

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

ZM - my name is Zarina Muhammad...

GDLP - ...and we are shitting bricks.

ZM - We're nervous, yeah. This isn't very Girl Boss of us.

GDLP - Just before this started, I was saying - God help us, pray for us in our sins. Amen. Because in today's episode we are going to be revisiting potentially the most controversial White Pube text in our many years on the internet. The text is called, Are White Girls Capable Of Making Art That Is Not About Themselves? It was published on June 30th 2019. I was the one that wrote it and I'm so sorry.

ZM - Right. My first question for you is, do you really think it's the most controversial?

GDLP - I think it was the most controversial and I don't want us to make light of our nerves going into this. On today's episode we are going to read the text and we're going to have a discussion about how we feel about it now and the reaction that we had at the time, and generally how we might do things differently. My nerves come in because I am first and foremost a writer, and I get really nervous that I'm not going to say the right thing when I'm speaking, because I can't take as much time or edit what I've said. That being said, it doesn't mean what I write is perfect! This text is an example of that. Euch, Jesus Christ... all the Catholicism is coming through.

ZM - Oh my God, the Catholic guilt! Not the Catholic guilt!

GDLP - I just want to get this right and hopefully we can make peace with it.

ZM - Exorcise! We're going to exorcise...

GDLP - ...this text. This text is the reason we started to do this series where we revisit old texts because it has been haunting me ever since and I really wanted to address it, and I haven't felt ready, but now I feel desperately in need of doing that. So I'm going to read it out, and don't judge us too harshly, this was years ago. We will explain everything at the end. OK.

Girls, we need to talk. And by Girls I should say that i'm not speaking to the whole universe of us here but a select few. White, cis, non-disabled, all ages and classes; maybe not all sizes or jobs tho, so make a note of that for later. I'm going to address us lot as capital G Girls in this text because i am looking to speak to the Lena Dunham personalities of the art world; and specifically about

how a lot of the art you make is boring to me. boring boring boring. I would like it to stop; i would like it to be better. It's funny, a fellow white once criticised me for using the term 'white people' and 'white girls' because they said I was trying to distance myself from my own identity, which was such a mad call out because their lashing out at me revealed a knowingness for how shit we really are. I feel like Villanelle when I say this: BORING. it is on us to sort ourselves out, so we better at least name it. ye it's a descriptor first but I'm glad it's also partly an insult, one we should accept and concede. We are responsible for making the world a horrible place, and we categorically need to do more for the people we have marginalised / need to b intersectional / support / finance / and vote smarter. So in this text I'm just talking to the white women of the art world, and in the vein of Hannah Horvath, I'm calling us Girls.

What I see time n time again are Girls whose entire artistic practice revolves around themselves. they might tag a < meaning > onto something at the end but more often that not it just feels like they think they look nice ,, and so ,, that can be their art for the day. For example, and im about to drop a lot of examples: Don't i look like a pretty manic pixie dream girl in this Photo Booth video where I'm crying a little bit for a long time ?? Emotional labour is real, so by crying into the camera I'm taking some of that time for myself. Praxis. I have bleached my hair and it is different colours all the time and that is important okay. Take a look at this photo series I did of my body looking completely normative and failing to make a statement about the body positivity it's claiming to champion - and check out the way I'm pulling at my bra to make it edgy. I'm doing a performance now where we do yoga together and use selfie sticks to take photos of ourselves from loads of different positions. And oh oh did I mention periods yet? Look at this fake blood and glitter on a sanitary pad I framed. I have also hung tampons dipped in paint along a washing line because #womankind and housework is work. Here is a picture of me in front of my art, it's very important you look at me in front of the art. I am wearing this Forever 21 t-shirt with the slogan Girlism on to make sure you know my very progressive politics even though this top was not ethically made hehe. In this new exhibition, I've painted all the walls pink, isn't that a cool idea. Oh, of all the art I've made on my three year undergraduate course that I paid a lot of money for, the best is definitely this portraiture series of my boring friends wearing makeup in QuiRky ways. I've photographed them in some Hotline Bling lighting to show the world that beauty is not just skin-deep :) Once at a crit, I showed work where I used Facetune to make my body look ridiculous to critique beauty standards! celebrities use it and wow it's so wrong. There's also these east asian photo editing apps that make you look really cute with big eyes, so I'm going to print off the selfies I took with it and that is my next exhibition - are you coming? In this piece I have dyed my armpit hair pink because of feminism. I'm a sculptor, and all I do is stuff tights so they look like sausages that have gone off because when you think about it, tights are a really like, feminine material aren't they? I am doing a durational performance where I pretend to be a popstar and I wear

pink dresses, right, and sing while everyone watches me pretend to be self-absorbed because I'm making a point about how self-absorbed celebs are or something. That's it, that's the joke. Anyway, I've also painted myself with my top off, and you're not allowed to say anything except nice things about it because I am brave and that's ALL that matters. Look at my A cup boobs, i am BRAVE. I'm doing an instagram residency anyway, and it's so interesting because all I'm doing is posting my face, my face, my face til the cows come home. I'm getting so many likes! - - - Ye This bingo card is full I'm gonna stop now.

In all this Girl Art, it is as tho the artist's interests do not extend beyond their own skin because their personality is, in fact, themselves. I think two things are happening here that get to me, that anger and bore me. The first avenue is this. When Girls make this art and think it is critical, it is always perpetuating the thing they are trying to critique. They become the problem they set out to tackle, probably realising how much they enjoy it and how valued it makes them feel. They put on this costume or attitude and think, wow I look good dont I. but the reason that feels so good is the white supremacy we created; you're just instrumentalising it for your own power, vanity and fame. That's embarrassing 2 me. go away. The world has decided Girls look best so this art is so overly self-centred in my eyes. when it comes to vanity I want to say I don't care and live your life but I do think it can't half be boring when it's calling itself an art practice. it gets repetitive or something. People never mix it up, take risks, and Ugliness is more interesting anyway. Why can't this content just stay on your personal instagram accountttt tho. I don't want to go to a degree show and see your top 5 pix of yourself, we're not trying to bang. Do you think that is interesting? If i like you as a person or I enjoy your style then i will follow you and keep up with what u do. But in an exhibition, what value does your image hold? Why do you have to impose your image on the audience? Do YOU think this makes for good art? It truly says so much that as Girls we think we hold enough inherent value that our very image is special, magic and < enough > to be art. We don't even hesitate, and we don't realise how other people might never dare.

The assumption that everyone automatically cares is what angers me, and it leads me onto the second reason I can't cope with any of this. When Girls make this art and think it is radical, it literally cannot be radical - that time has passed. Our period discourse is dead and buried - the actual policies on luxury tax and period poverty need to be dealt with by law, not by your little exhibition. We're over free the nipple conversations, long been white white white. Nudity is not this exciting rare thing. Not radical. Imo leave fat acceptance / happiness / and genuine body liberation to the world of fashion, where writers, fashion orgs and models are collaborating to change things (shout out 2 bethany rutter and navabi). Sex is normal and guess what, I'm bored of art that makes out it isn't. Not radical. I wana say leave the sex work/art crossovers to sex workers who make art but honestly even then I have yet to see that done in an especially interesting way (though as

always, feel free to disregard what the fuck I think, you're not making work to please me, are you). There might not be gender equality in the art world (and i doubt there ever will be) but it is normal and safe for Girls to be exhibiting. It is normal for us to be on the lineup. Soooo, haven't we now earned the privilege to not have to make art about ourselves and instead to do something else? like come on, paint dogs or memes, anything. create mad surreal performances about climate change or go full fiction and make sculptures of aliens. It doesn't have to be You By You, why would you wanna pull a Marc Jacobs. In visual art, it's like white men don't constantly have to put themselves in their work, they GET to talk about other stuff - and I think deep down this text is coming from a place of jealousy, that white men have art subject privilege. They haven't suffered the same structural inequality so they don't have to process those neuroses through their art in the same way other identities do and need to. Isn't that the aim for all of us, for identity politics in and out of art to not be such a necessity? an actual utopia where people are treated equally so we don't have to turn ourselves inside out for these exhibitions, or expose the way so many systems work against us. The thing is, I think with White Girl Art it's as though it is lagging behind reality, where a lot of those neuroses have already been dealt with in and out of the arts; we've been Saved in so many ways, so to harp on about relatively minor issues through the paintings we make is not only boring but a bit unnecessary - and offensive to everyone else who the world does not respect or value in the slightest. If I'm fucking over it, I wonder how it feels for people of colour, refugees, disabled people, and trans/nb people to see selfie after selfie of privileged white girls in exhibitions. Maybe so many white men art critics wouldn't be deriding identity politics in art so hard if white women stopped thinking they could continue to be a part of it and diluting what it actually means for others? I know this is a sticky subject to touch on, but mind i'm saying it with a gooooood amount of agency having been a victim of domestic violence and a young student who made art about that very experience - I think that even when it comes to our physical trauma at the hands of others, we should be looking to leave ourselves out of it or work through it outside of visual art because at the end of the day, the systems we enter into in art are staunchly male and violent anyway. galleries and museums, curation, funding, the market, criticism, art universities, and collections are mostly led and ran by men. They hold the power still and they continue to capitalise on us as subjects - y give them anymore content? They don't deserve your soul. Keep your art to yourself or share it with people who genuinely care. And get on a waiting list for therapy, it's better to work it out there.

The shit thing is and the reason I think it's pretty pointless me writing all this, is because I really suspect that regardless of this context or the shitty impact I'm describing, Girls will continue make art about themselves and Girlkind's past hardships because they want all the sympathy and attention they can get; they want to indulge in white tears and fragility while they still can, before everyone catches on and tells them to get over it. That

scares me. That's why I think it would be more respectful now to more marginalised identities than our ours to extract ourselves from art, to hide, and to join men in making art about literally anything else.

I have literal sunstroke from this mad weekend heatwave so I'm ending this now to keep it nice and compact. Before you kick off about me subtweeting your entire practice, please read through this a second time, read Aria Dean's 'Closing the Loop' from 2016 because she started this convo loooong ago and I'm circling back to it now because clearly a lot of you haven't read it,,,, and then take a moment to consider the art world beyond you as an individual. I would appreciate it. Thanks for reading/listening.

ZM - Before we start talking about this properly, I will say that we'll link Aria Dean's Closing The Loop, that essay you mentioned at the end, we'll link that in the little description. So if you do want to read that too, you can. I have something to say. I don't think you're wrong about most of it.

GDLP - OK, let's get into it then, because I was cringing at some of it. But less than I thought I would. So, the context for this entire piece, is that me and Zarina were invited to Copenhagen for some kind of thing, I can't remember, I've got brain fog now. It's been a pandemic. We were on this panel and I can't remember the order in which this happened but the person who was running the event had shown these two presentations about two different artists, two white artists, one was a fat woman who put herself into art historical scenes. The other woman was a little skinny woman who was doing these aerobic performances where she held a selfie stick, that was part of it, I don't know if it was interactive, like people could join in with the routine she was doing, or something? But after the end of the presentations I remember the person running the panel had turned to us and was really excitedly like, what did you think of these artists? Maybe they were Danish or something, I don't know what the connection was. But she seemed really excited to find out our opinion in a way that assumed that we were going to love the artworks. I remember just being like, no! Just because I look like I should enjoy it, doesn't mean I should enjoy it! I don't enjoy it! I gave a really messy answer that probably said nothing, it was just words, I probably didn't make any kind of coherent point. But it just stuck with me, because my answer was such a mess. I'm so slow with these things, I couldn't answer there on the spot what was getting to me. It took me weeks afterwards. I just have been going over it in my head, a little bit here and there, trying to figure out the problem. Separate to this, I was supposed to write one of our Sunday texts. Me and Zarina take turns every Sunday to publish a review or an essay and it was my week. Usually I write things way in advance, normally I've got things in the bag, texts for weeks. I know what I'm doing, what I'm going to say, it's all in hand. For whatever reason, the text I had written this week in June, it just wasn't working. I didn't want to publish it and I was like, fuck,

what am I going to do? It was a Saturday and it was a heatwave and I had sunstroke. Like I say in the end of the text. I remember panicking, I remember chugging litres of water, being like – the only thing I think of relevance I have to say right now is about White Girl Art. I'm going to have to just quickly fucking get it down on a page. So it was sort of like, thinking about it for a while and then shit, quick quick quick, gotta write. I mention the context because I've never written a text like that before, I normally write so far in advance, that I have a week or two weeks to review what I've done and to edit and have some perspective, and to think about who will read it. What the audience will think, and then to pre-empt what they might have an issue with, and none of that general code of conduct happened here. I don't mean to say that as an excuse, I just think it's insane that the one text that happened to me on is the one text that basically went like, viral in the arts. It was such a stressful time, that this text had 12,000 reads in its first ten days.

ZM – That's mental. That's half our audience back then.

GDLP – Exactly. It was really kind of like, helped by its clickbait title – Are White Girls Capable Of Making Art That Is Not About Themselves? Yeah. That is interesting to me. It gave me a new fear. Ever since that point I have edited to death because, what if something else takes off in the same way and I lose control of it? It's made me be so much more careful, because there are things in this text that I would have said differently and I sort of hate that it is on the record. Even the day after publishing I felt differently.

ZM – Right, so. It would be interesting to go through what you would do differently now, because that's the whole point of this revisiting series – going back, clearing out, taking back control of the texts that we lost our grip on, first of all. But, for context. Sometimes when a text goes viral it's viral for a nice reason, sometimes. Rare, but please describe the reaction. Is that what you want to do next?

GDLP – Yeah, I think the reaction is part of the issue I had. The reaction was borne from some of the comments I made that were messy and wrong. So, 12,000 reads in ten days. Mayhem. Instagram notifications through the roof, twitter, it was huge. It got to the point where if you typed in 'the white pube' the next few words would be 'white girl art' because people wanted to find it. Mostly it was a lot of people agreeing that they had similar issues, or people being able to laugh at themselves and say, oh my god, I have done this and I know why I stopped and this is why. I always felt strange about it and I didn't know what my issue was and this has helped me put that to rest. That is always nice. That's what it had done for me, that was the problem I was trying to solve, learning to articulate it. God. And then, that was maybe 99% of people, but it is always the 1% who are angry that feel like they are the loudest people and they have the most weight, that was definitely the case here. Initially, the first thing picked up on was the comment I had

said about sex workers because it literally haunts me to this day. I said: 'Sex is normal and guess what, I'm bored of art that makes out it isn't. Not radical. I wanna say leave the sex work/art crossovers to sex workers who make art but honestly even then I have yet to see that done in an especially interesting way (though as always, feel free to disregard what the fuck I think, you're not making work to please me, are you).' So, people were angry, and I completely, very quickly understood and agreed with their anger. I do not have any place in that conversation. We had messages from people who said we were wrong to bring sex workers into this essay, and then we also had messages from sex workers who were black and asian, who said that they agreed with it because the dominating artwork that they see made by sex workers in major institutions and smaller galleries is dominated by white artists who work in this White Girl Art aesthetic and for them that didn't feel satisfying. I always thought, OK, that makes sense, I understand that. The next step is what took me a bit longer to reach. Which is that this White Girl Art aesthetic I'm describing, this prettiness, this clean, pink, glittery, super-femme, decorative accessories, polished, glam look, is something that sex workers capitalise on and in a sense, it is their aesthetic to do what they want with because it is so integral to many people's career. That took me so much longer to understand. In a way, that comment, if I had had the wisdom and foresight and time to speak to artists who do sex work and sex workers who make art, if I'd have spoken to anyone that might have made a really interesting part of the essay that added a new perspective to taking back control of an art style and a visual style for your own ends. That wasn't in the essay because I was fucking stupid and I didn't think I knew anyone who was in sex work and I only afterwards found out that there were people I knew in my life, in my personal life, who are. So I don't know, it's again, been such a lesson. I shouldn't have used that word, I don't mean that in the cheesy way, like, I am learning. But I have learnt from that moment onwards that if there is something I'm unsure about... because there is a certain amount of questioning. What I write there is like, haphazard. You can tell that I'm unsure about what I'm saying. Whenever that has come up in future essays I have either taken it out, if I haven't had the time, or I've approached people who know what they're on about. So as cheesy as it was, it was a lesson. And I think, yeah, I just didn't realise how much damage that was going to do. I was just like, embarrassed that I'd made such a vague shitty comment that wasn't necessarily harmful but was just stupid. I think I underestimated our power as critics who say things that people believe in. Maybe this did more damage than I could ever know because I don't necessarily see the impact of it all. Yeah.

ZM - I mean... yes. I agree, I think that for me, that comment about sex workers, I think art made by sex workers, that line I think is slightly out of place within the rest of the essay because it feels like you jump over it, in a way that attempts to acknowledge something - yes, that, but, you don't have time to deal with it. I don't know if I'm being a complete wanker, but you just said... you just said you've not seen it done in an interesting way.

GDLP - But that interesting-ness isn't up to me, that's what I'm saying. Who the fuck am I to judge if it is interesting or not? I haven't got a fucking clue. I am almost definitely not the audience and I will, because of my experience not being in the industry, will not see things, like I said about handling certain aesthetics for your own ends and... how do I say this...

ZM - I think you say that too!

GDLP - I don't think I do, I think it's just a mess.

ZM - Maybe it is not worded as tightly as you would want it to be now, or knowing that people are going to read it a day after publication knowing that people are going to read that line and feel a type of way. I think you are flippant with it, but... that was the chair squeaking, hold on. I think you're flippant with it but in my mind, you're saying, tell me to shut up, who gives a fuck what I think. That acknowledges I think, in my mind, your lack of agency on the subject.

GDLP - I think damage was done by me saying I don't think this is interesting, but don't listen to me. I just shouldn't have gone there.

ZM - Yeah, true.

GDLP - I'm being flippant but I'm not realising the power that we have, writing from this crazy place where we're giving opinions but like, don't come for me. Then people come for you. That's one half of the thing that really sticks with me with this text. The other really major part of the backlash, I say backlash, it was one person who absolutely lost their shit in the DMs in a way that I have never seen before or since. They were really upset about the comment I had made about therapy. Again, I can kind of see where they were coming from. My comment in the text is like, listen, I think some of us have damage, and we want to deal with it through our artwork. But personally, having seen the way the industry works, I don't trust the industry to hold that artwork in a careful way. I don't feel comfortable when I see other people's damage there because I don't think it's safe, I think it's exposing you even more. You can't trust who the audience is going to be or the curators or the critics, to point at us, who are going to come in and read it in a certain way. My point in the text was, in terms of this White Girl Art damage, not to undermine the shit that people go through but this text does undermine the shit that people go through. My point was, go to therapy instead, work it out in therapy. I think I was hoping that would then free people's heads up to make other art I describe about aliens or trees and stuff. So we got a message from someone, we got a series of messages that were like, incredibly angry and violent because they were so, so angry that we had made that comment. I think the level of abuse they came at us with was... I should have figured out how to say this in a sensitive way. I think the level of abuse they came at us with was something we had never experienced before. They were telling us in detail about the

horrible things that had happened to them in their life that you can't even believe they told us, in order to say, I need art, so let me have it. It was really upsetting to read, I can still clearly remember what they said, and I think because of the screaming... it was like, voice messages. Because of the screaming, I didn't hear what they were saying, I think I just felt like, so afraid at what they would do next, when really what they were saying was – you've got no right to say go to therapy, let me do what I want. I know now that therapy doesn't cure you, therapy can give you tools to manage things and manage a difficult life and manage how you cope about what has happened to you. But at the end of the day it can't go back and undo the trauma that has already happened, also the wait lists... I can't believe I say in this text, get on a wait list, as if that's a really feasible thing for people. People die on these wait lists. I hate that I said that. I think I was coming at this text from a really overblown, over confidence, arrogant place because I had just done CBT and I thought I was invincible, which is so dumb of me. I've since realised how broken that system is. I know you're shaking your head, but I think that it is fine for people to make art about these subjects. I still believe and agree with myself that I don't necessarily think that exhibitions and collectors and that whole business system is where that stuff should end up, but at the same time, I do disagree with the fact that I was the one that said it. I agree with the content but I had a similar issue with the sex worker comment, where like, people have bestowed us with this power and we have said time and time again, we don't want it, what we say doesn't matter. At the same time, people have continued to offer us that power and affirm it. Even though we don't believe we have power, it is still there. When a text has gone viral-ish, not viral in the real world sense but viral in the art world sense, and one of those comments is don't make art about damage, just go to therapy – of course someone is going to kick off in the comments. If shit is not working for them, they're seeing me as saying they're not allowed to do that anymore, and they need that. I agree, and I understand, and again, since that point, I have understood our place better in all of this as well as the whole subject. I just wish again, like the sex worker comment, that I hadn't fucking gone there. It wasn't thoughtful enough and it wasn't fair. Does that make sense?

ZM – It does make sense, and I agree with you on both of those points. I'm not saying this to be devil's advocate, because I don't think that's a valuable or productive space to be in. Devil's advocate is a silly position to take up and I don't know why you would want to do that. I just think I disagree with you about how it affects what you're ultimately trying to say and the value that this text has as a piece of criticism in a cultural sense rather than an art world-specific thing. Critics in the art world, art critics write to this specific, insular thing. Critics review exhibitions and that is where they spend the majority of their time thinking. We're going to review an exhibition, talk about this painting, and its value to the canon of art history and the market. But literary critics and big juicy galaxy-brain critics that write about art, they talk about movements, right? There are book critics and

literary critics that spend their time thinking about the wider trajectory of culture, whether it be a literary trend, like the sad-girl narrator, thinking about Otessa Moshfegh and Mona Awad and these kind of, cultural touch points that are having flares at any given time. I think, and I know how this is going to sound, so I'm just going to have to firm it and say this. I think you were young. We hadn't quite gotten to grips with the place we had in the discourse. I'm doing air quotes when I'm saying that, like the discourse means anything, right? But in exactly the way that you describe, people looked at us and said, you've got power. We didn't clock it, it didn't feel real to us. And that's not a cop out. That's just, the way it was. That's just a fact. I still haven't really come to terms with that, and that's an active problem. I don't think I want to come to terms with that though. I think you've got to grips with it more because of texts like this, this text specifically changed you and the way you think about what you do as a writer and the effect that you have. I'm really struggling to, I don't know, maybe this is just a personal issue. I don't think those two problems fundamentally negate the rest of what you were saying. I think it's still sound.

GDLP - I think I allowed it to negate them. Those two comments and the backlash however minor the backlash really was, particularly that one person who lost their shit, to this day I haven't re-shared the text because I've felt like it has got holes in it. If I re-share it, put a spotlight back on it, people will be like - you've left holes in this! What the fuck were you doing! I'm so self-conscious of that because I want now everything to be so tight, and I want it to be water-tight when I put texts out. I'm so much more conscious of it because of this. There are things I could pull out and stress test. If I'm making comments about how I don't think White Girl Art should include people's trauma, I don't think people should work that shit out in the gallery because people more marginalised than white girls should have the space to do that. What the fuck am I doing? That's all I do on the White Pube. All my entire career is, I'm going to work these things out that are happening to me in my life, and I'm going to use art around me in order to refract myself through it. Then I'm going to write about it, these personal, private things and I'm going to make it public for tens of thousands of people. And now there's a podcast, and all the listeners are going to listen to it as well. I'm doing a very similar thing. Personally, it's a little bit different because the delivery goes from me to my own website that I share with you and then we control how it is contextualised. Is that a flimsy excuse? Am I not just doing White Girl Art too?

ZM - No, right, no. I don't think you are. And I think that is an unfair criticism to levy at yourself. At a certain point, Gabrielle... I think self-evaluation is really difficult, because it's difficult to toe a line between 'I'm fine, I don't need to think about this problem, I don't need to look at this problem, I said what I said, it's fine, did I stutter?' like, it's difficult to toe the line between that and, I don't know, really digging into yourself when you don't deserve it. Because it is really easy for

both of us, as people, to feel the weight of a problem that we have, as heavier than it actually is. Because we think it means another thing. I think that doesn't ultimately matter to anyone but us. Maybe that is where it feels like White Girl Art? I don't think anyone else notices this, it's just us and our probs. Where this text sits in my mind, and I don't think this is the right place in the podcast to say this, I think this is a note to end on, but I'm going to say it now anyway. I would like to speak in defence of the polemic. I don't know what I mean when I say that, it's just, there is value in being like, I have a problem with this thing and this is my problem. It isn't a perfect representation of the thing you're talking about but it's a perfect representation of one side of how you feel about it. I think the way you fundamentally feel about it now, and probably then, was way more complex than you've written about it in this particular one-shot text. I think this text still has value because there is value in the polemic, and in the same way as with our conversation about the I Hate Dishoom text where you asked me, is it actually that deep? I would like you ask you, if this text was actually that deep? Not now, back then, if you recall and remember.

GDLP - No, I think back then, I was taking the piss out of all the shit art that I thought people were getting away with. That's maybe an important part that we should speak about. A part of the art that I identify as White Girl Art is of very poor quality. It's poor thought quality, but also just poor production value. It is really shitty, basic, thin, plasticky bullshit, arranged in a way that is palatable. Or especially sweet, so it's especially palatable. But I just never felt like it qualified, because it wasn't worked. There wasn't much time spent on it, and it wasn't coming from a thoughtful place. It was just vibes, people just getting away with bullshit. Like, they're putting a sticker on something and being like, ta-da! But not even making the sticker. The sticker is from somewhere else. That's the level I was thinking about it on. The vanity of it all pissed me off as well - those two things together felt so insulting, because you're getting into all these places so easily. You're getting into Frieze with this bullshit. You're getting written about because you're a pretty white girl. Like, who gives a shit? It pissed me off that prettiness, whiteness and girliness was giving people cultural capital and cultural cachet that they could cash in on a real level. It just speaks to the whole system that we live in. It is not interesting to me, it still isn't. I just don't give a shit about celebrities, none of this stuff matters to me. It's very Zoella - this person never says anything of value, or anything new, or weird. Anything that would make them a specific individual on their own, they just blend into the rest of them. Very factory-made bullshit. You've learned the lines from other people and Instagram captions. You've not had a new thought or an individual thought for yourself. I have no time for it because I would rather spend time with better shit, better art.

ZM - I think, yes to that. What maybe perhaps we didn't have the vocabulary to articulate, back then, is something that you mention in one sentence in the descriptions of what White Girl Art is. You

say, I'm wearing a Forever 21 t-shirt with the slogan GIRLISM on to make sure you know my very progressive politics, even though this top was not ethically made, tee hee. I think there you are articulating a fundamental problem with where this category of art sits. It is fundamentally liberal.

GDLP – Yeah, it's very Hillary Clinton, all that. It exists in that realm I think. Where like, it says one thing but it doesn't come through with anything else. It has nothing to back itself up. It isn't even so obvious that it has come back around on itself to be interesting, it is just, still shit. Not to big us up, or big me up, because I've just remembered you're not a white girl! I was going to say the texts we write, but I mean the texts I write – the texts I write, I would hope, are of a higher quality than white girl art. Do you know what I mean? That's the difference. If I am talking about shit that has happened to me that is particularly sensitive, I want that thought to sit within a text that is really pleasurable to read, because of the writing itself and the words I have chosen and the words, the order, the structure and the way the text ends and the ending might reflect the beginning. I want to write a text I'm proud of, I want to spend hours working on it. I don't think that level of work, which is art work, is put into White Girl Art. It's like, you know, too fast.

ZM – I think that speed, that pace, regardless of how much time people actually spend on the work itself, making, fabricating right? I think that pace is important because... I might sound like a wanker again, I don't care, a pretentious wanker... I think that's part of its political position, right? It is just rapid, thoughtless movement without... maybe it's not about production, how much time it physically takes to make something, but the mental processing time. The mental production power, how much time you're like, spending mentally chewing on something rather than physically chewing on something. I don't think White Girl Art ever takes the time to really think about its position in relation to things like capitalism, to be honest. It acts as a complicit participant in that system, in a way that is unhelpful to point out maybe, because no ethical consumption and all that. But like, I'm not articulating this well, I'm aware of this. I'm a writer, not a speaker. This is a hot thought, fresh off my head. We can now, looking back, act like the Girl Boss, hashtag feminism Forever 21 slogan t-shirt Feminism TM, we can now look back on that era and see the ways in which it acted in service to big corporations and vested interests and power. This is something you touch on. This is my problem with the text. You articulate your problem but like, the wider political problem is in the wrong order. Maybe it is in the edit. Maybe it's not about us being better writers, we've become better editors, maybe it's the structure of it. I don't think this part of the conversation is interesting or useful to anyone except me and you. I think maybe you should have flipped it a bit, in the part where you're describing it, you describe the problem, the political elements of the problem, and you don't cap that off at the end. It kind of, goes around, and says some bits about why does it have to be about you, that internal looking. Why does art have to be the container through which you

process these heavy, emotional, important, valuable things because art doesn't deserve it. You mention or skirt around the subject of power itself, you say something which I think isn't a complete sentence. You say 'the systems we enter into in art are staunchly male and violent anyway. galleries and museums, curation, funding, the market, criticism, art universities, and collections are mostly led and ran by men.' I think it's not just about men, it's about power and the ways that white women, white girls, in the vocabulary of this essay, the way that white girls are not just in proximity to that power but active participants in producing, reproducing and containing it within themselves, holding onto exclusive ownership of it. Exclusive access to the means of cultural production. I think it's part of that. I don't think it ever goes there. We didn't know! I don't think I know now either because I've done a shit job of articulating that.

GDLP – I think in that little bit you said at the end, it reminded me, we have got the power now. I really am convinced that white girls know that they've got it quite good. Not perfect, lot of shit still happens, but they're relatively well off and safe. As bad as it is, people want to other themselves, we want to other ourselves, or hold on to special little things for attention. In a way that is really crude. It feels insincere, but it also, in the work that's made, comes off as what I have been recently calling, only to Zarina, Level One Identity Art. It's really light, you're seeing one problem, you're not taking a step further and thinking of the context of that problem, the history of that problem, you're just attaching it to yourself and being like, ahh! Give me attention because this bad thing is happening to me. Does that make sense? That's the lightness, the maliciousness that I have an issue with. I can articulate it now but back then I had no idea.

ZM – I feel like my last point I trailed off and didn't finish that thought, but that's it, right. Yes, that's it. The point that you make, I don't know if you actually think this, or thought this, I think this was just an easy ending, and you had heatstroke. I know you as a person, I'm not just saying this because you're my mate, but because I know you as a person and a thinker, and also my friend, but whatever. You say that it's like, white girls should extract themselves so other people who are not white girls, whoever that may be, you – I was about to say we! – you lot...

GDLP – You can't appropriate our culture, Zarina! We'll cancel you!

ZM – I don't know have the agency to talk about white girls and your people. But yeah, you say, extract yourselves to hide and join men in making art about literally anything else. So everyone else can come in and have that presence. I think that is incorrect. I don't think it's about that. I think it is so that the reproduction of that power, representing yourself in this glossy... it's about breaking that power, right? It's about breaking that, self as image as object as commodity as like, I don't know. I'm about to sound like a fucking Islamic Fundamentalist, but whatever. I don't think people belong in art! Maybe there's a case to be made for full

opacity all the time, maybe that is the end goal you need to commit to. Just be like, no people represented, ever. Maybe it's just about self commodification, maybe that's the opacity that needs to be moved towards, right? Because that's what you're saying, right? Like, we – you – I'll say we actually because this is part of what I touched on in The Problem With Diaspora Art. It's really seductive because it's profitable and on an individual scale it can be individually profitable and as a wider cultural movement for individuals participating and the institutions that are able to contain this. It's profitable to make yourself other, to turn that otherness into subject, and art object. I dunno. Saying that is capitalism is a cop out. Throughout this I have sounded like a crank and it is a cop out, because it's not just about that, it's about the way that society and culture at large deal with identity. There's a certain language that it slips into. The base, neutral level of it is producing financial capital and even that sounds like a cop out. I don't know. I think it's just about making the self neutral. Does that make sense?

GDLP – It does. I don't have anything interesting to say in response, is the only thing.

ZM – I've got a question for you.

GDLP – OK. You ask.

ZM – I don't know how to word this because I don't have an answer for this in mind. Sometimes I ask questions and I know what you're going to say, or I'm expecting you to say something and I actually don't know what you're going to say. Do you think you're the right critic to write this? Like in terms of your identity but also you as an individual? Do you think a white critic should have written this?

GDLP – Hmm. I think it would have been better if it wasn't me, yeah. I think so. I think I can only go so far with it. As this conversation is pointing out. I mean that on like, a personal aptitude level, but also just like, societal, seeing it from the outside. I'm too within it. I made this stuff. What am I trying to say...

ZM – You made White Girl Art? Is that what you're trying to say?

GDLP – Erm.... no, I didn't. I kind of skipped it.

ZM – I think I did, you know! Alongside this text we made a White Girl Art bingo card and I can check off an uncomfortable amount.

GDLP – Do you want to read what's on the Bingo Card?

ZM – Oh yes please. And shall I tell you which bits I ticked off?

GDLP – Definitely.

ZM – Or just how many I ticked off...

GDLP - I think as you go through you need to tell us what you did.

ZM - As a caveat I should say that I am consistently embarrassed of every single piece of art I made, ever. Not just the White Girl Art, all of it. You think you saw my art, no you didn't. OK, so, White Girl Art Bingo. Dyed armpit hair. Any art about periods... I made that.

GDLP - Did you! What did you do! Oh my god, please tell me.

ZM - I just included a tampon in one sculpture on Foundation, it's not that deep but it is embarrassing.

GDLP - It's on the list.

ZM - It counts. Body image collage from magazine cut outs... kind of. I used this aesthetic. Look at me in front of my art... this isn't just White Girl Art, this goes for like, identity art level one, this is applicable, so of course I've done that. I've rinsed that, banged that out, foundation, first year, second year, third year, after graduation. But I'd like to say I knew what I was doing... I don't think I did. Exhibition walls painted pink.... look at my A-cup boobs... (laughs)

GDLP - Have you done that Zarina?

ZM - I think I have. Look at my thigh gap... absolutely!

GDLP - Oh god help us. I can't remember what's on this bingo card, so as you read it out I'm just like, wow. I was so right. I take back everything I've said.

ZM - See, this is sometimes why I think that actually, writing a long-form text, you can do it better in a meme sometimes. Because this bingo card is correct.

GDLP - The bingo card is often all you need to do, because the most fun part of this text for me, before it got messy and all the holes appeared, was just the paragraph at the beginning where I describe all the White Girl Art I'm categorising. That, in itself, is my methodology, as we can see through these bingo cards. We've done so many of them.

ZM - There's more. So... stuffed tights as sculpture. Hotline bling lighting.

GDLP - You've done that. I've seen that.

ZM - I've done that. Crying selfie... I forgot about that. But that was on purpose. Fruit that looks like genitals... I have not done.

GDLP - Good.

ZM - Video singing to the camera...

GDLP - Oh, you've done that on The White Pube!

(laughter)

ZM - Bad makeup on purpose... Underwear and fabric dyed different skin tones. I've not done that. Glitter and webcam selfie... webcam selfie I have done. I think I've got a bingo.

GDLP - All of these things... I just skipped it. I was just like, I'm going to paint trees, and pigs, gonna paint shit... I just never thought about it in the same way. It's really fascinating that you lived the White Girl Art life that I should have lived.

ZM - I think in the way that you describe, what I was doing wasn't White Girl Art, I think it was just Level One Identity Art. Because I think the system you're describing, not the system, the category you're describing is wider than just White Girl Art itself. But I think you hit on the top of your problem with it, and you try and describe the shape. Gabrielle, I hate that this podcast episode has been you airing a problem with a perfectly good text that just needed an edit. And like, I hate... first of all, I don't want this episode to be like, here are all of the problems with my text, bye. So, like, devil's advocate, yeah, but then, two. I don't want this to be a podcast episode that White Girl Artists who make White Girl Art that don't really have any of the get out clauses you have now mentioned, that don't fall through the holes you've described that exist within the text. There are White Girl Artists that make this work, don't have the get out clauses, don't have the like- it still stands. I don't want them to end this episode saying, well it's fine then, because Gabrielle has a problem with it, and like, she's mentioned she's a white girl. That was, I think, the majority of the backlash was loads and loads of white girls feeling really uncomfortable for the first time in their lives.

GDLP - Gasp! This might be an interesting way to round this off, then. So one of the artists whose name I won't mention, but who I was referring to in the paragraph where I described all the different types of White Girl Art that I have seen with my beady eyes. This artist got in touch with us, maybe about a year after the text was written. This was an artist who I had thought, I can see what you're doing with your practice and I think you want to criticise the figure of the White Girl Artist. You're basically criticising Barbie. But what you're doing is just becoming Barbie and I think you're just enjoying playing that character, you're not actually being critical, because you're not really subverting anything. You're just performing and absorbing it. So this artist got in touch a year or maybe longer after the text came out and said, hello, I hated this text when it came out, I really couldn't stand it, I was really upset, and now I see what you were saying and since I have come to terms with what you were saying in the text and the points you made about what's critical and what isn't, I've stopped my performance and I'm going back to the drawing board to

figure out what I want to do as an artist that isn't this. Because that character had become so much of their identity as an artist, it was one and the same. They stopped their Instagram account which had been posting all the performances, and the link on Instagram was the link to this text. It's something that has like, really stuck with me, because it's very validating as a writer but also someone just agreed with me so deeply and understood and took on board the points I was making, even in this messy, angry, silly, meme way. And they like, changed. It takes so much for people to change in life, it's so rare that people listen to something and change their opinion or literally their business. I was fascinated by that, and I will never forget that happened. Just as much as that person was screaming at us in Instagram messages, someone else was really quiet, and really listening and really reading, and probably re-reading. They did something about it, and I thought that was really special, yeah. So it's not all doom and gloom. I changed somebody's life! I really respect them getting in touch and telling us that, it was really cool.

ZM - Yeah. I think that's a nice note to end on. I don't know. Wanting to change the shape of the culture you're writing about, as a critic, I don't think that's about vanity, or ego. I think maybe it can look like that sometimes, and it can be that sometimes, but I think... this is a difficult thought, potentially edit this out because it might just be good for you and I. I'm just going to say it, whatever, it might not be relevant to this conversation specifically. I think sometimes I really understand when other critics.... you know how we're like, subjective, yay? I always understand how objectivity can be a useful tool for the critic, because sometimes it's literally not about you. You, yourself, it's important, it has informed this perspective you have, the life you have lived and the experiences you have had, yeah. But I don't think you said, ah, White Girl Art is shit. The question - Are White Girls Capable Of Making Art That Isn't About Themselves - I don't think you've asked that because of a personal grudge or distaste for it. I think it comes from like, a wider sense of like, this is objectively bad, on an objective level. Fundamentally, structurally, critically, institutionally, all the descriptive way that it could be, it is bad. It is not a good idea to try and replicate power just so you can try it on like a pair of shoes. I think writing about it, maybe it would have been better received if you'd written about it in a more objective way. I don't think you should have had to do that. I think I hate that I want to ask that question.

GDLP - I see where you're coming from, maybe that just would have happened if I'd written it at a later point, or with more time, or I'd spoken to more people and I could have slightly zoomed out more and been a bit less facetious.

ZM - No! Don't say that.

GDLP - I like it, because it's old-school White Pube, but I would have also loved it if there had not been a backlash, for my mental health.

ZM - Sorry! I'm aware that this is like, your text, but I just want to speak in defence of it because I love this text! As a fan, not as your collaborator. As a fan of GDLP I fucking love this text, I think it slaps. I think you said what you said, I understand. Please don't cancel me. You said what you're said and you're right, and there is a role for that facetiousness. Maybe it needed to be coupled with - I say this lightly, again, don't take this seriously - like an academic approach as well.

GDLP - Yeah, yeah! I agree! Where did this start? Have we always done this? Did Tracey Emin not kill it and it's dead in a ditch? Why are we still doing all this shit? Maybe there's a second text to be written and this episode isn't enough. I would quite enjoy going through and finding that more objective position, not objective but slightly brushing shoulders with it, to figure out the lineage of where this shit has come from and why it still matters today.

ZM - I would love that, yes!

GDLP - It feels quite write-able and I've done a lot of the work already in this episode. It just needs an edit, like the original!

ZM - I think it does, and it's not just that it would be nice for you as a personal redemption arc, like the Big Bad Critic learnt her lesson, what a teachable moment, the moral of the story is. I think, we have outgrown the age of the influencer notes app apology. That's not a compelling... that's not the end goal of pointing out problems with people's public thinking, right? Like, the apology is not the point. The point is to do what needs to be done, to tie up the loose end. That isn't figuring out where the hole is. The loose end is, figuring out the thought that you started, answering the question. Are White Girls Capable Of Making Art That Is Not About Themselves. You started answering this question and this was a good first stab. But it is not it, it's not answered the question the right way, but it wasn't ever going to. I do this all the time, I give myself more grace in a way that you haven't afforded yourself. I hate that for you, that's why I'm like, I feel very agitated!

GDLP - Ha! I can tell! You're shaking on the screen.

ZM - I know. This isn't a visual episode but I am flailing. I think the way I have tried to write about race, racism and the institutional interaction with artists of colour and that is like, the widest area of interest across the spectrum of my writing on the White Pube. Not just the Art Thoughtz and the big, thinky essays, I've had so many stabs at trying to say the same thing and I've probably only said it once in a way that I would stick with and be happy with. even then, I would like to maybe tie up some loose ends. You're never going to get it right the first time, or second, or third, or fourth. Because I don't think that thinking is ever finite. it's too big, on a scale that's not human. It is not us, it is not an individual scale. You've got to keep having... this sounds really wanky and not useful for anyone other than us, but I think

writing is a process. You can never pin down your thought and be like, this is what I think, and that's it forever. There's no point. It's a process, you've just got to try and figure out where you stand now and even the day after it's published you might think ah, I was wrong. I don't think that's ever been something we've tried to do. Do you know what I mean? We just need to actively clock... you need a couple of run ups, you need a re-do. That is the benefit of being the White Pube, on the internet, on the website. Because you can just take this down.

GDLP - That is something I was thinking about - why have I never deleted it? Maybe I knew there was still value there and I was never ashamed enough to just scrub it.

ZM - I don't think you should.

GDLP - I think there will be a second text at some point, maybe after some reading to make it very strong. This has been a very long episode so we should wrap it up. I'm really glad we did this, very glad. Thank you for listening if you have stuck all the way to the end. This was mine and Zarina's most dreaded episode ever, but it's gone quite well. I think I've said what I meant. Watch us get some angry DMs now.

ZM - You said what you meant, I have so much more to say, I have a polemic of my own!

GDLP - Maybe you write the next one, then.

ZM - Absolutely not, no. No way, no way! You've asked me to write Level One Identity Art before and I wrote something totally off the point.

GDLP - That's true. Again, thank you for listening, thank you especially if you are one of our supporters on Patreon, PayPal or Ko-Fi. We have a really nice Discord server where anyone who has supported us can congregate or hang out, chat about texts and shit. It's been really nice and we would love you to join if you want to sign up on Patreon, Ko-Fi or PayPal. Thank you for listening and we will see you on the next episode of the podcast. Now let's play the really good jingle. Bye!

ZM - Bye!