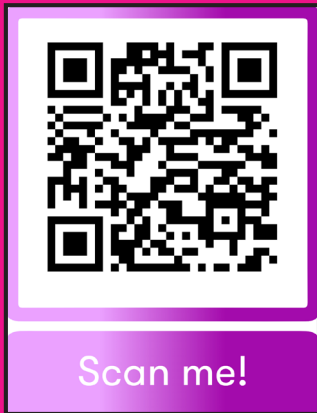


JUST BETWEEN US BY ELOUISE BLACKBURN

ARCHIVING AS A COMMUNAL STORY





Scan here to access the site or go
to <https://justbetweenus.site/>

Introduction

'Just Between Us' is a digital archive focused on communal and alternative art practices. The community involved in this project are a group of friends who grew up in Newcastle together. Artists Shawn Nayar (@shawnnayar), Adele Clifford (@selvatic.crochet), Alex Ellerton (@a.wwwwwwwwee), Ellie Home (@pois0n_pustule) and Tamara Okudu (tamaraokudu@live.com) work together with curator Elouise Blackburn (@_elouiseb) to produce an archive that regards how you frame an archive as important as its physical artefacts.

This text can be read before, after or during your browsing of the website. Intended to be the more detailed reasoning behind an experimental and slightly mad archive, the aim is to help lay some groundwork for how we can archive community, and why we should.

Showing you the personal experiences that lie behind the motivation for this project, I invite you also to think of your own community, your own archive and your own story. How would you do it differently? How would you tell your own history?

Tamara's first funeral - Tamara Okudu, painting



Shawn at Spinsters - crochet garment by Adele Clifford, photographed by Toi Guy (@toidinator)



Tattoos of Shawn's visual work 'The Void' on himself and Elouise



Birthday card for Elouise - Ellie Home

Archiving as a communal story

Have you ever gone to a museum, a gallery, an arts institution, and seen your history, your life, you? Did it feel like an accurate reflection? Or did it feel like looking in a fun house mirror, still You, but warped, and unfamiliar, and honestly, kind of triggering all of your insecurities? Don't worry, you aren't alone in this. Just between us, it's the feeling that kick started this whole project.

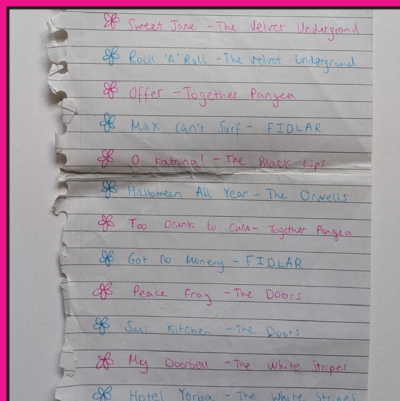
The history of the arts institution is a long one, built on a great many artistic wonders and achievements. But it is built too on an even longer history of exclusion, misrepresentation, and oppression. Black, brown, female, queer, working class – pretty much everyone who isn't a straight white middle class man has experienced feeling like an unwelcome stranger on some level, in the arts and outside of it. But, when it is your history, your life, YOU, stored away in an archive, on exhibit in a gallery, or the topic of discussion inside the white cube, it feels especially ridiculous that you still can't find an image of yourself that you can recognise.

These experiences define entirely how your practice develops, as well as your network. Adele and Tamara both pursued non-art degrees at university. Pursuing a career in the arts feels like too big a risk to take when you have to be able to afford to live. Both returned to art in some capacity, whether career-wise like Adele or as a personal outlet like Tamara. For Shawn, Alex and Ellie, their experiences of arts educations proved to be a different barrier entirely. In London, Alex's work was often given a limited interpretation as being solely about the gay experience, and thus solely about sex as is the view of gay men; Ellie, once accused of stealing a misplaced phone charger simply because she was in the room at the time, faced undermining and sometimes mockery of her Geordie accent.

The London art scene can be a competitive one, often rooted in who you know and what you have. While definitely more concentrated here, this hierarchy is not inherent to the south. Up in Edinburgh, Shawn found that networking came with a fee. Bars, restaurants, events. No expense spared outings were the pinnacle, and when your overdraft is a familiar friend, networking is a tough choice to make. As working-class Northerners, who we know and what we have doesn't easily translate into these kinds of environments.



Adele's personal archive



Playlist by Adele for
Elouise (2016)

Growing up in Newcastle, with minimal galleries and even less free ones, the opportunities to see ourselves reflected inside the institution were few and far between. Tamara and Shawn, as POC, have found this to be particularly true. With little opportunity, and even fewer that understand our backgrounds, our practice is defined instead by what we can find outside of the institution. When access to institutional art spaces is stuck behind a barrier linked entirely to the parts of your identity that make you YOU, how do you get around them without leaving that part of yourself at the door? How do you find a place to sit when you have to lop off parts of your body to fit? How do you share your story when you can't use your voice to tell it?

Tamara's bedroom studio



You build your own spaces, your own communities, and your own art practice. For many of us, these self-made spaces and communal methods of working define our entire practice. While barriers to the institution may pose limits on the art we can make, it does not limit the fact that we do still make art. All of the artists in this project have found alternative spaces for their practice, from nightclub exhibitions to at home studios and archives. Mixing private and public, these spaces operate communally and open to all.



Ellie and Shawn's living room studio

'Pupations' by Shawn and Adele,
photographed by
David Hall (@nostalgia_kid)



Adele's bedroom studio

Traditional ways of archiving are difficult to use when you don't have the physical space to preserve objects and records, or the means to find one. These archives usually end up mixed with our personal ones, stowed away in ur bedrooms and cupboards and any nook and cranny that we can find. The archive is designed to store history to ensure the knowledge and life it records can be passed down and shared. So, when the archive is crammed into our domestic spaces, how do we share it with those outside our homes? How do we ensure our story can be told once we are no longer able to tell it ourselves?

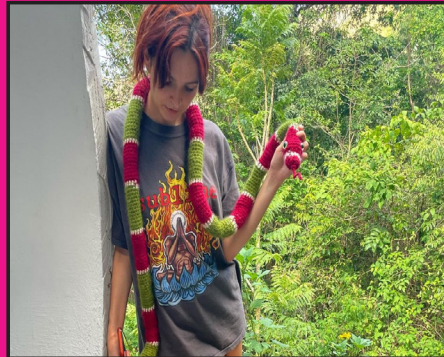
The shift towards the digital in the art world has been one way to take back control of the narrative. It has become almost essential to have an active social media presence, for promotion and networking. None of us are strangers to the presence of social media in our lives, nor the aesthetics and traditions that define it. Taking direction from the digitisation of archives, this project takes one step further and interrogates the visual presentation of the archive as being as important as the objects it holds. By lending from the y2k blog era of Piczo and Bebo, 'Just Between Us' affords some freedom to its viewers to navigate the archive at will. Following the build-your-own-world structure of these early internet sites, this project presents how the digital can be an art space in its own right by calling back to the ad- and influencer-free blogs of nostalgic childhood.

The history of the artist-led community is lengthy, with its ways of working and creating in tandem with the lives of those involved. For the artists involved in this project, this is the art world in which we occupy most. With varying degrees of interaction with the art institution, the space and community we always return to is the one which we made ourselves, one that we understand and that in turn understands us. 'Just Between Us', as one of those spaces and communities, tells you our story as we know it to be. I invite you once again to look at your own history and ask: how would you do it differently? How would you tell your story?



Floral Fallacies - Shawn Nayar and Alex Ellerton, painting and installation

Crochet snake - Adele Clifford



I had to fantasize to survive - Ellie Home, mixed media painting



Open your mouth - Alex Ellerton (digital rendering)

