



**BALANCE: Anna Berry In Conversation with Inaya Folarin Iman**

Inaya: Good evening, everyone. And thank you so much Jerwood Arts for hosting this really exciting and important event and hopefully a very stimulating discussion. And I think we're just going to get straight into it. So firstly, Anna, I think it would be just great to elaborate more on the work, A Fall From Grace, and why you chose to explore and experiment with some of these ideas, identity? These seem like very big ideas and discussions that we're having a lot within society. So why did that really capture your imagination?

Anna: Do you want me to describe the piece first or go straight into?

Inaya: Please do.

Anna: So it's kind of a pair of sculptures and it has repeating cone patterns, which are kind of part of my sculptural vocabulary and the first sculpture is like a fountain with rods of cones. And initially the cones are very delicate, hand-built paper porcelain cones, which is kind of, for me, a metaphor for authenticity and the individual because they're individually made. They then segue into cast cones, which are by their nature repeated by the casting process. And as they get further towards the end of the rods, the whole shape begins to be pulled down by concrete. And so it's kind of a metaphor for the ossifying or the point of which an idea perhaps is no longer useful or no longer being positive. And then the narrative moves to the second sculpture where we have a sort of big, a very threatening concrete cone that's kind of precariously balanced with a very tiny little paper porcelain cone underneath, which is a bit of a self portrait really of how I've felt in amongst these politics over the last few years.

Inaya: And could you elaborate on that a little bit, because when we think about identity and when we talk about it in today's society, we often hear it as wanting recognition of our identity. We want to be seen for our identity, but you have a different take on it that

actually it's something that could weigh us down. It could be heavy, it could be quite constraining. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

Anna: I think identity is definitely a box. I think it's always a box and I think it's something that other people in society thrust onto you in order to corral you into their understanding in how they want to contextualize you. So it means they are bringing to you their set of expectations about who you should be, what you should think, what kind of life you've had, all of that. And I had little stories actually that I was going to tell to illustrate that about my early life. So I was born and brought up in Scotland, but I had English parents. And so there's a narrative in Scotland that all the Scots are terribly oppressed by the nasty English. So I was always told that I was posh because my parents were English. And this was very strange because the people who were telling me this were much richer for middle class families, much more well to do. So it was really 180 degrees away from the reality that those people would call me posh. But in today's money, what they were doing was a sort of intersectionality equation and in their mind, that's punching up. So it's a sort of legitimized bullying, which is exactly what I see now with the use of intersectionality. It's like, who am I allowed to bully kind of thing.

And then I got to university and I was 17. And I came from this school that was entirely made of asbestos and had 2000 people in it and I got all the way to Oxford. And I met all these 20 year old gap year whatevers. And they all treated me like I was from some desperate estate with gun crime that I escaped or something. And exactly as inaccurate as the other perception at school of my boring, lower, middle class existence. And so for me as a sort tail end generation X'er, we knew that the search for authenticity was about breaking out of the boxes that people were putting you in. That's not where you find yourself, it's not where you find authenticity. And I see... it concerns me now that I see the opposite in young people today that they seem to want to brick themselves into ever more silly boxes.

Inaya: I really resonate with a lot of the things that you are saying because I think it is interesting, this kind of question of why you, why you felt that this was a subject that you really wanted to explore. Because I think, as someone you operate in the space of kind of disability arts. And myself as well as someone that is socially coded as a black woman, there's so many assumptions and expectations and roles that come with that. And oftentimes when you don't necessarily fit into preconceived ideas of what that's meant to be, often by people that are arguing that they are trying to liberate you or expand your horizons. You often find that you're put into these new boxes. And if you don't accept or affirm a particular orthodox, you're seen as less authentically that particular category, or you're not a legitimate version of that. And so do you resonate with that characterization? Do you feel a similar thing when it comes to this discussion about disability arts as well?

Anna: Yeah, I feel like a bit of a black sheep in disability arts really, because there's this very kind of one politics, one lens that you can view things through. And if you don't adhere to it they... it's all very open and lovely and happy clappy until you kind of say, "I'm not sure I agree." And then you're not quite as welcome as you were. I think there's a lot [inaudible 00:09:39] with it. If you are the kind of equality box tick person, it's a massively double edged sword because you never know if your works any good for a

start. You don't know why you're being picked and you never quite trust it. There's not very much room for you to feel because everybody else knows that you're the equality box tick. And for me it's kind of the flip side of the coin. I want my work to be shown because my work's good and it being shown because I'm disabled is just as bad as it not being shown because I'm disabled. I think there's no difference there.

Inaya: No, I think that's really interesting, and I've even thought that myself, that whether that's a role or something like that. Did I get there because of my ability and because of my quality? And I think, it is a weird tension because there is this demand for greater representation. And I think that's a really good thing. I think that it's great to live in a society where so many different people are represented, but you want to be represented because you bring something to the table and because of your humanity, because of your contribution. And when it does become reduced to a tick box exercise then you do have that self doubt. You're thinking, why did I get that position? Did I really get that for the right reasons? And again, that creates these new prejudices and new stereotypes that I think can create these new boxes, as you are mentioning. I guess on that point, what do you think then we lose perhaps when we reify our identity or when we get fixated on it, or when we put ourselves in these new boxes? Is there something that you think that we lose?

Anna: Yeah. Actually I think we lose everything and you literally wrote a little list when you're sending the questions and I was just like, "I can't say this any better." We lose our humanity, we lose our freedom, we lose equality, we lose curiosity and openness to others. I think we lose all of that. I think we lose our humanity. I think it's much more serious than people think, because I think... I don't have an articulate way to say this, and it involves boring on about critical theory and ideas from the nineties and stuff. But I think that a lot of this imposes a sort of edifice of theory between our ourselves and our heart and our response to others and our basic compassion and our response to art and our response to music and whatever it is. And instead of having that humanity, instead we have to deconstruct and we have to start parsing identity characteristics and deciding are we being patronizing by having compassion and all of this. And you cannot... it mediates and utterly just destroys it. It really erodes your humanity, I think.

Inaya: Do you see this as a left or right issue? Because oftentimes... and it is strange when you have this debate because you hear on one side that this is left wing identity politics, and then you often hear on the left, they'll say that identity politics originates in the right in terms of theories of racial superiority and so on and so forth. Do you think this is a left or right issue or do you think there's something deeper than that?

Anna: Both of those are exactly right, but what the left doesn't realize is that it's essentially taken on board right wing ideas and just kind of... the left doesn't exist anymore. It's a husk, it's dust. And what it's done is absorbed a lot of the bad ideas from the right and run with a strange false swag of progressivism. And that idea, yeah, that identitarian stuff is fundamentally right wing. It's bang on. I have a big list [inaudible 00:13:20]. I have a thing that I keep saying it's left wing hardware playing right wing software. That's what we have at the moment. We're in this kind of weird simulacrum where people are performing something or pantomiming something that feels like the left and looks like

the left, but it's not. It's not the left, it's something that's deeply individualistic and anti communitarian.

And I wrote a list, actually, I wrote a list of right wing things that are now considered the left. So the chauvinism of people like us, tribalisms, cultural preservation, the suspicions of which are now recast as cultural appropriation. Things being individualistic rather than communitarian. Illiberal rather than liberal. The idea that what your ancestors did or what people who look like you did in history is terribly, terribly important. And that it sees... this should be the biggest fucking clue ever that it sees corporations as of force for good. If you are marching in tune with institutions, corporations, and the government, you're not radical, and you're probably not progressive. So all of this is a mutated, bastardized left that bizarrely has taken on all of the complexion and ideas of the right, pretends it's progressive and then has become so intolerant of even centrists and right wing people that they won't even be friends with them, despite the fact that they've nicked all their ideas. So it's a very strange situation we're in.

Inaya: I want to just slightly drill down on that point about cultural appropriation, because on the work as well you want to explore this idea of balance. And I do think that, is there a middle ground here because on the one hand, in some senses there are groups that have been marginalized and kept away from being seen as beautiful and interesting and worthy. And so some people argue, maybe it's that overcorrection essentially in order to over represent, in order to give these people or give certain groups the recognition that previously historically they didn't have. Do you see that at all?

Anna: I think it's really important to show lots of work from different cultural groups. I think what needs to not happen is the shutting down of artists being inspired by other work. And then people saying that that is stealing something when actually that's the way that all art has always worked. It's all cultural means and we see things and we incorporate it and we're... people want to shut down Henry Moore because he's influenced by African arts and that this has somehow stolen something and this is nonsense. And it only goes one way as well. Nobody wants to cancel Hokusai because he's massively influenced by European landscapists. They're not saying he's culturally appropriating European landscape artists. And the problem is that we've... our art can't survive this. You've already got a situation in literature with sensitivity readers. We were talking about Kate Clanchy earlier, that there's this horrific burglarization where the art is just kind of hatcheted away by 15 or 16 Philistine people who take away anything that anybody could possibly find offensive. And you're not left with a piece of art at the end of that. And again, I find that really totalitarian and really frightening official propagandist art that's cleansed before it's even allowed to be put into the world kind of thing.

Inaya: Exactly. On that point, one of the things... and we were talking about this earlier, and I think, what about all of the works of art and literature that perhaps wouldn't have not been created because of fear of the reaction. We're also losing on that point, what do we lose? We are losing creativity. We're losing possibility in our imagination when actually people don't feel that they can actually express themselves out of fear of the reaction.

Anna: I've talked to a few art students and stuff, and it's really sad. They are genuinely afraid. They don't feel free in their imaginations to explore what they want. They need to know what they have permission to explore. They see other people around them getting canceled. So it's a real shutting down. And then a lot of people who do have, what you might call intersectional traction, their tutors will persuade them that they should be making work about identity because that's what you have to make work about now. And a lot of them are like, "I don't really want to make work about that. I'm interested in this idea." So it's a kind of horrible... I think it's a horrible closing down of creativity.

Inaya: And then how do we get that balance, the thing that you are talking about and exploring, between... I don't know, the particular identity and the universal... the subjective, the fixation in our psychology and the subjectivity, but also the objective. Is it always... Is it just a pendulum that always swings? Is it just a pull and pull or is there a way in which we can create those foundations as a society that we have a shared agreement on something as a foundation?

Anna: I think a shared reality is really important and things like the basics of the scientific process and allowing us to understand our reality with some degree of objectivity is incredibly important. And what we've seen is this weird reification of the subjective and an absolute denouncement and a deploring of the idea of the objective. And I think what happens with that is that firstly people end up in these grim little solipsistic bubbles, where my experience can never intersect with your experience with anyone else's experience. But it also, again, takes us to a very totalitarian place because when you start to break down people's collective knowledge, it then becomes power relations, my narrative versus your narrative. And again, it goes back to fucking political theory mush. But if you take away the idea that there's a significant way in which we can agree about reality, then all you're left with is narrative.

And that's why all of these battles land up being a middle class parlor game about language and language policing and changing narratives and crap that has no effect on people who are actually having a bad life. At a foundational level, if you're interested in social justice, you're interested in finding the people who are genuinely marginalized and having a shit time and you find out who they are and why. If you start off from a place of critical theory where you're issuing any materialist analysis at all, then at the ground floor level, you're not going to get to that place.

Inaya: On your sculpture work, just going back to that for a second, it, from what the things that you're saying, it does feel a weight. It does feel exhausting. And I can really understand why it went from this delicate thing to something that's heavy. Does it feel exhausting sometimes, this sense of identity and all of the social expectations and pressure that has now come to be associated with it?

Anna: I think what's exhausting is being clear eyed and a distant. When you see what essentially is having ringside seats to the start of totalitarianism, and you can see you that around you and nobody else can see it, and everyone is dancing to this tune that they don't seem to even understand what it is they're dancing to and you see it, that's exhausting. And it's a test of your ethical metal because you're like, I have to put a flag pole in the sand for reality and hold that line. And people will denounce you and they'll

say that you're evil and bigoted and all of this weird stuff. It's really bizarre. It's really, really bizarre.

Inaya: Anna, why do you think... do you think the art world is particularly susceptible to this? Do you think there's anything about the art world itself, that it is explorative, that it is creative that makes it more susceptible? Or do you see this as a society-wide problem?

Anna: It's a society-wide problem. I think it's probably worst in the art world than anywhere else, which I think is curious because it should be a place of descent, an openness, and it should be a place of people like me who are standing back and observing this and then making some kind of commentary on it. This is the most significant change in domestic politics that I've seen in my lifetime. Left [inaudible 00:21:40] just irrelevant. And I see no artists making work about this, or if they're making work they can't get it shown. And they're sort of doing the opposite, they're part of the mob so they all call themselves activists. And what they mean by that is that they put the right hashtags in their Twitter bio. They're not activists and they just have no interest in commenting on this as a social political phenomenon.

I think the art world is susceptible to it for two reasons. First it's full of fucking narcissists and they're the most susceptible. And they want to do... exactly the worst part of this, they want to curate a self instead of being themselves. So they want to curate an identity from silly boxes rather than be authentic. And also it's a virtue aesthetic. All of this is an aesthetic. It's a dance, it's a Plato's cave of being a good person and they love doing a virtue aesthetic. So they do all their little hashtags and they go about canceling people in their purity spirals and all the rest of it and they fucking love it.

Inaya: Do you think you are allowed to say this more than others? What do you think of that, that maybe your identity or the identity that society ascribes you gives you a greater ability to say things that other people may not?

Anna: Yeah and it makes me really angry actually that... because almost then it falls to my shoulder, because I can play my little intersectionality card because I'm disabled. And so that gives me a free pass to be able to descent. And that makes me quite angry because ultimately, either what I'm saying is correct, or it's not. And how much melanin there is in my skin or whether I'm disabled or not, will not change the truth value of that statement. And they won't make an argument. They won't say you're wrong because, they will just go straight to [inaudible 00:23:24] and it will be, we're not listening to you because, whatever. And so that's why you've got [inaudible 00:23:30]... if your entire lens in life is understanding people through identity all you ever have is an [inaudible 00:23:34] argument. So yeah, it shouldn't be the case.

Inaya: And why do you think there is this intolerance though? Because I don't... I often think we don't feel more cohesive as a society. We don't feel like things are necessarily improving. This mentality, these new taboos that we are creating, these new orthodoxes. It doesn't feel that we're creating the great works of humanity and that we're unleashing this unbounding creative potential. Why is there such intolerance when it's not actually serving us, it doesn't feel like it's benefiting us.

Anna: I think you have to have a really long lens on that. I think that there's a sign wave of waves of puritanism that come up in history and you get generations that want have bonfires of the vanities and they have great moral certainty and they want a year zero of culture where everything that's problematic gets cleansed. And that's what makes me most afraid about it actually. I've sort of decided over the last years that the most frightening behavior or personality characteristic is sanctimony, hands down, because there's just huge evils being done at the moment. And it's absolutely been done with the kind of, we're doing God's work kind of mentality.

Inaya: And what do you think of people that say it's a secular religion? Do you buy that too?

Anna: I think I absolutely buy that. I think it's a deeply religious architecture and actually I think that's what's mostly problematic about it because when you get people doing student radicalism, they have their few years and then they calm down a bit when they grow up. But I think because this is a religion masquerading as a politics, I don't think people will grant it as a deeply evangelical religion. And it has its own priest class and it has a clarity and it has original sin. Your skin color would determine if you live in original sin or if you're permanently a martyr and that kind of thing. And the most significant thing about it for me religiously is this constant search for apostasy, and this is why [inaudible 00:25:40] is canceled. They just don't, they're not interested in that. It's like a cult. The danger is the dissent within. So they take people... usually people who actually have done good in the world, lived as activists, who've done great things and they find the [inaudible 00:25:53] and cancel them. And the cry is always bigot but what they're really saying is heretic.

Inaya: But maybe do we... do you think maybe we have a religious impulse in us as human beings? If it is a secular religion, maybe there's something that we need to replace, or maybe the values to which have taken us so far, liberal world view is coming to an end or that it's being exhausted. And actually we need to do the philosophical, moral, and intellectual work of making the case for these things in a way that resonates with people today. So maybe there's something missing in society, and it's filling a void and that we need to re-articulate things in a way that's much more compelling and resonates with the new problems and new questions people are asking?

Anna: I definitely see that again, in the younger generation. I feel desperately for them actually. They're really... you can almost perceive a sense of void that they're trying to latch on to. It seems to have filled this imitation of social justice. It seems to have filled a void that they're looking for.

Inaya: How do you think we go beyond this then?

Anna: I think we have to keep having to make the case for liberalism for freedom. So we have to make the case that the reason we are in the position we are now with these [inaudible 00:27:14] is a hundred percent because of enlightenment values. We got away from fucking divine right of Kings and medieval witch hunts, all of that crap. We got away from... we did that through enlightenment. We did that through real values. And I don't think people understand that. They have it literally the opposite way around now. They think these values are oppressive and that they need to be overturned. And

they don't seem to quite realize that they're overturning it to replace it with something that is more oppressive than we could possibly imagine. And they know not what they do now.

Inaya: It is really interesting, this kind of modern idea that we constantly need to reinvent the wheel, when actually there are a lot of things that our ancestors have built up over thousands of years that we are not beyond, that still work today and we always want to just reinvent things. And actually, how do we transmit knowledge and more values from one generation to another when we are saying actually it's old, it doesn't matter, it's irrelevant. How can a young person then place themselves in the world, feel connected to the past and the future when oftentimes everyone else is telling them that the past is evil and that they need to differentiate radically from it as much as possible?

Anna: And again, and this is one of the things that I think is really scary about it is depriving people of their culture, and we're telling them they need to be ashamed of their history and ashamed of their culture and there's something inherently bad about them. And again, going back to that original sin. And of course if you... [inaudible 00:28:47] warfare, don't they. They try and bomb people's cultural artifacts in order to demoralize them and detach them from their own culture. And if we do that to ourselves, we really are going to have problems in a generation of how do we get any social cohesion.

Inaya: And just finally, do you want to be recognized as a disabled artist? Or how do you want to be seen? How do you want to be described and recognized? Because there is that tension, because some people do want to say, as a this I've created this. What is it for you?

Anna: I think I would only ever prefix with as a, when it was genuinely relevant because I... over the trajectory that I've seen in the last five years of just absolute psychopathy coming from the identitarian left, I've just become so anti identitarian. I absolutely think this is anti-human. And so I don't want to subscribe to it myself. But if I've made a piece that's specifically relevant to being disabled then... but I think it's not something I want to hide, but it's not something I want to cash in on.

Inaya: And finally, just more question, what would you want people to take away from, A Fall From Grace?

Anna: I want them to take away whatever they get from the piece. Because the thing that I stand for most is to have nuance, complexity, no finger wagging, no didacticness, no complexity removed. No, is this problematic? Do we have to break the bloody trigger warning? None of that shit. Just go take away what you want from the art, that's it.

Inaya: Thank you.

I guess we're opening to the floor for questions now.

Anna: Are we too early? Is this the right time for questions?



Speaker 4: Inaya, I was wondering how you responded to Anna's work?

Inaya: No, I think that's a really good question. I think I really... I resonate very strongly with many of the themes that Anna has elaborated on. This idea that identity, something fragile and precarious can actually end up really weighing you down. As I mentioned earlier on in the discussion, I feel that very strongly as someone that wants to be recognized for my humanity and is so grateful to inherit the legacy of those who have struggled for generations in order to be seen as individuals, as human beings now, as a way to supposedly liberate me or people that look like me.

There are these new boxes that, as a black woman, I think like this. People expect me to say that or people expect me to have certain political views or certain interests in... and I understand where it comes from in a sense. We do live in a world where we categorize and we put things in boxes. In many ways that's how we understand one another. But I guess the struggle that we've been on for so long is to see when we do that and try and seek to go beyond it. And now it's almost being reified and celebrated and made rigid in a way that is so constraining. And so I think that what you explore, the way in which it's now become a weight, to me very much so. So yeah, that's kind of what... I resonated with that really strongly.

Speaker 4: I only just started thinking about this. So it's an unformed idea, but you know about my professional background, one of the things that used to really bug me, whether it was in health or in mental health, was our history of Cartesian dualism. And how if you tried to think that there were different factors involved in whatever somebody's issue was you had to go to one or the other. So there's this dichotomy, and it seems to me, the things that you're describing about identity and what I know about identity from when I talk to you is it's like that, but in five dimensions, at least. And there's one that's right as opposed to it's complicated and ultimately there's only one person who knows about it and that's the person who you're talking about.

Anna: We don't live in times that embrace complexity. Everything's very... and I don't know how to say this word because I've only ever seen it written down, but Manichaeism is the word I think of where everything is like a sort of religion where everything is either good or evil and there isn't a gray area or anything in between. And people really, really resist the natural complexity of life. They want that good or evil box to put it in. I think you're absolutely right about Cartesian dualism. And again, that's the... without them having articulated it to themselves, that's the religious belief that young people have. And I think that comes directly from the digital age because essentially if your life is very, very online and you have this entity that has no relation at all to your physical body and you have curated that, and it's almost an act of narcissism that you've curated and projected the self you want to be, and your body becomes a kind of circumstantial, irritating thing that's just to be hacked into and mutated in order to achieve this narcissistic identity that you've created.

And so I think the digital age, transhumanism, biohacking, all of that stuff leads us down to the underpinning belief of it all, which is Cartesian dualism. We're just little floaty brains in incidental bodies and it's a deeply religious belief. And I think one of the reasons I kick against all of this, I'm such a deeply atheistic person. And so when this

stuff comes along, I know a religion when I smell it, I really do. And so I take the atheist route.

Inaya: And I think this... I've heard over the last couple years that young people need to be taught Stormzy rather than Shakespeare. Now I have no problem with Stormzy. As an artist I think he appeals to many people, but it was what we were talking about. This notion that the kind of great works of humanity, things that took humanity forward. Beauty, literature and philosophy, because of your skin color or because of your identity category in some way, that puts a barrier in the way to engaging with that kind of creation. How infantilizing and condescending and demeaning is that, that you are not really a full human being, a full, capable, moral agent that you cannot intellectually engage with something that's great because of your skin color. I think that's such a corrosive idea that we are institutionalizing in so many ways.

And also, we're so multifaceted as people. We have our family, our backgrounds, our cultures, our schooling. There's so many things that make up who we are. And so why have we just taken this one element and said that that defines you, that is who you are. And before the journey of young people, when they go into adulthood was to fashion a life. You transcended your circumstance and created a new human being. And now we're told that you are determined from the get go, you are already made, and there's nothing you can do about that. And I sympathize very strongly with people, as you mentioned, that are younger, that of course people feel conflict in their identity because it's such a pressure now to just be fixed and I think that's really sad.

Anna: I think you're really right about this horrible... again, really old school racism of low expectations, that they don't even realize is baked in. They're trying to be anti racist and what they're doing is Neo racism and they don't even see it. And it's enormously othering to say that I cannot know your experience and you cannot know mine because we are such fundamentally different types of humans. And that's what they're saying when they say, that I can't write a book that talks about someone who's had a different experience. That's fucking nuts, it's deeply othering nonsense.

Inaya: No, exactly. And I think if there was anything in the 20th century, the civil rights movements that were created, argue that the thread that unites us as human beings is far greater than any superficial category that society imposes. And we now say the opposite.

Anna: So I have a mini anecdote about this, actually. I was listening to BBC Science the other day, and there was a little program about the 30th anniversary of Nirvana's Nevermind. And I had Bat For Lashes on it. And honestly it nearly made me cry, because she's... if you don't know, she's a female Asian pop artist. And she said at the time, it massively spoke to her, it moved her, it was her world, she loved it. But now looking back as an adult, she understands that she shouldn't have really... it shouldn't have spoken to her because it was angry white men. So she'd gone from a place where she had a true soul experience with art and then this theory comes along and worms its way like a virus in your head. And then you're starting to interpose it between you and your own human experience of art. And I just thought that that's this crap in action.

Inaya: Totally.

Anna: It ruins everything.

Inaya: I've had very similar experiences. Friends that I know that are in interracial relationships who as a result of a lot of the ideology, the kind of racial thinking that's come into culture and society, are kind of reinterpreting their relationships as something that is riddled with racial bias and things like that. And obviously one doesn't know the specificities, but you worry that things that were previously okay, and previously fine and previously people loved and celebrated, people were looking at it in a new way and seeing conflict where perhaps it didn't exist. And it goes back to what I said in the beginning. What can we say has really been positive about what's happened? Have we become closer? Are we loving one another more? Are we understanding one another more? It feels every metric it seems like it's the opposite.

Anna: I agree. And again, it's what I find really frustrating about all the young lefters around me who are practicing this. And they really believe that they're making the world a better place. They really do. And they just don't see that they are making the world a worse place. And I don't know how to communicate that to them. It comes from such a human and humane place. They're absolutely sincere, but they don't quite understand yet the implications of the politics that they are so determined. And you're right, no, there is room, there is room for a multiplicity of lenses through which to see the world. There is room for some people to be very identitarian and fixated. The problem is we are in a place now where if you refuse to look at the world through that lens you are stigmatized and outcast, and all of our institutions have adopted that lens and it's become really an institutionalized dogma. And it's done that under the guise of this is progressive.

Inaya: We were speaking earlier about the weird contradiction within this identitarian world view is that, in the demand to recognize someone else's identity, it demands the annihilation of your own specific interpretation. So it's incredibly totalitarian because I can't be allowed to describe the world and see the world as it manifests itself to me, I must accept your world for you. So it's just completely narrow in that sense.

Anna: And I think that that's where this kind of idea that the world is just a war of narratives comes in and it's diddling about in this world of constructed language and then there's actual fucking people starving and people working in sweat shops and people who actually have a shit life, and none of them are affected by any of this. Identitarianism is a hundred percent a middle class luxury value system and this crap doesn't take off in the universities that have working class people with real problems. And it's utterly complacent, it's so frustrating and it stops you dealing with those actual problems.

Inaya: It is really interesting that you mentioned class. And I do think it is very frustrating how class has been subjugated so much in the conversation about society. When I do think class plays such a huge role still within society. Any research that we see that people from a particular network and class background are massively over represented in every kind of really background. And I do think that cultural fixation on identity means that we miss these kind of bread and butter issues, oftentimes it is still affecting people today.

Anna: But that's deliberate. That's because the people perpetuating this are middle class. And the one thing they don't want to look at when they're banging on about everyone else's privilege is they're all fucking privileged. It follows, one follows night and day. And also, a lot of this, again, because it's around language and ideas and knowing the correct way to say things that three weeks ago is fine and we'll get you canceled today, that this is like Victorian people needing you to know which fork to use. This is how we separate us as the morally superior from the working class [inaudible 00:42:42] who now are not just undesirable, but actually we now have [inaudible 00:42:47] to prove that they are morally inferior. And this is done through all of it, all of this kind of clarity and language and bollocks.

Inaya: And it is interesting with class as well is that for example, working class Britains were at the forefront of much of anti racist activism in the late 20th century. And it is interesting that it's been kind of recast as a racist majority when actually most mixing has been going on for decades and there's been little issues, but overwhelmingly people have got along and now are being seen as the forefront of racism within British society.

Anna: Most interracial relationships absolutely happen in working class people. And it's always like absolutely wall to wall white middle class neighborhoods that are super woke and calling everyone else racist. I find it grotesque actually. I find it vomit inducingly grotesque the whole thing.

Inaya: More questions?

Speaker 5: What role do you think social media has played in all of this?

Inaya: I think it's this, the way in which you can kind of unperson people, you can just disappear people without any sense of responsibility. There's no due process that you can go online and humiliate and attack and divide someone. And you are just behind a screen. You don't have to engage with them. You don't have to see the consequences of how that's impacting people. And I think what happened with Kate Clanchy to me is such a powerful example that the kind of author, that through just a few social media criticisms effectively had her publisher abandon her and just had her reputation dragged through the mud. And there were so many people that were affected by that that actually had to experience that, the consequences of the reputational damage, the loss of relationships, but all those who just tarnished her had no consequence.

And so to me, it's this, the whole humanity, as we keep coming back to gets totally stripped away. It's just these ciphers. And no one ever has to really confront the consequences of their actions in person to another human being. And I think that's what I find really sad that the very thing that was meant to be... liberate us, the internet, this free space of internet freedom, where we can information was democratized has now been recreating again, these new issues and problems that people are fearful to express themselves.

Anna: I completely agree with all of that. I can't improve on that, but I would add to, the thing that I think is very dark about it and darker than I think we realized, is what I was

touching earlier that we are totally separated ourself from our actual selves because we now... self presentation has always been a part of humanity and a part of social psychology, but that is now on steroids because you can actually just create a self that isn't you at all is it, it's your narcissist projection. And then that is now seen as almost more real than your real self. And I think that the long term mental health consequences of living like that in a society I think will be actually really, really quite dire.

Inaya: One thing that I would just add to that is that I'm not a technological determinist in a sense that I think that technology is the root of all our problems. I do think oftentimes they amplify and exaggerate preexisting social problems and concentrate them. So I think there are really important questions to be answered about social media and its role. But I think that we as individuals in person like we're doing today and generally have to recreate the public sphere. We have to demonstrate productive disagreement and show that it's possible to talk to-

Anna: We should have had a fight about something. We should have found something to disagree with that was dishy.

Inaya: Should have.

Anna: I should bang on about what [inaudible 00:46:52], and then you can, [inaudible 00:46:52] was great or something.

Inaya: Because at the end of the day, we still have to teach kids in school. We still have to teach them norms and values and we have to figure out a way to really transmit something that is shared. So while social media has massive problems we have to also take responsibility as citizens within society in recreating something that we can transmit. Any other questions?

Speaker 6: Is there anything good about religion? [crosstalk 00:47:26].

Anna: This should be interesting.

Inaya: Because I'm actually not an atheist, so I'm not religious either. I would say that I'm probably agnostic, I don't know. But I do sympathize very much with this religious impulse for something higher than ourselves, something collective and ecstatic and spiritual experiential. And I do think, at least in part, is responsible for a lot of great projections of the human imagination as beyond. So in that sense, I do think that spaces of worship and devotion can actually be really moving and profound for the human experience. So I do see quite a lot of benefits within it even if I may not have found something that I would say seems to me to be the fundamental truth.

Anna: I completely agree. My relationship to religion is complicated because reality is a big thing for me. I need reality and my instinct against religion was something... finding it very confusing as a young person that a lot of people were en masse believing something, which clearly isn't true. And I didn't get that. I still don't get it. It's part of why this politics scares the crap out of me. I'm looking at this and it's like, it's a target

with a bow on it. Why are people buying into this? And I don't get it. But religion is a good funnel for again, finding that real spiritual uplift. And I think... I don't know how you find that. It's hard to find that without the framework of religion and I wish there was a way to find it without the mythology part.

I'm someone... for example, I'm a classical singer. I've sung in every cathedral in Britain. I've done more even songs than I could count as an unreligious person. And it makes my soul sing and it is life and humanity. So I can completely understand the goodness we get out of religion. But I spent so much time seeing people do really bad things because of religion. And I very much buy into that [inaudible 00:49:41] of good people do good things, bad people do bad things, but for good people to do bad things takes religion. And that's something that I say about this politics all the time. Because that's the true hoarder of it for me, the brain virus that takes the best kind of people, the people that want to make the world a better place because they care about social justice and it turns them into actual psychopaths and it's horrifying. It's an actual horrifying thing for me to watch. And I find it brutal. I like your question right at the beginning, "Why am I doing this?" And that was actually the first thing I wrote down, "Why am I doing this?" Because I find it utterly brutalizing to watch good people do incredibly bad things because of this religion, which disguises itself as a politics.

Inaya: It's interesting though, some people have said that it's a religion without all the good bits. So you don't have-

Anna: A religion without mercy. That's what Nick Cave said, a religion without mercy, and I think he's absolutely right.

Inaya: It doesn't have the forgiveness. It doesn't have the-

Anna: No compassion. There's no forgiveness. There's no-

Inaya: Redemption.

Anna: ... redemption. There is no redemption. You do your little thing of apostasy. You said something on Twitter 17 years ago and you're fucked, that's it, you don't come back. No heaven for you.

Speaker 7: I wonder if that's partly what it might be providing people, is a sense of certainty? Because one of the few things science and technology don't do is give us any certainties. They're all doubts and people find it quite hard to live with doubt. So I wonder if that might be part of the appeal of these things, is I have something I'm absolutely certain I'm right about.

Anna: I think that's absolutely right and it's one of the things that again, I've spent my life struggling to understand about the human condition, that I always seem to want to live in reality, which involves shades of gray, complexity and all of that stuff seems, from my little outsider observations, it seems to make other people mostly really uncomfortable. And they don't want... they really want to funnel it into a set of boxes and rules. And

this is good and this is bad and this works and this doesn't work. And that is how their brain works to understand the world. And it's not how my brain works to understand the world. So I think you're right about other people. And I think that's part of my struggle in society is to try and understand how they think like that.

Inaya: I would probably echo that. It's said that with science, you can't derive it all from [inaudible 00:52:13]. So it can tell you a fact, but it can't tell you how to live a good and meaningful life. And in the absence of a shared collective moral framework, people want the certainty about what is the good and how do I move towards it. Where I would slightly disagree is that I do think that perhaps we do need some certainties. I think the love of your friends and family, or even my belief in freedom of speech, I've wrestled with that. And I think I'm quite morally certain that that is a good. And I think I would worry if everything was in constant flux and there was nothing that we could collectively, or at least generally speaking, decide upon, a foundation to which we can then build upon. So in that sense, I do think that there are some things that even if we have an element of doubt, maybe we can just say, we broadly agree that this is a good thing and we should move towards it, but we haven't. It's all fragmented right now. That's perhaps part of the problem.

Anna: Again, and yeah, I can bang on about critical theory for a long time being responsible for this shit. Fragmentation. On a personal level, I'd say that your way is better because I am terribly vulnerable to gas lighting because I'm really bad at being morally certain about anything or certain about anything. And that's one of the reasons why I feel my shoulders aren't broad enough to almost to take on this fight because I find myself questioning myself every day. Am I becoming dogmatic? Am I becoming reactionary? Am I still... and I don't want to have the moral certainty that I see on the other side that is so frightening. And so I feel like I quite like it actually when I do change my mind about something, because that, for me, that's like the spinning top, an inception that shows me that I keep parsing the evidence to make sure I'm tracking reality and not stuck in something regardless of the reality.

Inaya: And I think in some sense that that is a fundamental dynamic that we need within society, perhaps a conservatism versus a kind of radicalism and that kind of push and pull that there's some that say, actually, we've got something good here. We shouldn't just destroy it or we don't need to change it. And then other people that say, actually certain things need to change. It's not working for people. And I think we need that dynamic. And I think what I think part of the problem today is it's all imposed. That people feel stifled to not even engage in that dialectic, that kind of dialogue, where we can negotiate between those two polars. So perhaps I think there's truth in both of those elements.

Anna: I think you're completely right. And still again, a very specific example of that, that I was discussing with a friend here in the audience the other day. This is one of the huge problems in academia that there is always a lot of skewing to the left. There is now... I can't remember. I think it's [inaudible 00:55:16] work and there's something like 250 letters for every conservative. And it's made me deeply appreciate conservatism because much as... not in and of itself because I'm not a conservative, but it was an incredible balancing force that in my youthful un-wisdom, I didn't realize was necessary

because I thought they were wrong. And what's happened... and again, it's at the root of a lot of these ideas mainstreaming, is that academics haven't had to make a substantive argument because they've had no one saying, "This is crap. You've spun away from reality. You're no longer tracking reality with your theories." They're not making a challenge. They haven't had to defend their position because there has been no conservative balancing force. And then that's had enormous repercussions leaching out into society.

Inaya: Absolutely. Any final few questions?

Speaker 11: Anna, you've explored those quite complex ideas through your very material practice. What is that process for you? How do you take idea into material? And obviously I know that you've used some new materials for this commission, so how was it working with them and how did you feel about embodying your ideas in your work?

Anna: It was really epic. I kind of do this. I get really insanely carried away and someone's like, "Here's a couple of grand," and I'm like, "I'm going to make a giant, giant thing." So it was a bit like, and I'm going to learn this and I'm going to learn this and I'm going to learn this and I'm going to learn this. And I did actually do it in the end. And I'm quite surprised to be honest. My process can be quite agonizing because the way I see it is that I have parallel little conveyor belts in my head. And one of those conveyor belts is full of deeply abstract things like we're talking about tonight. It's political ideas, it's philosophical ideas. And then the other conveyor belt is a completely sensory place, which is where I explore materials and processes that come from an absolutely visceral instinctive place.

And what I need to happen is for something to kind of match up. So it's the right process and material for the idea. It's one of the things that makes it really hard to explain my practice to people because I don't use a single process. I don't use any single idea all the time because I'm always... I kind of make a rod for my own back because I'm always changing it. And one of the [inaudible 00:57:38] actually with this piece was that I had all the ideas and I had roughly the processes I wanted to use and I could not bring them together. And I remember myself panicking to you in September thinking, but I still haven't pinned it down yet and you can't force it can you. You've got a deadline and you can't make your brain be creative. And then the kind of breakthrough in that was that I was trying to put too much in a single sculpture. And when I had the kind of mini epiphany that actually I needed to make paired sculptures, then it was instant, I knew exactly what I was doing. And then it was 12 hour days work for several months to kind of catch up. So does that answer the question re process? Thank you so much.