

[Theme music plays]

lone: 0:16 What do people say at the beginning of a podcast?

Alice: It's like, setting the tone, and saying who we are.

lone: How can we do all of that in one soundbite?! [Laughing]

Alice: So this is the Polyester podcast!

lone: This is the first episode of the Polyester podcast!

Alice: First ever episode.

lone: I'm lone, and I'm the Editor-in-Chief, Founding Editor, I just run things at Polyester.

Alice: I'm Alice, and I'm actually a guitarist really, but, it's really great to be involved in this project and yeah, it's exciting to bring these voices together.

lone: Me and Alice first worked together four years ago, Issue Three of Polyester.

Alice: It was a long time ago yeah.

lone: Yeah we did a Power Puff Girls shoot and it was one of Alice's band's Dream Wife's first interviews. So we've been working together ever since, and the podcast kind of has been on the cards for a long time, or like in the works for a long time. For anyone who might not be that familiar with Polyester, or who may have found this podcast on it's own, Polyester is a biannual print zine and an online platform, we publish online about three times a week, I mean that's kind of pretty boring [Alice laughing] but basically Polyester is a cultural zine that encompasses feminist and socio-political discussion through visual and theoretical art practices.

Alice: For me, just 'have faith in your own bad taste' is a real like -

lone: Exactly, our tagline is 'have faith in your own bad taste' -

Alice: That's how I always explain Polyester to people -

lone: It's about not being embarrassed of who you are I suppose, it's about interrogating identity as a means of expressing yourselves, but all of the things that tie us down, socially, in our identity that are maybe oppressive as well.

Alice: And I think, I think also kind of finding... finding community and that discussion, I think my early memories of Polyester, it was this thing of community, it was this

really exciting thing that was happening in London where it was people talking about this stuff, and people listening to each other and it's been incredibly like, important, particularly to Dream Wife.

lone: Yeah, so I suppose without being cringe about it, this podcast is basically just gonna be the zine, but you're gonna listen to it instead of looking at it or reading about it. We want it to be a champion for like, people who might not feel like they fit in in other places that they go to look for things. We've got eight episodes, this is just the first one, as you obviously already know. Throughout these eight episodes, we're really just gonna be exploring the people, the collectives, the individual artists, and our own contributors that we love, that we care about, and get a bit deeper into the issues that are presented within the print zine and within the community, but celebrating that through this new way of communicating.

Alice: This is the sonic manifestation of Polyester magazine.

lone: We hope you like it.

[Theme music plays]

lone: The first season of the Polyester podcast is made with the support of Melissa shoes. We're really excited to be partnering with a brand that genuinely cares about supporting creative community, both in London and further afield.

Alice: And listen out because at the end of the show there'll be an exclusive discount code for Polyester listeners. So for the first half of the episode, we're gonna be introducing our 'Ask an Expert' section.

lone: This is gonna be a section that jumps around a bit, so sometimes we'll be talking to experts or sometimes we might be expanding on an issue that was first brought to the front of our minds from the print issue of Polyester, and we're gonna be covering loads of stuff to be honest in this bit, it can be everything from talking to a contraception expert about how to make the right choices for you, or we're gonna be getting some dating advice for fat people, but to kick off the first season our Online Editor, Helena, is speaking to Nadine from Pxssy Palace about how to throw the best party in the capital city.

Helena: 3:56 Hi, I'm Helena, I'm the Online Editor at Polyester. I'm here talking to Nadine from Pxssy [Pussy] Palace on how to throw the best party for our 'Ask an Expert' section. For those who don't know, Pxssy Palace is a space for women and femmes of colour to party free from discrimination and arguably one of the most fabulous nights you'll ever have. It's a space that I've been going to since moving to London, Nadine do you want to talk about how Pxssy Palace came about?

Nadine: Okay, so Pxssy Palace, I always say that it was like born out of like a frustration, and that we had absolutely no idea what we were doing - I mean we still don't really know what we're doing but... [both laughing]. No, it was a house party, the story was that my best friend Skye moved in with me and I lived in this like run down house just off of Brick Lane. I had three cats and one of the cats had kittens and we had so many people come into the house like all the time, like coming to

stay, couch surfing, it was just like a free-for-all, plus all these cats, so at one point there was like ten cats and like eight girls, like staying in this one house -

Helena: That's amazing -

Nadine: And someone said "oh it's like a pussy palace in here", and the name just sort of stuck, and we just weren't really satisfied with any sort of clubbing, even though we wanted to go out a lot and did go out a lot. We'd go to gay clubs, we'd get harassed there, we'd go to West End clubs and we'd have to like dress like a certain way, or we'd go to niche nights and we'd have to like act a certain way, there was nothing that like, really ticked all of the boxes for us, we were always having to sacrifice something, So we were like, let's just start partying here, you know, we could dress up any which way we wanted, like do all these cute looks, and smoke weed, and play the music we wanted and like, feel safe. We just started partying in the house, and that was like really good, we did that for like a year.

It started to get a little bit out of hand, people trying to pay to get in, and then someone offered us a space at Beach Blanket Babylon in Shoreditch. We were like, let's just try it, and it was successful - as in like, you know, three hundred people like turned up - but, something wasn't like quite right. The next month, we did it again, and then I was harassed at my own party, by someone who tried to pretend it was *their* party. So after that, Skye and myself, we had a conversation and at that time, I was starting to feel a lot stronger in like, my queer, brown identity, and I was like "babes, if we're gonna do this for real then I need to put all of that into it". A friend of mind, Munroe Bergdorf, seemed like she online was talking a lot of the same things that I was talking about, and I spoke to her and I was like "babes I've got this thing, I don't know exactly what it is yet, but I think it would be like, really valid", so she became a resident DJ.

For the next few months, it was quite a cute little party, about two hundred people come through, quite mixed, but nice, you know, felt like in control and like we had it sorted. Dazed picked it up, and we had six hundred people come through, and we just like weren't prepared *at all*. The security were transphobic to our guests, and we were just so ill-prepared, we didn't know how to handle something like that. And like, our whole community were just really upset with us, and people who didn't know us were like "I read about it in Dazed and I came through, and it's not what you said on the tin", and that's when we realised like, it's not enough just for people to know who we are and what our identity is, we have to put measures in place. And that's the point where we started to look into a policy, and Badge Bxtches [bitches], and talking on the mic, and a door picker, and lots of different ways that we could try and make it as safe as possible, I mean I don't really like to use the word safe space because it doesn't really exist -

Helena: Yeah.

Nadine: But, you know, to try and make a brave space or a safer space. From that point on is when the Pxxsy Palace as we know today started to, you know, get stronger. So I guess it's me, Skye and Bernice that work on it, pretty much almost full time, and then everyone else is like contributors or project based. We tend to have meetings like once a month, and everyone, you know, puts their little bit in.

Helena: The Pxxsy Palace policy of zero tolerance of harassment of any kind, I'll read it here: "Body shaming, slut shaming, racism, ableism, ageism, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia and fatphobia is not tolerated at Pxxsy Palace, nor do

we have any prejudice based on class, language ability, religious belief, or gender presentation. Do not assume pronouns and do not touch unless you are consented to do so. If you are not a queer, trans person of colour, or coming with a queer trans person of colour, please ask yourself why you are attending." So perhaps you could talk a bit more about the Badge Bxtches, and your feelings towards this like, social responsibility?

Nadine: Yeah the Badge Bxtches, I guess they just act as like, big siblings of the event, and security is, you know, a lot of the time, not very helpful, and can sometimes be even quite frightening to deal with, so we wanted to create like a buffer in between a situation happening and security. So Badge Bxtches are big siblings that are there to have fun, partying like me and you, they're other queer, trans, people of colour and there's a few white queer people as well. You just go to them, you lost your phone, you lost your friend, or you're feeling a little bit overwhelmed, or maybe something worse happens and you need to have someone like, thrown out, or for us to talk to someone, you can go to a Badge Bxtch, and they'll talk to us, or the Badge Bxtch will go straight to security, and then that person'll get thrown out, or there's a conversation sometimes, so it just depends.

And I guess the way I feel about that, in terms of social responsibility, is because I never set out to do Pxsy Palace, like the party, it was a house party, and it felt weird at the time to like take peoples' money for what at first seemed like a bit of a joke to me, you know, I was like "oh it's just a funny name we have for a house". I thought if I was always going to do it, I was going to treat every single person that was coming not like, a ticket, not like money, you know, that they were all individuals that needed like, customised care.

Helena: The fund for trans people of colour, the taxi fund, I think that's really great that that's come from that.

Nadine: That's been extended as well, so it's like all trans people, differently abled people. Cause we were doing that before anyone, just like paying for peoples' like taxis to go home if they were a little bit drunk and stuff like that. We didn't expect there to be such an outpouring of money and now, Mick's Garage, they actually give us all the cloakroom money towards it as well. Obviously we have quite a lot of requirements and, that makes it really difficult for venues, you know, they don't have gender neutral toilets, or if they do then it's not wheelchair accessible, you know, they won't let us talk to security or, we're not allowed to play bashment. So many things that we've come across throughout every single venue that we've been at, but with Mick's, they really support us, and the venue is like a nice size. I mean, we love the Yard - in the Queen's Yard - I mean that's probably like, actually my favourite venue, but we had two hundred people waiting outside, so we needed to move somewhere bigger. But then, that brought a lot of tourists.

That's why we put out at the end of the policy, if you're not coming with, you know, someone queer or trans, that's who the party's for. And we like always say it's open for all, because I don't want people to feel isolated, or we've had a lot of queer and trans people of colour that only know their family or their friends that are *not* a queer, trans person of colour, and I want them to be able to feel supported, and also for people to be able to explore their gender and sexuality. Plenty of people have come through who have maybe ID'd as straight or cis, and throughout their time at Pxsy Palace have come out.

All marginalised people do deserve a space of their own completely, without any outsiders, but I want people to be able to explore their gender and sexuality who have not, you know, sometimes it's quite scary, like "I'm not trans, I'm not queer, but I'm not sure if I am maybe", you know, I've - I've definitely battled

between all of those things before in my life, I think questioning your queerness is one of the queerest things that you can do [laughing]. So yeah, so I wanted to keep that open, but at the same time, you know, if it's groups of straight people, or groups of - of white people, then you know, without supporting their friends that you're trying to centre in the group, then, it just feels like there's plenty of other places that you can go. But then that said, I always say that like, the rules that we have at Pxssy Palace, the guidelines that we have, isn't queer ideas, those ideas should be adopted elsewhere, you know, there should be a party for straight women, and there should be a party, you know, that's a mixed party, that have those ideas as well, you know, so I'd like to see them like, spread a little bit.

Helena: You've spoke about this a little bit, but what challenges have you faced, has anything really stuck out?

Nadine: I mean right now, the challenges that we face as a collective, and a night, is making sure that everything sort of runs smoothly. When you're catering to like, four hundred people that come down a month, like lots of different queer scenes, do you know what I mean, we're not just like one scene, sometimes issues can arise and, it's not one person's right and one person's wrong, usually both people are right, and then we sort of have to take on like a mediation sort of role as well, and sometimes it's the venue and sometimes it's our, it's our own community, you know. But, I mean, we're messy, what can I say? [Both laughing]

Like, we're all problematic, we all make mistakes, and, and the moment when you're drunk and in the club, you can behave inappropriately, you know, so, and how to like deal with that afterwards, you know, and getting the proper support for someone that might need it or maybe that's just going through a bad time, and acted out of character, so yeah, it's tough.

Also, one of the actual main challenges that we have is... gentrification, cause Mick's Garage is good and everything, but there's gonna be flats that are gonna get built there, how much more are we gonna get pushed out, or how much more money are we gonna have to pay? It's all well and good, trying to put on these parties, but without the help of the government or the Night Czar, which we have one, Amy Lamé, but I don't know, bureaucracy seems to be like, against her or something. Sydney, like Amsterdam, like the Berghain, who's like, is actually seen as an artists institution, we need stuff like that, that's happening, in the UK, otherwise we're gonna see more clubs facing closure. Much as Mick's Garage is amazing, our challenge is gentrification, ultimately, so yeah, Amy Lamé, if you're listening, get your ass in gear! [All laughing]

Helena: The social media for Pxssy Palace is great, capturing the night with your nods to the Paris is Burning catwalks and things, and the themes are quite unexpected, like animal for Halloween, kink for Christmas -

Nadine: Yeah [laughing].

Helena: Is this intentional?

Nadine: Yeah, so if you ever have any ideas, please like, send them our way, because we're running out, like two days before we're supposed to go live with the event, and we're like "what are we gonna do?!" [Helena laughing] So that's like the goal of this year, is to be more organised, like with the shoots and have them plan them ahead of time, and also giving people more time to get an outfit if they wanna dress up,

cause, not everyone dresses up at the event, about forty percent of people come to theme, and then everyone else just dresses what we want, you know, so the themes are mostly like, for Pxssy Palace, and then if everybody wants to join in that's cool. But yeah, they are all quite like, last minute, and just what we feel at the time, you know, like for animal print we kind of felt like there was a lot of animal print going on at that time, and also everyone's got a bit of animal print, its easy or cheap to get. We're like "okay that'll be a good theme to do". Kink was like, our Instagram followers voted to do a party again, so we had Merry Kinkmas...

Helena: That was the best - both of them were amazing actually.

Nadine: Yeah it was really fun, so I mean, yeah but if anyone ever has any ideas please send them our way. The next one is prom, which is the 22nd of February -

Helena: Amazing -

Nadine: And then in March, it's gonna be like a stripper theme, and then in April it's gonna be Game of Hoes.

Helena: Oh my god [all laughing].

Nadine: Because, for the Game of Thrones like releasing, the final series is coming out in April, so -

Helena: That's so good.

Nadine: Yeah, it'll be fun.

Helena: Pxssy Palace as a brand has taken on quite a lot of new threads, the radio, workshops, collaborations, and parties for your trans friends. What's the difference between the branded work and the club night itself?

Nadine: So I guess the club night, we have like full control, but we try and keep those brand collaborations to be quite educational, and then there'll always be like a small party at the end, like we did one with like White City House, and that was a panel on safe spaces, and the value of them, especially in that area of London. And with Napapijri we just did a round of workshops and panels, there was one on intersectional feminism 101, cause I kind of feel there's like the safe space, intersectional feminism, inclusion, all of these are buzzwords, but a lot of people, especially a lot of people that come to Pxssy Palace, don't actually know what those mean, they look at the word cisgender and they go "what, what is that?", you know, and then they look it up themselves, so sometimes they don't, you know. I think, it's not feasible to expect everybody to have the accessibility or to know the language that we tend to talk in, so I wanted to create like a, series of panels and workshops that was just taking things back down to basics so it was like, intro to intersectional feminism, it was like a self-care workshop.

And then we also do The Sanctuary, which we're trying to bring into the monthly party as well. We did it at Lovebox last year and it was like a soft area for women and LGBT people only. There was like a drink spike detector kit, some lube,

condoms, dams, and there was a community library with like loads of people's zines and magazines, like for them to read, like drawing, there was self defence workshops, there was a self love workshop, an anxiety release workshop. It was amazing, just cause like, festivals are kind of designed for you to get like, as messed up as possible and not really designed for you to like chill or have fun, or to breastfeed or to take a moment, and also, for women, as soon as they enter a festival their chances of sexual assault and rape goes up more than fifty percent, and festivals aren't really addressing it. So we're hoping to take a mini Sanctuary like to every single party that we go to, so that there'll be a little section that's non drinking and that's chill and relaxed and a little bit quieter. Nightlife shouldn't be just around like, partying and drinking.

Helena: Pxssy Palace seems to evolving abroad?

Nadine: Yeah.

Helena: There was Amsterdam last week -

Nadine: So yeah, we've done a few DJ gigs like elsewhere, all over, but Amsterdam, it wasn't really our party, it was Lapa. It was Night Czar of Amsterdam, Shamiro, who's really cool, and he invited us to come and DJ. They've all got their own policy already, but then they adopted ours for the night, and teamed us up with some people, like House of Vineyard, which is a ballroom house in Amsterdam, and quite a lot of people came down, so that was good. What I'd quite like to do, because it's like a kind of global trend right now - people are trying to create nightlife in their own image, and trying to create like safer and more inclusive policies within nightlife. A little dream of mine is to go and like, do collaborations with all of these parties, and also find out like "what are your struggles, are they the same as mine, can I learn from you, can you learn from me?".

For example, like Sarah Wild in Glasgow, where I'm from, she's amazing, she like basically single-handedly cleared a path for women to start DJing in Glasgow, but her main problem is getting like the queer and trans people of colour in Glasgow to believe that the party's okay for them to have, you know, and believe that they deserve it. I know there's parties in Birmingham, and in Newcastle, in Manchester, in Leeds, you know, so I'd love to go and collab with them all, and share ideas, that's like a small dream of mine. So if anyone listening wanna give me some money to do that, that'd be great [all laughing].

Helena: Do you have any memorable moments, and any advice going forward?

Nadine: Okay so, memorable moments, oh my god there's so so so many, Sanctuary was beautiful, like that was really - I didn't expect it to be as emotional as it was, just cause so many people came through the festival who didn't know that it was gonna be there, and was like "wow, I needed this", people who'd been going to festivals for years, and people who'd never gone to a festival, who were like "I didn't know it was gonna be like this, I thought I'd pay X amount of money and see all my favourite artists in one day, but I didn't know it was gonna be as intense as this". The welfare tents tend to be really clinical, do you know what I mean, so to have a cute little area that they could go to, I'm really excited about developing that. Every single party, there's always like an emotional moment, cause, somebody'll come up to you and thank you, or you know, were scared to like go on the runway and they've been coming for like three or four months and they're like "okay, now's my time", and then you see them doing their thing -

Helena: That's so good.

Nadine: And it's so so so cute, and Skye, who co-founded Pxssy Palace with me, it was her birthday, it fell on a Pxssy Palace, and we did a big surprise and got her a cake and Nadia Rose came out and like serenaded her [Helena laughing], and it was just so amazing, you know, it was like a movie, so yeah, that was a pretty memorable moment. I mean, almost every single Pxssy Palace I almost cry cause there's like a cute thing that happens, yeah. And advice, advice, what for people getting into nights?

Helena: Yeah.

Nadine: I've worked in nightlife for a long time, so people have always asked me like "how did you get these resources, or how did you get into it?". Well like nightlife is like almost like the only language that I can speak. I know how to talk to managers, I know how to talk to security, and the same with Skye, she's worked in nightlife for a long time too, so that was like our strengths, but I always say to people who are starting to put on their own nights like, the first party is always gonna be good cause all your pals are gonna come, but then it's how do you make them come again, or seek other people? And there's so many different ways to do that, that's actually the other, the workshop that we did in Napapijri, is how to put on your own inclusive night, or, for people that already had a night, how to have inclusivity in mind moving forward.

Be patient, don't expect to make any money, especially the first five parties, and seek out information from people who have done it before. Don't be scared to do it, just because Pxssy Palace exists, BBZ exists, and also the plethora of all other amazing nights that have just started, like we deserve choice, we deserve a niche night, like a little emo queer night, or anything like, there's always, always room for more, you know, so don't be afraid just cause there's other nights going on, and also like reach out to me, I'll give you advice, other parties will totally give you advice, on what you need to do. But just be patient, and also, don't pay people straight away. Make a deal with like your DJ's and say like, I don't know how much money I'm gonna make on this night so like, I can't pay you, or I can pay for your taxis, or something like that, and then as I grow, you'll grow with me.

The big mistake that we made was like, "okay, yeah, let's get a photographer for £100, and let's get this DJ for £150", and, you know, for the first five or six months, me and Skye were paying everybody out of our own pocket, and luckily I had a decent job at the time so, be patient, be sensible with money, and, there's gonna be a lot of ups and downs before you start to get a level amount of people every month. And sometimes some nights are short-lived, you know, like, I'm thirty now, so in my fifteen years of clubbing, some amazing nights only lasted a year, and some mediocre nights last for twenty years. So sometimes there's moments in time, so catch your moment, and jump in and jump out when the time is right.

Helena: That was Nadine, and you can find her Instagram tag [@nadineartois] in the episode description. You can also keep up with Pxssy Palace on the tag @pxssypalace, and the next club night will be prom themed on the 22nd Feb at Mick's Garage.

[Theme music plays]

lone: 22:41 For the second half of the podcast, we are talking to a different artist, contributor, or generally creative person, each episode about something they're completely obsessed with, that has nothing to do with specifically how they make money, or how they got to where they are in their career or something like that.

Alice: It seemed like really important to just get different facets of these creatives as people and also like, the way this all feeds into their practice, and just stuff that people don't normally ask them about.

lone: I think often, especially when young artists or again, just generally creative people, especially those that come from marginalised communities or backgrounds, are featured in the wider press, or even just in general in the press, it's always just like "well, how did you get to where you are, because you're the anomaly, and this is - we need to interrogate this, and you're only put on a pedestal as some sort of aspirational figure and we're not gonna interrogate anything else any more" -

Alice: Yeah, this kind of lazy journalism, lazy journalism...

lone: Exactly, so we wanted to take it out of that a bit, have - I mean it sounds embarrassing, but have fun with it, I suppose [both laugh]. And -

Alice: Just have a chat -

lone: Yeah exactly, just have a chat about something, with the pressure off, and find out what really makes the people that we enjoy consuming their work, what really makes them tick. So this is Rene Matic, she's the first in this series. She's a practicing fine artist but also still a student at Central Saint Martins, she'll explain a bit more about her work, but I first came to meet Rene, probably about a year ago, at a Polyester party, and her and her wife Maggie have been kind of involved in the zine ever since they contributed some illustrations to the last issue, and Maggie contributed a reading list, and Rene's gonna be talking about her infatuation with skinhead culture and subcultural practices more generally.

Alice: Let's go.

[Theme music plays]

Rene: 24:36 My name's Rene Matic, I'm an artist, I make work about subcultural production and identity, specifically diaspora art, and what the fuck's up with that, basically [laughing].

lone: What do you mean specifically when you say subcultural production?

Rene: Subcultural production is any group that feels itself to be outside of society, and like actively resists the kind of social structures of a society. My favourite works so far would probably have to be a film I made last year called 'This All Belongs to You', which is basically just a sixteen minute, forty three second, slow motion film of me dancing to Nina Simone's Little Girl Blue, and I'm in full skinhead gear and I'm just outside some garages and like voguing and doing the ting.

lone: So I suppose, in one respect, it's actually cheating having you on talking about skinheads and subculture, because this is meant to be something that doesn't cross over with your work.

Rene: I do make work about this topic, but at the same time, I don't get to speak about it, and like, put all my references in, and like, I don't ever get to speak about *why* I do it, people just kind of see it and are like "oh okay you're doing this thing", but they're not really sure why. I wish that I was asked about it more, but at the same time I do like to kind of keep that opacity, because a lot of the time, when artists of colour make work, there's this demand to kind of catch everyone up on *why* they do it, and their experiences, and, you know, there's this demand to educate, rather than just exist as an artist and make work and have it read through a lens that is *art*, rather than race, or gender, or sexuality.

Um, I probably first discovered skinhead culture through my dad, when I was little, through music, I never really understood that the music he listened to was a genre of like ska or reggae or two-tone, but I knew that it was something that he loved and something that was a really big part of his identity. And then gradually as I got older I kind of recognised what it was, which made me ask my dad questions, and understand that as, as part of my history and my culture.

lone: So, for anyone listening who may have never heard of skinhead culture before, or have no idea what it looks like, or what it sounds like, how would you describe it to them?

Rene: The skinhead subculture came about in the late sixties because of the Windrush generation moving over to England, and then kind of living and working alongside the white working classes, and then those guys had kids, and all of the kids were like, integrated and then, I suppose, it was birthed from their relationships and their friendships and through sharing of knowledge and politics and aesthetics and music. So, it was this like utopia of gorgeousness. It was less appropriation, and more of an actual appreciation, and like the cultural exchange, and that is the same for the clothing as well. The clothing came about through, basically, white working class kids kind of starting to work, and looking like their dads, and wearing like worker boots and shirts and sta pressed trousers, and then that also fed into the rude boy aesthetic that was coming over from Jamaica, which is just like tonic suits and really sharply dressed people [laughing], which England had never really seen before, especially in young people, they'd never really seen this clean way of dressing from young people, and I think it was really exciting.

lone: Definitely, so what would you say was the movement's cultural heyday, and when was that?

Rene: So it started predominantly in 68, but then just continued, and in the eighties there was a resurgence I supposed, and then obviously since then, unfortunately it has been co-opted by white supremacists, which is... confusing as hell. Honestly, I can't put my finger on it, and I don't think anyone else can, it's kind of laughable in a way, because there wouldn't be skinheads without black people. The rise of like, Thatcherism, and the demonising of the working class, and you know, politics and racism became more rife, and so it got mixed up and muddled up with everything else.

lone: Yeah, because I would say in a modern context, the white supremacist reading of skinheads is maybe the overriding one for people of our age, so would you say that ever affects the reading of your work, or confuses people?

Rene: A lot of people look at the work that I do and feel very confused as to why this like young, black girl is making work about being a skinhead, and I've had a lot of messages from people being like "I don't understand why you're supporting this strand of white supremacy", but I don't expect anyone to have delved deeper into it, because it was just the way that, the way that the media has portrayed since they first ever started, is just negative, and so as soon as white supremacy got brought into it, that's what they fed off, and that's what they filtered through the media, and that's what you know, people think of it, which is understandable.

lone: So, I suppose as someone who dresses in that way now, in their day to day life, what do you find the most common reaction is to you, in general?

Rene: I mean, as someone who dresses like a skinhead, or a rude girl today, you're more likely to recognise other people who dress in similar ways and actually, it's mostly like middle aged men, who were like, original skinheads back in the day, who kind of give you this look as if to be like "oh my god!", and I've had a lot of exchanges with people on the street who are like "oh my god, I really love what you're doing!", and like, through Instagram and things like that, of old skinheads, so in that sense it's very positive. There's still... a big community of non-racist skinheads. It's still very popular in America, but, in a way that if you're a skinhead, you're a Nazi. It's very linked to that, and I'm sure it is here, but I've had a lot of positive experiences of it here, especially like with my dad, and like, shit like that.

lone: Do you reckon, if it wasn't for your dad, you would have ever found skinhead culture by yourself?

Rene: I think I've always been obsessed with subculture. Being mixed race is a big part of it, not really quite fitting in anywhere, and like not understanding my position in the world, you kind of look for other things to grab onto, and punk was one of the first things, in terms of music, and altering your own clothes, and kind of othering yourself on purpose, so that people don't do it to you. That was something that's always been quite a big thing from when I was younger, and then as I said, I didn't actually know that my dad was a skinhead as such, until I came across it as like a, you know, there's punks and then there's skinheads, and then like, just through further reading and being obsessed with it, then I was like "woah, I think my dad's one of these people - " [laughing] "- he listens to all of the music, you know, he's got the shoes, he's got the swag", and I just kind of put two and two together [laughing].

lone: As a teen, we quite often go through like loads of different phases with subcultures and stuff like that, so what other sort of identities would you say that you tried on before you decided on this one?

Rene: Definitely just punk, because of actually my mum's love for fashion and therefore Vivienne Westwood. When I first saw my first Vivienne Westwood garment, it made me see a different side to fashion, and therefore, I have quite an addictive personality in the sense that if I like one thing, I will make sure I find out everything about it. The first Vivienne Westwood item I saw was, my mum, bless her soul... [all laughing] saved up, *bless her soul*, she saved up *hard* for this dress, from a

Vivienne Westwood outlet that was close to where we lived, which was a classic silhouette, I dunno what you'd call it now, can't think about what you call it, but it's leopard print, classic like, you know the bust, that's liked draped, and it's very like Audrey Hepburn at the top and then fifties. I was like "what the fuck is this mate?" [all laughing], "this is the *sickest* thing I have ever seen", and she had it like, hung up on a special hanger by her bed like all the time, and I just remember thinking "whoever made this, is... this is sick" [all laughing] -

lone: Is a good gal.

Rene: Is a good gal, and then I went into like fashion design and stuff like that at college as well, and Viv was a big part of that.

lone: A lot of art is quite future facing, I think, in that artists often look to the present or the future, but as an artist, why do you think your identity is so rooted in something from the past, or something that you never experienced first hand?

Rene: As a mixed race woman, I am only offered certain images of myself, in the media and... everywhere, basically, and so, I recognise that those images are not true, and that they're not *for* me. The frame in which black, queer women have been pushed through repeatedly is not one that I associate with, of course, but when I was younger there wasn't an image of myself that I could understand, so automatically you go searching for those things, and I'm not sure that I found it, but it was helpful to see other people that felt the same way, which I suppose is why all those things were born in the first place, all of these subcultures. It's a difficult question when people say, you know, "is sub culture still alive?", because, I think of subculture as this like, fantasy, emancipatory utopia, but only psychologically. You know, you can't *actively* be outside of society.

lone: Right, so it's almost as though you're kind of digesting all of these things through rose tinted glasses or something.

Rene: Yeah, I think that it's absolutely romanticised, because, like I said, it's kind of like make believe.

lone: I suppose how - okay, so what, what makes you seek joy out of that, or what brings you joy out of doing that, out of that practice, of you know, doing something through this lens?

Rene: I think that, as I've said, it's difficult for someone with an identity like my own to find themselves in any context, I suppose. And so I find joy through making my own context, and my own fantasy world. I grew up in a very strange way, because I was raised by predominantly white people, as my dad doesn't know the black side of his family as much as my mum knows the white side of her family, and unfortunately those people are predominantly Tory, and therefore, racist, and that's a very confusing time to be brought up as a mixed race person.

As you grow up, as I've said, you search for reasons as to why you are the way that you are, and a lot of people can come to their conclusions through their past, and their ancestry, whereas I'm not aware of the black side of my ancestry, but I'm aware that I get treated as a black person on the street, whereas I've not been brought up by the black half of my family and that's so confusing. That's not to say

that I'm any less or more black than anyone else, it's just that, there are - I'm recognising that there is infinite possibilities for blackness, and that's what I mean about like, the frames that I've been shown, as kid or even now, that's not a blackness that I can fit into, that's a white, western gaze of blackness that doesn't really make that much sense. Skinhead is one of the only things that I can get a grasp on, of my roots, if you will. And, my black roots specifically. I suppose I found a home in that, that I can play with and feel safe in, for now.

Ione: Yeah, so hearing you speak about all this stuff, it sounds like you take quite an introspective approach to consuming subculture and all of these ideas, so then how do you piece that together with everything else going on in your life?

Rene: I suppose I've just recognised that I'm in between all of the places at all of the time, and I don't really make sense anywhere, at all. I don't make sense in the skinhead movement, really, and I don't make sense through the lens of blackness, as I've said. Like people need religion, I need something to grasp onto, otherwise me not making sense becomes my life, and I'm not here for that. Not that I'm grasping for confirmation, but I think it's understandable as to why one would need somewhere to kind of make a nest in, and I've done that through the way that I dress and the music that I listen to, and it kind of helps people recognise who I am when they look at me, rather than seeing blackness they see a blackness that doesn't make sense, and that in itself, to me, is emancipatory. It offers up a new kind of frame.

Ione: Would you say that you enjoy confusing people?

Rene: I think that, of course I don't make sense to myself so I'm not going to make sense to other people either, and that is okay, it's like Édouard Glissant has a theory of opacity, and he uses the metaphor of broccoli, but he doesn't like broccoli and he doesn't understand why he doesn't like broccoli, and that is something that he accepts within himself, and therefore he recognises that if *he* doesn't understand something within himself, then he won't be able to understand everything about someone else. The way that we attempt to define and understand other people is through a white western context anyway, so there's not actually a truth that you can draw out from that. I'm contradicting myself because I've defined myself as a skinhead [all laughing], and that doesn't make sense [all laughing]. But that's also something that I don't understand, and that's okay.

Ione: So, for your piece for this episode of the podcast, you've made a poster that is kind of like a dress up doll, that has you and lots of different skinhead outfits, so I was wondering if you could like talk us through that a bit and explain your reasoning behind it?

Rene: Recently, in my work, I've been making dolls a lot, like hand sewing actual physical dolls that are in skinhead attire or rude boy attire or rude girl attire. I suppose I like the idea of drawing attention to the vulnerability of... I suppose young minds, but also just minds in general, as I've spoken about, like how subculture is more of a quite sad fantasy world where we're trying to like, grasp at any idea of freedom. I suppose I'm trying to draw on the kind of commodifying aspect of that, but again it's not like a negative critique, it's just a critique, it's just factual I suppose.

Recently, because I did a shoot for Brutus, which is like a quite famous brand that's very linked to the skinhead movement, some of the comments on their Instagram were like, of old middle aged white men being like "this girl doesn't even... wear the right clothes, she doesn't even look like a skinhead, her trousers are baggy in this

picture". Like, I dunno, I found it quite humorous, and also, I suppose interesting because it's just a form of misogyny [laughing], and like, the femininity of the dolls is why I do that as well.

Ione: Where did women fit into the original skinhead movement?

Rene: The women in the skinhead movement didn't really have much of a voice, and I've been thinking about it loads recently, because obviously I wear braces and trousers and normally the skinhead girls or rude girls would wear skirts and braces, and it's so peak, because if I need a wee, I have to take my braces off, and my trousers off, I can't just like, get my dick out. It's such a - a labour, and that's, I found it really interesting because I was like "oh my god, okay this is - this would be so easy for men, to wear this outfit and to kind of get through the world, it's easy". It's actually designed to be easier, because it's taken from, you know, like factory workwear, but for women, it doesn't translate in that way, and so I think that speaks a lot about again just misogyny and lack of catering for women's needs in the subculture. And off the images that have been taken are normally of girlfriends and it's obvious that they're girlfriends, they're not just, you know, women of the movement. Being women, they're always someone's significant other... predominantly anyway.

Ione: Obviously the community you exist within now is like predominantly made up of women, or people of colour, queer people, trans people, non binary people, and it seems like now there's a real kind of, you know, the people leading subcultural movements are the people who have been marginalised from them before. Do you think things have changed for us, or do you think we only view it that way because of our position in society and who we surround ourselves with?

Rene: Okay, so one of my recent works is the crucified skinhead, which is called Sexy and Tragic, because as Pauline Black says, the only two options for women back in those days were either to be sexy or tragic, whereas the image of the crucified skinhead, which is to symbolise othering or being outside of society is normally pictured as a tattoo on like, the proud chest of a white man, and that's so funny to me [laughing], and obviously there's irony in that. Whereas today, we recognise that white men are like, at the top of the food chain and everyone else kind of, you know, gets lower and lower unfortunately. Shout out to Pauline Black, who is the lead singer of The Selecter, which is a predominantly black, two-tone band from the era, and she was like, one of the main images of black women back in the day. Sexy and tragic was the only two options for black women back then, and now obviously we're seeing that that's not the case and that we are pushing... boundaries.

[Theme music plays]

Ione: 43:29 That was amazing, thank you so much Rene for being one of our first ever podcast guests! If you wanna check out more of Rene's work, her Instagram is @bad.gal.rene, we'll link everything in the episode description *anyway*, and you can find out way more about skinheads and everything to do with that through Rene's amazing practice. So... we're gonna be putting out episodes every two weeks I think we've decided on, and we're gonna be doing way more of this, we've got loads happening, we're gonna be speaking to Polly Nor, we're gonna be speaking to Chloe Sheppard, we're gonna be speaking to Travis Alabanza, who is talking about their obsession with lists, and we're also gonna just doing lots to be honest, I don't know how much more I can say.

But yeah, again we'd like to thank Melissa for partnering with us on this, you can follow Melissa @melissaofficial, we'll again link that below and for all Polyester podcast listeners we have an exclusive thirty percent off discount code, it's MELISSAPOLY30, again we'll link that below. It's available on all full price products at shopmelissa.co.uk, and if you do buy some shoes, feel free to use the hashtag #MELISSASQUAD so we can see your looks! So... I suppose this is where we sign off, what do we say. Oh, like, subscribe [Alice laughing], leave us an Apple podcast review.

Alice: Thanks for tuning in.

Ione: See you next time!

[Theme music plays]