

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & A'Driane Nieves

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by the artist and writer A'Driane Nieves, where I ask her: How did you become such an amazing artist? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness. I am beyond excited to welcome our guest this week, but I do just have to, like, set the stage. This is a guest who I discovered on Instagram, and I became instantly obsessed, to the point where, like, I actually have chills on my thighs and my triceps. What I just said that, when I was thinking about when I discovered this stunning artist. She is a creator, she's an artist, she is also the founder of the Tessera Arts Collective and *Abstractions Magazine*, which I'm obsessed with. Welcome to the podcast, A'Driane Nieves. How are you?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:00:57] Good, hi! Thank you for having me.

JVN [00:01:00] Thank you for making time for us. Now, just I want to, just we are, we have so much to dive into it, but I just want people to visualize, don't close your eyes if you're driving, but if you're not driving listening to this, you can. But if you can imagine that room that I sit in when I do Getting Curious and there's this, like, pink couch and there's this *stunning* work of art behind the couch, the artist who made that painting is literally who you're about to be listening to. A'Driane, how are you?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:01:27] I'm, well first, I'm just feeling very, very touched by that lovely introduction. And I'm also I mean, I got to be honest, I'm a little just excited and happy and just feeling really good energy, so I'm a little like, ahh, I want to move, I want to jump around, I wanna dance, but I'm, I'm just, I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to get to, like, talk with you. And, you know, just we get to talk about art; I love talking about art.

JVN [00:02:00] I am newer to art, like, I've always liked art, but I never thought I would live in a world where, like, I could, like, you know afford it and, like, know about it and like, and it's just so exciting that I can and I, I, just it's so gorgeous, I love art so much, I just never knew it was a world that I would get to, like, you know, dabble in. And so when I first saw your work on Instagram, I felt like someone had taken me by the face and, like, drag--but in a good way--and like dragged me to this fantastical, gorgeous world. I literally usually it takes, like, figure skating or gymnastics to, like, get me into an Instagram hole that's really deep. I went so deep when I found you on Instagram, I think I, like, went all the way back to your first post. And how did this, like, how did you become so multifacetedly talented as an artist? And so I'm going to break down the questions 'cause I almost asked, like, 27 at once. When did you realize that you wanted to, like, grow up to be an artist?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:03:03] Oooh, well, I will say that I did not identify or think of myself as, quote unquote, an artist until I was almost, well, no I was 30 years old, I was in my thirties, my early thirties. I grew up knowing that I was a creative kid and that I was a creative person. I loved reading, I loved writing, I was one of those really nerdy kids who was, like, in first grade reading at a fourth grade level, writing these very, like, fantastical stories for my writing assignments, like, I was all in with writing and reading. And so my teachers always saw that, they always nurtured that in me. My head was always in a book and, you know, I was the kid in junior high who would check out a book one day and turn it in the next day and like the librarian and I became, like, best friends.

So I knew that I loved words, I knew that I also loved-, in junior high I was on the debate team, I was, you know, part of the theater club, so I did drama. I took this theater arts class where we did, like, what they called record miming. And so, like we would, like, do lip-synching to like songs and like record videos. So I loved all of that. And so I knew I was a creative person. And when I was 13, I discovered poetry and I discovered that I could write it. So my ambitions of, like, becoming a marine biologist--thanks *Free Willy*--completely, like, I just abandoned those.

I grew up listening to, my dad was a *huge* Prince fan, so I've literally been listening to Prince since, like, I was born in 1982. So I grew up listening to so many different types of music and I just loved music. And I was like, "I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna be a, I'm gonna be a poet, and I'm gonna be a writer and I'm gonna work for Rolling Stone and be a music critic." And I'm also going to do some investigative journalism like Lisa Ling, because *this* was back when Lisa Ling was on Channel One News. And I was, like, so in love with what she did as a journalist, as an investigative journalist-

JVN [00:05:15] Same!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:05:16] -And as a, and as a broadcaster, right. Like, she was amazing.

JVN [00:05:19] Yes!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:05:19] And so I had all of that kind of informing my ideas about who I was and what I wanted to pursue in my life. But when it came to visual art and, like, singing, so, like, my mom is a phenomenal singer, my stepdad, phenomenal singer, he's like done, he's toured with, like, Michael Bublé and Teddy Pendergrass and like-

JVN [00:05:42] Oooh.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:05:43] He's done backup for, like, some amazing people. My brother can even sing, even though he, like, doesn't like to. My sister can sing. They play instruments. *I'm* not musically inclined at all. So, you know, I just, I knew that when it came to music stuff and when it came to visual art, that just was not me. And in seventh grade, I tend to tell this story a lot because people always ask, "How did you get started? Did you *always* envision yourself as an artist?" And I'm like, no, because I was the kid who in seventh grade, after looking at one of my still life paintings, my art teacher was like, "Listen, you're so," because they knew that I was in theater arts that I you know was doing other things, I was, I lived in Texas at the time and back then Texas had these academic competitions called UIL and so I was doing oration in theater, I was doing all these things for these academic type of competitions on the weekends.

And so my, my art teacher knew that. And they were just like, "Listen, you're so good at *other* things, *other* types of you know art, you don't have to be good at visual art; it's ok." And that kind of cemented in my mind that I was not, quote unquote, an artist. Because in *my* mind, especially *then*, being an artist or especially being a fine artist, like, I didn't know, I didn't realize there was a difference, right, or that there could be a difference, was someone, you know, who was, like, my classmates, who had amazing still life paintings and charcoal drawings, and, you know, could paint pictures of flowers.

I mean, my, my, I think about I think about my little paintings back then and I remember thinking to myself, "This is kindergarten. Like, this is terrible. I'm 14, 13, 14 years old, what is this trash?" And so hearing my art teacher kind of like, "You're right, it's trash, but it's ok, you're good at other things," really kind of pushed me away from unearthing or even considering that there was, you know, visual art and creating images was any type of my, you know, related to my creative voice. So that was, yeah, that was my first experience with visual art, and I pretty much didn't look back until I was in my late 20s and I was, I had just been diagnosed with bipolar disorder following an experience with postpartum depression and anxiety.

And as part of my new treatment plan for this new diagnosis, I was seeing this brand new therapist and I was talking about you know a lot of the symptoms that I was experiencing and you know a lot of the, the agitation and the frustration and er the just unease and the tension that I would feel as part of my hypomanic symptoms and, and how intense it was. and I was talking to her about how the, the, the pressure that I would feel when I you know during these moments would be so intense that I would feel like I needed to hurt myself in some way to try to, like, just release the tension, like, it was just so unbearable sometimes.

And so she was walking me through how I can channel that into something constructive so that I wouldn't hurt myself. And so she started talking to me over a couple of sessions

about the benefits of making something with your hands. And she started talking to me about the data and the science behind it and how therapeutic it is. And she started talking about how art therapy and art expressive therapy is something that they use, especially, like, for senior citizens. And she just had all of this really great information that I really latched onto because it was very, like, science-based, it was, you know, data-driven. And back then that was really important to me because I was, you know, new to learning about mental health and mental illness.

And so, you know, she was like, "You need to find something constructive to do with your hands because, you know, it can help with your serotonin levels, it can help ease your mind, it can help your body relax." You know, she just kind of talked me through what the physical benefits of it were. And so I was like, "Ok," I went back in my mind and I went back to when I was like you know in fourth and fifth grade, and I remembered that for one Christmas I had gotten one of those rainbow looms, you know, those little weaving looms that you can get-

JVN [00:10:45] Yes!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:10:46] And I was like, "Oh, I remember doing that," and I remember trying to learn how to crochet. So I scooped up my kids after my therapy appointment and I went to Walmart, and I was walking down, you know, and this was a Walmart that had one of those huge craft sections like Michaels. And so they had yarn, they had fabric, they had, like, all this stuff. And so I was looking for the yarn and the hooks, and I happened to turn down an aisle that also had a bunch of, like, cheap craft paints and brushes and little small canvas particle boards. And I was pushing my cart and I'm looking, and it was just, it really was intuition, but it was so, so fleeting that I'm, to this day in shock that I even paid it any attention because it was like a nanosecond.

But it was, "I should grab some of those." Like, it was *literally* just a whim. And I was just like, I can't remember, like, I don't even think I even paused for very long. I just grabbed different stuff and threw it in the cart and then I kept moving and I, you know, I went to the yarn section, grabbed some crochet hooks, some yarn, took it all back to my house. All the paint stuff sat in a corner in my room. During this time I was, like, 27, 28, mother of two, my, who, he's now my husband, but back then we weren't together, we had broken up, um *drama*, and, and you know we were living in separate places. I was a full time college student and I was actually renting an apartment from the university.

So I was this 28-year-old single mom on this conservative Christian campus around all these young college kids, and I, I think I was approaching midterms. And so I had kind of like thrown some stuff, thrown the stuff in the corner, but I, I pulled out some of the yarn and I

spent about two weeks trying to crochet and I finally abandoned it because, one, it just pissed me off, and two, it, it's just too tedious for me. Like, I can't just, I want to, I want to, I love fabric and textile-based stuff, I love seeing what people can create with it, but it's too tedious for me. So, I was like "This, this is, this, no."

So I put the stuff away, and my partner at the time, he had the kids for one weekend and I was supposed to be doing my homework, using that kid-free time to catch up on work. And instead I was not, mostly because I just felt terrible. I was like in a, I was having another episode and I just was not feeling well. And I started feeling like all that pressure and that you know just that angst and anxiety and just agitation, you know, really kind of consuming my body. And I was sitting in my room and I looked over in the corner and I was like, "Oh yeah, I have all this paint stuff." And I just had therapy a couple of hours before and my therapist, again, had been like, "You know, I know you gave up on the yarn stuff, but, you know maybe try to keep finding something that's going to work." So I heard her voice in my head and I was like, "All right, fine."

So I grab the bag and I just, literally, I mean, I hadn't touched paint *literally* since seventh grade. And um you know I don't even think I like colored. Now, I had done, like, some collage stuff, and stuff like that, but I hadn't really, like, done anything like this in years since I, you know, was a teen. So I dump the stuff out, and I have, like, these little small tubes of paint, you know basic colors, right. And, some brushes and I don't even think I, I don't even think I grabbed water I just, because it was acrylic paint, that was the other thing, it was acrylics that I had grabbed.

And I just start, I had this little small, thin particle canvas board, and I just started putting gobs of paint on it and just kind of started, you know, like, looking like a DJ, just, you know, mixing stuff and moving stuff around the canvas. And it took about 45 minutes before I realized that, like, my thoughts had stopped ruminating, that pressure that I had felt had, like, eased, I was cal-, like, I was much calmer, I felt, like, stable, my mind was quiet, my anxiety was, like, gone. And I just, I remember the sensation, feeling that that tactile sensory input of the paint on my hands and moving it around, like, it just, it was so grounding for me. Like, I'm getting emotional thinking about it.

It was so grounding for me and it literally just changed so much for me. And so I went back to therapy the next week and I told my therapist, "So, I tried out the paints and it worked." And so she was like, "Yes, victory," you know, like, "keep going!" And I literally spent you know six months just buying more cheap canvas, buying paints and just painting like I didn't, you know, I was during this time, because I had started a blog in 2010, so I was writing and I was, you know, journaling and chronicling my, my experience with mental health and with, you know, postpartum depression and things like that.

So, you know like, I was, I was still being creative, but at the same time my creative voice was emerging in this other medium but I didn't realize it at first. To me, it was just something that was a hobby. And so I didn't, I didn't even think of it as a hobby, really. It was just something that I did that felt good. And so, like, I didn't go on YouTube looking for any tutorials, I didn't, I will admit to, especially back then, I've gotten better over the years. But back then I knew *very* little about art, like, visual art, fine art. I hadn't even been to a *museum* until, like, maybe three or four months prior to this. I went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for the very first time; that was my first time.

JVN [00:17:28] So this would have been, just in my chronology, so this would have been like eight years, nine, 10 years ago?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:17:34] Yeah.

JVN [00:17:35] You go to the-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:17:36] Yeah.

JVN [00:17:37] So you're like, "I'm into this, I'm obsessed with this art, it's making me feel good." You're, "Well let me, like, just go see a museum, just like what other like-"

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:17:44] Well and, well *because*, because I was in college, I was, I was, I had transferred to this four-year school after getting my, my associates degree. And I, we had, there were two things. One, the school was connected to this artist who, and they had a lot of work by him, and his name is Makoto Fujimura. And he is still to this day, one of my all-time favorite artists. I follow him on Instagram; he doesn't even know I'm alive.

But he, he, he creates, he, especially back then, he created these pieces where he talked about the beauty that can come from pain and brokenness. And he talked about a lot, about, like, culture care and how that ties into faith. And, so anyway, around the campus, the campus, the school had purchased a lot of art from him and had hung it around campus. And so I would spend lots and lots of time sitting in front of his works. And his, this was the first time in my life that I was actually *impacted* by a piece of visual art, like a painting. Like I had never, like I had, I had read about, like, people, like, weeping in front of you know Rothko paintings and stuff and being like, "Ok, what?!"

But, but standing in front of his work in front of Makoto Fujimura's pieces around the campus, like, I would I, I would just have such visceral reactions to it. He came for an artist talk and, you know, I was in, I listened to the whole thing, I was totally engaged. And,

following that, the Philadelphia Museum of Art had this brand new Van Gogh exhibit, and so one of my teachers was giving extra credit if we went blah, blah, blah. So that's how I wound up at the art museum. And I mean, the Van Gogh stuff I was like, alright this is cool, but there were a couple of other pieces where I was like, "Ohh, ok," you know, by some other artists that, and, and looking back, back then, they were definitely more abstract, right.

And, I just, that was kind of my introduction into understanding that art can, can, *visual art* and abstraction especially can be a channel for personal healing and growth and, you know, like a portal to just unpacking a lot of, a lot of personal things. Before then I didn't understand that art could do that in that way. Through music I did, through performing I did, but not through actually, like, seeing a painting. It was the first time that I really understood the impact that a painting, you know, that a painting can have the same impact.

JVN [00:20:44] So at that point, when you see, you're in school, you see Makoto Fujimura's work for the first time. But at this point you've just discovered like, "Ooh I really like this, I really like painting," but you hadn't yet been like, "Wait, this could be my career." Like, it was still just, like, kind of, like, an outlet.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:21:00] It was *still* just an outlet. And I, I was taking a humanities course and part of the humanities course was we walked in one day and my professor had one of those projectors up, and she put a paperclip on the projector, on you know the projector, and she put it up on the screen and she was like, "Is this art?" And so it kicked off this debate about what is art, what, you know, and that conversation led to a discussion about abstraction and abstract art and whether or not abstract art is art and all of these things, right. And so the class is having this, like, big, huge discussion when we get to that part, and she's showing us some works by, like, Jackson Pollock and, you know, the, the usual white men that you see when they talk about abstract expressionism especially, right. And you know I'm sitting there, I'm kind of just taking it in again, not connecting what I'm doing with any of that, right.

And again, remind, remind you, I'm, like, the oldest student there, ok, I'm surrounded by all these 18, 19-year-olds. And one of them had actually kind of, like, become a friend. She had been over to my apartment, met my kids, all of that jazz. So she had seen some of these, like, pieces that I had been doing because, you know, I was, like, you know, I put them up around my apartment not thinking anything, right. She opens up during this class discussion and was like, well, "What A'Driane does is art." And I was like, "Girl, what is you doing?!" [JVN LAUGHS] "Listen here you don't, you don't put my business out on Front Street, like." Like I, and I just looked at her, and she was like, *what?* She was like, *it is*. And I

was like [MAKES NOISE] and my teacher was like, "Oh well A'Driane do you have pictures of it?" And I was like, no. She's like, "Well, she has them on her Instagram." And this was back when Instagram was still just five people, like Facebook hadn't bought them-

JVN [00:22:55] Yes!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:23:56] -Like back in 2011. They had, like, five filters, right. It had just-

JVN [00:23:00] Uh. It was like Amaro, whatever.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:23:03] Yes. Yes.

JVN [00:23:04] Yes! Because I got it in 2012 like that was even-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:23:07] Yes it, it had *just* started. And so I was like, "*Girl*," you know. And I think I had, I'd only shown one picture of something I had painted by that point. But she's like yeah she has a *lot* of art in her apartment and she made it all. And I was like, "She's telling all my business; this is why I can't be friends with you." [JVN LAUGHS] So [LAUGHS] I was-

JVN [00:23:25] Were you, were you, was it like one of those things where it's, like, when someone's like, "Yeah, sing for the class," or like, "Yeah, show," but then you're like, but like, was a part of you like, "Ok, fine, look at it," or were you like-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:23:35] No!

JVN [00:23:36] -"You truly just fucking told everybody my"-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:23:36] I was really like, "See this is, see, listen white girl, this is why you don't understand, you can't just be telling people's business, like, this is," [JVN LAUGHS] like, I was very much like, "Sis no, like you're about to get your pass revoked. I can't, I can't deal with you." [LAUGHS] Like, I was like, "You ain't coming over no more." [BOTH LAUGH] I was just really sitting there, like, ahh! So, so-

JVN [00:24:07] 'Cause you're, like, 28 at this point or something? You're like-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:24:09] Yeah, 28.

JVN [00:24:10] Ok so yeah you're, like, "Too many teenagers, too much vulnerability."

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:24:14] I'm a single mom, right, like, and I'm at this conservative Christian school because they have this amazing social work program that I, I wanted to be, that I, you know, that's why I was going there. I, you know had a wild, multicolored afro, I had tattoos. So I was, I already was enough of, like I stood out enough, ok! [LAUGHS]

JVN [00:24:36] Oh yeah! I was like, "Where can I start your fan club?" like, listening to that description, but I get it, because we're in college. So did you end up showing the class at that moment?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:24:45] I did not show the class because I was like, "No!" But-

JVN [00:24:48] No!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:24:48] -When I was getting ready to leave, when the class was over, when I was getting ready to leave, my teacher, her name was, her name was Brenda, and again, we were, like, the *same* age, ok, so she was like, "Hey, so come here." And I was like, she's like, "Can I talk to you?" I'm like, "Yeah sure." I'm thinking she can talk to me about my grades or something, right 'cause I, because I had a couple of missing assignments. [JVN LAUGHS] And she was like, "Yeah, so talk to me about these paintings." And I was like, "Ohhh, here we go." [BOTH LAUGH] And I was like, "Alright, fine."

So I pulled up my phone and I showed her, and I had actually *just* done this one piece that was, it was big, and it had, it was all primary colors, like yellow, blue, um, er red, right. But I had, I had, I had with my hands, I had pretty much like you could see, you know, orange and green and, so I had, like, mixed it all together. It was this big piece and I called it: Elements. And I showed that one to her and I showed her a couple of others and she looked at me and she looked back at the pictures and then she looked at me and she was like, well, listen, she said, "I know," she's like, "You're a single mom, you have two kids, you're just trying to get through college, I know you want to be a social worker um because you want to be a therapist." She's like, "I know you're big on mental health. She said, but *listen*, she's, and you're *definitely* a writer, she's like, there's *no question* about that, she said, but, *I think* that if you were to bring some intentionality to what you're doing, she said, I see a lot of raw potential here for some incredible work in just a different aspect of your creative voice."

And I was just like, "I mean, alright Professor Ebersol," like, "Ok, give me, give me my phone back." Like, I was just standing there, like, "Ok." And she was like, she was like, she's like, "I know you joke about being art history illiterate, she said, but do you know anything, you know," she's like, "I know we talked about abstraction," she's like, "but you

might want to look into abstract expressionism. You might want to look into intuitive art.” She said, “There is a type of, you know, there are people who make art that, it's just purely intuitive.” And she was, like, “And really abstract expressionism is rooted in that, that's its whole ethos; that's what it was about.”

She's like, “Jackson Pollock had cigarette butts,” it wasn't about perfection. a lot of it was really about this raw, emotional, you know, just expression of your fullest self.” And she said, “When I look at what you're doing, I see *that*. I see the raw materials of that, and even if you just do it for therapeutic purposes, I think, you know, you might find some inspiration if you kind of look into those things.” So, I was like, “Ok, well, you know, thank you.” Snatched my phone back.

But over the next couple of weeks, I did start, you know I did do some Googling and I did start learning more about abstract expressionism and intuitive-based art. And, um, you know, learned that there are *tons* of artists who didn't go to art school or didn't start painting or collaging or anything like that until they were like in their thirties or this was their like second or third career, they, they quit their job and dove into making art. And so I started finding all of this while also learning some of the, the history behind abstract expressionism.

And that, that, that changed things for me because I felt like it kind of validated what I was doing as authentic and as, “Ok, so this is, this, *this is art*,” and, although I still didn't think of myself as an artist, but, it did help me see what I was creating as art. And so, you know, like, I just kept going with it. It wasn't until 2015 that I decided to go from it just being, like, a hobby and a therapeutic outlet to, “Ok, I want this to be, I want this to be my next career instead of social work,” instead of, you know because now, by this point, I'm a stay-at-home mom. My, my, you know I'd just had a new baby, but my middle son had just been diagnosed as autistic and so we were getting him a lot of help. So I was like, you know, “I'm a stay-at-home mom with three kids, um, *this is something that's flexible for me*.”

You know I was doing a lot of mental health and maternal mental health advocacy, so I felt that I didn't necessarily have to stick with my goal of becoming a therapist in order to be of service to people and, you know, like, make a difference. You know that was very important to me. So I was like, “I can stick with my advocacy over here, I can express myself this way, and people seem to be responding really well to what I'm creating so, you know, like, you know yes, like this, I should throw myself into this and do this professionally.” And so that's how I made the transition from, you know, it being a therapeutic outlet to it being a hobby that I really enjoyed, to, you know, becoming a working, quote unquote, a working artist.

JVN [00:30:39] There's no quote unquote. You are like a literal working artist. That made me cry like four times. I wrote down a few things. One thing that I wrote down is when I, definitely sense this with my own recovery and mental health and mental health and addiction because I've been recovering from trauma. Getting into something that is connecting to your childhood self, like for me, it was like gymnastics, figure skating, language, like all these things that I used to really like when I was little. And then for whatever reason, the world tells you, "this isn't necessarily for you," and we, it gets left in the dust.

And also when you mention that about, "Thanks *Free Willy*," thank you **Twister** because I thought I wanted to be, I thought I wanted to be a storm chaser for sure for like a long time. But anyway, um that's not where I was trying to go. But I think it's just so interesting when I listen to your story of recovery, it's like connecting to our childhood self is so often, I think, for so many people, one of the avenues that does start to help our, our healing journey, and that isn't so much of a question, just so much of an observation.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:31:37] Most definitely.

JVN [00:31:37] The other thing that was an observation, is that, like, just for people dealing with kids, like, you can have, like, I mean here you were a baby artist and I bet your, I don't, and you had an arty term for it, where it was live, the, like, what was the like the thing in seventh grade that you had, it was like a live painting or whatever?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:31:55] Oh, it was, like, a still life. It was one of those-

JVN [00:31:57] Still life!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:31:58] Yeah, where the teacher sets up you know a table and a bunch of stuff and you just you know.

JVN [00:31:02] But it's like you have this young artist and you creating *anything* is a vulnerable moment. And then this person agreed, or, like, or just kind of dismisses or, and I just think *that* to me *that* story just really drives home, like, we have to be so careful with young minds and like not, because I think, I look back on so many different times from my life where what would have happened if she would have said, like, "Girl, no, this is amazing, like, try again, maybe this way." Like, could you have maybe not had to go on a 15 year detour or however long before you're like, "Oh, wait, this is for me!" So I think that's an important thing to remember. Like, no matter kids, peers, whoever, just staying open to like your words have, like, they matter.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:32:45] Yeah.

JVN [00:32:45] And they can cause, like, lives to go, you know, in so many different ways. And then, the, so then, but basically you had a moment there where it went from hobby to this is what you're doing all the time. You are a *literal* working artist, which I think is incredible. And now I have just, like, a lot of questions about, like, art, 'cause I don't, like about, but your art and just how it works. So visual art, visual art *is*?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:33:13] So many different things. And I think it really just depends on who you talk to, who you ask. I mean, if you ask a critic, an art critic, their answer is going to be very different from if you ask a person who is just, this is just their hobby and their outlet, this is just something that they do, right. I mean, art takes so many different forms. I would, you know, visual art, you know, visual art is also photography, right. There's photography, there's painting, there's 3D art, which is, like, sculpture and you know there's stuff that's like so high concept that when I look at it, I'm like, "Ok, I don't understand this," [JVN LAUGHS] you know. But I, I think art is, is so expansive, it's so expansive.

JVN [00:34:09] And so for you, your first, when you first got into it, it's like, like how did you discover, like, what you like to make? What *do* you like to make? Like for me, like, I love it when I have like, like a new client comes in and like sometimes I like a corrective thing but usually I don't, like, it's more fun for me to get to like make what I would rather make from the get go versus like dealing with some crazy fucking, like, box color or whatever else the hell that client put their hair through before I meet them. So, what is, like, when you're like. "Ok, I am, Addye," just so you know, everybody, like, Addye did give me permission, early, it is A'Driane Nieves, but we did talk earlier and she does go by Addye and so she did tell me to go by Addye so but whatever. So, but if it's like, you know, 9:00 in the morning or whenever you like to make your art, and you're like, "Ooh I've just," like, what makes your heart sing?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:34:59] I, so, I definitely think that when you are, when you have and when, when you fully embrace being an artist and whatever form that takes for you, whether your performance, whether, you know, music, or you know visual, I think there are definitely seasons where you are living the art that has yet to be made. And then there are seasons where you're *making* it, right. And where, you know, what you're making is informed by what you've been living through. And so for me, I definitely go through periods where I don't make anything at all, um, but, I am gaining, I, I'm still *living* art and that could be through me doing my hair, how I dress, the movies that I watch, the music that I listen to, the other art that I look at, the stuff that I read, write, *all* of that for me is how you kind of like live out. Like, to me, art is something that, that is meant to be lived,

right. And that's just through your expression of self. To me, that's a, that's, I don't know; that's just how it works for me.

So even if I'm not actively making anything or, you know, actively engaged in my art practice, I am still taking in what I'm experiencing. And then I find when I do get back into making, those things that I've been absorbing start coming out in my work. So my practice and my process are very intuitive-based, right. And very, for me it's almost like, it's almost like praying. Like, for me, painting is a very spiritual experience, right. And so it's very you know spirit-driven, intuition-driven. And I find that when I'm, I'm making, that I might create something and not understand where it came from until maybe a day or a week later, right. Like, it takes me, like, making the piece and then stepping back and kind of looking at it and then having a dialogue with it and to, to be able to recognize, "Oh, it came from this memory or, oh, it came from this thought, this feeling, um, this problem, right."

So, for example, currently I have a show coming up, two-person show coming up next month in New York. And, so I'm a little bit on deadline because I have to get, I have to have things to show to the curator for the show. And, for this particular show they want works that are small, so they want works that are, like, 20 by 20, 20 by 30, you know nothing big. And I've been painting big for at least over the last year, right, like, I've been painting six- to eight-foot sized canvases. So I've been, and also painting is a very physical practice for me, so I'm, it's, it's all about movement and fluidity and flow, because that's, that's just how I work, that's just how, I allow you know whatever's coming out, I allow it to just kind of, like, channel and flow through me onto the canvas.

So, coming back to having to work, to work on canvases that are much smaller in size has been very challenging. And for a few weeks I didn't understand why I was, I just felt so much resistance and I didn't understand why you know and I was like, "Well, maybe I just need to get over it," like, "I should be able to you know like, even if I just think of them as little doing little studies," right. Like, "I should be able to work small," like, you know. But, this week, over the last like five to seven days it has started to click for me what the issue is and what the works that I'm creating right now are *really* about. And that is, you know, all of the um, the tension and the strife and the *constraints* of the last 11 months during this parallelogram that we're living in, all of, all of the the tension, the loss, the stress, and even some of the the, the, the, the brighter moments of it, you know, that being home with my family you know 24/7 because we're still in quarantine, 'cause we're high risk. So we definitely have really been in the house together since March.

You know, I've, I've been, I've been kind of just compressing all of that, because of, at a national level of what we've been going through, we've just been kind of forced to just,

like, march through it, right, without, like, pausing to, like, stop and, like, process. And so I'm finding that my, my, I don't like working small right now because it's, it's, it goes against what I would like to do right now. And so I'm realizing that there's this tension between what I want to do, but what I have to do. And in a lot of ways, it really also takes me back to some of the more, you know, abusive moments in my childhood where I was living under such horrendous abuse, but I was forced to just kind of endure it and live it and kind of, like, get through it, right, 'cause I didn't really have any other choice. And I feel like that now. I feel like there's so many things that are beyond my power and that I don't have any say or choice in, but I'm trying to do the best that I can.

And so, looking at these smaller size pieces, it's like, "Oh, I don't have to fight the, you know, I don't, I don't have to fight painting on them. I need to use, I need to channel all of that and, you know, use the size to speak to that as well." And so, like kind of having that, that flip for me mentally and emotionally has made it much easier now to grab one of these smaller canvases and kind of just, I mean some of them, they have, like, I'm looking at one right now and it has so many layers of paint on it.

Some of them are very thick because some of the paints that I have are, like, a thicker consistency. And so, you know, the brush strokes are very thick, kind of like what they call impasto, and then other layers are very thin, right, because I'm just covering up what I already did. And so, you know, some of these canvases I've reworked like five or six times because I just pour out whatever's in that moment, look at it later and I'm like, "Oh my God, I hate this," or I wrestle with whatever emotions come up when I look at it and then I just apply another layer on top. And so, I'm allowing all of that to kind of feed into the process of making these new pieces and all-, and just letting the process be as much a part of each painting story as whatever the final result is, if that makes sense.

JVN [00:42:39] It makes so much sense! It reminds me of like in yoga, how we'll think about like, well this practice on your mat, like, it translates off your mat and other places. And so I think that's really beautiful. So, with, how many different kinds of paint, like, do you work with, like is there like oil paint? Is there like water paint? Is there, like, acrylic paint? Like what's your favorite? Is there one kind of paint where you're like, "Oh, I don't fuck with that like that at all." [A'DRIANE LAUGHS] "It's just not what I, I don't like that at all. Like I'm an acrylic person," and, like, how many kinds is there?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:43:06] So there's, I mean there's probably even some that I don't know. So there's, there's acrylics, which acrylics is, is my boo.

JVN [00:43:16] I think that's what I like too, because I'm a massive fan of, yes-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:43:19] Yeah, like acrylics-.

JVN [00:43:20] -what you do.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:43:16] Yeah, acry-, but also too, like, what I like about acrylics is it's, it's easy, it dries fast, you don't have to add anything to it to make it you know like, acrylic is not tedious; I do not like tedious things. So if I have to add oil to it, if I've got to wait you know weeks for it to cure, like, I'm like, "Oh no, I don't have time for that." So [LAUGHS] or I don't-

JVN [00:43:46] I don't think I have time for that either. I don't love tedious stuff either.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:43:50] I just, no. So that's why I don't use oils, because oils you have to, there's, there's, there's a process involved and you have to wait for it to dry. And like I'm, it's so funny, I'm looking at my shelf right now and I have this, this container of these oil sticks that I got like months ago because I'm like, "Maybe now's the time where I'm finally going to try to use these oil sticks." And every time I look at them, my body's like, "No," [LAUGHS] "just no, because no, mmh mmh, no, we're not doing that."

There's water colors, which I don't do because, again, you need, you need a certain amount of control. They can get messy very, you know the colors can get messy and muddy very quickly. I respect and love people who can use oils, who can-, water colors, who can, you know, use different kinds of paint that require a more rigorous process. I just cannot. I am also terrible with brushes. I, last night, when I was trying to clean up my studio, I threw away, like, six brushes that had been like dried and caked over in paint because I just forgot about them.

So with oil, you know, when you use oils, you have to use special cleaners and stuff like that. So I just I, acrylics, also too, acrylics clean up easy, you can peel them off. Like, if you, dries on you, can just peel it off, I, because I'm very hands on, I know there are some artists who will paint with gloves on; I don't do that, I use my hands, you know, so I will literally get covered in paint and you know I miss spots when I, even when I shower and my family will be like, "You have this paint spot on your neck," [JVN LAUGHS] like, "What's on your eyelid? You've got so much-," [JVN LAUGHS] And I'm like, "Oh yeah." But I like, I like that tactile feeling.

So, acrylics is safe for that. I have just over the last two years started using house paint. Yes! So, and what I, what I primarily use house paint for, so I'll just go, like, to Sherwin-Williams, shout out to them because I love their colors. They, if you just get, like, the paint samples, the, like, the sample size, that's good enough. Especially for, maybe not, like, top layers,

but I use the house paint more for, like, under paintings, so, like, the base layers of what I'm doing,]I will use, like, house paint. So, like, in, for example, in *your* piece that you have, the, the first, like, two layers are just, like, house paint that, you know, in a color that I really liked and I wanted to use and-

JVN [00:46:39] That, like, subtle, blushy, gorgeous pink?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:46:39] Yes!

JVN [00:46:40] Oh I love it so much!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:46:41] Yes!

JVN [00:46:42] Can I just say, I was trying really hard not to interrupt you earlier, but it's so true. I can, your pieces are so spiritual. I feel, like, I can feel it when I watch, when-, I, like, I, I write next to that piece that you're talking about in it, and like it, and there's different aspects of it that I, that my eye just hones in on on different days. And I also feel like there's different areas of the painting that, like, my, I will go to like based off of what I'm kind of going through. So I, and I, *and* when you were talking about how Makoto Fujimura was the first artist that like ever made you feel impacted in real life, *your* art was the first art that ever made *me* feel impacted in real life-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:47:23] You're making me cry.

JVN [00:47:24] -And I hadn't even seen it yet; it was just pictures of it. And then when I got it in real life, it's like, wow! I mean, just so, I mean, like, I can't get enough of it, as you know I like I've, I have had a real issue stopping impulse buying your work [A'DRIANE LAUGHS] and it's um also hearing, I'm sorry that I requested the smaller pieces, but what's a girl supposed to do when she wants, when she has a smaller [**floor? flaw?**] and she wants you know add a piece of art on it, what's so sorry if I put, but maybe I got you ready for your um museum show because I was making you do- [LAUGHS]-

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:47:55] It was good, it was good practise, honestly it was very good practice. *And* I think too, I think with your pieces, your smaller ones, I think I felt less pressure, like I could kind of flow just a little bit more. I think I, which again, that's another reason why when I sat down to start creating new pieces for this upcoming show, I was really kind of, like, confused as to why I was feeling so, like, "Arghh!" But again, I think it's just because I'm, I need to use that. I need to, I need to, like, my therapist a couple of years ago told me that when you have lived through trauma and when you have lived through, you know, things that have had an impact on you, you know, if you don't, if, if

there's not a way for that energy, for that impact to be released, it'll just sit dormant in your body. And she was like, "You know, trauma has to move," right. And she was like, "So that's why painting for you is so important and that's why it's such a personal spiritual thing for you," she said, "because *that's* how you release it."

And, you know, I, I will say for your, for your piece, your, your bigger piece, the first one that I did, I, I listened to your memoir, you know, like, I had it playing here in my studio, I listened to the audio book and, you know, like, I would just kind of I would, I would make some, some marks and some you know I would paint a little bit, then I would just sit and just listen. And when I do commissions, I tend to do that. I like to, I don't, I don't allow people to give me, like, it's not a, it's not a collaborative process. I up front will tell people, "You know, here's what you can expect and just tell me if you have anything currently in your life that's resonating for you, that's important to you, that you're thinking on, where you're at."

And so I allow people in *that* moment to give me feedback and input. And then I take that and I sit with it and I meditate with it and I use whatever I can, whether that's, you know, like, if I follow them on Instagram or like with you, you know you have, you have an audio book, you know you had the show, right. So I, I really kind of take all that information, and this sounds very woo, but I really do channel and do what I can to divine for people what I feel that they *need* from the piece that they're getting from me. You know, so it's a very personalized experience.

And, you know, there's this call and response aspect to my work in general um just because of how I paint and how I process. And so my, at its core, my work is really about getting us to face ourselves and to use you know what's in front of us as a portal to whatever it is that we need to, to heal, to grow, to face some hard, difficult things, to examine, and, and gain clarity on how our identity, you know, our identity of self has kind of shifted or changed because of what we've gone through over the course of our lives.

And it's, you know, it's also really too about finding language to be able to articulate maybe some things that we weren't aware of before about our lived experiences. So it's, I say all of that to say, you know, I'm, it makes me very, very happy to hear that. What I *hope* my work is doing is it's actually doing that for you, so hearing that you see something different in it every time you look at it, that you write in front of it, that you have this personal connection to it like that, that's success for me.

JVN [00:51:59] So one thing you mentioned before that I think is really interesting and it's, like, I don't, I think I have this annoying habit where I just want to, like, identify with people's experiences so it's like, "Oh yeah, I understand." But it's like, at the beginning of

my podcast, I kind of went out of my way to *not* listen to other podcasts because I didn't want anyone else's mode or, like, process to, like, impact, like, how I wanted to do it. Because I really, especially with this podcast at the beginning, I mean the first like forty something episodes I produced *all*, like, by myself, like I booked the people. And then I did have like a sound engineer, but as far as like the booking and how they turned out, like I was very like, maybe not control, well yeah controlling, like I wanted it to be, like, a certain type of way and so I didn't want to listen to how everybody else did it, because I didn't want their ways to impact my ways.

So it's, like, what's at the very beginning you, had said like I've gotten better over the years of, like, learning about like art--and, like, I say art you guys, like, in end quotes--and, like, fine art. Because I just noticed when you were talking about it's like, to me as, like, a fan, and again, I'm only someone who's really been, like, looking at the art world for like not, like maybe like a little over a year, it's like your art is so valid and so, like, you know to me, sought after, like I want yours more than I want really anyone. So I just find it interesting, like in the, just, like, that you kind of were like, well, how does mine fit into other people's and whatever, but I'm curious, like, so what did you learn in that time of what you're like, "Ok, fine, I'm going to go to museums, I'm going to start to, like, learn about these things," like, what did you learn about?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:52:27] So I will say as an artist who has been te-, I have been teaching myself about art history, you know, I've learned that abstract expressionism, the way that I've interpreted it, you know, it's really kind of a push against the need for representation, for visible representation. You know, it's kind of like, it was, like, this push against, not *against*, but, you know just, it was, like, a response to this desire to not just focus on figurative works, right. Works that you know basically represent people, right. That you can actually see. There was this push to within abstraction itself, there was this push to bring some more emotionality into it and spontaneity, right. It wasn't about anything really being planned. And it was really also too about taking, again, taking what you've been absorbing and translating that into a canvas, right.

And it was also about experimentation and figuring, you know just kind of, like, trying things and seeing you know different, different ways to apply paint, different ways to, different washes, right, you know different effects to have with paint. So it was really about experimentation, freedom and spontaneity, right. When you look at the history of abstract expressionism, you will definitely see a lot of focus on white male artists. Over the years, there has been more of a push to highlight the women of abstract expressionism. But even with that push, there's still, there was still a big focus on the white women.

So, like, Joan Mitchell, who is a personal fave of mine, Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Krasner, some of the, the, the Black and brown women who have not been as recognizable, although over the last couple of years there is starting to, there's starting to be more of an interest and more of a focus. Bernice Bing is a *huge* favorite of mine, probably next to, next to Joan. I also love Julie Mehretu, Mary Lovelace O'Neal, Howardena Pindell. She, she, one of the things that she's most known for is cutting hole, punching out little tiny circles, and like stitching her canvases together and applying the circles on, there's like literally thousands upon thousands of like these hole-punched circles on her piece; her work is phenomenal. And you know there are so many Black and brown women artists who have been working in abstraction and, and who have been doing abstract expressionist work, but they are *just* now starting to get recognition.

And so what I have learned is that as, as, not just a self-taught artist who didn't go to art school, but also as just someone who loves this particular form and medium of art, is that the art world is very *slow* to change, and the art world is very focused on what sells, it's very driven by the market. And I've learned that there are different levels, I guess, or different circles in the art world. There's museums and other institutions, then there's, like, galleries and the art market, and then there's, like, your local art scene, you know, that's a mix of artists who are self-taught, artists who have gone to school, artists who are hobbyists, and artists who are working, right, professionally.

You know, so there's different, and you kind of just have to see, like, where you fit and what your goals are and what you want to do. Like what type, like, for me, I had to really kind of figure out what *type* of art career I want and what does success mean for me. And I had to kind of define that for myself and then figure out, ok, you know, how my goals or how I can achieve my goals and, and, you know through, whether that's through my local art scene, whether that's through, you know, do I need to get gallery representation? You know, I kind of have to figure all of that out.

One thing that has come out of this for me is that um I've taken my experience as a mental health advocate who has created space for others through my advocacy efforts in the past, and I've translated that into, you know, this other side of my art career, which is making room for artists like myself. So that's why Tessera Arts Collective exists, right, is because I've seen that there's this lack of representation, there's this lack of support and resources for Black and brown women and non-binary artists who work in abstraction. There, I've talked to so *many* artists who have, were interested in abstraction, but in art school, their professors pushed them away from it because you're like, "You know, if you want to have a viable career, you should focus on figuration or you should focus on you know something else." And there's so many Black and brown women artists who have, who haven't engaged with abstraction *because* of that.

JVN [00:58:57] Is that changing?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [00:58:58] It, it's slowly changing. And what, what helps is the artists who have been working for years *finally* getting some recognition by the art world, right, and by the art market, right. So, but, Tessera Arts Collective is determined to be part of making that change, right. And so that women, Black and brown women, and non-binary abstract artists don't have to wait until they're 80-years-old, like Virginia Jaramillo, to get a solo exhibition, you know what I mean, at a major art institution. You know, like I'm tired of seeing, you know, women like Bernice Bing, she, her work's phenomenal, but she, she passed before she ever was really fully recognized; she was so overlooked, right. You know, Alma Thomas is, you know, finally getting so much recognition, she's probably, she's gotten the *most* probably over the last, like, five or six years, but *she's* not here anymore.

So, you know, part of our goal with Tessera Arts Collective is we want to give these artists who are working in abstraction their flowers while they're still here. We wanna thank them for paving the way for us to explore this medium and you know kind of, you know, pushing back against this idea that black and brown artists can only create work that's figurative, right. That we can like, yes, our lived experiences, there's nothing abstract about our lived experiences as marginalized people. But, abstraction can really be a place where we find language and we find power and we find agency and we find freedom and liberation in being able to express ourselves as fully human; like, *that's* what abstraction is for me.

And that's why I think it's so important and, and, and, and necessary for Black and brown people to engage with abstraction, both whether they be artists or whether they just be viewers and, right, and so we want to honor these artists, we want to create resources and opportunities for these artists, and then we also want to engage, you know, Black and brown communities and expose them to abstraction and help them under-, develop a personal understanding and relationship with it and help them be able to kind of see, look at a piece of abstract art and maybe derive some meaning about their own personal experience from looking at it. That was a big answer, but-

JVN [01:01:29] No, it's gorgeous. How can people help support the art collective that are listening to this?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:01:35] So, you can find us on Instagram. It's the same as our name: Tessera Arts Collective. We also have a website: tesseracollective.com. We have a Patreon.

JVN [01:01:45] We love Patreon!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:01:46] We love Patreon!

JVN [01:01:48] And, and *Abstractions* is also incredible!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:01:51] Yes, *Abstractions Magazine*!

JVN [01:01:52] The thing about *Abstractions Magazine* that's so cool is that, and I didn't even realize, it, like it, actually until I'm kinda ashamed in the last few weeks, it's not just artists as well, it's also like art critics and it's supporting, like, a whole gorgeous, like, it's like a fully functioning ecology, like.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:02:09] It's a full thing, yeah, so we have, so we have interviews with artists because I'm a big believer that I'm tired of reading art books that are written by white male art critics that talk about other people's work. And I'm like, "Ok, whatever." I, as a Black, queer woman, I think it is *crucial* that we control the narratives about our work and that we *inform* the narratives about our work and that we have agency and power in this area. And so part of the goal for *Abstractions* is to create the space for Black and brown women and non-binary artists to share their stories, share their experiences, share their thoughts about abstraction, to talk about their work and their processes.

So it includes interviews, it also includes personal essays. So we ask people, "Hey, do you have a favorite Black and brown women, abstract artists? Do you have a favorite work that's by a Black or brown woman, you know, abstract artist? Do you, what's your, what's your relationship with abstraction been like? What have you learned? What has abstraction taught you? What have you found?" Right. And so we ask people to send us responses, to send us, you know, essays. And so for this issue, our first ever print issue is coming up next month; I'm very excited! We've been working so hard on it.

We're going to have interviews, we're going to have essays. We're also going to have a review of Howardena Pindell's latest show at The Shed in New York City called, *Rope/Fire/Water*. We are also going to have an editorial on Mildred Thompson, who is a *phenomenal* Black woman abstractionist from Atlanta. And we are also going to have some artwork in there. And some of the artwork is going to be, we ask people, we, we put out a call for art and we ask people to submit their work and we *just* finished our selections. So I'm excited because we're going to get to, like, highlight some unknown up-and-coming artists. So it's just, it's a, this is a very foundational issue for us because we wanted to try to kind of include some established artists, like, we have an interview with Shinique Smith. But we also wanted to try to highlight maybe someone you've never even heard of, that maybe they, all they have is an Instagram page, but their art is amazing,

JVN [01:04:29] I'm almost scared, honey, I'm going to get bit with the obsession bug again. And then, and actually another thing just occurred to me and I'm, like, dead serious, like, I need it like yesterday is, I need it, I like I am going to just have to sell a purse or something because, like, I need to buy *Roots*, like, today, because when this comes out, people are going to come for it and then it's going to get taken away from me.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:04:49]

JVN [01:04:49] I do too for the other pieces, but I can't, I can't lose her, are you about to say someone, no.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:04:54] No, no, no. No one else has *Roots*.

JVN [01:04:56] No I'm talking shit. I'm buying it today, I like, we, like, we have to, we have to, because we *have* to. And I'll have a nervous breakdown if someone else takes it. And my husband and I already decided where it's going to live in the house because he was like, "Jonathan, it's eight feet by eight feet," which I will say I didn't realize that *Roots* was that big until like a week ago. But I was like, "This wall." So this, we have this one huge wall, just this, like, big blank wall. And I was like, "Oh, my God, we're going to turn this into our gallery wall and *Roots* is going to be the first member 'cause it's big enough to hold it down until others get put around it." So, I'm buying it today; we have to figure it out. I'll transfer shit around. Like it's just, I can't wait. I'm not going to take the chance because this, I think this episode is going to come out in like a week or two and I will not, I cannot, I've already lost enough in my life and I will not be losing *Roots*, I'm sorry, you know what, it's just.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:05:41] No, you, you won't lose it, I promise. You, you're literally the only person-.

JVN [01:05:44] Well, I promise too because I'm buying it, so.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:05:46] [LAUGHS] You're the only person who's been like, I *have* to have it. Everyone else has been, like, "Hmm, it's on plywood, it's too big."

JVN [01:05:50] No, 'cause I can feel the greedy little Instagram fingers, I can feel the greedy, no I can feel the greedy little Instagram fingers when they see it [A'DRIANE LAUGHS], can just see their little fingers tipping and topping and bopping trying to come for my piece, and I will have it. Um, wow, ok so that just launched out of me 'cause I got so selfish and, like, for just a minute, I mean two, because I am obsessed with *Abstractions* and it's so amazing. I can't believe it's going to be the first print issue. So people need and

so people can, Patreon too, the Tessera Arts Collective, but then they can, can't they also be a sponsor of *Abstractions* if they want to?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:06:21] So yes, so if they want to be a sponsor of *Abstractions*, again, if you go to our website tesseractcollective.com, on our donate page, that lays out all the different ways that you can donate to us, that you can support the work that we're doing. We have an artist grant that we're trying to fund because the other thing that we're big on is providing direct financial support to artists that's unrestricted. So not kind of going through this whole grant process, just artists, you know, they need money, through projects, through working with them, whatever.

We're trying to just make sure, which is another reason why I've been so grateful to be working on this magazine over these last, like, six, seven months, because whether it's paying a writer, whether it's, yeah, paying a writer or hiring an editor or, you know, like, our, our team, you know, like we've paid out over \$10,000 to people during a pandemic, right. Like, we've been able, and it's literally because people have been sending us donations, people have been sponsoring the magazine, people have been supporting us on Patreon.

And so that money that we're getting it's not like we're sitting and holding on to it, like, it's going right back out into the projects and the things that, you know, and it's, it's just direct money to people. And that is a big part of, you know, it's a core value, you know, in our mission, and I'm really, really happy for that. So, yeah, I'm very excited. This issue, we've invested a lot into it, and I think, I, look, I will just say it, one of the things around 2013, 2014 was when I started myself as a Black woman, queer, abstractionist, started being like, "Ok, well where are the Black people at?"

Like, and again, you have to remember, I didn't go to art school. I didn't know a lot about art history, right. So I was like, "Ok, well, there have to be other, like, people who look, where are they at right?" So, while there has been more exposure and we know that you know there's more awareness now, there's more education now than there was maybe when I first started painting back in 2011, 2012. There still hasn't been a publication dedicated specifically to Black and brown women and non-binary artists who are working in abstraction. And so we are making the very first, that, like, the very first, and so it's terrifying.

JVN [01:08:57] But exhilarating!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:09:00] It is! It's exhilarating. And I'm so excited and I hope that we are not the last! Look I want this, I want this to push art publications and the arts media

that does exist like Artsy, Artnet, ARTnews, you know, like, I want this to push them to be like, "Oh, shit, we need to like, yeah, we've been--"

JVN [01:09:18] Up our game!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:09:19] "-But, yo, we need to really step up our game 'cause this other group over here, Tessera Arts Collective, oh my God, they put out, like," I think people are going to be so surprised and I'm very excited for people to just be like, "Oh shit, they weren't playing." No, we're not playing! We're not playing, ok!

JVN [01:09:36] I already knew. I feel like I already knew, but I can't wait to read it in real life. Now, one thing that you said--and we're going to try to wrap up--but one thing that you said that I feel like, I like to end my podcast with like a little, like, yoga moment where it's like you went to your yoga class but like they didn't teach the thing you wanted to teach, you're like, fuck I really wanted to open my hips or like my ankles and we didn't even do that pose. So, but I kind of but so you can answer this however you want.

But this, we-, I got to interview this amazing psychologist who is a Holocaust survivor, she's a doctor, she's amazing. Her name is Dr. Edith Eger, and one thing she said to me when I interviewed her is that when she was deciding on whether or not she was going to go actually become a psychologist, she was like already in her forties, and she was like, she said to the guy who told her, like, "Oh, you should do that." She was like, "I'll be 50, like by the time I'm done, I'll be 50." And he said to them, and I always get chills when I think of this, "You're gonna be 50 anyway. So, like, you want to be 50, like, *with* the degree or *without* it."

And when you were saying "I didn't start to self identify as an artist until I was in my early 30s," that just covers me in chills and inspiration because it's like, we *can* follow our passion and you following your passion has been so transformative to not only you, but this community that you've created. It's transformative to me, like, so, is there something about 'cause, you, you know, Black, queer, woman, you are making a world and making a community that I know has not been, it has not been as accepting. It, not has, it hasn't been accepting. And it's like Ashlee Marie Preston, our other friend we love so much, says, you know, it's, like, if that table doesn't have a chair for you, like, do you bring your own fucking chair?

So it's, I, I just feel so much, I feel like I've learned so much wisdom and life lessons that I have seen in action in other places. But it's like you have really lined them up in such an incredibly powerful way. So I guess that's, what those things together, what would you say

to anyone who's listening to this episode, and they feel that there is that artist within them, but they are too scared to bring it out, what do you say to that person?

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:11:42] Well, I would start by saying, you know, my husband is a software architect and he swears up and down that he is not an artist, that he is not creative. And I'm like, "Do you see what you do everyday? You build software; that's creative!" Right? So I would say that I believe that everybody is creative and that everybody *is* an artist, it's just a matter of finding out what that looks like for you. You know, Jonathan, you're an artist, right. Not just, you know, yes through how you express yourself, but you know the hair that you do, right. Like, you're an, you know what I mean, like you're an artist. Like the fact that you even said earlier, you know, "I don't always want to do, like, a correction, I just want to do my own thing." Yes, of course, that's your creativity being like, "Honey, let me just, let, let me make my magic right, like."

JVN [01:12:38] I don't wanna have to deal with this textile dye!

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:12:40] Right. Let me just work, let me just work my magic, right. Like, everybody has an innate ability to create and to generate things in their lives. And I think it's just a matter of figuring out how to express that. And so maybe for you, for those who are listening, it's not paint, maybe it's not yarn, maybe it's not dance or playing an instrument. Maybe it's gardening, maybe it's building software, maybe it's building robots, maybe it's, like, there's like, to me, that's what I want people to understand, I want people to understand that creativity and artistry are infinite. There are no limits, there are no bounds, there are no rules.

Like, you can literally do and be anything, like, you *are* an artist, you *are* a creative being. You just have to undo and unlearn all that messaging that's been kind of shoved into us, that, you know, that you're *not*, right. You kind of have to, and once you start, once you start seeing living as an, as an, as, as art, as an artful experience, right. And once you start realizing that how you live, how you move, how you show up in the world is in and of itself art, like, the embodiment of art, I think *that* will really help you figure out what means of expression is meant for you.

And that doesn't mean that you have to, like, you know, change careers, right. You don't have, or in this social media day and age, everybody wants to monetize their hobbies, right. Everything, not everything has to be commodified, right. But literally every, I believe, everyone is an artist, that everyone is creative. It's just a matter of finding what sticks and what helps you come alive and to bring that out. So, that's what I would say, you just, just walk in it, walk in that power, walk in that awareness and just watch it just transform your life.

JVN [01:14:46] And I would say to that, like, drop the mic, there's no better way to end this gorgeous podcast than that. A'Driane Nieves, thank you so much for your time, for your artistry, for your skill, for everything.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:14:59] Thank you for having me!

JVN [01:15:00] Everyone listening to this, follow support, do not come for my painting because I already bought it, so [A'DRIANE LAUGHS] back off of Roots I, but there is other gorgeous works that A'Driane has that you can get your hands on if you're lucky like, me, slash, like, ugh, you know what's really cute that we should just say really quick, there was this one time when I saw this really gorgeous work that A'Driane had done and then I wanted to get it but then I made the mistake of showing my husband that I liked that, and then he went behind my back and bought it for me for Christmas and it's like this gorgeous, gorgeous. I just love it so much, I think that story's so cute.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:15:30] I felt so bad lying to you, I felt so bad lying to you, like, "Oh, I'm so sorry, this sold!"

JVN [01:15:32] I know, you know, it really didn't occur to me that you're like, "Oh yes, sorry someone bought that same," and you had also sent that to me, like, in a folder of like files that wasn't even on your website. So I guess that was like random, but I believed it and I loved the surprise. So, [A'DRIANE LAUGHS] we love A'Driane and Mark working together to a Christmas surprise. Thank you so much for your time. I love you so much. This episode is amazing and I just love you so much.

A'DRIANE NIEVES [01:15:57] Thank you; I love you, too. I'm so, so glad that we got to, like, converse like this. So happy!

JVN [01:16:06] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was the artist and writer A'Driane Nieves. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe.

Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak.

Our editor is Andrew Carson and our transcriptionist is Alida Wuenscher. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, Emily Bossak, Chelsea Jacobson, and Colin Anderson.