

Lola Olufemi

Just before Ru starts, I just wanted to say, it's been such a joy, thinking up and dreaming up this program. And I wanted to, I guess, frame it a little bit and try and think about how I was thinking about resistance in relation to the events that are being put on. So I think of resistance broadly as related to processes of material refusal. And I think that often resistance is the threshold of political demand. And I've been thinking a lot in the work that I do about why like cultural production, why art so, so very rarely meets that threshold. And I think a show like this opens really critical questions for us to think about the place of art in material resistance. And for us to think about the connection between, I guess the ways that art can provide a like a felt texture to the ways that we live. But it's but ultimately, the importance of remaining aware of our social, political, economic conditions, and how refusal is key to transforming those. So I hope that's given you some sense that I'm trying really here in this program to marry the cultural and the political because I don't believe the two can be separated. And we'll we'll see that hopefully, from Ru's intervention, and also the panel that follows. I'm going to stop talking now and pass over to Ru. I'm so excited. I feel like she's going to be able to frame what I've just said. probably much better than I said it. But yeah, I'll pass over to Ru now. Thanks so much.

Ru Kaur

Okay, I'm gonna say a few things and then I think there'll be time for questions and comments as well. So yeah, I wanted to thank Lola for asking me to speak today, I've not had a chance to have a look through the exhibition, because I didn't get a chance yesterday. So unfortunately I won't be able to directly respond to that in the comments that I'm making and the sort of reflections I'm giving now. When Lola had asked me to speak, I felt a bit unsure about being able to kind of do justice to this quite broad spectrum of ideas about women's resistance that we could be speaking about, particularly because I didn't want to kind of risk foreclosing a kind of understandings of the meaning or the possibilities that they might create, so hopefully, I don't do that today but obviously, people can pull me up on it afterwards, if you feel that I have done. But what I am going to do is speak to a few things I've been trying to sit with recently. Some in relation to the ongoing mass injustice and fight for life that we're currently seeing in Palestine, and also what that means for our solidarity in different areas. And also some kind of questions that I want to pose to this room of people that I'm sure have a very varied set of political perspectives and experiences that hopefully will be helpful will kind of help to kind of guide how you're thinking through these challenges yourself.

Ru Kaur

So, I guess the thing I wanted to really start with in thinking about women's resistance and feminism is, it's always worth stating, because we may not have a shared understanding we may do. Obviously, there's many feminism's, namely, the kind of modes of analysis and politics that compel us to act upon the world and resist. And I feel quite strongly that it's not our task to try and create a sort of typology of a sort of ideal feminism or an ideal resistance around what that should look like. But instead, there is a question for us around who gets to make a claim to feminism or to radicalism. So the work that we might be doing is not so much to salvage a sort of true feminism, because I don't think that really gives us the tools that we need to be able to understand the world around us. But instead, we can sit with a sort of multitude of interpretations. And what we might be better off trying to do is understanding which feminism's are mobilized, not only for struggles for reparative justice, but also against them, such as an imperialist feminism, which sort of valorizes and incubates particular types of women's resistance and

struggles, sometimes as a pretext for occupation or wars of expansion and accumulation on a global scale, and how those might sit very much at the opposite end of the types of things that we might be trying to talk about today. And what a more robust feminist analysis might allow us to do is to not only resist that sort of framing and push back against the types of feminism that we are able to sort of define ourselves against, but also not past particular groups in trans historical categorizations of innocence and vulnerability. So namely, especially thinking about the kind of the current situation that we're in now, to remind us that there's those who may have been historically oppressed, but they can also emerge as oppressors in a different set of conditions, because it's obviously the material conditions that create our oppression, not this kind of historic idea of, you know, women, or those socialized as women as a sort of protected vulnerable class. So if we're sort of cognizant of a multitude of feminism's, what can we learn from the resistance of those on the frontlines of current struggles against disposability regimes of death making and accumulation on a global scale that we're seeing happening in real time right now. We can speak really briefly here about some of the global systems that others are struggling against, and the multitude of connections between our struggles and the systems that are marginalizing others at various scales. So I'm just going to name a few kind of different examples of things and where there's sort of systems of connection and then hopefully be able to talk about why that's relevant in the context of women resisting. So yeah, just in terms of a few sorts of examples, I was thinking about the kind of military industrial complex. So where we have a very commonly known Israeli based arms and military technology company called Elbit, which many of you may have seen people who have been kind of protesting or trying to block its supply chains in producing and distributing weapons. So Elbit produces the I mean exponentially catastrophic weapons that are murdering and mutilating Palestinians on a daily basis right now. This company also provides drones for Frontex, which some of you may know as a European Union's border Coast Guard, that also seeks to deter refugees and has been implicated in the abandonment and death of refugees at Europe's borders. Or we can think about Palantir. Again, a company you may well have heard of this surveillance tech company whose sister company delivers Israeli military surveillance that helps to target criminalize and kill Palestinians, a company that has been involved in repeated data breaches in a global context, and is also connected to the US border regime that separates children from their parents, and is now set to own the NHS contract for our health data, or many of us in this room that may access the NHS. Or we could think about the Rwanda asylum plan, which I'm sure many of you may have followed in the news over the last year or so, which the UK government is currently trying to pass into legislation despite the Supreme Court finding it unlawful. So this is a plan that draws from a former Israeli state policy to deport its own unwanted migrant populations to Rwanda and Uganda. So thinking about how these techniques for detaining people criminalizing people, these tactics were doing so are shared on a global scale and what that means for us in terms of how we think about resisting them in interconnected ways as well, or how the learning and practice on tactics, restraint, counter-insurgency, protest crowd control that police forces across the world share with one another, including the documented cases of Israeli police delegations visiting the Metropolitan Police in London. And I feel like I have to say that documented because, you know, you can veer into being accused of conspiracies and by pointing out these very palpable, obvious examples. So if we begin to unravel the interconnectedness of these systems, what does it mean to say that we're also complicit in them? Namely, that these entities that target, maim, and kill all over the world? How do we see ourselves as complicit in those and interconnected with them? The reality for many of us here is that we benefit from a global infrastructure of production of death through the ways that it protects our national security interests, props up our welfare state, pays into

our tax system, and also upholds our civil infrastructure. But there's an obvious tension here. While we benefit from the spoils of contemporary imperialism, this global infrastructure of death making also has an impact on our lives. It's something that I'm sure many of us in this room don't want to see upheld don't want to see the continuation of or are actively resisting the continuation of as well. The struggle that we're currently seeing live streamed on a daily basis in Palestine. Though, It currently also has resonance in other places, obviously, including Sudan, the Congo, Kashmir is one against the disposability and hierarchies of life, where the protections of some of us do not come at the expense of others, where life is not a commodity that can just as readily be extinguished, as it is accumulated in the service of regimes of global capital and production of death on a global scale. And one thing that I would say is is heartening to see right now is many of us increasingly grappling with and understanding that if we're not fighting for the dignity and lives of those elsewhere, we can't expect dignity and protection of life to be upheld here. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, Where life is precious, life is precious. This means that there can't be any space for a multi tier system or a hierarchy where we get to reap particular benefits and that doesn't somehow have an impact on the degradation of our lives, either in the immediate moment or down the line. So it seems abundantly clear that what is at stake here is resisting this consensus of disposability, and production of death that actually impacts on all of us, even if we're not immediately facing its effects right now.

Ru Kaur

So in light of that, what do the depictions of women's resistance tell us about the role of men in these modes of resistance, which I feel like is actually a really important thing to be speaking about right now, particularly when we're looking at the logic of settler colonialism and accumulation, which renders the work of reproducing day to day life a site of resistance in itself. And men participate in this resistance to through care work, keeping families together, this work is extending across different scales, which I think it's also important for us to think about how resistance is happening. So we can think here about on the individual level, in a community, in a prison in times of war, and more pertinently in times of genocide. And of course, gendered vulnerability is not a sort of linear, easily translated process. There are particular modes of racialized state violence that men are more likely to be subjected to, or in the context of war, policing, border violence. So what we're encountering are wars that are not only being fought on the physical terrain, but also through psychological warfare that is meted out against different gendered subjects that seeks to degrade and demoralize its victims. And this is where it's particularly important for us to see the importance of steadfastness and perseverance as not only a political strategy, but one for survival across gendered groups.

Ru Kaur

So how then, can we be more robust in challenging the paucity of the popular understandings of gendered social reproductive labor that also keeps us alive and together, and particularly in times of extreme struggle? And also how quickly do our theories of gender or gendered labor or sites of gendered resistance collapse in the face of ongoing colonialism and active genocide? And with this in mind, how can it help us to connect and understand that these rigid normative categories of gender alongside race, citizenship, sovereignty, and rights are also coterminous with the contemporary iterations of colonialism as well as its afterlives that many of us are continuing to live through in our day to day lives.

Ru Kaur

Now sometimes the weight of the forces that we're up against feels all encompassing, but the reality resistance for those who face the sort of knife edge of these global regimes of death making that I'm talking about, continue to resist with whatever tools are available to them. So even in the moments that we from maybe the relative comfort of our collective vantage points, see that hope is lost. These are the times when people are continuing to resist as an Neferti Tadiar reminds us of zones of war also zones of living. So life continues to be sustained and what appears to us as some of the most bleak conditions. And this is a resistance whose forces almost unthinkable to the likes of our political leaders, those who prop up nation states, those that are, you know, upholding these regimes of death, these modes of resisting and living don't translate, they don't, they're not logical. In light of that multiscale resistance, thinking about multiple scales at which resistance is necessary and is being acted out is really important here. So resistance is not only constant, it doesn't end when destruction and oppression is a prevailing condition. It continues in synchronicity with these conditions. And people resist using whatever tools are available to them in that context and moment, be it a stone thrown at an occupying soldier, a parent resisting the dehumanization they face in a council housing office when they're trying to access needed resources for them and their children, a worker resisting her conditions in an exploitative factory or other workplace. These struggles are not only connected, but they help us to also envision resistance at these different scales and the fact that they are continuing, when they are happening all the time. Which I find a humbling realization as well and quite a corrective to our collective tendency maybe, to fall into despair, when we feel that these forces are so overwhelming. I think it also urges us to rethink some of our preferred or maybe more visible or accepted examples, and tools for resisting and the things that we might take for granted.

Ru Kaur

And related to that, I also want to ask a question of who gets to be a resisting subject? And which forms of resistance? Do we collectively valorize? and for what reasons? So what are our own kind of understandings of acceptable resistance? And how is that framing the ways that we're interpreting the actions of others? What about the more uncomfortable forms of resistance, namely, the role that death plays in people's own autonomy in their own acts of resistance against the systems that they're up against? And what about militancy and violence? And how do we deal with our own discomfort, others expressions of this sort of radical expression of freedom? And what modes of disciplining resistance are we complicit in in our interpretive actions? And also, what does resistance look like for those who are hidden away in prisons and detention centers? In these spaces that actively seek to disappear people? How do we honor those people? How do we even recognize what they're resisting? How do we build those connections and resist the imperative for them to be disappeared, which is actively how these spaces are organized? And also, what about the resistance of those that are seen outside of desired political subject hoods, so thinking about sex workers, undocumented migrants, those that are criminalized, drug users? And in light of this, a crucial question that I keep coming back to is how do we honor the lessons that those resisting are teaching us about new ways to live, while also not dehumanizing them as mere objects for our salvation, or our learning and our kind of collective retribution?

Ru Kaur

So finally, in light of all of those thoughts, I also just wanted to pose a question to all of you around what does this compel each of us to do? I'm really conscious of the space that we're having this conversation in. As an art, as an institution, as an art space, how do we collectively resist the ossification that may happen when these ideas and radical parables are brought into institutions? How do we counter the images of resistance such as maybe the one behind me being made depictions of a struggle that either doesn't involve us or that becomes fixed in a particular moment of time, thinking here about Tina Campt's invitation to also consider the frequency of the images that we're we're taking in, and what they tell us about the conditions and the textures of life of those that are featured within them? So also, what's the sort of the kind of sound and the other sorts of senses that those images are conveying to us? And what stories do they tell us beyond the moment in which we're taking them in? And how do we meet these images with an interpretive dynamism? I think that they deserve rather than conditioning them within our own ideas of what resistance should be or what it should look like. What it does for us, like, you know, simply kind of taking that message away, and discarding it afterwards. I may be quoting Rafeef (Ziadah) in her absence, but also how do we allow them to teach us life? Or what is it that they're teaching us about life? In how we interpret them and how we absorb them? And what are the current spaces for us to learn from not only other struggles, but also to be able to share tactics and adapt in the face of the systems that we're up against in a collective movement against the prevailing consensus of death making, disposability and accumulation that our lives are increasingly being drawn into the service of. And finally, I guess how will you honor that moment that we're in right now? Is a question that I wanted to leave everyone with. Thank you.

Lola Olufemi

So I guess if anyone did have any, any questions, comments, I first want to say thank you that was that was beautiful. And I felt like it was such an invitation to think with and alongside you. And also to think about the notion of resistance as a relational tool or a relational principle, right? Like, I think the way that you were talking about interconnectedness and interdependence was making me think about how resistance is also a promise or commitment to be involved with one another beyond, you know, the narrow limits of the law, right to act as if we were responsible for one another, which is a key theory idea ethic in feminist politics more broadly. But also, I think you did a really great job of framing this political, like this specific political moment in terms of like, the production of freedom and unfreedom, like, what freedoms are we witnessing being produced? And what are the unfreedoms that must occur so that those freedoms are produced, right. But yeah, were there any questions or comments? Or like, just thoughts in general about how what Ru has shared has made you think about resistance? Or the exhibition if you've seen it?

Visitor Question 1

Ru Kaur

Thank you. So it was about kind of resisting in the kind of different spaces that we're in? Yeah. Yeah. And thank you, I think, a really pertinent question, I guess, I mean, in terms of resisting, obviously, we know, there's a lot of people that are actively trying to kind of, I guess, disrupt the maybe the sort of logics and the the sort of endpoint that we might expect these spaces are going to lead us to, right. So you thinking about people that are organizing within our institutions at the moment around complicity with the oil industry, with militarism, etc. So I would say, first of all, in the short term, obviously, there's

struggles right now that are obviously happening, and I'm sure people in this room are engaged in, I guess, in terms of thinking about how they might compromise what we do in future or, or the kind of possibilities of the sort of horizons that you want to realize in the future. I mean, the thing I always find interesting about the art world is like, it's always been a compromise space, right? Like, if it isn't the contemporary moment around kind of big business or corporate interests, financing art, it was, you know, rich benefactors, in previous generations, like, I always think in terms of, at least where money comes from in art. That's a relation that doesn't go away. It doesn't mean that you completely, I guess, turn away from it, but at least having a transparency around that, and being able to resist, you know, the impact of that sort of the stranglehold that financing has. And then also, in terms of I mean, spaces like social media. I mean, I think increasingly, people do realize that they are, there's ways in which they actively work against interest politically right. So thinking about particular countries where it's not even possible to kind of be able to share things in a free way. Obviously, there's increasing encroachments on freedom of expression, and speech in this country right now, which I think is always important to remember, rather than thinking of it only as a problem that's kind of happening over there. I don't have an immediate answer on how you get away from that. And I guess also, the thing I find connecting to the point that I was saying earlier of like, where I see that there's hope is that people are recognizing these things in structural terms as systemic issues as relations of power that we need to undo, get away from at least be able to understand initially, and that puts us in a much better space than perhaps we've been for a long time. And I guess the opportunities beyond that. i Yeah, I think remain open which is what, what generates hope about them and makes them a kind of generative possibility is, we can't predict where that goes. But yeah, I always, I guess, just to go back to I think on the kind of art world in particular. I don't necessarily think that it's an inherently compromising space, when you think about how art has always existed, but what is possible in those spaces? And also, really importantly, perhaps, some of the things that people want to do in that space just are inherently not possible. So where do you go to do that and realize particular visions elsewhere?

Lola Olufemi

Yeah, I think also, like just to bounce off what you're saying, it makes me think about the necessity of artists recognizing themselves as workers, right? I think like, what is really powerful about some of the work in this exhibition is that you can tell that that like understanding of power relations exists in the work in the subject of the work, how the work is framed, what it chooses to address. And yeah, I'm a, I'm a big fan of stealing resources, you know where you can, but you're right that often, when you're embedded in institutions, be them academic, law institutions, art institutions, there are loads of barriers and things that are put in your way that make the possibility of stealing that resource, the reason that you're there impossible to do. So I think it's about knowing also when to give up. And when to say this place is not a site of struggle, this is not a site of resistance, and when to actually employ some strategy. And I think crucially, also sorry, to just like thinking a lot, I feel like, it's about maintaining the antagonism that in and against right orientation that has guided so many of our past resistance movements, but also understanding that artists don't just make art, you know, like, hopefully, we'll see from the conversation with Sheida and Sophia, that they're two, yes, politically engaged artists, but they also have practices, lives, senses of struggle outside of the art world. And that's the difference, I think, between, you know, powerful feminist art and just feminist art that is just, I don't know, trying to narrativeise or tell a story.

Ru Kaur

And you're making me think about things which is Yeah, riffing on that as well, thinking about how kind of Fred Moten speaks about this, which is, it also gives you a sense of perspective that like the space that you're in is not necessarily Yeah, the sort of the endpoint for what is possible for you in terms of political transformation, or, yeah, the possibilities of sort of radicalism or whatever it is that you want to call it. It's really helpful grounding practices kind of Lola's also, indicating is, it's helpful because it helps you to kind of reorient your priorities, it helps you to really significantly understand the limitations of the spaces that you're in. And for me, that is really, it's generative, it's helpful, it helps you to think about that not being where you sort of waste all your energies and thinking about where else it can go as well.

Lola Olufemi

Thank you so much. Any other questions? Thoughts? Comments?

Visitor Question 2**Ru Kaur**

The initial thing I'd say in response to that is borders are not only cartographic, right, borders are also an internal process. They are also social. They exist at the point of someone being able to live in a country and access the services that they need. They exist at the point of the work that you're able to do and how you remain trapped in particular exploitative work conditions. So I mean, yeah, kind of immediately in responding to the idea of when we may talk about horizon around, you know, a world without borders, borders are not simply lines on a map, first of all, and then secondly, the idea. So you were kind of saying about, yeah, I guess you're kind of talking about self determination as linked to nationalism, and national struggles, what I would say when you talk about settler colonialism is it's not simply about people kind of, again, drawing lines on a map, it is a social relation. So when you think about people, when we talk about kind of indigeneity, to replace, it isn't simply the sort of, again, trans historical or kind of naturalized connection to a land. It is about people that have lived in a place and have been forcibly displaced from there right. So then you think about settler colonialism as sort of a social relations, not simply a sort of One Time Act. And then when you think about a horizon without borders, in light of those two things, so one that borders are, exist at different types of scales in different ways that people experience the country. And secondly, that settler colonialism is about relations between people the relations that they have to the state that they're within. I think probably it hopefully complicates the idea around what actually an abolitionist kind of border future looks like, which isn't just about, oh, we're gonna eradicate some borders. And you know, actually, that works in the interest of finance capital anyway. So like, is it actually transformative? We're talking about completely unmaking and redoing the relations between people in different places and within one place. I don't know if you want to add anything?

Lola Olufemi

No, I think you actually covered it all. Anybody else got any questions?

Visitor Question 3

Ru Kaur

So there were two questions, I guess, one around what I meant by kind of dealing with death as one mode of resisting for people. And then secondly, around militancy and armed struggle, in response to the first one, and I'm sure you'll have thoughts on this. I don't see dead bodies as a currency in trying to compel people to act or compel them to think about the dehumanization of the people that are dead. I don't think that necessarily works. So it hasn't historically worked. I mean, we see some examples, the obvious one being the death of George Floyd, where, yes, there was a kind of circulation of image which contributed towards people being able to, you know, understand the brutality, police violence, but I don't think that happens in even ways. I mean, I don't know about you, but I think a lot of us have probably been consuming images every day of dead and mutilated people. And it certainly brings up that feeling of well, why is this not compelling others to do anything? I think that already speaks to what I'm trying to say, and that clearly, those images themselves don't land in the ways that they should do and therefore they're not an effective currency, as I say. So what I mean, in terms of death is well, yeah, it's more just what do we, how do we respond to the fact that for others death is a mode for them for their autonomy, right for them to be able to autonomously politically act in a moment? I think that is a very difficult thing for us to be able to speak about, certainly in the sort of spaces in the political and national context that we're in. I don't have an immediate kind of idea about what others should think about that. What I'm interested in is what does that invoke for others? And why does it invoke a sort of distaste or discomfort? And perhaps it relates to the fact that we don't day to day experience the sense of desperation that compels other people to do that? And that's also one thing that we should recognize.

Ru Kaur

And then in relation to your second point around militancy? I guess related to the point that I said earlier about the space that we're in is that I won't give you a hugely detailed response on kind of my political and personal perspective or militancy, simply because I don't know everyone in this room. And I don't know, you know, there's certain things that I probably don't want to speak about publicly. And unfortunately, that's a level of kind of self censoring that we have to consider at the moment, in terms of statements that we make and how they may be taken out of context or, or misused. But yeah, as you say, it is something that people like Judith Butler, and others have pointed to, which is complicating maybe some of the kind of dominant perspectives around thoughtless violence, and trying to contextualize that violence and historicize it and speak about it as you know, as thought out as a militant strategy. And having been kind of strategized over a long period of time. So these are all kind of ways that people are trying to push back against this, um, you know, heavily racialized kind of framing of these mad people that we can't think of, and who are uncivilized, you know, acting out violence in these ways.

Lola Olufemi

I think also, like, on the question of just resistance, I find it like resistance in general, kind of in relation, I guess, to the exhibition as well, I find it really interesting when we define resistance as these like, mass processes of refusal, these mass processes of saying no, but then the parameters of that refusal are also neatly drawn for us. So if you're a racialized person, you can only say no, this way, you know, and I think what art enables is, is a funnel, a way to think about an excess of emotion, grief, pain, right? But that can't only be kind of constituted by us passively looking at something, when we're trying in this

space to link up material, our material understandings of what resistance is and what it can do to the cultural, we're also thinking about, like, what do we do? What do our bodies do? How do we refuse with our bodies? Which has been a question that has, you know, defined loads of historical moments, right? And that doesn't necessarily even have to be that that question can begin in the context that you are in, right, we've seen over the last 10 years, some of the most creative forms of direct action coming from feminist movements, where they have put their bodies on the line. And that can't, I don't know, I, the, like you've been saying Ru, I think, one way to dampen and to really mire us in a sense of despair and political immobility is to neatly say, here are the parameters of your refusal. And, you know, when historically people have gotten concessions from power in any context, that's always been because they've spilled over the parameters of what's acceptable, especially from positions of subjugation like that, that was just a broad kind of musing on resistance. But I think maybe that's a good place to end. Thank you all so much for being really generous with your thoughts and ideas. We're gonna have just a five minute break so you can kind of stretch your legs and then we're gonna come back and have a panel with Sofia Karim and Sheida Soleimani who are going to talk to us about their work, but also, I think, talk to us about the connection between the cultural and the political in relation to the exhibition. So thank you.

Lola Olufemi

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much. I hope that break allowed you to grab a snack. And we're gonna start back now.

Lola Olufemi

I'm actually going to start by introducing both Sheida and Sofia, which I did a terrible job of actually introducing. I'm very sorry, but I will introduce Ru as well. In, in post. So Ru Kaur organizes against state violence, including policing and border violence. She occasionally writes on topics including migration, race and gender. Sheida Soleimani is an Iranian American artist, educator and activist. Soleimani makes work that combines photography with sculpture, collage and film to highlight her critical perspectives on historical and contemporary socio political occurrences. She is interested in the intersections of art and activism and how social media has shaped the landscape in current political affairs and uprisings. Sofia Karim has practiced architecture for over 20 years at studios including Norman Foster's in London, and Peter Eisenman's in New York. Her practice combines architecture, visual art and activism. The incarceration of her uncle led to the development of her theories on an architecture of disappearance. She explores architecture as a language of struggle and resistance, her activism focuses on human rights across Bangladesh and India. She campaigns for the release of imprisoned artists and political prisoners. She is the founder of the Turbine Bagh, a joint artists movement against fascism and authoritarianism, and a platform for political art and activism. Thank you both so much. So Sofia and Sheida are both featured artists in the exhibition, which hopefully you'll have a chance to wander around after we finish, but we're just going to chat for about 40 minutes to an hour. And I guess it makes the most sense, given the context of what we've spoken about already. To think about the way art and artistic practice, as I've said, can change like the shape and texture of our social relations, even as they are and continue to be defined by capitalism. So I'm interested in asking you what are the freedoms and limitations that artistic creation offers? In moments of feminist resistance, how do those moments appear in your work? And how do they expand and limit feminist demands?

Sheida Soleimani

I mean, I was thinking about the, the limiting part of it, obviously, a little bit of echo reverb. I'm quite loud, I'm American too, so I'll project. I'm thinking a lot about like, we have to be thoughtful about the institutions we inhabit. And you were saying something similar, you know, I feel that most revolutionary feminism is curtailed by the limitations that are placed on dissent, on free speech, on efforts to reform labor, for example. And if we consider what these limitations are, they end up relating to the type of work that's often showed in spaces, you know, who is on a board, who's interested in buying, who's interested in collecting and so thinking a lot about the limitations placed on feminist, you know, actions and artwork, I find that often times they are institutional, and escaping that institutional lens is something that I think artists, often are great at doing, but have to find ways of moving into the undercurrent to do.

Lola Olufemi

And could you say a bit more about like, your experiences of trying to, like, I guess, move into the undercurrent, trying to do that, like, did it happen at the level of thinking about how your work appears, thinking about where it's displayed, thinking about the connections that you're making in terms of how you're entering an art market if you're entering the market? But I'm also thinking about that question in relation to this idea that there used to at least in this country be a very kind of vibrant DIY, art scene or art movement, or some sense that you could make art viably outside of institutional recognition and or funding. So I'm wondering how that how that comes up for you?

Sheida Soleimani

Yeah absolutely. It's a little bit reverby, is there a way to like...that might be better if you don't mind. Can everyone, I mean like, you can hear me fine right Perfect. Thank you.

Lola Olufemi

Yeah. Oh, wait, I think I think we're gonna turn it on.

Sheida Soleimani

Shortly. Fun. Perfect. All right. So yeah, thinking I mean, I started making like the work that's in the show here is actually really pretty early work for me. And I learned a lot from making that work. I made it in 2016 2017. I was unapologetic, and I was really interested in working with individuals whose voices have been silenced. Gaining access to the information, though, is extremely hard.

Lola Olufemi

Sorry contextualizing the pieces for the people that haven't seen that.

Sheida Soleimani

So in the exhibition you'll see in doors there, I have a wall. It's all of these kind of protest flyer paper looking posters, there tulips, tulips falling in front of a mountain. And it's a nod, I guess I'll describe the whole work. The backdrop is a nod to a revolutionary anthem from the 1950s called the 'Aftabkaran e jangal'. It speaks a lot about the tulips in the foothills of the mountains, obviously, something beautiful, but resilient. And thinking about revolutionaries and martyrs being something that could be suppressed

or dies off in the winter, but every spring, they come back, and they come back with more force, and they grow. And thinking a lot about the tulip also being a symbol that's been co-opted, especially by the Islamic regime, right now in Iran. And so I wanted to kind of think about re-owning and re-bringing back that symbol into currency. So the revolutionary kind of like tactic, a fly papering a wall urgency, of course, is extremely important to me, I wanted to use that aesthetic, to show something as simple as a flower, you know, thinking about like how we're always seduced by things that are beautiful, and we don't want to look at trauma or the pornography of pain in order to insert ourselves or to understand something. And then on top of those images are portraits of five women, those five women, most of which had been executed by the Iranian government, unjustly and for crimes that they did not commit. And so working with human rights lawyers inside of Iran, working with families, speaking to their families, and excavating these histories, to bring them to the forefront was really important for me. I was thinking a lot about observational psychology. Albert Bandura's 'Bobo doll' experiment for anyone that's interested in psych in here. The very early iterations were about how individuals enact violence and thinking like societal violence, but also I'm thinking about violence with women. Iranian government has always used women as scapegoats in order to blame or to, you know, put something on them in order to be able to get away with all the crimes that they commit. And so those five women were examples of that, working with images of them, sculpting them turning into them, turning them into these effigies, similar to Bandura's 'Bobo doll' as a form of a scapegoat, but to bring attention, you know, what was happening to them. So those are the five images they're built, they're constructed in studio and they're placed upon the tulips. You might also notice on the ground, there are some takeaway posters. So if you turn the poster on the other side, it's the color image of the tulips in the mountains. But the other side gives you details on how many women have been imprisoned, how many individuals have been executed, how many children have been executed, and killed in state sanctioned violence in Iran since the beginning of Zan, Zendeji, Azadi which started in September of 2022. So it's really hasn't been that long now. Um, so jumping forward, I started making that work when I was 25/26. And I was unapologetic, but I also was young and not knowing how to talk to the media, I'm thinking a lot about like clickbait. It was the first time I had a gallery show in London. And I was talking to a journalist, and I just was, you know, speaking passionately about what's happening. And what ended up happening was that something that I said about who wants to buy images of executed women ended up becoming like this clickbait kind of title of this article. And it's not at all in any way, what I wanted to communicate or what I'm interested in doing, but it made me realize that this work isn't meant to be commercially traded or to be sold, but it's, in a way meant to be displayed in institutions, where people could learn about these stories. And so that took me really into thinking about zine making, poster making, distribution free access and distribution of these images in a way that aren't meant to be, you know, traded or given for money

Lola Olufemi

And Sofia..

Sofia Karim

Freedoms and limitations. I got into resistance through necessity. I wasn't an artist, I wasn't an activist. I was an architect. And my uncle was in prison by the Government of Bangladesh. And that's when I started doing what I do. And I think, I think resistance is really like love. It was filling, a void, a void, which is the vacuum when love is annihilated. And it feels very much like love. So this week is a huge

week for me. Professor G.N. Saibaba, a political prisoner in India, who I've been making art, and campaigning on for four years was released this week. And I saw photos of him with his wife Vasantha, and her hand is on his shoulder and she's touching him. And I realize, again, liberation feels like love. And I think resistance and love are similar forces and they're nourished by the same root. and I was at a talk this week, called Except Palestine, and it was at Birkbeck University and it was Palestinian feminist scholars speaking. And one of them was speaking about the men, Hamas and other groups, who got through the fence and entered Israel on October the 7th. And she was talking about how many of them are very young, they're living in refugee camps, they've seen death of their families all their life. And she talks about pain and resistance. From my experience, resistance, love, art, are ways to transcend pain. You can't necessarily control them, and like love, it's quite uncontrollable, inexplicable force. And so, in terms of freedom and limitation, I'd say it has the same kind of freedom and limitation that those forces like love, have.

Lola Olufemi

Thank you so much. You both said. You both kind of started threads in my mind, specifically about the importance of Sheida for you like thinking about like, what an art market does or what processes of economic exchange do to that love relation, right? Because I'm constantly trying to think like, why in moments of pain, grief, do people turn towards art why do they turn towards language as a means of attempting to express those things? And how, how is that process defiled by making something that then somebody else will buy? Right? And I think it's linked to that question of resistance, because so often, things that are important aspects, so things like revolutionary like love, or or hope or, you know, not not optimistic, not optimism, but a kind of like political determination, they become infused in the things that we make and those things circulate and as a result, those aspects kind of circulate as well. And that is, I think, an important part of revolutionary and radical struggle is why people return to the posters and zines of revolutionary movements, for example. But yeah, it's that kind of tipping point of thinking about how, when something loses its revolutionary fervor or its resistant fervor, I guess, all of that to say that was a huge tangent. I wanted to ask you, you've both kind of mentioned how it feels, I guess, superfluous to think about but the efficacy of art in this particular political conjuncture with the witnessing of an ongoing genocide, witnessing an ongoing genocide unfolding in Palestine. I guess, as artists whose work is kind of intimately tied into those political contexts, can you speak to the role of like cultural and artistic production, in acts of resistance specifically their propagandistic function. So I know Sheida, you've spoken before about how your aesthetic, the aesthetics of your work are influenced by revolutionary movements, like Black Panther, the Black Panthers, the OSPAAAL in Cuba, and I know, for you Sofia architectures of disappearance came out of that came out of a political context that I guess you didn't choose. And so I'm wondering, yeah, if you could speak more about how art functions as propaganda, I guess, and why that's good, rather than not good.

Sofia Karim

So yeah, I mean, the way I, I kind of got into this by realizing when I was campaigning that every civil rights resistance movement has always had art and used that and I did too. And what was interesting was, at the moment, I'm seeing sometimes a lot of guilt of people sharing beauty or just listening to music, thinking, no should be campaigning campaigning. And it made me remember that when my uncle was in jail, and I'd make political art posters, I'd always run it past my aunt, his partner in Bangladesh, and I'd send it to her. And she'd say, Sofia, it's not beautiful. And then I'd scrap it and start

again. And I knew that, you know, beauty is essential, and fascism destroys beauty. But, um, so, on one side, one side of my work is that the work that you see in the exhibition, and it's quite didactic, and it's direct in its messaging, and that kind of art is needed. And it's always been needed. You know like, we're not messing about this is life and death situations. But then there's like another whole side of my practice, which is entirely different. And it's much more inward, and where meaning is not clear. And I think that's a very essential aspect of art as well. So, you know, a lot of the kind of Palestinian revolutionaries like, Ghassan Kanafani, whose work I was using when I was making architecture projects. And, you know, what really seduces me about his work was his writing, initially. And I think that other aspect of art is something that is much less tangible. And I guess it gets into sort of folds between logic and logic is used by power to justify what they do. It's also used by Western feminism at the moment, we can see. And I think where art is interesting is that it gets into the folds of logic. And that's why it's a thorn in the side of power.

Lola Olufemi

Just say a bit more about the architecture of disappearance, how it kind of operates as a platform, idea.

Sofia Karim

So on August, the fifth 2018, my uncle was abducted in the night. And I, we got a phone call from my parents in Bangladesh and began campaigning immediately. And so in the day, I'm just doing really boring stuff, the emails and campaigning campaigning. And suddenly at night, I realized I'm dreaming about space in a way I've never seen before. And then I remembered that he used to teach, he's a photographer, and he used to give his students a lesson. And he'd asked them to think of a color that they'd never seen before. And the way they would do it was they'd go back into their memory back back back to the earliest memory and trying to dig out a color they'd never seen before. And when I was having these dreams about these spaces, they were kind of expanding contracting expanding, formless, raw emotion as space, I was wondering Is that what's happening am I seeing space I've never seen before. And that's when I began writing, my theories on an architecture of disappearance, because also, as an artist, it's really the only language I know architecture. I'm not a photographer, I'm not a writer, I'm not a musician. But I had no model or precedent for how to use architecture in this way. other art forms have a tradition of the art of dissent, you know, poetry, music, architecture doesn't really, but I think architecture knows. And it has always known that it's connected to the human condition. So in say, church architecture, they were quite overtly connecting to the suffering of Christ or in Islamic architecture an underlying reality. And so I think there's something about the inherent melancholy, of architecture, where you're in it, and you know, that you are, it's about something beyond your own existence. So I kept on with this, not knowing where the hell this was gonna go, no idea. And then after he was released, I began campaigning for other political prisoners and writing to them making architectural drawings. And this work has many manifestations sometimes, like one is a theoretical house I made for the prisoners who had disappeared or hidden. Other times, it comes into the most mundane projects I'm working on. So I might be doing some shitty kitchen extension somewhere, and there'll be a red window. And I know what that red window is about. It's the red exit gate, the prisoners that I'm campaigning for. Or I started something recently called Architecture for Palestine, where anyone, you guys could say, I've got this weird little space under my stair, can you give me some ideas for it? And then I, we do ideas, and then you donate to MAP in return. And somehow the politics comes into those designs. So yeah.

Lola Olufemi

And Sheida

Sheida Soleimani

You know, propaganda posters, and you talking about beauty and why artists turn to art, you know, especially in times of need, I mean, I think beauty and propaganda really have a lot in common because it's about comfort, and us finding comfort in things and trying to latch on to something. And I mean, I think that's also very capitalist, as like, end point. But also thinking about, you know, why are we looking for comforting ourselves? And why are we looking for always finding something that resonates with us immediately and shutting ourselves off from learning more or to excavating those histories. That's what my interest in propaganda posters really comes from, because propaganda posters aren't really just images that speak to us to put our minds at ease about whether we're on the right side or the wrong side, or whatever side that you know, you think you're interested in participating in or being on, which is also a very binary way of thinking. I'm also thinking a lot about like the composition of a propaganda poster, the symbols on a propaganda poster, who they're depicting how they're depicting them. For example, the image of the fist has always been an image oriented with the, you know, leftist kind of movements, but for right wing movements, if you're looking at propaganda posters, and you might see a torch and a flame, those are actually images and symbols that will tell you that maybe you know that that torch might look like a light, it might look hopeful. But it's actually often times used as a right wing image. In like the history of even Soviet propaganda, and that was picked up a lot and Iranian propaganda posters as well as OSPAAAL, and like the way that they were kind of thinking about the methodology of, you know, breaking down those types of hierarchies of image and hierarchies of place. I also think a lot about, you know, this idea of comfort and people expect art to be beautiful, and to be this escape. And I'm really interested in Trojan horses because of that, because I mean, as we scroll, Instagram, I teach, I'm a professor, and my students are constantly getting their news just from looking at social media. And while that's extremely effective, and quick, it's extremely biased oftentimes, and they're only being fed what's in their own curated circle. And so instead of excavating a history and learning about something that's already happened, they're ingesting quickly these kinds of like sound bites and formulating this opinion. And oftentimes, the sound bites are either fed to them in two ways. So the pornography of pain through images of trauma that are easily ingestible. That's something that we want to turn away from, or they're fed to them and like beautiful, you know, hopeful images. And I was actually just talking to a friend of mine that lives in Iran and has been in prison quite a few times yesterday, and she was telling me, you know, we need to have hope in some way, we have to look at images to be able to live in a place that's constantly falling apart, you know, to live under a regime, you know, there is no democracy, it's a theocracy, it is totalitarian regime. How do you cope? And what are coping mechanisms? And so I think of beauty as a coping mechanism. But I also think that it's very perverse, you know, there's comfort and thinking about, are there ways to undermine that? And that's the Trojan horse for me. I think a lot, you know, in researching, you know, the ideas of capitalistic comfort, or the symbols and propaganda posters, or how I might make up my next still life, for example, how do I seduce my viewer? Because, you know, people don't want to look at difficult things. They do look at difficult things, and they turn away, there is a currency of bodies, dead bodies that we're often looking at. And we're like, wow, like, we could rewind this video over and over again and watch someone die over and over again. And what does that do for

us? Nothing, desensitizes us, I think. And so in thinking about how we engage, I'm interested in you know, a slow burn, I'm interested in things slowly unpacking someone looking at an image and being like, Oh, my God, that pink is so hot, like, let me just look at that image for a while. And you know, that kind of like slowly burning and being like, wait, but what is this about? And like, why am I looking at this? And oh, fuck, this is really disturbing. And for me, that's a lot more interesting than someone just picking up something on social media and being like, you know, oh, my God, I saw this. Is this real? Is it true? Like, it must be because my friend posted it, you know, in that I'm also thinking about excavating the legacies of women and in Iran and bringing their history to the forefront. And thinking a lot about Forugh Farrokhzad who was a revolutionary poet and feminist, who wrote this book called Captive in the 50s. And thinking a lot about her work, and how this work has been buried for quite a long time, thinking about women, life, freedom, and how when Mahsa Jina Amini is, I mean, was murdered. So many people came to me and said, Oh, my God, I can't believe that happened. And to me, I mean, like, of course, I could believe that happened, because there's a whole history that predates that. But, you know, oftentimes, we're not interested in looking at the history or excavating that history. And I think that's what, you know, propaganda posters often do.

Lola Olufemi

I guess, what you're kind of pointing towards is the necessity for artists to have have some kind of strategy. But I also think of the most basic levels of artistic production and or communication and things like the people who are in like a text, like the Trinity of Fundamentals, for example, like texts that are written and smuggled out of prisons, or states of incarceration, where people have chosen beauty, they've, they've chosen beauty, they've chosen a form as a means of urgent communication of a message, which I guess is what I'm interested in, in that question of propaganda. And like, I, kind of want to take a step back to ask, we're here talking about feminist acts of resistance in particular, and I am a feminist, but I think about the, I think about the route to coming into feminism, and how that political orientation has framed my life will continue to frame my life but but completely transformed my sense of myself, my sense of others, the capacity for relation between us, and subsequently, I can't, I can't get rid of that frame, it colors everything. And so I'm interested with the both of you and in terms of like, what your understanding of feminism is, revolutionary feminism, how you position it, but also, what were those political frames that shaped your creative practices, or even your political consciousness that you can't shake.

Sofia Karim

Everything I learned about progressive politics, came not from Western feminism came from the Muslim women in my family, who were way more radical and progressive than anything I saw here. One of the first samosa packets I made a long time ago around the time of the Shaheen Bagh protest. It was a kind of riff on Marx, I think said sport is the opiate of the west. And that packet said, feminism-lite is the opiate of the masses. And it was in response to episodes of Fleabag where she's like masturbating over an Obama thing, and apparently, that's like really radical or whatever. And so, a lot of my work is actually about challenging Western or imperialist feminism. And that's what that big Shaheen Bagh thing was that one of the reasons I focused on Shaheen Bagh was because it was one of the biggest women's resistance movement of our time. Yet hardly anyone I met even seemed to know about it. They know about the Iran protests. And if these women had been like, ripping off their hijab or fighting to have Sharia law, it would be on every newspaper. You'd damn well have known about it. And

Shaheen Bagh was amazing because it was, again more progressive than anything I've seen it was mixing Muslim women with trans movement, Dalit movement, labor, farmers, I mean, like, nothing like that exists here. Yeah.

Sheida Soleimani

I didn't really have a choice in coming to critical consciousness. I was raised by a mom or a mother that was in solitary confinement for her political beliefs and viewpoints for a year, in prison multiple times. And, you know, I grew up with her, my generation of parents, and many of ours, I'm sure don't believe in therapy. So I became a childhood therapist. And so because of that, there was really no choice in coming to critical consciousness, you know, I could have pushed it away, as my sister did, which is absolutely valid in her case. But I chose not to, because there's so much there. I mean, like, my mom would, there's so many stories that I could tell. And it's not worth again, getting into the pornography of pain, but she would tell me, often, very often on a daily basis about what would happen to her what men and what people in the government would do to her when she was in solitary confinement and what that type of existence looks like and what that meant. And because of that, I've like really just, you know, and I also grew up in Ohio. So I don't know if any of you are from the states are aware of the states, but Ohio is very isolated. I grew up in like the country in the middle of like corn and soy, which is now known as Trump country. And, you know, there was no understanding of, you know, prison or incarceration. And the United States is extremely fucked in many ways, obviously. But it's much more about like, quote, unquote, criminal activity, drugs or murder. And so there are no really political prisoners in the same way in American carceral system. And so when I started learning how to speak English and going to school, and I would say, Oh, my mom was imprisoned. People didn't know what that meant. I'd be like, oh my god to just did your mom steal something that she killed someone. And so it's really thinking about refashioning Eurocentric ideologies here, I think you said something about your understanding of feminism comes from, you know, not from Western feminism. And I think the same for me, it's challenging Western feminism, challenging imperialist kind of feminism, and the understanding, or the expectation that we have that, you know, things should be this way or work this way, but it doesn't come without extremely, you know, hard work, mostly, usually at the hands of women of color. And so that, you know, yeah, that's how I came to consciousness. I think, though, often about how to tell these stories, right? Because we always, especially in news, use shock value to tell stories. And I think there's a softer way for these histories to unfold and to unpack. It's interesting that you're saying that you see women, life, freedom in the news so much, because for me, I feel like, you know, it was only for like, a few months. And now, I don't see it anymore. And when the green revolution happened in 2008, it was on the news for four days before Michael Jackson died. And then that took over. And so because we are in a, you know, my favorite term media saturated economy, we're constantly being overwhelmed and bombarded by things. And we're not holding on to the meat of the issues that we're oftentimes trying to speak of. And so thinking about, you know, how are we sharing these types of critical consciousnesses or sharing these stories in a way that aren't trying to overwhelm one another, I often also think a lot about like this idea of oppression Olympics, and people being like, Oh, this story is worse than this story was worse than this story. And I don't think it's comparable. It's just different.

Lola Olufemi

I think, oh sorry, I really respond to what you were both saying about, I guess how an imperialist feminism refuses certain subjects like says certain subjects basically can't be political subjects so that

they don't have the capacity to make the same kinds of political demands that are made in kind of Western context. And I think specifically about in this country in a kind of feminist capacity, we're constantly mourning the loss of a labor movement, we're constantly mourning, we're constantly saying, you know, what will it take for us to all get on the streets, but these are regular occurrences in Yemen, in India, in Iran in so many different contexts, right. And so I think, yeah, there's something in there in terms of if people are unable to understand those contexts as such, why? And what are the lenses through which they're conceiving of political subjects? But yeah, there's, I guess there's also something more broadly in what you're both saying about, and this refers back to art as a form as a means of communication, the value of exposure, I think when we're talking about a media saturated landscape in which, you know, there's this kind of competition between new stories, I'm interested in why the circulation of a particular kind of feminist news or whatever, is kind of important, or why people ascribe an importance to the media landscape only as the means of communicating what is going on. Because we know often there's a bias, we know often that that kind of media circulation doesn't work. And I think of art and people's, I think of art as a similar thing, right? People come to the artwork expecting to be kind of told something or or expecting the artwork to bring something to light. And there's, there's something in there, I don't know, this is more of a musing than an actual question sorry. But there's something in there I think about people are overly reliant on art as a means of exposure to violence, rather than forms of political transformation, or like protests or joining a radical organization or organizing locally, that might actually have a better sense of you getting to grips with the social relations that define how you live, if that makes sense. 1,000%. I guess what what does that mean for you as artists, right, because we're in this time when people are talking constantly about the impotency, like how art is impotent to like, in the face of what we're witnessing. But also, I think, how do you balance that with the level of trust some people put in art to do everything?

Sofia Karim

So I think my art is very fragmented. And I never have kind of, because I don't do residencies or have big projects. And I think part of the reason for that is because I really let what's happening drive the art, I never know what art I'm going to make something will happen and then I react to it. So someone will be put in jail, I'll read about that. I'll start writing letters to them, the art will come. A lot of my art goes into the prisons, I don't even show it. And so in a way, I'm not really making art for the outside audience as much as I'm engaging with my life, and the people I'm campaigning for with art. Yeah, I think that's what I think.

Sheida Soleimani

I think a lot about how sometimes making art is a selfish act. Often times, we're doing it to relieve something in ourselves. And what does it mean to be doing it for something else? Or for a cause? Is being selfish, okay? Is that taking care of yourself? There's all these questions that constantly are bouncing around my mind thinking a lot about care work or self care. Also thinking about an image just being potentially something a bit superfluous and potentially not making a change, like you're saying, I do think it's an artist's job to respond to the issues of our time. But I don't think that means that we can change what happens. And I think that we need to know that, you know, because there are so many other larger things at work, than whatever work we're making in our studio or showing in amazing places like SLG that support it, we have to think about who comes into those spaces. We're not talking to critical consciousness of like the masses, we're talking to the 1% individuals that have had access to

education, individuals, that higher education most of the time, and I would say most people that have had access to higher education have some sort of maybe enlightened worldly understanding, although I'm always surprised. You know, I am thinking often about how we learn our information, where it comes from. And I don't think it's my job to you know, I'm not going to change the world with my art. But I think what I can do is help shape an undercurrent. And I think about that a lot in my work as a professor as well, like I can have conversations in my classroom. I'm not going to change what's happening across the world. But I can hold space for students or people to exchange ideas, and hopefully they take those ideas with them out of the classroom or out of the gallery or out of the museum and start other conversations. And, you know, my father, a Marxist and a revolutionary often is flabbergasted at how quickly I expect change to happen. It's a slow thing. And it's conversations that are started and images that are disseminated, and publications that are given out and talks that are said and individuals that come together and maybe it's not even being a physical protest, maybe it's people coming together in a room and sharing stories or holding space for someone to tell, you know, tell them about something that happened to them. So yeah, I think a lot about selfishness and how we're not going to change the world, but we can shape things.

Sofia Karim

Just one thing, sorry, just, it's relevant to this exhibition and how this stuff kind of works. So when we were first planning this exhibition was before October, the seventh and I think I put forward which work I was thinking of showing, then October the seventh happened and what I realized is that some Western feminists were saying, is Palestine, really a feminist issue? Whereas the South Asian feminists that I'm working with, you can't not talk about, you can't talk about feminism and not talk about Palestine at the moment. So I was like I've really got to show something on Palestine in this work, I have to. At the same time, what I was also getting was some of this envy thing that we were talking about competition. Some people were saying to me, so how come you know everyone's talking about Palestine? What about Rohingya? Now, there was a Rohingya refugee photographer who was jailed by the Government of Bangladesh in 2020. So I started making samosa packets to campaign for him. I didn't know him. So I was quite cheeky. I took his photos off Instagram, he does amazing photos from the Rohingya refugee camp. I asked journalists, you know, do you think he'd mind myself, just do it, because I'm calling for his freedom. So I do it, I post it on Instagram, it gets like one like or something. And I think I should give all this up. I have an audience of about two. And anyway, so I keep going. And then one day that post gets a like, I'm like, Alright, we've got two likes now, who liked it. And then I get one of those DMs, where someone who's not following you, it's him. He says, I'm out. I saw that you did this. Thank you. So I keep following him in his work. And he keeps sending me work from the refugee camps, not just him, but other Rohingya photographers are taking. I'm like, they've only got about three likes, they use their cameras like prophets. I see so much shit on Instagram with 1000s of likes. And this, this photography is incredible. So one of the first things that he was photographing was Rohingya women, with placards in solidarity with Palestine at the time. So Christmas this year, I'm like, What can I show at SLG? So I phoned him up, and I leave a voice note. And I say Abul, I say what Israel's doing is genocide. Many here disagree. As someone who escaped genocide, what do you think? And he sends me a voice note back, and it's from the camps and I can hear the kids playing in the background. And he starts with sister, it doesn't matter what international opinion thinks and he continues, and then I make the packet. So it's serving a few functions now already of why I want to put this packet in. The other reason I want to put that packet in because she's in a burqa. And he says, Can you also blur her identity to safeguard

it? So I put text over her eyes. This is the kind of thing that I mean, she represents everything that imperialist feminists consider vulgar. She's holding up a sign saying Rohingya Palestine brotherhood. And it's important to me that she's saying brotherhood, because our men are demonized by Western feminism, as well. And for us, sisterhood is also standing up for our brothers. And that's why I wanted to include that work. And that's, that's why it's there.

Lola Olufemi

Thank you so much. That was amazing. Thank you for telling us that. Yeah, I think just as a kind of last question, I wanted to ask you, what your experiences of attempting to mobilize other artists have been, you know, I think we're thinking about resistance in terms of not only artistic work, but also our relations with others. And I think that there's something perhaps particular to the competition inherent to the art world, just like academics, for example. And the publishing industry, every art industry that really relies on a sense of the star individual that rises above their peers. And I'm interested in the cultivation of like radical writers, artists, sound, engineers, musician, movements that are based not on the sense that one person rises to the top, but that you're able to make work laterally, and that you talk to each other. And it's about who your peers are, how they influence your thinking. So maybe that's a that's a two pronged question. Who are your peers? Who influences your work in this sense? And What have your experiences been trying to work together with other artists to mobilize, you know, to enact acts of resistance? Not within institutions, but just generally.

Sheida Soleimani

My peers are my students. I'm not interested in hierarchy and higher education. I don't like the term professor when I say I am because people's ask what my job is, but I have just as much to learn from my students as they have for me. So de-centralizing and de-hierarchising the classroom makes me think a lot about what my education wasn't. What was left out, and what type of spaces that I would like to foster, I'm not interested, you know, there always, always is this competition of the art world, oh, my god, who's like the activist artist is that actually activism is that soft activism, like, you know, and of course, a lot of it is, that's, but that's fine. Because there's space for many different types of conversations. And we can't be competitive. Because no one's going to succeed or win in that way. Whether we disagree or not. I think it's about cultivating community. And you know, that might sound cheesy in some sort of way. But I think those types of communities for me are cultivated in the classroom, because that's where I have the reach. And I have the ability, giving individuals or students or younger artists, the ability to tell their stories, building connections, helping them show their work, and decentralizing myself as part of that I think is huge.

Sofia Karim

So I always feel incredibly lonely at these kinds of openings, actually. And, you know, wherever I've shown the work here, it's very lonely because I miss those artists I work with, my work is all made with other artists and I have to mention hugely, that huge photo of Shaheen Bagh is by Ali Monis Naqvi, an Indian photographer, I mean, my work would be nothing without them. But as well as I work with hundreds of artists, and I have to say it's been in the four years I've worked with them, what really astonishes me is that I often just take their work and make stuff. And I thought I'd get people saying, I don't like how you use my image, or you did something. And I haven't had that once in four years, which is just a testament to their generosity, and just yet how positive they are. The other thing is

that the other people I work with are not artists, but they're journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, and also the prisoners I campaign for who I'm writing to, and in dialogue with when I make the art and their families. And that is absolutely essential. Because I'm extremely conscious about mining someone's pain for my art, and me kind of rising as an artist by mining someone's pain. And often also, when I'm showing in spaces like this, I have to obviously think about the politics of that. Is it a sellout to show in Tate, or here, or V & A? And what I found is that I would often have these kinds of theoretical discussions with art, the art world, and they'd be like, yeah it's a sell out, don't do it, whatever. You know, they've got Goldsmith's degrees, or PhDs on it. And then I'd go and like, speak to the families of the prisoners I'm campaigning for, and it's them I trust. And they will say, Show it, show it or don't show it. And for me, that's an essential part of my work.

Lola Olufemi

Thank you both so much. This has been such a like such a rich conversation, and it's been wonderful to listen to you both in an attempt to kind of round up and wrap up. I think my last thought is trying to kind of link something that Ru said, about, I guess, the act of looking and the act of thinking about like an art work being locked into a very specific temporality. And I think that what resistance as a process of refusal enables us is to, I guess, to undo or unsettle this idea that unsettle the passivity of looking I think, I think like the best kind of resistant forms of cultural production, as we've like, kind of discussed, involve the viewer, rather than assuming that the viewer has something to learn from x artwork, right. It's a critical invitation to think and I also hope this has been a critical invitation to think. I want to thank everybody I want to thank Sarah, Lily, Ru, Sheida, Sofia, everybody that's been part of bringing you all here today. Thank you all for coming also. I also just want to highlight the last, there are three events in this program. The last two events. There's a workshop happening on the 17th of April. Yes, on the 17th of April here, which is basically thinking about transnational feminist solidarity. So it'll have feminist speaking to contexts like Sudan, Pakistan, Palestine, and the Kurdish women's movement and trying to think about how we from the position that we find ourselves in how we think about and practice forms of transnational feminist solidarity. So if you're interested, if you're somebody that's involved in forms of feminist organizing in the UK, and you're interested in learning about women's movements in those contexts, please do come along. And then the last event we have is a reading group with Sita Balani and Abeera Khan, who will be thinking about resistant text together. So they'll both choose a text and they'll facilitate this reading group where the those texts are read together and against one another, and then there'll be a conversation about it. But yeah, thank you so much for for giving your time on a Saturday. I hope it was useful for you