

RMJ

Let's see. Now, we're recording and, um.

CGJ

I'm the one who starts. Do I start? Do we do we just want to roll into the—we record the intro separately, don't we.

RMJ

Yes.

CGJ

Okay. Nevermind, we're not gonna make you listen to us talk about ourselves.

RMJ

We were gonna do that--

CGJ

(Overlapping Remus) It's your turn to talk about yourself.

Higu Rose (HR)

Uh oh.

RMJ

We were gonna do that before you got here, but then there was tech things so that's okay. So.

CGJ

Oh, was that the plan? Oops, we had 5 minutes. We did—Okay (laughs).

RMJ

No, we were like, troubleshooting it's all good.

CGJ

(Laughing) Whose plan?

RMJ

It's all—listen. We're still figuring it out, we're still figuring it out so. Hello. It is May 12th 2024. and we are joined today. Uh.

RMJ

Actually, hold on, I want to ask a very, because I realize it's been a long time since I've seen you in person. Is it "Higu" [He-gu] or "Higu" [Hig-u]?

HR

I say it "Higu" [Hig-u] but I don't really, it does not bother me either way.

RMJ

Cool. Um, so we are joined today by Higu Rose and, uh, and Higu is an illustrator cartoonist, ethnography and local terror living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, based in fiction and autobiography. Higu's work focuses on experiences of being black, queer, trans and a little bonkers whose narratives are a constant endeavor to understand that the self in society with a snarling desire to love and live. Their auto graphical graphic novel *Titty chop Boobslash* was called the breast trans—the *best* trans comic of 2017. um.

RMJ

Higu is currently working on *Yinz City*, a graphic novel series about a group of queer and trans people of color. Higu works in various mediums, such as paint, ink, fiber and print making. One time they made Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel wait 5 minutes for an 8 ounce cup of coffee. Um, love that. Great bio (laughs). So, if you're ready for...

HR

Thank you. I've never heard it out loud.

RMJ

If you're ready, we can go ahead and just hop right into it. Right?

HR

Let's do it.

RMJ

Great. So, my first question for you is, uh, how did you get into comics?

HR

So, my dad wrote a comic in the 80s, um, when he was like, my dad was, like, considered radical in the 80s. So he wrote this like, sci-fi 1 issue comic that was floating around the house when I was growing up. So I, which I read as, like, a 10 year old and did not understand anything about it, but it was a comic. So I read it. Um, and so I was introduced to them kind of young. My family had a lot of the...how to draw such-and-such books lying around, um, which eventually became how to draw manga but for the most part were like, how to draw dogs, how to draw cartoon dogs. How to draw bugs. Um, I was not good at the bug ones.

I read a lot of the Sunday comics, or I just looked at the Sunday comics. Um, and then.. I'm trying to think. Uh, then, I guess. Oh, I started jumping from like the Sunday comics, at some point, I started drawing comics for my brother every single year for his birthday. Um, I have no idea if they've survived, they're all pretty silly and self-referential. Um. I would love to go back and read them one day. Um. And then in 6th grade, I read *Maus*. Because it was just in, uh, my brother was several grades ahead of me, and he was reading it for school, which meant that I,

of course, read it. And I, this is kind of weird in retrospect, when I thought about it, I would trace certain panels from it, like very, very simple panels from it and not the, like, horrific ones. Um, but.

Yeah, and then from *Maus* one of my friends on Neopets introduced me to shojo manga. And I just got really into it from there. Shojo manga, specifically, *Kamikaze Kaitō Jeanne* and the Pokémon manga where the main character was Red. Was Red?

RMJ

Mhmm.

HR

Yeah, it was Red.

RMJ

Yeah.

HR

Um, and then the other, the other early manga I read was called, I wrote it down, um, *Japan Inc* which is about the economy in Japan in the 1980s which was another one that I read and I was like, clearly I know what this guy is talking about. Um, but mostly I was like, wow, manga's so neat. I like these graphs. (RMJ laughs.)

So, yeah, so I guess, yeah, I started drawing comics from doing these birthday comics for my brother. Um.

RMJ

You're also in in that culture of, like, manga that we all grew up in.

HR

But I'll never escape, gladly. Lovingly.

RMJ

Cool. Um. I guess following up on that, now that I'm thinking about it, what was the point—Was there a point for you where you felt like, oh, this is what I just want to do sort of as a career, like as my work or whatever, or is that kind of, was that, was kind of..

HR

Well, I don't ever want to commit myself to something called a career. Um, because I hate work and the concept of work, um. So, I didn't really consider myself, like, a for real artist until I was graduated college. And I just started, like, I don't know what to do with myself. So, I guess I'll just draw a lot and that was around when I was like, oh, yeah I'm an artist and I, and then a couple years later I was like, oh, yeah I'm a graphic novelist now.

But I have never considered it as like, a viable career not because, um, I don't not because I don't think I could do it, I guess? Well actually, I don't think I could do it, but also I just don't want to, um. Because there are very few things that I want to do consistently for a source of income.

RMJ

That would sort of, like, take the joy out of it or?

HR

Yeah, I, I also cycle through things that I'm interested in, so I might draw comics for like, 6 months of the year and then not for another 6 months, and that's not really a good way to sustain yourself. So, I have a I have a day job that is not related to comics.

RMJ

Coolio, um, great and then. Um, kind of like thinking about your work some more um, my second question for you is kind of a two-parter, so I can give it to you separately if you'd like, but the first, part of it is, uh, how do you define trans representation? And then let's start there, then we can move into the other half.

HR

Yeah this is one of the ones that I took notes for, um. 'Cause I kind of don't really know how to define it? So much as I know what I am, like, interested in seeing as trans representation. So, like, for me, the first, stage of what I actually care about in terms of representation is the actual people making things. Um. Like, if I see a trans character in media that is like, well written. I'm like, that's that's, really cool. That's awesome. But then if I find out that there was no trans person involved in the creation, I'm kind of like, eh, that's cool. That's, that's not as interesting to me.

As a black person, I feel the same about black characters.

RMJ

Right.

HR

Especially if we're looking at, you know, like, there's Marvel Comics where they're like, we put one in, it's there now. And I'm like, I don't know. I don't care. I don't read superhero comics anyway, so that's not the best example, but, um.

And even if it's like trans people being represented in the creation of something. I. If they make something that is not even explicitly about trans characters, or even involving characters, I think the fact that there is like a trans person in the writing group or whatever informs the tone of the work, um. And that's another thing that, that is just more interesting to me, like, as a writer, and as a consumer of media.

RMJ

Yeah, that makes sense. And then thinking about that, then how do you sort of situate your own work in relationship to trans representation?

HR

Um. I do it. (All laugh)

RMJ

Listen yeah, I mean.

HR

Like, yeah, I, I make comics and I am a trans and queer person so it's like, I got the first step down and then, you know, on top of that, all of my characters are like. The majority of the characters are trans so I've got that checked box. Um, yeah.

RMJ

Makes sense. So it sounds like you're someone who doesn't really mind if people use that, like, describe your work as like trans representation because that's what it is, right?

HR

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

RMJ

Yeah. Cool. Um.

HR

This is actually a really interesting question, because I was telling my coworkers about it and I just, like, read the question out loud or like. Or I paraphrased it very poorly, where I was like, what are you like, what do I think is the importance of representation or something? And it's I work with teens, and one of our students was nearby and they just yelled, it's good. Like, you know what. It's good, it's a good thing to have.

RMJ

That's really cute, I love that. Uh, yeah, I mean, yeah, um, it kind of, I mean, like, in a good example of this, right is *Yinz City*, uh, which I definitely want us to talk about, I love *Yinz City*. I think it's so cool. Um. You describe it on your—you described on your website as “an ongoing fictionalized archive of localized QTPOC histories,” and I was wondering if you could unpack what that means for us.

HR

Okay, um, that comes out of, I applied for grant so that I could do *Yinz City* and so it's extremely grant speak. And also my friend who applies for lots of grants wrote it for me.

But, um, hm, I'm trying to think of how far back to go in explaining this.

RMJ

As far back as you want, we've got time.

HR

Um, so I guess the background context for *Yinz City* is that a long time ago it started as just focusing on one character, who is still a major character. Um, and it was taking me forever to draw it until I realized, I didn't feel like drawing it. Um, so I changed it to being about a group of characters. Um, and at the time I was living... So, *Yinz City* is based in Pittsburgh secretly, but I won't admit it out loud. Um.

And I was not living in Pittsburgh when I started drawing it as, as what it is now. And so it became sort of like a mocking love letter to Pittsburg. Um, and because of that, it was based really heavily on my personal experiences and the stories that my friends had told me.

Um, and after a while I was kind of conflicted about that, I guess, um, especially when I started applying for grants. And wanted them to give me money, because I was like, they're not going to give me money to be like, here's my comic about these characters who are all just me.

Um, so I thought, oh, two ways to handle the situation of, like, expanding the narrative and also getting a grant is I'll make this into, um, a project where I interview other queer and trans people of color in the city.

Um, so it became—I didn't know this word until I was telling this project talking to my friend about this project, and he was like, oh, so you're talking about an ethnography.

I was like, I don't know what that is (laughs). Um, but, um. Should I explain what an ethnography is?

RMJ

Yeah, I'd love to hear your, uh, explanation of it.

HR

It's going to be a very basic explanation, because I, I don't really know how to do it. Um, but they already gave me the money to do it so, what are they going to do? They can't take it back. Um. So I Googled "what is ethnography" and it is the study of people in their own environment through the use of methods, such as participant observation, and face to face interviews.

And then you take the interviews. Which is what I did, the face-to-face interviews um. And you, like, analyze them by looking for, like, common language, or like, cultural references and experiences and you see how they might be thematically connected across the interviews.

Um, and then you use that... Well, I'm using that to inform the writing of *Yinz City* in terms of, like, um. Like, how the characters, like, navigate their relationships with each other and how

they, like, develop these characters and may be. The different spaces they inhabit. [Coughs] Sorry, excuse me. Um.

HR

There is something else. And ethnography is very much like, as opposed to being like a survey where it's like rate your experience on public transit from a scale of 1 to 10 or something. It's very much one of the questions I would ask is like. Tell me a story about a time you were comfortable in a queer, like, setting or something, and so it's very much like, tell me stories rather than, um, like data analysis exactly. I guess. And so I am not setting out to draw the stories that people told me.

People mention oh, yeah I went to that one gay bar and it really sucked. Like, if a bunch of people say that, I'm like, I'm probably going to reference the gay bar that sucks.

RMJ

Right.

HR

Yeah. Localized history, so. And *Yinz City* accidentally kind of starts and is set in 2015, um, and so that's kind of like the ongoing history part of it, although it's an alternative history, um, because smart phones were never invented.

RMJ

Is, why, why did you decide not to include smartphones?

HR

Um, they're not cute. (RMJ laughs) They're not cute and they are really boring to draw and I am, I've for a long time been really fascinated by, um, I can't remember, I think it's called the Galápagos effect, which is how, um, in Japan, the development of technology was, like, very specific to Japan. So their flip phones could do a lot of the things that smart that, like, early smartphones could do. But, but like, way before. Um, and I just I always thought that that was really neat and also the phones are just like cute.

RMJ

Yeah, they're much cuter. That's fun. Yeah. Um. How is the... I think, I think what you're doing with *Yinz City* is really interesting, um, and so I'm gonna kind of like, how has that interview process like, process been? Like, what is the, like, the, the kind of responses you get from people when you, when you do those interviews.

HR

Um, I like doing the interviews more than I like drawing the comic. (Laughs)

RMJ

Yeah.

HR

So, if I could do more interviews, and then, like, just keep putting off the comic, I totally would. Um, I honestly have thought about doing a zine or something about, the, like about doing the interviews instead of doing the actually *Yinz City* part, um, maybe that can happen later, but, um. Yeah, they were really fun for the most part. I was really bad at it at first and then I got once I got to be good at it. I was like, oh, this is this is awesome. Um.

So most of the people, I put out a call on Instagram. I was going, I made a poster and I was going to, like, throw it around town, but I started by putting it on Instagram and it specifically, um, asked for queer and trans people of color with a focus on Black and Indigenous folks of trans masculine and nonbinary leanings, um, which was a nightmare to figure out that language because I had to face myself and be like, what the hell does that even mean? Um.

So most of the people I interviewed, I think all except one person? All except one person, um, were black. And...

CGJ

Can I ask a question?

HR

Yeah.

CGJ

How many people did you interview?

HR

I was supposed to interview 10, but I did 12 or 13 interviews. Some of them were follow ups, though. Yeah, I would I want to do more.

RMJ

Yeah, interviewing people is fun.

HR

Yeah. Um, yeah, there were certain just like things that that popped up that I wasn't expecting, um. Like, so many people were asexual. And so many people were, um, self-diagnosed, uh, ADHD or autism.

And there were so many nonbinary people, which was really like very cool. I don't know. I wasn't...Well, one thing that ended up happening was I really wanted to interview people who were around my age because they would have been in the city in, like, maybe the same scene as me. Um, but because I posted it on Instagram, I got a lot of people who were like. 27 or like, I think the youngest person I interviewed might have been 23 maybe..

HR

And so I think I think that age gap in certain ways had to do with there being far more nonbinary people that I anticipated, but I think it also is kind of related to, um, the way Black people sometimes conceptualize, like, gender and identity.

Um, I think I only interviewed one binary trans man. Yeah. Yeah? Yeah.

RMJ

Could I ask you to talk a little bit more about what you said about how, um, Black people conceptualize gender and identity?

HR

Oh. Can you? Yeah, um. (Laughs)

How do I explain this? Um. I think that because of the way, like, colonial gender roles have been imposed on Black folk for so long, um. When we, like, try to kind of like. Oh, gosh, I don't know what I'm about to say. Um, we're all on a ride right now. Um, when we kind of deconstruct that, it allows for like, a lot of, a lot of different fluidity and, like interpretations of what like, masculine and feminine might mean.

Um. I mean, there's also like, in the Black community, there's such a, like, there is still like a very kind of, um. Very toxic culture of, like, hard masculinity and at times hard femininity but I think the queer Black folk really like play with that a lot. Um. In whatever way they're floating back and forth.

So, um. Some of the people I interviewed were like. Yeah, I use they pronouns, but, like, I don't really define masculinity in the way that a lot of, like. In the way that masculinity has been introduced to me through my life, and the way that, like, masculinity is like, supposed to be applied to like, Black men or whatever. But I am still a masculine person.

RMJ

Right.

HR

Um, which was neat. Which was very cool.

RMJ

Yeah, um, kind of on the same, we talked about this a little bit in terms of how you're analyzing the interviews and stuff but, um, how did you, how did you actually, like, approach depicting those, uh, queer, trans, people of color communities and experiences in *Yinz City*, or, like, more broadly, um, like, from the interview process to, like, synthesizing it on the page.

HR

I am actually still in the process of doing that because, um.

The, the timeline that I kind of accidentally imposed on myself to coincide with the grant was I was like, yeah, I'm going to do these interviews and I'm going to draw an entire volume of a comic. I'm going to do it in 1 year.

RMJ

Oh, no.

HR

And then I got 6 months into it, and it was like, please give me an extension. Please please please. And when the deadline rolls around again, I'm going to be like pleaaase.

CGJ

When you say a volume, how many pages were you like kind of aiming for?

HR

I think the the last volume was... so 36, multiply by 3 plus... 42, maybe.

RMJ

So, like around 150?

CGJ

150! You—wow, Remus!

RMJ

I'm so bad at math, that was a lucky guess.

CGJ

It's exactly 150, I pulled up the calculator.

HR

You could've said anything and I would have believed you, I was gonna say, I don't know 118.

CGJ

Okay 150. cool.

HR

Oh, that's so many pages.

RMJ

That's a lot of pages to draw! So you started—.

CGJ

I just finished 170 of this book. And I was looking at it, I was like, one s-, what, I don't, I don't even conceive of drawing that anyway. Sorry, continue.

RMJ

I was just going to add, like, [unintelligible] of *Yinz City* was drawn before the grant interviews, right? Cause we have the 1st volume?

HR

Yeah, right and I was, I was really cocky about it because I had drawn 36 plus, I dunno, 42 over the span of lockdown. So, like, I can do it. It'll be fine. It'll be fine. Um, and then, you know, I went to draw it and I had a job. I was, I had to go to work.

RMJ

Right.

HR

Um, but I think what is actually going to happen is, I kind of vaguely had an outline for certain aspects of volume 2.

That certain, certain things about it changed because of the interviews. Um. But what is really going to happen is, I think, after I finish volume 2, I'm probably just going to take a break and do the proper ethnography analysis for, like, however long that takes, um, and then kind of reassess the situation.

RMJ

Gotcha. Cool.

CGJ

Can I ask what the grant is that you got? And, like, what's the timeline for getting the grant and starting the project?

HR

What the name of it is or?

CGJ

Yeah, if you want to share.

HR

Yeah, it's the Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh grant, I got it in 2022. Yes, because the 1st time I applied for it, I did a really bad job in 2021. In '22 I did a good job. (All laugh)

RMJ

Thank you. Cool. Um, so. When you're designing your characters, because *Yinz City* has like a big ensemble cast. So, again, this can be like, *Yinz City* or more. Generally. Um, what sorts of things are you thinking about or, like, how do you come up with your character designs?

HR

It's always the hair first. Always starts with the hair. Cause hair is like, I love drawing it, but it's also really hard to draw. Like, the more hair there is, the easier it is for me to draw it. So, if the, if the hair is the thing that I'm going to be focusing and stressing over the most, that's where I'm going to start. Um, but. Um, honestly, the character designs come from, like, pretty much anywhere as a jumping point. So I, there are characters in *Yinz City* who are based off of dolls that I collect, um. I got a new doll in the mail yesterday, and that they're probably going to be a character in the city.

RMJ

I did see your Instagram posts and I was like, that's a really nice doll.

HR

I love him so much.

RMJ

Irrelevant to this particular thing, I also love ball-jointed dolls, so yeah.

CGJ

It seems completely relevant. How dare you say that's irrelevant?

RMJ

I, like, my personal taste is irrelevant, but, uh.

CGJ

I was going to ask what kind of doll. Ball jointed doll makes sense to me.

HR

Yeah, ball jointed doll. Um. I think at least one of them came from, um, a stuffed animal, um.

So, uh, one of the. One character who is like a fan favorite, Nabakov, was inspired by a photo. I was inspired by a girl who I was not following on tumblr, but every now and then I would check her blog and I was like, oh, she's so cool looking.

Um, and like, I always put, well. I always put a lot more effort into drawing the people of color, um, which is. Um. So it takes me a while to design the characters, because I'm very much like, okay, like, what, um, ethnic background do I want them to have? How do I draw people from that um, background or ethnicity or whatever um. What are like, common, like "common"—This is so. I'm like, oh, my God, am I getting into race science? Um, but like, what are like, common, like, features like, whether it's like the body or whatever.

I will say that coming out of, like, a manga background, um, one thing that I really over the years have struggled with and try to address as much, as aggressively as possible is like, body diversity. So I really want, um, like the 4 main leads of *Yinz City* are supposed to have different

body types, and it's something that I'm still like, very critical of myself as to whether or not I like, pull it off.

So, it's like, there is, there's, one of the main leads is just like, going to gain weight over the series. Kind of as I get better at that.

RMJ

Good for them.

CGJ

That's what happens, I dunno.

RMJ

That is how it works, yeah.

HR

Exactly, I'm like, no, it's realism. It's not because of my skill set.

Um, and there are little things that I like to put in, um, but I don't think anyone notices, so I'm gonna talk about it so that people notice it from now on. Like um. For drawing trans masc characters, they always have a lower eyelash line. Um, and then for drawing transfem characters, they always have connected like, eyeliner or something. Not like eyeliner, but connected eye situations going on here, um.

And, like, I will think about if a masc character has like, top surgery, but am I going to draw it? Not unless it's like, probably, I don't know. I just never think about it, but, like, if I'm drawing porn or something, then yes that's important. But in the comic, I'm like, I don't know if it'll come up or not. Um.

Um, yeah, and I also, I'm like, very obsessed with the fashion. And like, making sure that the different characters, I want them to have very specific, like, unique to them fashion. Um. Which sometimes is pulled from the way my friend's dress and sometimes is, like, something I see on Pinterest or something um.

Uh. Yeah. White people are really hard for me to design. So I, um, I always go to my roommate and I'm like, I need this white person to kind of look like a combination of this person and this person from these stock images. Can you do this for me since the character's vibe? And he's like, I got you, um. (Laughs)

CGJ

Is he an artist as well?

HR

Yes.

CGJ

Oh, cool.

HR

Yeah. Um. There's one of the lead characters, um, Shelley is just like, literally Damon Albarn, but I didn't know how to date draw Damon Albarn. So I went to my roommate and I was like, can you job Damon Albarn for me?

Um, but it's funny because they're really easy to draw though. Um.

RMJ

Like, once you have the design established?

HR

Yeah, they're really easy to draw because, like, my shorthand for white people is often, and I got this from, um, anime, is that they'll have like, droopy eyes and, like, heavy lids and, um. A lot of times I default to them having like *schwoop* nose.

CGJ

That's what they say in *Cosmopolitan*.

RMJ

Yeah, the famous Anglo *schwoop* noise. Nose.

Um, I am, okay. I would love to know why, what the bottom eyelash line for trans mascs.

HR

Um. I think. I can't remember the exact context of this conversation. I think I was with a friend, and I think we were watching, like, some show or movie and we were like drinking or something. And my friend, and there's someone on the screen in whatever we were watching, and my friend goes I think that guy's trends. He has beautiful eyelashes. It will just never leave me. So I was like, I'm putting it in *Yinz City*.

RMJ

That's fair. That's real.

Um, all right, so we're going to switch gears a little bit. I know you've talked about this in previous interviews, so forgive me for asking about it again. But, how would you describe the politics of your own work sort of broadly speaking.

HR

This question made me laugh because I recently did an interview with, um, our local art

periodical um, *Petrichor*. And they asked me this question and I was not expecting it and I just totally beefed it. I was like, oh, I don't know. Uh, and then I said, I truly said, I can't believe I said this, I don't consider myself a political person and then I went home and I was like...

CGJ

(In exaggerated disbelief) *What?*

HR

Oh. I can only imagine my friends read it and were just like, what is this, but were too kind to say anything to me about it. Um, but. I actually don't know truly how to answer. Could you ask the question again?

RMJ

Yeah, um, so it's how do you, would you describe the politics of your own work sort of broadly and you, that doesn't have to be as, like, granular as, like, it's an anarchist or leftist or whatever. It can just like be, however you would define, you know, politics.

HR

Okay, I like that you used anarchists and leftist as examples because I think that that is where I kind of like, fall along sort of and I feel like maybe that shows up, but I don't know. Maybe not.

Um. I feel like, I don't. I think when I told the other interviewer that I don't consider myself a, like, overtly political person in terms of my work, I think I meant that it's not, like, I, I don't actively think about my work as, like, purposely being political. I think that queer people and like people of color and like, I'm focusing on those two because that's who I am. Um. Our work is inherently politicized just because we are, like, seen is just, like, the other in society and so anything we do, people are going to look at through, like, a political lens of, like, kind of like oh, but what does that mean? Why are you doing that kind of thing? What is what is that about? Is that because your queer is that because you're like Black or brown, whatever.

RMJ

Right.

HR

So, I've kind of just accepted the fact that, like, whatever. My work is probably going to be, is like, inherently political in that sense. Um, but in terms of, like, politics, um. Mmm.

CGJ

I just keep picturing, like, you putting Joe Biden in *Yinz City* or something, the way you're talking about it. (All laughing)

HR

Okay, but I flipped through, um, volume 1 and there's this part—I really like graffiti, uh, Pittsburgh's graffiti culture for so long has been like majority tagging because Pittsburgh has a

really aggressive anti-graffiti, like, task force. Um, so a lot of it is, like, tagging, um, and in one of the panels in volume 1, it just says “Bill Peduto eat my ass,” which is a real piece of graffiti talking about, um, former mayor of Pittsburgh Bill Peduto.

CGJ

So, you know, that’s, that’s political. But, no, but really, you were just talking about the graffiti of Pittsburgh. See, that's, that's political, right?

RMJ

Yeah, yeah. And I think from my perspective, the reason I was thinking about this, too is, I think. Both like in *Yinz City*, and also, like, through this conversation that we've talked so much about, like, community in the way that you have really a meshed yourself in this very like, local like. In your local community, and like, wanting to, like, understand and be connected with other, like particularly like, queer trans, people of color, particularly like Black queer people right, around you. And I think that is also like, a sort of like, political framing. Not like—again, not necessarily in the like, American representative politics, but, you know.

HR

Yeah, I'm going to take a reader response poll on who they think votes, and who they think doesn't vote in *Yinz City*.

CGJ

(Laughing) I was just thinking, I was like, give us the political affiliations for every character—

RMJ

(Laughing) Yeah, breakdown the voter registration [intelligible]

CGJ

Who is Marxist...

HR

I feel like at least. At least one of the trans girls has to be a tankie.

RMJ

Right, yeah, I mean, realistically speaking. (Laughs)

HR

Um, I think the character Sage probably is not even registered to vote. Um, and then probably every, all of the other, like, main characters are like socialist towards radical, or radical socialism um. I'm sure most of them have anarchist leanings. Yeah, definitely. Cause that’s just who I spend time with more than anything else.

RMJ

Absolutely, if you're reflecting back what you see around you, right, that's gonna be what comes up. Um.

Coolio. And so now we're going to switch gears a tiny bit again. Uh. And, uh, sort of talk about, um. Your relationship to comic and zine fests, because that's something that I've been interested in all of these, right. Um, so, like, what is your relationship to comic/zine fests? Like how do you feel about them?

HR

Um, so I entered them through anime cons, um. I started doing anime cons like, towards the end of college and after, like, immediately after anime cons, after college, um. And they are so big and stressful, um, I don't like them.

RMJ

Could you, did you ever a table, or were you just like attending?

HR

Oh, yeah, I only ever went to them to table. So I was in the like, in the artist alley. And I think at the time, when I was starting out, I was one of the few people who had, like, sort of like narrative, autobio and fiction zines and comics, um, which some people at anime cons were like into and some people weren't. And, um, in, like, 2015, someone local maybe said, like, well, why don't you ever go to zine fairs? And I was like, what the hell is zine fair.

Uh. So, I kind of like slowly got into comic fests, and was, like, flabbergasted because they were so like. There, there, were not like. At anime cons people basically build, like, billboards on their tables of fanart. And, so that was kind of what I was expecting, and then I got to like, a zine fest and then, like, I, I went to like, CAKE or something and I was like, oh, my God, I can see the ceiling. This is great. (laughs)

RMJ

Yeah, we were, I've already talked to, Cathy and I have talked about that before of the like. I think we talked we're talking about it with Sunmi, maybe, the like culture is so radically different. You can tell when you're at a comic show, so you can tell who has a background in anime cons.

HR

(Laughing) That is so true. I'm always like, I don't want anyone to know.

CGJ

If you, I have a question. If you. How did you start making zines if you didn't know that zine fests were a thing? Like, how did you first find a zine. I feel like a lot of think they invent genes like, when they're a kid like, they were like, I've invented a zine.

HR

I mean, I was already around my dad's self-published thing. So, I guess I was already kind of like, I wonder if he even...

CGJ

Oh, so your, your dad's comic was, um. A self-published, was it zine? or, like—Oh, cool.

HR

No, it was a comic. It was a comic.

CGJ

But not like a, not like, um, he stapled it himself.

HR

I think he, I think probably what happened was, it was like one of those traditional old school zine things where, like, one of your friends works at an office with a copy machine that has the automatic stapler.

RMJ

Classic.

CGJ

So you grew up with it! You grew up with self-publishing as, like, a possibility. Okay, cool.

HR

Yeah. I, I think I got into zines proper because I was, when I was in grad school, I started drawing this journal comic. Um, that got moderately popular, um, and I think people asked me about whether they could buy it in print and I was like, God, no, I don't know how to do that. Um. Yeah, I don't really know. I don't know how I made the jump to zines, that's such an interesting question. I have no answer.

RMJ

Sometimes it just happens.

HR

All of my like, early stuff was autobio and then I kind of. I slowly shifted into doing the fiction stuff. I used to be convinced that you needed to have something new for every single show that you went to.

RMJ

Yeah, that's yeah. It's hard to break out of that mentality.

CGJ

(Overlapping) A lot of the shows ask, are you, in the applications they ask are you debuting something? But the thing is that comics take *forever*. They take so long. That, yeah. It's like, realizing it's like, I can't have a new—it's, it's not possible. It's just not possible.

HR

I did it for, like, maybe 2 years and then I realized it was making me crazy to have something new, because I was putting out like, 5, at least 5 comics, like, a year it was suffering.

CGJ

Wow.

HR

That's why I have [intelligible] 10 self-published pieces, because I was like, unmedicated at 3 am drawing comics.

RMJ

Right, and they're all, a lot of the shows are clustered in the same span of 5 months too. So it's like, yeah.

HR

The comic fests uh, I don't I don't know if I, I only want to go to a comic fest if I know people who will be there. Um, is my thing, um. Recently there was a comic fest that I almost didn't go to because someone I have a crush on isn't, wasn't going to be there. So I was like, what's the point? Why would I even want to go. Just a dirty dog.

But, uh, um, yeah, I mean, I really like that I get to see so many people that I won't see otherwise, but I also feel like going into comic fests and shows turns on this, like, sort of like feral part of my brain, that, um, is fun, but also exhausting. Um, yeah.

RMJ

Have you been to any...I'm asking this because it's come up a couple of times with folks. Have you been to any since, uh... Not that COVID's over, but people are doing stuff again.

HR

Yeah, I have. I think we went to SPX whenever SPX started again after lockdown and we went to MICE and I've been to, like, smaller zine fairs, zine fests, markets, um, and it's weird. You can't see people's faces. I, I used to like, work in service and I got really used to like, reading people's faces and body language and how to react to them in that way. And when I can't see someone's face, I'm like, I'm, I have no idea. Um, I think my ability to communicate with people also, like. It didn't tank, but it also took a hit, partly because I can't see people's faces as much.

RMJ

That's a pretty common thing that I've heard, not necessarily the faces specific part of it, but just the, it turns out being, like, locked inside for a few months really fucks with your ability to talk to people. Uh.

Do you, so, uh, another definitional question. So there's two parts. (Laughs) Um, sorry, but the definitions matter, right? Because people define them differently. So, um.

How would you define, if you think there is one, let's say, a trans community in comics.

HR

Um, so, my thing is that the word community. I don't identify with it because it has so many meanings that, to me, it almost functions as a demographic label. Or, like, it's, it's like, excuse me (Sneezes). Yeah, like, queer community is just like a demographic that doesn't, like, really have any depth to it other than it's a group of people who have certain common things about them, but it's like, I don't, what is that to me? Um. And then, uh, oh there was something else I was going to say. Like, the word community to me has such a, like, nonprofit sound to it, um, that is like, you use it when you want to look like whatever you're doing is, like, really important. (All laugh)

RMJ

Right.

HR

I actually read, I wrote it down. Um, where are you. Where are you notes? God dammit. Oh. Um, this article called, um, Pods and Mapping, um, by Mia Mingus for the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. Yeah, and the idea is that, like, community is like, that term is such a nebulous concept that has so many different meanings to different people, um, that like, in, in writing this article, I guess the collective, like, talks to different people and were like. What community are you in? They'd be like, oh, I'm in the queer community and so they'd be like, okay who in the queer community supports you and people will be, like, uhh, or like, how does the queer community support me support you and they'd be like, uh, well, I have my 2 friends who are also queer.

Um, and so they developed this theory of pods, which is, I hate that word. I don't know. I wish they had come up with a better word. There are certain words that just don't sound good to me. Um, um, and the idea of pods is, like, the people who you interact with directly, who are, like, your support group that you go to. Um, and, um. That's actually part of like the way I write the community, or, like, analyze community in *Yinz City*, too, is like, part of why it's like, a specific set of characters is like, because they are a pod within a larger community, and maybe they overlap with each other's pods or outside pods. But, um.

So then, leading back to, like, trans community and comics, I mean, yeah, it exists in the sense that there's like a group of trans people making comics, but in terms of, like. For me, I think that there are other trans creators who I identify with, and, like, relate to specifically who I, um, find. Yeah, who are my pods, I guess. Um, so.

CGJ

That was a great answer.

HR

Thanks, Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective.

RMJ

Yeah, I, I really love their, and Mia Mingus' writing in general. Um, I think that's a great way to frame it. Cause it is, I think you're right, there is like a. There's the sense of, like, there's a large group of people that are transgender who make comics. But that doesn't mean that we all, like, actually have each other's back or talk to each other in any meaningful way, right?

HR

Right. Right, this is like this is tangential, but it's also like, in talking about it, I just now realized that it definitely. I think the way I'm looking at, it also comes from the way I've looked at, like. What it means, when you say the Black community. Because it's like, mm, politics here we go. It's like, I probably like, I am in the Black community with like a Black conservative Republican. But those, that ain't my people. Like, I'm, I'm more closely, like, in certain ways aligned with like, my white. Like, weird ass anarchist, psychology professor friend that I am with, like, the Black academic cis conservative person.

Um, so I think that, that is also where, like, why the whole, like, community versus pods thing makes more sense to me. Um, yeah.

RMJ

Um, so then, in sort of a similar vein. Um. Is there, an-and obvious, I'm thinking mostly like, contemporary but, like, we can go back as far as you want if you've if you've written notes on this. But like, have you noticed in general any like, trends or particular approaches to, like, on page depictions of transness.

HR

What do you mean by on page, like?

RMJ

Like, cause we were, I'm thinking about like, if you read a comic about like, a trans character, right? Um, unless you want to, unless there you also want to talk about, like, what you've just seen trans people doing in general, but.

I'm thinking about how we talked about the difference between like, trans representation as someone who is trans, writing, versus like it being about a trans character, whether the person is trans or not.

HR

Yeah, um. I feel like for a while now, if a comic is about trans people, and it is by a trans person, it's often like, memoir.

RMJ

Mhmm.

HR

I think that is changing a bit like, like, you know, you guys interviewed Emma Jane, and, like, I feel like, I see more things like what Emma is doing, where it's about, like, trans people, but, like not memoir, it's, it's like. Yeah, um, trans people doing other things.

I feel like when I see, um, trans people represented in media by people who are may not be trans it's still kind of like. Kind of like, on the side sort of thing. Which can be really good sometimes. Sometimes like, a casual representation of a trans person, like, in something not made by a trans person is like, delightful, actually, the way it's done. Um.

What was I going to say. Um. Trends. I, I, I don't know if this is a trend, but I would love for it to be a trend of more, um, comics about trans people where they're drawn as like, not humans. I want more furry trans comics.

RMJ

Hell yeah.

HR

I don't know, I feel like it's still like, very like memoir based. I think that maybe like publishers like Silver Sprocket are putting out things that are not memoir based that are, like, I don't want to use the word weird. I want more weird shit but, like, they're putting out things that are more, like a wider range of narrative, um. The note that I took for this question was "more freaks more casual." I think that that's, I don't really (laughs)

RMJ

Oh, yeah yeah yeah, I love that.

HR

That's my hopes.

RMJ

I'm gonna put that on a t-shirt. Awesome. Okay. And then to wrap up, I have one more, well, two more, but one more actual question, um, which is, what is your favorite comic or any kind of media, we can get expansive, um, about transness, just broadly?

HR

Lately, I am obsessed with *What Happens Next* by Max Graves. Um, it's a web comic about, um, God, how do you even summarize this web comic? It's a web comic about, if I wanted to really

dumb, dumb it down. I don't like that phrase. If I really wanted to oversimplify it, it's about a trans man who is like, in his twenties or something, but when he was a teenager, um, he was an accessory to murder and was like, um.

What is the word for when people are put in, like, a psychiatric ward as punishment?

RMJ

Institutionalized?

HR

Yes. He was institutionalized for, like, his like entire teams, and then was, like, released into this world where, like, he, he was a tumblr teen, and now he's released into this world with a landscape of, like, social media and online life is just completely different.

And it's about him struggling with that, but also interacting with other like, chronically online trans people. It's really fucking good. It's so good. It's so good. It's one of those ones where I'm like, why didn't I do that, and it's because Max Graves did it and part of why it's so good is because he did it and not me. It's super good, and it's like, every page is just one shot. Um, which, the way that he, like, repeats shots, but edits very small things about them, like just lands so well, it's so good. I'm like, oh.

Ah, so good. Um, let's see, uh, *Little Teeth*. Which I feel like, is kind of a throwback which, like, freaks me out to think about, um, by J Bearhat and Rory Frances. Um, which is about like, it is furry queers and it's very, I don't know if I want to use the term slice of life, but it is like, interpersonal relationship—

RMJ

Right.

HR

—Snapshots of different queers—what?

RMJ

Oh, no, I was agreeing with you.

HR

Um, yeah, which I think it's very like Portland or maybe not maybe Seattle. I don't know. Whatever those places are over on the West Coast. I don't, I don't go there. Um.

CGJ

Seattle, yeah, yeah.

HR

Okay, there you go. It's so good. I like, um, I feel like it actually inspired me to actually follow through with doing *Yinz City*. Um, the tones are very different and, like, the presentation is very

different. Um, but the aspect of it being snapshots of these lives overlapping I was like, yeah, I want to draw that.

Um, uh. *The Prince and the Dressmaker*. By Jen... Jen Wang, I think? Um, which I don't feel like, is necessarily like, overtly about. I mean, it's about, I interpret the, um, Prince character as being trans.

RMJ

Right.

HR

Or, like being genderqueer or something and so I think it is, like, a big part of it is him, like, getting to explore that, um, and like, dealing with how that, like, might impact his relationship with his parents and kingdom, but also it's part of his relationship with a dressmaker character. Um, it's really cute. I love it. Um, I definitely reread it pretty often. Um.

And then, okay, stay with me here. The movie *Creep 2*. Which, I don't know if either of you have seen this. Um, so, the, the basic premise of it is. In the first one, this videographer, an amateur videographer responds to a Craigslist, um, posting about, like, filming this guy talking about his family and his life. And so it's from the first person, um, and it's just, he's just, like, hanging out with this guy all night, but it gets weirder and weirder. And like, as you go along, you're like, something is up with this dude. Um, and like, spoiler, the guy is like a, some kind of murder man. Um, it's like, really low budget. It's very short. Um, and it's good but *Creep 2* is like, even better. It's so. It's so great. The videographer character is actually, she's a YouTuber. Um, and I was watching this movie with my friend. I was, like, is she trans? And my friend was like, I don't know, but I think, I think you're right and, like, it's never brought up in any way whatsoever. But I'm like, no, but I get this vibe. I get this vibe that this character is trans and then I looked her up and, like, the actress is not, or at least she's not out, but, like, she's not trans, but like that character. I'm like, no, like the way she talks, and like, the way she carries herself and reacts to things, she's a trans woman. I swear. So good.

RMJ

I will definitely have to watch that. I, uh, it's yeah, that sounds good.

HR

I, I would compare it to the way that Pico from *Dragon Ball* is absolutely Black. It's like that except she's a trans woman.

CGJ

Totally.

RMJ

Well, okay, awesome list. Uh, also *What Happens Next* is one of my favorites, so.

CGJ

Oh, right, right, right. That's the, that's the Max Graves comic?

RMJ

Yeah, yeah, it's really good. Um. And, uh, I mean, I, thank you so much. This has been a super fantastic conversation.

CGJ

Yes, thank you so much for joining us. (Overlapping RMJ) Where can..

RMJ

(Overlapping CGJ) We have one more—oh, we have—

HR

There's so many questions.

RMJ

Do we want to do—

CGJ

You say goodbye first and then you do the question.

RMJ

Okay, my apologies. So, is there. Is there anything you would, like, where could people find you? Is there anything you would like to shout out?

HR

Um, mm, let me think.

CGJ

Are you on social media?

HR

I don't know why I'm blanking. Yeah, um, lately I am kind of trying to use Instagram more, so it's just higoons, which is just the word hi and then goons, but as one word.

Um, and then it's the same for Twitter, but. It's twitter, um, uh. I feel like I'm really bad at using social media. The other day I realized I hadn't posted anything on Instagram in, like, 4 months and I was like, oh, maybe this is why people don't remember me.

CGJ

It's, it's really, it's, it's rough out there.

HR

And then, *Yinz City* is just at yinz.city. That's the website. Um, I have a Patreon that I'm very bad at. I'm behind oh, oh, poor patrons. They're such delightful people. They're so patient with me. Um, yeah.

CGJ

Perfect.

RMJ

Perfect.

HR

I'm gonna be in a—I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about it. I'm going to talk about it. Whatever. I'm going to be in that book. Um. Oh, I really wish I could remember the title. *Becoming Who We Are*.

CGJ

I think you talk about it. It's out, it, it didn't come out already?

HR

I, I should, I should know.

CGJ

I, I believe it's at TCAF right, like. Presently.

HR

Oh. Shit.

CGJ

Like presently, as we're speaking.

HR

Oh, whenever this podcast comes out, people better have bought it. Or else I'm gonna be pissed.

CGJ

Who is the publisher? Is it Little Brown? I think it's Little Brown right?

HR

No, it's, I always mess up the name. It's A Wave Blue World?
Oh, their logo is blue. I'm sorry, guys. I'm sorry to my publishers. I love you.

RMJ

Right, yeah, the Kickstarter was, uh, uh, last...at the end of last year too, so I think definitely... yes.

CGJ

I saw Hazel having it.

RMJ

So people should definitely go buy that.

CGJ

So that's, that's the book. This is the most hilarious plug for a book, um, that you, you illustrated someone else's story, correct? It's like a trans childhood story.

HR

Yeah.

CGJ

Okay.

RMJ

Cool.

CGJ

Yeah. Well, uh, thank you so much for visiting us..Um, Remus. It is now time for the final question.

RMJ

Okay. Now I'm allowed to do this. Um, what have you been reading lately?

HR

Um, I got a few.

RMJ

Ooh, yes.

HR

I'm rereading *There, There* by Tommy Orange.

CGJ

I was, I was just thinking that! Because that entire premise of that book is ethno, study, like, what you were talking about, I already forgot the word.

HR

It's so good.

CGJ

Yeah, that's like the entire like, the, the like, uh, the boundaries of that book, that's exactly what I was thinking of. I'm so happy you're reading it.

HR

Oh, my God. I love that book. I, I, this is vaguely related. This is only related to the book. I read it in large format print when I worked at the library and then when I bought it, um, to read it again, I requested large format because I am old, and they gave it to me in regular format. And that's why I haven't read it in a while. But I'm re-reading it now.

CGJ

The audio book is lovely because they have different actors for the different characters. So actually, the audio book is also a great experience.

HR

I'll check that out. Um, I'm reading *The Summer Hikaru Died*, a manga by oh, I'm gonna say wrong. Mokumokuren? Mokumokuren. Yes, yes. Um.

CGJ

You have such great taste, Higu.

HR

Well, and then all the other stuff I'm reading is just like, I had a period where I was manic. So I was just on shopgoodwill.com, bidding on auctions for manga lots for shojo manga. And so, now I have to read this. I've never even heard of most of them. So that's my other thing I'm reading, is a bunch of random shojo manga that I love.

CGJ

Thank you. Thank you so much.

RMJ

Yeah, thank you so much. I'm so glad we got to chat.

HR

Yeah. This is dope. I want to say solidarity forever.

CGJ

I know, we usually say, I mean, we can say goodbye.

Well, thank you for—

HR

Oh wait no, we don't have to say goodbye. We can be here all day. (All laugh)

CGJ

All right. Well, thank you for joining us, and thank you for listening to Drawing a Dialogue Presents. My name is Cathy. G Johnson.

RMJ

And I'm Remus Jackson.

HR

I'm Higu.

HR, CGJ, RMJ (at the same time, slightly unevenly)
Solidarity forever. (Laughing)

CGJ

Let's get a clean take, let's get a clean take Higu.

That means you say it by yourself.

HR

Oh. What's, clean take? I don't do anything clean. You kidding me? I'm an anarchist. Solidarity forever!

CGJ

Remus is the editor here and--(laughing)

RMJ

Mm, oh, that's all staying in, are you kidding me?

HR

Authenticity! That's what we care about.

CGJ

Yeah. Yeah. That's what it's all about. Well. Thank you, genuinely. Thank you so much for visiting us.

Visiting us I'm like, man, it's been. Been a long time.

HR

Since what?

CGJ

I don't know, life. (all laugh)