

Transcript YOYI! Voices: Natasha Ginwala

Magnus Rosengarten: So, I would like to begin our conversation with this question I feel also certain artistic positions you've invited really tackle between community, the communal and these big themes of caring, repairing and healing. And maybe you could start discussing what this relationship means to you and your curatorial practice, to the communal and caring, repairing and healing. And how is it also expressed in these positions you've invited to the show?

Natasha Ginwala: Sure. So, our collaboration itself has been with a range of curators, thinkers, artists, curators for this exhibition. So I think that's very telling also in terms of how we might address these not only concepts but really the questions that emerge for our times. And for me, it's meant a certain prolonged engagement with practices like PARI, the People's Archive of Rural India, which is essentially a platform in which journalists and writers are bringing stories from across the rural terrains and landscapes of India that are neglected for various reasons, and also how to archive them differently, how to process the knowledge that comes in the form of, say, song. *The Grind Mill Songs Project* is an archive that is growing, and it brings to us the songs that are sung while grinding grains. So, the act of creating food and engaging with food politics is also a moment of transmission. The role of the voice is something that I'm very focused on, the kind of knowledge that is shared among family, the kinds of kinships that are formed between groups of chosen family. What are the words of solace, of recognition, of advice that are passed on? Because often I think these processes of care and healing take place in the oral. And, so listening and singing and voicing are really key. And I do feel they are acting out within different projects, but particularly within PARI. And at the same time, when you think about someone like Outi Pieski, she's also working very much in the collective with Sámi women recovering forms of matrilineal knowledge, also through Sámi attire, which is not only about appearance, of course, but also very much a material relationship to the Earth and its resources and to ideas of what is inherited through something like the *Horn Hat* [a crownlike, graceful headgear that was used by Sámi women until the end of the end of the 19th century in the Sámi area in what is now northern Norway and Finland.]. And it tells us a lot as well about Europe's relationship to communities like the Sámi people whose idea of history has been fundamentally challenged by Christian priests in the area of Sápmi, but also by a certain kind of Nordic colonialism that has persisted for so very long and is now being also actively renegotiated in that terrain.

Magnus Rosengarten: Why do you think that these large themes – very much inflationary used – of caring, repairing and healing in recent times; why do you think that the museum space could possibly be an adequate space to negotiate and discuss it in? Or can it even be?

Natasha Ginwala: I feel like at the Gropius Bau, also, given that we're not a traditional museum, there's been a space for artistic languages to flourish in very different ways. And so we're constantly acting together with the artists and their methods, their grammar, their way of reading the world. And that is where I believe we create certain entry points, certain ways of accompanying these highly imaginative, yet very charged approaches that enter into this space and circulate within it. So I think the processes that have landed here in recent

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years are not only being now unique to *YOYI* and what will be on view, but it has been a far longer process where we have engaged with questions of care, aspects of ritual within something like a contemporary arts organisation, but also where I think the position of collectivity has been, you know, there's room for it in a far bigger sense than perhaps before.

Magnus Rosengarten: Maybe like the other way around. What can it then possibly do to a museum or exhibition space? These processes, how can they alter change? Can they?

Natasha Ginwala: I think unless we believe that they have a transformative effect, we are perhaps still considering them more in their objecthood and the art object is then perhaps still thought of as alienated from the public. And that's something I purely do not believe. I believe that what we create our experiences and what we work with are our ideas. And so there is a way in which we deeply inscribe and are inscribed the minute we enter into an exhibition like this.

Magnus Rosengarten: I'm also now thinking about SERAFINE1369 and their performance programme, but also the fact that they are inviting an Acupuncture Clinic into the Gropius Bau where visitors have the chance to actually receive treatments. And what do you think this will do to an audience if they enter sort of like a museum space and all of a sudden they on a very corporeal level engage, and it's not just this passive watching or experiencing, but it becomes a very embodied experience, hopefully, that's what we hope in the end. What do you think it will do to an audience or can do to an audience?

Natasha Ginwala: Yeah, again, I think the entity of Gropius Bau itself has been a space where there are concerts; it is inherently an interdisciplinary space in which there has been resonances, whether that is a jazz concert or whether that is the sounding of Ayumi Paul's *The Singing Project*, or whether that is the vibrations that have been created through SERAFINE1369. The reverberations one feels in the body when in a club, or whether the reverberations one feels against one's own skin when one is going through an acupuncture treatment where essentially as far as I've experienced it, it is the body as a field of energies and vibration. So, I think we are doing something that is still very much within what this space has already witnessed, what it has experienced, and maybe pushing it to another layer and also responding very much to what we have all lived through in the extreme sense of vulnerability, exposure, a sense of fear and alienation. And I think it's time also that some of these very raw and real experiences are, again, not looked at in a purely kind of rational, objectified sense, obviously, but far more through these lenses in which artists are also testing out certain methods and certain grammar. And to that, I would just also add someone like Georgia Sagri, who is an incredible artist who has really been performing for so many years and dealing with various forms of what she calls also pathologies of capitalism and neoliberal society; dealing with aspects of exhaustion that the body goes through in and after performance, and at the same time thinking about that with different forms of

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metabolism within the ailing body. And so her project, *IASI*, which means recovery in Greek, deals with some of these forms in which to address the body in pain, deal with also questions of exhaustion through a certain kind of method that she has been using on herself and then inviting various individuals to partake in.

Magnus Rosengarten: So having all this in mind, I wonder, because this project *YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal* is very much also a collective curatorial effort – it's five co-curators who have really brought all these artists together. Maybe you talk a little bit about this whole process of curating collectively. Also, the challenges this brings, if curators are living all across this globe, basically, dealing with time differences, different approaches to concepts of healing, caring and repairing. How have you experienced this process?

Natasha Ginwala: Yeah, I'm grateful to have been invited into a collaborative process. I did feel that we would have gained so greatly from having more shared time and space. I feel like the four days that we had together with *Ámà: [4 Days on Caring, Repairing and Healing]* to also public be interlocutors of our own questions and our own processes becoming public in this way; where artists were placing once again their vocabularies around these concepts really at the center – I think we all learned a great deal from that. And so for me, I look at this as a series of dialogues that have been private within the space of meeting one another regularly online, and then more this public moment of thinking out loud, which was very beneficial to us, I think, as a group. Some of the colleagues within the project, I feel I've read more of their work, I've seen more of their work in exhibitions and others are newer to me. But I really feel that what has come together is a polyphonous approach that holds high regard for one another's ways of thought without seeking to overwrite any kind of entry point. So, I'm grateful for that.

Natasha Ginwala: You've also briefly mentioned sort of like the recent programming, particularly in the last four years here in the Gropius Bau, and that this show is also very much in conversation with this programming. How do you think and feel will this show also influence sort of like the coming month, years? Does it have that power to impact sort of like the future?

Natasha Ginwala: For me, it's hard to speak about what it might hold for the future of the Gropius Bau – that I think is a much larger question. I think what we've seen here is just when you create a sort of programme that is a form of sensibility in which it is not an ending and a beginning, but there is a continuation, a continuation of forms, a continuation of expression that actually creates almost overlaps and echoes. That's what I feel has happened here. So, with somebody like Wu Tsang and Tosh Basco, in a sense returning to the Gropius Bau while Wu Tang was the first *[In House:] Artist in Residence*, that kind of cycle is what I am deeply interested in as a curator as well. I'm not someone who works one off but is interested in a constant process of open learning and debate. And I think these relationships also then create tangible shifts within how an institution sees itself from the inside and from the outside. And I think those pathways are by this point becoming an

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approach that I think we can say with confidence has impacted the city in the cultural experience that people are having here. So that's what I would perhaps say for now, really. And I hope that by having this set of performances at the start of the exhibition, it's also this way of making sure that the institution is seen in the most active sense and not as the person walking in is, you know, being force-fed these heavy concepts but actually that you are a participant in what is going on here. And I really love this line by Ocean Wuong, who writes: "You are a participant in the future of language". And I really hope that that's the experience too, that whatever the future understanding of these concepts is, is something that is co-created and not something that is already forced and placed as a resolved issue at the very beginning.

Magnus Rosengarten: This also brings me to this question of, you know, the show definitely speaks, of course, to an international audience, but you just mentioned that this institution also has and probably will impact, of course, also various local communities. And what do you think the show can also do to the Berlin sort of like environment, cultural environment, cultural atmosphere?

Natasha Ginwala: There are, of course, Berlin based artists in the show in the most obvious sense. People like Anne Duk Hee Jordan have been working around also the rights of the beyond-human in relation to these questions for a long time. And I think the invitation in that sense has been quite elaborate to Berlin communities and to Berlin artists. That again, is something that has been central to a lot of my work at the Gropius Bau. And part of it has also been through the way we program across. And that's also why it's great for us to work and think together as we are doing with *Breathe*. I feel that definitely also anchors the subjects very differently within Berlin's very, very uneven and disproportionately cared for city where there's such immense pressure and such a demand for infrastructures of care, but very, very narrow ways in which to access it. So, for a population that is undergoing in many ways huge neglect, also, and coming from very different backgrounds, how do we create a space which at least within the artistic mode, is receiving these very different forms in which bodies are already shaped by non-caring systems? Again, I think I'm kind of much more interested in like continuities. So, for me personally, this has been a way to reengage with some of the projects that already started out for me and Defne Ayas is during the Gwangju Biennial, which was called *Mind's Rising Spirits Tuning* and fundamentally address the mind body relationship. Again, from a political sense, but also through the lens of Indigenous knowledge systems, forms of spirituality. And I believe that bringing some of those projects to life again, projects that had really suffered from the height of pandemic to engage with them in the context of Berlin is something I'm really looking forward to. And I also wanted to say in closing just one more aspect of what I hope this exhibition will do, which is that when we enter as an audience, what it might mean for an exhibition to speak to you as someone who is a receiver of care and also a care giver, because I believe that both of these are components in each of us, in our different roles in society, we are playing these acts sometimes again in a in a very uneven way. And those are what create also ruptures within ourselves, in our psyche, in our physical health. And so when being in an exhibition like this one is invited to be alert to not only one kind of role, but all of the

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different aspects of giving and receiving care and thinking about it again at a very individual level, but then also at the level of belonging to a certain system in a city like Berlin, where aspects of access and also of the pressure of recovery is something that we are all grappling with.