

Imani Mixon ([00:05](#)):

I'm Imani Mixon, an arts and culture writer and host, and this is Subject Matters, a podcast about artists, the world they live in, and the worlds they wish to create. Diaspora is defined as a scattered population, but for many of us who are far from our ancestral homeland, the diaspora is a welcoming place, a gathering place where we learn our shared history and collectively add to it. Today I'm speaking with artists Ajara Alghali and Patrick Quarm about how art happens when West Africa is the focus, the inspiration, and the audience. Ajara, we'll start with you. Can you please introduce yourself?

Ajara Alghali ([00:44](#)):

I will go. It is such a pleasure to be in conversation with you both. I am super excited. I was born and raised here in Detroit. I have an American mom and a West African dad by the way of Sierra Leone, but also my family in Sierra Leone is a part of the Creole population, meaning that we're a mixture of repatriated black American slaves that went back to the country of Sierra Leone, but also mixed with some Nigerian Yoruba, so that's where I trace my lineage through. Before Africa became what it is today, we were all one.

Ajara Alghali ([01:37](#)):

I began studying West African dance about 20 years ago. I just walked into a dance class and was like, "This looks lit," and I just started dancing. My dad would say back then, "Why are you doing this?" because I don't come from a dance family. Now he's to the point where, "Oh my god. You should do this. You should go back to Sierra Leone and X, Y, and Z." That's where I get that from.

Ajara Alghali ([02:08](#)):

My dad owned a nightclub growing up here in Detroit, so I think that's just a mixture of everything that I was around. I try to fuse dance, music into my academic practice, being an urban planner, formally trained as an urban planner. I want to bring in the non-formal and the traditional ways that we build community and space. Again, it's such a pleasure to have a conversation.

Imani Mixon ([02:41](#)):

What was the nightclub? I'm very intrigued about that.

Patrick Quarm ([02:44](#)):

Yeah, me too.

Ajara Alghali ([02:48](#)):

It was called Sierra Afrique. It was on the west side of Detroit, Plymouth and Southfield area. I grew up in it. My dad would take us. When they would bring in guest artists from the continent when they were touring, my sister and I would go and watch the performances when we were like seven, eight in a nightclub when they have alcohol and such. That was just being brought up in an atmosphere where you embraced all of that. It wasn't like, "You can't do that," or, "You can't go there." It's like, "No, this artist is coming. You guys need to see them before."

Patrick Quarm ([03:32](#)):

Nice.

Imani Mixon ([03:33](#)):

Wow, love it. Early education. Okay, Patrick. Patrick, can you introduce yourself please?

Patrick Quarm ([03:40](#)):

Yeah. I'm Patrick Quarm. I'm really happy about this, and thanks for the invite. Nice to meet you, Ajara. I was born in Ghana. That's where I was born, grew up. I was born in a postcolonial town. It's called Sekondi. It's actually a twin city. Sekondi is the initial town and Takoradi came out of Sekondi. They are next to each other. Sekondi has a lot of colonial remnants, buildings, architecture, and all that stuff. I grew up in Takoradi, did most of my education back in Ghana. I think in 2015 after my undergrad, I came to Texas Tech for my MFA. That was three years from there, I moved to Detroit. That was fun. My main attraction was my sister lived there, and she was the only family I had in the US. I was like, "Hey, I might as well be closer to family," so I moved closer. I really enjoyed my time there.

Patrick Quarm ([04:58](#)):

Currently, I positioned myself in a way that I could freely move in-between Ghana and the US. That was my ultimate goal. I was back in Ghana for almost eight months, and I'm back currently in New Haven for an artists' residency. Basically, this will be the interesting part of my life.

Imani Mixon ([05:27](#)):

That's a good invitation though, just marking it. This is going to be interesting. I like the term interesting as opposed to this is going to change my life. That feels a lot more organic. When I was preparing for this conversation, I Googled the word diaspora because I feel like people pronounce it a different way, I feel like people understand it a different way, and the first thing that came up was scattered population which just sounds disgusting to me. That doesn't resonate with me at all. I'm wondering how you all describe the diaspora and if it's something that you think about actively in your life and your work?

Ajara Alghali ([06:12](#)):

I actually do, and I say diaspora. Again, tomato, tomato. I think of it as lost family so to speak. I say that because of how I grew up, being that I come from duality in terms of continental African and African American. I viewed it as wow, this is all of me. This is who I am. Being that when I was growing up, my dad had the nightclub, we hung out with the Jamaicans, the Haitians, the Costa Ricans, the Ghanaians. It was all one big family, so when I say family, I truly mean that. I have uncles that I literally call uncle that are from Ghana, that are from Nigeria, that are from Jamaica because of that community.

Ajara Alghali ([07:17](#)):

I do feel that it's sad that now we go into our own enclaves. I think of the diaspora of us being of one people. The motto of Jamaica is out of many, one people. That's how I think of the diaspora. We all have our roots and lineages in Africa. It's great that we focus on what makes us individual people or individuals countries, but let's not forget these places in which we have all this connectivity to, they were not countries 50 to 60 to 70 years ago. That's the way I look at it. Even when I talk, I say, "The country that is now Sierra Leone," because prior to European influence, there was no such place as Sierra Leone. It was the place of where the Mende and Temne and the Susu people lived. I will shut up because I could go on and on about this.

Imani Mixon ([08:45](#)):

I love it.

Patrick Quarm ([08:46](#)):

For me, I think when it comes to the word diaspora, the way I think of it... I will take it from a different angle. The way I think of it is there is a place of origin and there's a base. Out of the base, that's where you stretch your wings to everything around you. Being displaced out of origin or base is when you start navigating the space that I think about as diaspora. Looking at my experience, I'm going to do a little comparison between me and Ajara. Ajara was born in Detroit, right? I grew up and was born in Ghana. Even navigating through the American space or the Western space, diaspora doesn't play much in my mind because I'm constantly thinking of a place that I call home, that I'm connected to I know of.

Patrick Quarm ([09:56](#)):

The word diaspora becomes very paramount when I start engaging with the politics of a place, when I start feeling like I'm the other. Do I belong to this space? When is tart asking myself these questions, that's when I'm like, "Oh, this is not home. This is not my base." How do I navigate that and still try to not forget or stay connected? It was a struggle when I first moved to the US. A part of me was constantly longing for that home, that base. At the same time too, I was in a new space where I'm like, "Okay, I have to try and navigate this space, try and understand the rules of this place, and move through here." I think that's how I see it.

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

That makes sense, and I think the phrase that used Ajara, Western influence, just rings in my ear, because I think in the worlds that we inhabit in general right now there is that outsider feeling for African Americans as well as continental Africans as you said. It just feels very sad and very far from the work that can be done or the community that can be built. I think definitely there is a common thread of I don't belong here, I have to make something new, but also being able to have the resources to make something new. I'm curious because I think that some artists, when they make it into certain space, or they get a certain platform, they can distance themselves from their origin, but it feels like both of you have come closer to it or navigate it in different ways. I wonder if you can walk me through the journey of incorporating West Africa and your home into your practice or maybe traditional techniques into your practice, and if it was something that was always there or arose over time?

Ajara Alghali ([12:17](#)):

I don't want to go first. I'm thinking. I would say for me this is something that rose as my curiosity about Africa increased. Again, I grew up knowing a lot of my African family. I had my grandmother's brother would come and spend the summers with us all the time. I knew that. I knew how to properly greet people, just the ins and outs of what you're supposed to do, coming up as the child of an African parent. My mom was real cool about it. Don't eat fufu with a spoon or whatever, stuff like that. However though, I do feel like a lot of how I am came into play because of the fact that I couldn't hide from it, like my name. How am I going to hide from Ajara Alghali? It's nobody with that name in southeast Michigan, even the Midwest. Who has the name Ajara Alghali? I was just like, "Okay, it is what it is." No matter how I try and Americanize it, it's right smack dab in my face, so I really tried to build a story.

Ajara Alghali ([14:03](#)):

What is my story? It's been a slow moving train in which it started picking up momentum, and then now I'm like, "This is it. This is what I have..." My lot is in Ajara and what I'm trying to do in terms of

furthering dance and more attention to the continent, but also really having to rethink our place on the continent, and how we came to be, who we are as a larger group of black African people globally. That is the conversation that I am more interested in having, using dance as a conduit to actually start those conversations because it's a lot of dialogue that needs to be had in that. I said, "Now is the time that we should be thinking about it." I do sometimes feel like, "Oh, this is the shit I was talking about years ago, and now people want to talk about it. What's up with that?" It happens because I just was like, "I'm not about to continue to hide myself or hide who I am. I just have to go in it full throttle." It's me.

Imani Mixon ([15:55](#)):

Truly.

Patrick Quarm ([15:57](#)):

Right. I mean, with me I think I would take it from the kind of upbringing that I had. This is my dad. I always refer to my dad as this post-colonial gentleman. Growing up, we went to school. The school was geared towards the colonial system. You have to learn English. When you talk about who a gentleman is, you have to present yourself like the queen because Ghana was colonized by the British. My dad, even growing up, when you start speaking English at home, he'd give you a knock and tell you that, "Speak your own language." After you prefer speaking your own language, you stop adopting someone else's. He was that type. He was like, "Learn that. Don't forget it's who you are. Don't forget yourself." That was him. That was my dad.

Patrick Quarm ([17:04](#)):

With regards to me staying connected and finding these stories in my work, I feel like there's that connect back. These stories that my dad used to tell me, my mom used to tell me, my uncles used to say that even within the work that I do, I'm always trying to reconnect to it. There are some paintings that I've done over the years, that the inspiration was clearly from a story my mom told me or my dad told me. As a young man who has been told this story moving through the world, how can I find meaning in that kind of story? For me, that's a clear connect.

Imani Mixon ([18:02](#)):

Yeah. That's beautiful, and I love the idea of just memory. There's some memories you have to run away from or that you want to distance yourself from, but being able to actually own like, "Yo, it was actually sweet that my told me that and my mom told me this, and I can actually use this," I think is also a psychological leap for some people.

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

I had the privilege of going to Ghana for the Year of Return a couple of years ago. I just remember prepping myself. I didn't want to go with the Disney view of what Africa was going to be or I'm some special person that everything's supposed to open up for me and it's going to be lovely. It was lovely, but I think a huge part of my preparation was just like, "Imani, be present. Don't try to push what you think Africa's supposed to be for you or what it's supposed to do for you on you being there."

Imani Mixon ([19:02](#)):

In my eyes, I think the biggest thing that stuck with me, being from Detroit which is a black, black, black city, it was just beautiful to see a whole country do the same thing. I saw black at every level, every

street corner, and I just felt like, "Yo, I know we don't all speak the same language, but I feel cared for, and looked after," and I never felt necessarily alone, which I think is the feeling that you were talking about that happens in America. I wonder for each of you, how you would describe your Africa, wherever it is that you return to, to people who have never been before? Specifically black people, if I'm being honest.

Ajara Alghali ([19:53](#)):

Go ahead, I want to hear it.

Patrick Quarm ([19:54](#)):

I wanted to clarify the question. In terms of, let's say, when I go back home, are you taking it from that angle?

Imani Mixon ([20:06](#)):

I think that'd be nice. I think present day is nice because I think that is obviously probably way different than what you grew up in.

Patrick Quarm ([20:12](#)):

Cool. Ajara, you can go.

Ajara Alghali ([20:18](#)):

I just want to actually celebrate how you came into it, Imani, because not a lot of people take that time to really ground themselves in what they will experience. I do feel like a lot of people would be like, "Oh, it's going to be people walking down the streets with Ankara fabric," but no, it's not like that. People go about their business. For me, I don't know. I feel like, I might get emotional because I do have some things I like and some things I'm like, "Oh my god, get it together Sierra."

Patrick Quarm ([21:09](#)):

Yep, all the time.

Imani Mixon ([21:13](#)):

Come on, honesty.

Ajara Alghali ([21:16](#)):

When I get off the plane, I just take a big whiff. I just be like, "All right." I try not to live my life in terms of how I would live it here, just in terms of I would expect X, Y, and Z in America, but this is how people live here. I really try to do my best in being present in the fact that Africa is a different place. It's a different continent. It's a different weather pattern. It's all of those things. Don't come with the notion of wanting something that I have 5,000 miles away and want people to accommodate that in Sierra Leone. I take that approach just even piggy backing on what you said earlier. I take that approach in terms of, "All right, girl. You're about to go home. Get it together." That's what I do every time I step on a plane. I think that we need to be conscious and say, "Not everyone lives the way we live here, and that's okay."

Ajara Alghali ([22:45](#)):

I have an example with my husband. I was always like, "Why do you eat... Why do you hold your fork like that? Oh my god. What is going on?" He said to me, "You wouldn't ask a Chinese man how he hold chopsticks." It's the fact that you grow up eating with your hands. If you haven't been exposed or whatever to eating with a fork, so that would be foreign just like for anyone else. For example, a Chinese person eating with a fork, why would you? That is foreign. That's not what you would use, so eating with your hands is the utensil. That's what you do.

Ajara Alghali ([23:47](#)):

I'm honest, and I think that if all black people here in America, if you want to go to Africa, I would say have a conversation with yourself and really try to decolonize your thought about what you're going to see, what you're going to experience because our interpretation of Africa and how we view Africa has always been through a white lens of what they want us to see of Africa. I'm just thinking, "Okay, it's time to peel back that." You have to go into it as a black person wanting to know more about your history. You got to wipe away that whiteness, that Western view of it.

Imani Mixon ([24:43](#)):

Well said.

Patrick Quarm ([24:45](#)):

That's really nice, what you said. I think Africa is a whole mood that you have to set your mind in when you're going. What Ajara was saying is really interesting because Africa's history was written by the West, and the West taught us how to... The people on the continent itself, mostly through the education system, were taught to look at Africa through the Western lens, not through the lens of the African or the inhabitants themselves. It brings about that conflict, but I think for me, the reason why I love home and the reason why I love going back is the sense of freedom and the sense of community. Everyone is your friend. You walk down the street, and it's like, "Hey, what's up?" that kind of thing. You're just free. That kind of freedom is something that...

Patrick Quarm ([25:58](#)):

I always describe America as this façade, but when you dig beyond the façade, you realize that the problems that America has is the same problem Africa has. It's just that when you get to Africa, you see the problems. It's not polished, but when you're in America, it's polished, it looks really nice, but the longer you stay in, you're like, "Man, you know what?" that kind of thing.

Patrick Quarm ([26:28](#)):

I agree with the fact that if you want to visit Africa for the first time, you don't just jump and go. You have to school yourself a little bit, prepare yourself. Anything can take you by surprise. It's a whole new world, and it has its own beauty. It has its own way of presenting itself. I think when you start appreciating that... I had a few friends, whilst I was in Ghana, visit from the US, and that was their first time. When they came, one said that, "Oh, I've been lied to." I was like, "Why would you say that?" He was like, "I had this perception that Africa would be this, Africa would be that, and it's not. It's far beyond what I even thought."

Patrick Quarm ([27:32](#)):

Even during my MFA time, I had some of my colleagues in class, I was just wearing T-shirt and jeans, and I had someone ask me, "Hey man, so do you guys dress like this in Africa?" I'm like, "Oh man. There's Google. Go check it out." These little things, it throws you off sometimes, but it makes you also see where all these old histories have made these perceptions come to be.

Imani Mixon ([28:09](#)):

I feel like there's also a level of globalization at play here because it feels like, as a black person in America, one of the easiest, low pressure ways to interact with Africa is through consumption. If I'm going to listen to this artist, I'm buying these clothes, I'm getting this print... Outside of that, are there things that you think people can do to actively be in support of the culture maybe before they go? I feel like it's just hard. I completely understand why someone would stop at that base level if they don't know what the next level is or if they maybe never even planned on being there, but it feels like there should be more. It feels like there should be a bigger investment somehow.

Patrick Quarm ([29:00](#)):

I think the biggest thing basically would be, like Ajara said, breaking down your thinking. That would be initial investment and self-education, trying to understand. I always have that principle that before you venture into a space, know the history and the story of that space, know something about that space. You don't just throw yourself into it. I think once you do, you become a part of it. That new space embraces you for the fact that you know it. Let's say you get to Ghana. Before you go, you know a few local words like [foreign language 00:29:48] that you need to look up, and maybe they assist you with something. You go like, "Oh, [foreign language 00:29:57]." That alone sets a tone, and it gives that welcoming vibe with everyone because most of it is this community, welcoming community vibe most of the time.

Imani Mixon ([30:15](#)):

For sure.

Ajara Alghali ([30:17](#)):

I definitely concur with everything you said, and I would also even say read books or even blogs in terms of what's going on presently right now. Again, I think that a lot of people have this romanticization of Africa. I've heard this a lot where people, it's like, "Oh, I could be a king or a queen." No, you can't. Stop. That's not happening.

Patrick Quarm ([30:54](#)):

Everyone is called Nena.

Ajara Alghali ([31:05](#)):

Exactly. Actually that's a name. Get it together, but you do feel that presence there when you are there. It's just people going about their black business.

Imani Mixon ([31:24](#)):

Which if we all continue to do, the world would be a much easier place. It's crazy because I feel like that's the same thing we say to people who try to come to Detroit, where they're like, "Oh, I'm here. I'm going to move here," or they're like, "Oh, where's Eminem? Where's Coney Island?" It definitely is some

mirroring, but I think it's just an interesting dichotomy to think about not necessarily being able to touch the place that you've been from. I do want to applaud you both for having an international connection. I feel like there are a lot of artists who wish they could perform or present in a certain way in both places and places that matter to them. I wonder if you can tell me a little bit more about how you've been able to physically be in those places and also continue your work elsewhere?

Ajara Alghali ([32:16](#)):

To be honest, I don't view it as me working. I'm there trying to get more in touch with who I am. Even when I spent time with the National Dance Company of Sierra Leone, I'm always like, "Hmm, how do they keep up with all of the energy they exude because I'd be tired after one or two moves? I'm just tired." I feel like it's going back to keep informed on your practice, keep informed of your... Okay, I'm on the right path, to reaffirm what it is that you do. I think that it is for me because of dance, because of movement. I like to see how people move in the marketplaces, and how people get things done from day to day, and me understanding and knowing that I come from a place of privilege, and wanting to always go back and ground myself in the African-ness of Africa.

Ajara Alghali ([33:54](#)):

That always brings me to the point where like, "Oh hey, it's not as..." People don't really care so much about what you always care about, and that is proof in Africa. I want something done right now, and they're like, "Hold your houses, wait a second. I'm doing something. I'm eating lunch right now." It's like, "You know what?" It's not always about you. I know I have to go 5,000 miles away to get that, but it isn't always about you. I go just so I can be reminded, knocked on the head, that it's not always about you, girl.

Patrick Quarm ([34:46](#)):

For me, I'm telling a story of a place. What best way to tell the story than to be part of the place? That's why I never want to feel disconnected. I've had friends in the US who were born here who have never been to Ghana before or Africa before. They spent most of their lives here, and sometimes I see how they struggle because it's like, "Oh, I'm an American," but within the African community it's like, "No, you're not really that African," and within the American community it's like, "Oh, you're not really that American."

Patrick Quarm ([35:48](#)):

For me, I'm privileged to have both spaces I can easily maneuver. I think that's a lot because for me I'm interested in the idea of having this hybrid identity, so being able to go here when I want, come here when I want, it follows my story. I'm always sitting back, looking at everything going on around me, and translating those experience into the painting, the work. It's like a case study for me. I'm just having fun in both spaces.

Patrick Quarm ([36:33](#)):

I remember one time someone asked me, "So, what country are you a citizen of?" I was like, "I'm a citizen of the world." I'm just moving through the world, and I'm taking the experiences from all places that I go, and I'm translating that." To stay connected to Ghana or Africa is my ultimate goal because at the end, the stories that I'm telling, the narratives and the dialogues that I'm coming up with, it's coming from there, and that's where I get my soul's influence from. It's always good to stay connected there.



Imani Mixon ([37:17](#)):

Yeah, that's beautiful. I think we just need tangible examples, to be able to say, "Oh yeah, I know this dude that goes here and there and makes work the whole time," I think is a lot of the ultimate goal for people, so it's good to hear that it is possible and to see that it's possible, since you're sitting in your studio right now.

Imani Mixon ([37:37](#)):

The beautiful thing for me is Ajara, I met you out in the world. I don't think I knew what you were about, who you were. I just met you as a person, and then slowly, maybe the second time, I saw you dance. I'm like, "Oh, she dances dances." We all dance, but she's dancing. I think the beautiful thing about the way you dance is you dance with your whole body, and there's so much joy and laughter that I feel in your dancing. It just feels very embodied. I'm just curious from when I see you and also right now, whoa re you dancing for?

Ajara Alghali ([38:22](#)):

Wow, I've never been asked that question. Oh, man. I'm dancing for people who may or may not even have paid to see me perform. I'm dancing for my teachers who showed me those steps. I'm also dancing for the people that came before me because in African dance, particularly for me because I am a West African dancer in the tradition, but I do believe in Africa when we speak of dance, it isn't viewed as dance as a five, six, seven, eight type step. It is a communal thing that people do together, and so I am dancing with community. When I gave all of that, who I'm dancing for, that's exactly... I'm dancing in community for community, and so when I dance, I'm engaging with the dancer next to me, winking and whatever because I feel like I draw on that energy and I draw on the energy of those around me.

Ajara Alghali ([39:49](#)):

It's difficult for me to dance by myself. If I'm doing the piece I'm like, "No, no, no, I can't," because I need that energy from my fellow dancer to get me through choreography, moves, steps. Also, for me it would be a disservice if I'm talking about presenting the tradition piece and for me to do it by myself because it isn't done by yourself. Everybody plays a role in what it is that you're doing, what choreography, or what dance you're doing. I do it for all the above and just making sure that I have a connection with everything around me.

Imani Mixon ([40:47](#)):

Which goes back to your point that it's not all about you, just like you said. This is for all of us, and we can all do this. I do just want to talk more about the... Is it a dance conference or event that you just hosted? Can you tell us more about what that was like and how it came to be?

Ajara Alghali ([41:07](#)):

Yes. This came out of my partner and I who we danced together, and we co-founded an organization together. We presented at Duke University for the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance, CADD. We were talking about, we were saying querying classical. What does that mean? How come classical, when you think of classical dance, your mind takes you to Russian style ballet? Classical dance form in itself is something that is the tradition or the tradition of the tradition, meaning there's classical Indian dance, there's classical West African, Zimbabwe, whomever, Thai dance. It is classical dance, however when you think about the actual word, that isn't what you come to mind.

Ajara Alghali ([42:16](#)):

When you talk about world dance, they say folk dance or something. Why is folk dance? I'm not saying anything about folk dance, but what I'm saying is that classical is the foundation of dance period, and even to take a step further if we really truly talk about it, if we want the foundation of the tradition of the tradition, underneath all of that, it came from Africa period. That's what we talked about. How do we start to change the narrative in academia as well to talk about what classical really means? How do you take away that formal training of dance or whatever thing that is tradition and is nature that you learn from someone else through mentor and apprenticeship?

Ajara Alghali ([43:21](#)):

When we came back from that presentation, we were like, "Oh my god. Why don't we do this conference?" Because of COVID, it changed in a way. It was supposed to be a weekend long where we would have panels, et cetera, but it turned into a three week long virtual thing where we had discussions with scholars speaking about dance and how they came into the dance tradition. We also had performances from dance companies.

Ajara Alghali ([44:00](#)):

That's something that I want to continue to do. I want to be able to continue to ask those questions, to have a line of query where we are not trying to fit ourselves into a narrative that wasn't written for us or by us, but we are solidifying our own stuff. Either you want to come and celebrate with us or you don't. We don't give a damn. I feel like it's time for us... Right now, I really don't care about having a seat at the table. What has that really done for us anyway? I'm really interested in how we can push our own narrative. Not even push, we create and move forward into the future our own narratives and stories, and how we want to represent dance and the culture as a whole.

Imani Mixon ([45:04](#)):

I love that. Are the conferences, the stuff, is that still available online? Is that something people can...

Ajara Alghali ([45:11](#)):

It is online. We have a YouTube page where you if you want to sit down, if you got an hour. We were really talking for an hour with teachers out of New York, individuals from California talking about their craft and the history that was behind it. This is something that we'll be doing every other year, so next year we'll do another conference. Hopefully it will be in-person. Even last year, right before the pandemic hit, we had what was called our rule of three where we had three teachers teaching three different types of dance disciplines.

Ajara Alghali ([46:02](#)):

That's what I want to do is really expose, especially black people, to the variety and the traditions of Africa. I'm not even speaking of West Africa, I'm speaking Africa as the continent because what I feel that we miss is that whole connection that was stolen from us. Let's not forget it was stolen from us. It isn't something that we gave away wholly. Here you go, take my culture. No. It was ripped. How we can make that connection and what that connection looks like, that's why I do what I do. I know I just said a lot...

Imani Mixon ([46:53](#)):

We needed it all. I personally needed it all. You brought it on home. Thank you so much. The work sample that you shared Patrick, Eye of the Beholder, for starters can you tell me how this piece came to be and also describe what it looks like for people who can't see it?

Patrick Quarm ([47:18](#)):

Actually this idea, I was watching a documentary one time on YouTube. In the documentary, they were talking about this ancient way of making mirrors in India where that mirror, the technique in making it, the materials are very ancient. It's a small group of people practicing and making that now, and it's nearly extinct. One thing about the mirror is that it reflects your true image. That to me was very interesting. The title of the documentary was actually In The Eye of the Beholders, In The Eyes of the Beholder. It got me thinking, constantly thinking about culture, the invention of culture, the evolution of culture, and what happens with the individuals living within that kind of evolving culture.

Patrick Quarm ([48:23](#)):

If you look at this image, it has two groups. The characters are actually from... It's my sister and husband, and the two kids are actually my nephew and niece, my sister's kids. They live in Detroit. I lived with them for a while, so living with them, looking at this, it got me thinking. My sister and her husband grew up in Ghana, and they moved to the US for school. Now they live here. They have their kids who were born here. They visited Ghana about two or three times in their lifetime.

Patrick Quarm ([49:15](#)):

It was interesting to see those two dynamics because parents trying to connect their kids back to home or back to their, I talked about this, base. The kids are so American-ized, they're like, "Oh mom, oh dad," that kind of thing. At some point, my nephew started asking this interesting questions. If you look at the painting, they are holding a mirror. The mirror is a confrontation from a certain generation, the younger millennial generation towards the older generation, confronting the idea of what culture is or who they are supposed to be within a given space. That was actually what influenced the art. When I'm actually working, it's like I take all these stories around me. It's everyday life, but how can you take this from the experience and translate it into the painting which is really interesting and stuff?

Imani Mixon ([50:34](#)):

It's gorgeous, and I really love the layering of it. I was just talking about the specific places that you were talking about just now, and I love the orange part, I guess the first panel part. It stands out. I'm still trying to figure out what to do with it, but I don't want to push too many meanings on it.

Patrick Quarm ([50:57](#)):

The whole idea is I think about time. I think about history. I always say that history is a sedimentation of events, so what if I can slice through history, a particular event, and reveal what's in the past, at the same time show what's in the present? This whole approach that I've been using in my painting with the idea of layering is a way that it's like I'm slicing through time. I want people to question the relationship between the past and now.

Patrick Quarm ([51:43](#)):

The question who is a modern African or who is a contemporary African? We are always tempted to go back to the whole notion of who an African is, but for me now globalization and industrialization,

everything has been hybridized. There are more layers to it. This layering is my attempt to break down history, so that as a viewer when you come to the work, you go around it. When you're reading a history book, you're wrapping your mind around history. I remember reading something about World War I, World War II and stuff, and I kept wrapping my mind around these events like, "Oh wow, this is crazy, all this stuff." This is my way of physically creating that mind bend within a physical company.

Imani Mixon ([52:48](#)):

Beautiful yeah, the mind bending. My mind is bent. That's gorgeous. This is beautiful. I knew this was going to be a cool conversation, I just didn't know how cool it was going to be, so thank you for staying on this journey. I don't want to keep y'all for too long, but I'm curious if there are any ways that people can engage with your work in the next couple of weeks or so? Any digital things that are happening? If not, that's completely okay.

Ajara Alghali ([53:24](#)):

I have classes in-person. At first, they were at Marygrove, so now we're looking for a space right now. When that is announced, I'll put that online at TeMaTe Dance. That's the dance organization that I have or my own personal page. I want people to get in touch that way. Here, if you want to step your foot in, come to class. Come and let's dance together, so I'll be doing that.

Imani Mixon ([53:58](#)):

Beautiful.

Patrick Quarm ([53:59](#)):

I have nothing coming up anytime soon. I'm currently in New Haven for NXTHVN, an artist residency. In September, I'll be showing during Armory in New York. I think same week, I have a group show in a gallery called Ross+Kramer in New York. That will be interesting, looking at the conversation, because it's curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah, and it's going to focus on a few Ghanaian artists and talking about what we're discussing right now, being African, being in America, being Ghanaian and practicing in America, all that stuff. We're establishing that language through our next exhibition. That will be interesting. If anything comes up, Instagram definitely would be where I would put it.

Imani Mixon ([55:11](#)):

Beautiful, so that was two different shows or one show?

Patrick Quarm ([55:13](#)):

Two different shows. One is in Alfred.

Imani Mixon ([55:16](#)):

Where's?

Patrick Quarm ([55:17](#)):

Armory, The Armory, Alfred, yeah.

Imani Mixon ([55:20](#)):

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Got it.

Patrick Quarm ([55:22](#)):

The other is I think on the 5th of September at Ross+Kramer Gallery.

Imani Mixon ([55:29](#)):

Got it. Beautiful. Well, this was great. I am just so honored to be in conversation. I think originally this was planned for earlier, but I'm so happy this is the bow, the cherry on top. Very cool conversation I was looking forward to for a long time. I'm very honored to be in conversation with you.

Ajara Alghali ([55:51](#)):

Thank you so much. This was a treat. I was able to rant, and I appreciated that.

Imani Mixon ([56:04](#)):

Anytime.

Patrick Quarm ([56:04](#)):

Thank you too. I had so much fun.

Imani Mixon ([56:04](#)):

For sure. I can't wait to see you all in-person. I cannot wait to see people in-person, so I'm going to try to make that happen.

Ajara Alghali ([56:11](#)):

Yes, all right. Thank you so much. It's was such nice meeting you, Patrick.

Patrick Quarm ([56:16](#)):

Likewise. Thank you.

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

Beautiful. Y'all stay in touch. Nice to meet you. Bye. Talk to you soon. Bye.

Imani Mixon ([56:26](#)):

Shout out to the artists and listeners who have joined me on this marvelous journey. I'm your host, Imani Mixon, and this concludes Subject Matters season one presented by Kresge Arts in Detroit and Red Bull Arts Detroit. Thank you so much for listening.