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Imani Mixon ([00:00](#)):

I'm Imani Mixon, an arts and culture writer and host, and this is Subject Matters, a podcast about arts, the worlds they live in, and the worlds they wish to create.

Imani Mixon ([00:11](#)):

It's hard to move through an industry without peers or mentors, yet so many creatives feel like lone wolves as they navigate the ever-changing terrain of their career. Today, I'm speaking with Cherise Morris and Holly Bass, two artists and writers who center the spirit of the collective and their ancestors in their practice.

Imani Mixon ([00:31](#)):

Hey, y'all. Can you please introduce yourselves?

Holly Bass ([00:34](#)):

Hi. My name's Holly Bass. I'm a performance artist and visual artist based in Washington DC. I was a 2019 Red Bull Artist in Residence.

Cherise Morris ([00:46](#)):

Hi, my name is Cherise Morris, and I am a writer, multidisciplinary artist, and spiritual worker based in Detroit, Michigan, and I was a 2019 Kresge Literary Arts Fellow.

Imani Mixon ([00:59](#)):

Beautiful.

Imani Mixon ([01:01](#)):

So just generally, I feel like when we talk about mentorship and reaching down and reaching up, it can get really stale really quickly, like it just doesn't sound very cool or fun, but I feel like if we reframed intergenerational work, to me, be more about communing with our spirits and our ancestors, it may feel more welcoming to some folks. So I'm wondering how your spiritual practice informs your art practice right now, and we can start with Cherise because you just mentioned that you are a spiritual worker.

Cherise Morris ([01:33](#)):

Yeah. So I think of my journey into writing and artistry as very parallel with my journey into my conscious spiritual path. I started out as someone who was writing about my lived experiences and the spiritual inquiries that those opened up for me, and then have transitioned into someone who takes that writing as a foundation for more immersive and collaborative work. I think for me, and this is really, like within writing, I never found the mentorship that I was looking for. I think within my spiritual work and development, that's really where I found the mentorship that I was looking for and the community that I was looking for. There was so much of an emphasis placed on, not just learning from your elders but learning from everyone. I am a new mother and I learn as much from an infant as I do from my elders, just in different ways. I think that that really informs the spaces that I create in my work.

Imani Mixon ([02:48](#)):

Yeah.

Cherise Morris ([02:49](#)):

[inaudible 00:02:49] making it accommodating to everyone [crosstalk 00:02:53]-

Imani Mixon ([02:53](#)):

Yeah. That makes sense. Congratulations on the new baby. That's a big deal. That's a huge deal, and I think it's wild that you mentioned trying to find a writing mentor versus a spiritual mentor, and I feel like a lot of people would just stop. Like if you don't find a mentor in one place, maybe you wouldn't seek it elsewhere, so it feels good to know that you've been able to merge the two.

Imani Mixon ([03:17](#)):

Yeah, I want to hear from you, Holly, as well about how your spiritual practice informs your art practice.

Holly Bass ([03:23](#)):

Yeah. I come out of a black church tradition, and I feel like in those communities, particularly my parents were southern Baptists but I grew up in California, and so it was a more progressive, nondenominational black church, but in those communities, I just feel like it's naturally multi-generational and there's a lot of interplay, and there's also a lot of support. Like I was in the children's choir and I did children's oratory. So my earliest performance experiences were actually coming out of church and that kind of training. Then as well as I got older, there was the expectation that the teenagers would help the little kids, like maybe you would assist in Sunday school or something like that, and then you also looked up to ... I guess we say "adult age" folks who were maybe in the main choir or were your teachers or were the preachers, and then there's also that tradition of the mother of the church.

Holly Bass ([04:31](#)):

I feel like I had eight grandmothers, and there might be like one or two that were very special and that we would take them to get groceries. I spent a lot of afternoons with various adopted grandmothers just, they were my babysitters, but I also adored them. So we would sit and talk, and learning so much. That idea of sitting at the feet of the elders I think very much so a black community tradition, and particularly for black women. You sit, like really old school, like shelling peas on the porch or getting your hair done and sitting between someone's knees and they're gossiping around you, and you're just sitting there and getting your scalp greased. So all of that I think is spiritual practice that definitely informs my artistic practice.

Imani Mixon ([05:29](#)):

And I feel like Eight Grandmothers sounds like a cool band name. When you first said it, I'm like, "That would be really sick," and I love the idea of mutual adoration because I feel like when we westernize this idea of mentorship or taking an apprentice or something like that, it's always like you're pining for attention from a greater force, and that just doesn't feel very sustainable. So I definitely see what you mean when you're talking about that.

Imani Mixon ([05:58](#)):

I want to hear a little bit more about what you all think the standards are for what a mentor is. Like in your spiritual practice, Cherise, if you have a spiritual leader or guide or mentor, what does that look like? Then I guess also the energy. How do you know when you're being mentored, or when have you crossed that threshold where you're like, "I'm going to cash in on this experience and gain something

from it, something of value to my art practice or my life?" I think life would be a little bit more accurate. Cherise, I would love to hear from you first.

Cherise Morris ([06:39](#)):

Yeah. I think for me, that experience has always been really organic. So I didn't necessarily set out to find a specific spiritual mentor. I think throughout my life, different people have fulfilled that role, and I think about just the phrase "godmother." Holly, as you were talking about the sense of mothering within the church community, I think as black people, that carries out throughout so many areas of our culture and our communities. So for me, it's been a really organic process of meeting with someone, of course knowing that that person has something I want to learn from, but then really stepping into that realm of mentorship has been just like stepping into a reciprocal trusting, authentic relationship, first and foremost more than anything.

Cherise Morris ([07:41](#)):

Yeah. I've been really blessed to be in Detroit where I think that sense of community mothering is so powerful and so potent here. There are so many amazing community mothers to feel that connection with and who are open to responding to that.

Imani Mixon ([08:08](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). That makes sense.

Imani Mixon ([08:10](#)):

Holly, I know that you mentioned that you were kind of born into a community of mentors, but is there anyone in your journey that you selected as a mentor who has grown to be a mentor to you?

Holly Bass ([08:24](#)):

Yeah. I think that there are a number of people, and that shifts. I want to name the artist Deborah Willis, Deb Willis, who is someone who mentors a lot of people. If you go to one of her art openings, one of the things that she does, because she's trying to navigate all of her girl fans and friends and family, is she'll say, "Oh, oh. I want you to meet So-and-So," and she'll grab your arm and then she'll pull someone else and then get you talking. Then she'll slowly walk away, and you've met your new best friend or your new collaborator, or a new scholar research partner. I learn a lot from observing her in public space as an artist, as a curator, a public figure. She's someone that I definitely admire and look up to.

Holly Bass ([09:27](#)):

I also think that there's a way in which, like for me, it took me a while to figure out that I was "ready" to mentor people, because I thought of myself as like, this is a while ago, but, "I'm just young and I'm just out here and I'm just trying to figure it out." A friend of mine was like, "Actually, this young artist over here could benefit from what you have to offer." So that's when I began to more consciously think of myself as a mentor and make myself available to younger artists.

Imani Mixon ([10:09](#)):

Yeah, and that's definitely something that I ... I don't know if I struggle with it, but I feel like as black women, there's this assumption that you will just teach and sometimes it feels like maybe you haven't learned all the lessons yet so you don't know, so I am curious about, when you discern whether there's a

time to receive and to learn or to teach and activate something, and if either of you have come up with a system for that.

Holly Bass ([10:40](#)):

I don't know if it's a system, but maybe it's more like a flow, because one of the things that I'm learning is I also gain so much from the younger artists who become my friends. It's interesting; it's like the dynamics of the relationship, there's a mentorship level. There's a friendship level, there's a sisterhood level, and they are all in flow. I think about an artist like Omolara Williams McCallister, who's a textile artist and community organizer, and I've learned so much from Omo about intersectional politics and gender identity and blackness, and how we show up in public, but I've also definitely mentored Omo through navigating the art world and the art market, even as I am still navigating those systems myself.

Imani Mixon ([11:41](#)):

Yeah, that makes sense. Cherise, have you had to make that discernment for yourself?

Holly Bass ([11:47](#)):

Yeah, definitely. I'm still very much intimidated by it, realizing that there are other creatives and other people interested in spiritual work who come to me with questions. I still think of myself as such a learner, but then I realize that through teaching, there is a learning process happening for me as well. Even within my performance work, it's been a challenge for me to really feel confident stepping into the role of mothering in the sense, mothering this creation and holding all of these pieces together, but I think thinking about it in terms of holding space has been a really powerful practice for me. So I'm not thinking of myself as an expert in any way, but I'm thinking of myself as someone with the capacity to hold space for that exchange to happen.

Imani Mixon ([12:47](#)):

I love that because when you hold the space, you have to clear it. You have to bless it, you have to keep making new space for it, and I think that is something that we forget sometimes. I think there's a lot of folks just wanting to reach that level, like whatever that level is, and then every time the level changes, we don't have a new method for how to get back to it. I think that holding space is key, very, very key.

Imani Mixon ([13:14](#)):

You all are multidisciplinary and you do a lot of different things. So how do you, I guess, make space to practice those different things or put on those different cloaks before doing them? I can hear from you, Holly, first. That'd be great.

Holly Bass ([13:30](#)):

I actually think I almost would want to reverse the question because it's harder for me not to express all of those sides of myself. Maybe as a younger person, I felt this pressure to try to just be one thing because that's what people understand, or people want to categorize who you are and what you do, and so I was like, "Okay, I need to simplify and just pick one thing, but I don't feel like I'm just one thing." It's really been a process of self-liberation to allow myself to express all of my different sides and facets, and then to give myself time to continue to develop. So I would say my first art form actually was writing.

Holly Bass ([14:22](#)):

I started writing as a child. I just loved making up stories and writing poems, and then I started dancing and theater, and then from there, it evolved into more conceptual performance, and then from there, the sort of visual art practice happened, which really surprised me because I'm not someone who draws well or paints well. I wasn't like the artist in school, but allowing myself to explore all of the expressive outlets and connecting them, because to me they're all connected and I've said several times, I think of everything as a form of writing. It's like I'm trying to tell a story, I'm trying to communicate an emotion, an idea. I'm trying to build community. Yeah.

Cherise Morris ([15:21](#)):

Yeah, thank you, Holly, for that answer because every part of it resonated with me. Thank you, but yeah. I think I have always approached everything from thinking of it in a way of, "How is it modeling the world that I want to exist in?", and I think that that naturally brings all of the different forms of work that I do together. I grew up in the country, and there's a part of me that loves that solitude and that quietness, and that's the part that I really explore when I'm doing my [inaudible 00:16:07] writing, but then there's also part of me that loves summer in Detroit, which is ... the opposite. There's a lot going on. It's sensory overload.

Imani Mixon ([16:18](#)):

Yeah, it's lit.

Cherise Morris ([16:18](#)):

Yes. So that is the part that really comes together in the live performance work. I think that similarly to Holly, I spent a lot of time feeling really confused because I wasn't just one thing and I couldn't just pick one thing, and it was a very libratory process to realize that they all are a thing together, and that also, we're not alone doing this work. There are so many artists and creatives who also bring those multiple parts of themselves together, multidisciplinary.

Holly Bass ([17:04](#)):

The other thing I want to add though too is, so there's the process of liberating yourself and then there's the process of educating those around you so that they understand who you are and what you're about, and that you are this multidisciplinary or multi-hyphenate artist. I feel like that was a really frustrating kind of, I don't know, eight years of my life, trying to help other people understand like, "No, no. I'm not just a poet," or, "No, no. I'm not just this person who teaches or does theater. They're all connected." So, that was an experience I had where I had this sense of, I knew who I was but I was frustrated because I felt like people couldn't see me. I didn't feel seen, and there was a lag.

Cherise Morris ([17:59](#)):

Yeah, and I feel that very much just where I am in my work. I'm still ... within the writing world, and I think it's really difficult sometimes for that space, for that realm to create the space for me to express all of the different things that I bring into the work.

Imani Mixon ([18:27](#)):

Yeah. I remember when I graduated journalism school, I was on a call with somebody who I thought could be a mentor, like somebody my mom was like, "Oh, call this person," and the first thing they said

was like, "You're doing too much. You need to choose one thing." I remember automatically just shutting down, rolling my eyes like, "Okay, this is not it." I think what people have to realize is that, it's a tender place to ask for help or say what to do next. I think it's very demeaning to be like, "Oh, you're not ready to do these things" when those things are already inside of you. So I really did love hearing a gap between the liberation and the education, and even the time-marker you put on it. I feel like once we learn a lesson, we think we're just going to figure out, and next year it'll be a different thing or next grant cycle, but it takes time, relationships, and work in-between. So yeah, that hit home for real.

Cherise Morris ([19:25](#)):

I think that's also, from a societal perspective, that has been so much of what black people have been forced to do since we existed in this place. So I think on the one level, there's like, you have to work against that as an artist period, and then there's an added barrier when it comes to being a black artist and expressing that you aren't just one thing. I'm not just a black writer. Everyone wants the next James Baldwin, and he was a huge influence for me, but there were so many others from so many different fields of places.

Imani Mixon ([20:14](#)):

Yeah, and I feel like sometimes, people don't recognize or understand the connectivity of the black art world. When we first started talking about this topic, it was like Boomer versus Zoomer, and I'm like, "Those are not things that resonate with me. We all still got to go over our grandma's house and talk to our aunts." There's just not that generational separation, and I think part of it is because it took artists so long to arrive that once they did, they're kind of showing this new generation how to come up and do a thing. So, yeah. It's like we can have reverence for the past and also want to do something more, right now, something different, something that everybody won't approve of. I think that is part of the freedom that I need more black artists to be able to have right now.

Cherise Morris ([21:04](#)):

And I do see it as an ancestral return. When I think about our ancestral traditions and wisdoms, part of the diaspora is ... an accommodation of so many different things. Yes, we told stories, but we also danced while we told those stories, and we also made music while we did that, and we also made food to go with that, and we also had people of different generations doing different things in the process of making this one thing. I think that's a really powerful place that we're in right now.

Imani Mixon ([21:51](#)):

For sure. It feels like a return to nature. Like you both said, it's more natural to be doing all these different things than to try to slow down and narrow it down.

Imani Mixon ([22:01](#)):

Something that I noticed about both of you all's work is there is this sort of reverent referential part of it that I really enjoy, but it also still feels really current, which I don't think always happens. So specifically, Holly, I'm curious because you seem to synthesize a lot of history in the work that you do, namely African Futures, Root Work, Crunk Lessons, and Money Maker, which I just watched this morning, and I'm curious about how you bring the past to the present or how you make a container to hold all those experiences in your work.

Holly Bass ([22:39](#)):

Yeah. I mean I think it's this concept of ... I don't want to get too sci-fi, but parallel universes and time being continuous, and even if I just think of it purely as ancestral thread and lineage, there's some part of my DNA that goes back and back multiple generations to a point that can't even be traced but it's still there. I feel like because it's still there, I am an artist of my time and of my moment, but that means I also need to be a student of history so that I can better understand what's happening now and so that I'm not always being reactive but I can be proactive and even beyond proactive. Then you go to visionary. That's always the goal, and to sort of collapse or combine those histories.

Holly Bass ([23:43](#)):

I also, as an educator, I think there's a part of me that feels a responsibility to include a lot of different historical references, musical references for younger generations so that they can be like, "Oh, I don't know this song or this artist," or, "Oh, I'm not familiar with this historical figure, but I see how it's connected to this other part of her performance. Maybe I'm going to pull out my phone and just do a quick search." So that's also definitely in my mind.

Imani Mixon ([24:18](#)):

Beautiful.

Imani Mixon ([24:20](#)):

I guess I am curious from both of you, because I feel like when you go to school or you're in all these different places, your history feels lesser than for a while. Like you're learning all this other stuff or you maybe have two black people you can look up to. So I'm wondering how you open up that portal to be able to access your history and actually value it as a resource, as an archive for the work that you do.

Cherise Morris ([24:51](#)):

Yeah, that's a good question. I'm trying to figure out where that happened for me, because I think it's really easy to say like, "Oh, well I studied Afrikaan studies in college." That did definitely shape the way that I framed things. It felt like it gave language to things that I already felt, but before that, from somewhere emerged the impulse to do that. From somewhere emerged the impulse to believe that that was legitimate and valid and necessary for me. I think that for me, growing up in the rural south grounded so much of that. I like to think that I grew up on top of layered histories; I grew up in a small town that was settled by black people right after the Civil War ended, and they named it for the plantation that they worked on that was on that plot of land.

Cherise Morris ([25:54](#)):

So I'm just seeing this image of myself in a cradle because I think that being surrounded by that energy and growing up in that atmosphere where my grandparents, they were sharecroppers but they also were the sharecroppers who never left the place that they sharecropped, and so just being so close and having my feet literally on the same ground that their grandparents walked on as they labored it imbued me with this inherent desire to want to hold that close to me always.

Holly Bass ([26:37](#)):

We have very similar histories in a way. Even though I grew up on the west coast, my parents are all from the south. On my father's side were sharecroppers, and so I have this project called Root Work. I went back to Georgia and made some videos and images with my dad, and also kind of interviewed him

mon camera. It was this kind of thing where it's like, I realized I'm literally the first generation in my family that did not pick cotton, on both sides of my family. I can only imagine that that's what my previous ancestors who were brought here did because my father, he told me this story about picking cotton when he was 15 years old and earning more than he would've earned at a factory job, and how proud he was of himself.

Holly Bass ([27:36](#)):

So that story that, to me, is about dignity and pride and a young man's accomplishment is so powerful, but then also I remember asking him, "How old were you when you started?", thinking he's going to say like, I don't know, 11 or 12, and he was like, "Five." I'm like, "What? Five?" He's like, "Well, you know, it was like playing a game. Your mom was in the field. All your relatives were there. So they gave you a little bag and you picked cotton too." I was like, "Wow." That just really ... It shook me, and it's my own family history, and it's American history, and it's many people's history, and yet we act like it happened 500 million years ago. I'm like, "No, my dad's still alive. He's still alive. We drive around and he's like, 'This is where our little shack was, that was where our house was,'" but also at the same time, he's telling me how they used to grow their own food. Like they never went hungry. My grandmother went from being a sharecropper to being a domestic worker and being able to buy a brick house instead of a wood house.

Holly Bass ([28:51](#)):

So this idea of leveling up and these small resistances are really important. Even though my grandmother only had, this is my paternal grandmother, only had a sixth grade education, she taught kindergarten and first grade in the colored school because she loved education. She wanted to be a teacher. She actually had wanted to finish high school and go to teacher's college, but she didn't have that opportunity. I think it's kind of interesting that I grew up to be an educator and how much of that is the influence of my mom and my dad and my grandparents, and how much of it is in my DNA to do this work.

Cherise Morris ([29:41](#)):

Yeah. My mom actually, so we're from Virginia. In the summers, her and her siblings and the neighborhood children would be bused out to camp to pick tobacco. So, yeah. We do have a lot of resonances in our stories, our narratives.

Imani Mixon ([30:04](#)):

Yeah. I think it definitely is wild when people talk about it like it's been so far or we can't still have access to those stories, and also thinking about in your two stories how the ability to rest or have leisure or just research and not be doing manual labor is wild. It's a new thing. It's not like we've been doing this forever or have had the luxury of doing that forever, so thank you so much for sharing that.

Imani Mixon ([30:31](#)):

I think a lot of this comes down to information-sharing. From what I've gathered, if there are gaps in information between the generations, that's when the relationship is not that sweet. So I'm wondering, and I also have learned that a lot of people, I'll speak for my generation, millennials think that we're the first to do everything all the time, and then if you just start talking to people or asking questions, you realize that it's happened a thousand times over and this is actually the 1001st iteration, but we still feel



cool about it anyway. So I'm just curious about how you think that intergenerational information can be better shared and/or how we can be in better conversation with each other.

Holly Bass ([31:19](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. So I'm about to turn 50, which feels so crazy to me at this point. "How did that happen?" I still feel like I'm 25 or 30, and I'm one of the few people in my friend group that actually watches Tik-Tok on a regular basis, but I think it's the most beautiful social media platform. When you talk about intergenerational, there's just so many stories of mothers with children, children or teens with their parents, with their grandparents, people sharing their culture, indigenous culture, black culture, Latinx culture, and I feel like that's actually one of the better, in a very concrete way, one of the better ways to share that intergenerational knowledge. I love going in the comments and seeing millennials be like, "Oh my God. I didn't know this or that, or that you all did that."

Holly Bass ([32:24](#)):

So it's been really cool to just be a participant. I don't really make Tik-Toks, but as a viewer, to be part of that community-building.

Imani Mixon ([32:34](#)):

Yeah, for sure.

Cherise Morris ([32:39](#)):

Yeah. In the past couple years, I've been learning a lot more from my mother. For a long time, I've talked with some of my friends about this, about how we felt like there was this gap between our grandparents' experiences and then our parents' and then us, and our parents being the connecting link who didn't always share that knowledge with us. I realize that, well for one, I think there is this feeling that in thinking about mobility and thinking about moving forward, and thinking about how mobility was denied for so long, my mother's generation thinks that, not necessarily that the narratives of our grandparents and their childhood, it's not something that they have to be dishonest about, but it's just something that ... there's not necessarily a sense of pride in. It's like I'm here, I'm young. I'm learning about herbal remedies and putting together different tonics and tinctures and things, but for her, when she was a child, they did that stuff because they still had to, because the other option existed but the access to it was denied from them.

Cherise Morris ([34:10](#)):

So I think that that was one barrier that we had to cross, and I think that also, now because there is such an energy and such a conversation happening around ancestral traditions and wisdoms, now it's just known that that information is something that we want to know. Since that has been in the cultural ethos, I've noticed that it's so much easier to have those conversations with my mom and my aunts because they see that it is something of value and it's something that we still want to hold onto. So I think that, and maybe this is a generational destiny or something, but I think that right now, with things like Tik-Tok and Instagram, with the internet, there is the ability to show a hunger and a reverence for that information, which then gets folks to open up and to share those wisdoms.

Imani Mixon ([35:18](#)):

Yeah.

Holly Bass ([35:19](#)):

I mean yeah, there's a lot of pain associated with some of those memories. Parents always want to protect their children. I think it can be difficult to figure out what to share and how to share it.

Holly Bass ([35:37](#)):

I was recently in Jamaica for a number of months, and what was interesting to me being there is that I would meet some women, but actually a couple of men in my community who were in their thirties. They knew all of the herbs because they'd learned it from their grandmother. So they'd be like, "Oh, well go to this tree. I'm going to make you a paste that's good for this burn." They would literally be like, "Go in the backyard of the house you're staying in because I saw such-and-such plant, and that's what we're going to use." I was like, "I don't know a lot of brothers in DC who could just do that." It was so impressive to me, and also again, that sense of how much we've preserved but how much we've also lost or has been lost to us.

Imani Mixon ([36:27](#)):

For sure. I'm curious: in these conversations with people in your community, are you making a point to document it, or are you just memorizing it in the moment, in your body, or journaling, or something like that?

Cherise Morris ([36:41](#)):

I'm a writer, but I'm actually horrible at keeping a journal, so I have tried. There was a part of me that wanted to write down every family story, every piece of information, but I think that for me, I do process it through the work. I think ... Yes, the details matter and I'm grateful for them, and there's a part of me that I'm taking my mushrooms so that my mind stays sharp and I can spread it to the future generations, but I think also, there's so much of me that understands that the details aren't everything. I think about the fact that no matter what I do, I can only gather details from so long ago, but so much of who I am and who those people were was informed by people and communities and experiences and ancestors that have been completely lost to the archives of the west.

Cherise Morris ([37:51](#)):

So, the details are really beautiful to have, but I also know that I don't have the details of those distant ancestors and I never will in concrete, tangible terms, but it still moves with me and travels with me, and is inherent in who I am and who will come forth. So in that way, I put it into the work but I don't put the actual details of the story into it. That's when I rely on feeling and body language and movement to communicate something that, in so many ways, is larger than words.

Imani Mixon ([38:39](#)):

Yeah, that sounds really freeing, that the detail-oriented stuff is a lot harder to come by, it feels like nowadays too.

Imani Mixon ([38:52](#)):

And Holly, do you document stuff like that strictly?

Holly Bass ([38:57](#)):

I very much so relate to everything Cherise just said, like not good at journaling. I'm not the best with the archive. I admire my friends who do; I mentioned the artists Omolara Williams McCallister because Omo has this really amazing practice of archiving through Instagram, like really detailed Instagram posts that have multiple comments and multiple images and video, and it's like the background and the actual making and the final project. I just, yeah. I'm much more about letting it all wash over me and then translating it aesthetically.

Imani Mixon ([39:41](#)):

That sounds very inviting. I love it. I love the hand motion too of the "wash over." I feel it.

Imani Mixon ([39:50](#)):

Another thing that I'm thinking about is, we've talked a lot about external stuff for other people, but there is a sense that some of this is inner work, specifically inner child work. So I'm curious if there are any aspects of your work that you feel like taps into that inner child or if you have engaged with it to make certain things happen.

Cherise Morris ([40:14](#)):

I would say yeah. I also, I have five or six inner children.

Imani Mixon ([40:21](#)):

You have a classroom?

Cherise Morris ([40:23](#)):

Yeah, yeah. There's a little school of little Cherises who each give me something else, but I think that for me, in this journey of coming to fully express who I am and the work that I feel I am here to do, I just, in that, make space for the inner child and the part of myself that never had space to really articulate what she was thinking or who she was or how she felt.

Cherise Morris ([41:01](#)):

So, I often think about my younger selves and how they would think I was so amazing and cool. They were so amazed by me, and I do think that for me, in liberating that inner child, because she was a product of the many, in my experience, mothers who came before and the ways that they had to compress themselves, in liberating her through this work, I feel that resonate throughout the lineage and I feel and see the ways that it opens space for other women close to me and in my family to express themselves more fully and to take that space for how they feel. It's really important to me, is that the work can reach them as well as me.

Imani Mixon ([42:10](#)):

Love it.

Holly Bass ([42:12](#)):

I always has this sense, and there's a lot of different practice in the beliefs that children come into the universe knowing everything they need to know and actually being connected to realms outside of this concrete, tangible realm. That feels really true to me. I feel like the child that I was was really wise and really ancestrally connected and understood universes, and then learned how to function in this culture,

and that part of the work of being an artist is actually undoing those societal expectations and norms so that I can tap into this more elemental, intuitive space that is my birthright and that is the core or the origin of who I am.

Holly Bass ([43:09](#)):

So, that's kind of how I look at it, is like the inner child was healthy and whole and brilliant, and all-seeing, and understanding, and generous, and loving. It's always about getting myself back into that sort of space.

Imani Mixon ([43:29](#)):

I love that. I really do. I feel like I grew up and I was really rewarded for being in my head, like being smart and witty and all this stuff, and when I do inner child work, it's just like, "Girl, can you play? Can you make this feel more fun in your body to be doing this thing. I think when we do let the noise in from outside and have these benchmarks, you don't even have enough silence to be like, "Yo, baby me would love this. This is the most fun we've ever had in our life." So that definitely feels like a lesson I need to remember.

Imani Mixon ([44:04](#)):

Something else I'm curious about, because you both have been doing art for a while now, I know that we are not the same person every day or every year or anything like that. I'm curious about how your artistic practice has changed and adapted over time and what has remained constant for you.

Holly Bass ([44:21](#)):

So one of my collaborators, Jasmine Hearn, who's a fantastic choreographer and dancer, when she teaches a class, she'll say at the beginning, "Let's dance with the bodies that we have today." I love that because there's so much pressure to be like, "Oh, yesterday I was super flexible," or even in a yoga class, you're like, "Yesterday I was in tree pose and I was all balanced, and today I'm wobbly. What's wrong?" It's like, "You're not wrong. It's just a different day and a different body. So can we be more in the present and in the moment?" I think that's important to recognize, but I would say the biggest difference between my earlier artistic practice and my current artistic practice is actually just a deeper understanding of the process of that practice.

Holly Bass ([45:21](#)):

So, I know when I'm getting ready to make a new work that I usually get a flash, like a visual of the thing, and I'm like, "Okay, I got the flash. So that means it's real." I can see it before it's real. I got lots of ideas, but I don't have time, resources, energy to exercise all of them, but at some point, one of them will really be insistent. It's like, "Okay. Which idea is being insistent and which idea am I able to really visualize?" Then I also understand that just because I can visualize it doesn't mean it's going to happen in the next grant cycle, to borrow from what you said, Imani.

Holly Bass ([46:04](#)):

Some of my projects, they literally take like seven or eight years, and when I was younger, I'd be so frustrated and I'd be like, "Why are they holding me back? I started this and now I have to put it on the back-burner, so I guess I'll work on something else." Now I'm like, "That is the process. That's going to marinate, like you started it. You started writing about it. Proof of concept. Just work on something else

now. When the time is right, the resources and the space and its borders will align for that project to come forward, and it's going to be even better." So there's this sense of less frustration, more trust, and even in my own trusting. I go through this thing where I procrastinate and it's like, "You got a show. There's a show coming up. People are going to come in the room. There better be something in the room when they show up."

Holly Bass ([46:59](#)):

I even feel like I have the sense of how much procrastination is good and okay and how much is bad, so I don't have to constantly beat myself up or freak out. It's like, "These ideas are marinating. They're actually doing work. I'm not being lazy. I'm not blowing it off. It's actually a process." Because I've gone through the process so many times over so many years, there is still a part of me that's like, "Maybe one day it won't work. One day you're just going to fail horribly," but it honestly really hasn't happened. It always seems to come together just in time. To trust that and be like, "It's okay. Just stay in the flow. Ask for help when you need it. Don't panic. Don't stress yourself out. No one's going to die on the operating table. You're not operating on infants right now. You're just making art," that, I think, has been the biggest difference. It's really kind of a joy and pleasure to be like, "Oh, I understand myself a little bit better, but there's still a wonderful sense of mystery about it too, which I love.

Imani Mixon ([48:21](#)):

Wow. Yeah, the "sitting with the process" part is ... interesting because I think, you don't know when you're in the middle of it. There's no way for you to know how far along you are, so that makes so much sense.

Cherise Morris ([48:35](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Holly, for reminding me that things I started three years ago are still in progress. I'm just shifting my attention away, but they're not dead because I'm like, "Oh no, I like that and it died."

Cherise Morris ([48:52](#)):

But for me, I think ... I started out very much trying to prove a certain level of aptitude, a certain level of talent, being very focused on that. Proving technical skill in a really intense way. I think maybe I was just doing that until I got to a level where I proved it to myself, and now I am definitely much more open, with specifically the way that I write. I know that I have the skill and I know that I could do this and pull this trick and do this maneuver, but I don't have to do it all the time. Sometimes I just have to say it plain. I don't need to write the most beautiful sentence ever all the time, and that's been a really important lesson for me. Then, I think as my work has opened up beyond writing, I started out writing experimental lyrical creative nonfiction. I was always the vocal point of the piece. The narrative was observed and articulated through my voice and my perspective always.

Cherise Morris ([50:13](#)):

Over time, in opening up to different forms and working in more collaboration, my voice has shifted to a place that is more ancestral, a place that is more disembodied. A place that is as intimate as it was before for me, but also is open enough to feel like it can accommodate others. I think I'm still getting in the groove of that, but I'm really excited by it.

Imani Mixon ([50:52](#)):

This is also exciting. I feel like I, I don't know, man. I've been trying to work on things and I've been complimented for having patience lately and I'm like, "Thank you, because that's what I'm working on and I needed to hear that because I was about to blow up." So it's good to know the "sitting with a thing" is still possible to still make the stuff happen for you.

Imani Mixon ([51:18](#)):

Cherise, I wanted to talk more specifically about your work, The Visions of the Evolution, the Ritual Performance series. Can you tell me more about that and how you are progressing with that work?

Cherise Morris ([51:32](#)):

Yeah. So it came to me, it was the winter of 2019 and I didn't know what it meant, but I was like, so I'm doing this writing and it feels really good and I'm in this groove, and I did, before I always had a background of theater and collaborative and more devised, experimental performance work, but I hadn't done it for years. I was like, "Okay, but I want to bring others into this," because writing is, for me, a very solitary act, but I also knew that what I was writing about, I wasn't just doing it to connect with myself. So, I wanted to open something, some space, and I had no words for it. I still actually, in the place of creating language around what the project actually is, because on one hand it is a performance that is choreographed and thought out and conceptualized, and on the other hand, it does have the spontaneity and the intention of ritual and it is actually a ritual in process that the ensemble is doing, and in opening space to be interactive with others.

Cherise Morris ([53:02](#)):

I think about it through the lens of just the many different things I did and the experiences I did to get here. So, a lot of my background, when I was in college, was in organizing work, and thinking about how to move us from this place and these injustices into the liberated future that we all have to always believe is possible, and that vision that we have to hold onto. This arose from that same place, but it's less of the actual tangible, direct work of getting there and more of the opening space to have that vision, because I think so often, we are called into being so aware and so present with what's going on around us and relating that to history, and spreading that information to others, getting other people to understand that, that we aren't always allowed the space to just go through that envisioning process.

Cherise Morris ([54:13](#)):

So, that was what I wanted to do with the work. In an essay I wrote called The Cosmic Matter of Black Lives, the ending scene is a very fluid, magical ritual that comes to be, and then we all levitate over everything and into the world that we have created through our magic dreaming power. Visions of the Evolution is my way of trying to recreate that in a practical sense for communities of people. So, I feel like I rambled a lot-

Imani Mixon ([55:01](#)):

No, you made a lot of sense.

Cherise Morris ([55:04](#)):

But yeah. I'm still working on really putting the words around the feeling and the impulse I had to create this work and this project, and each one is different. I think that's part of it, but I do think of myself when I'm in that space as, yes, a creator and a director, but also as the facilitator of a ritual.

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Imani Mixon ([55:32](#)):

Yeah. I do have one last big question that kind of relates to that. Is there a wish that you all have for your future self? If so, what is it?

Holly Bass ([55:46](#)):

I've been asking myself that question recently, especially having spent the past four months in Jamaica. On a very practical level, one of the wishes for myself is to have a really robust artistic practice that is financially sustaining and also allows for a lot of rest and pleasure.

Imani Mixon ([56:18](#)):

See, that sounds like something we all need.

Cherise Morris ([56:26](#)):

Yes, that wish sounds beautiful. I wish that as well, and I think I also wish to exist in a state that is as unbothered as possible, that is, yeah, where I ... have the space and exist in a world, or at least a world within a world that exemplifies its almost highest potential almost all the time.

Imani Mixon ([57:17](#)):

Come on. Yes, let's get that. Beautiful.

Imani Mixon ([57:22](#)):

So before we head out, I would love to hear about any upcoming work that you all have. This episode will be coming out on June 2nd, so anything that's happening digital or otherwise that people should tune into or can support you in some way.

Cherise Morris ([57:44](#)):

I am, so late summer/early fall, there will be some more Visions of the Evolution installments happening. Location, to be determined, but there's definitely going to be one in Detroit, and then there's going to be one at my old stomping grounds, Brown, and then there will be some other dates and some other locations that I'm still figuring out. So I'm looking forward to that, and then in the next month or two, I'm starting a new series on Instagram called Sunrise Sermons. It will be a very intimate performance, philosophical thing happening at sunrise on a somewhat regular basis.

Imani Mixon ([58:47](#)):

Beautiful.

Holly Bass ([58:52](#)):

I will be part of a group show in August at Miles McEnery Gallery in New York. It's connected to a book that's all about basketball in contemporary art, so everything is sports-themed. That should be really fun, and then, exact date TDE, but I'll be finishing up my residency at New York Live Arts with an outdoor performance in New York in September.

Imani Mixon ([59:24](#)):

Beautiful. I'm so excited for summer for everybody. I can't wait until we can just breathe.

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Imani Mixon ([59:29](#)):

This was marvelous. Thank you so much

Holly Bass ([59:32](#)):

Thank you, Imani-

Cherise Morris ([59:33](#)):

[crosstalk 00:59:33].

Imani Mixon ([59:33](#)):

All righty. See y'all later. Bye.

Cherise Morris ([59:36](#)):

[crosstalk 00:59:36].

Imani Mixon ([59:42](#)):

Shout out to the artists who joined me. I'm your host, Imani Mixon, and this is Subject Matters by Kresge Arts in Detroit and Red Bull Art Detroit. Thanks for listening.