

Art Lives Podcast Episode 7 – transcribed by Emma Jensen

Elizabeth DeLamater 0:09

Welcome to Episode Seven of Art Lives, a series of interviews with artists of all media. My name is Elizabeth DeLamater. On this podcast I talk with artists one on one about their art, their lives and how they navigate the world. This episode features Zahra Gordon. She is a poet and writer living in La Brea, Trinidad & Tobago. In this episode, Zahra recounts her experiences growing up in both Trinidad and the United States and learning to read and write poetry in Trinidad, and the United States. We also learn of Zahra's mission to rescue voices from the past before they disappear. And we learn how poetry and prose create and are created by Zahra's vibrant ecosystem of thought. Here is Zahra Gordon.

Music 1:14

(Marimba)

Zahra Gordon 1:14

It's a, it's a funny question. It's a, it's a funny thing. Because it's just, it's just how I express myself with words. You know, a lot of times people say that there's certain things that you have that, calling, especially in art. And, I just, you know for me when I was growing up for a while -- because I had parents who were heavy, heavy on the maths and science as well, particularly my dad, who actually had done math and science up to a master's degree.

Elizabeth DeLamater 2:11

Oh.

Zahra Gordon 2:12

Yeah, so he did biometry and statistics in college.

Elizabeth DeLamater 2:18

Oh wow!

Zahra Gordon 2:19

Yeah, so. And my mom was a nurse, so she was also very much --

Elizabeth DeLamater 2:29

Okay!

Zahra Gordon 2:30

Yeah, dealing with, you know, medical things, scientific things. And the thing is, even though they were like that, I think they still recognized the need for me to be artistic. But, you know, they were like the kind of parents, like, "Yeah, well, you're bright you could be a doctor when you grow up." Because that's like, that's the thing you do when you're bright. You become a doctor.

Elizabeth DeLamater 3:03

Yes. My mother still does that.

Zahra Gordon 3:12

Yeah, even now! And you're like, a really accomplished musician. So that was a thing. And then, I've been keeping diaries since primary school. In primary school, it was really silly. Like, what happened at recess that day. But also, there was also a thing and even, and funny enough in primary school I also used to write songs, which is something I don't do anymore.

Elizabeth DeLamater 3:59

Oh!

Zahra Gordon 4:01

But in the time that I was growing up as well, I would have started with piano lessons and dance. And then piano and at my high school I even played guitar at one point. So I always had these other influences. You know, I come from a family that they like to play Mas. They're very involved in Carnival and even in creating costumes and stuff, so that was always there, but it was always regarded as like, you know, more of a hobby than a profession. So, it's just that there was a point when I just discovered that this was something I love to do.

Elizabeth DeLamater 4:53

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 4:54

And then, that was it.

Elizabeth DeLamater 4:56

Yeah. What is the best part about writing an essay, writing poetry, for you?

Zahra Gordon 5:10

I think the best part for me is actually finding the perfect imagery. You know, there's a poem that I wrote. Like my, my great aunt and I were having breakfast one morning, and she told me a story about her childhood. And, it just, it was like whoa, like, you know. And, it was a kind of a shocking story. And she shared it with me and she was like, "You know, I've never told anybody this before." And that just, it was like that was on my mind and I, you know, wrote, and wrote over again, to try to get the right words to express how she was feeling. And when I had gotten to a draft that I thought was there, I thought, "Okay yeah, I think I've gotten it." And she read it and I was like, "Whoa, I'm in print!" Because I didn't say her name or, you know, anything, I just expressed how she was feeling, and I just used imagery from a moment that I wasn't even there.

Elizabeth DeLamater 6:44

Oh!

Zahra Gordon 6:44

And she was able to read it and actually be like, "Okay, wow, this is, this is, you know, how I felt. And this is what happened."

Elizabeth DeLamater 6:56

Oh my gosh.

Zahra Gordon 6:58

And, to me it's like that is like actually hitting, to the point where you can describe the undescrivable. It's really, it's beautiful.

Elizabeth DeLamater 7:11

Yes. Oh. That's so powerful, and you don't mind the quest to get to that point.

Zahra Gordon 7:21

No. It's something that you have to, you just have to make up your mind that you're not going to be able to get it the first time. You know, you just have to make up your mind that that is something you have to work at.

Elizabeth DeLamater 7:38

Yes. How do you feel about sharing something like that, for example like that poem, with then other people? Is there, are there times that your work is so personal that you don't want to let it go?

Zahra Gordon 7:55

Yes. So, I tend to write best from personal experience, which is something that a lot of writers do. You know, you get your, your first set of writing is going to be, I guess, like, you working out all your issues or some, you know, something like that, or just writing anything that's most familiar to you which would be yourself and family. And, to me, I feel like that's the time when I write best. And it can get a little difficult. I haven't really reached the point where I've actually been, let's say, brave enough to share the most personal as yet.

Elizabeth DeLamater 8:50

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 8:51

But it is something that I, I plan to do actually. Because what I want to do for my first book, whenever I do this -- whenever I get the time for it -- is focus on the, like, the untold stories from women in my family. That could get, it could get that.

Elizabeth DeLamater 9:23

Yes.

Zahra Gordon 9:23

You know, because there are some things that, there are some things that I didn't know about my grandparents' relationship. For instance, like domestic violence, or like, you know, molestation that happened when they were younger. And, you know, I'm gonna have to figure out, I'm gonna have to ask a lot of permission to share these stories that they may not necessarily want to be shared.

Elizabeth DeLamater 9:55

Right.

Zahra Gordon 9:56

But that I think are so important.

Elizabeth DeLamater 9:59

Yes.

Zahra Gordon 9:59

Or even if I talk about some of the things I've experienced. It might be difficult, but it's something that is important to share. And it's bridge that's gonna have to be crossed.

Elizabeth DeLamater 10:17

Yeah. What do you, what do you like to read?

Zahra Gordon 10:22

I really, well, I should say, I love poetry. I do also love fiction. I don't read as much nonfiction. I tend to focus more on like the creative literature when I'm reading for myself.

Elizabeth DeLamater 10:40

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 10:42

My, like, college experience was is really a big influence on the things that I read, because I went to an HBCU. It actually was a time where I got introduced to writers that, you know, I would never have heard of if it wasn't for school.

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:08

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 11:08

So, I tend to read a lot of, like, Caribbean literature and literature from the diaspora. And, you know, it's something that I can relate to.

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:27

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 11:28

And also, you know, there's also like just so much writing that, you know, it's like, not necessarily as mainstream.

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:43

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 11:44

Because, even -- So for my birthday in November, one of my friends who is a writer, we have this thing of gifting each other books.

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:58

Wonderful.

Zahra Gordon 11:59

So, she gifted me this book by Zora Neale Hurston who I've, I've read before, but funny enough I hadn't read that one. So that's my next thing that I'm going to read.

Elizabeth DeLamater 12:17

Great.

Zahra Gordon 12:18

But when I was in college, I had to read Zora Neale Hurston as well. And I remember, um there's a time when I worked at this golf course for a little while. I was talking to one of the customers, I think I had the book out because I was just by the register, and he was like, "Well who are you reading?" And I said, "Zora Neale Hurston." And he was like, "I've never heard of her." And I was like, "Really?" And to me, it would have seemed like something that, you know, that people would have known.

Elizabeth DeLamater 12:53

Right.

Zahra Gordon 12:55

You know? And it was just like, "No, I've never heard of her. Who is that?" And so these are the writers that I tried to read. Because I think there's been a lot of erasure.

Elizabeth DeLamater 13:12

Yes.

Zahra Gordon 13:13

And that's something that, you know, even with like the history with steel pan with certain, with certain types of stories, you know like, you hear Kim Johnson talk a lot about women at the start of the steel band movement who we never talked about.

Elizabeth DeLamater 13:36
Right.

Zahra Gordon 13:36
Right? You know, it's always like Spree Simon, and Rudolph Charles,
and so we never hear about those women. And it's also like, for some
of this, we never hear about these writers. And they have amazing
important work.

Elizabeth DeLamater 13:55
Yes.

Zahra Gordon 13:56
So, for me, I do read a lot of Caribbean, African Diaspora, Black
Diaspora work, because I don't want it to be erased. I want to keep it
in my consciousness, you know?

Elizabeth DeLamater 14:13
Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 14:14
It's like I'm trying to read all of these stories that, like, there's
a, there's a writer I read in college named Chester Himes and before
college -- well, I had never heard of him and he is someone who has
extremely important work, I find. It's like he's almost unknown,
unless people writing after him who've done similar things, who've
used him for inspiration. But we don't ever hear about him as
somebody, you know?

Elizabeth DeLamater 14:48
Sure.

Zahra Gordon 14:49
Yeah, so.

Elizabeth DeLamater 14:50
Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 14:51
So that's a big thing.

Elizabeth DeLamater 14:53
You don't, you don't write much fiction, do you?

Zahra Gordon 14:58
No, no. No, I tend to write either poetry or creative nonfiction.

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:05
Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 15:07

Fiction is something, even though I love it, t's not something that I've had a lot of practice, or training with even, apparently. I have a few short stories. But to me, I don't think they're very good. It's, it's not, I guess also it's just not something that is my craft.

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:42

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 15:42

So, so for instance, if I, like, relate it to steel pan, so, yes I could play tenor, but the bass is my area of expertise.

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:55

Right.

Zahra Gordon 15:59

So it's like that. The, the workshops that I've done, the training that I've gotten, has always been poetry. And, you know, when I was expressing myself just on my own it's like I used to express myself in, in writing poems. That's just how it came out.

Elizabeth DeLamater 16:21

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 16:22

As a poem. And so, so that's just what I've built on.

Elizabeth DeLamater 16:28

Your writing, you said you were writing lyrics when you were young. Do you remember a time when you were first introduced to poetry, or were you already writing poems before you studied poetry?

Zahra Gordon 16:45

Um, no. The poetry that I would have been introduced to while I was growing up would be things like, I'm trying to remember, I think it's A Christmas Carol, but it's like in a poem.

Elizabeth DeLamater 17:01

The Night Before Christmas?

Zahra Gordon 17:02

Yeah, things like that.

Elizabeth DeLamater 17:05

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 17:07

I always used to, I used to read a lot when I was growing up, so I

would have been introduced in that sense, in, just to reading and reading lots of different types of things.

Elizabeth DeLamater 17:20

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 17:20

But there was a time in, when we had to do in ninth grade in our English class we just had this kind of random visiting teacher for two days. I'm not sure, I'm not even sure how this worked out or why. But we had a visiting teacher for two days who did a poetry workshop.

Elizabeth DeLamater 17:50

Oh!

Zahra Gordon 17:53

It was just like, you know, I'm not even sure how it got in the curriculum, but we had this visiting teacher and she came in, and we had two classes with her. And it was just like, something magical happened in those two classes for me and I was like, "Whoa!" And so the, the end product, you know, like my grandmother had really loved that poem, that was one of the first conscious times I had written a poem. And, like, even, my aunt still says, "You know, I remember when you wrote that poem and it was great." It was just like, it was just like, "Oh!" Because even the, the poetry teacher said that, you know, this was like a really good product, that this was a good poem. And I just, I just, that was it! It was like, "Oh!" It was that amazing feeling of accomplishment at the end.

Elizabeth DeLamater 18:59

Right. Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 19:00

Right. And so then, luckily I was in a school where, like my high school was actually pretty good, in the sense that we had access to quite a few things, you know, outside of just the regular curriculum. And so I ended up, after that year in ninth grade -- so between ninth and tenth grade -- there was this summer program, which was the first time they did it, called Arts on the Block. And they had training for visual artists and writers, like teens, so. Yeah, so it's actually sad though because when I participated, they had two sections, which was visual arts and for writers, and that year was the only year that they did writers.

Elizabeth DeLamater 20:07

Oh.

Zahra Gordon 20:09

Yeah, after that, they just ceased to -- so they would have kids like participate in mural projects and, you know, different art projects

throughout, Silver Spring, throughout Maryland.

Elizabeth DeLamater 20:22

Sure, cool.

Zahra Gordon 20:23

So, yeah, so it was like I was really lucky to participate in that. And then, you know, I was always afterwards, seeking opportunities to write.

Elizabeth DeLamater 20:35

Sure. So, who were your mentors or, or role models, during high school into college?

Zahra Gordon 20:49

So, in high school, from the, the program, I had two mentors, which were Lisa P. Graham and Laura Smith, and I'm actually still in contact with them.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:06

Oh, nice!

Zahra Gordon 21:08

Yeah, which is really, it's really great. Then, let's see, I had another teacher in high school named, I think her name was Miss Johansen, I had a creative writing class that I took as well. And also, in college, I had Tony Medina, and he would have been my biggest influence at the time, that was my poetry professor.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:45

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 21:46

And I also had another professor who was actually a filmmaker.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:51

Oh!

Zahra Gordon 21:53

But, he's, I mean, well, he writes scripts.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:57

Oh.

Zahra Gordon 21:59

His name is Haile Gerima. So he would have been a great mentor, as well.

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:09

That's wonderful.

Zahra Gordon 22:10

Right? @ith me being, you know, that inspiration, yes, based on their work, but also the commitment to craft and commitment towards scholarship and to practicing and to, you know, creative work that made a statement as well.

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:35

Did you have any specific goals when you started, say when you started college about what your life as a writer should be or what you wanted it to be?

Zahra Gordon 22:51

For me, I think I had very idealistic ideas about what it would be like to be a writer, without thinking about, like, financial situations. But I think one of the things with me seeking out opportunities to write, is that -- and once again, also, luckily, going to the high school that I did -- after ninth grade, in tenth grade, I took a journalism class.

Elizabeth DeLamater 23:26

Oh.

Zahra Gordon 23:27

And then in 11th and 12th grade I was on my high school's newspaper. So, that was a skill that I developed, and then coming into Trinidad, getting to write for newspapers, magazines, and actually writing for a living, then.

Elizabeth DeLamater 23:54

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 23:55

Maybe not necessarily poetry, but it was something that I was doing what I wanted to do.

Elizabeth DeLamater 24:02

There you go.

Zahra Gordon 24:08

So now like freelance because, you know, being a journalist it's pretty intense.

Elizabeth DeLamater 24:16

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 24:18

Yeah, and it's almost like you know you have to be on 24/7, kind of. So, I actually don't work full time anymore and I occasionally will contribute. But that's, so I didn't, I had like idealistic ideas I

guess about being a writer. And then I found out, okay, no, how you do it really is that you're going to have to, you know, I'm not going to be able to publish books every year, and just make money off of that. The monetizing or the career aspect of it comes when you can adapt to the situation. So, the adaptation for me was, you know, being in a newsroom. And that's how I got to write, but also make a living. So it wasn't necessarily my initial goal, per se, but it definitely was something that, you know, opened up -- because even when I was working on an article, I still have my poetic voice, I still have my creative voice, and I still apply it to my way that I describe things, the imagery that I would include in a story you know. And it's one of the things that, you know, I've heard a lot of times when I've interviewed people, and they'd say, "Well, you know, you really just, you got it."

Elizabeth DeLamater 25:59
Yeah!

Zahra Gordon 25:59
So, it's like being able to translate that, you know, it's, you know, that's the artwork then, being able to translate the people's thoughts and feelings and their stories, and then sharing them.

Elizabeth DeLamater 26:14
Right. I think you do that very well. I've read some of the interviews you've done and I feel, I feel like I'm there with you. I feel like I could see that person or I truly understand that person's intention, and, and always the environment that you're speaking about.

Zahra Gordon 26:34
Thank you very much. Imagery is definitely something that I, I look at, and try to practice. So, even when I'm not necessarily writing, I'm always making observations.

Elizabeth DeLamater 26:47
Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 26:48
So, like for me with Trinidad, you know, I'm not necessarily Trinidadian, even though I call myself a Trinidadian. Because, so, I was born in the US, right? And then I came to Trinidad, in, I was here for primary school, basically, with my grandparents. And then I went back to the States and did, you know, all of my formal education. But it was because I was here at a young age, it was this place that I really loved and really identified with. And, you know, a lot of times when, even now that I've been here so long, and people will still say, you know, like, "You're not from Trinidad!" Or, you know, sometimes people try to charge me more when I'm buying things because they think I don't know the prices and things like that, you know?

Elizabeth DeLamater 27:53

Oh my gosh!

Zahra Gordon 27:53

Silly, you know, things that they try to do.

Elizabeth DeLamater 27:56

Wow!

Zahra Gordon 27:58

But, you know, some people recognize, like, they think of me as foreign still.

Elizabeth DeLamater 28:04

Huh, wow.

Zahra Gordon 28:08

But at the same time, like, because I was never really here in my teenage years much, except for like a short, short vacations, I observe. So I'm always observing the way people do things, the way they interact with each other. You know, I ended up writing this poem, series of poems actually, called "Rainy Season" because it's like I was even observing the rain fall. Like, I have this, this point where I'm comparing experiences and comparing rainfall in the States to rainfall in Trinidad, or comparing the, when seasons change, the types of foods people eat, just, just everything. So, it's all this this heavy observation that I do that, you know, something that could be called "people watching."

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:13

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 29:15

And, so I'm constantly doing that. And it's constantly feeding into what I write.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:24

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 29:24

And constantly creating images for when it's time to write something.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:30

I bet that helps a lot. So, how do you identify yourself? What is your identity?

Zahra Gordon 29:37

Well, now I say I'm Caribbean American, because I think that's, that's really what it is, you know. I have, my, my dad was from Guyana.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:55

That's right.

Zahra Gordon 29:56

And my mom's Trinidad -- yeah, and my mom's from Trinidad, and I was born in States. So I think that's enough for me to put it in a nutshell.

Elizabeth DeLamater 30:09

Do you feel that being a writer is something that you have been since you started writing, or was there a time that you finally thought, "Oh, I am a writer now!"? I'm asking because this is another thing I'm seeing with my young students now. They say, "I want to be a musician." If, well, you're playing music. I think you are a musician. But they are, they're attaching it to a certain level of accomplishment. Does that make sense?

Zahra Gordon 30:39

Yes, it doesn't make sense, and it just made me think of another professor that I had, Dr. Arana, in college as well. Because when I was in college, I used to say the same thing. "I want to be a writer." And Dr. Arana would say, "But, you know, you're showing me poetry and you're writing essays and you do all of this. You are a writer." And it's this constant questioning. And it may come from the fact that there's not necessarily, you know, I guess, if you went to med school, you know, there's a time when you can say, "I am a doctor now, because I have finished a residency. And I'm going on to actually work with people." You know, there's a certificate that you can get.

Elizabeth DeLamater 31:43

Yeah!

Zahra Gordon 31:44

Right? Just, that's it.

Elizabeth DeLamater 31:47

You get the letters in front of your name!

Zahra Gordon 31:49

Right! But, writing and, not even just writing but art, is so subjective, and it causes us to constantly question ourselves. So I think for your students, something that I have had to learn is that, you know, you have to just, the fact of doing it, of practicing, of actually focusing on your craft, that, that makes you an artist. That makes you a writer. It makes you a musician. Accomplishments, it's, you can't rely on, you know, winning an award to say that you are, you are a writer or a musician, because it really is so subjective.

Elizabeth DeLamater 32:45

Right. So did, did it, for you, was all it -- all you needed was to hear that professor, or did it take longer for you to accept it?

Zahra Gordon 32:56

No, it definitely took longer. It definitely took longer. And, I guess, maybe it also took me getting older or growing or being more confident in myself.

Elizabeth DeLamater 33:15

Uh-huh. Sure, sure.

Zahra Gordon 33:16

You know, because I definitely think, for a long time, even with, you know, working in a newsroom and basically I'm writing everybody, essentially, I still would call myself, at times, "aspiring,"

Elizabeth DeLamater 33:39

Ah.

Zahra Gordon 33:39

You know, because I felt like, "Well, I don't have a book out yet." You know, I haven't really done what you're supposed to do.

Elizabeth DeLamater 33:52

Ahh.

Zahra Gordon 33:53

And I just, at the end of the day, well yes you know you have to be publishing, like, as far as writers go. But the projects will come as and when they need to, and when the time is right. But the, the actual practicing of the work, you know, like if you are in college and you're gigging, then you're a musician.

Elizabeth DeLamater 34:26

Right.

Zahra Gordon 34:27

Right. There's no question about it. So I think for me it was just to realize that what I have actually been workshopping and participating in readings, and I've been actually writing so, there is no more questioning that has to happen.

Elizabeth DeLamater 34:50

Nice. So what does success mean to you now?

Zahra Gordon 34:57

Oh. Ah, that's such a hard question. To me, I think it means being true to my work.

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:17

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 35:18

And I'm focusing on, on being the best that I can be within that work.

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:28

Wonderful.

Zahra Gordon 35:29

So, I think, success for me would mean actually putting in the work to, to write the, you know, the poetry book that I want to write, or to participate in, in the readings that I want to do, and also just continuing to do this, this work of making people aware about representation. When it comes to a whole bunch of different things. When it comes to women in music, or when it comes to, you know, writers in the diaspora.

Elizabeth DeLamater 36:09

Yeah. Yeah. So just more.

Zahra Gordon 36:13

Yeah, definitely just more. I think success to me now would be being a lot more. I guess, putting in even more focus.

Elizabeth DeLamater 36:27

Okay.

Zahra Gordon 36:28

Even more focus, yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 36:29

Yeah, yeah. I think that, I think that's basically how I feel too. I don't, I don't know when when I'll get there, but, not there yet. But maybe that's why we keep going.

Zahra Gordon 36:49

Yeah. You know, it's like, I think a lot of artists do that. Like they just, they just keep going. They keep, like, you know, trying to create something better than the last thing they created.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:04

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 37:04

So, it's like, as long as you keep doing that, then you are working.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:13

Right.

Zahra Gordon 37:16

Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:17

So, what are you personally thinking about right now, or writing about right now, in the, in the near future?

Zahra Gordon 37:26

I really want to continue working on this book that I had an idea for, which is basically the the untold stories of women in my family.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:41

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 37:42

And, so that's something that I really want to, to work on. It's kind of in two ways, because I, I'm not sure I can't say for sure. I haven't really decided, for sure, for sure. But I did want to go back to school and do an MFA. So, for, for the application you need, you should have, like, a manuscript, or part of poems towards a manuscript. That's something that I do want to do is come back to the States and do an MFA. And so, the, the book project then would be the starting of that application.

Elizabeth DeLamater 38:45

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 38:45

That's what I would submit. Yeah. That, for me, that is, it's something I guess that's been like ruminating in -- well, not necessarily ruminating because I actually have like an outline written down and actually have some of the poems already.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:05

Oh my goodness.

Zahra Gordon 39:06

It's just to put it all together, and to put in, to make it like realized, then.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:14

Sure.

Zahra Gordon 39:15

Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:17

Yeah, beautiful. So, what inspires you on a daily basis or in general?

Zahra Gordon 39:28

Um, well for me, definitely, those observations that I talked about.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:35

Uh-huh.

Zahra Gordon 39:35

That I'm always, you know, aware of how people interact and the things that we see and do and the language that we use. That's definitely a source of inspiration. And then, you know, the people that I read. When I read a book, you know, I'm always looking at the way it's written, the techniques that they've used. And, then, I'm also always writing down things from the books, you know. When I read a book I'm going to make a note of some quote that might actually be the basis for a poem sometime later on.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36

Oh.

Zahra Gordon 39:36

Yeah, so, I'm always, always -- it's like you always have your ear and your eyes open. Even the other day, like, I was watching a movie and a guy, one of the characters said something that I thought sounded so beautiful and I just, like, had to pause the movie and make a note.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36

Wow, great!

Zahra Gordon 39:36

And then continue watching. So it's like the inspiration comes from everywhere. Definitely from everywhere. And from that, like, always making keen observations.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57

Yeah. So, If you could point me, and anybody listening to your words, three things that we should check out that you find inspiring or interesting. And it can be, it can be anything that gives life. It doesn't have to be a poem, but it certainly could be a poem.

Zahra Gordon 39:57

Hmm. Okay. Well, the first book that comes to mind is Citizen by Claudia Rankine. And I think she won a National Book Award when that was published a few years ago. And, you know, a lot of the times people say that poetry is harder to read, but I like to point people to Claudia Rankine because she's a really accomplished poet. And then she wrote this book, and it was almost like in prose but it was poetry. It was like really experimental. And then she had art inserted into the book as well that was related to what she was writing. It was like, this, you know, this really great book and it's something that, even if you're not familiar with poetry --

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36

Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 39:36
You, yeah, you get it.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36
Beautiful.

Zahra Gordon 39:57
You know? So, definitely Claudia Rankine's Citizen is one to check. If I had to give a movie, then I would talk about this movie by one of my professors actually -- past professors -- Haile Gerima, called Teza. And Teza is a film that he did that was about some things that, you know, like, being from, being an immigrant in a European country. It also dealt with the civil war where he's from in Ethiopia, and I think it was a personal story, but also he used that story to tell a bit of history. And it was really beautifully done.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36
Oh, great!

Zahra Gordon 39:57
Right? So, there's that, and, okay, I'll try to do like, something, something in art as well. So, a few years ago -- I think it was two years ago, maybe a year ago -- I was in New York and I went to this exhibit which was a retrospective on the artist Kerry James Marshall. And, actually, I had never heard of him before, never seen his work. And when I went to the exhibit it was, like, maybe three or four floors of years of just his art, his work that he's done over the years.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57
Oh!

Zahra Gordon 39:57
It was the most amazing thing. You know, he had photography, he had mixed media art, he had paintings, he had -- it was just, it was amazing! And I was like, "Wow!" Really never heard of him, and really enjoyed, you know, this exhibit. So, I don't know if he has anything that's like, like a book maybe. He may have, like, a book of the retrospective. But definitely Kerry James Marshall is an artist that has this, like, you know, really wide spectrum of things that you can tap into. And I found him to be pretty inspiring as well.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57
I will put some links up on the website. I will find him and where, where people can look at least a few works and put that up. Well, is there anything else you want to talk about, say, that you've been thinking about lately?

Zahra Gordon 39:36
Well, not really, but you know this whole converstaion has made me

think about another friend of mine, who is not a writer, he's a painter.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36

Oh!

Zahra Gordon 39:57

But he said something to me once a long time ago that I always remember, and it seems to relate to the conversation that we've been having, where he said that, "You know, we're all artists. Some of us just aren't brave enough to practice." You know?

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57

Oh. Yeah. Yeah.

Zahra Gordon 39:36

So, that's, that's definitely something to think about.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:36

Yeah, I believe that.

Zahra Gordon 39:36

I do, too.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57

I believe that. That's wonderful. Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for talking to me today.

Zahra Gordon 39:36

You're very welcome and thank you for asking me to participate.

Music 39:57

Music cue -- Trumpet & Percussion Duo

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:57

You have been listening to the Art Lives podcast. Much gratitude to Zahra Gordon for talking with me. I posted links to Zahra's blog called "Zee Speaks," where you can find some of her published work. I also put up a link to Zahra's literacy organization, "Speakeasy Solutions." In addition there are links to the artwork and authors she mentioned. All of that is on the "Art Lives" page of my website, elizabethdelamater.com. Please remember to give us a rating and comments on Apple Podcasts. More ratings allow more people to hear us. My continued gratitude to Bill Sallak, artist Eduardo Moreno, and special thanks to composer Nicholas Meyers for our theme music. Finally, thank you so much for listening to Art Lives.

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