

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

ZARINA: And I'm Zarina Muhammad.

GABRIELLE: And on today's episode, we're going to be doing something new, a little different. We realised that we started the new podcast years into The White Pube. So anyone listening to the podcast might not realise that we have, like, buckets of texts that you've not heard before. And so we're going to start a new series. We are going to be revisiting some of our older, spicier texts and reading them out, but then also having a little discussion.

ZARINA: Yeah.

GABRIELLE: And reflecting on like, dunno, do we still agree with what we said?

ZARINA: How do we feel about it?

GABRIELLE: Would we say anything differently?

ZARINA: Do we have anything to add?

GABRIELLE: And how was the response to that text at that time?

ZARINA: Yeah. Gossip, context. It's going to be an extended throwback Tuesday with THE DIRECTOR'S CUT is what we're doing.

GABRIELLE: It's the director's cut.

ZARINA: I'm excited.

GABRIELLE: So the first episode is going to be a text that I wrote called Why Museums Are Bad Vibes. I published it on the 17th of November 2019. And it was actually one of the – maybe the final text I wrote about art. A bit of a goodbye when I had simply had

enough. I'll read it out and then we will get to the discussion. Okay. It's very short.

'a quick rant if I might, because I actually can't bear going to museums anymore. so much is getting in the way of me having a good time. i'm like naaa. museums are bad vibes.

'it's just old stuff in rooms, what's the big deal?' i hear readers of a certain look droning @ me through the internet. With most UK institutions it's calm to start with; I think cool, this is government-funded, it's ours, and that's what gets me over the threshold to see the culture-things inside. but on entering, that nice image is replaced with busybody staff excited to police the bags and behaviours of anyone* who's braved their way in (*by anyone i mean everyone but the Ruths of the world). god forbid you answer a phone call in an exhibition; cafes are expensive; there's nowhere to rest before or after the whole slog, not enough seating in general; and while the building miiiight be accessible, many exhibitions aren't. recycled air is gross, and the temperature never makes sense for the time of year. and that's just visitor experience. When we get to the art: permanent collections (you know the stuff on the walls that never changes) are boring - I don't wanna see old paintings of people I don't know, b-side abstract art, and a shitload of boats. permanent collections have to be free because they are bad, but pls free yourself of their permanence and get a new energy i beg. Ticketed shows are never reasonably priced and these big blockbuster exhibitions advertised on public transport just show the same people, things and conservative ideas on rotation. bad and stagnant like tory chat. Why are we brainwashed to think we HAVE to go whispering around these exhibitions in order to keep our finger on the pulse, when what pulse does andy warhol even have? he's been dead for time. I'm over going to museums to look at Important Things that don't align with what I really enjoy. i can't with shuffling from cabinet to cabinet pretending to read the captions. i should have stayed at home. daytime tv is more engaging.

This text is a moment to punctuate, release, and to explain where i'm at. i'm not sorry for the knowledge that stops me enjoying the museum experience, i'm grateful to be here distrusting their activity. So much is stolen colonial property that museum directors now feel is their legacy to keep holding onto. mad. so much is art acquired by people back in the day who made their money off the slave trade & other exploits. even art that's arrived from other people's collections makes me feel iffy bc wow, shouldn't we be grateful the billionaires have let us spend time with their belongings uwu. Contemporary artists whose work is involved in these processes don't get rental fees/royalties like musicians and authors; the work acquires value without them and the people who benefit most from that rising value are, ofc, the billionaire club collectors. I can't go to museums without thinking about money, the white powers that be, and the wider working environment. you know, they exploit volunteers, use zero hour contracts, don't look after public-facing staff (who are on the frontline for an absurd amount of abuse) and generally only hire marginalised identities in the gift shop, kitchen, security and cleaning teams. b careful mentioning unionising. These are the bad vibes i'm talking about. oh it's so nice u have an educational wing! oh wait the opioid crisis causing Sackler family paid for it. get to fuck. White illuminati curatorial departments of Alistairs and Susans and their boring personalities only curate whiteness because that's all they recognise as being qualified for exhibition status - an aesthetic 'constructed to justify and perpetuate colonialism' as @redpraxis tweets. BAME, lgbt, disabled and working class communities have wide diverse actual cultures that aren't seen as worthy of Collections - and if they are subject, it's through the lens of the white middle class curators working out their own subjectivities on marginalised bodies, violently. I see you all programming public talks about diversifying the museum in order to buy yourselves more time. I want to ask, how long are you planning on keeping up the charade? I guess it's cheaper to

throw a speaker fee at the problem instead of a full salary; cheaper to pay an underrepresented creative 2 hours to run a workshop instead of commissioning them to do something substantial. there's an endemic right now of museums and galleries being made up with themselves for hiring a woman of colour (for example) as curator in residence or visiting curator or temporary maternity cover, and from all reports reaping the good good benefits of Looking Diverse whilst treating that individual with no respect whatsoever, because they are different, they can't really complain because we're hiring them, and they'll be gone soon anyway so who cares. it's fucked through and through.

Directors and Curators, these problems aren't new to you. critics, artists, visitors and good staff raise them on the daily. So it's not that you CAN'T change things for the better, it's that you simply choose not to, as these aren't 'problems' for you because of who you are as people. opaque, evasive, disinterested. you don't ask us what we want to see or how we want you to be because you don't care. The whole shape of the box and everything that's in it is just not conducive to the aesthetic experience I want to access from museums. i learn more from twitter threads anyway, and i feel enough from video games to do without. why would I give you my visitor number? i don't want to be seen near you. I want to stay away, i wanna boycott, protest. it's the end of the decade and i don't know how else to say this but I'm DONE, breaking up with museums FINITO my legs and eyes are closed. so long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen GOOD NIGHT.

And breathe.

(ZARINA CLAPS)

GABRIELLE: It's a good text!

ZARINA: That was good. And I don't mean to sound surprised. Like, obviously, it's good. You're, like, my favourite writer. But, like, you know, you go to a

concert and you're like, I love this one. Track seven, a bop – that's how I felt just now. Like, I was at a concert, waving my arms, lighter in the air. That's a bop.

GABRIELLE: It's mad isn't it. It's really – like, if you've been following The White Pube for a long time, you might know, if not, you won't. We wrote about art and only art for years and then in 2019 I bought a Nintendo switch and I reviewed Breath of the Wild, the Zelda game, and I was like so blown away by it and I'd forgotten how amazing games were. And I just thought, oh my god. I compared the experience of playing a video game like that to going to Tate Liverpool. And I just thought, this just doesn't compare. Like I'm really – I'm so over it, I'm not convinced. And I felt like playing a game for the first time in years, just like broke the spell or something? Like we've been art critics and we were starting to be embedded in all these different galleries and museums and I just thought like, oh my god, I just don't care. Like, I just don't care. And I've just remembered and I can't believe I thought I did care. I'm over it. So this tax was like this moment where I was basically saying I'm not writing about art anymore. I'm writing about games. And this is why. And I did. And I didn't know that then like a pandemic was going to happen and all those museums would be closed anyway. And the only thing I would have left was games. So, like, I was setting myself up very well by accident.

ZARINA: You might be psychic.

GABRIELLE: I might be psychic. It's crazy. And now I haven't even read my old art texts because I've just been so done with it all, and reading this reminds me why.

ZARINA: Well, now you read it back. With hindsight, distance, you're at arm's length from this text, in terms of like time and also subject matter, how do you feel reading about it? Like reading about you writing about art?

GABRIELLE: I... agree with myself. I grew up loving to make art. I was convinced I was going to be a painter, but I just – I always thought art was the one. And then I went to art school, was still really happy about making art. But I think, like, because you love making art, you expect yourself to love going to galleries and museums by default. And then I started to write about how I don't think I love going to galleries and museums and, like, there's something confusing and strange about, like, the the white cube aesthetic and this whole performance of going to a gallery. And I eventually stopped making art to write about it instead because I then realised I just really enjoyed writing as an art form. And I think this text is all of those years of confusion just like boiled down to 1 text. It's so short as well. We write things now that are like two, three, four thousand words. And this is so, so tiny. Like, just because you like making art doesn't mean that museums are right. Like, they're not... right. They're not right. None of it feels right. I was thinking about it now during a pandemic, when things are starting to reopen again, like, I'm not excited to go to a museum. It's not something I've missed. And to go to one now would be such a strange experience because – this sounds so trite – but why would you put so many paintings in one room? It would be so overwhelming. It has in the past made me just dismiss all the stuff in there instead of taking any one thing seriously or spending a lot of time trying to have a connection with a painting or a sculpture, whatever it is. Like, why is this so much stuff packed in those rooms? Why is there not one thing per room so that you actually like, look, that you actually see it, you actually think about it. I think going to a museum now would just be a joke because I would be like, this is badly laid out. I don't know. Stop it. This salon hung that people have been doing for centuries? Just stop it.

ZARINA: It's not a good format.

GABRIELLE: Just whittle it down. I dare The National Gallery – is that a museum?

ZARINA: Yes.

GABRIELLE: The National Gallery Museum is a museum isn't it? Oh my god, my brain. I dare the National Gallery to put everything back in storage and just put one thing in each room. And then change it, you know, like the next day, change it the next day, and then just keep changing.

ZARINA: Yeah. That's a really good point. And you know what? I'm glad that you made that point because that has never occurred to me. That's a brand new thought that you've just put. It's such a good point. That is such a good point, and I'll tell you why. Obviously, you know why. That Salon format popped out in the 1800s, regency period. Right. Back then when they were doing things, they didn't have phones then. They didn't have laptops. People didn't put things on billboards yet. If someone something life-changing happened right across the world, you'd find out about it in two to three years. You simply would not know. The news didn't happen. Images. If you saw a painting back in the 1800, 1700, you'd shit your pants because that's still witchcraft to you, you know. That's bonkers, that's nuts. But now I see about 5 million images a day and they're all horrifying and I see too many. What I need is like isolation, sensory deprivation and maybe one really good image.

GABRIELLE: You need an edit. You need them to be editing this stuff. Like, the issue is we go to the National Gallery or one of the many shit Tate. The stuff that's on the walls is there and five years later you go back and it's still there. Just change it up!

ZARINA: Can you imagine if they did change it every day, like there was a new painting. It'd be like a Supreme drop. People would be losing their minds, going crazy. Well, which one is it today?

GABRIELLE: You'd be like, I need to go.

ZARINA: The Van Gogh.

GABRIELLE: I need to go and see otherwise I'm going to miss it.

ZARINA: People would book their train tickets to come down to London, being like it's my favourite painting, I've got to go experience this. It'd be such a moment.

GABRIELLE: Oh my god. It's not going to be there for another two years, like I need to see it on this Wednesday the fifth of whatever. Inject scarcity back into the picture.

ZARINA: More scarcity.

GABRIELLE: Make things special again.

ZARINA: Gaslight, gatekeep, girlboss. That's what the Tate needs. Tate Britain, if you're listening to this Alex Farquharson, which you probably aren't if we're completely honest.

GABRIELLE: You probably aren't.

ZARINA: But I hope you are

GABRIELLE: So there's the art side of this. Like, I very much still agree. I don't want to see portraits of people who I don't know on walls. The stuff in museums, it's not selling it to me. It's not making me want to, you know, get there. And the stakes are higher now because since I wrote this, I've gone through COVID and I'm still going through long COVID. My health condition now means getting to a museum would be pretty much impossible and staying in a museum. So, like, whatever was there would have to be worth it for me to, like, army crawl on the floor like a zombie to get to see this thing. It would really have to be good and it would have to be worth the fatigue crash I had after it. It would all have to be worth it. And at the moment, there is nothing worth it in any museum. And that's not to say I'm

someone who doesn't enjoy art. I'm just saying I don't enjoy it presented in this way, in this in these buildings, inside organisations that are so poisoned that it throws off the whole atmosphere. It's not the neutral space that I think they want to achieve. The politics of these galleries are news headlines now – the way that they treat their workers is all transparent. We all know it. Things like the Barbican Stories Project and protest. The staff have like, you know, made instances of racism and discrimination into a book, and they've shared that online. And, you know, that's not just one isolated incident, it's happening across the country and across the world through all these galleries. Like, I'm done even more so now in 2022 compared to like when I wrote this in 2019. There's a lot more noise between the visitor and the art object because we know so much more now about the context.

ZARINA: I think that's a really astute point, no, not astute point. That's a really eloquent, clean way of phrasing it. Like, the noise between the gallery and the work itself and the visitor is louder. Because you're right, like museums and galleries both at the same time, there's this assumption that they are a container, right? They just like a seethrough container that lets you see the work for what it is in the best way possible, right? They're just an environment, like they don't really exist. You don't notice them. That's the theory. But like in practice, the politics leaks into what you're seeing in such an insidious and, like, palpable way. If you're paying any kind of attention. It becomes the subject matter. And I think this is an interesting text for you to write as someone that loves art but hates institutions because I think the parts that you identify that you hate are the institution. You still really fundamentally love art in this text, I think. You're writing in defence of it. But this is like a speedrun through every single problem.

GABRIELLE: A speedrun is an ironic way to put it. I think just in the sense that this is like a compact list of all the bad shit, there could be a compact

list of all the good shit as well. A sister text about why museums work, why they're good. I couldn't write that because I don't believe it and I don't know, I'm not the person to do it. I think what's changed in our writing since then or in my writing anyway is a want to find more of a rounded opinion in what I'm saying, and to allow other people's opinions to inform my texts. The White Pube has always just being me writing or you writing, and at times it's suffered because of that. At times it has also flourished because of that reason too. But you know, there were people who really, really missed museums and the gallery experience over the pandemic especially. I wasn't one of them. But I wish I would have understood what people were missing and if I were to write another text now, I think I would try to fold that in so that people felt a little bit more represented. Or they felt the tension between me and them and in a clearer way or so that I was a less dominant writer. I would also, if I did write a second text, have to include the people who are caught in that really in between knot of a relationship with museums. Because just as there were people who didn't care about museums when they were closed during the pandemic, just as there were people who really, really missed them and were dying for them to be open again, there were all the workers who had to protest outside museums like Tate, Southbank Center, Royal Academy – just to name the London ones – in order to receive better treatment by their employers who were the museums and galleries. They were all in a really, really difficult position because they needed real support financially, and otherwise, through a global pandemic. You know, many of them had probably chosen or aspired to work in creative spaces because they had a love for art. They loved making it or writing about it to reading about it or curating, whatever it is. And then to be faced with like a notoriously precarious industry treating you like this sort a pandemic was there just, you know, either soured people's relationship with art or written it off completely. Just really challenging stuff. And I'm sure, you know, when there was talk in government and on news shows about whether or not

arts funding should even be a priority in this sense, like of course you would want that but at the same time it's all being sucked up by the big bosses in museums. It's not necessarily going to all of the staff in a fair, equitable way. And it just must have been a headfuck. So like that's the kind of stuff that would need to go into a text now after everything that's happened because it's just a scandal. And you know, you've got to expect coming out of this, for people who want jobs in this industry to think twice about it and either go elsewhere or really look closely at the contracts they're given, and the experience of all the staff who have been there for a long time. Like is this a place that's going to really look after me or not? Because I just don't have high expectations and all of that stuff would have to go into another text. Such a fucking dodgy industry. I don't know if I'm explaining myself right. I'm just trying to think about how else I'd do it if I was to write about it now.

ZARINA: No, no. You are. But I think that begs a follow up question, which is: when you say in this text, 1. when you were writing this and 2. now, do you think that they're bad vibes so throw the whole museum away or do you think they're bad vibes, can we please fix it?

GABRIELLE: As depressing as an answer as this is, I just think we've got to rip it up and start again. I just don't have faith, to be honest. Like everyone loves to talk about change and loves to talk about diversifying the curriculum and the institution and the programme and fucking everything, and then none of it happens or it happens in these like really sly, meaningless, quick one-off ways. I just think we have to start again. I don't have faith in the people in charge, and I don't have faith that the shape of these institutions even allows for change to take place, to be honest. Like the fuff, the boards, the trustees, the ethics committees. I think it's locked in. I hate it. And I don't think it's fair that workers have to protest to try and get these tiny

inches of changes to happen if they're lucky. No, rip it up and start again and just actually make the, you know, that one artwork in one room gallery that we've decided now is the way to go.

ZARINA: I really think that's a really good idea. I can't believe you just slapped it out there. So cazj, like, you were so nonchalant about it. Like, that's such a good idea.

GABRIELLE: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you what art handlers would make so much money if they were having to change this artwork in this gallery every day. Yeah, like so much money.

ZARINA: But isn't that like the way it should be? Like art handlers should make a lot of money because they're the ones lifting, putting it in place, like doing the actual work, right?

GABRIELLE: In a way, it's true because art handlers are like the ones, the only ones who get their hands dirty.

ZARINA: Yeah.

GABRIELLE: Even they've got gloves on so this the saying doesn't really work here. But yeah, they'll put the curators out of a job. We'll just put the curators out of a job because we'll just, like, get some algorithm to randomise the list of artworks that we show as and when. And, you know, we'll just let it happen.

ZARINA: The museum version of Google's I'm feeling lucky button.

GABRIELLE: That! That's the gallery of the future. That's really funny.

ZARINA: That's what it's called: I'm feeling lucky. You turn up. What'll it be? Will it be a Renaissance masterpiece. Will it be an abstract expressionist nightmare? You simply don't know until 9 a.m. and you

walk in, you find out. Yeah.

GABRIELLE: It's just because of the speed of it, there'd be no time to do all the faff. There's no time for faff. So we just, you know, on the day of, print off business card-sized information press release bits with the name of the artwork and the artist on, and maybe it's a sticker as well, and you get to take it away with you.

ZARINA: This is -

GABRIELLE: Or no, no, no, save on paper. Scan a QR code on your way in and you get a text with this information on.

ZARINA: The sticker's the good-

GABRIELLE: Oh okay, no. If you want to a sticker, we can do stickers.

ZARINA: The stickers are the best idea you've ever had because that sticker then becomes like a little 'did you see the sunflowers when they came? I've got the fucking sunflower sticker on my water bottle, on the back of my phone, on my laptop.'

GABRIELLE: No, no, no, no, no listen, listen. Sticker book.

ZARINA: YEAH.

GABRIELLE: You go every day, you get your magical sticker that you saw because you were there, you got it. And then, you know, you've got your Monet, you've got your Lubaina, and you complete the collection and you've got it and it's all our algorithms and it's magic. The future.

ZARINA: This is the best idea you've ever had. You've had some pretty banging ideas. You need to write a new tax called 'this 1 particular way that a museum could be a good vibe.' A better title than that, you know what I mean? I'm really bad at naming text, but

like, that should be the vibe of the text. How to make museums have good vibes.

GABRIELLE: Our little pamphlet 'ideas for new art world' should have just been about this because this is better. This is more fun.

ZARINA: That's it.

GABRIELLE: Like, I just really want to sticker book now. Maybe more than I want this gallery to exist. I just want a sticker book. Oh, yeah. Okay, so you complete the stickers. We've incentivised gallery engagement. We've gamified it. What do you get at the end? You've got to get some kind of prize for completion. Something really special. What is it?

ZARINA: I think you get entered into a tombola or a raffle, right? Because think about it, there are a lot of people with time on their hands, like retirees. What are they doing? If you said to them, you get entered into a sick prize, right? They'd do it. So I reckon you put them in a raffle and the winner wins a holiday.

GABRIELLE: Yeah, I was going to say cruise.

ZARINA: Yeah, but like a nice cruise, a booze cruise, bougie cruise.

GABRIELLE: Oh yeah. But wouldn't it have to be like art-related, at least in some way? I don't know.

ZARINA: Well it could be an art cruise. Like, maybe you go on the boat and it's themed. Just, I think you should be able to go on a waterslide of some kind if you go. It should be just a really nice prize, all expenses paid trip to... Paris.

GABRIELLE: With all the art handlers because they worked so hard this year, they deserve a holiday.

ZARINA: This is the end of the podcast. That's it. Short, sharp, punchy. That's our idea. I think that's

such a good idea. I have a question for you. Do you remember the reaction to this text?

GABRIELLE: I actually don't, to be honest. What happened?

ZARINA: Nothing. People agreed with you. Sorry if that's underwhelming but it was underwhelming for me. Because when we booked this in the calendar, recording this podcast with this text, I was like we're gonna spend all the time talking about the juicy controversy, like everyone's comments, 2000 comments, people being like, no, fuck you, I hate museums. No one wanted to die on this hill. You even anticipated people dying on the hill, like for this text, in defence of museums. You say, 'I hear readers of a certain look droning on at me through the Internet.' No one did. And I think that's so telling. I think that says loads because the people in the comments were just like, yeah, good point well made. Do you understand how rare that is on the Internet?

GABRIELLE: That's funny. It's really funny. No, of course I understand how rare that is on the Internet because we've posted so many reviews and had so many backlashes and stuff. I think this was very much in our era of writing silly clickbait titles. If this text had been called 'museums are bad vibes' I don't think half as many people would have clicked on it. But because I said 'why museums are bad vibes' people are like, why? I want to know and also I want disagree with her, so people click on it. The bad vibes bit as well makes me laugh because it was around the time when I was working on a project with some men who kept saying they wanted the exhibition space to be vibey. We want it to be vibey. And the word vibe was making me laugh so much. What are these people on the about, vibes?

ZARINA: Is 2019 when vibes reentered public vocabulary?

GABRIELLE: I think yeah. I think it was everywhere. And I don't think I'd use it now, like in the same

way, in a text tile.

ZARINA: What would you say then? What would you rename it?

GABRIELLE: It'd be something like 'why museums are broken,' something a bit sadder.

ZARINA: That's not as good. That's not as good though.

GABRIELLE: No, it's not as good. Yeah, I don't know. It would suit the tone though. Things were a little bit more careless in the past and now it's just dire. In the interest of having more well-rounded discussions and being nice grown up critics like, you know, museums do serve a purpose for many people. They're great places to take kids in half term, weekends, whatever.

ZARINA: We went to the sex museum in Prague.

GABRIELLE: We have been to the sex museum. I've also been to the Penis Museum in Iceland which was an experience. And in the before times when I'd go on holiday, like I would look up the museums and go to the museums straight away even, you know, not just abroad but in different places in the UK as well. And maybe it's just the case of like, I could enjoy all those spaces as a kid and then as a foreigner because I'm ignorant to the goings-on, because it is the goings-on that get in the way of being able to enjoy the arts sometimes. And like maybe we should only ever seek to go to museums in places where we are not familiar with the art scene.

ZARINA: That's a good point about how like it's better to go in a different country, I think, because then it's like, well, for me, right, I spend a lot of my time on the fly in London just bopping from one place to another. Museums are warm. You don't have to pay to be there, at least in this country you don't have to pay to be in the main collection bit. There's a free collection. And they're warm. They are – I was

about to say comfortable but not really. But there's normally a seating area. You can have a little sit down somewhere. You might have to fight someone for that seat at some point. I think that's like for me, their number one contribution to society, the fact that they are public space, especially in London, public space that you don't have to pay to be in is so rare.

GABRIELLE: But it's not public space though. It's not. I don't know. I don't think it counts.

ZARINA: But it technically should be. I think that's like something that you write about quite nicely in this text, the fact that it should be better. You should be able to walk into these places and feel like a certain amount of ownership over them because they are publicly funded. It's ours, it's taxpayer money. They should serve the public. That's what their own kind justification for cultural funding, like that's what their own blurb says. They're there to provide culture as a form of public service. Right. Or like a form of public value, culture as a publicly valuable thing. And like, they're public space, they should be. And they're not for all these other different reasons. And I imagine security guards might give you a hard time if you're a certain type of person, like this happens to you in wider society, like it's not like a perfect neutral space. Like, you know, the fact that they check your bags is a bit much because they're only checking some people's bags. That weird kind of chafing of like public space happens. But even when I'm not trying to figure out one good vibe that they have, I'm like caveating it so heavily.

GABRIELLE: You're just saying that you like chairs.

ZARINA: (LAUGHING)

GABRIELLE: Do you know what I mean? You're just saying I like to be comfortable. To be honest, like what you were saying then it was making me think that if I was to write this text now, it might not be a

condensed list of all the bad things, but it might be a more generative, productive text, like how museums could be better or something to that effect, to flip the mood of it a bit and try and suggest things instead of just criticising them. But then, as I say that, the times we have written texts where we've tried to be well behaved critics that give you the answers... it's not like anything's ever been implemented so never mind.

ZARINA: I mean, the things like that, like when we give people the answers, when we do cheat sheets like that, like 'ideas for new art world,' the OG text-text. Even though no one does it, even though no one takes our ideas, I still think it's an interesting way to write because it helps me think about what I want from an art space. And I think then that helps me -- if I'm able to, like, figure out what I want -- it gives better shape to my grievances than just complaining, you know?

GABRIELLE: Yeah.

ZARINA: Do you feel like that happened with this?

GABRIELLE: At the time, it wouldn't have been something that I would have thought about. It was just done, it was a breakup letter, I'm writing about games now, bye. Now, I would think about these things and stop to think what worth there was in putting my ideas out there for free.

ZARINA: Gab, I give them all. I can't keep them in half the time.

GABRIELLE: I don't know how you do it.

ZARINA: I am the unsolicited opinion giver. That's our job, giving unsolicited opinions.

GABRIELLE: Maybe it is. I get bitter, though.

ZARINA: I can't stop myself.

GABRIELLE: You know, if people don't want to be fixed, why would I tell them how to fix themselves?

ZARINA: I'm a heckler. I think I'm a difficult person because I love giving unsolicited opinions. Like, I really do. Like.

GABRIELLE: Well, okay, let me frame this differently, and this can be the gossip at the end of the podcast for people who stuck it out: every single time we have been hired directly by an organisation, by someone to give them criticism, it might be a big festival or or a media-focused company in another country. Raised eyebrows. These places say, we want to hire you to look at us specifically and look at us up close because we want to get better. So please here's some money – look at us, assess us. Every single time that has happened and we've given our criticism, everyone has kicked off about the criticism we've given. So it feels like a lose-lose situation, like it feels a little bit pointless to be honest. I probably shouldn't be thinking about this because either way nothing happens. So I should just give it out. Give it out for free.

ZARINA: Well, no, I think that they do go somewhere because people read the website. They don't go to the top because people at the top are way too invested in this way of working. I think when I asked you should we -- way, way, way back, earlier in this podcast episode, if you're still paying attention -- I asked, Gabrielle, should we fix the bad vibes or should we just put the whole museum in the bin. And you were like, put the whole museum in the bin. When you said that, although I agree with you, part of me still felt like, I'm like a junk collector. I hate throwing things away. I keep cool packaging and I'll keep it for a lot longer than I need to. And when I throw it away, I'll feel really bad. That's just me. So even though I agree with you, I know that I would say the same thing, when you said that I still felt like, aw, but like can't we have a go? But like, you're right, because even when they offer – even when not an unsolicited opinion, when they solicit us for our

opinions. They say, we love what you do, and it's not like you don't know what you're getting with us. We're going to come in and we're going to tell you our thoughts and they're not going to be like, 'oh you're doing such a good job' unless you're actually doing a good job, in which case, like, you're probably going to be fine with hearing criticism. But yeah, even when they solicit opinions, there's always like the vague hope that someone's going to say, yeah, you're good, you're on track, all good. No one wants to actually hear ways to improve as much as you say we really want to improve. When you actually are given some examples and places that you can improve and reasons why that improvement is necessary and the ways that it could help, it just kind of like it triggers this defensiveness. And I think that's because this like system of running a museum, there is one particular way of doing it, right? And it's the way that everyone does it, everyone does it. And that way of doing things is upheld by like professional standards, like ethical code, like an agreement that everyone has the same kind of ethical code; things like diversity and inclusion commitments even, things like that inform the way museums run. HR. The wider structure. When people talk structural inequalities, that's what they're talking about, right? Like it can feel really abstract and like bizarre and loosey goosey, hippie. Structures, what are they? But that's what it is. It's specifically hiring practices, right? The contracting you issue to people, that's the structure. It's the nature of the relationships, like the things that are nailed down. And the people that spend their time within these structures, if they don't like it and they take it to whoever's in charge, I feel like that's like a personal affront. You're in charge of these things whether you wrote those structures or not. Like, I think you spend so much time kind of like at the helm of these institutions – not to become like a museum director apologist, but like just to understand the psychology of it because it baffles me – I think you must get way too personally involved in being the figurehead or being in charge or like this being your job. I think there's way too much involvement

basically. People aren't really able when they're in that position at the top to step back and be like, actually, objectively, this is not going well. Like, what else could it be? Is this off topic?

GABRIELLE: No, I don't think it's off topic. I think it just speaks to too many cooks, too many cooks in the kitchen. And a recent example of this might be what's happening at the Whitworth in Manchester at the moment. Alistair Hudson has been forced out, question mark, question mark. Because Manchester University have been listening to like a lobbyist group of Israeli lawyers. Forensic Architecture's exhibition earlier this summer had a statement in it that showed support to Palestine. The statement was removed at one point, then it was put back and a few months down the line this has come out, this news story that Alistair is being asked to leave. You know, this is what I mean about too many cooks. The Whitworth is tied to the University of Manchester who have a say in who's at the helm. And I'm sure many visitors to the Whitworth don't quite realise the University of Manchester has so much of a hand in what happens in the space and maybe that's true of other galleries as well. I don't think that's necessarily something I've picked up on in this 'why museums are bad vibes' text from 2019 because I don't think I was as knowledgeable about the stuff, about how everything is linked and. If I was to write about it now, it would have to be mentioned. If funders have this much of a say in the culture that we see or the culture we don't see, I think it needs to be spoken about more generally. And, you know, we have quite a young audience of art students and I think they need to be the ones thinking about this.

ZARINA: Especially more now, yeah.

GABRIELLE: I hope that when visitors are going into galleries and museums, they're looking at like the logos on the walls.

ZARINA: Even more specific than that. It's not just like the funders that have the logos. It's like the

'with thanks to' on the exhibition wall. The 'supported by' and then a list of donors. That even becomes complicated when you think about it. On the subject of Alistair Hudson and the UK lawyers for Israel complaint and Manchester Uni, right, on that subject. People have known about the Zabłudowicz collection, them as funders, problematic. OUTSET as a funder – well I suppose their logo would be on it but like the Zabłudowicz collection wouldn't have a logo on it. Things like that fly under the radar. The Sackler family you actually mentioned in the text, big donors with their big money. I think a huge part of the way that museums are so broken is because of the funding. It is way too many cooks. The funding is like the most complicated part, and it's getting more and more complicated after like ten years of Conservative government. Those consistent funding cuts are making money way more complicated. And it's like tying museums up to have to do financial acrobatics and make deals with so many different people. And I agree, so many things just get cosigned away and it makes the work of actually serving the public a lot harder. I think with Alistair Hudson, I think it's interesting to think about this text right now, not only because it's topical and like, you know, everyone wants to think about topical things. News, right? But I think this Conservative government more than any other is way more invested in the culture wars, right? And I hate the fact that I'm not even using that phrase, but that's their own language, right? Like it's not just the Whitworth and Alistair Hudson. It's also like the National Trust. Last year or a couple of years ago, there was like a whole hoo ha about the National Trust losing their NPO status because I think one of the houses that Churchill owned had done a little thing about the historic, like the history of where the money came from. And it was like slavery, right? Like, of course, always. These historic houses that the National Trust own were like looking at the sources of the money that built them and also exploring and researching the links with colonialism and all these other things. And Tory government does not like. No, no, none of that. You're going to lose your NPO

status. And I think that's part of the structure that's broken, right? Like, that's part of it. It's also yeah, you know, ethics codes, HR, whatever, like contracts. But it's also relationship to government. Like the Arts Council was meant to be at arm's length from government, but yet somehow like if an institution's NPO status is being called into question, that's fucked. That's part of it being fucked because then government imposing like a political agenda upon these museums which are meant to be neutral. And then say the reason why we're firing Alistair – whatever, like, maybe not with Alistair Hudson – but like the reason why you can't explore colonialism as a thing that your house might be related to is because you meant to be politically neutral. But like that's a political agenda. Whoever's listening to this, god bless you for following my really obvious trite thought that I'm telling you with breathless excitement.

GABRIELLE: But the obvious thoughts are useful to share. That's what this text is, the 'museums are bad vibes' text. Like, sometimes it's fine to just state the obvious and speak without nuance.

ZARINA: And it's useful just to collect those thoughts just so you can have them all in one text: a compendium, a mic drop. That's what I think this text is. I think it's a mic drop, but also just like a list. Like, just, here it all is. Here it all is in one neat package.

GABRIELLE: Sometimes I wish we had more of them to publish, and I don't write about art anymore, so I harass Zarina instead to write the obvious things. But Zarina does have a tendency to write really complex, interesting essays instead.

ZARINA: Do you know what it is? Because I think to write these kind of these kinds of text where it's like, I'm not saying like the bare basics in like a derogatory way. I think to explain things simply – like you're taking all of these complex problems, right? You're explaining it really simply,

understandably, manageably. That takes actual brain cells that I simply don't have. I think basically this me saying I think you're cleverer than me like because you've managed to do this. I can't write like this. I simply lack the brainpower. This is why you should start writing about art again so you can - it's going to happen.

GABRIELLE: [GROANS) I don't want to though.

ZARINA: Can you start writing about art? I'm going to review Super Mario Galaxy.

GABRIELLE: Let's swap.

ZARINA: Yeah, let's swap.

GABRIELLE: Okay. Well, thank you for listening to the first episode of this new series that we're going to do where we revisit old White Pube texts. If you enjoyed this episode and you want to find out more about the things that we've written please visit thewhitepube.com. If you want to go a step further and review or rate this podcast, we would be very, very grateful. We're in the midst of trying to find a podcast sponsor at the moment. So the higher rated we are, the higher up the charts on the podcasts we are, the easier that will be. If you want to go a step further than that, please consider becoming a Patreon supporter. You can give a pound a month and it all just adds up and that is our wage. Thank you very much for listening. And if you have an old White Pube text that you'd really like us to revisit, just get in touch. Message us on something or email us info@thewhitepube.com and we will take it into consideration. We've got a few lined up that we're going to do, texts that honestly make me sweat but they are texts that also need an exorcism, so we've just got to do it. We've got to push forward through the embarrassment and the controversy and so yeah, we will see you on the next podcast. Thank you for listening. Bye

ZARINA: Bye.

