art education in schools. So people come out of school not knowing anything about art. So building up that market can be really, really tricky. And that's important, I think, for artists too, you know, if they want to get any further in their career, they need to build up either a European or American base for their work.

GDLP:
The most recognisable way that artists make money is to sell art. And that's very difficult. Like it's not a given. It's hard to find people who are interested. It's hard to find people who have the money. It's hard to find people who are in the business of buying art and selling it to other people.

So to make a profit, or people who have like massive collections that they want to add to, or people who buy on behalf of other galleries and museums. Like, it's hard to get in front of those specific people. So an art fair is an opportunity to be supported by a gallery or a trust, like Spier, who can put artists in the right place at the right time to hopefully make sales.

Nkosinathi Quwe (NQ):
I'm Nkosinathi Quwe. I'm a visual artist, a painter from South Africa.

ZM:
Where are you based in South Africa?

NQ:
I was born in the Eastern Cape, which is more rural, and then I moved to Jo'burg to study and then I ended up staying in Jo'burg, I practice in Jo'burg. So my work is about overcoming difficult situations, mostly, but then when you overcome, find a way to get back to your self. Even if you lose yourself, floating away, back to yourself. So the work is really about the back and forth of life, you know, like the waves. Because I do a lot of scenes with the sea and baptism.

GDLP:
Do you feel like making art helps you do that for yourself?

NQ:
Definitely. It's quite meditative. So when I create, I get more into my self, sometimes I resolve my own issues without really thinking about them. It's just the work, sort of like it untangles certain things inside you.

GDLP:
I feel that as a writer!

NQ:
I feel like once you start working, certain things just resolve. Issues, things, just go away to disappear. And then you find solutions at the same time.

ZM:
Can you describe what your work looks like visually?

NQ:
Okay, So, so I create like baptism scenes. Either one individual or group of people by the sea. Scenes performing rituals, and some of them are about to plunge into the water and get baptised. So I sort of like pull the viewer in, into those kind of situations. Sometimes unknowingly. I work now mostly in oils, sometimes in acrylics as well.

GDLP:
How difficult or easy is it to be an artist where you're from?

NQ:
It's quite challenging. It's not easy, very difficult. Firstly, from from the point of view of trying to sustain a life financially, it's quite a challenge because you don't get to sell an artwork every day and it's not like a 9 to 5, you don't get paid every month. So it's quite a challenging aspect in that way. But at the same time it's so fulfilling, having to be able to control your time and and how you want to influence the world. I think that's such a powerful thing to be able to do that as an individual without having to ask permission from someone to be involved, to be yourself, basically. So that's the reward. And I think the biggest reward is when people can give you feedback of how the work makes them feel. I think that's the biggest reward, having to be able to influence or touch people in that way. I think it's really amazing. So amazing that you forget about the financial strains.

GDLP:
We really do! *Laughs*

NQ:

Yeah, you forget. And the reward is being in spaces like this, this is such a reward for me, being here and connecting with different people. So yeah, that's, that's the -- I guess the payment.

GDLP:
Did you study art?

NQ:
Yes I did.

GDLP:
How was that? Where did you study?

NQ:
I studied at the University of Johannesburg. That was quite an amazing experience as well as challenging at the same time mostly because when it came to the history of art, I figured that, you know, I realized that there's a huge gap between what we were taught -- you know? Because we were mostly taught European art, but it never really touched on African art. You know, African art was mostly seen as primitive, which is, you know, I think it's an injustice because it's sort of like silences African artists, if their approach is like that. It doesn't give them a platform. We learnt more about European art more than like African art, if even such a thing exists. But we didn't-- We were not-- It was it as if we're not allowed to explore ourselves further, but more allowed to learn about other people and, you know what I mean?

GDLP:
And did the students challenge that?

NQ:
Not really. I think when you're in an institution, challenging such things, it's so difficult because you get failed. But only when you come out of the institution, then it can be yourself and how you find yourself even more. It was kind of like that for me. Only when I left institution, I could speak about such things or even dive into such things, you know? African spirituality that that wasn't seen as a positive.

ZM:
Are there any artistic references that you're looking at now you're out of the institution? Now you have a bit more freedom to kind of...

NQ:
Let me let me start with what inspired me, because I was inspired by [Dewy le finn's?] work. With how he just paints and draws African features and how he uses that as, you know, expression of African people and also [Kita Coleville?], which is one of my inspiration. She's a German artist. So there's there's a common thread between the South African political struggle and what Germany went through. I found that there's parallels. That's why I was inspired by her work, she speaks mostly about loss in her work, she's dealt with a lot of loss and I've dealt with loss in my personal capacity. Also, South Africa politically has dealt with a lot of loss.

GDLP:
What's your experience been like? of Nando's relationship with Spier.

NQ:
Oh, so so Nando's and Spier have been very instrumental in supporting what I do, in terms of giving me the platforms, like the different platforms like this. Also, because of the exchange programs that you do, there's a project that you're given in Eastern Cape in South Africa with a rural community. So they take sort of like create those opportunities for artists, especially artists that aren't represented by galleries, so independent artists like myself. So they bridge that gap.

ZM:
Okay, I'm stood in front of 18 paintings. This is the work of Colijn Strydom, the paintings are blue and white, a little bit bigger than A4, but they're all portrait. They are hung in like a grid, and these blue and white paintings are mostly white, blue on white. They feature lots of interiors, lots of

windows, looking out of a window from inside. Figures airbrushed on, so they're kind of soft and hazy, but also brushstrokes that cut off, are interrupted. scratchy detail drawings. There are bodies doing yoga on carpeted floors from odd angles. There are trees branching out from a window, that a person is revealing with like a like a hand on a curtain. There are. Yeah, loads of people doing yoga, actually, people bending through the windows like they're dancing. There's a cat stood in front of multiple portraits. There is one that I really like, which is a hand disembodied hand holding pleated fabric and revealing a leg in a Nike trainer, like a flat Nike trainer. They look like Blazers. If you know what a Nike Blazer looks like, then yeah. *Laughs* There are lots of columns, lots of bodies. Kind of reminiscent of William Blake's illustrations. There are soft gradients, harsh lines. It's meticulous, diagrammatic, but also loose and gestural in places. A real balance to be found between those two different ways of working. But yeah, mostly bodies, interiors, windows, grids, the diagram, the flat plane of a surface messing around with the two dimensionality of the painting itself.

Colijn Strydom (CS):
It's a mythological version of my flat. Right? So it's I thought, why don't I make work about things that I know about. And if there's one thing I'm an authority on, it's what I do in my flat. Because I live in this Batchelor flat. It's all kind of -- the bed's there and art kind of there. And it gets to this real sort of sense of a microcosm. And in there I sleep and I look out the window and I roll around the floor and I do some yoga and I get late for work and I get dressed and I nap again.

ZM:
I know your artist statement mentioned something about Mughal miniatures, the Sienese school, Japanese woodblock prints. All of which are like, my favourites. I love the Sienese school, I love Mughal miniatures and the way they do that... They fuck with flatness and like the surface. It's really exciting when you talk about in your artist statement, you know. Can you talk through the way you interact with or fuck around with the surface of... yes!?

CS:
Totally, you've hit the nail on the head. That's exactly what I like about them too. There's something nice about being giving an illusion of space and doing something diagrammatic at the same time. Yeah. You know, when I saw these miniatures, I thought, this is just -- it's so clever. I never realised properly exactly how emancipating this thing was. I really like the way that they deal with ornament as well. The 19th century, the Japanese stuff, the woodcuts. I was looking at a lot of interiors where they have spaces within spaces, and how it unfolds. In this really sensual way. I mean, the line use is, ugh beautiful. And the Sienese School it's like, WOW. I don't know, it's like this awkwardness, that's really cool. And so alive. There's also the embracing of mythology. You know. I like it!

GDLP:
I love when Colijn mentioned mythology, I asked him at this point if his work had anything to do with the desire to self mythologize because it's something that I think a lot about in terms of like the writing I produce, but also in how we all use the Internet, main character syndrome, celebrities, religion, politicians, power and Colijn gave like the most fascinating answer. But the room was particularly loud at the art fair, when he spoke like loads of people just kind of bustled in. So I'm just going to read out, word for word what he said so that you don't miss anything and then the room got quiet again. So I'll hand the mic back to him in due course. But this is what he said.

CS via GDLP:
Maybe a bit, you know. So I got to thinking about 2 things: 1 was about representation, who can I represent? Who do I have the right to represent? I was so aware of my whiteness, and I thought look, the only person I feel I can really speak about in a free way is myself and my own experience but I was very scared of becoming solipsistic or self-indulgent. How do I do this in a way that's interesting for somebody else? So, alright, that's a problem. But that's one thing. But what do I love? What do I like in the world? And I remembered as a kid I used to love these stories with myths and my Mum would always take me to the library and I would always take out these myth-y kind of things. I thought, jeez, I remember really liking that. And then I had a bit of a brain flash — Ancient Greece is such a cool shorthand for Western Europe. It goes straight right — Ancient Greece, and if we're talking Western Europe, that's whiteness right there. A-ha, maybe that's a good way that I can have a lot of fun, talk about my own experience, but in a way that's hopefully interesting. So, that's how I kind of managed, for myself, to join all the dots. Because I thought,

well, I love the myths and I love the themes that it brings up, but I think it’s really important to make whiteness strange, to make it apparent, to de-normalise it. It’s important. But I don’t want to be didactic. It’d be nice if it’s a strategy and not, in a sense — and it’s such a bad term but — maybe not baked into the work. So that I can make something that is perhaps about sadness but enmeshed within it is a language, and that language has certain connotations and performs certain functions.

ZM:
Yeah! And the way you deal with whiteness in the work is something that I actually really wanted to ask about. I think this is one of the first questions that came to mine, beyond the Sienese school, because it's not really something that you find white artists in the UK, having to or wanting to content with, and I wanted to ask about that as, perhaps a cultural difference with South Africa the UK. I was wondering, if you could tell us -- the vaguest question possible -- could you tell us a bit about that cultural difference and the way that contending with that whiteness feels important, maybe in your context?

CS:
OK, cool. I suppose my preface would have to be like, I don't think I can speak for other people, so this would just be my own kind of experience. Just as a disclaimer, you know. But for me, I feel in Cape Town or just in South Africa, I'm so aware of my whiteness all the time because it is such an unequal society and I feel I'm so implicated in everybody's lives. So if I see somebody who's not doing as well as me, I'm very aware of the fact that it's really, I'm only doing as well as I am because of an accident of birth, and that, chances are, that my happiness has something to do with their unhappiness. And it's -- I think my privilege came at a cost to that person. So a real sense of ethical pondering, common sense, you know, I think because in society, you know, you're constantly seeing that benefit. You know, even in the most fancy spots in Cape Town, you can come out of some fancy place and you see that, oh, gosh, here's a whole bunch of people who have been trying to just survive right in the shadow of a tremendous amount of wealth. So I think that's right there. Whereas perhaps in the UK, the effects of colonialism aren't that apparent. The effects of colonialism stay in the colonies, but the money makes its way out, you know. Yeah. So I think that's, that's the thing.

ZM:
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I agree. I really agree. We only see like the profits of it all. Oh I mean I don't know. I'm kind of like *laughs* me being here is like I'm the visible example of a colonized subject, but even then, it's like. So divorced... It's the colonial motherland. Yeah. It's interesting. It's a cultural difference I'm really fascinated by, and I wish that white artists in the UK would tackle or see the value in contending with that whiteness. Because I think looking at whiteness itself is so rich and interesting --- In the same way, it's like a cultural product, or a sort of cultural identity category in the same way.

CS:
Absolutely. Yeah. It's so constructed. And it's so fragile as well. It's incredible how defensive people kind of really quickly, you know you start to poke a bit, which is always a good sign.

GDLP:
It reveals the fragility of it.

CS:
Definitely. So much goes into normalising it, you know. Yeah.

ZM:
Yeah, yeah. But it's -- yeah, it gives it a slick surface that's too slippery to pierce from. Yeah. Interesting!

GDLP:
This might be a bit of a gear change, but what's your experience been like of Nando's involvement with Spier Arts?

CS:

So positive, they're totally amazing. So for me, trying to make work and living and pay my bills and stuff, it's quite tough. And so with the kind of programs that Spier do like I've participated in a whole bunch of them just in a very straightforward way of helping me get through the months. It's really helped a lot. And also really it's helped me grow as an artist, you know, feedback from Tamlin and I get to discuss stuff. And then this thing and getting to be in London and participate in this fair, it's really overwhelming. I really can't believe my luck, this is incredible! Nando's and Spier Arts Trust, bless them.

GDLP:
That's so good to hear. From what we've read, it all sounds good but it's like, there's got to be a catch somewhere.

ZM:
Maybe this is a testament to the way the arts run in the UK, but I'm like, it's too good to be true! Because everything in the UK for artists *is* too good to be true.

GDLP:
And then last but not least, we spoke to Vivien Kohler, who is also there with Spier Arts Trust, as sponsored by Nando's. The presentation that Vivien did was, almost a bit of like, an altarpiece or an installation. There was a central image that was definitely biblical in nature it had like a figure coming down from the sky and the clouds parting either side of it. And then two bodies also flying up alongside this kind of like God or Jesus figure, with more bodies on the floor. Everybody covered in robes and the curve of the robe was sort of sectioned off so that there was like this really nice flow through the image as determined by colour. Because actually it was an image made with beads. Very, very tightly sewn, minuscule beads that made the whole thing feel much more precious, and also maybe domestic? Because actually, whilst it looked like an altarpiece, either sides of this God figure were loads of plates hung on the wall, and on closer inspection they weren't plates at all. They were made to look like plates. So they were circular canvases or cardboard that Vivien had painted onto with, yeah, loads of different scenes. Some of them were references to artworks, some of them were photos of some kids playing football. I think there was a Constable in there, and then some were more abstract, some were just disks of metal or cardboard and that illusion between actual ceramic and yeah, like -- the artist's trick was great fun and like homely and yeah, like that word because it did sort of remind me of my Nan's house. You know, how like plates and religion are so important to like a family's culture and like, that's what decorates the walls. And yeah, we're going to be house proud about it. So we spoke to Vivien about it.

Vivien Kohler (VK):
Well, my work tends to be highly process driven. I consider myself a maker before before I'm an artist. That's where I start, I love making things. So whether it's fake cardboard, which looks like real cardboard, but it's not.

GDLP:
It really looks real.

ZM:
Gasps Shut up. No way. It --- hold on.

VK:
That's not real. No.

ZM:
I need to really quickly process this.

VK:
So what I do is I start with actual cardboard sculptures. I add all the details like the creases and all of that to the real cardboard and then make a silicone mould. And then I cast it in resin and fibreglass and then I hand-paint that -- not real cardboard.

ZM:
This was not in your artist statement! This is like a magic trick. This is amazing.

VK:
It is. Artist by day, magician by night.

ZM:
I really believe that. You've just blown my mind.

GDLP:
And what are the types of processes that you use?

VK:
It usually starts with constructions, assemblages, scavenger hunts.

GDLP:
Where do you go scavenger hunting?

VK:
So, you know, the thing is this. Growing up, I always wanted to be a treasure hunter.

GDLP:
Oh, my God. Same.

VK:
Right. I mean, growing up, watching TV, I have to be a treasure hunter. Yeah, exactly. So whenever I find scrap yards, scrap heaps, whatever on the side of the road -- I might not know how I'm going to use it. But I know I'm going to use it. I remember one time I was driving through Cape Town and this dump truck drove past me and there was this piece of reflective scrap metal on the back of the truck and I chased the dude down, man. The next road, like I stopped and jumped out like, Yo, can I please have that piece? And he thought I was crazy. I explain to him, Look, I'm not crazy, I'm an artist. And yeah, it ended up on an artwork and, yeah.

GDLP:
Yeah, I'm not crazy I'm an artist! *Laughs*

VK:
Yeah, right. We should make that into a T-shirt.

ZM:
I know what I'm doing. Yeah. *Laughs* your artist statement was really interesting. Because it spoke about quite a grand scale of like, the sweep of history. South Africa's colonial past and like, the future and the way that are of these enormous and sociopolitical level things interact. And the scale of the work is very intimate and confronting on a very personal scale, in that they address me directly, in the head. How do you wrestle those enormous things down to such a personal tender scale?

VK:
It's it's about the delivery of wisdom. How do you how do you deliver wisdom? If I was the most wise person on the planet, but I didn't speak your language, what was the point? Right?

GDLP:
Yeah.

VK:
So I try to use a cultural visual language that we can all internationally have access to. We all understand plates. We've all lived with plates. Our grandmothers had plates, that they didn't allow us to use. But it was passed down to us, right? Yeah. We all understand cardboard, that it's a liminal substance. It's a beautiful substance. We live with it every day, but we all understand what it is, what it can do. How can we use -- how it can be abused, and so in those terms, to answer your question, it's that access point. It doesn't matter what your educational background is. I believe everyone needs to understand that and gain access to the arts, because this is a vital message.

Like you were saying, that's a grand message. But how do you voice that message in a way that everyone can understand?

GDLP:
Zarina refers to something in the artist statement, and if you are in the Spier Arts Trust booth, there are a few handouts that you could pick up, including one for each of the artists that opened up, showed you some prints. Other works that weren't included in the exhibition and I want to read something from it. But before I do, I just want to say that this is the only place I could see a Nando's logo. They were so lowkey about the patronage.

There's a paragraph that says: 'Kohler most often evokes familiar scenes, everyday objects or motifs from Classical or Traditional Western painting to ensure that his art is accessible to as many people as possible. he attributes this objective to his parents initial rejection/reluctance of his art in the early days of his career, when they refused to attned Kohler's big solo exhibition at the AVA in Cape Town, as they believed, 'Art/the gallery space was only for white people.' This had him decide that he was going to use a visual language that everyone could understand and gain access to, no matter their educational background.'

I just mention that bit because that's part of the socio-political stuff that Zarina's referring to. And I think all artists are hindered or motivated or they want to heal what it is that their parents say and do. And it's so nice to be able to bring family members into art when maybe it's something they never thought they'd come close to. Ok. Back to the interview.

VK:
Part of the concept of my work is that dichotomy of realism vs perception. I was asking myself, 'how do I portray these images' right? In culture around the world, this is how plates are displayed. It's a beautiful juxtaposition between the value of the plates, politics of the plates, but then the narrative of the everyday.

ZM:
It's fucking with the idea of an artwork as an asset, like painting especially, as an asset class. Something of inherent value as a commodity. And then these commemorative plates have a completely different kind of value. Right? But it's a more human one, right? Yeah. Yeah, it's really interesting.

VK:
It's your mother's, it's your grandmother's plates that gets passed down to your mother.

GDLP:
Princess Diana.

VK:
Exactly. And we all understand that. And so with these works in particular, I find it interesting that colonisation, and the process thereof, works in different ways. It's not only taking, but it's also planting a flag. Emblematic flags. One of them were the plates, right? In South Africa. So what got passed down generation to generation, and it wasn't just white people, it was across the spectrum of South Africa, right. But along the way, it changed, the narrative changed from a political one to a familiar one became a grandmother's plates. So when you inherited them, you weren't inheriting a political statement, or a political emblem. It was your grandmother's most prized possession

GDLP:
Like a subconscious narrative?

ZM:
Then it's assimilated.

VK:
Yeah, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. But the thing is this, I've now taken that emblem and I've brought it back to the soil where it came from. And I've put our narrative on it. Art is a really

powerful tool, right? And you can wield it any way you want. So as an artist, you really need to choose which side of the coin you want to use your soul for. You know, for me, that's important.

ZM:
And we were talking earlier, before we started recording about what it's like to be an artist in South Africa, in Johannesburg, or Jo'burg. Like, can I say Jo'burg? I'm not familiar. I can't. I'm not around. Yeah. We're not on first name basis. But yeah. What's it like being an artist in Johannesburg? And how do you experience the arts ecology around you?

VK:
South Africa is a burgeoning economy. It's not a first world country, right? So art is not on top of the list. Right? So it's very hard for for artists to make a living in South Africa. So Spier Arts Trust, to be honest, I would not be here without them today, quite frankly, they gave me my start. They saw possibilities in me that the gallery system at the time didn't. But the amazing thing about it is this, they have a standard that they will not step down from. So artists will not sell work if their work is not up to scratch. Right? Yeah. And the way that I personally, and other artists, have been mentored along the way, they push you, and they really genuinely bring out the best in you. Because the way that they're thinking is, they're thinking long term. They're not thinking at the point where they're standing in front of you and buying an artwork, they're thinking where can I place this, they're thinking about the clientele as well. They're thinking about the standard in the industry that they need to bring you up to, so that they can push you. It's not about, actually no your work is crap go away. It's actually, no we see possibility, let's work together, let's get you to this level because there's this client we know will love your work. So organisations like the Spier Arts Trust, specifically in South Africa and Nando's, they're so key, they are so important.

GDLP:
Do they make you feel like art *is* a necessity?

VK:
That's a good question. It is, eh? Because you you tend to live in a bubble, and you don't get to see outside the rest of the world. You know how people evaluate things. How People live. And so I'm introducing you to those other worlds and like, Oh, crap, okay. There's, there's more to this than just, painting a dream or, you know, I don't want to say messing with paints because that undermines what we do. Yeah, because the thing is -- artists are mirrors for society. And that mirror is vital for the progression of society, and nations. So if Nando's and Spier Arts Trust aren't there to facilitate the mentorship of these various voices, important voices in culture, those voices are going to be lost. And we do know that art is a forunner culture, art changes culture, you know, for the good or the bad. Yeah.

GDLP:
Without them, the mirror's a lot smaller, or it's like cloudy or something. Yeah.

ZM:
Yeah. It's like a weird human universal, right? Art has been being made since humans were humans. It's an intrinsic part of the human condition. At least that's what I tell myself. To justify being an art critic. I think that same kind of push and pull with wanting to be like, it's not life and death. But it is to me!

GDLP:
Yeah, it's back to that 'I'm not crazy. I'm an artist' thing you said. It feels like those are the two parts of it.

Well, I've loved our Nando's day out. We've eaten Nando's two days in a row.

ZM:

You said something, the Nand-ean way of doing ---

GDLP:
The Nando-ean. It sounds like the Mandalorian.

ZM:
Nando-ean Art Day Out.

GDLP:
So we've eaten Nando's two days in a row, and it's been great. And I've looked at some of the pieces in these restaurants slash galleries, and been like, oh, yeah, I could totally see that in like a super slick Mayfair space for thousands and thousands of pounds. And actually, I'm really glad that Nando's has bought it with the intention of just letting restaurant goers look at it while they eat. Like, it's so complimentary to the experience. And it's so pleasant that you don't have to force yourself to go through the experience of like, okay, I'm going to go to a gallery today. And I'm going to, like, try my best to look like a clever person. And I'm going to brace myself for like, the fact that I need to have opinions like all of that pressure is kind of stripped away. It's the white cube-ness of it is gone. Because it's not in a white cube, you're placing are -- you're taking art -- you're **saving** art from the white cube.

ZM:
YEAH!

GDLP:
You're giving the artist what they need, which is money. You're giving the artists what they could massively benefit from, which is an international platform. And then you're also giving the audience a much better time as well. And if you're going to a Mayfair gallery, or any commercial space, you might be assumed to be going there with the intention of buying something. But I'm never going there with the intention of buying anything because, I haven't got the money. When I go to Nando's I'm going there to get chicken livers. And I'm going to just let it, let the art just wash over me.

ZM:
That's so nice! Art can exist in more casual places, in a way that like, doesn't have to compromise on the quality of the circumstantial bit, but also on the quality of the art. There's -- awh, there's Shamiyaana, Rasheed Araeen's restaurant, where the table is like his sculptural cube unit pieces.

GDLP:
Like Art on the Underground

ZM:
Awh! I love art on the underground! So if you're in London, the quickest way to get around is on the tube -- Art on the Underground inserts art into like, the empty spaces that would normally be taken up by a billboard.

GDLP:
But it does that thing of letting you experience art in a sort of coincidental, oh I'm on the move, I'm doing something else peripheral setting, which feels like yeah, the pressures off. It feels much easier to accept and to receive.

ZM:
I think because, right -- This is a brand new thought. I think what it is, is that so much of the way we view and understand art is that it happens contextless in that sanitised white cube space, perfectly blank. It's just the art. But the most exciting and unstable kind of work happens when art includes other things. Some of our favourite artists are artists that came to art later on in life, and had whole other lives and careers and passions and trajectories outside of art. And they pull that into their art. It's just, the thing on its own. It's not sometimes it's not enough, you need to put other things on the table to create something dramatic and exciting and unstable.

GDLP:
And actually, maybe it's not helpful for us to say, every Nando's is a gallery, because we shouldn't be putting the pressure on.

ZM:
Yeah. Maybe every gallery should be a Nando's.

LAUGHS, bc galleries could never!

GDLP:
Every Nando's should just be a restaurant that happens to have really considered art on the walls.

ZM:
And that should be a normal casual thing. Yeah!

GDLP:
As we opened this podcast, I think maybe that's a nice way to end it. The person we spoke to who was at the table with the girls on a lunch break. She told us that she doesn't go to galleries because she doesn't have time. And actually, I think we could insert art into all of that spare time. People might be better off for it. Thank you for listening to this special edition of The White Pube podcast. You can find the transcription for this on thewhitepube.com. We'll be back next week with another episode. Ok.

BOTH:
Byeeeee!

Funky outro like boopbooopboopboopbopp