

SLOW REFLECTIONS ON PRECARITY

As an issue prevalent in the cultural sector, of particular difficulty for artists and freelancers, we wanted to centre the perspectives of those whose experience of the working environment affects their ability to work. Rather than asking these cultural workers to further extend their labour in return for little pay, we decided to use our production budget to pay three artist-curators to rest through receiving a treat, and to create an artistic response to the questions formed by the curatorial team.

Umulkhayr Mohamed: *Treats and Treatment*

This piece combines images, video and text on screen with audio spoken by Umulkhayr Mohamed, and one short video clip with audio.

Audio is transcribed in black. The corresponding written text on screen is written here in purple.

Other sounds within the piece: relaxing electronic music, intermittent sound of fingernails tapping a surface, nail filing and peeling off acrylic nails

So I booked a massage, first professional one I've ever had, figuring I carry a lot of tension that I pick up from working. And I'd wanted to experience what it would feel like to live without [that] for a while.

embodied, as in, in my body
all that I give up, before I give out

About 10 minutes in, the masseuse asks if I'd be happy for her to spend more time on my shoulders, as she really wants to get all the knots out. Apparently there's loads. I say, "Yes", knowing it'll hurt more this way, but that seems like the most useful use of her time. That's just it though, I think, with my face down on the massage bed: even when I'm supposed to be doing something as a respite from always having to make the sensible choice, rather than the hedonistic one, I make an ultimately entirely practical decision, being out of practice doing things just because.

Knots, Knots, Knots
I'm held together by tiny knots

And so I don't stop there – I book another treatment.

This one's definitely not functional. A full set of acrylic nails, with pastel tips and stars – something silly, really, when I think about it for too long, but I'm not planning to. I did it for the way that it makes me smile when I type things out on my laptop, and the sensation of running my newly painted fingernails up and down my forearm. And as I painfully pop off the acrylics while watching a film in bed a month later, I have no regrets, other than wishing that I could've paid a nail tech to take them off for me. But that is a luxury I can't afford again. I guess it was nice while it lasted.

Sometimes frivolity is functional
Precarity permeates my peace, poisoning it from the inside out

TIKTOK VIDEO SPEAKER talktomenicer_: Somebody need to document the effects, psychologically, that a full set will do to you. Because psychologically, I got a B-B-L.

So much of the work I do lives in my mind first and foremost. It's ephemeral, gestures towards things, and is led by feeling. So naturally when you combine that with my material conditions of having just enough to keep going and little more than that, my body ends up being a blind spot of sorts. Precarity for me has meant that I am only able to look after it well enough for me to keep working, so it was nice to pay it more attention for once.

Constant exposure to the mundane is its own kind of pain
When all but work is a treat
what withers away and depletes

Treats, like the ones that I mentioned, are nice enough as passing pleasures. But the colours fade and the knots return. So, maybe we should spend a bit more time talking about the treatment we are expected to take as art workers, living on the edge, without the cushion of familial wealth. I can see how so many slip through the net in a system like ours.

Candice Nembhard: *Can't Make Money (As An Artist)*, 2021

This piece combines video on screen with audio sung acapella by Candice Nembhard.

Lyrics are transcribed in black.

Other sounds within the piece: begins and ends with the sound of a train moving.

Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now, but I
write the songs in the hopes that somehow I can
grab a coffee in the morning light just to
find some semblance of an afternoon delight, but the
moon is full and the dark feels right and so
I ride along until the end of the night
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money as an artist now
Can't make money anyhow

Lauren Craig: *Treatment*

This piece combines text on screen with audio spoken by Lauren Craig. The audio includes imaginary stage directions.

Audio is transcribed in black. The corresponding written text on screen is written here in green.

“Do you have time for a treat?” [Pan to the left to art jobs website advert reads, ‘Able to deal with stress and deliver tight deadlines under pressure.’]

Precarity is an invisible frenemy* to the curator.

They might just call it something else.

elements that are visible also drain your game

The potential of creating ethical, cultural memory

“Do you have time for a treat”

**Frenemy is Jamaican Patois for an enemy in the guise of a friend*

[Pan right to the tendrils of the Passiflora Plant (sped up 4x) furiously reaching out in thin air, stretching grappling, and striving for the next support to hold on to. When the plant arrives at it. The scene plays backwards, forwards again. Then on repeat.] A haunting.

A haunting.

Precarity feeds on your ability to protect yourself
your creativity

hooks to your energy flow

support, connect and collaborate with artists

stretches across the space from imagination

way out beyond the sky-blue-sky thinking

[pan to Mozilla search for chiroprapist] Making a list is one thing: Chiroprapist, Manicure, Osteopath, Dentist, Hygienist, Neurologist, Pedicure, Wax, Head Massage, Haircut, Threading, Acupuncturist, Homoeopath...

time/space to research

create,

organise

deliver

rest enough

Be well

reflect and gain the fortune of retrospect

a relaxed state, a relationship open to slippage.

But these things are a given, I hear you say.

[Cut to the Barber scene in the film Coming to America, where Eddie Murphy plays a barber using big scissors to snip frantically at a man’s afro who sits in the Barber’s chair in front of him. This man is also played by Eddie Myrphy. But the barber is talking, he’s talking a lot, and snips the scissors, snips the scissors. But actually cutting nothing the whole scene. The whole scene. The whole scene.]

If you know of someone, an artist, curator, cultural worker, who is not afforded the space or time to experience these things as a standard, then perhaps ask yourself why?
the innate capacity to create collective intelligence is infinite and available to all
all of the steps towards achieving a more ethical place

There is also a framed colour photograph of the day when Nelson Mandela visited Brixton and an embroidery ring that has in it a monstera and palm tree printed fabric. Embroidered onto it in red cotton lowercase serif letters are lyrics from the song *Work It* by Missy Elliott: "If you're a fly gal, get your nails done/Get a pedicure, get your hair did." [Pan left to a scene from Salma's work]

Whether an artist or curator, precarity is a familiar friend
self-fulfilling prophecy, being the happy host
I do not invoke the experience of precarious ways of living

This piece is called Treatment
Patois
Shape-up
Treat

Making a list is one thing, but there are many factors outside the role of the curator that make self-care and work-life balance impossible:
I see the chiroprapist again in 3-6 months, the osteopath I'll wait 3 months for, the dentist I saw in November. But, there is no follow up appointment for my child's emergency appointment until December. I will call back repeatedly. Got an appointment on the 7th. They got a cold. Had to cancel, wait 2 more months.
The manicure and pedicure - I can't give you a follow-up date for that. The wax and laser never happened, nor the head massage, nor the sound bath. But the haircut happened.
The acupuncturist has been postponed, the homoeopath will be in February. Let's see when the neurologist can reply. I have given up on the GP.

But with busy brain
self-care can slip to the bottom

"Do you have time for a treat?"

the question was truly for myself
work that was left undone
Two and a half weeks
mild hemiplegic aura

the promise of meaningful ritual
mind barren of its meaning
ringing in my left ear
self-sufficient by force
Well, no, I am not.
Just, decreased time for care and wasted health

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