

00:00:00:01 - 00:00:05:13 GDLP

Hello and welcome to the latest episode of The White Pube Podcast. My name is Gabrielle de la Puente.

00:00:06:12 - 00:00:07:17 ZM

And I'm Zarina Muhammad.

00:00:08:04 - 00:00:30:19 GDLP

And we're going to do something a little bit different today. Basically, me and Zarina are losing our minds in the in the midst of writing a book. We don't necessarily find it easy to say things at the moment because we're just so focused on writing. But we feel a lovely obligation to provide more interesting content to our art-interested audience. So what we've done today is invite an interesting person that we know and they're gonna entertain everyone on our behalf. We are joined today by V Buckenham, who is an artist slash many different things and I think that many different things end of the sentence is going to be the subject of today's podcast. Hello. How you doing?

00:00:54:18 - 00:01:01:16 V

I like how little pressure you introduced me with, with like, Yes. This person is going to single handedly entertain us like (laughs).

00:01:03:00 - 00:01:06:09 ZM

You made it sound like we're losing our minds. And we are.

00:01:06:15 - 00:01:25:16 GDLP

We are. Yeah. We're going to chat to V today and ask some interesting questions about what art they make, but also what is a creative technologist and some projects that are about to be launched that are exciting. And I think that a lot of our audience will love to be honest.

00:01:25:17 - 00:01:35:15 ZM

You gotta humour me for this first question because I think Gab alluded to that artist and many other things. You are a polymath, right?

00:01:37:08 - 00:01:38:13 V

Sure, sure. Yeah.

00:01:38:17 - 00:01:38:21 ZM

Yeah. I'm saying it. Yes, polymath. And so the first question is, hello. Imagine I am an alien or a child. Please describe your

practice to me in a way that I would understand and enjoy.

00:01:52:02 - 00:02:20:02 V

Uh, so I said my -- I always think like what you put as your, like bio is kind of interesting for this. So my bio on Mastodon is I make things that make other things. So I guess that seems about right. Like, so I guess the two main strands are either making a computer program that then makes the art, if that makes sense, or making a tool that other people can then use to make the art. So it's always like a little bit one step removed.

00:02:24:08 - 00:02:39:00 ZM

What did you study at university to, like, lead you into making things in the first place? Cause I've got like a, a question I don't quite know how to word, which is how do you do all of the things that you like, practically speaking. How do you know so many things?

00:02:40:16 - 00:03:01:17 V

So the degree was cognitive science, which is like kind of a weird one in itself. So I like at the University I went to it was basically like a joint degree between psychology, like computer science. You can also do linguistics and philosophy in there. I did a bit of linguistics and then was really bad at it, so I dropped it. So I guess I came out like having studied psychology and having thought about a bunch of stuff from that and having done a lot of like AI related work and just general kind of computer science stuff. So it was a real kind of grab bag of stuff, but I guess I came out of it with, with that you know, some ability to program and some kind of familiarity and friends who were kind of in that scene. And then also, I guess just a lot of thinking about human behaviour and how to like make systems and how to like think about it from that side of it. And but I think I actually got better, like in my practice after I'd left it, after I was like working in games and making my own projects there and just kind of putting stuff together there. A thing I really like about making games, especially in kind of small teams, is it's just like there's just too many different things you need to be able to do. Like it's like to make a game is like, Oh yeah, you need to do the sounds and you need to do the visuals and you need to do the programming and you test it with people and you need to think about how you're going to market it and you need to think about, yeah, just like all of these things, all -- and every game is different. So it throws up like random problems. So I think it's like kind of you do that for a while and then you just suddenly you start developing that like, Oh yeah, I can do that. Like I've not done it before, but probably I can do that well enough, well enough to get this thing done. Then I guess like a load of the project still kind of come from that same mindset. It's just it's like, Oh yeah, the thing the thing you're making doesn't have a win condition yet.

00:04:38:10 - 00:04:40:05 GDLP

And what games have you worked on?

00:04:41:21 - 00:04:50:16 V

So I worked on one that you've definitely heard of? Mutazione, which I worked on for a few years and I think you reviewed. Right?

00:04:50:23 - 00:04:52:06 GDLP

I reviewed in 2020.

00:04:52:07 - 00:05:17:02 V

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I left that project a few years before I was out. So a load of the stuff with the story and stuff I can't really take any credit for, but they were good colours and I can take responsibility the way those colours change. So definitely claiming that. So yeah, I worked on that. I worked on I worked on a game for -- a promotional game for Azealea Banks where she's a mermaid.

00:05:18:01 - 00:05:18:11 GDLP

?? What.

00:05:19:02 - 00:05:21:18 V

Swimming underwater. That was the first studio I was at.

00:05:24:07 - 00:05:25:13 ZM

I'm -- Oh my god?

00:05:26:05 - 00:05:33:21 V

Like, didn't didn't get to meet her, but like we sent it over to her for like feedback and approval. And the one comment we got was, Can you make my butt bigger?

00:05:34:08 - 00:05:35:00 GDLP

Amazing.

00:05:35:00 - 00:05:35:10 V

Yes.

00:05:36:24 - 00:05:47:23 ZM

This is -- that's. You know, sometimes what you want from an anecdote, like, you know what you want from someone else's anecdote. And that was, like exactly hundred percent what I was after. Yeah.

00:05:49:14 - 00:06:04:23 GDLP

Those are all someone else's like ideas that you are working to fulfil. When, when did you start to like, yeah, veer off and make art or games or whatever we're going to call them that were totally coming from you and made by you and fulfilled by you.

00:06:05:13 - 00:06:21:13 V

Yeah. So it was kind of always kind of alongside. I was always making stuff and I guess it's a bit of a divergence where it started out as I was making games alongside and then, and then it was other things that weren't necessarily games or kind of drifted further away from that. But maybe that's not even true. Actually maybe I was always still working on stuff that was kind of weird alongside. I just didn't think of it as a practice more just like, Oh, wouldn't it be interesting if I made this thing? If that makes sense?

00:06:31:20 - 00:06:42:21 ZM

That does make sense. But what was the first thing that you made that you were like that that felt like, Oh my God, okay, I feel like I am an artist like this. This is now undeniable.

00:06:42:21 - 00:06:45:10 GDLP

Can't hide it anymore.

00:06:45:23 - 00:07:10:08 V

Maybe other people relate to this, actually like. Definitely for me it was like -- I had been paid a reasonable amount of money to give an artist talk, and I still felt insecure about calling myself an artist so I think the point at which I was definitely an artist was earlier than the point at which I was just like, Yeah, no, I'm an artist. Like, this is this is an identity I feel comfortable claiming and having, if that makes sense.

00:07:15:09 - 00:07:17:13 GDLP

But why was there any discomfort there?

00:07:18:05 - 00:07:36:20 V

I think it's just the yeah, I don't know, here is this community of people that I don't feel part of, I guess. I was part of like, game developers who are artists but those are the people who do like 3D art. That's what that word means in that community. And then I was involved in a lot of stuff with Twitter bots. I was making Twitter bots and making tools for other people to make Twitter bots. And with a lot of people who are very clearly digital artists and like reasonably accomplished ones, but at the same time, people there were bot makers rather than artists. And I guess it was kind of looking at this stuff and the stuff I was making and kind of going, Oh, actually, I guess this is art? I guess this is art that could be

legible in this kind of artistic community. I guess I'm going to actually call myself that and try to exist within this community.

00:08:13:00 - 00:08:37:22 GDLP

I think what you're picking up on is like depending on the context, the identity of an artist means different things. And when you're speaking to me and you're telling me all of these like cool things that you do that seem like, you know, why would a human spend their time doing these things? It's just for fun and because it does something that makes you go, Oh, that was cool. Oh my God, how did you do that? Oh, that looks good! I think. Well, obviously that person is an artist, but it's like that moment in House that I always think about where if a patient presents with issues and a cardiologist is the first person to see them, the cardiologist is going to think it's something to do with the heart. And if it's a neurologist, they're going to think it's something to do with the nervous system. Like I think seeing this through an art critic lens, I have to be aware that I've never worked in the game industry and an artist is listed in the credits of a game that normally the person who did like just the technical, like production of the artwork in the thing, it's not even necessarily that they came up with the concept design because that might be another job on top of that and they're just following someone else's instructions. And then it makes me think like is an artist someone who comes up with everything from beginning to end on their own, or can you be like an artist to hire? Which also exists, but like, I don't think the art world talks about that a lot. And actually something that me and Zarina have been thinking about recently is like, how do you make it work as an artist? And do people, for example, art students, are they told about all of the different avenues that they might be able to follow in order to, one, make work but also make money at the same time? Because taking that game design route as an artist could actually be quite healthy? To an extent.

00:10:10:06 - 00:10:11:22 ZM

Lucrative, potentially, Yeah.

00:10:12:06 - 00:10:34:11 V

Oh, I keep thinking about talking to someone who works for Ian Cheng. You know, Ian Cheng's work is like, well, but yeah, basically he was describing like the set up of that and I was like, Oh, this is an indie game studio. It's like five of you. You're working with Unity. Like it sounds like the kind of production pipeline and process is exactly that, of like a, you know, reasonably small scale indie game studio. But like the thing you're producing is artwork, and the studio is called Ian Cheng.

00:10:42:01 - 00:11:11:10 GDLP

Exactly. There's almost like a sanctity or a weird, stricture in art production where like if someone else is telling you what you should

make, then it doesn't really count as art because when or even if there's a fee at the end of it and they're telling you to make something very specific like, you know, the aura is kind of lost because it becomes like, like capitalist production, less so, like someone who's had an idea of their own accord. And that's just so weird. But also I sort of get it.

00:11:15:04 - 00:11:42:14 ZM

It's like that kind of weird, icky feeling around like capitalist production. But I think also, tied to it is the idea of -- the art world loves a singular genius, like the art world loves a prodigy, a virtuoso, like someone who is so gifted and talented that money just simply they exist in a currency-less state where, like they are able to transcend the dirty, grubby realities of like, actual banal existence. And they just kind of sit there churning out these deliciously abstract conceptual ideas. And like, I think what you're identifying with that resistance of like -- because as I say, I have effectively stalked you, like really gone through your website and like, even the stuff that you were making kind of on the side, like punch the custard and that game where it's like your frog on a trampoline and you're bouncing up and down? Yeah, and like the, like the graphics are bouncing up and down as well. I think there's something about that -- Jon Rafman would pay really good money to, like, come up with an idea like that, like the trampoline? Like, just that as like a, a way of experiencing a moving image work. That and Hell is Other People? Like the idea that you would fight the shadow of the last player?

00:12:35:05 - 00:12:40:20 V

Yeah. So Hell is Other People is like I made just when I was coming out of university. So that was like the first thing I made.

00:12:41:24 - 00:12:43:16 GDLP

Tell the audience about it because.

00:12:43:20 - 00:12:44:01 ZM

Yeah.

00:12:44:01 - 00:12:45:16 GDLP

They're not going to know what punch the Custard is. Yes.

00:12:46:11 - 00:12:47:13 ZM

Yes. No, you should, right?

00:12:48:03 - 00:12:48:07 V

Yeah. So Hell is Other People is it's like one of those kind of basic 2D, you're a little spaceship and you're firing weapons and

you can pick up a thing and then you fire a different weapon. Except all the enemies you're fighting are people who have previously played the game but just like flipped. So they're shooting in the other direction. So you start out and they all have the beginning weapon and they're kind of shooting and then dodging. So you're like dodging as well. But this means you're like shooting slightly offset to shoot where they would dodge too, because that's just the kind of pattern. And then you start going like, oh, no, I can hide at the side. And then they pick up the thing that fires sideways and you're like, now I have to dodge this. So yeah, like in increasing numbers of them increasing kind of difficulties there, but it's this still this kind of yeah, I guess I've not thought about it Like it's also this kind of video game is made by the people who are playing it. So it is kind of that kind of creative tool at the same time.

00:13:45:19 - 00:13:48:18 GDLP

Yeah, Yeah, I see the and then what's punch the custard.

00:13:49:10 - 00:14:12:16 V

So punch the custard is I was kind of, I guess kind of involved in this kind of community who was making I don't know what the right word it is like. I think of it as like running around games, like games that are like folk games or that you play. They used to be those like festival at the Southbank Center, hide and seek, sandpit, like weekenders, and they did one kind of every month over the summer. So yeah loads of people making stuff there and some of that had a little bit of electronics in some different stuff. It was a really kind of cool community and really kind of cool scene existed there. So yeah, I was like, Oh, I want to take part in this. And I emailed my now friend Holly with like, Oh, hey, I've got these like two ideas. It was one of them was like some terrible thing about running around quoting Shakespeare. And then the other one was like: What if you have this game where you're punching a bowl of custard like corn flour and water competitively against someone else and you've got to punch it as fast as you can. And also the computer knows how many times you've punched it. So it like beeps and like increments, a little number. And she was like, No, yeah, definitely that one. That one's definitely good.

00:14:59:13 - 00:15:01:05 GDLP

What was people's reaction to it?

00:15:02:16 - 00:15:17:06 V

Pretty great. Yeah. Like I ended up running it like at a ton of places and I ended up like, yeah, like actually toured it went to like L.A. Margate, Singapore. I feel I have to list Margate.

00:15:17:19 - 00:15:20:06 GDLP

What the fuck.

00:15:20:08 - 00:15:21:14 ZM

L.A.! Singapore! Margate!

00:15:21:20 - 00:15:39:14 V

No, I have to list Margate because I went to Singapore because I showed it at Margate and Kate Neill who was running it down of Margate then got in touch and like, oh yeah, we're doing this thing at an Arts Center out in Singapore. Do you want to sort of come out to Singapore for a week, like run this for half the time and then just like see Singapore for the rest of the time? And I was like, Yes, yes, I could definitely do that.

00:15:42:06 - 00:16:06:03 GDLP

Okay, Right. So this is what I'm trying to get at. Of all the things that we could do as humans in the world. Like why was that so successful? Like, I don't mean that in a way I don't believe it could be. But like anthropologically, as someone who has studied human psychology, what do you think that says about us and you as well?

00:16:06:03 - 00:16:31:19 V

Like, I mean, fundamentally, it's just nice to do a strange thing. It's nice to like, feel a weird substance. Like, it's like it's entirely piggybacking off like, oh, there's this fun substance that's fun to play with, and then you're doing something kind of silly. And the because like, it goes for a minute and a minute is like a really long time to be doing this kind of like 'do something as fast as you can' kind of activity. So you start out and you're like, Oh yeah, I can do this. And then you get halfway through, you're like, Oh God, can I do this? Oh, and I'm going against someone else. So I'm like, competing really hard. Yeah. So you're like, suddenly in this, like, you know, Yeah, really like, competitive, frantic space, touching something strange. You just, people like to be in a new, weird situation, you know?

00:16:54:08 - 00:17:16:01 GDLP

That's what makes it art. Like people every time someone goes into a gallery, they love to be in a weird situation. I think the weirder the art, the better. In terms of inserting like weird little moments into our daily life. You were mentioning before about Twitter bots. Now, for anyone who maybe doesn't know what they are could you just explain?

00:17:16:16 - 00:17:51:21 V

Sure. Yeah. I mean, they're just I guess Twitter accounts that you can follow interact with like a normal Twitter account, except instead of there being like a person who posts the tweets, it's a



machine. It's a computer program running on some computer somewhere, that posts the tweets. Usually on like a schedule or like responding to stuff. So the stuff that I'm like, I guess most interested in there is stuff that's relatively simple but becomes powerful because it's in this space that you wouldn't -- I was gonna say you wouldn't expect. But I've been like deep within the twitter bot world for years. So now I totally expect them to be there. But it is existing on the same level as people exist in this space. But it's weird art that does operate by these different rules and, you know, so produces things that are like surprising or delightful or interesting to see all the different variations of like over time. Like an, artwork that you don't like go into and you're like, cool. I'm like, immersed in this and I'm giving it my full attention. Instead. It's like I'm like glancing at this as I'm scrolling through and doing other things that that's that's super exciting to me.

00:18:30:04 - 00:18:49:14 GDLP

It totally, like, just inserts itself into normality in a way that I've always really liked. Erm, I know Zarina's probably dying to speak because Zarina is the first person I ever knew who made a bot. But V, can you just like tell us some of your top highlights out of the bots that you have made?

00:18:50:09 - 00:19:19:02 V

Oh, I guess the first one I'd say is Soft Landscapes, which makes these like --. You know, like when you see like a mountain, it's like a mountain range and like there's, like fog or cloud. So like the ones at the back are kind of hazier and maybe the colours are beautiful, like this kind of genre of picture. Basically, it generates those and like, it's like super simple kind of forms, but like, it can get some wild colours in there, so that that's pretty good. One I'd also just shout out is like one of the first ones I made, which is basically each of the tweets is like a different step of an instruction. Like I remember being like round at like my gran's house and like when you arrive there, the conversation -- as somebody who doesn't drive -- the conversation always starts with like, Oh, how did you get here? And like, there's like long discussion of, like the route that you took and whether it was optimal or whether there was a better route. And you ask people like, oh, you like mention you're going somewhere, and then they're like, Oh yeah, you should go this way and take this route and stuff like that. And for me, it's kind of like, it's fine. I just, I just I'm just going to look at Google Maps. I'm not even really listening to what you're saying. But it's impossible to shut you up. You just need to get this out. So it's like, okay, this is fine. But it just like generates that as like a series of tweets. I made this platform that you can make Twitter bots with called Cheap Bots Done Quick. And then recently I made one that just tweets out lines from the lyrics of Dry Cleaning, you know the band? On the basis that like, actually, I think the thing that Cheap Bots is mainly used for is like this kind of like tweeting out lyrics or like quotes from

characters that people love. And I was like, Oh, I want to do this. And then doing it was actually really nice just to be like, Here's a band I really love who has lyrics I really like and just like looking through their entire set of lyrics to like chop them up into tweet sized quotes and like, think about what's good to do there was like this really nice, like engaging with their work.

00:20:44:12 - 00:21:01:06 GDLP

I love that they're my favourite ones as well. I love ones that are more like image based like many gradients, soft landscapes, Unicode garden as well. And, and like people. Yeah. When it when loads of little emojis pop out the ones that look like desserts, things like that.

00:21:01:07 - 00:21:03:02 ZM

The desert ones my favourite.

00:21:03:02 - 00:21:03:21 GDLP

So good.

00:21:03:21 - 00:21:05:21 ZM

Because sometimes, you get a little snake.

00:21:08:01 - 00:21:24:22 GDLP

But but I think like yeah maybe even more than that the ones that sort of start to like eat themselves a bit fascinate me because as you say, they start to come out with things that you just weren't expecting them to, which is great, which is why Zarina's one is also so funny to me.

00:21:25:04 - 00:22:03:03 ZM

Erm, for context listeners and V. My bot, I made her oh. I've personified her. She's her own separate like sentient entity in my mind because she's been running for like, I think eight, seven, eight years and she is a non sequitur Twitter bot, I think is the thing. I fully pinched the code from someone I didn't write it all myself, but she just takes the content of my tweets and my retweets and she kind of like turns them into like a jumbley soup and like she does like the snipping herself. Like on the back end of that. Heroku or wherever it takes place. The python, the python code it does that.

00:22:10:19 - 00:22:10:24 V

Yeah, another snake.

00:22:10:24 - 00:22:40:11 ZM

Another one, that one. I hand her over to the snake and like it kind of garbles up and then spits out kind of this weird dada surrealist poetry from like my own words. But like, I think the fascination I had with it at the time, because I haven't heard from her in a while, I don't know why, but Elon's new algorithm just means that I just don't see her on timeline. But at the time when I made her, the fascination that I had was very much what you describe that like small punctuation, like the delight, right. Of like the staccato delight of like her popping up on my timeline when I wasn't expecting her.

00:22:54:24 - 00:22:57:00 V

Like your alter ego. Yeah.

00:22:57:01 - 00:23:22:08 ZM

Yeah. But it was it's yeah, you use the word delightful. It's something that would be like, yeah, that feels like the right word for the way that those bots function. Because like the. Yeah, there is like a little pleasure in it like, and it's just nice, nice like it's -- it's not nice on like a grand spectacular scale. It's a very, a really small human. Mm. Niceness, which I really like. I really, I think the scale of that, small, it's the small things that make up the entire world, right? It's -- the world doesn't take place at the scale of the normal. Or the geopolitical, it's like the small, crunchy things. And I do have a question about maybe particularly what it is about, but like, why do you want to see more bots in the world? Because cheap bots done quick is about facilitating other people's access to this as like a technological format or like a like, affecting other people's ability to actually go out and make this stuff. Why do you want to see more bots in the world?

00:24:09:09 - 00:24:21:19 V

I've like, thought about this like -- weirdly only thought about it obviously after I'd made it and it was up and like, you know, like when I was making it, it was just like, of course this is like a good thing to do, but then afterwards.

00:24:21:23 - 00:24:29:17 GDLP

Which is also why you're an artist because artists just do things and then like, figure it out later.

00:24:29:17 - 00:24:52:07 V

But yeah, like, I mean, fundamentally it's like, of course I want to see more of this just because people enjoy making things. People enjoy creating something and getting that like, you know, the creativity of like, Oh, I want something to post some random thing regularly. Like, like I wanted that to happen and now I have. And it's brought kind of delight and it gives people that creative

canvas that they wouldn't otherwise have. Because making a twitter bot is I mean, this is, this is the thought I had at the beginning. But just making a Twitter bot is fundamentally an annoying process. Like, it runs on a server. Okay, cool. Like, so now I have to have a server and I have to have something running on a server reliably. Like, that's just, that's annoying for me to solve, let alone someone who does not have a kind of technical background. And you have to do a lot of this just to make something that's like --

00:25:21:07 - 00:25:26:18 GDLP

The Arthur Morgan Bot, like all of that work, just to tweet, like Red Dead quotes.

00:25:27:05 - 00:25:28:05 V

Yeah, like. It's just it's just not worth it. There were people in the kind of bot making community who were just kind of like, Yeah, you've just kind of got to do this and like, because it was only those people in the community, people who could do all of that. And who felt that was like easy or like manageable. They were like, Oh, that's fine. And then I looked at it and I was like, this is annoying and it could be better. And I also, I guess like making generative work is a kind of interesting thing in itself for me. Like making a generative work is interesting because you're not making a thing. Like the output is not the thing you're making. You're making like the probability of various things being in the output, like the thing you said, Zarina, about the deserts and how sometimes there's a snake? The decision to have a snake there very rarely is an interesting creative decision to me, but it's like an interesting thing because it's like if you look at any one of those outputs, that decision doesn't come through. You only see the decision in like repeatedly engaging with it and then noticing, Oh, there's a snake and that's rare. Like so like crafting that is a kind of interesting thing to me. And like, there's not many ways that people get to play with that kind of thing, except Twitter bots do give that kind of kind of joy.

00:26:45:00 - 00:26:46:21

So yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:26:46:22 - 00:27:09:11 GDLP

Like I don't want to be this person because I went to like a talk by Ed Atkins at the Contemporary Art Society years and years ago where he was like: We should not be speaking about technology as if it's some kind of magic. Like we shouldn't be speaking about the Internet like it's, you know, or the cloud as if they are these, like, impossible, magical things that we don't have any control over because who knows what they are? And like, I feel like I have been that person for so long. But when I see Twitter bots, I think, oh, it's like a it's like a parlour trick. It's like a little magic trick. And how amazing that like V, the wizard, is the person who's

like teaching everyone how to do the magic behind the scenes, by providing a tool in order to be able to do it. Feel like the same confusing mystique when you talk about generative art because it does have that like wonder attached to it, like, Oh my God. Because you have set something up, you don't know what art is going to come out of it, but that's almost like not the point. It's the setting it up and making those creative decisions. That is where you're happy to leave it at. What have you made in terms of generative art that you would be interested in telling the audience about? Because I can see it for the people who watch the video version that you've got something behind you that is like a giveaway.

00:28:11:01 - 00:28:13:08 ZM

And I want to know how to say this out loud.

00:28:13:11 - 00:28:26:03 GDLP

So V's website, if anyone wants to go to have a look, is v21.io And on the side there is a list of artworks and and two of them are not language in any recognisable sense.

00:28:28:12 - 00:28:30:22 ZM

But they're called something else. You know, with emojis you can just say the emoji and you can.

00:28:34:05 - 00:28:34:14 GDLP

Yeah.

00:28:35:12 - 00:28:46:00 ZM

So I'm used to translating pictographs into words now because of the emoji summaries. But with this, I don't even know, like it's like shaded, shaded square.

00:28:46:10 - 00:28:55:24 V

I think it's like when you, when you edit this, can you just, like, replace the thing I'm about to say with like just like a bunch of static.

00:28:56:07 - 00:28:59:01 GDLP

Yes.

00:28:59:01 - 00:29:00:03 V

I think I'd say it as [STATIC].

00:29:01:22 - 00:29:02:10

Perfect.

00:29:02:10 - 00:29:12:06 V

Okay. Like the stuff that they were making was like so garbled that it didn't, didn't feel right to give them a name that would otherwise work? I don't know.

00:29:12:09 - 00:29:18:00 GDLP

When you click on the page, that is like [STATIC], what happens?

00:29:18:00 - 00:29:40:05 V

A pattern forms and then the pattern kind of I guess, kind of continues eating itself and continues changing. I don't know. Yeah. Like I'm like, I'm like trying to describe it on one level and I'm like, there's two levels I can describe on. One is just that it eats itself and these patterns that feedback on each other and kind of develop. You can kind of see like a crease that then kind of extends itself out or becomes a line and there's kind of these patterns that are forming by themselves. And then I guess the more technical level is that as it as it runs each of the pixels on the screen is fed into an input. And so each of the pixels depends on all of the pixels around it and which adds up the values of all of those pixels with random weighting. And then that produces the patterns that starts with here is like a particular pattern. And then we add this just keep on layering on this kind of like adding stuff up. And the technical term for that is convolution.

00:30:22:23 - 00:30:25:20 ZM

I was about to say, that sounds like really friendly Maths like really interpersonal Maths. That's like the pixels are all mates in there.

00:30:31:05 - 00:31:07:11 V

Yeah, you might also hear a bunch of this from AI stuff because a bunch of the AI algorithms are about creating these set of weightings that the convolution works on. That's how a lot of this kind of AI stuff works is training to find that. But instead of doing it with AI and training very cleverly to find these weights, instead it's just like, Oh, what if they have some random weights so that there's a little bit of like aesthetic similarity there between this and I guess those kind of early deep dream things where it kept making dogs and adding crinkly detail into stuff. But it's actually the same algorithm that Photoshop uses when you say, Oh yeah, do a blur or sharpen, it's that same, Oh yeah, take the edges and highlight those. So it's like, Oh, what if you just keep taking the edges and highlighting them and then doing that repeatedly until it just becomes this grainy, grainy mess.

00:31:31:08 - 00:31:35:10 GDLP

And you've, you've done it with colour as well in the RGB piece, which is sort of similar.

00:31:35:10 - 00:31:56:21 V

Yeah. So that I kind of came back to it and I was like, Oh, what if I did this with colour? And then I worked on a bit more and ended up instead of sampling necessarily the next pixel, it can sample pixels further away. Because all of these convolution ones always have this -- you don't have kind of large forms. You only have this kind of like texture that builds up. Occasionally you have large forms, but it's like very focused on this kind of texture. So I was like, could you have it where it's like a larger wash of colour? And so I think the RGB one actually does this. All of this pixel stuff and it does it for like red, green and blue separately and then constantly seeding it with like a dot of red dot of blue dot of green.

00:32:22:08 - 00:32:34:23 GDLP

I just want to underline that all of these exist on web pages and interactively. So you can click and start to mess with like the pattern of it as it happens. I have a question.

00:32:37:04 - 00:32:49:09 ZM

I have a question. I'm absolutely burning to ask you, because I think with [STATIC] and with the other the other second one with the the blobs in. That one, how you say that?

00:32:51:03 - 00:32:52:00 V

I think that's also [STATIC].

00:32:53:00 - 00:33:27:18 ZM

Okay so with [STATIC] and second different kind of [STATIC] and RGB and calming sphere I think and maybe Epicycles as well. I was like having a plink plonk like a tip tap type around last night and sending them to someone and we were like sending each other little screenshots of the things that were popping up like, like the little pages and just swapping back and forth these delicious, delightful images. And I think I want to know now, if you think of yourself as a painter of sorts? Like do you, do you use it? Because if -- there's so much about like the way these web pages function that feels painterly or like painterly in the way that they generate images, painterly in a time based way or a digital way, but like, fundamentally, painting.

00:33:56:23 - 00:34:00:11 GDLP

MM Do you want V to think of themselves as a painter?

00:34:01:22 - 00:34:17:07 ZM

No, no, I just, I think that's something that I would say about you. But I'm an art critic, of course I'd say that. I'm a critic that loves paintings. Of course I'd say that.

00:34:17:13 - 00:34:22:22 GDLP

Yeah, you just submit RGB to the John Moores Painting Prize this year. Oh, my God.

00:34:23:19 - 00:34:43:04 ZM

They'd be a shoo in! We'd both be there, like you should, definitely. I want this one to win! But like, regardless of whether I want to call you a painter, would you like, has that term ever, like, popped into your mind? Like, is it about like the pleasure of producing images or is it more like a technical question? I think that's the question I'm trying to, yeah.

00:34:43:04 - 00:35:08:18 V

I don't think I'd call myself a painter, but I definitely take the compliment. But I think that I think there is something to it. And just in terms of that, like. Mm. Like just, you know, like a lot of it is just this kind of delight in the texture of it or like the texture of the colours and how that stuff is interacting. And I guess it's like also just trying to, I guess like trying to understand that, like trying to understand it by making stuff that creates it, trying to understand like that kind of texture and form and like being interested in exploring that. Like, I guess it's kind of interesting, building these things because it's I'm making them because I don't know how they're going to work? And then I make them, and then I'm exploring in them and, you know, I feel like I'm discovering stuff as much as I'm creating it or, all of these are kind of techniques that have already existed before. Like, I'm not creating the idea of convolution or anything. It's like, Oh yeah, this is an existing thing. So it's more I want to make it and see how it feels. And then, and then you're kind of exploring it. And then there's usually that kind of stage a bit later than that where it's like, How do I package this up so that I can give some of that sense of exploration to other people. And I've made the version where it doesn't crash all the time and where it actually does the interesting thing more often than not. So it exposes the interesting part. So yeah, I don't know.

00:36:17:04 - 00:36:43:15 GDLP

On your website under RGB, like in the RGB explanation, it says: What forms do these processes create? What does it look like to wander randomly through the state space? And I feel like wander and randomly looks like Zarina sending snapshots of what she found and what she got to see. Like they're the things that she discovered in the exploration and it's really nice. Your website is also a good example of how art can exist online. Maybe sometimes better than it can exist in a gallery because it's on a web page and you can access



it any time of night. Do you worry about how this might translate into exhibition spaces?

00:37:07:06 - 00:37:28:06 V

I don't know. I mean, the work isn't designed for that kind of context, and maybe this is the dirty commercial video games part of me, but, I can't make the thing without thinking about the context of how people are going to experience it, you know? So I'm making these things as web pages and they're optimized for that. Or Twitter bots are made to be on Twitter. It's not like ahh here is this exciting art and here is the medium or the delivery format that comes later on. Yeah, I don't know. And I guess doing the video games, like in Punch the Custard and stuff like that. That obviously just doesn't exist online, it only exists if you can put your hand in the bucket. So yeah, but at the same time, the same thing can be adapted or, you know, you can see that. But a load of them are like, this is interesting because you get to play around with it for a longer period of time or because you get to sit with it. There's a piece that I've made, but not actually figured out how it can come out, which spins off some of this epicycle stuff and makes this basically uses it to make a clock that has like a different pattern than a kind of continuous animation that lasts for about 24 hours. And now I'm kind of like, oh, I mean, it works as a web page, but actually it doesn't make sense as a web page because people are going to come and look at it and they're going to go, Oh, that's a nice animation. But the thing you appreciate is only if it's sitting there for 24 hours, if you're kind of living with it, if you can like catch your eye in that kind of way. And then I'm like, Dammit, do I need to like, make a clock and sell a physical clock? That sounds like a project I don't want. Is it a screensaver? or exactly what form is it? Or like, how would this actually make sense to kind of show like even in an exhibition kind of context, you come in, you look at it and you're like, Oh, that's kind of interesting, but you only really appreciate it if you're around it for a while.

00:39:02:03 - 00:39:04:19 GDLP

So if you're the invigilator in the room. It would need to be installed on the outside of a gallery that's interested in creative technology. I can think of many of them. And if you're listening, please get in touch (LAUGHS). And one of the other questions I had was the work that you make, especially like the HTML pages feel like enjoyable enough as they are, but do you ever worry that you want people to understand the background maths behind it in order to unlock further appreciation? Do you want to like tell people how the magic trick is done or are you fine with them not knowing?

00:39:41:24 - 00:40:02:08 V

I mean, sometimes I do kind of want to. But I'm less interested in like, you know, starting a YouTube channel where like I explain stuff, like do walkthroughs and kind of deconstruction of that. Less because I want to keep the magic trick there and more just because I

don't know. The joy is just exploring it, if that makes sense? Like the joy is flicking through and feeling the texture of it and putting some work into that. With RGB, for example, there's a whole thing of -- as you move your mouse across the screen, it's not a linear relationship between where you've got your mouse and the relationship there. It's like ah! moving it halfway across, moves it from 1 to 10 and then moving through the other half moves it from like 10 to 1000, some example like that. And like tuning that curve to make it interesting to explore. That is part of it. But at the same time, I guess from like the kind of nerdy point of view, I do kind of enjoy putting this stuff up and, where I can, where it makes sense to having it just like, Oh yeah, you can. If you're like a programmer, you can view the source and it's like readable and it has some of the comments and messiness of the making process and it would be easy to minimise it and compress it and tidy that stuff away. But it's kind of nice, you know. It's just like working with the medium, right, of this kind web page type thing. It's like, Oh yeah, it's a web page. So it's a text file you download that your browser turns into something else.

00:41:11:21 - 00:41:13:20 GDLP

Yeah.

00:41:14:18 - 00:41:32:01 V

Or I did a piece for an online magazine called Taper. The display case thing, also linked on my site. They have a thing of like, you put your artist statement in the source code of the comments. So if you want to read the artist's statement, you have to view source, view the thing that people have written.

00:41:32:01 - 00:42:14:05 GDLP

That. I like that. That's like a special treat for people who -- Yeah, it's an Easter egg. And yeah, I like the, you know the tool explanation is there if you want it, but actually just using it, you can start to think about how it must have been made and figure out like what its capacity is as you experience it. So we know each other from the Internet but also worked together a bit more closely over the past year because V got developing your creative practice funding, which is a strand of funding from the Arts Council in order to figure some shit out. It's time and money and some people use it for equipment. Some people use it to meet people, some people use it to travel as well. If anyone is interested, we have like a million examples of successful funding applications to DYCP on our funding library on the white pube dot com and--

00:42:37:20 - 00:42:54:15 V

Let me just quickly shout out and say the funding library was very helpful when I applied and that also contains my application as I was successful. So if you want to see that, see this conversation in funding terms, you can do that.

00:42:55:05 - 00:43:07:03 GDLP

Yeah. And what did you get money for? And again, referencing the thing that's behind you that you've still not mentioned for the people who are watching the video.

00:43:07:03 - 00:43:39:12 V

So yeah, I got money. For this strand of work that is this kind of, generative stuff. So, so that's kind of the website stuff. And then it's also I was doing, I'm doing a lot of stuff with Pen plotter, so like a robot, that draws. So building these kind of algorithms to make patterns and that's interesting doing computer stuff because you're limited to -- this might sound weird to people who like primarily work by doing drawings -- you're limited to just like lines? You just get to draw lines on paper. It's very limiting. But yeah, no, I mean, anyway. It's interesting to break stuff down and to think in terms of lines and movement rather than pixels and colours and fully rendered stuff there. So yeah, it was to develop that stuff, to develop web page stuff, to buy a new pen plotter because the one I had was annoying and now I have one that's much less annoying to use and also bigger. So I can do these A3 larger scale stuff and then also paying for time with you, Gab.

00:44:18:21 - 00:44:32:00 GDLP

It's funny. So I think mentorship implies that there's some kind of hierarchy between people. You know way more about the world than I do. I haven't got a clue, but I was going to ask. Zarina, did you know what a pen plotter was?

00:44:32:24 - 00:44:35:19 ZM

I googled it and I still don't know.

00:44:36:12 - 00:44:36:21 GDLP

Okay. So maybe just like in practical terms, if Zarina is like the litmus test for the audience, what is a pen plotter? Because it's like a tool that actually I think a lot of artists would be interested in.

00:44:49:15 - 00:45:19:14 V

Yeah. So basically, I mean, it's a little friendly robot, like it moves X, Y so it can move the arm in 2 dimensions across the surface of the paper and there's a little motor that moves the pen up and down, and you feed it SPGs. So is this kind of focusing in on just like here is a line here is a movement. You clamp a little pen in there, put a piece of paper under it, you set it going and then you realise, oh, actually, I've calibrated it wrong. And it's drawing slightly off the paper because it doesn't know where the paper is. So it's really easy to do this. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's like a

little robot that you get to draw stuff, which is obviously interesting because you're bringing it into and especially like the stuff I do where there's all kind of random chance that you've been bringing in obviously the random chance of the paper and the pen and how those interact and the kind of physical tactility of it. But the pen plotter is actually kind of amazing, especially if you're used to normal printers. It's got a resolution of I think about a 10th of a millimeter? So you can draw these really precise things with then maybe pens that are less precise. So there's a really weird interplay between that kind of precision and that kind of looseness. Yeah, it's also weird just using it, compared to drawing normally because the pen plotter doesn't put any pressure on it. It's just the weight of the pen or pencil that's holding it down. So drawing with a pencil is really difficult because you need to push harder with the pencil to get it to make a good mark. So you're often using a fine liner or something, that is the kind of thing that works well. Oh, it's also interesting just because it lends itself to this stuff where there's like a ton of fine detail. And so it's just like, Oh yeah, it's hot on very precise marks that are kind of repeated.

00:46:45:10 - 00:47:03:14 GDLP

MM It makes it sound like a really good tool for accessibility as well. For like energy and just physical capabilities as well. Yeah, the difference between holding a pencil IRL and giving a robot it instead.

00:47:03:20 - 00:47:15:12 V

Yeah, I guess like the flip side is obviously just, because of all of that, if you lose a lot of that sense of liveness from it? Like is this kind of computer controlled thing?

00:47:17:01 - 00:47:55:11 GDLP

I don't know. Yeah, I've seen a lot of the drawings that you've generated. I don't think I agree. I mean, there is something important that artists have always been interested in, in terms of like the visibility of their mistakes and keeping, you know, when people do draw with pencils, they often get a lot of like led on the side of their hand and then the marks might carry across on the paper and that happens in paintings as well. Artists who use their pinky finger to lean on the canvas and leave those marks in and, that liveness can be nice, but I don't know, liveliness is definitely in the works still.

00:48:01:07 - 00:48:32:07 V

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I was gonna say, also that's partly because I'm, I guess playing with it or adding that in, in the algorithms or a lot of these algorithms are based on a lot of random numbers or simulating that kind of error and that feels like a good joke to me. That I've written an algorithm to simulate inaccuracies or doing

something slightly wonky and then I've got a robot to very precisely draw out that wonkiness.

00:48:32:24 - 00:48:34:08 GDLP

Like, it's like, so charming.

00:48:34:09 - 00:48:52:03 V

Yeah, yeah. Like, it's like, oh, yeah, I put some fake wonkiness in there and like, the way you choose to put the fake wonkiness in or like, where there's weird precision or everything's the same pressure. But there's this mimicry that's never quite right of these human processes.

00:48:52:03 - 00:48:57:05 GDLP

And is that from a self-consciousness, that you feel like you should be doing it yourself or?

00:48:58:00 - 00:49:17:16 V

No. Not really. Like, I don't think I would draw this stuff myself or -- it's not like oh, I should do this by hand, but I'm too lazy. It's kind of instead starting from, I guess it's starting from the same same kind of thing in terms of talking about being a painter or, like, interested in that texture. I'm like doing it because I'm interested in what those slips, inaccuracies look like or, what is the system behind them or trying to understand them in a systematic kind of way and then to understand them, you try to recreate them, and then there's always this joy of their not being quite right or -- I don't know, it just seems like a good joke to me.

00:49:41:08 - 00:50:05:02 GDLP

It probably goes back to like what you were saying at the beginning of the conversation about like making games that you can't necessarily win. Like if you're making tools, maybe you don't always want the tool to work perfectly, like we would assume it would. You make something that is is bumpy and human and see what you can see with it, like in the same generative way.

00:50:05:06 - 00:50:24:16 V

Yeah, Yeah. I mean, also like really some of this I think is just justification for like no, I think it looks nice. I think it looks interesting. I think the mark of a lot of this kind of interesting work is seeing really small variations and then in the larger form, for me that's kind of a thing I really like. Yeah. So it's like, yeah, no, I want to make small variations in a repeating larger form because I think it looks nice.

00:50:35:10 - 00:50:43:05 GDLP

Artists do not say that enough. Oh my God, I wish they did. So much shit just looks good. And that's it.

00:50:43:05 - 00:50:51:15 ZM

Yeah, I think that should be enough as well. Like that feels like, so much gets post rationalised in a really strange way.

00:50:52:06 - 00:50:54:22 GDLP

On podcasts and interviews and...

00:50:58:07 - 00:50:59:22 V

You got the truth out of me eventually.

00:51:01:05 - 00:51:06:17 GDLP

And maybe we should end by talking about Downpour. If you want to do that?

00:51:06:17 - 00:51:33:22 V

Yes. So downpour is -- I'm always coming out of this kind of, creative tools, things that let other people make things. And it's coming out of the video game stuff. So it's like, what if people could make video games, which obviously they can already, but what if people could make video games on their phones without having to either learn to code or deal with the fact that they can't learn to code? So just a super accessible, super easy thing that you can just use, built around the fact that phones have a camera in them so you can just take pictures of things and then link those together. Basically the thing ends up as this hypertext thing. So it's just putting in images, putting in text, linking between pages, making that super quick and super simple to use and then yeah, and then you can also just press a button and it uploads to the server. And you can do that, then share it with people. So yeah, I guess that's the first level and then the second, more ambitious thing is once you've made this, can you then have, I guess a platform? A social media platform? Which is people making little interactive jokes and making these little website nests and, ah let me link a thing together and let me create stuff and that kind of handmade aesthetic to stuff which I think could be really nice.

00:52:37:20 - 00:52:58:11 GDLP

I'm super excited. I downloaded a build of it yesterday. It's just so easy to use and to be able to pop little bits in. And I was just saving transparent PNGs off Google images and just dropping them in and then looking what was in my camera roll. And it made me look back at what I actually had. And it felt like, okay, maybe I could use some of this. Maybe it could become material for something creative or just like, silly. It was really nice. V messaged me yesterday to send an invitation, like a birthday party invitation,

but it was made on Downpour and it was like, again, hypertext going through Google Maps so that I could see where your flat was and it was just getting more and more zoomed in as I was clicking on. I was just like unnecessarily exciting, for a birthday invitation. And but it did make me think, how do you feel about -- are you calling it a game making tool or is it something broader than that? Or do you think the word game should, you know, broaden itself to meet what you're doing?

00:53:47:03 - 00:54:10:17 V

I think the egotistical way of kind of framing this is like, no, I'm making a new type of thing. But if you say I'm making a new type of thing, then people go, okay, well, what is that? I don't want this new weird thing. So yeah, no, but it does make games, it is a really good tool, I think, for making these kind of little games. And I think game is a really flexible label to put on a lot of different things. Especially where they've got choice and interactivity and exploring a space within it. So I guess basically I'm saying, yeah, it's a tool for making games because games can be anything. But hopefully once people get into it, then -- I don't know when people get into it, they might not call the things that they're making games or they might use it for other purposes. I think a measure of success for a creative tool is whether people use it to make things that the creator didn't originally intend. That to me is the kind of challenge. So like Cheap Bots did this, like people are using it to make bots I never would have thought of. Similarly I'm trying to make downpour and this is a weird like mindfuck thing to think about because I'm trying to make downpour in such a way that people can make things that I wouldn't think of. But I'm thinking about making it so that people would make things I can't think of if that makes sense.

00:55:09:24 - 00:55:10:04 GDLP

Yeah. And there's just, such a limit. There's a limit to that. And it'll surprise you because people will just run with that once they can get their hands on it. When do you think it will be launched?

00:55:23:08 - 00:55:40:17 V

I think this summer. I mean I originally put up the website and it said late 2022 and then I edited that when that came and I was like early 2023 and now I'm looking at the website and going, Oh, it's not it's not really going to come out early 2023. That's kind of happened already.

00:55:40:17 - 00:55:57:07 GDLP

So now you're like, now you're a game designer again. I was just thinking, when you say a game can be anything, and I was like, No, it can't. An artwork can be anything. I just don't think we've got the language for these things. But like, good. Sometimes that's good.

00:55:57:21 - 00:56:00:11 V

Well, you know, you're you're the games critic and the arts critic.

00:56:00:11 - 00:56:03:00 ZM

Yeah you're responsible for coming up with a name for them, you should coin a term.

00:56:08:01 - 00:56:19:14 GDLP

Ahhh I'll get back to you on that. Okay. Thank you to our audience for listening to this lovely conversation at V. Where can people find you on the internet if you want to be found, you don't have to tell people.

00:56:21:06 - 00:56:40:14 V

I mean, I so, like basically go by v21 pretty pretty much everywhere. So website is v21 the i my twitter is v21, Instagram is vtventyone except 21 is spelled out because Instagram won't let you have a short handle. Yeah I know you had your own tragedy about that.

00:56:40:20 - 00:57:04:02 gdlp

Yeah I had @GDLP on Instagram for like two days and then it's gone. But we won't talk about that because that makes me sad. Anyway, thank you again for listening and yeah, we'll be back with more of these episodes chatting to interesting people because again, we have lost our minds. But hopefully it'll be worth it because there'll be a book at some point. We'll see you in the next episode of the podcast. Byeeeee

00:57:08:09 - 00:57:11:13 V

BYE! Thanks so much!