

Women Working Class

Young Hearts Programme

Co-production, Class and Young Women

Transcript

Recorded: Monday 8th November 2021 over
SquadCast

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1:01

Women Working Class

Fox Hi I'm Fox Irving and welcome to these conversations, which form part of the Heart of Glass Young Hearts programme for Children and Young People. Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Young Hearts has developed, and is informed by, an evolving understanding of young women as under-represented and under-served in St Helens. Wider to St Helens, Heart of Glass argues that a lack of attention is being paid to working class young women as audiences, participants and in relation to talent development and creative careers. The aim of the Young Hearts Programme is to explore and address the challenges of provision, access and engagement for young women in and with collaborative arts activities, arts experience and developing careers in the arts.

It comprises a range of artist commissions and resources that you can discover and explore via the Heart of Glass website at heartofglass.org.uk. As part of the programme I have worked with the Women Working Class Network to create a series of resources that reflect upon and consider co-production, class, and audience development in the context of young women. These resources take the form of two conversations with the Women Working Class Network, which focus on the lived experience of female working-class artists in the UK and investigate how art, space, and class interact to reinforce or subvert dominant values. If you are interested in more information about the groups and our members' work please visit our interactive Women Working Class resource at womenworkingclass.com. Our North West resources will be added in 2022. I hope you enjoy these resources, there is humour, there's sometimes swearing and there is a wonderful richness in each of their stories, as told in their own voices. I hope you are as inspired by them as I have been.

Fox Hi, everyone, welcome to this conversation. Today we're going to be talking with the women working class group. And we're going to be thinking about and talking about exploring of coproduction class and young women. When I was asked to think about this resource that we're creating tonight, this evening, which we're recording. And the first thing that came into my mind when I'm thinking about working with young women from working class backgrounds, is obviously jumped to our own experiences, and my experience myself as a working class benefit class. woman entered the arts. Now, for me as a young woman, when I thought I wanted to enter the arts, and I was excited, one of the things I really loved at school, that was one of the only subjects I was good at,

Women Working Class

and I rocked up to my careers advisor at 16. And said, I wanted to be an artist, they kind of, they did actually laugh and say, you won't make any money from that. So coming from a benefit class background, where we were living week to week for our benefits, and often the end of the week, we didn't have any money, the thought of not having any money, really scared me and kind of put me off my track to entering the arts and taking that as a career. So I kind of went on a very nonlinear path into the arts. And ended up coming back into the arts at the age of 30, with lots of different life experiences. So I think that's really important for me. So the first thing was about thinking about my own experience. But I'd also like to welcome into this space. And we're thinking about working with young women, and asked members of the group about their own experience of entering the arts. So I'll introduce Charlotte, could you introduce yourself, say bit about your practice? And how did you enter the arts?

Charlotte Well, my name is Charlotte Cooper, and my my core practice, I suppose, would be as a writer and performer, that sounds quite dry. I often perform under the name homosexual death drive, which isn't dry at all. And my practice is quite eclectic. It involves music, it involves making digital stuff like involve drawing. Yeah, so it's all kinds of things. And I'm interested in queer sensibility, strangeness, emotions. Yeah, I would say that's what my art practice looks like. But how I got into the arts, it's weird, because I don't actually feel like I'm in the arts in many ways. I do feel like an outsider, which is not always a terrible place to be. And that sort of fuels my practice in its own way. But yeah, how? How did it start? Occasionally, I had some really good teachers when I was at school. Just want to give a shout out to Irene Kiffin from Wembley High School let's see, when would that have been 1984? That she taught me drama. And she was fantastic. She took us to see serious plays really amazing plays, and she'd organise it so that we could talk to the actors. And directors and writers afterwards, sometimes, too. So she was really encouraging, you know, in quite a sort of lowkey way that a teacher ought to be encouraging. And that gave me an idea that this would be this was something I was really interested in. Also, you know, as a kid, I had an opportunity to try things. I was a teen synchronised swimmer. Most people don't know that about me. And we would put on synchronised swimming shows for people. Yeah, being in plays, that kind of thing was really important playing instruments. But I suppose my main practice as a young person, I'm an old lady now in my 50s. But as a young

Women Working Class

person, my main practice was about DIY. So I come from punk, which is all about making your own world making your own stuff. And that's pretty been pretty much been my practice until around, I guess, 2015 When I worked with some younger women, and non binary people who, yeah, who sort of showed me there might be other ways to make to make art as well. So So I worked on a show called Swagger with Project O who's Alexandrina Hemsley and Jamila Johnson-Small and that was really eye opening in terms of how you might go about making making a performance making a dance piece making Live Art. I mean, I've never really thought of my my practices Live Art before I didn't even know what the words were. But it was a real kind of apprenticeship in a way of finding out how you could go about doing things. So So yeah, I guess that was, that's, that was when I really started thinking more seriously about, well, even having a practice that feels strange to say, this lifelong act of making and writing and doing stuff actually had a form to it. And that is something that could be developed is really, really eye opening.

Fox Thanks Charlotte and you just reminded me when he talked about teachers then it is, you know, vital. I remember my art teacher, Mrs. Blond, a fact about her . She is Daniel Craig's mum, the James Bond. I did not know that at the time, but she really inspired me. And it's those teachers and there was a Mr. Evans as well. And I remember just spending time in that room, just wanting to make art. And I will always have those memories. And it's amazing that when you talk about your teacher, that the fact you know, you went to see plays because for me 90s, late 80s, early 90s The place we used to go was the panto. And that was my experience of theatre. And, but these were all kinds of visceral experiences that I really just wanted to know and understand more. Thank you for sharing Charlotte. And we've also got Marjorie, Marjorie, can you introduce yourself a little bit about your practice and how your experience has been entering the arts.

Marj Hi, my name is Marjorie Morgan. And I'm a writer mainly, but I'm a multidisciplinary artists as well. I think that's part and parcel of most of the working class people I meet, because we don't have a straightforward route into the arts. So we try so many things. I mainly write plays for stage and screen. I'm also into photography and videography. And my work is interdisciplinary because I try to highlight the voices of marginalised people such as myself,

Women Working Class

being a person who's racialized as black in the UK. So my kind of got a triangle of things that I do with my gender, my sexuality, and my race. So I kind of work on those things and highlighting the hidden stories for, like, say people, much as much like myself, I got into arts, because I've always wanted to I've always read I've always written and a bit like Charlotte. I had a teacher who was very kind to me. I found a school report recently and it said from my English teacher, Mrs. Kirby, she will do well, if she continues her good work. So I think she'd be proud to be I don't know where she is now, but I'm doing okay, I'm writing and I'm, I'm in that way I'm an artist is kind of successful in my field, which at the time, I didn't see a root into artist at all, because I thought arts was just for rich people to to make, but for poor working class people on benefits or, you know, living in social housing. It was just for us to consume what we were given not for us to make art and be part of it. The only art I made when I was younger, I used to write stories and create things within the church group that you know, create places and church group that I was part of. Apart from that, I I wasn't involved in anything professionally. It was like as I said, you could go to the theater, you could watch TV, but you couldn't actually do it because there wasn't a space. It was like it was a one way mirror. And yeah, so eventually, I found my way into into arts in a professional way, but it took me many years and various routes. It wasn't direct at all.

Fox Thanks Marj and I really liked that kind of idea of consuming what you are given basically, as in this space is not kind of for you to make the work, we will produce the work for you. And this is what you will experience. And it's interesting you talk about, you know, sure this will come up more tonight, this kind of nonlinear way into the arts for often many working class people and kind of no, not thinking there's a space for them. So we'll talk a bit more later I hope about how can we create that space? Cath, do you like to come in and do an intro? And tell us about your path into the arts?

Cath Yeah, sure. Hello. So I'm Cath, Catherine Hoffman. Let's get formal. So I, yeah, I've struggled with like, what am I so sometimes I call myself performance artist. Sometimes I call myself a live artist. Sometimes I call myself a performance maker. But yeah, so my main, my main practice is performance, which I've been doing for a while now. And slightly similar to Marj and Charlotte in terms of like, again, it's multidisciplinary. I'm bringing in different ways of

Women Working Class

making performance. I'm using text, I'm using DIY, some making, sometimes I bring in a bit of video. And I collaborate with different artists with fine artists or musicians, sound designers. And I would say, like, I do solo work. So I'm, I do solo work, which is quite personal stuff, where I'm sort of exposing things that most sane people wouldn't want to expose. But I'm like, okay, no, I'm gonna, I'm gonna go into so I tend to go into subject matters that are a little bit kind of uncomfortable. But I also use absurdity within that. So humor, for me is a really important component of what I do. That's been a main kind of thread all the way through the things that I make. So how did I get into all of that? I mean, I guess. So yeah. Similar in terms of like, when I was young, I just was into arty things, even at a very early age. I mean, we moved around all over the place. So it was always, so I didn't have that one teacher or anything, I didn't really have that sense of to be honest with you. I don't actually remember any good teachers I had the only person I remember is my history teacher. I remember that when I was doing my GCSE. So I had this real difficult thing of where like, I wanted to, to art and I want to do music, and I wanted to do drama. And I was told no, you can't. You're not allowed to do all of those at once you have to choose. And for me, that was really painful, because I was like, but I want to do all of them. And they were like, no, you can't. So I dropped to music. I did art I did drama. And I remember because like, I mean, I went to at least 12 different schools. And I at the age of 11 was in it was in a secondary school. And I was told that I should do the 11 plus. So then I ended up at this grammar school, which I hated. But I remember doing GCSE drama there. And and it was kind of a weird experience, because everyone around me was quite posh. And they just looked at me as if I was like, You're not going to be capable of any of this. And then there was this real moment of like, do you wanna bet? and there was a real moment of like, you know, we did our final year production and I just was like, I know that sounds really big headed. But it was it was a real moment for me if going oh yeah, I do have a voice actually and my voice usually is within performance in terms of like the something in me that suddenly switches and I feel like this kind of like oh, you know, I'm, I'm in I'm in the power stream, shall we say? So in a, in a weird kind of way. Like since I was a teenager, I thought I was actually going to be an actress. In that classical kind of, you know, I'm going to do that jobbing actor and then I went to a really and then I went to Dartington College of Arts, which if anyone knows what that is, it's like totally just destroys that whole idea. And it's just like, hello, welcome to the avant garde. And it was kind of like, I've noticed

Women Working Class

that what I do is that I tend to sort of go into things thinking they're one thing and they end up being something completely different. So I kind of naively thought I was going to some kind of drama school. And I was like, No, I'm not, I'm going to something that actually was what I was supposed to be doing anyway, in terms of mixing all the disciplines. But, so then that was it. For me, I was like, Well, how can I go back to just thinking that I can do things in that conventional way, it's just like, wasn't possible. But then at same time, also being aware of how much again, I felt really outside of it, in terms of like, I felt totally, like, I didn't have a voice that I it took me a long time to kind of get rid of my shyness. And that, yeah, the class, I did feel like I was surrounded by people that weren't from the same background as me, I hid a lot of stuff of where I came from. And to be honest with you, that sort of carried on right through my 20s, where I felt like I was just trying to fit in. And to be honest with you, I didn't even make a lot of art in my early 20s. I just kind of did a lot of sleeping, and a lot of existential angst thing about doubting myself, and thinking I wasn't good enough. And so it took me a long time to actually get around to making stuff. And I would do little steps here and there that it wasn't until I was 28 that I actually made my first sort of solo show yeah. Yeah, so it was, I was a slow burner.

Fox A slow burner, but you're shining bright now. But it's interesting, you know, I'm already picking up these kinds of you know, you know, things about feeling outside of it and, and hiding where we come from, and where we fit in and I know very much a big thing that comes up. In the group work that we've done previously to this for the working, Women Working Class is imposter syndrome. And how very much so we've had that from I imagine a very early age about when we try and navigate these spaces, the feeling of not being able to fit fit into these spaces. So yeah, Siobhan, How about you, can you introduce yourself, tell us a bit about your experiences?

Siobhan Hello, everyone, I am Siobhan Noble, and I am a theatre producer from Liverpool I'm based in the Northwest I have produced right across the Northwest really am a freelance theatre producer at the moment, I'm working for Shakespeare North playouts as their project producer for the next 18 months, which is exciting. My practice has mainly been rooted in new writing, I used to alongside my mum run a little fringe venue in Liverpool that was really, really focused on new writing and creating voices for people like us. And because I do

Women Working Class

think that there is a serious lack of working class voices in theatre, my route into the arts was a funny one, really, because I came I found drama and stuff when I was three years old, because my mom and dad divorced and she went back to college and studied drama. And took us with her on that adventure. So we were in the corner of rehearsal rooms, watched all kinds of shows that were probably a little bit too old for us because we just had to be there because she had no childcare. And was always in new theatres, whose her friends taught the new theatres so we would get free places to go or like she'd pay a quid for us to be there. And, so I've kind of always grown up around around the arts and around theatre. I did experience I was thinking about this today and I've not thought about it for years. The kids who I went to theater with were all really well off because they're the kinds of kids that can't afford to go to the theater and you did get a little bit of discrimination as a kid in that kind of setting. I can remember kids asking me once why I wore the same trackie every week because it's my one trackie, why do you not? And so you kind of from a young age also felt that like 'othering' in theatres, which I still feel to an extent now I then reached the age of about 16 and didn't want to be an artist anymore because I didn't want to be different from my friends in school. I was told not to not to study drama, and not just as any arty, arty subjects similarly to you Fox, I thought they wouldn't make me any money. And that was something that was important to me. I wanted to I wanted to grow up and make money. So I ended up leaving school at 16. I did study, I actually studied fashion design for about a year, which was a funny path for me. And so did that for about a year and then got a job in a bank. And my dad was literally over the moon did cartwheels down the street, because that was just me set for life. I'd cracked it. I was working in the Giro. Everybody from North Liverpool knows what the Giro is. It's like a rite of passage that you live, you, If you live around there. You work there at some point. So I worked there until, from when I was 19, until I was about 24. My mom carries on, she continues working in the Arts, my little brother followed her into that path. But for me, I always said Oh, no, it wasn't, wasn't really for me wasn't really for me, until I experienced a really horrendous bullying incident in the bank that I was working in that was supposed to be like the set for life job. And I was really bullied by a person who work there. And at the same time, my mum had been offered to take over and run this theatre. And she said to me, why don't you come back to come back and work here with me. So I went back there. And that was about 11 years ago. And the rest is history. Really.

Women Working Class

Fox Well, we are glad to have you back in the fold. It's interesting that you kind of did that rebellious stage of not wanting to be an artist and go and work in the bank. And I can imagine Yeah, my family would have been overjoyed if I had gone into those kinds of routes as well. So yeah, thanks for sharing that and definitely glad to have you back with us in the fold. And last but not least, Kyra would you like to introduce yourself say a bit about and then your entrance into the arts?

Kyra Hello. My name is Kyra, Kyra Cross and I'm from North Kent. I first got into the arts probably through like pop culture in the 80s like bands like The Pet Shop Boys sort of referencing Derek Jarman, things like that. Films thing, you know, just general pop culture. And I was always led down paths, like someone would mention something in an interview and I'd go off on that. And I remember watching things about the Southbank show because I found it really interesting. So. But I also had, like you Fox, I had really good teacher, also a drama teacher actually, called Chris Dew, who is my English teacher, form tutor, and drama teacher all rolled into one. And he became a bit of a mentor. And because I grew up in a benefits class household, and my household wasn't very good. So I spent a lot of time after school, helping with school plays and stuff. I then went on to do BTEC in Art and Design and I thought, Oh, I've got this sorted. And, I was going to do B, I did a BTEC National in Performing Arts which I failed miserably. And I then worked at McDonald's for five years, and then looked after my nan for 20. And then after my nan passed away, I lucked out and got a job at a local Arts organisation. And I've been working there ever since. So for the past five years. And just working in around the Arts. So I was like, I can do this. And so in 2019, I had my first solo exhibition of drawings I've done at my local library. And then a colleague of mine saw the Women Working Class artists opportunity. She knew that I really was interested in Arts and she thought you should go for this. So out of everyone. I'm kind of the newbie even though we're all a similar age. So yeah, I've been obviously doing this. I've done some other things as well. I've got an exhibition piece coming in in an exhibition in Liverpool. I make a lot of stuff to do with pop culture, humour, memory, bit mischief as well. So a video comedy drawing. I mean, if you look on the Working Class Women website, and I'm dressed as a nun in one video, so yeah, lots of sense of humour and part of my job as well, in my the Arts organisation or work in and just my general sort of

Women Working Class

practice is democratising the language around art so that it's not so poncey. And because I think everyone gets it in the end, but I think sometimes the academic language of arts really use a barrier, so I don't like any of that. So yeah, that's me.

Fox Thank you. And I know, you say you're the newbie to the group. But some of the pieces you've, you've put on the website are absolutely stunning. And such beautiful pieces of work. You know, I'd say like, like, you've been doing it all your life. Like, it's like, I really love your pieces on the website. Okay, you know, thank you for sharing those, like how we, you know, this group and how we have kind of gone on this journey to enter the Arts and kind of just having us in this room, having these conversations and wanting to bring that into the space? Yeah, I'm just wondering, and one of my reflections is, none of this is straightforward has been straightforward for us. And would you say, is this the case for? If we're thinking about young women entering the arts? A) do you think it's gotten any better? Or do you think this is just something that's ongoing, and it continues, you know, with cuts in the Art,s just reflections and what we've heard anyone, Charlotte, you want to pop in?

Charlotte Well, I don't know if it's got any better or any worse, I think it's different from when I was young. But one of the things I want to say is, you know, when you take the other path, you have to take the other path to keep a roof over your head or food in your tummy, wherever, that can be really good. That it's not a failure to do that, you know, and the other things that I've done to, to keep myself well, and to and to pay the bills, you know, they do feed into the art as well, it's not. For me, it's not the worst thing in the world. And I do wonder about what might have happened if I had pursued art as a as my first career as a career even even now, I'm not really sure if it's career or not. Yeah, I think it might have been very different. I mean, there have been times when I have been a writer as my as my main job. And I've got to say, it wasn't all that. So. Yeah, I don't know this thing about being nonlinear, about having to take other parts of the careers. I think those are things that really enrich us as practitioners. And I'm not trying to sort of, you know, sort of happy clappy spin on things. But I'm also not trying to denigrate that the other path, either, so yeah, has it changed? Has it not changed? It's yeah, it's a different world. Now. When I was nipper, it was possible to sign on and stay somewhat under the radar

Women Working Class

and have a, you know, an alternative arts practice. And then there was this thing called the Enterprise Allowance scheme that a lot of artists took up. You know, the system for supporting artists these days is, is pretty rubbish. But there are also probably more opportunities that I'm aware of the that I knew of back then too. So it's hard to tell really.

Fox It is hard now and just reflecting on that, as well as Charlotte like, I often think about if I'd gone straight into the Arts, yeah, you know, '88, I used to I was very much fresh from Liverpool, head to toe leopard skin. I used to go on the sunbeds and all I knew was Liverpool. And the art I make now is very much about my life experience. But it's kind of thinking about what would I have made then what experience would have done and maybe I needed to go on that that path. And I guess thinking about this is what do we kind of be? First of all, I think actually, what support do you wish you would have had in place as a young woman to say, Hey, I'm going to enter this Art, Art world. And this is for me, what would we have needed? Anybody want to come in? Marj?

Marj I think arts grants would have been nice to to have that. And they wouldn't sometimes when the older of us, they're in here, and went to uni, we got grants for studying at uni, to have that, similar to the Arts Council England. Now, if we had that way back when that would have been helpful, because money is a major factor in pursuing the arts, because the Charlotte said, If you can't eat, you can't really be an artist, the, the trope of starving artists, yeah, it's great, but it's not realistic. So we have to find things to do to feed our artistic spirit, because I went into computing. And even even that, I was discouraged from doing because I was told, Oh, you know, somebody, like you should go to a factory or, you know, work as a secretary or a nurse, not that there's anything wrong with those jobs at all. But what I wanted to do was pursue computing because I was interested in it. But also I was, as I said, I was always into writing and creating plays and things like that. But I there wasn't a model for me. And especially a financial model. So there was no way I couldn't ask my parents for for money to help me. I It was just like, if you can't do it, if you can't financially do it yourself, and you're not going to do it at all.

Fox That's very true. Cath do you wanna come in?

Women Working Class

Cath Yeah, I mean, the financial support is obviously really important. I also think like, looking back when I was in my 20s, and even back at college, like, for me, it was that, I mean, I was doing loads of jobs to try and survive. And then also trying to also be in the kind of artistic realm, whatever you want to call it. And I think I just didn't have a clue back then, that I was always feeling like I was failing, because everyone around me wasn't doing any of that. They were kind of coasting. Whereas I was like this, you know, person who was just like this the entire time with my legs, pedaling under under the water, trying to look as if I was like everyone else. But I wasn't because I was trying to hold it all together, I was trying to hold it all together financially, as well as as well as psychologically. Just everything. So for me, it was about like, I would have loved something like this, for example, like to just had some kind of beacons of people going. I understand what you're doing. And, you know, I understand how that's very different to how all the other people around me were experiencing being in the Arts. And it took me a very, very long time to try and work that out. I didn't unpick it until much later why I felt like I was constantly failing. I was like, oh, yeah, of course I was because it was stacked. Everything was stacked against me. And I wasn't allowing myself to have a chance in terms of like, I was also hard on myself thinking I've got to be like everyone else, but not realising that they had a lot more support than I did. So just just the idea of just yeah, group groups like this one. I'm I don't know just some way of people rallying in some way with each other.

Fox Marj?

Marj I think it's as Cath said, the mental health pressure is quite high in the heavy on working class artists. Well, because well, as Cath you probably looked graceful like a swan, but underneath your feet, we're going crazy. It's it takes a toll on you and your once again referring to Cath you said about not creating work for probably first 10 years or something like that. Because you work whilst you're gaining the experiences as well. And doing the three, four or five different jobs to be able to make the work. It is it really is really difficult. And that's what I consider to be one of the costs of being a working class artists without a model out there for us to go to to learn from and to share with each other. But that was in the past. Now we've got this, you know, Fox has created. So but the other people are really lucky we if we had this when we were younger, you know, that

Women Working Class

could have changed our positions now, but we wouldn't have had this, Charlotte said, the experiences that we have that inform our work,

Fox Charlotte?

Charlotte Well, I was at a conference in Detroit a few years ago. And it's called the Allied Media Conference. It's a really incredible space. And I bought a t shirt from a group and the t shirt, had the slogan on it, which was all of us or none. And it really, really stayed with me, the t shirt has sadly disintegrated now, but the sentiment has really stayed with me. And I do think in terms of access that, you know, it would be great if there was a, I don't know, an attitude shift that the arts are for everybody. And nobody, you know, nobody should be left behind that there should be a space for all of us, or none of us win so, yeah. Just wanted to add that pithy little statement.

Fox That that's not a pithy little statement. That's a beautiful statement. Kyra?

Kyra Yeah, I just wanted to say as well, not to have like, working class, young working class women artists, just because you want to hear stories of the poors. We don't want that, you know, there are young women artists who want to make art about what they imagined the future to be, what they want, you know, silly things, but they have as much right to make art about what they want, I'm reminded of like, Andrea Dunbar, and like the Arbor and things like that, about how she was taken out of her estate, to the Royal Court, made to write and rewrite her story and then chucked back. And there needs to be care from arts organisations, when they work with artists from, you know, backgrounds like mine, Fox, everyone in the room, you know, that there's a duty of care with the artists you work in, that we're not just using you for you for your experience, and then chucking you back the with there, you're supported throughout your journey. And I think that, you know, there are some arts organisations who are really good at that. And then there are others maybe not so good at. But yeah.

Fox Can I ask on that note, when you say there are Arts organisations that are good, what is the good part? What do they do that they do well?

Women Working Class

Kyra I think it's that they check in and they see the artist, as a human as a person, rather than just a statistic, as a as a tool, really, for engagement. Like, you'll get a lot of working class artists, like Scottee, who, you know, who will be employed because they can connect with the poors, and or working class communities. And it's like, that's great. But, you know, there's a duty of care, because there are things that happen when you work within communities, like most projects are quite short, anyway, when you're funded, there there needs to be consistency. And, you know, there's things like social prescribing as well, that, you know, where doctors prescribe people to do arts and creative and cultural things that, you know, can really affect the artists especially if people are going on them that have complex issues. So, I think, you know, you treating artists as people and holistically so that, you know, an understanding that some some young women artists or parents some, some have caring responsibilities, and being flexible with that and not just saying, we've got a rigid deadline, you know, is it is being that a community, you know, being human to people, I think it's a big thing rather than a corporate entity, which I think some arts organisations are guilty of.

Fox Anybody want to come in or respond to that?

Cath I really, really like the voice of doom in terms of, I don't see that practice very often, to be honest with you, in terms of really, artists as humans. I mean, there are, there are a few organisations I know, but they're kind of rare. And I've even been part of fest, I was part of a festival that was highlighting work about class. So whole festival, the way they treated us was just like, I was quite shocked. But yeah, sorry, but to please someone tell me some experiences that have been great because I find them very surreal to me.

Marj I can't add to the great experiences, because so often I've been in rooms where I know that I'm a tick box exercise for you for being black for being gay. I know that's why I'm in the room, not to anything that I could really add, and that that's really disheartening. But there are a few occasions and I will say there is a couple of theatres in Liverpool, especially the Unity theatre, but see you as a whole person and support you as an artist all the way through the process with like, they got some call out commissions, which they've had in 2021, going through to 2022. And there's been support from the Everyman Playhouse

Women Working Class

theatre as well, for new works. So, occasionally, there is some good stuff but historically, yeah, like Kyra said, it's, it's not seen the whole person like us. Yeah, so now you are, you're just here so that we can almost like we can leech off your experience, and then chuck you back in the bin. Because you've shown too much of your working classness. We, we don't want it to infect us, we just wanted to look at it and laugh at it and go away. And I say laugh at it. Because I do believe sometimes our experiences are used for almost almost like for visual porn value, you know, trauma. So they owe those poor people and then run off back to their and their nice situations really.

Fox So yeah, reflecting on that. It's kind of I think what we're saying here is there is, you know, as Cath going right back to when Cath talked about and I think we've definitely talked about this is feeling of failure failing because you have to work because you have these other duties because you have these other responsibilities. I remember that when I got on my MA and I got a scholarship for my MA to do my Art MA, but I still had to work I still had to do. And I remember coming in for my doing my final show on I still work as a nurse doing nightshift doing the night shift, and then I could come in and do like the work. So there are these kind of added pressures and you don't really I think what we do is working class people is we wheel and deal. And we just have this, like we've got to do all this all at all of this and we just got to keep going. And it isn't really you know, when you especially when I was the first time I started thinking about class when I was put into art school in London, and I really realised I wasn't meant to be there. I was not meant to be in that space. But I continued to do it and I continue to try and fit in and I try to kind of shift into that space and I just exhausted myself and there's these things we have to be mindful of you kind of you know, you know you know pressure of mental health you know you're working nonstop to do trying to do something you really love. That's, you know, what, you know what you've, you know, your love is if it's in the arts and seeing as seeing ourselves as people as humans. So going back then just thinking about those thoughts kind of going back to ourselves at a point in our lives, and it would be me at 16 in that careers office. Really known deep in my heart that I, you know, art was for me, and I kind of, as I said, went on a very nonlinear path, but I kind of couldn't resist that urge to create and make something and you know, it was something that I wanted to be what would you've done? What would you kind of? How would you have supported that 16

Women Working Class

year old and what you need to as a practitioner, what you need to be mindful of, Siobhan?

Siobhan For me, it goes back to the teachers and who the teachers are, I mean, a lot of you have said that you had really supportive teachers, and really kinds of supportive networks in your school. Like, my school was not bad at all, there was no support. And it was kind of was like a zoo, it was like, they were just penning us into classes, and they didn't care if they taught us anything. They just had us in these rooms. And I was told, my mum was told actually, at one of my school open evenings, that I was just always out in the common room talking to the boys, and I was probably going to be pregnant by the time I was 16. Like, that was genuinely that was something that got said and by a teacher in my school they had no respect for so I think it starts at that level. If you if your teachers have got no respect for you, then you don't have it's hard to kind of define that path. If there's nobody there to kind of see you. I was lucky, I had it from my home influence, which is really, really lucky for me. But yeah, I think it starts with school. And it starts with mentorship and having people believe in you, because I don't think I really believed in myself until I went to uni much later. And then got a placement doing a doing like an internship with a company called Tmesis Theatre Company, we're based in Liverpool. And I've been working in the arts already, I've been working with my mom. But the the mentorship that I got from Claire and Ellie and Tmesis was really, really valuable because I felt like they could see me and they that they kind of believed in me as an artist as well. And it kind of pushed away a little bit of that imposter syndrome that creeps into your head from being told that you're not that good from school age.

Fox So do you think in response to that, you know, you hear on the news that the government is cutting Arts as a subject, and very much it's not on their agenda. And if you're in that environment, as you say, where the teachers aren't encouraging, do you think you would have benefited from an Arts organization coming in? Doing a mentor role or doing a project with you?

Siobhan Yeah, absolutely. I really do. I really do. Because it's just I've seen it happen firsthand with with kids, when I've worked on projects where we've gone in and kind of given given kids, you see it happen, you see, you see kids get a

Women Working Class

little a little bit of a spark back. And I think it's really important to reach out to communities that are not necessarily going to have access to the arts

Fox Anybody, Charlotte, you wanna come in?

Charlotte Yeah, well, those kind of mentor relationships can come in all sorts of ways. They don't necessarily have to be formal. So when I was a teenager, I was a Saturday girl in a charity shop. And my boss and her boyfriend were old punks, and they had a band and we put on fashion shows in the charity shop and, and do all kinds of things. So and it was from the scene that they were part of that I sort of got to understand that you didn't really have to, you know, you didn't have to go to Royal Academy to be an artist that you could you could make your own space. And that I'm always moved when I see people doing that, you know, in East London where I live, you know, there are kids dancing in the street, literally singing, selling, you know, the music, you know, by the shopping centre. You know, I think that's really incredible. And I do think that although formal roots in a really important these kind of informal ducking and diving ways are really crucial. too. So advice I would give to that 16 year old would be really about being naughty, about breaking rules about, you know, finding your people, and about trying to make your own space as well. Because if you can't get into, you know, places that are excluded or who want to be part of that anyway, it's nonsense, make something that is meaningful to you that speaks of your life and, and find find other people. That, yeah, that can hear you that can that can hold you. I think that's important, and certainly been vital for me in my practice.

Fox Definitely finding your people. All of us are not sticking in my head tonight. Definitely. Cath?

Cath Yeah, I mean, I would definitely follow one and say the same thing it's about finding is finding those souls that you can be yourself with. I think this also, this is something I've been looking at, in myself this week about. So for example, I have gone back to academia for the first time in like 25 years. And I'm doing an MA. And I find it terrifying. And, but this is what I'm trying to say to myself is that actually, it goes back to this idea of failure. So, for example, I'll come out of these lectures where I'm expected within an hour and a half to

Women Working Class

critique main texts, I'm supposed to critique my three colleagues work in detail. But so what I'm trying to say is like the setup, it took me a long time to realize a setup is made to make me feel like I'm failing. So it's about kind of reflecting it back. So it's a bit like what Siobhan was saying, there were no decent teachers in my school. So it's like, so I'm learning to not lean into this idea that it's somehow my fault. And that I'm not getting it. And I'm not understanding the environment, or I'm not understanding the language, when in fact, it's them that are failing. And not us. So I think it's about like you find it, and that's hard finding the tool to be able to, to, yeah, turn it back. So I would say to, you know, to my 16 year old self is like, what's actually going on? That's making you feel like you're failing, because it's probably not you.

Fox Yeah. So really important, because I was just gonna say, What would you say to your 16 year old self too, you know, because I know a lot of working class artists suffer from that imposter syndrome, feel like they are failing and kind of how do you get that resilience early on? I've needed to build up a really hard shell, and it's still, you know, I still haven't got it right. I still have doubts about myself. So how do you support those you know, that 16 year old self, you know, as fresh faced at that point, you know? Yeah, it's really, really interesting. Marj, do you wanna come in?

Marj Yeah, I think 16 year olds, nowadays, they've got it slightly easier because of the internet. And as Charlotte said that they're braver than we were, we didn't want to be seen as breaking the mould or stepping out of place. Because the system was the system and you didn't go up against the system. But now the younger people are just creating their own routes and their paths and know making making music and making films, you know, I heard of somebody did made a film series from a wall that they were just sat on the wall and they said that I can make a film and that that's got taken up by Netflix eventually. So you can you can do all kinds of things now where we had a set route and that was the only way in when I was younger that was that was it so then we didn't have the amount of flexibility that they have now to do a practice it had to be either a part of the system or you're on the outside as I think it was Cath who said do you you're viewed as the other and once you once you with the other or you know when you whether you're punk or Rasta, or any, you know, any of those

Women Working Class

external groups, you weren't part of the system. So you had to, you make your music but it's not art really is it darling? That was the kind of response you got.

Fox Thanks, Marj. Does anybody want to come in? Kyra?

Kyra Yeah, I think if it was 16 year old me, the first thing I would say is go and get yourself tested for ADHD. Because that's something that's happened recently that I'm like, Oh, that makes a lot of sense about my life. I would also sort of like, Am I allowed to swear on here?

Fox You're going to go on them, okay, you've announced!

Kyra My advice to my younger self would be, take no shit, but do no harm. Don't let have confidence in what you can make and your imagination. Because like, you know, you, you've got tons of it, and don't hide it, show it. And also, you know, do make it do the stuff, but don't feel like you are competing with anyone else. You know, you may take 20 years to have your exhibition. But you'll get there. And sometimes, you know, there are alternative routes, and there should be more alternative routes for people because not everyone does well in academia. But yeah, and if there isn't an Arts organisation that's talking to you get off your ass and make one.

Fox Yep you've done exactly what Charlotte said be naughty. And this is the space. But yeah, like. If, you know, make your own spaces, I think this is what's happening. Like we didn't have as much access, as you say Marj, that the Internet to these online spaces. And, you know, if we were, you know very much in our little silos, as we would have been back then. Feeling like the 'other' I hope now that there is more space to feel like there is others like you. And the government cutting art they can't stop that they can't stop this building, the other kinds of things popping up and groups forming. Does anybody want to have any final little says on that?

Marj I think language is in an important thing to talk about as well. Because sometimes we change our language or we exclude parts of our languages. Kyra mentioned about swearing and if it's part of your normal vernacular, then you should use it. You shouldn't sanitise it for an audience that is going to consume

Women Working Class

your work if it's because, it's important to have a mirror of yourself. Because if we because one of the reasons why we were blocked when we were younger is because we didn't see ourselves in the arts out there. We only saw the other version of society was like the split strata of people. So yeah, I think we have to be authentic, not be offensive, but be authentic in how we're presenting ourselves now our work and I really love Kyra that are by taking as long as it takes to do you not doing it to anybody else's timeline. I know we've grants and everything you have to kind of work sort of compromise slightly. But yeah, do you I think that's that's really important. And like Siobhan did as well, with you know, with your, your mom Siobhan that you you had that arts organisation, that's amazing. That's that kind of thing makes such a difference to people as is Women Working Class, going to make a lot of this made a lot of difference to all of us here. It's gonna make a lot of difference to a number of other young people coming along as well, and it's yeah...

Fox and I think, you know, part of the reason I, you know, invited this group to think about these questions is because I want young girls if they listen to this, to hear voices like them, it's really important to for this narrative to be coming from these voices. And, you know, I, I did an MA at a very well known Arts University in London, apparently one of the best. But it wasn't till after that, and I sat in a room actually with Bryony Kimmings, that I could actually talk like me and I could swear and it wasn't a thing, like, you know, So language is so important Kyra you're gonna come in?

Kyra Oh, no, I was just scratching.

Fox Good. But yeah, it's language is important in these spaces. And thank you so much everyone for sharing in this conversations, as always, I adore these conversations that we have together, especially as you say, where we can reflect each other in these kinds of mirror images and hear these experiences because I think they're so valuable. But some of these things that I'm going to take away from this is definitely kind of we are not outsiders. Just, you know, be you know, have the confidence to do you. Be naughty. And again, I'm just kind of, I love that you brought it in Charlotte, all of us or none. So thank you for sharing. And thank you so much, everyone.

Women Working Class