

Elizabeth DeLamater 0:06

Hello, welcome to season three, episode three of Art Lives. 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 Malika Green. She is an American jewelry designer and maker who lives in Trinidad and Tobago. In this episode Malika tells us how her art has been influenced by her move to a new country, how her business has been affected by the pandemic, and how jewelry design contrasts with her previous career in music. Here is Malika Green.

Malika Green 1:01

I'll flashback all the way to elementary school Not that I was a jeweler in elementary school, of course not. But I was always, I was always crafty, like finding things around the house, and, you know, like making earrings out of keys. And I used to make, I used to make these cardboard boxes. Well, not the boxes like cardboard pouches, like something that you'd wear to a party, you know, as a woman or to the beach, you just put your essentials in it. And I'd make them with cardboard and I'd paint them with whatever paint I had, which was like nail polish or paint around the house. And I'd sew it together with - I don't know if you remember GIMP is like the plastic? So, I used to make them and then wear them to school like I'd be so proud and wear them around. (laugh) So I was always into doing stuff like that. And I took art classes outside of school and in high school growing up so I was always into doing things with my hands.

Elizabeth DeLamater 2:16

Sure.

Malika Green 2:18

Maybe that ties in with with pan and being so tactile and everything. But it wasn't until I was finishing my master's at NIU actually. I needed a credit. I needed a three credit course that was outside of music. It had to be an arts credit. I can't remember if it needed to be three credits, but I needed a class outside of music. And I was looking at what's available and I saw jewelry. Actually it wasn't jewelry, it was silver smithing. I was like, "Oh that would be interesting to learn how to make jewelry and forge metal." So we made bowls and different kinds of things. And, the class was great. I just did a one semester thing, but I loved it. And the teacher was like, "Have you considered maybe changing your major?" I don't think my parents would be really supportive of me. saying, "I want to go from music to silversmithing" in the last year of my master's. That wouldn't go over so well. (laugh) So yeah, I just kind of kept it in the back of my mind as something that I really enjoyed. But I didn't get back into it until about three or four years later, when I got really sick. I was having some heart issues. And my doctor told me to just find a sedentary activity. So I was like, "Well, I guess I'll make some jewelry. That would be nice." So I went to Michael's and just like bought a bunch of stuff, and started making steel pan inspired earring out of aluminum and brass. And I started selling it online and Etsy and stuff. And I did that for a couple of years. But then, you know, I was still fully engaged in music and working. You know, when I was at CAFE I was working so many hours a week because that program was so so busy, the kids perform so much. So I was like, "I don't know if I can do both." So I ended up letting it fall to the wayside.

Elizabeth DeLamater 4:36

Mmm-hmm

Malika Green 4:36

I didn't get back into it again until many years later again, when I moved to Chicago and found some classes that I could take and then I started working my way back into it. And then many years later again in 2019 when I moved to Trinidad, trying to figure out what to do, I met a jeweler who was looking for an additional apprentice to bring into his workshop. And he ended

up being one of the best jewelers in Trinidad for sure. Some really well known people come to his shop, and he's just been amazing. I mean, he's been basically teaching me everything he knows, anything I asked him. I'll tell him about something I want to make, I'll say, "I need to do wax carving, I don't know - do I need to cast it?" and he'll sit down and figure things out with me. So it's been amazing. But I feel like jewelry has been there, or crafts, maybe? I don't know, but it's been there in my life, just like waiting for me to grab hold of it. Like, "Hey, I'm still here. You know, when you're ready." So, here we are.

Elizabeth DeLamater 6:01

Yeah, I mean, I remembered you selling some things when I knew you, when you were in Chicago your second time. But I didn't realize it went so far back. It really has been there all along. And I didn't know you've trained so much for it. So how do you introduce yourself now, if somebody asks you what kind of jeweler you are?

Malika Green 6:33

Oooh, I have not figured that out yet. I don't know. (Laugh)

Elizabeth DeLamater 6:38

I mean, maybe that's a dumb question. Maybe I don't know what I'm saying. (They laugh)

Malika Green 6:45

I probably don't know what you should be asking, so I don't know either. (laugh)

But um, I would definitely say I'm more of a silversmith, because jewelry making could be anything. I mean, that could be using recycled materials, you know, or organic materials to make jewelry.

Elizabeth DeLamater 7:08

Yeah.

Malika Green 7:09

So I do work with metals. Specifically I work a majority with silver and do a lot of forging and plane machine and so on; the hammering and actually shaping the metal and using a lot of heat. Some jewelers will call themselves goldsmiths as well, because they work with all metals, including gold. So I guess I should start introducing myself as one of those things? I'm a silversmith or a goldsmith.

Elizabeth DeLamater 7:42

Yeah. Do you feel like you are definitely still an apprentice? Or do you feel like you are now producing what you want to be making? Do you feel like you're be able to carry out the visions that you have?

Malika Green 8:04

I think for the most part, but jewelry, just like music, is something that you'll be learning new things for the rest of your life. There is this great podcast that I listen to. This will tell you how much I nerd out on silver smithing and jewelry stuff. It's by Rio Grande, which is a huge jewelry supply company based in the States. And they have this really great podcast where they just interview different jewelers. And they talk about their life. You know, how they got into silversmithing or goldsmithing, and then you know, making jewelry, creating their business, and so on. There are some people who are just designers or some people who do both designing and fabrication. And it's really inspiring because there's just some jewelers on there who have been doing it for like 30 years. And they're like, "Yeah, I just found out about a new metal and I'm going to start using that." There was one woman in particular, I found her story so interesting, her trajectory, because she started back in the '60s and '70s when it was still a

majority male-dominated industry, right? If you think about it, silversmithing or this type of jewelry making came from blacksmiths, right, traditional blacksmiths which is mostly men. So with the the growth of craft fairs in the '60s and '70s, women started to get into making things and selling things and then started working their way into silversmithing and goldsmithing. So she came up learning from a lot of men, and had to prove herself, and she had her own business for a long time just making contemporary items, and now she makes glasses. Like 10 years ago. She's like, "Yeah, I just got into this, and now I love it." And she just makes like two pairs of glasses a month of really high end glasses. I was like, I'm even thought of that. Um, it's really fascinating because there's just so many different specialties that you can go into, you know, whether it's wax carving, or 3d design, which is becoming big now or enameling, or doing large pieces, small pieces, stone settings. So yeah, I'll be learning for the rest of my life, I'll probably always feel like an apprentice. But I do feel like at this point, I am able to come up with my ideas, create them and then develop them. I can look at something and say, "Man, this design in general is great, but the function of like the hook is not good." or "I need to change the size of the junk ring, or change the size of the sheet metal. You know, things like that. I'm figuring it out on my own. So yeah

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:44

That's important if you can troubleshoot and also see things that you can improve and figure that out on your own?

Malika Green 11:51

Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 11:53

That's got to be like, at least a step into professional level if not professional level. Well, I mean, like with music we say, "If you can teach yourself then you're..." I mean, I see your jewelry and I think it's absolutely beautiful, absolutely spectacular, but I never know of course what others - what the makers think themselves.

Malika Green 12:18

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I still feel like I'm always learning. I'll be learning forever with this stuff.

Elizabeth DeLamater 12:30

Lately, you've been making jewelry inspired by flowers and plants from Trinidad. And I saw that you were making some - or going back to -some inspired by pans again. Does that seem right?

Malika Green 12:46

Yes, yes. Yeah. Well, there's not a lot of pan jewelry out there. But also, I wanted to specifically do something to help out the pan community and do some...well, give back basically. When I first started going down this jewelry path, this time more seriously, I'm like, "I'm gonna start this business, and I want to have a philanthropic side. And I don't want to wait to do it. I'm gonna start it from the very beginning." Because why not? And so the proceeds from my pan jewelry will go towards nonprofits. I work with kids, and music education. So it hasn't really taken off yet. I don't feel like I have enough pan jewelry out there yet to like really get people buying but but that is the goal. And eventually I want to actually donate a portion of all of the proceeds, so if it's just 5% of all of the proceeds from all of my sales to music education and maybe just arts education in general. So that's the goal there and I'm saying it out loud and public so it's true!

Elizabeth DeLamater 14:10

That's wonderful! How did you figure out these business models? You're working, you have your own personal business... How did you figure this out? How did you decide this?

Malika Green 14:32

It's just what I, I guess dreamed of you know? I want to be able to make enough money to give back and then you may think about, like, what's "enough?" Okay, so if I'm doing comfortably and I'm making enough to pay for my materials and build my business, is there a bit left that I can give to an organization? Or a group of people that are trying to get kids exposed to the arts and getting them to, to see their value through an artistic medium?

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:17

Yeah.

Malika Green 15:17

So, you know I also know how much the arts did for me. So I think it's just, it's just something I've always wanted to do. And I think maybe just growing up in a family too, where we had a nonprofit arts organization. And I think if my mother could have, she would have, had a for-profit arm that could support the non-profit part.

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:47

So, yeah, do you mind talking about seeing your mother start that program? CAFE?

Malika Green 15:56

Oh, goodness.

Elizabeth DeLamater 15:57

I can only imagine what it would have been like to watch that happen. Do you remember her talking about it?

Malika Green 16:05

Yeah, no, I do remember it, very vividly, actually. Because there was years, it was years leading up to that. She first started the "Caribbean Infusion Cultural Committee," which was basically just an avenue to have some events to fundraise for this program. And so that took about two years. And I just remember, like, a month before the program was supposed to start, before we were supposed to get the pans. We hadn't gotten the pans yet, and the program was supposed to start. And she's like, "They'll come. We're gonna do the program in the basement, and we're gonna go to this person's house and have art, and we're gonna go here and have dance." And my brother and I are in high school. My sister had moved out already. My sister might have gone to California already. And all of us are just like, "Okay, Mom, we'll see how this goes." You know, like, I don't know if this is the best idea, or how this will workout or whatever. And then it was like the Friday before the program was supposed to start, we got these pans. It was supposed to start on Monday or something, and we had to set them up. And Leon Edwards, "Smooth" Edwards as everyone knows him now, the arranger for All Stars Steel Orchestra in Trinidad, so he was the director in the beginning.

Elizabeth DeLamater 17:46

Amazing.

Malika Green 17:47

Yeah, that was amazing! So it was, it was kind of crazy in the beginning, because it just seemed so like, unbelievable that we want to start a program like a summer camp in our house, you know. And all these kids that none of us knew, were going to be in and out. So we weren't at the house for very long. I think just like six months, really, before the end of the year, we had moved. So things happen really quickly. And I think it was once we once we moved, we as a family really saw the potential of it. Like. "Okay, this is this is not just one of mom's harebrained schemes, this is this is happening." Yeah. And I think just not her enthusiasm, her passion about it. This was something that she was always talking about, no matter who she

was with. You know, it could have been family, it could have been a neighbor or even someone she just met. You know, she was talking about this program that she was gonna make happen. So, yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 19:16

A couple years before she came up with it.

Malika Green 19:18

Yeah, yeah. Years before, when she knew that she wanted to do it. And, and I guess it was advice from someone, I can't remember who the person was. But they said, "You need to fundraise for this and raise money, raise awareness for it." So that's how she was able to get so many kids the first year. We had 14 students the first year, which is quite a bit, you know, to do a thing in someone's house. (laugh).

Elizabeth DeLamater 19:51

Yes

Malika Green 19:52

I think two of the kids might have been people in the neighborhood, but most of them were people we didn't know. So...

Elizabeth DeLamater 20:00

Wow. And now CAFE is... how big?

Malika Green 20:08

Well, I mean, easily the program has reached over 500 students, and the program now is at two sites. And there's a full after-school program. So it went from just a Saturday Academy with a few weeknight rehearsals to now a full fledged, 3:00 to 7:00pm after-school program. Yeah, yeah. It is incredible.

Elizabeth DeLamater 20:37

Yeah, so, you saw that from very beginning, it makes sense that you want to have a philanthropic arm. I think that you are, you would anyway, because you're an educator, but then you saw that, so that makes a lot of sense. So you have this jewelry business, and you're working alone instead of?

Malika Green 21:09

Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:11

So the job, what Job did you have right before you moved to Trinidad?

Malika Green 21:17

I was working at Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra, as the Education Coordinator and the Director of Steel Orchestras. And, yeah, we have a small staff, but it's a really tight staff that worked really well together, like eight or nine people.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:34

Okay. How many steelbands there?

Malika Green 21:42

There were four, we have four on-site and two off-site. Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:48

Wow. So has there been anything unexpected from going / from doing such a big change? I mean, I imagine that, I almost don't know what to ask. Because (they laugh) It's such a change from organizing and being part of a big organization, I mean, the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra is very old, right?

Malika Green 22:24
Oh, yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:26
It's like seventy years old?

Malika Green 22:28
Seventy years old at least. Yeah, maybe 73. It's up there.

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:34
Okay so you went from working as part of this huge organization, and now you have... your business is you.

Malika Green 22:41
Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:44
So for you, is there, is it the kind of things I might expect? Or, what's the most surprising thing about it?

Malika Green 22:55
The most surprising thing about it? I think, that's a good question, I haven't thought about that. I will say that there's often times when I'm like, "Man, I wish I had four other people with me." One person to do marketing, one person to do prep work or something, or one person to run errands, you know? I don't know, I feel kind of bad. I don't know how to answer that question.

Elizabeth DeLamater 23:35
Maybe It's too big. Okay, let's go with specifics. Yeah; doing the jobs. I mean, in some ways, you have to do all the jobs. Is that kind of nice to have that control? Are you somebody who...

Malika Green 23:51
It is. It's nice in the beginning, because, you feel like you can kind of set the tone without someone coming in and imposing their vision on you. Not that a good partner would do that. You know, they might not. But I think it's nice to start out and say, "Okay, this is what I want." You know, like the philanthropic idea. If I had a partner, they might say, "Ah, can we wait three years or something. But now if I bring someone in now, I can say, "Look, I have this already. What I need is someone to help develop, or to structure things better." I'm not someone who necessarily likes to be in control. Like one of the things I liked about CYSO is that we did have an exceptional team of people who.. I mean, we had different departments. But every department was like one person, right? Because it's so small. It's a small/medium-sized nonprofit. So if someone dropped the ball on something, someone else would just pick it up, and it wasn't a big deal. Like, we just got to keep moving forward. We have 600 kids in this whole organization, we have to make things happen for them. Right? So if eventually I can have a team like that, that would be amazing. I don't know how long that's gonna take. And so I do, I do miss that. And I, I will be really happy to have other people on my team who are experts at what they do, like someone who is the bomb at Instagram, you know, I still struggle, I had to have two tutorials on Instagram. And you know, and that's where a lot of businesses are going now. And it does work for me, but I do feel like, I dropped the ball, I am so inconsistent, I just feel bad. I'm like, "Oh I wish I had someone to do this." And I know other

people who do have someone who does those things for them, or someone who... I have a friend who does clothing, so she's a designer, and she has someone who does the styling for her photo shoots and all that kind of stuff. Even the shop where I work, you know, they have a retail store, and they have someone who does photoshoots for them with their jewelry, and so on. So it's just me kind of learning about all these things and learning a lot of information on YouTube, but um, you know, it all it takes time. Making jewelry, silversmithing, really is so time consuming. I'm just looking back at my desk. But it's like you make a thing, and then you have to clean it, you have to polish it. And then here in Trinidad, it's pretty much a practice, like, you work with scrap silver, so you have to start with the raw material and melt it down. In the States we can go, "I'll just go online and I'll buy some sheet [metal], buy some wire," you know? Because if you order it from abroad here, it's going to be so expensive it doesn't make sense.

Elizabeth DeLamater 27:31

Sure.

Malika Green 27:31

So that just adds all this extra time. So yeah, so if the control is good, I think just for learning enough to be able to have good teammates in the future.

Elizabeth DeLamater 27:47

That makes a lot of sense. Do you miss literally working with people? I would imagine it could be very strange to be around people a lot, and then now you work alone? Or is it marvelous? (they laugh)

Malika Green 28:12

Well, okay, so there's two things that I'm involved with with jewelry, right? I do my own stuff at home. And then I also work part time and [the store] apprenticing, basically. So I'm there, but there's four other jewelers who work there. And that's fun, because there are so many crazy things that happen in a jewelry shop, where people bring things in, they get fixed or whatever, or get custom work. So, we show each other things and say, "Oh, man, I cracked this stone" or, "what did I do now?" So, that's really cool. And plus, if we do stuff at home, we bring it in and show each other. So that's really cool. But then I do enjoy the the solitude, partly because I am a fierce introvert, like I'm very comfortable in my introversion. And I like to have that alone time, just to be with my thoughts and think and look at things, and turn it around and not have anyone looking over my shoulder seeing what I'm doing or anything.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:33

Yes. Hard agree.

Malika Green 29:37

So if I can have a combination of both at some point? That would be nice.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:42

Yeah. And now you are in Trinidad. I mean, you've been to Trinidad a lot over the years. Were you born in Trinidad?

Malika Green 29:53

No, I wasn't born in Trinidad. I was born in DC.

Elizabeth DeLamater 29:56

You were born in DC. Where were your parents born?

Malika Green 29:59

My mother's yeah my mother's Trinidadian and my dad is from New York.

Okay. All right. Sorry, all of a sudden I couldn't remember about your father not.

No that's okay.

Elizabeth DeLamater 30:13

But so because of that you've been to Trinidad many times in your life, right?

Malika Green 30:19

Yeah, yeah. The first time I came, I was seven. And my mother in very Trinidadian form, she put me in my "Sunday Best," you know, a dress, flying on the plane, a little seven year old black girl with curls in her hair, it was so ridiculous (laugh) And I went down with, I think it was a cousin of hers, and I stayed with my grandmother. And I had several cousins, I still have several cousins who are in New York. And so we would spend some summers in Trinidad. I think the next time I went, I went seven and I went again at 12. And that's what I learned to play pan. And then I went, I don't know, I've gone several times; at least 10 times, maybe since the age of 12.

Elizabeth DeLamater 31:20

So does Trinidad feel... And because your mother is a Trini, now that you live in Trinidad, does it feel like as much of "another country?" Do you feel like you've moved to another country or just to another "part" of your home?

Malika Green 31:46

No, I absolutely feel like I've moved to another country. I mean, especially thinking about all the things that are happening right now with Black Lives Matters in the States and politics and everything. There's been a lot of conversation right now in the Black community about "Blaxit," and Black people wanting to leave the States and be somewhere else. But it's been fascinating because I, when I was in the States, I always felt like I could be somewhere else. And then being in Trinidad I feel more American than I've ever felt in my whole life. The way I might think about things, or question things, is definitely from an American point of view. But also being Black in a place, That is majority what we would call a in the States a minority, majority Black and Brown, has been really empowering.

Elizabeth DeLamater 32:54

Yeah.

Malika Green 32:55

And I was telling Kim, my boyfriend, the other day; I was at a print store couple weeks ago. And there was a an older black woman who came in to get some work done. And she had a suit on, like she looked like she might have been a lawyer, it was very conservative. And she had her hair in this beautiful hairstyle. It was like cornrows in the front and then was out in the back. Well, it was braids, but they were like loose braids in the back. And then she had these beads on the end. Kind of like the Bo Derek, famous... right? Now, Black woman today in the States, you wouldn't see Black women wearing their hair like that, right? In a professional say, like with a suit on. Like, I just stared at her. I stare at her long enough to where I realized I was staring at her. And then I had to wonder, "Why am I staring at this woman?" It was like, "Oh my god, in my adult life I've never seen a woman dressed that way with this African hairstyle, or that type of hairstyle in the States." And I was like, "Wow." There's a way that women carry themselves and express themselves in Trinidad that I don't feel you see a lot of Black women in the States or in any other place that I've been. I was in London. There's a Black community there too. I don't feel that the the way that they present themselves is with the same amount of confidence or power that women in Trinidad do and maybe it's the same for Black women in some African countries or in countries where Black is the majority. So, yeah, I feel like I've

moved to a completely different place. And, and I love it. It's it's interesting because it's made me contemplate a lot. And there's a lot of things I haven't figured out yet, but I'm definitely journaling, and thinking, and talking to people and trying to figure out things.

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:24

Wow. It's going to or probably already has affected your art.

Malika Green 35:30

Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, um yeah, color, I would say. It's not something that I... but you know, the way that people here just wear color. I think they're unapologetic about it.

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:57

Right!

Malika Green 36:00

And for some reason, that was like a big hurdle for me. I'm only just now introducing color into my artwork via stones and so on. Like people would ask, "Okay, so you have this bougainvillea earring, but you don't have any, like bright colored beads or anything." I'm like, "No. Black beads, you don't like the black beads?" (laugh)

Elizabeth DeLamater 36:24

Interesting. Well, I can't wait to see. I can't wait to see the color that you might be introducing into your jewelry. I don't know what that is. I think that's also a Midwest thing. You lived on the East coast. Is Maryland different than the Midwest?

Malika Green 36:43

Than the Midwest? Oh, for sure. Moving to the Midwest was a big culture shock. That might have been a bigger culture shock than moving to Trinidad. I think just because I've been to Triniada so many times?

Elizabeth DeLamater 36:58

Sure.

Malika Green 37:01

Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:01

I can imagine! So the transition from making music and audible art and performing art to you're still enabling that by working on the foundation, the internship - the Fellowship it's called right?

Malika Green 37:28

Yes.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:32

But are you performing anymore? On pan? Have you performed lately?

Malika Green 37:37

No, not lately. I haven't performed since Panorama 2019.

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:44

So you did play last year. Where did you play?

Malika Green 37:48

In 2019?

Elizabeth DeLamater 37:50

Yeah.

Malika Green 37:50

I played with Renegades last in 2019. Yeah. Which was amazing. So I will definitely keep playing in Panorama. There's nothing like that experience.

Elizabeth DeLamater 38:06

So do you think that you... you don't have the need or the urge to perform anymore?

Malika Green 38:19

No, I don't. But I haven't had the urge in a long time. As I became really engrossed in educating, I was really into that, I want to see my kids perform. And sometimes I would perform with them. But really only if a person was missing, or a section needed help or something like that.

Elizabeth DeLamater 38:49

Yeah. Yeah. It's fulfilled by having them go out. Pretty amazing feeling.

Malika Green 39:01

Mmm- hmm. Yeah.

Elizabeth DeLamater 39:03

So for you, was the actual performing of the music, an important part of the creation for you? I know you composed [music], so I'm wondering if that is now fulfilled by the jewelry or does it feel like you've... I'm just wondering if everything, all of your creative juices, are still the same or does it feel like it's it's different? Or some of it is waiting? Are all the are all of the boxes ticked?

Malika Green 39:45

(laugh) No, I feel that my creative juices have definitely shifted. But you also have to realize I haven't written music in quite a long time. I wrote a lot when I was at NIU and I wrote a little bit after I left NIU, and then I was just writing less and less. And I was doing a lot of arranging.

Elizabeth DeLamater

Yeah.

Malika Green

Because I was teaching. But I actually developed an injury, at the end of my master's at NIU. And so I had, I had an issue with my right hand. I still have an issue with my right hand to the point where I eat with my left hand. So I mean, ever since that injury; and I had a Master's recital that a lot of people don't know this, but like I practically cried at the end of my Masters recital, because it was so disappointing, as far as my level of performance, because I had this injury that I just pushed myself through, instead of really doing what I needed to do. And then years later, I was like, diagnosed with focal dystonia on my right hand. So thank goodness, it's not as bad as like, the pianist Fleischer (I can't remember his first name.) But it's, and I know there's several musicians who have that and it's crippling, but mine never got that bad. So anyway, I've just been dealing with that insecurity for a long time.

Elizabeth DeLamater

Injuries really - I've been injured. It really messes with you.

Malika Green

Yeah, yeah. So, um, so you know, not being able to play at the level that I did before. That took something away from me, I think with music.

Elizabeth DeLamater

Yeah. What was... For you now, as an artist of any kind, what is important to you, to be a part of creating art? Is it? Is it the 'sitting there and filing away?' Or is it, 'thinking of an idea, and seeing it at the end?' Is it 'doing all of it?' Do you have a part, of a specific... Is it tiny? Or is it a large part of the vision? (Malika laughs)

You know, some of us are really specific in our "I love THIS moment In the journey," in other people that journey has to be complete. Other people say, "As long as my hands are on sticks, I don't care what happens."

Malika Green

No, I think I love all of it. I love coming up with the idea. You know, I might work on a sketch. And I'm not the greatest sketcher but you know, I'll draw out something and I'll think about it. Do it this way. And I'll work on that for like, a month. And I'll, I'll finally sit down and say, "Okay, here we go. We're gonna actually make it." And then, and then I love that phase of like going through and saying, "Oh, man, I drew it to look like this, but I realized, when I'm cutting it here or I'm sawing there, it looks better like this." And so yeah, I love that whole process of going from, like, the seed basically, to the final fruit? Or the flower at the end?

Elizabeth DeLamater

Yeah.

Malika Green

And saying, "Yes, I did it!" I think it's the 'Accomplishing The Thing' at the end. Even if I don't like it even if I'll say, "Man, I'm gonna have to melt this and start over again." I still say I did it.

Elizabeth DeLamater

Cool. Would you say you're easier on yourself? Or that you have a positive dialogue with yourself, with this jewelry?

Malika Green

I think it's been a process, but also what's different is being around people. Being in the jewelry shop and working with people as we're all making things. Whether it's a new custom thing or whether you're repairing things, [even with] the amount of swear words and the amount of anger and people losing things on the floor and the amount of disappointments you have in the process, but then in the end, it's there. It still comes together. So I think that has helped me to have a positive conversation with myself because everyone who works there has years of experience ahead of me. There's one woman who's been there for 20, 23 or 24 years and she's brilliant; she can look at a piece of wire and just tell you what size it is or something. Anytime there's a problem with something she'll say, "Oh, well yes, it looks this color because of copper" and "Sometimes it's copper and zinc and blah blah," and it's like, "Okay!" But even she will have her little curse words under her breath when she accidentally melts something - "Ohhh the fire was too hot. I didn't realize that I melted the piece!"

So I think if it was just me by myself, like trying to learn things off of YouTube, (which is what a lot of people do because there's a lot of things you can learn offline), I would probably be having a lot of conversations with myself that are negative speak because I do still struggle and I might say, "Man, I can't believe I melted this thing." Or, "I can't believe this is taking me so long to solder," or, "I thought I was gonna make five pairs of earrings. I've only made two. Why is this taking me so long?" You know, things like that. But I think with music, so much of it is - you do so much of it in isolation, right? You practice hours and hours and hours in isolation,

and then every once in a while you get to perform for someone else. So then, that is tough. I think when I was studying music, I did have a lot of negative speak. And I think one of the reasons I got an injury was because I stressed myself out so much and over practiced, if that is a thing. But overworking the same muscle over and over again. Because you want it to be a certain way. Instead of accepting what it is at the moment, you know?

Elizabeth DeLamater

Yeah. Well, I think I, I find your journey so fascinating, because just the big facts are so impressive, and seem so different [from each other]. And I think that when you first the first time I talked to you after you moved to Trinidad was pretty soon after that. And you said something like? "I don't really know [what I'm going to do]." You kind of did know. And I think everything has been following exactly the correct path for you. I think that it's been really another fantastic example of an artist's journey.

Malika Green

What's fascinating is that with what you said, is that I actually decided to start selling my jewelry during the pandemic. It was when things kind of shut down. For some reason I said, this is a good idea for me to see if this will actually gonna work. (They laugh)

Elizabeth DeLamater

You weren't gonna sell it until until then? You hadn't planned it?

Malika Green

Yeah, I mean, up to that point, it was like, I was just learning, I was just soaking up so much from this jeweler that I was learning from and, and I was working on my own designs at night at home, and was thinking, "Okay, I'm gonna work on this design. And once they get to this place where I can just look at it, and it looks beautiful, then I'm gonna sell it," you know? And then everything closed up. And yeah, I just decided, "Well, I have all this time. And I might as well just try. There's gotta be some people out there who are interested." I'm looking at my stuff, at least even if they're not gonna buy it. You know, if people say, "Man, after the pandemic, I'll buy your stuff," that's at least encouraging. So I just went for it. I just went for it. And

Elizabeth DeLamater

That seems really brave. Did it feel like you' were taking a risk?

Malika Green

It didn't because I didn't have anything else at that point. I wasn't working on the UTT project at that time, because there was some legal issues. So I couldn't. Right? So...

Elizabeth DeLamater

What I would wonder is what would you tell somebody who is conflicted about their artistic path or feeling stymied?

Malika Green

Hmm. Well, I think that you have to take some time to yourself first. I didn't talk about that. But you do need to sit down and think about what you want for your life or what you want out of this art and, talk to people, you know, it really helped to have Kim to talk about what I was going through. I think when when you saw me, I was telling you, I was thinking about applying for a PhD. And, and he was the one who said, "You don't have to do a PhD." It was like, it was so weird because when he said that, it was like those were the words I needed to hear for some reason, and they were just so simple. And it wasn't as if at that moment, I decided right away to be a jeweler. But it was at that moment, I said, "I don't have to do this thing that I've been forcing myself to do." And if there is something else that I'm interested in, there's nothing wrong with being curious about that.

Elizabeth DeLamater
Right.

Malika Green

Right. So, I think, yeah, definitely start off by talking to people, writing things down, I think has become more important now than it ever was before. And, and be curious, you know, if, if there is something that's really interesting to you, and you're not sure about it, just dive into it little by little and kind of see where it goes. I think that's the thing that got me so much into jewelry is that I am really curious about it. I ask one question, and then I realize that opens up like, four more things I'm interested in about it. So and you may realize that there's, there was an intuition that you had about this thing. And maybe you just needed to ask a question or talk to the right person. And then that opened up something for you that you didn't realize what was there. And then at the end of it, you may decide to continue on the path that you were originally on, which is fine, too. But I think through it all, you do have to be kind to yourself, and that's probably the hardest thing for us to do as human beings.

Elizabeth DeLamater

Thank you for talking to me. I'm gonna think of a gazillion things more that I want to ask you [about]. But I don't want to take any more of your time. But thank you, thank you for talking. Thank you so much for talking.

Malika Green

Thank you for asking me. I really appreciate it. Anytime I get to talk to people about these things that go on in my life. It helps me kind of contemplate my life.

Elizabeth DeLamater

You have been listening to the Art Lives Podcast. I am so thankful to Malika for talking with me. I have posted information about Malika Green, and links to her work, on the Art Lives page of my website, elizabethdelamater.com. Please take a minute to rate Art Lives on Apple podcasts or [stitcher.com](https://www.stitcher.com). More ratings help more listeners find the podcast. Special thanks to Bill Sallak, artist Eduardo Moreno and composer Nicholas Meyers. And as always, thank you very much for listening to Art Lives.