Ep 67: Neha Choksi & Alison O'Daniel: The People

Transcript from October 21, 2018

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music intro fade up*

Mathew Timmons: [00:00:21] Welcome to episode 67 of the people on KCHUNG 1630 AM, I'm Mathew Timmons.

Ben White: [00:00:27] And I'm Ben White. On this episode our guests are Neha Choksi and Alison O'Daniel. Neha Choksi works in Inglewood, California and in Bombay, India. Choksi works in multiple media, across multiple disciplines and at times collaboratively, and in unconventional settings to explore how we seek, experience and acknowledge losses and transformations in material, temporal and psychological terms.

Neha Choksi: [00:00:53] In a way it's your life that's embedded in the work, and I find that beautiful because it's a slant way of including your experience of making the work into the work. And it affects people's read without knowing that it's actually your life story.

Mathew Timmons: [00:01:12] Alison O'Daniel is a visual artist and filmmaker working across sound, narrative, sculpture, installation and performance.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:01:21] The sculptures are always this way of pointing to the fact that there's this long detailed process. I'm not at all interested in making objects that end up as props

in the film. I like this double life of the project, that there's this physical, hard to comprehend sculptural life that's really based on just the generative process of making, and then there's this narrative film.

Ben White: [00:01:49] At the end of the show we're going to hear a song from New York musician Lacey Spacecake.

Mathew Timmons: [00:01:54] Another thing that we want to tell you about is that we're planning to release a transcript of this episode specifically for members of our audience who are hard of hearing, and also for anyone else who is interested in a transcript of the show.

Ben White: [00:02:08] Yeah we're really excited to do that, and we're still figuring out the transcription process, and the programs and the technology involved. So, if it's not out when you're listening to this episode, it will be soon and we'll let you know where to find it when it's out.

Mathew Timmons: [00:02:23] The People features the voices and ideas that make up the cultural landscape of Los Angeles, the West Coast and beyond. It's like a broken record, magically repaired.

Ben White: [00:02:33] It is.

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fade out*

Mathew Timmons: [00:02:34] Neha Choksi and Alison O'Daniel welcome to The People.

Ben White: [00:02:38] Yeah, Welcome. Thanks for coming.

Mathew Timmons: [00:02:38] Thanks for being on the show.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:02:39] Thank you for having us.

Neha Choksi: [00:02:41] Thank you.

Ben White: [00:02:42] So, you guys were both in Made in L.A. at the Hammer Museum here in Los Angeles. You want to tell us about the show and your work in the show?

Neha Choksi: [00:02:49] Sure, this is Neha here. I have a four channel video installation titled, if you read it as a single sentence it's, *Everything sunbright (i) in the womb (ii) lives (iii) ever rehearsing the end *indirectly*. And it is sort of my multi-year exploration of our conflicted and yet beautiful relationship with the sun, which is the source of all power, and also the source of a lot of harm to us. So that's kind of where that piece came from. Alison?

Alison O'Daniel: [00:03:24] I have a three channel video installation as well as three sculptures and they're all in reference to this project I've been working on for five years called *The Tuba Thieves* and that title comes from the fact that tubas were stolen from high schools for a few years all across Southern California. And I've basically been making this film project backwards. I started working with three composers trying to make the musical soundtracks first, and in order for them to actually make the music, I gave them three individual lists of references for them to respond to. So, Christine Sun Kim, Steve Roden and Ethan Frederick Greene are the composers that I worked with and each of them got different things to respond to. So, Christine Sun Kim, for example, I gave her the articles about the tuba thefts and then a picture of Louise Nevelson's eyelashes. And then Steve Rodin, I gave him a picture of a concert hall called the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, New York, a picture of the path the Zamboni takes when it cleans the ice. Ethan Frederick Greene, I told him, there's more things on each of these lists, but Ethan I told to think about sex scenes, to think about kaleidoscopes, breathing instruments, so they were really random things, just things that I kind of wanted to hand over to other people and tell them, you make music out of that. And then I listened to their music, wrote a screenplay, and then I've been slowly shooting scenes, and showing them, with all of these missing scenes as an acknowledgement, in the exhibitions, and then I make sculptures that refer back to those lists of references.

Neha Choksi: [00:05:11] Yeah, I mean in that, your process obviously involves a lot of other people and their relationship to sound and music, and I guess my work didn't start off as being related to other people, but it ended up being a multiple-year, multiple-project piece that ended

up being stitched together in this one avatar. And in a way it all started over a decade ago when I was doing a play with Rehaan Engineer in Bombay in India, called "That Time," a Samuel Beckett play, and I was doing the videography and scenography for it and ended up shooting a bunch of sunsets from the crematorium on the southern tip of the island where pretty much everyone in my family that has passed away has been cremated. And that sort of set me really working with the sun in many different ways, so I ended up applying to go into the archives at the Solar Observatory in southern India to find more information, and I worked with an astrophysicist towards that, and that led to me writing a screenplay, and a theatre play, that involves this character of an astrophysicist, and it kind of just grew from there. And it ended up being a piece which has elements of things that I researched in the Archives, elements of a piece that I did in Sydney for the Sydney Biennial, and a piece that I did in Dhaka earlier this year in Bangladesh, and that kind of allowed me to stitch together, what I realised I was dealing with was, birth, life and death. I didn't realize it until I had all the material in front of me. So, my process was, I didn't know where I was headed, in a way it just took ten years to get here.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:07:06] That's interesting, because I think a lot about my process as like this listening process that's not prioritizing the ears. So, it's like kind of reimagining what it means to listen, or to be a sponge, or all this information kind of coming in, and then how I respond to it, allow it into the film, allow it to direct the making of the film, or even, you know, like anecdotal things, like the main actor in my film, she was on my last film and she's deaf, I found out after we finished filming that, the last project, that she was a drummer and there were all these kinds of poetic connections of these tubas being stolen, students having to deal with like not having the deepest sound in their band, to the Maverick Concert Hall which is where John Cage premiered *4'33"*, to Nyke being a drummer, there were just all these kind of beautiful resonant relationships that I wanted to explore about not ... not sound, or no sound, or not having sound, or not making sound, or making sound but not having aural access to it. And you know how access shifts.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:08:17] And so, I'm curious about how you (Neha) feel about your audience not maybe having access to all of the information, and is that, I'm just interested in how you, how you respond to that, to the fact that there is, there are so many layers, there's so much in terms of background information and background research. What's, yeah, what is your relationship to the audience?

Neha Choksi: [00:08:53] It's complicated, not only because I expect a lot from the audience, but also which audience are we talking about, which is something that you grapple with. In my case, I have, I built a career kind of in India and then moved back to Los Angeles. So, I have two audiences with very different cultural backgrounds, very different ways of approaching things and very different knowledge bases that they bring to their work. So, references to, let's say, a particular plant, or a particular way of doing things, or my mother's religion may not actually translate to an audience anywhere else (outside of Bombay or India). And then references that are very L.A. specific may not translate to an audience in India or anywhere else in the world. And I'm not sure I'm even bothering to, at this point at least, I am not trying to figure out a way to force a conversation between those parts of my local existences, because I do have two very local, grounded, rooted ways of being in two different places. I don't want to do the work of explaining anything about my two different cultures to each other. I kind of think the burden partly lies on the audience to do that work for themselves. And I realize that's very, I mean, it feels like it's coming from an ungenerous position, but I'm actually giving them the generosity of, like, choosing to view from their cultural position rather than forcing everybody to see everything always from the western eye, which is the de facto way of looking.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:10:43] I mean yeah, I love that characterization of it as a generous act, because it's also allowing space for the poetic, for interpretation, for my agency as a viewer. Yeah and that's like always, I really don't like work where I'm being told what to think. So thank you for doing that.

Neha Choksi: [00:11:08] Yeah, I mean, you might want to talk a little bit about how your work kind of actually deals with different cultures, it's just a different way of talking about culture. When we say culture we typically just mean ethnicities, but there are other cultures out there and it's not just ethnicities, it's also class, which I think my work sometimes delves into, there's species things, and in your case there's a whole other layer.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:11:33] Yeah, I mean, I've been really struck by all of the articles that have come out about Made in L.A. where there's constantly this is sort of, “Oh, this is so great there's so many identity politics in this show.”, and every time they do the list they leave out ability, and I'm always just like, “What the fuck?” To be honest, it really bothers me that no matter how much

we talk about these different viewpoints of ability, disability is still left out, no matter how progressive people think they're being.

Ben White: [00:12:07] Or if it's in, it's always last on the list.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:12:09] It's always last on the list. And it's, and I will say, like people are recognizing it more. I've seen it in the last two years. But, I kid you not, every single article that has come out about this show, never has that been mentioned and I'm just like, Hello!? You know, look, this is actually, really being talked about. And on Friday, I organized this event that had four people, me being one of those four, who worked on my film, talking together. And then a meditation that was led by a deaf meditation instructor, Matt Reinig, who's based in L.A., and then a critical response from a deaf scholar whose name is Rezenet Moges-Riedel, and she's brilliant, and she was amazing to hear her talk about my work because she situated it within Crip Theory, which like I have never specified, but I'm aware of Crip Theory, which is like looking at, the way she described it, was looking at using sort of lived experience through disability as a way to destabilise the kind of hetero-normative ableist, racist position in the world. And it was really remarkable because I've also gotten, and we talked about this, I'm also in a show right now that's in Moscow called The Infinite Ear at the Garage Contemporary Art Museum, and this is a really amazing museum because they have developed this whole, sort of, segment of the museum that's devoted to a deaf population and there is one person in particular who's developed all of these accessible ways of engaging the museum shows. And so, when I was there for the opening, I was in conversation with him and he was really hard on me and was basically like, “You know art should be 100 percent accessible to everyone all the time.” And he was asking (he is hard of hearing), and he was like “You know, when I see your film, how am I supposed to know that that stopwatch that's ticking is ticking?” And he didn't actually ask that as a question. He said it was like there was a period at the end of the sentence. It was really like a grad school critique, it was just really critical. And I wish he had asked me because basically what I've been trying to do is develop this system of captioning that's where every single edit in the film goes through this thing in my head that's, how does a deaf audience, how does a hard of hearing audience, and how does a hearing audience respond to this edit. So, every single edit is like going through this acknowledging process of like, oh I have three, I mean many more than just three, but I have this like huge spectrum of responses to the way that this edit happens. And so, I do have actual captions that are being exploded, but then I also have edits

that are meant to kind of function as captions. So, for example, there's a scene that's a recreation of the very last night that there was a punk show at the Deaf Club in San Francisco in 1979, which was an actual deaf social club that hosted West Coast punk shows. And I recreated that scene and there's one moment where the beat of the music that their playing is represented through this flipping between two channels, one is black, and then one is the image and that, I think about that black as a caption. And then also the fact that there's two channels is really meant to represent two very different responses, or two different perceptions of the film. So, I wished he had actually asked me and given me the chance to speak about this thing that I'm really trying to develop which also involves that, you know, if you see something, the source of sound is there, there's never offscreen sound. And if there is it's specified, like, “radio announcer”, and then whatever they're saying. So, that's written and then sometimes there are captions where the letters are spreading apart which is meant to signify that there's this whole breakdown in the way that sound is being conveyed, rather than typical systems of captions which are just, [Music], which is not helpful, it's super irritating, it's actually really insulting, because it's just like ..., it's interesting, I've been articulating for the first time since being in Moscow, I've been articulating this thing, I've been thinking a lot about captions and there is something that really bothers me in it. Okay, so just to preface this ... ADA: totally necessary, we need that. We must have that.

Neha Choksi: [00:17:02] I wish the whole world had it.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:17:03] Yeah, totally necessary. But there is something in captioning that sometimes I feel like there is this lifting up of, and I'm doing air quotes as I say that, lifting up of the deaf experience to, up to this hierarchical hearing position, and that value system, I want to throw it out the window. I think that there are other, it is really this question of value systems, and who's developing it, who is naming one as the expectation, and what happens if we just open the floodgates to this experience of not getting everything, and there is poetry in that also. There's frustration, I'm not denying that, I've lived that many times, but I think sometimes the frustration stems from this hierarchical position that this hearing experience, is the experience, whereas in my experience so far, like many of the deaf collaborators I worked with, just deaf friends that I've made, and also just moving more into deaf and hard of hearing culture, there's a perceptual way of engaging with the world that is of so much value, is so beautiful, it's so like ... It's Different. It's just, it's different and that's great.

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fades up*

Mathew Timmons: [00:18:22] You're listening to the people on KCHUNG 1630 AM. I'm Mathew Timmons.

Ben White: [00:18:26] And I'm Ben White. Remember you can hear us every 3rd Sunday at 3:00 p.m. on KCHUNG 1630 AM, Los Angeles. Or you can find us anywhere where you get your podcasts. So, iTunes Store, SoundCloud, Stitcher, overcast, all that stuff, go there and download an episode. Also, it would really help us out if you have a friend, or an acquaintance, or not a friend, someone you just met at the office, who you think might enjoy the show, tell them about it. That's the thing that helps us out the most.

Mathew Timmons: [00:18:53] And, in that spirit, we want to tell you about a friend of ours who has a great project called L Star Murals.

Ben White: [00:18:59] It's a business.

Mathew Timmons: [00:19:00] It's more than a project, it's a business, and it specializes in interior custom murals, nursery murals, hand lettering, hand painted signs, chalkboards and more. L Star Murals is run by Lauren McElroy a Philadelphia area native who lives in Los Angeles, California. And you can find her at L Star Murals dot com.

Ben White: [00:19:21] She does really great work and also she has an upcoming show at Elephant Art space here in L.A., so stay tuned for that.

Mathew Timmons: [00:19:29] And check it out, yeah for sure. And now back to our conversation with Neha Choksi and Alison O'Daniel.

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Neha Choksi: [00:19:37] I like what you were saying, Alison, about allowing space for different perceptual experiences of the world, especially, yeah, just letting something sit experientially, sensorially, the touchy feely-ness of it, whether you hear it or not, just letting yourself sit with the experience rather than having everything translated for you. And I, what I was really, I mean I think that's why we both probably not only make films, but we make a lot of sculpture.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:20:13] Yeah, my sculptures always function on a bunch of levels. On one level, they are very practical. They are meant specifically to deflect, absorb, change, the aural reality of the space. So, basically this came about because I had this show in 2015 in France in this space that had this huge, vaulted concrete ceiling. It was this beautiful space, but I got in there and like so many art spaces, I was like, this is an acoustic nightmare, and I am about to show a bunch of videos, and it's going to look and sound terrible, like so many video installations do, because the space is not meant for it. And I was just like, I have to actually think of a solution because I want people to be able to hear these videos, and I want to be able to play multiple ones within the space. And so, I had had multiple studio visits where I would tell people about the fact that I had given Christine Sun Kim this picture of Louise Nevelson's eyelashes. So Louise Nevelson, you know she would always be in her amazing studio gear, but she would still have these super impractical 1960s huge fake eyelashes on. I just loved that. And so I gave Christine that picture and, you know it's, I mean in a way it's this really beautiful riddle of, how do you, how is that even interpreted through sound? And I knew Christine would do it because her, her relationship to sound is lived, through lived experience, and then, because she's deaf, and then totally, there's a quickness for it to be super abstract, to be thrown out the window, to be reimagined in ways that are completely new every time that I see her work with it. So, I handed that to her and I was like you know what, what is the sound of that? And I would have studio visits, I would tell people this, and I would do this google image search to show them the specific image that I had given her of Louise Nevelson smoking a cigar. Look it up, It's amazing! And when all of the thumbnails would come up there was one Louise Nevelson sculpture that would be kind of low, and in the thumbnail, the size of the thumbnail I would, I just had this thought that it looked like acoustic foam. And then later, after the studio visit I opened it up and looked at it, and then my first thought was, actually, it looks like a quilt, it looks like quilting patterning. And then when I got to France, I was like I have to figure out how to deal with sound and I was like oh I'll just remake those Louise Nevelson sculptures out of acoustic foam and then as a soundproofing quilt. And so it was super logical, super practical, but coming from

this weird, not logical, not practical, kind of poetic, linear process of collaboration. And I really love honoring that process of collaboration. In a lot of ways, I'm more interested in the storytelling of working with these composers and making this film backwards. And so, I'm always trying to reference back to these original lists of references. And so the sculptures are always this way of pointing to the fact that there is a long detailed process. There was this original list of references and I'm not at all interested in making objects that end up as props in the film. I like them to, I like this like double life of the project that there's this physical, hard to kind of comprehend sculptural life that's really based on the sort of generative process of making. And then there's this narrative film and the ways that I'm approaching them are somewhat similar but they don't show themselves in either modality. And then most recently I've been thinking a lot about the children's game telephone, so the show that I have at Shulamit Nazarian is all based on this children's game, telephone, but I started thinking about how beautiful it would be to play telephone with only hard of hearing people that it would be so much more abstract and that the mishearings would be so much more interesting. And so I started thinking of it like a process of making a series of mishearings. So, basically I started with that picture of Louise Nevelson's eyelashes, went to the actual table legs that she would find and put in her assemblages, included that in the Made in L.A. sculpture. And then in the Shulamit Nazarian show, made these like really tall table legs that were kind of like the third person's mishearing. And then there's these other abstracted columns that are the ninth person's mishearing, and without the sort of fifth through the eighth people, you know. So, it's like all that is missing information, but it's these sculptures that are coming from the starting point and then going through all these fuckups so ...

Neha Choksi: [00:25:24] Yeah that's, that's beautiful. I did see that show yesterday.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:25:30] Oh good, Thank you.

Neha Choksi: [00:25:30] Yeah. I on the other hand, I've never really mixed the two, except last year when I did a piece called Faith in Friction, which is a seven channel piece that is actually about my faith in engagement, but engagement as friction, and allowing that lack of translatability to bubble up and that's okay. And it was really about me and my friends, and I collected a bunch of my friends in India, I mean, collected a bunch of my friends to come to India and then do this piece four hours outside of Bombay at this construction site for a Jain

Ashram. And there were props that were involved that were based on my collaborations with or conversations with my friends prior to doing this piece, where the question posed was, How would we relate to each other? What would you like to do? What are ideas that you have about you and me together? And it was simply beautiful how the conversations got translated into objects, got translated into things that we used on site, and some of them were discarded, some of them were used up, and one survived, and you know, now will probably end up at a sculpture park in Bangladesh and that's like an afterlife of the piece. But the life that was created, and the relationships that we had as a result of our conversations, and as a result of these objects (that's important). For instance, there was an abacus made out of fruits that we played around with as the last scene in the end, in the last scene that we shot, it's not necessarily the last scene in the film, and then, anyway, the fruits obviously got eaten up and the structure of the relationship between all of us at the abacus, the fruit abacus, was that we could pick the fruits, we could eat it ourselves, we could offer it to someone else, we could throw it on the ground, but the only two lines allowed to us to communicate with each other were, "I want it." "No, you can't have it." Those were the only two lines allowed, but none of this necessarily makes it into the film in quite that way because I didn't edit all those films. Part of the collaborative process for me structurally was to then take all those days of footage of all of us collected together in that pressure cooker situation, give it to different editors and friends of mine to edit, so that each film has its own texture that comes from that person's conversation with me, again, and then they all have to live together simultaneously.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:28:26] So each channel is a different editor?

Neha Choksi: [00:28:28] Uh-huh, of which one is me. So, interconnections that we all have in the collaboration, that we all have, are becoming a lot more important in my work. As opposed to earlier where, you know, I anesthetized myself and four farm animals, but it's ... the relationship with the audience is not quite as conceptually ingrained in the work. I mean it's there, of course, calling a piece *Petting Zoo* ... invites the idea of an audience petting you, but … And so, I'm kind of curious when you say that, you know, you're interested in these parallel lives for your objects and the film, and I obviously was perfectly happy bringing the two together, like maybe there's something there for you to respond to?

Alison O'Daniel: [00:29:17] I don't know. I mean, I think it goes back to what we were talking about earlier, it's this acknowledgment of experience. And so, for me it's a sort of philosophical desire to be comfortable with things not appearing at first cohesive. I find that real. I'm really inspired by that.

Neha Choksi: [00:29:47] Yeah that's actually, I mean I guess even if I have objects that end up making sense as part of the piece, I've never shown them together. And so, yeah, I totally get the non-cohesiveness and also the multi-modality in which you can think about things and let it lie in its own material existence, doing its own thing.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:30:06] Yeah, I mean I think there's enough detail in my installation in Made in L.A., for example, there's this Zamboni pattern that's made out of acoustic carpet underlay which is the material put under carpet to muffle your footsteps. And then there's this composite of seven Louise Nevelson sculptures made out of various densities of foam including, at the softest, the acoustic foam and then slightly higher densities of foam. It's all still pretty soft. And then this one giant block of very soft absorbent foam and then this steel sculpture that has the eyelashes on them, has actual false eyelashes on them. And two of those are remakes of Louise Nevelson sculptures. And then one of them is the Zamboni pattern. And I know it's information that somebody encounters and is probably visually just like, “What do I do with this?” But if you take the time to read the materials there's a pointing towards a sonic aural experience.

Mathew Timmons: [00:31:15] So let me ask a question on that and I think for both of you, I think both of your guys work at Made in L.A. ... I always wonder, or, I often wonder how does, ... Do you think about or, and if so, how do you think about what's the difference between an audience member who comes in and spends like five / ten minutes versus an audience member that maybe spends an entire hour in either of your pieces? What, I mean do you think about what you're giving to someone who just shows up for five minutes in a different way than what you give someone over an hour or are you thinking about...

Neha Choksi: [00:31:53] I'm definitely not thinking about the five minute person. I expect people to stay there the whole time, if not in one sitting at least over a few sittings. And if they don't do

that, they can say that they saw part of it, but they will never be able to say they saw the work as far as I'm concerned.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:32:13] I don't expect them to stay for the whole thing. Mine is a 51 minute loop. I don't expect them to because it's been jammed into my head for forever that people have this … I feel like the anecdote is a 30 second attention span for video, but I made a 52 minute video loop and consistently I had people sit through the whole thing. And so, what I will say is that when I edit I think a lot about opacity simultaneously with entertainment and I am like really trying to get the audience to sit there. So, I am pretty critical of Hollywood and yet I know it intimately because we are all trained in Hollywood by default and I really do try and think about how to keep an audience sitting there.

Mathew Timmons: [00:33:11] So if you're thinking about the five minute visitor, you're thinking about how to convert them to at least a 10 minute or 20 minute ...

Alison O'Daniel: [00:33:20] Yeah I really do. I mean I hope that they will sit there and I mean similar to you (Neha), I'm not ... I'm not making work for the five minute visitor either.

Mathew Timmons: [00:33:30] Sure.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:33:31] But I recognize that those people are missing my work. You know I know that that's a thing I risk in my work.

Mathew Timmons: [00:33:40] But would you also say, either of you individually, that when you're thinking about how you're setting up the installation, where the projection is on the wall, how the projections relate to each other, what the room is like, how you're arranging the room, that that is on some level communicating to someone that is just walking in for the first 30 seconds, so you must be thinking about it on some level.

Neha Choksi: [00:34:03] Maybe I should not say I expect the audience to sit there for that long, but I certainly want them to sit for the entire thing. But having said that, that is not, I don't even ... I mean, I have greater expectations of an audience member than even just sitting through my work, which is ... I don't think you can get what I'm, I guess what I'm about, or the texture of my

work, if you haven't followed the work for a while. So, you're only going to see one piece, you're not going to see my work so far, in a way. And yes, and to address your question about the space, I mean, of course I'm thinking about the audience. I'm thinking about... I'm aware that there are people who will spend 30 seconds to two minutes to five minutes, to people who will stay and see a piece six times over, as somebody did of one of my pieces in the past, and actually came up to me to say they sat through it six times and they had already seen it once before. And it was not a short piece. So... So I'm looking for that kind of engagement and with the engagement with the ideas in there that may not necessarily … they are in the work, but that you know, they need to do extra work to get to (those ideas). And I think the positionings of the space—especially in Alison's installation at Made in L.A. and slightly in my piece, it's not as obvious structurally as in Allison's piece, there are important components of the meaning of the work. And for me it was very important to have an embodied experience of that space. And I'm sure Alison will have something to say.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:35:49] Yeah, well for my Made in L.A. installation and the installation in Shulamit I'm using these two really different kind of approaches where I have definitely been in my installation in Made in L.A. with people who are standing there or sitting there watching it for a while and seeing the people who walk in and turn around and walk back out. I think there's something about the way that we organized everything in my room where, if you don't walk ten feet in, you can turn around and walk out, and all the people who walk at least like 7 to 10 feet in, they then get directed. So, there's this thing that happens to your physical body where you're forced, if you're watching the videos, you're forced to, as a group and mass, shift and turn, because you can't see ... There's one video in particular that has Christine Sun Kim, one of the composers, she's signing the script of the film, but she's translated it into American Sign Language, and so she's signing like a completely different syntax a completely different order of the scene, and Steve Roden's voice is saying the American Sign Language translation that she made, and also her translation is for a teleprompter, so there's also notes that she makes for what her hands should be doing. So instead of just saying the translations she also says OK two fingers up, and so it's just notes for herself to know what to do because she's performing in front of the camera. And then on the other side is the actual English script. And they don't line up but you can tell, if you kind of like flip your head, you can tell that it's the same like origin of information and it's specifically meant for you to make a choice of like which one you're going to get more of and … And then you know, like one video will end and then the projection is on the

other side and everybody will kind of like move en masse and it's really lovely for me to watch that happen. And then in Shulamit there's all these ropes on the floor that really direct the way that you physically move through the space.

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fades up*

Ben White: [00:38:08] You're listening to the people on KCHUNG 1630 AM, I'm Ben White.

Mathew Timmons: [00:38:10] And I'm Mathew Timmons. You can hear the people every third Sunday at 3:00 p.m. on KCHUNG 1630 AM and you can definitely find us anywhere that you find podcasts. And if you are listening to this and you like the show you should tell a friend about it. It's going to be great.

Ben White: [00:38:28] Yeah it really helps us. Also if you're somewhere where you can leave a rating and review, leave us a rating and review. Only good ones please. If you're not going to leave a good one, why bother? It's a waste of your time.

Mathew Timmons: [00:38:37] Exactly. And now back to our conversation with Neha Choksi and Alison O'Daniel.

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fades out*

Alison O'Daniel: [00:38:43] So, this is the third podcast interview that I've done and, you know, there's a problematic irony about it. Every time I do it I'm really aware that I have an audience that I'm specifically making my work for, and with, that has no access to this and it's an interesting thing that's always you know kind of like weighing on my mind as I do these interviews and ...

Mathew Timmons: [00:39:25] It's a question, it's a question of access right. And it's like it's this, recording a podcast is not the work, but it's like, kind of, a part of the world of the work, and making that for a group that can't access it is ...

Ben White: [00:39:41] Well it's exclusionary, yeah, big time. And for us it's not the easiest thing to do to create a transcript of a one hour audio situation. I mean, we're going to try to do that and see how successful we are at it, but we can commit to saying that we're going to, we're going to do it. Yeah I mean of course we'll do it.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:40:03] Cool. Yeah that's exciting. Yeah, it's interesting because I've, you know the event that I just organized on Friday at the Hammer, that was the first time that I've had a deaf scholar write about the work and present about the work. And I specifically sought it out because I have only had hearing writers write about the work and there have definitely been moments where I have had to do some pretty intense education. The New York Times wrote something a few years ago and my producer and I, we were really intense that you cannot say hearing impaired, and it was fascinating because most people don't even know that that's problematic. NPR every time they ever talk about the deaf and hearing impaired, they say that, and it's like, oh, I cringe so much. So hearing impaired is like an old school, totally, like not politically correct term and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community has been saying this and like trying to express this since the early 80s. And it just doesn't, you know it's a marginalized community and that information just doesn't seem to land.

Neha Choksi: [00:41:24] It doesn't register.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:41:26] It doesn't register. I hear the word impaired and I'm like, obviously that's a diminutive term, but because it's so widely used, I've seen things that I wrote like eight years ago where I use that term, and it was a process of education for me as well. You know and it's fascinating. But when I was working with that New York Times writer he actually was like, I don't know if we can not say hearing impaired, because it's in our... they have a specific… I don't know, dictionary?

Mathew Timmons: [00:41:47] Style sheet.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:41:48] Yeah yeah yeah. And he was like, I don't think it's been changed, and I was like, you have to change it. If you're going to do this, you have to, it's not OK because

it automatically excludes the deaf audience, because they will read it, and they will be like, oh, written for a hearing audience, period, we don't care.

Ben White: [00:42:05] Well, we're not guaranteeing that the transcript will be out when this episode comes out, but we will get it out.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:42:13] So I, Neha, I was interested in talking to you about process. Because I think one of the things that's similar in both of our work is that there isn't necessarily kind of a finite start and this finish to the projects and that we draw, we make these projects and then we draw from all of these kind of ancillary like tentacles that are going out from the projects and bring them back in, give them more importance, and then sometimes let things go that seem important. And I just was at a performance that you did about the next project you're doing, and it was a performance, but it was very much witnessing somebody's pre-production. And it was really, it was a really interesting conversation about the next project so maybe you can talk about that, but it was one of the things that specifically was interesting to me was about watching you lay bare a thinking process and then that kind of becoming content. So maybe this sort of marriage of process and develop, development as content. Can you speak to that?

Neha Choksi: [00:43:31] Yeah. Thank you, Alison. A good question. And I guess the performance conversation that you came to was a precursor to a project where I attend elementary school for a year in Los Angeles as a way to think about how we learn to become who we are and who we want to be. And these are questions that I have increasingly found important, because as I was referring to the “Everything Sunbright” piece which is at the Hammer, I got interested in parent-child relationships, and that is an educational relationship, it's an empathetic model. It's got all of these things that are working, that allow a culture to be passed down from a parent to a child. And however you want to define the parent, the parent culture to the child culture and that sort of spun out into me thinking about education and the value of it and how we get socialized into being who we are as social creatures. And, so that's kind of where the process started, but I'm sure it started way earlier in ... I want to say maybe seventh grade for me, when I started reading all these books that my mom had around about exceptional children, and just teaching children, that I was interested in. She was training to be a teacher when they lived in the States, before they moved to India and ended up doing something else with her life. But there all this material was around that I absorbed and was very

interested in, because I felt schooling was completely failing me and it continued to fail me until high school. Like I mean until I was done with high school, I just hated (high) school. And that interest in how we become who we are, like I was this quiet kid who then came to UCLA and was not quiet anymore, at all. And that's something we talked about at that performance. And I think that was the germination of a lot of the interest in the project which has now become a more considered excavation of my own relationship with both childhood and adulthood. And I'm allowing myself the space, and the process, and the time, and the luxury of doing that at a very, very slow, real time pace, and I don't really know what the end result is.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:46:20] But you mentioned that you have a plan to do one year elementary school, one year of middle school, and one year of high school.

Neha Choksi: [00:46:27] I would love to do that. Yeah. So one year in elementary school, then a year off to process it, and a little break, and then go back to middle school, take a year off, and then go to the final year of high school and then, obviously have time off.

Ben White: [00:46:43] And are you going to be specifically looking at the sort of institutional plans for these, you know, these separate school groups, or is it going to be a sociological thing that's going on, or both?

Neha Choksi: [00:46:54] I mean the ways in which I'm thinking about the social, the cultural, the educational, institutional, personal, familial also, like, led me (here) ... This summer I went to the Philippines to do a project, to do a site visit for a project where I was going to be dealing with a bunch of workshops that I had access to and I could potentially do anything I wanted in those spaces with those workshops, with the laborers, and there's 300 people working ... and while I was there I learned of this curriculum that is being implemented by another section of this program, that is not related to the art part of this program, where they are inviting three outlying village areas to send their youth, especially those who have not been productive members of society, productive as in the capitalist model of productive, to have a sort of character rebuilding exercise. And I know it's done from the goodness of the heart, in many ways, as patrons of that area, to fund this, to pay people to show up to learn how to be better workers so to speak, and to learn how to be better husbands. They excluded the women at some point very early on in the process because it got very difficult to manage it for them from what I understood. But what I

realized is that I'd gone with one idea into that space thinking that I was interested in how the individuality of each worker who is in the crafts workshops is represented in their work and how that would be part of my work. Working with everybody until getting interested in this curriculum that was like a 100 page or 200 page document that was about education and that I would have never found had not, you know, a stray comment from another fellow artist who knew of its existence, you know, and who heard about this other project of mine. It's like oh, you might be interested in this because of your elementary school project you know ... And that's kind of part of the process, like you just, one little thing leads you to another, leads to another and you don't know where it's going to end up and I really don't know where this is going to end up. These are both inchoate projects.

Ben White: [00:49:31] And it sounds like the project, or the one that you ideally want to do, will go on for literally years, right? Like that's on purpose to allow those sorts of things to evolve right?

Neha Choksi: [00:49:43] Oh absolutely.

Ben White: [00:49:44] For new strategies to appear, right?

Neha Choksi: [00:49:47] To be open and to allow the generosity of the world to influence my generosity. You know what I mean?

Alison O'Daniel: [00:49:53] That's interesting, because my project takes a long time mostly because of finances, because making a film is so, the economic reality of making a film is, it's just so intense, and yet I'm now working with a really amazing producer who came on whose name is Rachel Nederveld. She came on to my project about a year and a half ago and she keeps saying to me, let's just make the feature now. Don't worry about the money, we'll just make it happen. And to have someone say to me, Don't worry about the money. It's so mind boggling. And there's a part of me that's become used to the reality of making my work in the way that I've made it because I now find it extremely generative to have these, you know these pauses that are imposed upon me, because I run out of financial, you know, I run out of the financial ability to shoot the next thing, and then, so then the project has to kind of develop in this other way because I have the itch or the ambition to, you know, I keep thinking about and

making this project. And so, it takes these other forms and then out of that has come this realization that, like showing segments of the film with the scene numbers in the beginning of it, and people knowing that there's like, all this missing content is just, kind of, helping the content become more realized. Knowing that you're sitting there and you don't know what's in between these two scenes, but somehow they're going to link up, I find that I love that experience for the audience.

Neha Choksi: [00:51:30] In a way it's your life that's embedded in the work and I find that beautiful, because it's a slant way of including your experience of making the work into the work. And it affects people's read without knowing that it's actually your life story in a way.

Alison O'Daniel: [00:51:47] Well, yeah, and also waiting becomes kind of pregnant with like hearing, not hearing.

Neha Choksi: [00:51:55] Pregnant with anticipation and with loss at the same time. The future that could be and a past that isn't, and temporally there are all these presences and absences.

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fade up*

Ben White: [00:52:06] Well thank you both so much for joining us. It was really great.

Mathew Timmons: [00:52:10] Yeah, thanks for being on the show.

Mathew Timmons: [00:52:13] You've been listening to The People on KCHUNG 1630 AM, I'm Mathew Timmons.

Ben White: [00:52:18] And I'm Ben White. Remember, find The People wherever you download your podcasts and tell your friends about it.

Mathew Timmons: [00:52:23] Yes please do. That would be great. Our interstitial music, as always, is *Ocfif* by Louis Keller. Go for it.

Ben White: [00:52:30] And we're going to go out with a song from Brooklyn, New York musician Lacey Spacecake. More fuzz! More chorus! More reverb! More eyeliner! The album is *The Stars Have Left The Sky* released on January 1st 2018 and the name of the song is *How Do You Sleep At Night?*

… Ocfif *by Lewis Keller music fades out*

… How Do You Sleep At Night? *by Lacey Spacecake, full song*

Alison O'Daniel: [00:57:20] Different experiences are great!