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

I'm Imani Mixon, an arts and culture writer, and host, and this is Subject Matters, a podcast about artists, the worlds they live in and the worlds they wish to create. Cultural work is sacred work. It's spiritual work. It is something we gather over time and share with others as we see fit. But where do we draw the line between cultural admiration and cultural appropriation, and is gatekeeping even worth our time?

Imani Mixon ([00:00:30](#)):

Today I'm speaking with artist Ian Kualii'i and poet Jessica Care Moore. These artists are committed to preserving culture without being exhausted or exploited in the process. Hey y'all, can you please introduce yourselves?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:00:45](#)):

Aloha mai kākou. My name is Ian Kualii'i, currently residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico, or the Tewa name is O'ga P'ogeh Owingeh, which translates to White Shell Water Place in the native language here. I have a bit of family history in this region from my Apache side, but they've basically been out of this region for a few generations. They basically migrated from the area near the Mescalero Reservation and then helped establish Old Town San Diego in Southern California.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:01:23](#)):

And then my Hawaiian and Apache side met in the military on Oahu, just before or I think it was between World War I and World War II. So, yeah, I am a Native Hawaiian Apache individual. I have some British ancestry. I work primarily in hand-cut paper, large-scale installations. I try to embed as much of my Hawaiian religion and culture into my work and embed them in spaces where you typically wouldn't see them. So, yeah, that's the basic nutshell of me, yeah.

Imani Mixon ([00:02:08](#)):

Come on, nutshell.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:02:10](#)):

Wow.

Imani Mixon ([00:02:12](#)):

Yeah, and Jessica, can you introduce yourself, please?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:02:17](#)):

I'm Jessica Care Moore. I'm a poet, interdisciplinary artist, activist, momma. I'm a screenwriter now. I create culture, I protect culture, and I mean, I'm a part of the problem probably, and the solution. I'm just one of the many voices of brown-black folks in this country that write to advance the voices of oppressed people, the underserved communities, and the most beautiful people on the planet.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:02:57](#)):

I also have indigenous roots. I love New Mexico. It's one of my favorite places that I've ever been in the whole world, and so, if I kind of retire in the United States, that would be... I spent some time in Taos,

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actually, and of course, I was in Santa Fe, but I spent most of my time in Taos. I just fell in love. My daddy, my DNA is West African and indigenous people in Georgia and Alabama having babies together.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:03:28](#)):

My family go back to a Cherokee Reservation. So, they're in Georgia, also in Alabama. And so, we don't know much. A lot of it is learned through oral tradition, passed down stories because I have one... I'm actually doing an installation now around my grandmother because I literally only have one picture of my grandmother.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:03:51](#)):

So, I'm doing a large-scale piece with my grandmother's picture duplicated a million zillion times because that's what we deal with, right? We have a picture of someone, a grandmother, a great grandmother, one person from African or indigenous reservation. We have photo albums full of people and then it's passed down through stories.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:04:18](#)):

So, I'm a griot, but I'm a poet at my core. I work with a lot of music and I've recorded a lot of music with hip-hop artists with my own band. Working on a lot of music now. My voice is gone, but I'm happy. I'm just traveling back from Yellow Springs, Ohio, hanging out with some really amazing artists there.

Imani Mixon ([00:04:42](#)):

Beautiful.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:04:43](#)):

[crosstalk 00:04:43].

Imani Mixon ([00:04:43](#)):

I'm happy to have you all, and I feel like those intros kind of touched on what I'm trying to get to, which is like just being in our bodies, we synthesize a lot of history. And even if we don't have the oral history for it or the picture about it, we contain multitudes. I'm really curious because I think a lot of people just assume. They see you physically and they assume that they know which cultures you're a part of.

Imani Mixon ([00:05:10](#)):

So, I'm curious for each of you, what culture or cultures do you feel are uniquely yours? For example, I'm a black woman from Detroit, and that's my target audience for every single thing I do. So, I'm curious about what you all feel about that or how you identify.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:05:31](#)):

You want to go first?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:05:32](#)):

[inaudible 00:05:32]. Yeah, so I mean, I identify deeply and heavily with... I was raised in cultural hip-hop and I was raised in my Hawaiian culture. So, it's those two things that essentially inform who I am as an

individual now. My main mentor was a gentleman named Doze Green who is one of the original members of the Rock Steady Crew and the Zulu Nation.

Ian Kualii ([00:05:58](#)):

So, that's sort of on that side of things and then always like them, always like a lot of them being brought up as five percenters or other practices as far as those levels of spirituality, and knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Making me realize at an early age that I needed to delve deep into my Hawaiian history as well and not just be like a full-on stereotypical hip-hop head. That it's super important to go right back to who you are.

Ian Kualii ([00:06:32](#)):

We talked about oral tradition or oral tradition people. So, it was a privilege for us to write. Cherokee Nation had the first printing press and written language as far as indigenous people of this region are concerned. So, it's like Hawaiian hip-hop all the way. Yeah, and I need to get back home to Hawaii and put my feet back in the soil. The pandemic has put a huge [inaudible 00:07:04]. So, yeah, that's where I'm at.

Imani Mixon ([00:07:08](#)):

Beautiful.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:07:09](#)):

That's beautiful. Hip-hop is such a amazing connection because we're all connected to hip-hop, right?

Ian Kualii ([00:07:15](#)):

Definitely.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:07:16](#)):

Especially my generation are the hip-hop babies. So, I don't know how I identify definitely as a... Well, I mean, I represent Detroit heavily everywhere I've gone. So, I've got the D on my arm and black women, definitely connect to... Black and brown people to me are indigenous people. And so, we're the people of the earth. So, I've been blessed since I was in my early 20s to be able to travel around the world.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:07:45](#)):

So, I went to places like Brazil, I saw myself. I went to South Africa and I saw myself. I've been to Ghana, saw myself. I went to Europe, we're everywhere. Black people are everywhere. Being specifically from Detroit is very important because I come from a predominantly black city. Especially when I was growing up, it was a very heavily populated black city. So, culturally, I'm very rooted in my blackness.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:08:10](#)):

I grew up with a black father in my house and my mother was born in Wolverhampton, England. Not American. Still not American. Grew up in Canada, very different. So, I'm culturally also connected to my Canadian roots, my mother's Canadian roots where she was raised. My mother's born in Wolverhampton, England, so she's British. And so, I've traveled to Wolverhampton where my mother was born and gone back to the corner, the house she was at when she was born.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:08:41](#)):

And so, that's a part of my story too and I think the older I get, the more I talk about it. But I was raised so blackity blackity black, and so grounded in blackness, black culture, black music, that there was no wavering with that. My mother grew up in a house with my two older brothers and my younger sister. So, she was the minority in the crib. She was the only person that wasn't black in the house, and she's not American.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:09:13](#)):

So, I think that's just the difference. I have one parent that wasn't an American and one that was very black, Southern, Alabama-raised, and all that goodness that my father gave to my life, entrepreneurship. But I'm definitely connected to hip-hop culture. I'm a poet of the hip-hop generation. Yeah, I'm a Run DMC baby, I'm Public Enemy baby, I'm a Queen Latifah, MC Lyte. Those are the people I admire, right?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:09:41](#)):

You know? Yeah, for sure.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:09:44](#)):

Yeah. I mean, all of that informs people from my generation in particular who I say like the '70s babies, right? Who came up in hip-hop in the '80s. Got to be around and came up with the MCs from the '90s, what I call the roaring '90s in Brooklyn. Just watching everyone's progression, that's a very, very special culture to be connected to like Rock Steady Crew and all those kind of Zulu Nation, you know what I mean? I was around all of that in New York City.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:10:16](#)):

And so, yeah, I'm connected, but more importantly... And then women. Women. Women of all cultures. Women of... It doesn't matter. Women. Women and girls anywhere I've been able to connect with outside of skin, right?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:10:37](#)):

Yeah, empowering the next generation of the great matriarchs.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:10:40](#)):

Come on.

Imani Mixon ([00:10:42](#)):

Come on, divine feminine. Jessica, you mentioned you feel even more drawn to your culture right now, and that was a question I have for both of you is how do you hold that culture now, and has it changed over time? Or was there a moment where maybe you didn't feel so secure in it or so sure about it? About the communities that you're a part of or that you represent.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:11:09](#)):

So, how has it changed now is what you're asking? Changed because of what?

Imani Mixon ([00:11:15](#)):

Well, you were just talking about how you feel more connected to Detroit and to hip-hop than you ever have before I believe is what you said. So, I'm just curious throughout your career have there been moments where maybe you were not as secure in those identities?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:11:32](#)):

Let me-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:11:32](#)):

Let me say this. So, it's more about what I figured out I could do as an artist more than me feeling more connected. I mean, I've always been connected to Detroit. I was in New York in '95 and people was talking about New York poet and me correcting them like I'm not a New York poet, I'm a Detroit poet. I live in Brooklyn. I live in Harlem, but I'm from the D, right? I'm a very proud Detroiter. I've been like that forever and nothing has changed that, nothing has affected that in any way because I love the city hard and I have for a very long time.

Imani Mixon ([00:12:10](#)):

Ian, what about you?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:12:12](#)):

Yeah, I think for me currently there's a longing to be home back in Hawaii decompressing, being with my family. Can't be with my family. The state was on... Our ancestral home was on lockdown because of COVID so getting out there was impossible. Also, didn't want to put my community in jeopardy by hopping on an airplane and landing in the spot. Our elders like, "Nah, I'm good." So, they're the keepers of tradition, so we got to make sure that they're taken care of first, right?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:12:47](#)):

But now that things are... I'm fully vaccinated. Things are sort of opening up again. My mother and I are planning a trip in Octoberish to visit. She's in the Bay Area still, but go visit the rest of my siblings and aunties and uncles and stuff.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:13:10](#)):

As far as the community here, we're good. We're solid. We connect. There's not too many Hawaiians out here in Santa Fe. Polynesians in general tend to be a smaller population around the pueblo population here, Navajo population here. It's sort of like a strange United Nations of the indigenous community like Santa Fe in general.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:13:39](#)):

So, I'm honored to be one of the only Hawaiians really doing things out here, trying to pull more in. But yeah, embedded, I've always been embedded in my culture. I've never felt uncomfortable. I mean, there's times I'm around some of the old heads from New York and they're having those serious conversations about old [inaudible 00:14:02] or something, and I'm just listening to the history. They're always turning to me and saying things like, "You wouldn't know because you weren't there."

Ian Kualii'i ([00:14:10](#)):

So, I feel sometimes a little uncomfortable about that, but that's just part of the hard lesson as well. Again, listening to the elders and the keepers of the culture, right? The ones that pass down the traditions. So, yeah. I mean, I guess even to an extent, I don't feel really uncomfortable about that either because I'm being given the knowledge, right?

Imani Mixon ([00:14:31](#)):

Yeah. And I feel like just cultural awareness, in general, is trendy right now. It's very sexy to know things or to have been places and all that. Even with your land acknowledgment in the beginning of your intro, Ian, I've been to a lot of other things and places or conferences where that has also become a practice that a lot of people do. I'm just curious about how you feel about that. Do you feel more welcome in a space when that happens or are there ever moments where you're like, "Okay, maybe this space doesn't hold up those ideals," that you want to be?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:15:14](#)):

It's typically when you're in a so-called cultural institution, right? Which is heavily... Their foundation is built off of our cultural patrimony and white supremacy. When you see somebody that is a curator or a director of non-native ancestry or a non-person of color in general, and they're up there. I'm really good at checking their intentions when they're actually doing their land acknowledgments. I think that that's what it is. The words hit you different when they're real, right? Obviously.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:15:55](#)):

And so, yeah, I mean, you can kind of tell who's in it for the right reasons and who's in it just for the lip service, right? For the optics. My partner actually, Felicia Garcia who is the curator of education here at the School for Advanced Research Indian Arts Research Center, she's the one that does [landacknowledgment.org](#).

Ian Kualii'i ([00:16:22](#)):

So, she's had NASA, she's had the Whitney, she's had all these major institutions. Patagonia recently hit her up to do some stuff in regards to land acknowledgment. She always tells them the land acknowledgment is just step one. [inaudible 00:16:37] truth and reconciliation and about understanding our relationship as a human experience in general and you acknowledging whose ancestral land you're standing on.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:16:49](#)):

You need to not just be lip service and optics. You need to take those next steps, fund some sort of indigenous program, especially through somebody like Patagonia [inaudible 00:17:03]. I'm always like it's great when land acknowledgments take place, but what are your next steps? I think is really what it's about.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:17:13](#)):

Ooh, and I can really chime in on this because during the pandemic, after George Floyd was murdered, I mean, sis, listen. So, I already write about this, right? I've been writing about police brutality. I've been writing about what happens to black and brown people's bodies and black women's bodies in police custody. Written poems for Winona LaDuke. I've written about land-

Ian Kualii'i ([00:17:43](#)):

[inaudible 00:17:43].

Jessica Care Moore ([00:17:43](#)):

... and colonized people. So, when that's what your work has been for 25 years and none of these corporations ever cared about you. Never asked me to read no poems, never invited me to sit on any panels. Didn't care if I was sitting in a box on the corner, let alone able to feed my sons on poetry or whatever, are now hitting me up to be the black voice on their panel. Or they're trying to act like they tapped into black lives mattering.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:18:18](#)):

I did a lot of that shit early, right? I said, yes, but I felt like I was supposed to. I was like, "Well, I have to be that voice because they're asking me and I don't want it to be a bunch of people that don't know what this is, so let me say yes." But they really wanted to pay me any money for my time. And so, I said yes to the point of exhaustion. And I already had a book that came out during the pandemic, so all my income was wiped out between... Most of my money for the year is made in February, March, and April. Black History Month, Women's History Month, and National Poetry Month.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:18:56](#)):

My book came out March, We Want Our Bodies Back. Everything gone, my money gone, and then everybody want me to show up and read poems to help inform people about blackness and what it means to be a black woman in this country. Suddenly, they're interested in Sandra Bland or George Floyd's life, right? When I've been... You know what I mean? I'm raising sons scared in this country. They're ever ready, so yeah.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:19:26](#)):

Yeah, we also [crosstalk 00:19:28] responsibility, you know what I mean? As movers within our cultures, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:19:35](#)):

Yes.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:19:36](#)):

In Hawaii, it's called kuleana, right? So, it's like an honor and a privilege to be able to do this work. And so, I often... There's cases where people will come to me and they want me to be, I guess the token Hawaiian, right?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:19:52](#)):

Right, yep.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:19:54](#)):

And the money isn't... It's never really about the money, and believe me, I would love to have great... I'd love to be able to have Hilary Clinton speaking money like six to [crosstalk 00:20:04].

Jessica Care Moore ([00:20:04](#)):

Yeah.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:20:05](#)):

But I'm not in that position, right? And there are cases it's like you get a few hundred dollars to do something, right? And so, I typically will be like, "Oh, it's cool. I'll just take that few hundred dollars and put it back into a community organization," right? Something within the neighborhood or whatever because I feel this greater sense of responsibility to [crosstalk 00:20:25].

Jessica Care Moore ([00:20:24](#)):

Right.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:20:26](#)):

But it is, again, at the end of the day, it's exhausting. We all know because the labor is very real. It's emotionally taxing, and so-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:20:39](#)):

It's draining.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:20:39](#)):

For sure.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:20:40](#)):

And then it's on Zoom or whatever, so I have to look a certain way. So, I'm putting on make-up and I got to be dressed. I got to come looking like I'm together. It's work and having to figure out what work look like as an activist, an artist that was politically charged, my work is very... What that looks like and what to say yes to. How many yeses am I going to do before I have to say, "Well, my mortgage is this amount."

Jessica Care Moore ([00:21:14](#)):

So, that became my bottom line is I need my mortgage. I can't lose my house while I'm trying to help y'all be better humans. I got to keep my house in order. My mortgage is real up in Boston down Edison. I have a son that still wants things. He doesn't understand. Children don't get it, you know what I mean? He knows all my gigs got canceled. He's like, "And? I still want these shoes. I want this gear." He's understanding to a point, but he's a teenager.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:21:46](#)):

Yeah, and so, I had to stop... I had no problem asking for what I deserve, but it took me a minute, right? At the beginning of the pandemic so many of my friends started dying, and so I just... You start losing people, you're not even thinking about money. So, you're like... Poetry and art is a act of service, so I say yes to things and people don't have any money. But I also have to... People understand \$100 is literally just my son wears a size 12 shoe. That's a pair of gym shoes at this point. I can't do anything with that except maybe donating.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:22:25](#)):

For me, donating is putting some shoes on my kid's feet right now that keep growing every four damn weeks. So, yeah, it's the beautiful struggle and the balancing act that you have to play when you're an artist that's of conscience, right? That has a connected community. You want the conversation to go correctly, right?

Imani Mixon ([00:22:47](#)):

Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:22:48](#)):

Yeah, I've learned how to say no though.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:22:50](#)):

I've been a bit wiser too I think now, especially with the pandemic on checking people's intentions as well. Right out the gate just be like, "What's this about?" Or even going in and doing my own personal research on individuals and being like, "I don't know if I can mess with this person because..." I mean, the pandemic has given me that luxury as well, right? I have a bit more time and space to sort of work that all out.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:23:21](#)):

Yeah, and you're picking, deciding with your... Because your time is so interesting during the pandemic. I'm much more paced than I used to be. I used to just be gigging and now I'm like it's very intentional what I actually do and don't do.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:23:38](#)):

Instead of an agent, you're like you're going on a tour for months, right? [crosstalk 00:23:44] majority of that stuff. Now it's like we have the time to really sit back, sort of view things from all these different angles-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:23:53](#)):

Right.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:23:53](#)):

[crosstalk 00:23:53] what we don't want, what doesn't serve our communities, what doesn't serve us, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:23:58](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I spent most of my pandemic in Yellow Springs, Ohio, honestly, with my artist friends. I wasn't going there for money, I was going there for peace. I was going there for fellowship to be around other artists safely, to be able to dance.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:24:18](#)):

[crosstalk 00:24:18] trying to get the financial... Any angel investors out there want to hit me up.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:24:22](#)):

Right, look.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:24:26](#)):

[crosstalk 00:24:26] ancestral homeland in Hawaii so I can have a beautiful place to perpetuate our culture more for the future generations and leave space for individuals such as us, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:24:45](#)):

Yes, can we build that because I want to come to Hawaii?

Imani Mixon ([00:24:48](#)):

Right. Looking at flights right now.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:24:50](#)):

Yeah.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:24:52](#)):

[crosstalk 00:24:52] on that.

Imani Mixon ([00:24:54](#)):

Everything you all are saying just rings very true for me, and I think as somebody who I guess would be considered an early-career artist or creative, it's a interesting thing though because a lot of times you don't know when you're being tokenized until it already happened. Until it's happened three times, you don't know what this is about.

Imani Mixon ([00:25:14](#)):

So, I wonder if you have any advice or wisdom that you've gained so far for somebody who's coming into a space openhearted and intentional and wants to represent their community, but may be thinking, "Hmm, am I being taken advantage of?" Or are there any bullet points that you look out for personally before you agree to something like that?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:25:40](#)):

Depending on who's asking me, I try to get some intel from another person that maybe has worked with the company. I said yes to this interview because you're interviewing me. It's just that simple because I was like, "Imani's doing the interview, okay." That's it for me, right? But if I didn't know who you were, I probably would have not said yes as quickly. So, that's how I look at it. If I don't know who it is, then I have to do a little more investigating before I just say yes and not be afraid to ask for what you're worth. Not be afraid to ask for what you are worth.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:26:17](#)):

I've learned people will say, "Oh, I got this panel." The University of... I won't say their names, asked me to do a panel with some other people and they told me in a group email what they were paying other

panelists. And so, I privately emailed them and said, "If they say yes to that, that's fine, but I don't do anything for that, so I need some different money."

Jessica Care Moore ([00:26:42](#)):

And so, even if you say, "Hey, all the other people are getting paid that," that's on them and I said, "Well, they shouldn't have said yes to that." I've challenged institutions, big-name institutions that way where they tell me this lineup of people that they're getting. People who I know deserve more money than what you're offering me. They're even like legends, like some elders that were doing a gig with me. I said, "You're giving that person that honorarium? Fuck out of here," you know what I mean? I was like, "You shouldn't be giving her that. You give these elders what they deserve and me too."

Jessica Care Moore ([00:27:21](#)):

So, I would say do the digging, know your worth, ask for what you're worth, and if people can't afford you... My boy told me if they can't afford you then they need to afford you. So, if they can't give you the money, then what can they give you? What marketing are you... What am I getting... I don't need any exposure.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:27:41](#)):

Yeah, I mean, how many times have you heard too like, oh-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:27:44](#)):

Exposure.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:27:45](#)):

Throw the price out there too. How many times have you heard, "That's kind of steep," or, "That's too much"? But that's my worth, you know what I mean? You can't afford me, you know what I mean? Not the other way around. Not that I'm too expensive, but you can't afford me. And I completely agree with everything that you're saying.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:28:07](#)):

For me, on the idea of tokenism though especially being one of... There's a bunch of us contemporary Hawaiian artists out there doing things, bobbing and weaving throughout museums and different galleries globally. But we're still very few, right? So, I have again, this great responsibility. Even in certain cases when I feel like I'm being tokenized, I'm like I need to get my foot in this door because if my foot is in this door, then I could bring everybody else in with me.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:28:41](#)):

So, tokenize me, I'll take the hit, then we come in, you know what I mean? And we come in as a unit. We empower each other, right? And so, there's that, but then there is also the flip side of it, right? Understanding what you're worth, valuing yourself. As we all know, so many of us deal with imposter syndrome because we're dealing with these so-called western institutions that have never honored who we are from the jump.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:29:17](#)):

And I think that's the thing too is when I'm being tokenized, I understand how strong I am. I understand how my power can be used to elevate other individuals, right? And so, yeah, let them tokenize me because it's not going to hurt me too much.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:29:31](#)):

Just so you could be a voice to open up the doors for the next, right?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:29:37](#)):

Yeah, so I mean, the reason why I moved out here to Santa Fe was I did the first national endowment for the arts artist residency at a Native American art college here called IAIA. It was like the number one. I was the first one to do it. In my head, I'm like, "Oh, this is incredible." They're not picking an amazing Cherokee artist or an amazing Muscogee artist or an amazing Navajo artist. They're picking this Hawaiian, this-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:30:05](#)):

Yeah.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:30:05](#)):

Yeah. And so, again, I had this great responsibility. I said, "Yeah, I may be the first, but I'm definitely not going to be the last," right? Now on the flip side, and I even did that with this other residency I did here. I'm like, "I may be the first kānaka maoli, Native Hawaiian to receive this residency here at the school for advanced research. I'm not the last dude then to get it." As a matter of fact, the individual that's coming in is a Māhū, a queer kapa-making Hawaiian, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:30:38](#)):

Hawaii, come on.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:30:41](#)):

I mean, that's what we need to do. We need to show everybody, our peoples that there are these spaces and we belong there and we're worthy to be there, right? And we'll continue to be here. Regardless of what sort of oppressive systems have continuously tried to minimize us, right?

Imani Mixon ([00:30:58](#)):

Yeah, and it just feels like there's a season for everything, so my hope is that we don't look back at these last five 10 years and every artist of color is exhausted and has sacrificed and compromised along the way, but that there is that release and that reset and just that investment. I think there is an assumption that we're always already, right? Like, "Oh, she's already black. He's already native. They can do whatever." It's just like, "No, actually, I'd rather not. Treat me gently. Treat me better."

Ian Kualii'i ([00:31:29](#)):

The importance too, one of the more valuable things that I gained from hip-hop culturally was each one teach one. We go through with the each one teach one mentality. So, if I have the time and ability... I have to make myself available to people as well, you know what I mean? That's another part of the great responsibility is there's a lot of these young native artists here in Santa Fe, Albuquerque,

surrounding areas living on the pueblos living off the pueblos. Still very much embedded in their culture dealing with crazy amounts of trauma, right? Multigenerational trauma.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:32:07](#)):

And again, dealing with heavy imposter syndrome, but I always let them know. I'm like, "I'm available. If you need me to write you a letter of recommendation even though I'm a terrible writer, I will do it," you know what I mean? "I will put myself out there for the community. For the next generation." [crosstalk 00:32:27]-

Imani Mixon ([00:32:27](#)):

That's real. No, go for it.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:32:31](#)):

Oh, no, no. I was just like just showing up for each other, you know what I mean? Trying to make sure we make ourselves available especially to the generations coming up because the generations before me showed up for me. So, why wouldn't I carry on that tradition? Why wouldn't I do the same, right? Regardless of how much, I don't know, whatever, illusionary notoriety or whatever comes along with my career, you know what I mean? You always have to make yourself available.

Imani Mixon ([00:32:57](#)):

Yeah, and as I kind of mentioned at the beginning before we really started recording, I wanted to dig into the tension between cultural appropriation and gatekeeping. So, I'm curious for each of you how you personally define cultural appropriation and we can start with you, Jessica.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:33:23](#)):

Wow. I mean, it's a hard one because African American culture, black culture permeated so many different people outside of black culture to the point that you can't really be mad when people, especially youth, are copying what black people do. Black people are cool as fuck. Can I say that?

Imani Mixon ([00:33:49](#)):

Yeah, you sure can.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:33:50](#)):

Yeah, they're cool as fuck, and so, it's difficult... I remember being in Rotterdam years ago, which is right outside of Amsterdam in Holland and it's kind of more heavily populated by black people, people from Suriname, so black and brown folks live there. The black promoter that brought me there asked me, "Jessica, what is black American culture?" He said, "I've heard of Kwanzaa, but what else is there?"

Jessica Care Moore ([00:34:17](#)):

I was like, "Are you serious right now?" He didn't really know, and I said, "American culture." I'm sorry, what'd you say?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:34:27](#)):

Kwanzaa was the barometer for them? They're like their only-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:34:32](#)):

Listen, Tyler Perry was another one. It was very, very limited, but what I told them was American culture is black culture. Anything that's cool and cultural and interesting is us. The way that they sell their cars or their cereal. Everything that they appropriate from us to sell their commercial bullshit comes from black people's culture. It comes from a real, honest, pure, gorgeous, beautiful source, but they take it and turn it into something else, right? And water it down and sell it to people who've never been here, who may never have the money to travel to America.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:35:15](#)):

So, all they're seeing are TV ads or whatever they're given through media. There's so much appropriation of our culture that that would be a lifetime of stress if I focused on it. So, some of it is just like, "Okay, that's a compliment." But I've seen some things that are disturbing. There are some people out there who are using their tanning bed all the time. There are some people that I know of that are definitely inside the culture in a very honest way, I think for themselves.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:35:51](#)):

But just sleeping with people outside your culture doesn't make you down. I would say the political platform is not the bedroom. It's just not. No, go ahead, Ian. Please chime in.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:36:06](#)):

It's super complicated. Our Hawaiian culture as well has been... You still get dashboard bobble hula dancers, you know what I mean? That's-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:36:19](#)):

Got it.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:36:21](#)):

You know what I mean? You still have corporate America still throws tiki parties or luau parties.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:36:28](#)):

Of course.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:36:28](#)):

Yeah, and coconut bras and grass skirts every Halloween.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:36:34](#)):

I mean, that's like party city.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:36:39](#)):

Yeah, for sure.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:36:39](#)):

I mean, it is, and people aren't educated to know that there's nothing wrong with that, and so there's an education problem about what is considered not cool. I can't say I know all of the rules of Hawaiian

culture. I've been to Maui, I've been there just as a tourist regular person coming to just go to the island, right? I've been to Maui, beautiful. Can I get gigs in Maui, please?

Ian Kualii ([00:37:03](#)):

Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:37:05](#)):

Oh my God. All of us want to come to Hawaii, just so we're clear.

Ian Kualii ([00:37:09](#)):

[crosstalk 00:37:09] out there actually does some stuff every once in a while with Questlove. Questlove will go out there and do DJ sets-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:37:16](#)):

Oh, I love him. Yeah.

Ian Kualii ([00:37:18](#)):

... more like a beautiful thing where folks are getting gigs out there, which is great. Yeah, [crosstalk 00:37:24].

Jessica Care Moore ([00:37:24](#)):

Yes, nobody says no to those gigs. They can have the low honorarium. That's the people that can show up, but not all the [inaudible 00:37:31]. You'll be like, "I'm good. Do I have a hotel? Is it on the beach?" I think there's a fine line, you know what I mean? But I don't drive myself crazy with it because I know some of it is a lack of education.

Ian Kualii ([00:37:47](#)):

For sure.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:37:47](#)):

I don't think people are always intentionally trying to have malice. So, I try to kind of my high [inaudible 00:37:54] because I can culturally make a mistake. I'm not perfect with every culture because I've learned about culture through existing, through curiosity, not because I was taught anything about myself let alone anybody else inside of school.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:38:09](#)):

So, kids aren't learning about other cultures. Maybe a few very progressive educational institutions. But for the most part, the public school system in this country sucks, sucks, and these kids are really... You're fighting a battle against the bullshit, the history we're taught. We're taught about indigenous people.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:38:28](#)):

Really, I have a 26-year-old earth son and my son that's 14. I'm having the same fights with teachers about how things are taught. The Native American genocide. The genocide that happened that made this country what it is. The Middle Passage is not taught correctly. Slavery is not taught correctly.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:38:49](#)):

I remember in my history book it was two pages. The Middle Passage was two pages, and it was like one of the lines was, "Slavery in America wasn't how people depict it." It's like they like slavery. They were friends with their masters. Crazy.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:39:08](#)):

And then they mention the invention of the cotton gin or something, you know what I mean? And then that was it.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:39:13](#)):

Right, that's it.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:39:14](#)):

That was it. And say with Hawaiian history, it was like you got King Kamehameha up to our final queen and the overthrow by indigenous people and that was it. It was only a little section and everything else was like, "Power to America now." Modern American history, not even modern Hawaiian history today.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:39:35](#)):

No, and it's so many problems too with that. I've seen some good docs about Hawaiian culture and what's happened to the indigenous people there. So, not cool.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:39:46](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I just did a bunch of research on my family's kuleana lands. The land commission awards that we were given by our monarchy. My family has seven parcels, but because we can't get the TMK, the tax map key number to it, we have a harder time trying to go through and fight them for title. So, these are seven pieces of land that belong to my family.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:40:13](#)):

Yeah, they belong to you, absolutely.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:40:15](#)):

[crosstalk 00:40:15] allodial titles. They can be sold by family members at certain points, but they're allodial titles. They're given to us by the crown of Hawaii, by the royal family. But yeah, cultural appropriation it's crazy with Hawaiian culture too. Just surfing culture, in general, it's a multibillion-dollar business as well. That's Polynesian.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:40:37](#)):

Arguably it could be Peruvian. The Peruvians did the reed boats that they would take fishing [inaudible 00:40:45] and everything, and then they would just ride them back. But what we know as surfing is predominantly known as Polynesian stuff. And then even like there's this crazy company called... What are they called? Aloha Poke?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:03](#)):

Oh, stop.

This transcript was exported on Jun 30, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:03](#)):

Aloha Poke in Chicago.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:06](#)):

Poke? Chicago.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:10](#)):

And they tried to copyright the word aloha.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:14](#)):

Stop it.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:15](#)):

No, I'm not even playing.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:16](#)):

Oh, they crazy.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:17](#)):

And so, yeah, of course, I mean, you don't want-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:22](#)):

Did they do it?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:24](#)):

I think that they backed out last minute. When you have a bunch of big Polynesians on your [crosstalk 00:41:30]-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:31](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I like that.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:34](#)):

... things kind of change a bit.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:35](#)):

Good, fall all the way back on the aloha.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:42](#)):

People forget too that aloha means a multitude of things including goodbye.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:41:51](#)):

I love you.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:41:53](#)):

Aloha spirit is very real amongst our peoples. Our Māori cousins, they have aroha. It's like the same exact word just a flip and variation on the Polynesian language, right? But it's very much a huge cultural thing. It's also hugely appropriated.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:42:14](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), of course, it is.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:42:16](#)):

Hugely appropriated. I think our language more so than so many of the other elements are. Even when you talk about the word tattoo, it comes from the Polynesian word tatau, you know what I mean? So, there's so many crazy interesting little things in regards to cultural appropriation.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:42:39](#)):

The way that I go about it though is because I believe in sharing knowledge, right? You share [inaudible 00:42:48] whenever you can, right? And part of that is even not so much calling folks out on maybe... Everybody says calling people in, right? So, in a sense, calling people in being like, "Yeah, maybe that's not the correct manner to go about things. Maybe we can do this instead," right?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:43:05](#)):

Yeah.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:43:06](#)):

Because I mean, I don't always have to try to crack skulls. Sometimes I could maybe do a little ancient brain surgery to release a little pressure on the-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:43:18](#)):

Right. Right, right.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:43:19](#)):

Let the blood flow properly or something.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:43:21](#)):

Hilarious. But calling people in, I think, is beautiful, and I've heard the term. I think it's important to have that balance, right? Because that's what I mean because I'm a hothead, so calling people in is a part of my practice. It's also a self-care practice so I can just calm my little self down because I'd have to remember how uninformed people are about so many things. And so, I try to come to approach situations like that, yeah.

Imani Mixon ([00:43:49](#)):

And I'm curious about the line between open dialogue and gatekeeping. Are there certain things that should absolutely be held, since we've been talking about the beauty and the power of the cultures that we belong to and how they've been sort of rehashed and reintroduced through us through a white gaze? When do we get to gatekeep?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:44:11](#)):

I mean, our spaces aren't for everyone, you know what I mean? People have to be vetted in certain things. Certain ceremonies in my culture, you don't get to do that. You're not allowed access to the ceremony, you know what I mean? You're not vetted, it doesn't belong to you. Yeah, so in that sense... And I don't know even consider that gatekeeping, I consider that more cultural preservation than anything.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:44:44](#)):

Cultural preservation.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:44:45](#)):

Yeah, we are great survivors, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:44:50](#)):

Right.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:44:50](#)):

Throughout everything that we've been handed and then for people to feel like it's okay for them to come after certain cultural practices of hours that they have no business stepping into, you know what I mean? Or if they're really about that, go seek a real kumu, a real teacher in our culture, you know what I mean? And see if you're allowed to gain permission somehow. Let them vet you, you know what I mean? But don't just go through.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:45:20](#)):

Right now, what's happening in Hawaii, we have this huge influx of people moving to Hawaii that work in the tech industry because they can work remotely now, right? Because of the pandemic, and because they have so much money, they were just buying land. It was like a land grab thing. And then they were bringing their weird Burning Man new age [inaudible 00:45:42] of Hawaii, right?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:45:45](#)):

And then part of that was also like, "Well, since we're here, and Hawaiians, we have this amazing healing practice of ho'oponopono, we'll just start adopting that, but without even being vetted by anybody." This strange new-age version of something, and it's like they don't even know what they're doing. They have zero knowledge in it.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:46:09](#)):

But again, seek those elders, seek those teachers if you're truly interested in the culture, right? If you're truly interested in our culture and pushing things forward and you want to represent us to an extent, you know what I mean? You'll never fully be us, but you can represent us to an extent like we lend parts of our culture, then it's your responsibility now to elevate us as a culture.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:46:33](#)):

Our traditional tattoo practices, it's everywhere now. You have all these individuals in Portland, Oregon, even some here in Santa Fe, New Mexico that they buy a book that has symbolism of indigenous tattoo

work inside of it and then they feel like just because they own the book that they have [crosstalk 00:46:53] to use these symbols.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:46:57](#)):

"I bought the book."

Ian Kualii'i ([00:46:57](#)):

Yeah, they have no understanding what the symbols represent, right? This is my genealogy and protection and travel and all these other beautiful [inaudible 00:47:04]. They know zero about that. They get the book and they're like, "It looks great. It's what's hot right now, let's do it." Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:47:12](#)):

That's so interesting. So, I think the only way to combat gatekeeping because there's gatekeeping within cultures too. I've dealt with gatekeeping with black people, so it ain't just outside culture. Gatekeeping is our own people gatekeeping other people who look like them. And so, I've dealt with a lot of that and because I'm a poet and academia is different than performance art.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:47:41](#)):

Because I do so much on stage as a performance artist, I've had to push back against academics who try to call me a spoken word artist or whatever and not a poet. So, I fought against that label hard. Even though I'm a spoken word artist, but you're not going to call me a spoken word artist.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:48:00](#)):

You're not limited to-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:48:02](#)):

I'm not just that. Well, I'm a poet first and I'm a writer first and they don't want to call black women poets poets because black women poets are scholars, are educators, are institution builders. We're a lot of other things. We're activists. We're not just juggling on a stage. We're not just word magicians, you know what I mean?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:48:24](#)):

I do love the fact that when you initially presented yourself in this talk, you were like, "I'm a griot," you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:48:32](#)):

Yeah, griot. I like the word griot.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:48:36](#)):

Because you can't just encapsulate what a griot is. There's so many other aspects to being a griot, right?

Jessica Care Moore ([00:48:43](#)):

A griot, right? Storyteller passing it down. You're a teacher.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:48:46](#)):

When it comes to our languages and our terminology, they're living languages where I feel like when we get into English and the American homogenized way of [crosstalk 00:48:56]-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:48:56](#)):

Yes. Yes.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:48:57](#)):

... so much of its life. So, they compartmentalize so many things, they silo so many things, but it's so much bigger than.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:49:04](#)):

It's so much bigger, and that's why you have to build institutions though. And so, I've been dedicated to be an institution builder because I'm going to build Black Women Rock since y'all don't want to support women in rock and roll. I'm going to create an institution that supports black women in rock and roll, puts them as headliners on the concert. Not because they have a Grammy, but because they are better than everybody that has one because they are unrecognized.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:49:32](#)):

Don't get radio play on black urban radio because they're not singing R&B with two background singers and a dance troupe or whatever because they're hardcore rockers. And created the music genre, but don't get any credit for it. I just focus on creating the institutions like Moore Black Press. My poetry press started in 1997 with The Words Don't Fit in My Mouth. Then I published Saul Williams and I published Ras Baraka.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:49:59](#)):

I started publishing the poets because nobody at that time was looking for black poets of my generation. They just wanted us to be spoken word artists. They just wanted us to be spoken word artists so people would record us, but they weren't publishing our work and didn't look at us as part of the literary canon because the canon's very white and male.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:50:21](#)):

I've been dedicated to blowing up the canon for a long time and pushing back against labels that would push me out of that space. Because I was like, "No, you're going to acknowledge me on all platforms. That's what you're going to do. You're going to acknowledge me as a writer and as a poet and a black woman at the same time.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:50:37](#)):

And yeah, I can rock with a full jazz solo project. I can share a stage with a Talib Kweli or a Mos Def or whoever just fine and be able to hold my own on the mic, but you're not going to tell me who I am, you're not going to name me. And so, that's been my pushback in that way as far as gatekeeping. But I definitely have felt gatekeeping from men in the industry, promoters who want to sexualize our conversation. Call me sweetheart nonstop sweetheart. "How many times have I said I'm not your sweetheart? I'm not that. I'm not baby. I'm not sweetheart. I am that to some people, but not you. You're just the person that gets to write me a check."

Ian Kualii'i ([00:51:27](#)):

[crosstalk 00:51:27] power of language, you know what I mean? And [crosstalk 00:51:29] step in with that stuff. And the power behind the language, so-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:51:36](#)):

Absolutely. So, it's a lot, but the academic piece has been a deep one, so we have to push back about some of those labels keep us out of spaces.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:51:45](#)):

Yeah, I think academia is always the biggest hurdle, and because they're so set in their ivory tower perspectives you know what I mean? And you can't even... The more you chip away at any one of those pillars, it's still erected pretty tall, so-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:52:03](#)):

And they need us though. One of the best things I've done in the pandemic was a three-week residency at Grinnell College, and it was fascinating, and the students... I was doing masterclasses. I was hitting them babies on top of their head left and right. They done never heard of Amiri Baraka or Sonia Sanchez. Don't know Lucille Clifton or Audre Lorde. They didn't know any of those people, Gil Scott-Heron. My students were crying.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:52:29](#)):

[crosstalk 00:52:29] Scott painting on the wall-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:52:30](#)):

They were crying. What'd you say?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:52:32](#)):

I saw your Gil Scott painting up on the wall right there.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:52:34](#)):

Oh, yes. Gil Scott, where is it? Oh my God. There's my barber, right? Gil Scott-Heron. That's a Alfonso Cox painting, yeah, right? And there's Assata Shakur checking us out.

Imani Mixon ([00:52:45](#)):

Completely covered.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:52:46](#)):

They don't know who she is either. I taught Assata Shakur, so that's my poetry class. They learned about Assata Shakur and Amiri Baraka. We talked about imperialism and prison industrial complex. But these are things these kids are like seniors and juniors a lot of them, so they're really smart, but still largely uninformed, culturally.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:53:07](#)):

So, I remember Talib's mom, Dr. Brenda Greene, from Medgar Evers College, right? National Black Writers Conference interviewed me during the pandemic. She's like, "Well, Jessica, what were you teaching in your poetry course?" And I was like, "I was teaching culture." I can't teach poetry. You can't write poetry if you don't know culture. You don't know culturally who built me, who made me who I am then you really ain't going to...

Jessica Care Moore ([00:53:33](#)):

People talk about they good poets and I can read two poems and know that they have read nothing, but they think they're the shit. All right? I'm like, "Baby, I can tell you ain't read nothing but you and your friends' poems at the open mic. That's it."

Imani Mixon ([00:53:49](#)):

Yeah, and I did want to direct our attention to the works that you both sent via email, and I think they're in beautiful conversation with each other specifically around displacement and cultural preservation as we spoke about before. So, I'm going to send it in the chat. This is Ian's work and it'd be great if you could tell us more about Monument Pillar installation.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:54:16](#)):

Can we look at it?

Imani Mixon ([00:54:17](#)):

Yeah, for sure. Take your time.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:54:20](#)):

Yeah, I got into yours earlier too and I was like that's what's up.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:54:23](#)):

Oh my God, you're a genius. Dude, you are a writer, you just write with your... You write with your mind. You're writing with the visuals. You're amazing. Oh my God, I'm so stupid. I got to look up all your work right now. I'm about to completely stalk you on all the things. Amazing, but I love that you're saying it's a memory because it reminds me of this... Well, I don't want to... I want him to talk about his work, but I'm really inspired to see that you're talking about memory and created those beautiful visual works because that's what I mean about me.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:55:00](#)):

My father was born in 1924 in Alabama, so my daddy would have been 96 this year. So, my father is of grandfather age. He was older. So, my grandmother and grandfather, his mother and father are late 1800s. So, that's what I'm saying, I don't got all these photo albums. I have to use ancestral memory to know who my grandmother is, to know who my grandfather is.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:55:31](#)):

Yeah, I think whispers are strong though, you know what I mean? I always tell people, and I think that's what it is for me too when I step inside. When I step back into myself and I actually listen to the genetic whispers, I have clarity and then I was told that the more you ignore your genetic whispers, the more

they become genetic yelling. And the last thing you want is your ancestors screaming. The ones that are past and are better placed to serve you to be yelling. That's the last thing you want.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:56:04](#)):

So, it's good to kind of take those moments, step inward, listen to those multiple generations that exist within you. Figure out how you want to channel that and transform it into something. Whether it be your power of word or you on stage with the rock band projecting and reclaiming that space of black women who created rock and roll, you know what I mean? [crosstalk 00:56:34] where it's at, you know what I mean? But always trying to pay attention. Even if it's like... You don't have to totally make out the transmission, right? [crosstalk 00:56:43]-

Jessica Care Moore ([00:56:43](#)):

That's right.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:56:44](#)):

And train yourself to slowly [inaudible 00:56:46] in the transmission, right? But it's all there. It's all there for you.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:56:50](#)):

I mean, I wouldn't even be able to exist if I wasn't listening to them. Talking about them whispers. My ancestors are everywhere all around me at all times. That is the reason why I've been able to use my imagination to either be the person that I am right now or to create the art that I create without fear is knowing that I'm not alone because I know they're with me.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:57:14](#)):

But having to reach... Yeah, paying attention to those... I mean, they're all in my work. Brother, I wrote so much about West Africa that I forgot that I hadn't been there. So, when I went to Ghana for the first time to take my son, I forgot that I was taking myself. I was like, "Oh, I'm taking my son to Ghana. My son's going to West Africa. This is amazing for him." It was all about me taking my son because I was like, "I already been there. I've been to Ivory Coast. I've been to Senegal. I've felt all of it."

Jessica Care Moore ([00:57:46](#)):

Then I had to pull back and like, "Jessica, this is your first time, girl. This life you're just getting there." So, my first life experience. But I had to remind myself because I carry so much. I have information that I didn't read in books that I know was passed down through ancestral memory.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:58:04](#)):

Sure.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:58:04](#)):

And so, I honor that and I have my entire life and that's why... It's good to know other people do because you think you're crazy, you know what I mean?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:58:17](#)):

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Let's be honest. We are a little crazy.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:58:19](#)):

In the best kind of way. Look at your work. You're a genius.

Imani Mixon ([00:58:23](#)):

Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([00:58:25](#)):

Do you have books? I want to know everything. I'll do it after the interview. I'm going to find all the things.

Imani Mixon ([00:58:29](#)):

Yeah, and Ian, can you just, for people who can't see the video that was shared, can you explain what is included in it and how it came to be?

Ian Kualii'i ([00:58:38](#)):

Right. So, it's the first iteration of works that I'm doing in the series called Monument Pillar and they play directly into the problematic monuments that exist around the globe. Primarily uplifting and perpetuating white supremacy, right? So, the idea was to... Monuments that exist in these places, so let's take for instance the actual piece that we're discussing here is on the left-hand side is a 26-foot by 12-foot wide.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:59:18](#)):

This one is hand-cut vinyl. I usually do hand-cut paper, but the museum that I was doing it in wouldn't allow me to do it in paper because the process involves other types of spray adhesive propellants to adhere the paper to the wall, so I had to figure out a different process of doing it. But it's a 26-foot monument-like sculpture of King Kamehameha III who is the one that wrote our constitution, original Kingdom of Hawaii constitution in Hawaii.

Ian Kualii'i ([00:59:51](#)):

To the right of him is Captain James Cook who was the British navigator who discovered, right? Discovered Polynesia and so many different places in the Pacific, and his monument is inverted. It's as simple as that. That simple language, right?

Jessica Care Moore ([01:00:14](#)):

I love it.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:00:14](#)):

So, trying to put it in the face, and this was at the entryway as you're going into the main gallery of this museum. It was the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, which is a native arts museum. And so, they had an exhibition which was called Larger Than Memory, which was a phrase that was off of my aunty Joy Harjo who's the third term now US poet laureate. Holding it down for Muscogee peoples-

Jessica Care Moore ([01:00:50](#)):

Yes.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:00:51](#)):

... and badass indigenous women like our great matriarchs again. Shout out to all of them. But it was in one of her poems. I believe it was her poem Grace and it makes mention of how we exist larger than memory or whatever. I forget exactly, but it was called Larger Than Memory: Contemporary Art from Native North America.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:01:16](#)):

And it was beautiful. It was an exhibition that had Kent Monkman in it. It had all these serious like Jeffrey Gibson who's incredible. And then the little old Hawaiian, and that was in the mix. And so, I was super honored because, again, that whole thing with gatekeeping and being tokenized to an extent. Not so much for this, but being able to put your foot in the door and keep the door open for other people to come in as well. There's that.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:01:43](#)):

But the idea was to play with the idea of especially in our ancestral homeland, right? In Hawaii, equity and a equitable future for us. Instead of being considered second-class citizens if even that on our own ancestral homelands, put these images right into the face of the viewers and monumental, massive. They're hand-cut 26-foot each, you know what I mean?

Ian Kualii'i ([01:02:18](#)):

And so, they'll see this strong Hawaiian male greeting them, and then they see the inverted Captain James Cook, right? On the flip side. So, it's automatically triggering. Why is this one upright? Why is this one inverted? And immediately make people question. It's such a basic visual language too. It's not too complex, and I think that's something I've learned as well, as I get...

Ian Kualii'i ([01:02:49](#)):

I used to, especially studying under Doze Green from Rock Steady Crew, he's one of those individuals where we did our studies in trying to understand ancient Mesopotamia, trying to understand the orisha. All these different elements, right? And then everything he would do was like serious ciphers, right? Codes everywhere within his works that as I got older, I started simplifying my thing and trying to figure out a way that I could take a visual language to kind of just [crosstalk 01:03:26] these things such as equity and representation within space. And challenging those white supremacist narratives of monuments [crosstalk 01:03:38].

Jessica Care Moore ([01:03:38](#)):

[crosstalk 01:03:38].

Ian Kualii'i ([01:03:38](#)):

Yeah.

Imani Mixon ([01:03:40](#)):

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Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:03:41](#)):

Visual language is an important... Yeah.

Imani Mixon ([01:03:44](#)):

That's beautiful, and I just love the scale of it. I kind of wish I could see it in person, but it feels right. It feels right that that's what you made, so thank you so much for sharing it.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:03:55](#)):

[inaudible 01:03:55].

Jessica Care Moore ([01:03:55](#)):

Beautiful.

Imani Mixon ([01:03:55](#)):

And I know-

Jessica Care Moore ([01:03:55](#)):

It's-

Imani Mixon ([01:03:55](#)):

I'm sorry, go ahead.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:03:58](#)):

No, I was going to say it made me think about my first conceptual art installation. I worked with Radcliffe Bailey. I don't know if you know Radcliffe, Ian, but he's a master artist. Talk about battling some fears, I did a residency with him. I didn't know why he chose me to do this residency because I'm a poet, but I ended up being with all these visual artists.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:04:19](#)):

It was the Atlantic Center for the Arts where they bring seven writers, seven painters, and seven musicians to work together, and they're grouped and then do collaborations. I was like I became the queen of collaboration because I was with the painters and the visual artists, and I didn't know why.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:04:37](#)):

But you paint, that's the reason why, you know what I mean? You paint with words too, you know what I mean?

Jessica Care Moore ([01:04:42](#)):

Yeah, Radcliffe just really became a teacher for me and got me not scared to play visually a little bit. It took me to go thrifting with him and I found this... I went through this whole transformational... It was really a deep experience for me and it was in the art library. He was showing me all these things that people have done with language, structured things, built monuments, and things out of language.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:05:09](#)):

And I was like, "Oh, wait, I'm a conceptual artist." And he was like, "Exactly, that's why you're here because you can think. So, you can make art, Jessica." And so, he changed my life really and I went crazy. I ended up taking over the sculpture studio and did my first conceptual art installation. But I love how you inverted the monuments because I took the word canon and my installation was called Nonac, which was canon backwards.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:05:34](#)):

Some of the political posters and broadsides I created were all these names of what I consider the canon to be, which was Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Nikki Giovanni, and all their names are forward. And all the old white men are backwards, T. S. Eliot, and Whitman, and Frost. All these men that are pushed on us as the template for what literary greatness is are all backwards.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:06:02](#)):

So, I love that idea of flipping the shit upside down to get people to go, "Oh, so what are you trying to say?" Anyway, but it made me think about my first time.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:06:14](#)):

[crosstalk 01:06:14] always. Always [crosstalk 01:06:16].

Jessica Care Moore ([01:06:16](#)):

Yeah.

Imani Mixon ([01:06:16](#)):

Yeah, and I wanted to get into your work that you sent, Jessica, called Where Are the People?

Jessica Care Moore ([01:06:22](#)):

Where Are the People? Thank you. I mean, it's a poem from my book we want our bodies back and I wrote it. I dedicated it to my friend Kwame who unfortunately died in a motorcycle accident who was called the King of Cass Corridor. So, I live in Detroit and I went to Wayne State. And so, Wayne State's the neighborhood that was considered the Cass Corridor, which is where you could find college students, heroin addicts, Vietnam vets. Everybody is on the street in the Cass Corridor.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:06:51](#)):

Since I've come home, I've been home now I think it's 14, 13 years now, 14 years, and I've watched Detroit change a lot. Decolonization, a lot of gentrification, and Where Are the People is about me and King going to a new pizza place in Cass Corridor, getting a pizza with pepperoni. We don't eat it. So, we literally drove up and down Cass trying to find someone to give some food to, which maybe even five to seven years ago would have been quite easy.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:07:24](#)):

We couldn't find anyone and it was just... It blew me away. I was like, "I can't find anyone to give food to in the Cass Corridor." And so, I wrote Where Are the People? I said, "But where are the people? Where did they go?"

Audio ([01:07:37](#)):

Where is the sage, the holy water? Where is the black imagination located? How much does it cost per square feet to rent there? Is there a rent to own your black imagination option? Where are the-

Jessica Care Moore ([01:07:48](#)):

And Trey Simon, shout out to him singing on that song. That recording is from WDET. We did that live in the studio at DET, which is in the Cass Corridor. And so, it's me as a person that's left Detroit, was gone for 12 years, came back home, and was genuinely looking for my city. I was like, "What did they do with my people?" The people that inspired me the way I would be inspired on the A Train going to Harlem or going into Brooklyn. The people that make up humanity are not just the people who can afford to live in the big houses.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:08:22](#)):

It's the people who are displaced, right? The people who... They have stories. And so, as a poet, you can't just overlook that. And so, that's what that piece is for. But in the video, I purposely highlight businesses that are there that honor the neighborhood and are new. Still, the Avalon was there before gentrification. The woman-owned business, the bakery. I went into Third Man Records, Jack White's place because everything on Jack White's everything says Cass Corridor. He could have easily said Midtown, but every-

Ian Kualii'i ([01:08:58](#)):

He bought the Masonic as well, right?

Jessica Care Moore ([01:09:01](#)):

I wouldn't be surprised if he did. I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised if he did, and I hope so. I ain't mad. I like him. Do more Jack White. We need you. But I like that he decided to be right there on Third. He grabbed Third Man Records making vinyl right in the middle of Detroit. And Source Booksellers. Janet who survived gentrification who was in a smaller space who went to a even bigger space during gentrification and stayed in the neighborhood.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:09:30](#)):

And Que's Kitchen it was a new space. My sister, Quiana, who has the black vegan... It was a black woman-owned vegan spot right in New Center Area. And so, I wanted to just show that this change can be okay if it's done respectfully and that some of the people that are a part of the change look like the people who built the city and it's kind of about that balance. You're screaming, "Where did all these Goddamn bike lanes come from?"

Jessica Care Moore ([01:09:57](#)):

And I had to tell people, "Listen, I ride a bike." So, I ain't against bike lanes, but I'm acknowledging the fact that y'all go into spaces and don't ask the people if they want them. It's okay to have a bike lane, but you should ask the people on the street if they want the bike lanes.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:10:13](#)):

I was guilty [crosstalk 01:10:13] bike lane.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:10:16](#)):

What'd you say?

Ian Kualii'i ([01:10:17](#)):

I was guilty of using that bike lane.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:10:19](#)):

Yeah, man, I ride a bike, you know what I mean? I ride a bike all over the city. So, I like bike lanes. I have a kid, great. But it's like the intrusiveness of adding things to neighborhoods without talking to community first is the issue. Yeah, I'm not anti bike lane. I'm just anti not community involvement [crosstalk 01:10:39].

Ian Kualii'i ([01:10:41](#)):

[crosstalk 01:10:41], especially within the Native American and Native Hawaiian community about consent, not just consult. [crosstalk 01:10:51]-

Jessica Care Moore ([01:10:51](#)):

Consent, let's go.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:10:53](#)):

Yeah.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:10:54](#)):

Permission.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:10:57](#)):

Yeah, instead of just you don't consult... Because we know the formula. We've seen it 100 times over, 1,000 times over where like, "Okay, we need to get this done and we can find maybe the one or two people that could speak for the community," right?

Jessica Care Moore ([01:11:09](#)):

Yep.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:11:10](#)):

Instead of actually engaging with the whole community.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:11:11](#)):

Exactly.

Imani Mixon ([01:11:13](#)):

Yeah, that's great, and I don't want to keep you all for too much longer. I love that we dug deep and got into this for real, real quick. But I would love to hear if you could share just how people can support you or follow you or if you have any upcoming events in person or digitally that we should know about.

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Jessica Care Moore ([01:11:32](#)):

Okay. Yeah, so August 6th I'm doing Concert of Colors at the Charles H. Wright Museum. They're having a limited capacity audience. I'm not sure if it's sold out yet, it might be. I'm supposed to be with Roy Ayers at the DIA in July. I don't know if that's still happening, but August 6th I know is and it's me and DeSean Jones, a saxophone player who's been composing strings around my work during the pandemic.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:12:01](#)):

I've been doing a lot of collaborations in the pandemic, so this was kind of our first time doing a show called Wild Beauty, which is a nod to Ntozake Shange's last book before she passed away. It's about isolation, survival, love, all these things. It's more kind of I guess... I don't know, it's a different space for me. I'm getting my Sylvia Plath on and it's going to be good and interesting.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:12:28](#)):

And so, I'm doing that and I got my first feature film. He Look Like a Postcard is being shot in Detroit in September. Qasim Basir... I haven't even announced that he's doing it to anyone, so I'm telling you, Imani.

Imani Mixon ([01:12:41](#)):

Okay, thank you.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:12:43](#)):

Yeah, you're hearing it here first that Qasim Basir signed on to direct and Marvin Towns is producing and we have some really... Not announcing the cast yet or casting. And really excited. It's my first screenplay that's coming to life literally using black art and beautiful Detroit as the backdrop for the film very purposely.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:13:04](#)):

So, yeah, my screenwriting. I've been wanting to be a screenwriter for a long time. Please support. Follow me on Instagram. It's kind of the only social media outlet I kind of like still.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:13:15](#)):

[inaudible 01:13:15] right after this I'm going to give you that follow.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:13:18](#)):

Please. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Thank you. Thank you.

Imani Mixon ([01:13:21](#)):

All the love.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:13:22](#)):

Yeah, I can't wait.

Imani Mixon ([01:13:24](#)):

Beautiful. And then, Ian, what about you?

Ian Kualii'i ([01:13:27](#)):

I'm in the studio just trying to... I've been knocking out a bunch of commissions. I've got this huge body of work that I've been wanting to do. We go back to the genetic whisper turning into genetic yell. There's some pieces I've been wanting to do for 15 years and I'm finally getting around to them because it got super loud in my ear, but I've got these post-it notes on my board right now of one, two, three, like five pieces.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:14:00](#)):

I just finished a study of one of them, which is... You can kind of see it there. It's this ko'i or adze. It's like our traditional axe and our coconut cordage and kapa and everything with it, but it's got a book to it and it's basically about how us as native Hawaiians, how will we talk about our own future. So, I'm playing into that right now.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:14:23](#)):

Yeah, I mean, that's kind of my existence. Just in the studio working. I have another... I just collected a log that I need to carve out for a kua, which is like a wooden anvil for that visiting artist that's coming in for the residency. The other Native Hawaiian artist. [Hawaiian 01:14:44], they're coming in on the 15th, but I have to create this wooden anvil so they can actually make their traditional kapa, which is our cloth bark stuff, so I got to get on that. Yeah. Other than that, you can just follow me on Instagram Ian Kualii'i.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:15:02](#)):

Is it your name just as it is right here? For my own-

Ian Kualii'i ([01:15:08](#)):

I'm the only one on the planet too, so it's like you just type in Ian K-U, and it'll probably just pop up.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:15:14](#)):

And it'll come up... Okay.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:15:14](#)):

Most likely. But yeah, that's where I'm at. If you want to... I mean, there's always issues happening in Hawaii around water and land rights. I advise anybody that has any sort of admiration for our people, for our culture, for Hawaii, even if it's like you romanticize about it. Do some studies, you know what I mean? Just get on there, learn. It's not too hard, you can figure out what the current issues affecting us Native Hawaiians are. So, yeah, I many-

Imani Mixon ([01:15:55](#)):

Beautiful.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:15:57](#)):

That's pretty-

Jessica Care Moore ([01:15:57](#)):

I'm all over your Instagram right now stalking you.

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Imani Mixon ([01:16:00](#)):

Yes, we love our artistic connection, but I just want to thank you all for taking this time to speak with me. As much as this is outward-facing and for the world, I really just enjoy being in conversation with y'all. This was great.

Jessica Care Moore ([01:16:13](#)):

All right. It was good for my spirit. I needed it.

Ian Kualii'i ([01:16:16](#)):

[crosstalk 01:16:16].

Imani Mixon ([01:16:16](#)):

Good, that's what we like to hear. But yes, I'll be in touch and thank you again. Have a beautiful day. Shout out to the artists who joined me. I'm your host Imani Mixon, and this is Subject Matters, a podcast by Kresge Arts in Detroit and Red Bull Arts Detroit. Thanks for listening.