

# RCAST\_Thandi\_Loewenson (final)

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## SPEAKERS

Benji Jeffrey, Thandi Loewenson

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### **B** Benji Jeffrey 00:07

Hello and welcome to RCAST a podcast from the Royal College of Art home to the next generation of creatives, and the world's number one art and design University. Representing the largest concentration of postgraduate artists and designers on the planet. We'll be bringing you insight into the philosophy behind the programmes at the RCA by talking to staff, students and the wider RCA community about what we do here and how the work of architects, artists, communicators, designers and researchers affect the world at large. I'm Benji Jeffrey and today I'll be talking to Thandi Loewenson about this year's Venice Biennale and education is placed in the act of decolonizing. Thandi is an architectural designer and researcher who mobilises design fiction and performance to stoke embers of emancipatory political thought and fires of collective action. And she is also a senior tutor on architecture mA here at the RCA. Thandi, thank you for joining us today. Nice. Okay, how you doing?

### **T** Thandi Loewenson 01:03


Yeah, good. I'm good. It's very exciting to be here discovering entirely new rooms of the RCA didn't know about.

### **B** Benji Jeffrey 01:08

Yeah. We are in, so we have a sound studio here at the RCA which is where we are recording today, which is a weirdly calm space.

### **T** Thandi Loewenson 01:16

Yeah, it's great.



**B****Benji Jeffrey 01:17**

In the bowels of one of our buildings. So let's start off by talking about the Venice Biennale like, can you tell us a bit about what happened this year?

**T****Thandi Loewenson 01:25**

Yeah, I mean, I have to say it was being in Venice for the opening of the Biennale. Like this is not a flex, it's just the fact was a bit like being in Jay Mews. There were just so many people from the RCA there participating part of events, part of exhibits, exhibiting their own work. And so it was quite, it was quite amazing, actually. And I joined the RCA about three years ago. And so it was this wonderful culmination of a few years of alumni, of people I've been teaching with over the last few years. And it was fantastic. It was really fantastic. And I believe there was something like 20 odd people from the RCA that were involved in the Biennale as well. Yeah, no, it was incredible. I don't, you know, I would cautiously say it was almost unprecedented. I think the RCA was the largest institution represented there. And so, and very different kinds of people. So a lot, as I mentioned, alumni, people that are working in teaching at the RCA, people are doing research here, but also alumni who've now become members of faculty. So there's really nice intergenerational and kind of history in the cohort of people that were there, which was great.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 02:34**

Nice

**T****Thandi Loewenson 02:35**

It was really good.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 02:35**

And the theme this year was the laboratory of the future, which was putting Africa in the spotlight as the laboratory of the future, right?

**T****Thandi Loewenson 02:43**

Yes, yeah. And Lesley was also, Lesley Lokko, the curator of the Biennale, was also really interested in framing the Biennale around the two concurrent themes of decolonization and decarbonisation. So what does it mean to fundamentally rebuild our world our forms of relation between one another as people but also between people and the earth, towards more equitable and fair futures. The kinds of futures which in the words of Eric Olin writes, enable the fullest flourishing of us all, you know, for the many, not for the few, which is which is ambitious, which is which is grand, which is really imaginative. And that's something that I want to talk about a bit more. But I guess maybe it's important to think a little bit about what does this mean for architecture? How does architecture fit within these kind of grander, larger ambitions and aims? And I think one thing that is important to recognise is that architecture is kind of really long

been utilised within projects of colonialism, racial capitalism, and carbon based economy is quite literally to build a world and to build worldviews, so segregations between people built through walls and borders, land management, and extractive practices, the kinds of gendered labour and class relations, these uses and kinds of expressions of space construct and cement through their construction, but also the materials which we use to build them and how we care, repair and tend to them over time, or don't, and who does this work. And so to take decolonization and decarbonisation seriously from an architectural perspective, is to quite radically reconsider these fundamentals of architecture, right? Yeah. And in the Biennale, Lesley Lokko's curation includes two really interesting sections, which, which I think are really interesting and kind of exemplify the sort of fearlessness that is needed to do this kind of brave work. And they're titled The guests from the future and Dangerous Liaisons and here, which is mostly in the arsenal, it is where you'll find practitioners who are operating at the fringes of, of what has previously been called the discipline has been called architecture, right? So works that engage architecture through performance through sculpture, through film through spoken word and more and more. And this is dangerous work as Lesley's title for this section kind of calls our attention to, which has, especially younger practitioners in it. And I think it's dangerous work, especially for younger practitioners to be kind of taking those risks. There's a quote from Sarah Ahmed that I really like, which is that once he points to the floors, within hegemonic ideas or dominant ideas of doing and building the world, you yourself become the problem.

B

Benji Jeffrey 05:25

Right

T

Thandi Loewenson 05:25

So to do this kind of work, and to do it on a global scale, which many of these practitioners are doing is incredibly brave and brilliant work, actually. So I'm very honoured and very proud to see so many of our students, so many of our research community and practice community doing this work and to be a part of them, too.

B

Benji Jeffrey 05:42

Yeah. And what does that look like thinking about performance? For example, how, what does that, how do we engage with that in the Biennale in a way that starts to do that work?

T

Thandi Loewenson 05:53

Yeah, I mean, that's an interesting question. So the Biennale, it looks very different to what Architecture Biennales have looked like in the past, certainly the ones that I've been to, there are lots of dark rooms with films and screens and performances taking place within them. The idea of how we might understand space and how space might be interrogated is also expanded fundamentally. So where you might have seen lots of models or drawings of buildings, you now see drawings and tapestries and small sculptural works alongside those buildings. There's a there's a project by one of our alumni Lauren Lois Dewar, who is an alumni from ADS two which

is taught by Dele Adiamo a BA camp and a masa Randolph in Delhi and a BA also showing work in Vienna. And her work is a woven tapestry that explores kind of global networks of fabrics and clothes recycling. So how a secondhand clothes from largely from the west are dumped in the Ghanaian market, and how they then become recycled revalorized, particularly by young women who use them to create livelihoods to navigate the city and open up the markets in really interesting and ingenious ways and kind of contest this idea of a wasted material, but also that they themselves have been excluded from globalised international markets and, and networks of material remediation, and so on. So Lauren Lois' piece is this incredible tapestry that explores these spatial practices of these women. But also thinks very carefully about how her own material engagement through tapestry and through working with fabric can have quite close engagement to do that work. Which is really interesting, I think, for an architecture student to be working very closely with fabrics and with tapestry making. And Lauren Lois is talks a lot about how she found herself in the workshops that deal with fabric at the RCA and was like what am I doing?

B

Benji Jeffrey 07:55

Right.

T

Thandi Loewenson 07:56

But that's one of the amazing benefits of having an architecture school within an art school.

B

Benji Jeffrey 08:00

Yeah.

T

Thandi Loewenson 08:01

Because you get those kinds of quite radical encounters and see the kinds of fantastic work that produces to.

B

Benji Jeffrey 08:07

Yeah, and how do these works that I suppose are kind of proposals in a way for ways of thinking, if we're gonna be quite literal about what architecture is, how does this translate? How do you envisage that this could be translated into kind of producing the world that we want to see?

T

Thandi Loewenson 08:24

Oh, that's an interesting question. I mean, when I was studying architecture, many, many, many years ago. When I was studying architecture, there was a quite a sort of throwaway comment that really stuck with me from one of my tutors who's that architects don't make

buildings, they make drawings of buildings, right? They make designs of buildings. I'm not sure that's necessarily true. And I think certainly the work of many of my colleagues and of our students shows that architects are really engaged in their, in their nuts and bolts in a one to one of really building and making the world and there and there is a lot of that, and you certainly see that within the Biennale. But I think what's interesting about this Biennale and certainly Lesley's framing of this Biennale is to say that the world is made not just through construction, and through to the act of physically building but also through the ideas and ideologies that underpin that work. And so part of that practice, part of that work of building another world is also radically reconsidering what those ideas that underpin the buildings that we make, and the spaces that we make, are rooted in.

B

Benji Jeffrey 09:30

Yeah. And to what extent do you think that that will be translated out into the world in a quite often there's been others can be little bubbles, like little utopias. Do you see that that is extending beyond beyond the Biennale?

T

Thandi Loewenson 09:43

It's an interesting question. I hope so. I think this Biennale was particularly innovative, certainly within the world of architecture in terms of the breadth of practitioners that it involved. You know, I taught for a while in South Africa, a lot of my work engages with Southern Africa, in Zimbabwe, Zambia and so on. And it was remarkable how much of the continent was represented at this Biennale.

B

Benji Jeffrey 10:11

Yeah.

T

Thandi Loewenson 10:12

In a way that I've never seen before and so these are people that are already doing this work in the world. And so I'd maybe flip the question a little bit, actually and say it's, it's perhaps more for the Biennale layers bubble to start to see more what's going on in the world. And then vice versa. Yeah, having said that, I think there's one of the clues that the Biennale has also done is to draw attention to this kind of work. You know, Biennales a really important in terms of, in my opinion, in terms of giving platform to existing work and practices, and practitioners, but also in terms of valorizing and legitimising particular kinds of work and saying, actually, this is this is worthy of presentation at an international level. And so, it also means that people that are interested in doing this kind of work when asking these kinds of questions, and making these kinds of provocations and political provocations, are encouraged and supported to do that by seeing it be platformed at a scale such as this one. So it's hard to say exactly what the impact of it is yet. But these are some of the directions that I can see the impact of it could go. I mean, it Yeah, it also really bolsters the work of people already doing this work, but you may not be getting the recognition that they that they deserve.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 11:33**

And talking of bolstering people's work, you got a special mention in the category of the Golden Lion, which is very exciting. Congratulations. Could you tell us a bit about what your work was at there at the

**T****Thandi Loewenson 11:45**

Yes, yeah. I mean, you know, and I was in really good company. My colleague Emilio Distretti, who is a research tutor in the MA architecture programme was part of the team that that actually won the Golden Lion participants. Yussef Agbo-Ola was exhibiting in the British Pavilion, which was which also received a special mention for the golden line of national pavilion participants. So it was, it was a good day for the RCA. My work is a series of drawings and a film that is exhibited in the central pavilion. And it takes its title from a rocket that was launched from Kenya in 1970, the Hooroo satellite, which was the first satellite to really image the universe in quite a radically new way. So it was the first X ray astronomy satellite.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 12:39**

Oh, wow.

**T****Thandi Loewenson 12:40**

Through which we got evidence of black holes of hegemonic clouds of all sorts of you know, quite seismic discoveries were made. So the work looks at this series of drawings that was produced from that satellite from that moment, the task of drawing the universe, no less. But it also looks it sort of situates this moment within the independence that was happening in Kenya at the time. And a kind of push back as I frame it, that was happening from former colonial powers in the UK, Italy and the US. So it was a project between NASA and the Italian Space Agency or the Italian government. And through through this, we kind of see that while decolonization with its attendant Liberation's of land, sexuality, class, gender was happening on the ground through the Kenyan independence project, there was this seeding of the air that was happening at the same time. So this maintenance of control of the air above the ground, that has increasingly become more and more important today, with satellite technologies, which are used for extraction for surveillance for militaristic purposes, you know, space based warfare and so on. So there's this, the work kind of brings into the frame these these tensions where the land is one back, but then is seeded through this occupation of the air and the increasing importance of the air. So that's what the work was really looking at. Through that project. Yeah.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 14:10**

Amazing. And is there much thought within the architectural community about the potential colonisation of space? So just what you were talking about? I was just thinking that that's the next frontier, I guess of potential colonisation.

T

Thandi Loewenson 14:24

Yeah. Well, I mean, as I hope the work shows, it's it's not necessarily an emergent frontier. It's largely it's almost Yeah, then one. Yes, I think this is something that is present within architectural discourse at the moment. And one example that I could point to is a BA camps work ba who I mentioned earlier, and she turns ADS2 so BA's work looks at data, which she frames as a kind of new gold, particularly in Sierra Leone. And she looks at how the worlds of data are kind of in many ways similarly to this discussion around colonisation and carbon that we've been talking about.

B

Benji Jeffrey 15:02

Yeah.

T

Thandi Loewenson 15:03

The terms with which we engage with data are prescribed by those who control the technologies and who have disseminated and control the dissemination of those technologies and access to those technologies. So what happens when they encounter the African continent, and they create new or emergent or exist, or they continue existing forms of domination and control through these spaces. So her work really looks in quite an amazing way and how contestations might be built into those worlds. So she's working through glitch, through disruption, through subversion, as some of the tools of the architect within the digitally based space.

B

Benji Jeffrey 15:46

Right. Okay. So just thinking about glitch, it's interesting to think about things such as glitch being taken in those ways, because in a way, they're things that have been appropriated from DIY culture that are then being brought into to the edge. And I don't know quite where I'm going with that. But they're just the interesting things that start to become recurrent themes running, running through these ideologies.

T

Thandi Loewenson 16:05

100%. And I think it's really interesting. And you know, I have a collaborator and someone who I'm incredibly inspired by Miriam Hillawi Abraham who is an Ethiopian based designer, she talks about how often when we talk about Africa and technology in relation to Africa, we're talking about hacking or kind of make do and there's actually a lot of really interesting ideas around how those terms or those methods become some versions. But also that actually, there's much more sophisticated work going on there.

B

Benji Jeffrey 16:37

Right, right.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 16:37  
Within the work of the glitch.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 16:39  
Yeah.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 16:40  
There's there's potential for really interesting subversions to be built in, but subversions that also create that a generative of alternatives. And within those subversions, there are perhaps other kinds of worlds and other kinds of practices entirely, that don't necessarily rely on contestation, but are also rooted in generation. Right.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 17:00  
Yeah, amazing. So thinking back to the RCA with some of these things, how did these ideas start to get embedded at the RCA and what other ideas are kind of coming to the fore in the programmes here?

**T** Thandi Loewenson 17:11  
Yes, absolutely. So you know, I made a kind of joke earlier about how being at the Biennale was a bit like being in Jay Mews

**B** Benji Jeffrey 17:19  
Just for context, Jay Mews is the lovely little cobbled street we have outside RCA Kensington where everyone meets.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 17:27  
Yeah. And I think that it was, it was quite amazing. The thing that struck me about there being so many RCA practitioners there was, was that it was a real moment of recognition of how seriously people are taking these ideas and taking the kind of call to radical reinvention of the practice of the discipline of architecture within our community in really rigorous and serious ways, and the level to which this is happening. So frankly, I think this is quite sick. And I, you know, our community is quite serious about not accepting the cards we've been dealt, and instead being a part of rethinking this practice, how architecture should be done with whom, by



whom, and this is across all our programmes, really. So you find it in MA architecture through a host of ADS studios that are tackling climate and coloniality through a range of different and varied perspectives. So students can really come at it from many different angles.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 18:28

And what does ADS stand for again?

**T** Thandi Loewenson 18:30

Yes, Architectural Design Studio.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 18:32

Architectural Design Studio, just double checking

**T** Thandi Loewenson 18:34

The RCA is made of acronyms. RCA is one of them.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 18:38

Yeah.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 18:39

We see this in interior design, for example, where interior life and futures are kind of brought into the frame of scrutiny. In Environmental architecture and City Design, where extraction land use an existing an emergent frontiers of expulsion and expropriation are really being critically engaged alongside communities in some of the most acute contexts of the worlds in which this is being felt. And also in the Mres and the PhD, too. We've also recently launched a new M Arch in design practice. So it's a new master's, which really speaks quite closely to the themes of the Biennale, which I'd like to talk about a bit too. So it's a one year programme that takes climate as a central focus. And through which students will consider how reuse materials waste and embodied carbon intersect with economics, politics and identity to kind of really critically engage how design supports this just transition towards fair and flourishing worlds. So through the programme, students will really be exposed to a host of ideas to different tools and methods of coming at climate and it's and its relationships with architecture and a number of ways and then through a final research project in the third term, start to make their own claims and propositions around how just transition can be realised too.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 19:57

And within that programme, there will be a capacity to collaborate and work with people on different programmes as well, which I guess starts to bring down the boundaries of what could be considered architecture in the way that you were talking about someone working with textiles, maybe not feeling like it should be. But I'm not not feeling that it should be but feeling like they were out of their their pond in doing so.

T

Thandi Loewenson 20:16

Yes, absolutely, absolutely. And I think, you know, this is part of a suite of really exciting programmes where an enormous chunk of the programme is dedicated to elective units, which can be taken across any school in the college. So, you know, an architecture student will be studying alongside someone from the school of design from the school of communication. And I think what's really interesting for me is that they'll then be coming back to the school of architecture within the third term, and really quite seriously thinking about what does that exposure mean? What does that done to their practice, but also really excitingly for us is we're within the School of Architecture going to be teaching students from all parts of the college to so it's, it's an exciting time.

B

Benji Jeffrey 20:59

Definitely. And I think it really ties into this idea of like, architecture as an exhibit double acts, which is just something I've been thinking about even talking about the Venice Biennale, and particularly as we've just got RCA 2023 going on at the moment. So we have an online platform for the students in interior design, you know, they have these kind of speculative futures, right, where they imagined that there's just one word I can think of, which is by someone called Lucy Nurnberg, which is this speculative date Rescue Service. And so it's this incredible idea of queering, the future, what what kind of car rescue operation might look like? And I guess that's something that starts to come through within these March, right, they kind of have a more speculative take, or maybe I'm Miss misunderstanding that.

T

Thandi Loewenson 21:40

No, I mean, I think, listen, I think one of the things that I find brilliant about about the Biennale, sorry, to loop it all back together, is we're looking at we're looking at issues of Coloniality and carbonization. And there is a timeline in which you can say that these issues are rooted in practices that were begun, even perhaps in or before the 1400s With the advent of the transatlantic straight slave trade, settler colonialism, and a form of building and fueling the world that is associated with particular kinds of social class, gendered, sexuality based ableist, base discriminations, right, that are really quite deeply embedded within our practices and our ideas of, of what the world is and how it's made. And so the task of contesting over 500 years of dominant worldview is an enormous one. And that means taking two things quite seriously, which is really rigorously undoing a lot of the unbuilding a lot of the practices that we've inherited, that we've we've been dealt the cards we've been dealt. Also, you know, really seriously taking the imaginative project seriously. If we've inherited over 500 years of thinking, there is an imaginative project on the scale of which is absolutely enormous that requires these kinds of speculative propositions that very radically, reimagine what our society looks like, when you take sexuality seriously. A broader kind of spectrum of sexuality really seriously, and

how that remakes the world. Yeah. And also think about its intersections, as this project does with class with production with labour with race. And so um, yeah, it's very exciting to see this kind of work happening. Yeah. And it is entirely appropriate for the scale of challenges that we have ahead of us.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 23:43

Yeah. And I guess it's a bit like a rubber band as well, right? You know, if you speculate on something, and there's big, wild speculation, when you pull the rubber band back, even if there's one tiny bit of that, that is, like, materially doable, in the current moment, it's doing something wonderful.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 23:59

Totally. But I think the thing that really inspires me about our students and our colleagues here at the RCA, is that there isn't a sense that we have to wait for that rubber band to snap back. Right, right. We can be demanding. It's for this extent. And actually really seriously looking at how do we actually build that? How do we get there, and that's what the M Arch is doing. So it has one unit, that just Transition Unit, which asked students to speculate to stretch that rubber band to its fullest extent. And then to think about what kinds of work we need to do now in order to realise that vision.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 24:14

Yeah. Yeah.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 24:14

And that's something that I see across all of the programmes within our school, which is really exciting that refusal to accept even the smallest compromise.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 24:44

Right. Yeah, yep, yep, yep. Yeah.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 24:46

And, you know, this is a this is an existential conversation, really. So we I don't think we have the luxury anymore of accepting piecemeal change.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 24:55

Yeah. Yeah. It's so important. It's so difficult, isn't it? Well, maybe it's just my brain that finds it

difficult and scary to imagine from, from the beginning of the tweaking of the road to how much change can happen.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 25:09

No, I think you're right. I think it is scary. And that's why that's why I often use the term brave, because I think you have to be really, you have to take a leap. Yeah, actually, and stand by it and put in the work of standing by it.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 25:23

Yeah, I mean, this is coming from a kind of music point of view. But I know that, you know, David Bowie and Bjork always talk about the idea that or did always talk about the idea that there should always be a little bit of fear in what you're doing not like an overwhelming like deep anxiety, which is a little bit of fear in what you're doing that keeps you going. Right.

**T** Thandi Loewenson 25:39

Absolutely. And I mean, look, I'd hope that the RCA, we are we are giving people a scaffold with which to feel safe to take those risks. Yeah, we're also showing them that there is a community around them that can support them. And that believes similarly in the in the necessity and the need for that kind of braveness and imagination. And I think that's what I love about the vnla is that it shows on a global scale. Everyone can look at it and say, this is at Venice. This is what we need to be doing.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 26:10

Yeah, for sure. And are there any student works or other alumni projects of note that you that you could tell us about that are doing some of this good work?

**T** Thandi Loewenson 26:20

Yes, absolutely. So, okay, there are just honestly too many to mention. I wish I could call on them all. They're, they're fantastic. And thank you for pointing to the online platform, RCA 2023. A kind of happy consequence of the pandemic was that these online platforms started to move aids. So there is also an archive of them. And I would encourage everyone to dive into them.

**B** Benji Jeffrey 26:46

I think as well sorry to interrupt but I think as well that's such a particularly for someone who's not from an architectural background. I find them so useful to look at is obviously wonderful seeing the exhibitions but being able to have that the whole process of someone's thought and of running through their profile is just so illuminating.

T

Thandi Loewenson 27:02

It's fantastic, is really it's a brilliant platform. Look, I'm gonna name just two. Okay. The one I've already mentioned, Lauren Lois doer, who looks at this practice of secondhand clothes and the global economies around it, which are fantastic. That's also hosted on the Venice Biennale website. I also want to draw attention to philosophy icon Roberto's work titled The blue hour. This is just an exceptionally beautiful project, which started to be developed during philosophies, a architecture work her final year work. She was part of the first cohort that graduated during the pandemic. So we did our kind of last credits and award ceremony. And I hopefully, they won't mind me saying but she was awarded the Dean's prize for the kind of exemplary project of the year and there was honestly not a dry eye on the Zoom screen. So the work explores the structural properties of colour, producing proposals for an emerging community of young creatives in Nigeria to kind of remake community spaces, but also open up new horizons for themselves and for their futures to which transcend the imposed restrictions of class gender and sexuality and more. It's an exceptionally beautiful piece of architecture. But underlying it is also this quite radically reconstructed ideology that underpins how architecture should be built by whom and to what end. And so I think it's a great project for exemplifying a lot of what we've just been talking about, in terms of how a belt project responds to this kind of call for ideological change. So they're not at the vnla. But I also want to draw attention to two new groups. One is desks a disability led research collective, which has been set up by Jordan white with Neil and James outcasts who also worked in the School of Architecture. And Dan, which is the Deaf architects network, which was set up by an alumni Chris Lang. And they're both doing really amazing work to rethink disability. So not as a stage of, of compliance, or the kind of apologetic aftermath of a project, you know, you go around and check that everything works or that, you know, a wheelchair can move through a space, it's but rather looking at how centering the lens of disability expands our worlds of design in really inspiring ways. And I think what's quite interesting about both of them as well is that they're doing this practice, through bringing people together through collectivising through unionising. And through hosting events and publications and workshops, that kind of start to start to create spaces for architects and spatial practitioners to look to to be strengthened by and to be galvanised by, but also the centres to kind of entirely rethink that the discipline to

B

Benji Jeffrey 29:48

Yeah, amazing, the Deaf architects network who say, Wow, I'm from both my parents are deaf. I've never really thought about architecture in terms of the sound of is that how they're kind of approaching it. Is it to do specifically with sound or space or just to do with supporting deaf arc? You know, what's their kind of angle on it? Yeah, it's,

T

Thandi Loewenson 30:09

it's a bit of both. And Chris Lang's graduation project was also fascinating. So he was designing a kind of headquarters for, I don't know if he called it the Deaf architects network at the time, but it was. It was an institution like this. And it was on the Southbank. And so there were lots of strategies and methods that he used in the design that would support a Deaf community, to be able to navigate the space that the space would perform for them and and enable them to

communicate to host events to be supported, in the best way possible. So often, that was through drawing on other senses through sight, but also through thinking about how this project might become emblematic, you know, so it was sited on the Southbank, it might become a space from which to be seen and to activate a community from and a new way of thinking from Chris Lang is also so Chris worked with interpreters throughout his study. He's since developed with another collaborator, a kind of lexicon of BSL that supports discussions around architectural design through BSL because I think one thing that he found was a limitation with with the terms that he was understanding conversations between his cheetahs and his interpreter than himself. And so there was a kind of limitation around around the lexicon, right. And so he's developed this, this new series of terms through which education can happen, but also discussions within the studio can happen, discussions between clients. And it's really groundbreaking work. I think, you know, in one of her curatorial statements, Lesley Lago talks about how the discourse around architecture has been dominated by a particular worldview. It's as if it's been spoken with one tongue. And so part of the work of decolonization and decarbonisation is also to think about new languages with which we speak about architecture with which we communicate architecture. And necessarily that leads to new forms of architecture to write as Chris Lang's project shows, yeah, spatial formations, material use an understanding of how a building presents itself will be completely different once you start to expand those those languages and terms of which architecture is spoken into being

B

Benji Jeffrey 32:33

Yeah. And I guess who was invited to do the translation? Or isn't every every little element of it, right, like considering the whole thing? And just touching on going back a little bit you were talking about made by whom? And most of the things you talked about kind of being on a local level, right? Or at least have had a particular locality? How important is that to architecture in particular, to think more on a local scale, rather than trying to do something global?

T

Thandi Loewenson 32:59

Yeah, it's an interesting question, I guess part of the part of the work of architecture is to is to engage with sight, and to engage with materiality. So where something is and what it's being made of, and then by extension, who is who is there? Who is doing the making? And what are the dynamics of relations that exist there? And so how does your work engage that, but I'm just trying to think, you know, a project or the work of someone like a BA camp whose site is essentially data? Yeah, we're talking about something quite intangible there, or indeed, and in my own work, where I'm thinking about systems of control or surveillance, that are made through space based technologies, I suppose part of the reason why these projects may be sometimes touched down on sites is so that you can understand both the global scale the planetary scale of the problem in relation to the frictions that it produces in life, right. Yeah. And that these frictions are highly contextual, that they depend on the dynamics that are existing in place. So you know, and part of that is also because the expressions of coloniality of racial capitalism of carbon are different, right? Yeah, depending on where you are. So there is a need to do the broader scale work alongside the specificity of work and also that they're reliant on one another that we start to understand one more through its expression. Yeah, on a local scale to



**B****Benji Jeffrey 34:26**

other they're both important because I'm probably going to paraphrase Dave Webster, slightly wrong. But on the last podcast, I kind of asked him about local and global we've we've designed and the interesting, but what I found interesting in what he said was that you have to focus on the local, but realise that you can't just scale up the local and assume that it will fit every type of global situation. Yeah, absolutely.

**T****Thandi Loewenson 34:45**

Absolutely. And I think that's, you know, one thing that is present, I would say throughout all of our programmes, is emblematic of or reflective of this thinking is that we really encourage students to bring their own and passions to bring their own worlds to bring their own knowledge systems from where they're coming from. Whether that be a part of the world or position of sexuality or ableist experience of space, to their, to their research and to their practice, because students are not blank canvases, students come into the RCA with an enormous wealth of knowledge and experience. And that is only to enrich their studies and their experiences here. And we in turn are also enormously enriched by that too. Yeah, of course. Great.

**B****Benji Jeffrey 35:33**

Didn't have to start wrapping things up now. But before we go, do you have any advice for anyone that wants to engage with these sorts of topics? Any I mean, obviously, they should all go to the Venice Biennale early, of course, but aside from that,

**T****Thandi Loewenson 35:45**

like this is another one of those enormous questions. Yes, gets the Venice Biennale if you can, it's expensive to go to Venice. Yeah. You know, tragically, it's not it's just simply not possible for a lot of people to get to Venice. Yeah, Lesley draw drew our attention in the first few days of the Venice Biennale about how the Italian government had not given visas to five members of her research team based in Accra. She was accused of bringing unnecessary young men to Italy. So you know, which shows how live and how current the questions of coloniality of border making are present within our world, something that will be no surprise to I'm sure many people listening to this podcast. And so they have done an incredible job of listing all of the participants on their websites. And so go and look them up, go on their Instagrams, find out about them, travel it, travel it digitally, if you can't, if you cannot go physically. But in terms of what what would I say, you know, what, what should you look to or there's one, there's one book that's kind of disquieted my mind a lot since it came out towards the end of last year, which is a book by salvage the salvage collective. It's very skinny. It's almost a pamphlet, and it's titled The tragedy of the worker. And I think it kind of skewers our current condition incredibly incisively. It shows how carbon capitalism and coloniality are embedded with this within social and economic structures, and importantly, how our collective imaginations must be larger than the worldviews that we inherit. You know, the book unflinchingly shows the scale of this work, and the tragedy of the limits of our collective unionised work against the forces

that seek to destroy and contain us. But it's necessary and inspiring reading for those of us who need to be brave enough who need to be imaginative enough and militant enough to build these entirely new worlds. And that is all of us really, or there won't be in us to speak of at all.

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Benji Jeffrey 37:46

Amazing. Wow. Thank you, Thandi, you've been listening to our guests, the Royal College of Art Podcast, home to the next generation of artists, innovators and entrepreneurs, and the world's number one art and design University. You can learn more about our programmes at [rca.ac.uk](http://rca.ac.uk) as well as finding news and events related to the college and our application portal if you're a prospective student.