

In Conversation is a project guest-curated in collaboration with Priya Chopra, by No Jobs in the Arts. For this interview series (May, 2021), we talk to six creatives of colour, linked to the East Midlands, on the themes of accessibility and inclusivity in arts. The interviews feature short voice messages responding to questions exploring the above themes.

This project includes WhatsApp interviews with: Aiofe O’Connor, Arit Emmanuela Etukudo, Jade Foster, Jagjit Kaur, Janhavi Sharma, and Khari Worrell.

All of the artist’s responses were initially recorded as voice messages, the original audio messages can be listened to on our [website](#). To ensure make this content accessible to a wider audience, the interviews have been transcribed below.

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## Introduction to 'In Conversation' by Priya Chopra:

*Hi, I'm Priya, the Guest Curator for this No Jobs in the Arts project. In these interviews, we talk to people of colour working as artists and curators in the East Midlands, about their everyday experiences, identities, and accessibility in the arts industry. As a Masters student, at the University of Leicester, my research is focused on the decolonisation of the museum. So, I thought it would be interesting to hear from practicing artists and curators about what they think needs to be done to further that process.*

*Decolonisation is more than just giving back stolen goods, it's allowing space for colonised bodies and voices to be seen, and heard, and most importantly, given the opportunity to be celebrated and understood outside a colonised context. These interviews ask each participant three personalised questions, and then one final question, asked in response to their answers. This is to promote the idea of a back and forth, a reciprocal narrative being had between artist and curator and institutions, or more generally - the types of conversations that should be had between people of colour and white folks.*

*Let me tell you a bit about the interviewees:*

*After being introduced to Khari Worrall, I was taken aback by the intricate mix of simplicity and chaotic vibrancy in his compositions. I was reminded of peeling factory paint, and post-industrial Britain, by the many shades of grey dispersed between layers of strong black lines. Khari is equally passionate in his roles as father and artist, roles which are actually pretty similar; both require painstaking effort to nurture and protect, but both roles also allow for a gratification like no other.*

*Arit Emmanuela Etukudo's work can be described simply: as pure magic. Her mystical, mysterious digital compositions are dark, decadent and sultry in their solipsism. Her work is dripping with symbolism, and a kind of dark psychedelic excess. Through our conversation, I gained insight into Arit's story, and how this seeps into her work.*

*Jagjit Kaur's work spoke to me on a very personal level. Her use of personal imagery, symbolism and colour in her compositions are gorgeous, but her visual references to her Indian heritage is what drew me most to her work. Personally, I have always felt like a mosaic made up of British cultural references, and Indian spirituality. Jagjit's use of collage definitely evokes a similar feeling, but her work is so much more than a tribute to her ancestry, as we learn through speaking with her.*

*Janhavi Sharma's work transcends geographical borders, and we learn through this interview that her influences of everyday experiences, intersecting with socio-political issues, fuel her inspiration. Her perspective as a Indian in Britain was particularly interesting to me and pertinent to my research into the decolonisation of museums and curatorial practice.*

*I've been lucky enough to work with Aofie O'Connor before on Radio 1xtra's Words First project, in 2015. She has evolved from a spoken word artist to a theatre maker and producer, writing about the multifaceted nature of existing at the intersections of multiple identities.*

*She provides insight into what can be done to remedy the misconception that the arts are not a lucrative space for people of colour, and how industries can best support people of colour.*

*Finally, we have Jade Foster, they are an artist/curator working in prominent institutions, such as Nottingham Primary and New Art Exchange. We crossed paths in 2018, when they recruited me to work on UKYA's Nottingham Takeover festival. Jade is a powerhouse in their ongoing work to nurture black creatives as individuals, to hold space for plural voices and in the progress to affect systematic change.*

*I hope these interviews are as interesting to listen to as they were to make! Thanks to everyone involved, and to you for listening!*

**Additional references:**

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Priya's introduction recording\)](#)



[Start of 'In Conversation' Interview Transcript)

## In Conversation with Khari Worrell

### Khari's interview:

**Question one:** What everyday experiences influence your painting practice?

*Khari's response: 'My everyday experiences, that influence my painting practice, are being a responsible father. Having someone else's life in your hands can be daunting. So, when I'm painting, I become irresponsible. I give myself that break from being a parent. Not having to worry about a sense of direction, experimenting and being free, really excites me. Expressing is therapeutic – I find real peace. It definitely helps with the parent side of things. A lot of what I feel is reflected in my everyday experiences. Through my painting practice, I always try to relay and relate to an emotion. Whether I'm experiencing a bad day, or a wonderful day, I feel it's important for those who don't have a focal standpoint not to feel like they're alone.'*

**Question two:** Working in the arts, do you feel supported in your dual roles as an artist and parent?

*Khari's response: 'Being brought up in a creative family - such as my own - I definitely feel supported, as an artist and a parent. For the patience taken with me, for the time I can take out to focus on my craft, and to have that balance, and not to feel like I have to explain myself to my fiancé - who fully supports and understands what I'm trying to accomplish. I don't feel there is separation between being an artist and a parent. When I'm painting, I'm still an attentive father. When I'm looking after my girls, I'm also inspired and being creative. I believe it's hard to support people with creative traits, as there aren't any guarantees, and it's somewhat just a dream. But, having people believe in you, to believe in yourself, definitely pushes a narrative and congregates your emergent career as an artist.'*

**Question three:** What changes would you like to see in the arts to better support and empower artists who are creating a family?

*Khari's response: 'Changes I would like to see in the arts, to better support and empower artists who are creating a family, would be a community in which artists feel they can congregate, collaborate, educate, and be educated. I don't feel like there is a space where artists can go to socialise with other creatives. So, it'd be cool to have a place to learn and improve my skills. I definitely have been looking for classes to join, such as painting or drawing, but I haven't found anything, But, having more skills under your belt is like having a CV, because it makes you feel that much more empowered and supported, especially for those who are creating a family.'*

**Question four:** Tell us about your ideal space, where artists can go to socialise, collaborate, and learn?

*Khari's response:* 'Idealistically speaking, my space would be for emerging artists wanting to take their craft seriously, and put them in the right environment to help push their motive. For example, having a couple rooms that can be used for photography, fashion, sculpture, or painting, a main room to hold lessons and to teach others, and then a café for creatives to socialise, collaborate and build relationships. Having a space like this would broaden the horizon for innovators, because I know if I'm in need of a service, I can go to that spot. My end goal as an artist is to make it easier for other emerging artists to have a house they can go to, to feel welcomed and supported. That's my ideal space.'

### **Artist biography:**

Khari Worrell is a self taught Black British Artist, consistently seeking to challenge himself with work that congregates all emotion, imagination and his general love for creativity. Aiming to capture important moments through his works like a story, he believes that sometimes for something to be overcome it needs to be destroyed, or for something to be deconstructed it must have been emotionally unstable.

Preferably working on large scale work, Khari feels more immersed, open with his feelings; treating the canvas as his therapy. When asked about his process, Khari Worrell states, "when the works are destroyed, this erases anxiety allowing my energy to be transferred within the painting resulting in an abstract fashion".

### **Additional references:**

Instagram: [@khariworrell \(click here to visit Khari's instagram\)](#)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Khari's interview recordings\)](#)

## In Conversation with Arit Emmanuella Etukudo

### Arit's interview:

**Question one:** What is the 'Black Magical experience' and how does this relate to your lived experience?

*Arit's response: 'The Black Magical experience is just that innate or organic magic that exists within the black body. This magic comes from our roots, or our mythology, our spirituality. I see this in my lived experience everyday, with something like seeing angel numbers everywhere, or having certain intuitions, or even something as little as looking up at the clouds and seeing images that give me answers to something I've been struggling with. It basically just has to do with having a connection to your roots, which are and then connected to the universe.'*

**Question two:** How do you feel placing yourself in your work empowers you as an artist?

*Arit's response: 'So - being black, dark skinned, queer, woman, African, whatever else, I have always felt like I had this cloak of invisibility placed over me, where I wasn't acknowledged, or when I was acknowledged people tried to invalidate parts of my identity just to make it fit into their own beliefs. So, when I put myself in my art, I'm retaliating against that. I am taking authority and saying this is how I exist. This is my art and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it.'*

**Question three:** What changes would you like to see in the contemporary arts to empower more black creatives?

*Arit's response: 'I would love to see more space for all forms of black expression. I see a lot of times in the art world that black artists are only found interesting, if their work speaks on black suffering or struggles, because that's what the white people in charge feel is more interesting to their white viewers. But there are so many layers to art and black people and the black experience that the world needs to see. I want to see blackness emancipated from these restrictions. I want to see black stories told in full, and I want to see more space for the black radical imagination.'*

**Question four:** How can institutions that have benefited from colonialism support artists and portray the full Black experience?

*Arit's response: 'So, these institutions can do this simply with outreach. So, by firstly understanding what this full black experience can entail. And then, actively looking for artists that are expanding their stories in these ways. The*



artists have done the work that they needed to do, and I think it's the job of the institution to do the work in finding these artists.'

**Artist biography:**

Arit Emmanuela Etukudo is a Nigerian-American self-portrait artist whose practice focuses on the simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility of the self, body and existence. She earned her BA in Cinematic Arts and minor in Creative Writing from University of Maryland Baltimore County in 2016. She then earned her MFA in Fine Art from Nottingham Trent University in 2019. During her MFA study she took an Erasmus at École Supérieure des Beaux-arts to expand her research. Her work has earned her achievements such as the 2019 NAE Future Exhibition Prize, the 2017 Indie Capitol Award for Best Experimental/Animated film, and the 2016 UMBC Senior Exhibition prize for Outstanding Work in Cinematic Arts.

Recent Exhibitions include: Garden, Art Share LA USA (2020), Lost Stories, Surface Gallery UK (2020), Prescription, Art out Loud LA, USA (2020), Waiting to become: Images from a dream-state, Attenborough Arts Center UK (2019 ).

**Additional references:**

Instagram: [@arit\\_emmanuela \(click here to visit Arit's Instagram\)](#)

Website: [https://aritemmanuela.com/ \(click here to visit Arit's website\)](https://aritemmanuela.com/)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Arit's interview recordings\)](#)

## In Conversation with Jagjit Kaur

### Jagjit's interview:

**Question one:** Does your use of collage techniques in your work represent the clashing of Eastern and Western cultures?

*Jagjit's response: 'My collages are more of a merging than a clashing of cultures, Eastern and Western, I believe personally. They come together in this melting pot, and create this new composition where it has been mixed and combined with all sorts of imagery. The imagery comes from archives, then, it's never really cohesive, Instagram, so many different places. Images I've taken and I try to bring them together and create these narratives, and this visual balance, where I use symbolism. And, I also think they're made in relationship to art and the digital world, in terms of social media and Instagram, and that quick consumerism of these collages.'*

**Question two:** How would you like your art to be received in spaces that have a largely white audience?

*Jagjit's response: 'I think I'd like my artwork to be viewed by being understood. But firstly, for the visual harmonies that I've been able to create, hopefully. And, the beauty of the visual side of it. And then people look into it deeper, and look at the symbolism, and look at the narrative, and go into what this could mean, and perhaps go off and do their own research about cultures, and just being exposed to different narratives, that they might not relate to, or are not their own. However, they can understand that, and appreciate that.'*

**Question three:** What changes would you like to see in the arts to better support creatives who are representing and discussing their histories through their work?

*Jagjit's response: 'I have been so lucky to have such a positive experience in the art world, and work with curators and gallerists that have really wanted to understand my work, and know what it's about, and never disrespected the cultural, religious symbolism that I've used in my work. And, I felt so accepted because of that. And, I guess the people who have been exposed more, and have worked in the art world longer, will know more about what definitely needs to be changed. And, I think I've been lucky enough, because these people have made me feel welcomed, and have really sat down and had conversations about our work, and wanted to know my perspective.'*

**Question four:** Is the contemporary British-Asian experience like a collage?

*Jagjit's response: 'I'd say that the contemporary British Asian experience is different for everyone. It is a merging of culture and a merging of people.'*

However, my collages are a merging of imagery and trying to find a visual and spatial balance. So, I'd say that making a collage, and having this quick snapshot of my interpretation of how images fit together, cannot sum up the whole British Asian experience at all, and it will not be the same for everyone. So, I'm not really sure.'

**Artist biography:**

Jagjit Kaur is a multimedia artist focused on painting and digital collage based in Leicester. Blending and building and pushing images and worlds together Jagjit looks to create a visual harmony. The source points may not be cohesive (whether screen shots from Instagram or gallery archives) but come together to form distinct and thoughtful compositions. Through her work, and the duality of her identity, she brings together her English and Indian culture, often painting traditional Indian subjects in a non-traditional manner and material.

**Additional references:**

Instagram: [@without\\_looking \(click here to visit Jagjit's Instagram\)](#)

Website: <https://jagjitkaurg.wixsite.com/jagjitkaur> (click here to visit Jagjit's website)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Jagit's interview recordings\)](#)

## In Conversation with Janhavi Sharma

### Janhavi's interview:

**Question one:** since moving from Bombay, how do you feel living in Nottingham, through the COVID-19 pandemic, has influenced your creative practice?

*Janhavi's response: 'Because I moved to Nottingham during the pandemic, My experience of its cultural space and social life was very compromised and limited. The only thing that I had access to, during that prolonged period of isolation, was the material of nostalgia and memory. And, also the craving of the food from back home. So, I ended up cooking a lot, and also examining the socio-political context of that food, and it's very obvious, but the neglected connections to maternal history. And, these themes sort of just trickle down in my practice and I'm presently engaged in exploring them from an eco-feminist lens.'*

**Question two:** Coming to the East Midlands as an international art student, how have you found accessing local art networks?

*Janhavi's response: 'We have already engaged with three prominent galleries of the city via NTU [Nottingham Trent University], and the experience so far has been very friendly and inclusive, I must say. But, I haven't yet approached any of these spaces independently. And, I'm curious if I would be given the same advantage if the university was not facilitating these interactions.'*

**Question three:** What changes do you feel need to be made in the UK art institutions to better address colonial narratives?

*Janhavi's response: 'I guess, to stop looking at written histories as everything. To make space for oral histories and oral traditions, as equally important references. To take the idea of research with a pinch of salt, and know that this desire to extract from communities for the sake of art and academia has never been ideal for the colonised people. To stop grouping art references of a certain geography together, and know that there are various pluralities, and diversities, and hierarchies, within those geographies that are very much present; to acknowledge them. And, I think most importantly, to shift the vantage point - to stop looking at colonisation as something of the past, and something that should exist in textbooks and art circles but, to address it as a very contemporary, and a very much present issue. And, I guess, do what you're doing with this project, you know: to include, and collaborate, and listen.'*

**Question four:** Through your work, do you reject contemporary expectations of identity?

*Janhavi's response:* 'I think my work should always acknowledge that I am a cross-cultural entity. That I can't even articulate myself in my own mother tongue. And, it took coming to another country to understand the importance of sustenance and preservation that I so talk about in my practice right now. That it took coming here to realise the one sidedness of Western epistemologies, and wanting to decolonize methodologies. I don't think it would have happened if I was not a part of a global dialogue. And, I think my work should always ask questions and challenge things, but also accommodate these dilemmas and contradictions within it. And, I don't know what contemporary expectations of identity are, but if they are contemporary, I think they should be inclusive, and understand the hybrid nature of identity, and the multiplicity of identity. And, if not, then sure I reject it, because I think there should be more acceptance than expectation, anyway, right?'

**Artist biography:**

Janhavi Sharma (She/Her) is an independent visual artist from India, with a background of Journalism and Modern and Contemporary Indian Art from Mumbai University. She is presently examining the broader themes of ecofeminism, maternal histories, and memories through her practice. She experiments with various media and material that persist a layer of socio-political and cultural contexts in her work, along with using the tools of performativity, repetition, and distortion in her work. Her photographs are often choreographed to reflect the ambivalent nature of memories that she attempts to revive, re-assemble and re-interpret; often using fiction as an active instrument to remember the deliberately overlooked pasts of women in a domestic space.

**Additional references:**

Instagram: [@janhavi\\_sharma \(click here to visit Janhavi's Instagram\)](#)

Website: [https://janhavisharma.com/ \(click here to visit Janhavi's website\)](https://janhavisharma.com/)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Janhavi's interview recordings\)](#)

## In Conversation with Aoife O'Connor

### Aoife's interview:

**Question one:** Tell us about your artistic journey, transitioning between the disciplines of theatre and poetry?

*Aoife's response: 'Transferring between the disciplines of poetry and theatre was quite a journey, but also, an ongoing process for me. I've kind of always been a performer: I'm a spoken word artist. I prefer to write for stage rather than page. So, I have like that experience. But, I also kind of believe that a lot of artists have transferable skills: that we are self-promoters; we are researchers; when we look for opportunities to showcase our work; we advise ourselves on how to take the next steps. So, I kind of used those skills to move into theatre. And, I also like being in a position where I'm constantly learning, or I'm constantly able to gain new skills, work with different people and get different experiences, and I think it is a constant process for me at least.'*

**Question two:** How do you feel your cultural heritage influences your creative practice, as a poet and writer?

*Aoife's response: 'As a writer, I tend to find my jumping off point is to write what I know. So, for me, that obviously is my identities: a lot of it is my cultural heritage, growing up as like a second generation immigrant in this country, the privileges and advantages of being a person of colour, but, also like my sexuality, and how all these things interact with each other. Because, I think I think anyone could write about all these different elements, but for me, it's sort of how they interact with each other. The multifaceted-ness of being all these different things, and how they influenced me. I also think it's important to write what you know, to write where you come from, because that's your perspective, it's your uniqueness. Like, even if you're writing a nature poem: it's about how you interact with nature, and that comes from how you've grown up, where you've come from.'*

**Question three:** What measures do you think should be in place to better support women working in the Performing Arts?

*Aoife's response: 'To encourage women to work in the performing arts, I think it starts young. It starts with teaching all young people that the arts and creative industries are valid jobs, and this was something I struggled with when I was younger. When I chose to go into a creative degree, a lot of people frowned upon it because they didn't understand the opportunities and the options that were available to me. They didn't see it as transferable skills and they didn't see the benefits of gaining that kind of creative education. I also think it's partly by putting women in positions of power and authority; and, I think that goes for any job, or anything really, there needs to be more diversity in the workplace. I'm really lucky that I work in quite a diverse*

*workplace, according to gender. But, I also think that opportunities and call outs need to be supportive and targeting women. And, when hiring you need to be aware of who is on your panel and your diversity quotas.'*

**Question four:** How do you make the benefits of pursuing a career in the creative industries more visible to creatives from marginalised backgrounds?

*Aoife's response:* 'Making creative industries more visible to creatives from marginalised backgrounds starts at a young age. I think, through education, through teaching them that it is possible. By making it affordable, if not free, to pursue creative after school activities - through grants, bursaries, and social initiatives. I think it's also about making sure you've got people in the positions, so that young people can look up to role models who look the same as them, come from the same backgrounds as them. And, to do that, I think there needs to be more people of colour in positions of power. There needs to be more colour by casting, generally, I don't think we do that enough, and I think there's a lot of controversy around that. I think it's about founding bursaries and education systems for people from marginalised backgrounds. I think there needs to be more initiatives that target that and attract that.'

#### **Artist biography:**

Aoife O'Connor is a writer, poet, producer and performer based in Derby. She graduated from the University of Derby after studying Creative and Professional Writing. Her main focuses are on Spoken Word and Performance Poetry which she has performed nationally. She is a Slam poet and co-founded a female and minority lead performance night that focuses on diversifying the arts. Her work surrounds the themes of Feminism, LGBT, Race and Disability.

#### **Additional references:**

Twitter: [@AoifePOConnor \(click here to visit Aoife's Twitter\)](#)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Aoife's interview recordings\)](#)

## In Conversation with Jade Foster

### Jade's interview:

**Question one:** What advice would you give to a younger version of yourself when you were thinking of pursuing a career as an Artist-Curator?

*Jade's response: 'Don't undervalue your labour, and don't let anyone tell you the pace in which you will develop or grow, that is a unique thing to you, and you will know what feels right to you. Align yourself, and surround yourself, with people who are supportive, and that will offer reinforcement; this could be organisations, artists, curators, cultural workers. Make sure you have a strong sense of direction, and work with organisations that fundamentally are not exploitative. And, that will provide a support infrastructure to allow you to thrive.'*

**Question two:** How do you think local contemporary Visual Arts organisations can better support the next generation of Black creatives?

*Jade's response: 'I don't think local contemporary visual arts organisations are equipped to support black creatives in the city (Nottingham). However, I do think there is a potential there for real listening to be had, and organisations have been doing this, such as Primary and New Art Exchange. But, even those organisations have a lot to do, learn, and grow. And, I think it's just about not assuming the needs of the community, and just opening up your doors to people in a way that is an open offer, and a very nuanced offer, and don't homogenise and generalise a community; to know that every black creative needs that level of support, when everyone is individual and different. So, think it's just about finding the nuances,'*

**Question three:** What have you learnt by creating a forum for Black curators and producers?

*Jade's response: 'No black person is the same, every black person is different. What I've learned about creating a forum for black creators and producers, is that we're not all interested in the same things, we don't like the same things, we didn't go to the same things. And so, it's about building community, but within there, being very specific about what types of interests and careers you're trying to build within that. So, for me, it's about holding a space for plurality, holding a space for multiple voices, multiple opinions, multiple*



*emotions, multiple attitudes towards systemic change, or towards black curatorial practice. Practices that are not limited or bound by blackness, practices that might be rooted in blackness, just being open to all of that and just creating a space for people to be themselves - and just feel at peace.'*

**Question four:** You work with some of the most established contemporary Visual Arts organisations in the East Midlands, what do you want to achieve through your roles?

Jade's response: 'As a board member at Nottingham Contemporary, I want to support a shift in the work culture and shake things up, supporting a period of organisational change, focused around social justice and social change. At the end of it, I hope the staff are developing, thriving, and the institution is more responsive to the public and communities in which it serves. At Primary, I want to work with artists and support them to make new work, through a series of commissions. At New Art Exchange, I want to provide a space for local and regional artists to show work in the Main and Forecourt Gallery. I'm not a curator at NAE, I'm actually at the bottom of the hierarchy within the creative team, so I don't have a position of influence. But, I would like to facilitate this with our black-led upcoming project, 4UBU. 4UBU will take over the Main Gallery in August and support local or regional Black artists.'

#### **Artist biography:**

Jade Foster is a British artist, curator and creative producer of AfroCaribbean heritage based in Nottingham, UK and a current CCCADI Curatorial Fellow in AfroCaribbean Art. They are a founding member and initiator of Black Curators Collective (BCC) with an upcoming project at Glasgow International 2021. Foster holds positions as a Trustee of Nottingham Contemporary, Assistant Curator at Primary, and Creative Programme Coordinator at New Art Exchange (NAE) in Nottingham. They are currently working with artist Maybelle Peters for Primary. As a freelancer, they have worked with UK New Artists (formerly UKYA); Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) Glasgow; Live Art Development Agency (LADA); performingborders and Never Done.

#### **Additional references:**

Instagram: [@\\_jade\\_foster \(click here to visit Jade's Instagram\)](#)

Website: [https://www.jadefoster.co.uk/ \(click here to visit Jade's website\)](https://www.jadefoster.co.uk/)

Audio: [\(click here to listen to Jade's interview recordings\)](#)

[End of 'In Conversation' Interview Transcript)

## Editors Notes:

**NO JOBS  
IN THE ARTS**

'*No Jobs in the Arts*' creates opportunities that support early-career arts professionals in the visual arts, within the East Midlands, through creative opportunities, events and publications.

[@nojobsinthearts](#) / [www.nojobsinthearts.co.uk](http://www.nojobsinthearts.co.uk)



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[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Thank you to all the participating artists: Aiofe O'Connor, Arit Emmanuela Etukudo, Jade Foster, Jagjit Kaur, Janhavi Sharma, and Khari Worrell. Also, thank you for the support of our Guest Curator, Priya Chopra, in developing this project.