

In Conversation – Jay Carlon

Joshua Oduga: Hello, thank you for joining us for this virtual program, In Conversation: Jay Carlon and Joshua Oduga. I'm Joshua Oduga, Public Programs and Exhibitions Manager at Art + Practice, and we are very excited to share this virtual program. This program is organized in association with Art + Practice's current exhibition, Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures, a co-presentation with the Getty Research Institute. The exhibition is on view until February 2022. For this program, we welcome movement artist, Jay Carlon, for an intimate conversation around his work and practice. Jay Carlon is a contemporary movement artist based in Los Angeles and New York City, whose highly physical work is centered in experimental, site-sensitive performance. Born and raised on California's central coast, Carlon's work is inspired by his background as a competitive wrestler while growing up the youngest of 12 in a Filipino, Catholic, agricultural migrant working family. Hey, Jay.

Jay Carlon: How's it going?

Joshua: Pretty good, how you doing?

Jay: I'm doing well.

Joshua: Thank you for joining me today for this program. Very excited to be back in this space and be doing this program with you in person. It's a little bit unique, so I want to kind of start it off by handing it over to you for you to give us context about what we're about to do.

Jay: Yeah, for sure. So, I have a lumpia wrapper right here. Lumpia is like a Filipino egg roll. And I'm really interested in bringing food decolonized practices surrounding food waste into my creative practice as a performing artist. If I'm going to be a Filipino, if I'm going to be a Filipino organizer, there better be food at that event. So any kind of POC would probably argue that if there's going to be a family gathering, there'd better be food.

Joshua: Yeah. There better be food.

Jay: So I'm here to feed you lumpia. But I think before I get started, I want to take a moment to kind of invite the ancestors into this talk. One of which is my dad. My dad's name is Honorio S Carlon. He was born in 1912, which means we have a very old dad, but he immigrated here in 1932 and kind of worked in the strawberry fields, tending to the agricultural landscape of America. Mainly picking strawberries for over 50 years. And there's something about his story that is often under-told and erased, and that's that the Filipino migrant workers actually kind of convinced Cesar Chavez to start the strike, the grape strike. And so I feel like it's really important to ... And as we're filming this, it's October, and Filipino American History Month. And so I just want to bring awareness to my dad, most importantly, but also all the other Filipino Americans that have paved the way for me, in solidarity with other people of color surrounding that time in America.

And I also want to knowledge Blondell Cummings as someone that we should probably bring to the space too, as a unique ancestor. I think of ... I like to bring in my artistic ancestors into the space. Audre Lorde, I always invite Audre Lorde into the space. I always invite. And now recently, because I've actually

just become acquainted with Blondell Cumming's work. And so thank you for inviting me to kind of be in conversation in parallel.

Joshua: Definitely. I think that that was a really important thing for me, having followed your work for so long, and working on this exhibition for two years. When it came to the point when we started thinking about programs, you were the first person that I thought of to do something like this. And I think because of the way that you hold space in your performance, I think, and all of that. And you really just beautifully kind of gotten us to one of the first things I wanted to talk about, the origins of your practice. I think growing up in a family of 12, and you probably had so much going on. So I imagine a lot of it started in the home, as well. So I want to talk about not only your origins of practice that may be academic or professional, but I'd love to talk about the really early onset when you knew that you were going to be thinking about movement as something in your life.

Jay: Great. Well, actually, before I hop into that, I'm going to give you a little task.

Joshua: Okay. Cool.

Jay: This is a lumpia wrapper, or egg roll wrapper, made out of rice paper. So just individually slowly kind of tear them away. Yeah. I like to think of this as my ... in Filipino it's called tsismis, gossip. And I feel like that's how all these stories, oral traditions get told, and how the best way to do it is at the dinner table, judging each other. How tight their lumpia is, or something.

Joshua: Right. I was watching you do this before, and I was like, he's going to ask me to do that I'm going to have to do it the right way. Oh man.

Jay: So to go back to the question about the origin story ... It's funny. When I talk about myself, I often go straight to my dad. I go to the lineage, I go to legacy. And for me as a Filipino American, I feel like I'm constantly holding two very opposing parts of my identity. And so, about ... Let me take a step back. I started wrestling at the age of four years old because all my brothers did it. So it was really just, I did it because my brothers did it. I didn't even necessarily like it. But what I learned from wrestling is, I learned at a very young age how to manipulate energy, how to use force-

Joshua: That's what it's all about, in a sense, right?

Jay: Yeah. Yeah. How to use momentum and balance and shifting weight. And I feel like that is when I started my dance journey. I also did Tinkling, which is like these long bamboo poles. Sometimes it's called Chinese Jump Rope. But it's like long bamboo poles, it's kind of like the Filipino folk, the national folk dance of the Philippines. So I would dance in between these bamboo poles and that was ... I kind of had dance experience as a child. But then I didn't start training until college. And I feel like I ... Actually, a funny story about this is I was an architect major. And then I graduated high school early. So actually I'm going to, I feel like I have to ... I'm going to crack the eggs.

Joshua: Yeah, go ahead. We can kind of talk through that.

Jay: Yeah. I graduated high school early because I was kind of an Asian over-achiever.

Joshua: Yeah, definitely.

Jay: And I was taking classes at the community college and then I had a big break during [inaudible] and I took a dance class and then all of a sudden I wanted pop class experience, and taking a jazz class, taking a modern class, taking a ballet class. And I was like, "Wow, I'm really falling in love with the energy that my body has and I can channel that [inaudible] process."

Joshua: The physicality.

Jay: The physicality. Going back to my wrestling background, I was able to use that, to channel that. But then also, as an architect major, I didn't see that much of a difference in my practice. Actually let's just take one.

Joshua: One?

Jay: Yeah. I gave you too many. A lot has happened during my career. I went to UC Irvine for undergrad, I went to Cal State Long Beach for graduate school. So Southern California is my home. I'm from the Santa Barbara county. So it's just like boom, boom, boom.

Joshua: Those are two very different places in Southern California.

Jay: All SoCal. I'm a SoCal girl. But I didn't see a difference between ... I saw architecture needs bodies in space, otherwise there's no culture to the architecture. There's no life. And I feel like the dance, the body, the human form activates architecture.

Joshua: It definitely does.

Jay: And so, to me it didn't seem like a big shift in my changing career.

Joshua: Definitely see that. Yeah.

Jay: So I would say that is the long ... I don't know. That's my origin story.

Joshua: Yeah. I love that, especially because I think most people think of origins of dancers and they may think of them studying at a really young age. So I love the fact that you were doing wrestling, which is another physical thing, and I think also has to do a lot with body awareness, which is what I think about when I think of dancers as well. I think the progression of that is really interesting.

Joshua: And one of the things I wanted to talk about, following up from that, is when you started to engage in that in college, were there any references or any things that you started to see that really made you think about dance on a deeper level? Like works that stuck with you, or experiences that you might have had, readings, things like that?

Jay: Hmm. So my dance work at UC Irvine ... Oh yeah, yeah. So, get a spoonful, and then I like to put the square like a point towards me. And then at the lower bottom third, you're just going to put a little bit. Yeah, down there. And this is jackfruit that I made. It's a jackfruit carnitas.

Joshua: Love that.

Jay: And I'll talk a little bit more about this dish. I did it.

Joshua: I watched you do it, I'm going to watch you do this.

Jay: Yeah. So you have a little bit like this, and then you just roll it a little bit, and then you fold in the corners. Yeah. And then the important part right here is you have to keep pulling it in and tucking it, almost like you had to roll a sleeping bag, you keep tucking it in. Or if he's human. For the wrestling thing, the tucking, [inaudible]. Yeah, actually I think of the wrestling mat as a big lumpia wrapper.

But to go back to your question, what works? So Yvonne Rainer, who is postmodern, one of the founding mothers of pedestrian movement in a lot of modern dance forms, she was my mentor at UC Irvine. And she has this big manifesto called the No Manifesto. Essentially it's like, "No to spectacle, no to" ... All the no's are escaping me right now, but no to representation ... not representation. A lot of no to the standards of what traditional performance is. And so I have her in my back of my mind as I'm creating all the time.

Joshua: All the time.

Jay: And then I also started dancing around the first season. [inaudible].

Joshua: Oh, okay.

Jay: That's kind of when I started actively training, and so I kind of fell in love with that spectacle, to kind of contrast the no spectacle. And then in other corner of my mind I've got my mom, who ... I always want my mom, this Filipino immigrant mother. Yvonne Rainer, this dance scholar and postmodernist performance maker and the commercial [inaudible] dance world. To kind of ... I don't necessarily need them to love my work, I just want them to be in the audience kind of going, "Okay. That has a place here."

Joshua: Yeah. I feel like that's really important. One of the things I've learned working on this exhibition, thinking about Blondell's work, is how much dancers, more than other artists, need to make a place for themselves. How much often that is a thing. So I think it's really interesting studying with a person like Yvonne Rainer and having that influence happen really deeply in your studies, because that had to affect how you think about your work and how it's seen in the world. Those are not super great.

Jay: It's fine, it's okay. If my mom was here, she would she put those in the trash. But I appreciate them, and we're going to get better.

Joshua: Yeah. That's point. I hope by the end of this I will be really great at it. But what I was saying is that I think ... That takes me to then when you started making work on your own, right. When you started thinking about all the knowledge that you had acquired and then thinking about being a person that's creating work as well. This idea of spectacle versus non spectacle and all of these things had to be really guiding your principles when you were creating work. One of the things that really strikes me about your work, at least the works that I first encountered, was this idea of site specificity and being in certain spaces and thinking about the space as being equally a tool in the work as the work itself. So I wanted to spend some time talking about that and how that became part of your work.

Jay: Yeah. The origin story of site in my work is ... How do I talk about this? I was living in New York once I finished grad school. I went from undergrad to grad school right away, so by the time I was 25, I had just been eight years of college. And for dancing, I think you really need some outsiders' opinions, so I moved to New York and found, wow, I wish I knew that there was ... I didn't know that you could make dance outside of the theater. I mean, I knew you could, but I always just had these ideas that it was like, white women frolicking in the park or something. Nothing wrong with that, but I didn't see myself in that. And so, anyway, I was dancing in New York and I couldn't see an entryway I had in my career to choreograph because it just seemed so expensive, also such a big institution. So after I finished my [inaudible] at the Metropolitan Opera, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to go to LA and become an urban gardener and not dance anymore. [crosstalk]"

And somehow I ended up being a part of an organization called homeLA, which does public performances and private residencies. And I've been working with them since 2016, I did a performance on the side of a hill, which we could link to.

Joshua: Yeah, definitely.

Jay: It's called Raked, and it was in the area in Northeast LA called El Sereno. And I fell in love. I was [inaudible]. I felt, actually, in the studio and in the theater, that those spaces didn't reflect me or my people. I still love me, I still love the gallery space, but it was feeling really sterile at that time in my life. And so I started to fall in love. I created a work in a parking lot where I was ... I honestly was just rehearsing and I was like, "You know what, I really don't want to be in the studio. Let's go outside." And we made a piece in the parking lot. And so I started to really fall in love with being outside. It made me think I was also closer to ... My parents were migrant workers. So I really wanted ... and I'm a Taurus, I'm an earth sign, so I'm like, get my hands dirty. A decolonized [inaudible] equates labor to good work.

Joshua: Yeah, [crosstalk].

Jay: The more I'm sweating, the harder I exert effort, the better this piece is. But so I kind of just started going onto the site and then I started thinking about access. So, if I keep doing public works, then you know, I get passersby, I get ... I perform for not only the people that purchase tickets or donated or whatever, but also even the unhoused folks on the street. And they'll be like, "What's happening right now?" So I'm lucky and I love them. That's how site became a character within my work.

Joshua: And I think that's really interesting, going back to the idea of spectacle versus not spectacle. One of the things I always think about when people are making any kind site-specific work, whether it's dance or anything like that, is the level of control that you give up. You give that to the public and all of those things. And how quickly performance in site-specific place can be perceived as spectacle, even if that's not the intention. And so, one of the works that I wanted to talk about ... and we'll link everything I'm about to talk about in this conversation at the bottom of the Art + Practices program page, so you can explore the works on your own ... was the work Baggage. I wanted to talk about that because that was the work that I got to experience in person when I saw what was happening. And I think everything that was happening in that space ... So I wanted to talk about that.

Jay: Yeah, yeah. So Baggage ... I really kind of love creating spaces that are liminal, keeping work in the middle spaces or transitory spaces, the in-betweens, and train stations, shores. Having done this, I would love to create a work in an airport hangar, or ports. I'm working on getting a work at a port right

now, hopefully [inaudible]. But thinking about these spaces of migration ... When Metro Arts asked me to do a work at Union Station I was like, this is perfect because they call that the Ellis Island of the west. So just thinking about the people that pass through that. So when I was creating the work, I was thinking about what happens in these spaces? And then I saw the baggage claim, and I was thinking about ... I've kind of been, since the beginning of the pandemic, thinking a lot about intergenerational trauma and trying to heal myself, my own intergenerational traumas, but also maybe healing my mom's traumas and my ancestors, and helping to ... and my unborn lineage.

So when I created, when I started workshopping *Baggage*, I started to literally use bags. I was thinking about rope and thinking about vectors of identity, and intersections of different cultures, and pathways. And so I made this piece and then I really wanted to use a soundscape that reflected the communities that Union Station serves. There's a lot of immigrant communities that pass through there. So I used my mom's ... I used an interview that I did with my mom, where in the interview she talks about, it's just us and her sons [inaudible] and my brothers and my mom, and an interviewer from CalPoly San Luis Obispo that was collecting stories about Filipino migrant families on the central coast. And they asked me ... She was asking my mom about her marriage. And my mom was 19 and my dad was 59 when they got married.

And so, very young mother, very older dad. And I never ... Filipinos don't really talk about their ... they have a lot of repressed emotions that they don't articulate, especially through words. And so I found out in that interview that it was somewhat of an arranged marriage to kind of send money back to the Philippines. So to get married, you can marry for money and eventually send all that money, send money back to the Philippines so my family, my Lola, my grandma in the Philippines can make a living. I don't know if this is ironic, if I've got the right word, but when I was filming this, my Lola, she passed away. And so I started to realize that ... And when my Lola passed away, I noticed my mom's purpose in this country started to feel ... She was like, "Whoa, I came here to send money back. Do I keep sending money back?"

And this is deep colonial trauma facilitating this. The Philippines were colonized for over 400 years, so they've never really established self-sustaining practices. So then they [inaudible] my dad. [inaudible] my mom through this arranged marriage [inaudible] for a better life. And here I am, this privileged American, I feel like ... I think I feel really sometimes guilty for being an artist. I'm like, oh, I know my mom wanted me to be a doctor, or she really wanted me to be an architect. An architect of [inaudible].

And so the reason I'm mentioning all this is because it's the intergenerational trauma which is the baggage, the bags. I'm trying to literally unpack all of them, so ... Great. Now we get to fry them. I'll just put this here.

Joshua: Yeah. You know, it's funny, I've heard that from a lot of first generation Americans and artists. I'm one myself. I struggle with those things all the time, especially if I get [inaudible] thinking about what type of legacy I should leave behind. Pass that down for me.

Jay: Oh, yeah.

Joshua: And I think it's really interesting in that you're making work to figure these things out.

Jay: Yeah. So this is a practice that I like to call my ... I call it tsismis, which is gossip in Tagalog. And I like to kind of ... The things my dad never told me, and I'm not going to be able to get them directly from him because he passed away 12 years ago, but I like to fill in the gaps. He's a historical figure in that community, or he was a part of that generation. So through my work, I like to fill in the gaps.

Joshua: Meaning it's constantly creating a form of conversation and collaboration in that sense, as well. Just another thing that I think I wanted to talk about in terms of your work is collaboration and how you collaborate with other individuals, how you collaborate with space, material, all these things. We're really [inaudible 00:26:256] it's clearly grounded in some form of personal research, right? Whatever that might be. Is it you participated in this archiving of stories with your family and that becomes something that later on influenced the work that you're making, or you're approached by an institution to work on a program like this, and you end up doing something like that, which I think is a way of going back to cultural history and also potentially looking towards things that you want to do in the future. Thinking about Blondell, thinking about her legacy and the way that she looked at collaboration and things like that, I'd love to hear a little bit about your personal philosophy about collaboration. And then we'll talk a little bit about it from that.

Jay: Sure. Sorry, let me make sure the oil's hot enough because we want to be sure that these crisp to a golden hue. And I think [inaudible]. So, collaboration. I like to think of Filipinos as great collaborators because we are so invested in community. We really, it takes a village. So I also think that I love collaboration because I don't like being alone. I just don't like being alone. By myself, the extrovert in me is like, "Ah, I need to be around people! I'm the youngest of 12!"

Jay: But collaboration, I'm kind of ... I love the spectacle, and I love sensation, so when I think about, especially with the site work, site-specific work, I like to think about the whole thing as ... I focus on the body. I don't necessarily know how to create a soundscape or a music for this, so I would need a musician to help. So I like to think of collaboration as a way to just kind of help create an environment. So it's pretty-

Joshua: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. So for you it's a lot about bringing in other people in to help fill out things, or thinking about [inaudible], which I think is really nice. And it also speaks I think to some of the works that you make with other individuals. Even though that's not a whole part of your practice, being a person that at one time was leading the company and doing these sorts of things, navigating that with collaborators, I'm sure, is a little bit complicated, right?

Jay: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's always a negotiation because I definitely ... I think there's a time where coming into a generation where it's very common for dancers to be expected to help generate material. There was a time in history when it was like the choreographer came up with all the movement and it was a single choreographer, that was their voice and their vision. They made a technique. And I don't know if that's so popular these days and I'm not ... I don't have anything against that, but I much prefer to see what somebody else's body, how ... I like watching people make choices. And so a lot of my work has improvisation. I'm trying to lean more into choreographing scores instead of choreographing phase work so I can see the individual, whether it's an embodied dancer, or if it's a musician, or if it's even a set design. I don't know how you'd improvise a set design, but I'm really interested in figuring out how each person can thrive within that.

Joshua: It's really interesting. You say that set design, how do I improvise set design, you do these videos like the Dance Film Selfies, all the time. Seeing so many of that even in the recent past that you've been doing. I think a lot about how where you're making it must come meant to play, and it's like this little snapshot of where you are as a person, just as much as it is snapshot of the movements that you're making in these sorts of things. So I think even when I say collaboration, I'm thinking in a sense it might just be you making more, you're thinking about the space that you're in and thinking about how all of that is going to come across.

One of the things I wanted to talk about is your work working in video and working as a choreographer, working in support of other people's visions, and how you navigate that when you have such a strong basis in your cultural identity and all of the things that that entails.

Jay: For film, I much prefer the live. I love energetic exchange between people, being in person [inaudible] especially after the pandemic. Making something in person. But film, there's something that's really ... that you can do with film that's a little more intimate. You can kind of transport people more quickly that aren't ... to places even though you aren't actually here.

And for film, I really ... Like with Dance Film Selfie, that project emerged out of me traveling a lot because I was touring with other dance artists and I was craving a personal creative outlet. And I also wanted to create a series of work. I really loved that a lot of visual artists did series and I thought, why don't dancers have series? And so I started just ... I mean, it really started because I was stuck overnight at an airport in Russia. And so then I just recorded myself dancing.

Joshua: Yeah. [inaudible].

Jay: Yeah. We'll dance like Dance Film Selfie. And I just kept doing it. And now I'm like, well this is a lifelong project. So this is an archival. It's simple, it's on my iPhone, I just put it on the floor. It's meditative for me. It forces me to kind of go out on walks and explore something that I wouldn't ... Sometimes I like really iconic sites, or like a backdrop is just an alleyway somewhere. But yeah, with film I'm still exploring what that means. I want to do more film.

Joshua: Yeah. One of the projects that I was really excited to see work from that I actually found out after you started talking about this, was your work working with Mndsgn.

Jay: Yeah, Ringgo.

Joshua: I'd love to talk a little bit about that.

Jay: This oil is not getting hot [inaudible]. Okay. So yeah, so actually Ringgo is a friend of mine. So Mndsgn is a friend of mine. And you know, when Ringgo asked me, he said "I have this song, it's called Slow Dance. I really want dancers, but I don't ... I was going to choreograph it but I'm just not sure how to create that vibe." And I was like, I got you. I got you.

And so the song is really ... The lyric is, "If you slow dance, we can really take time to get to know each other." And so I was thinking about what the song was asking, and it wasn't asking for choreography. It was asking for a connection. It was asking for two people to come together and to have a sensual experience to get to know each other. And so when I was choreographing that, I kind of just created ...

Again, like I said, I created this container for the dancers to thrive within it. I mean, there's some set framework that we created, there's an infinity sign, if you watch the video, there's an infinity sign that kind of was inspired by [inaudible]. But just trying to figure out ways to get the bodies to move together. Of all the music videos I've worked on, this Mndsgn Slow Dance music video is by far my favorite.

Joshua: Yeah. I'm sure there has to be a little bit of personal connection that you all are friends as well. But I think one of the things I've learned [inaudible] about in this conversation that we're having is the way that you're using your work as a means of problem-solving, in a way. Really thinking about the task in front of you and using movement as a way to figure things out, I think, which is really interesting. If we're thinking about that, I wanted to talk a little bit about this idea of practices of care. Using your body, using movement and all of these things. How do you then begin to think about all of this in a way that you're taking care of yourself as well? Because I think when I think about choreographers and the dancers and moving people, like you said, often times the task of translating things, so you're brought into a project and they're putting so much on you. So I wanted to talk to you about how you go about taking care of your work and yourself and all that, given ...

Jay: Yeah. I'm glad you bring this up because I've been doing a lot of active work in healing lately. Some of that involves meditation, breath, breath work. Some of it also involves ... We talked about this earlier, community with ancestors and just different ... And developing boundaries, or voicing boundaries, something I've never ... It's a practice I've never had until very recently that I'm like, "Okay, I can voice my boundaries. I can also ask that of all my collaborators." And then if I make sure that everyone is on the same page, everyone feels safe, everyone feels like they can thrive. Of course I'm often the director, so I'm bringing everyone together, but I don't ever want it to feel like I'm ... that they might lose their job. I've been in situations where I've been like, "Ugh, if I speak up I might not get the job." Okay, it's getting hotter. Sorry about that.

Joshua: No, no, it's fine. We've got time.

Jay: Trust is a word that I really love to ... Sorry, I'm just going to check I didn't turn it off. I like to think of trust as the thing that fills my work. So, trust with performer to performer. Trust from performer to audience. Trust audience to performer. Trust performer to space, audience to space, space to ancestors, ancestors to the performance. So trust is something that I'm constantly thinking about when I'm thinking about protocols of care.

Joshua: Yeah. I think you absolutely [inaudible]. Especially when you're thinking a lot about the work that has to be your personal identity. You have to think about, you're bringing a lot of even your family's personal history sometimes into the work. Even if it's nuanced in a way that doesn't translate exactly, organizing all of that and figuring out how to get the company together and rehearsals and all of that stuff, can really be a lot. Now that we've talked about all this, let's figure out if we can get this popping first. One of the things I wanted to talk about is where you are now in your work.

Jay: When now. Yeah, it's funny, we're talking about site a lot and I'm really craving to be in a theater right now or in a ... I really want to work with technology and projection on this project where ... I said I'm a wrestler. So I want to kind of create this solo where I'm wrestling ... A duet where I'm wrestling myself, but it's actually a solo. So I feel like I need technology to help support this, whether it's motion capture or 3D mapping, 3D scanning of my body. So I'm working on that solo right now.

But it's funny. It's probably my first theater ... I'm thinking as a theater as a site. Because I want a controlled setting. I want to go to blackout.

Joshua: Yeah. That makes sense. I feel it is a logical progression in all the things that you're doing that now you want a little bit more control. That sounds great. Did it get to the correct?

Jay: I'm not sure what's going on. I need to check this. Heating. Let's see. If we need a pause or something ... Yeah, so that's the work I'm working on right now, is this solo. And I really just want to kind of figure out a way to wrestle the voice of ... I think of my wrestling training as how when I started dancing. But then, as a queer person, I always talk about wrestling and I tiptoe on the fact that it's homoerotic. And so I'm kind of wondering if there's a way that I can ... I think why I don't want to go into the homoerotic is because I'm kind of thinking about my mom watching my work and I'm thinking, I feel like a lot of Asian folks probably are nervous about experimental work when it comes to accessibility. I want the work to be accessible, but I also ...

So I'm curious in how I can be liberated and tap this ... I don't know what's happening with this. But yeah, that's the solo that I'm trying to work out.

Joshua: Yeah. That sounds really great. It sounds like it's once again one of those things where you'll be setting forth a lot of different things and you'll have like a research period where you'll have some problems-solving to do. I'm really excited to see where you take that.

Jay: Yeah, I'm really excited to show it, too. Let me check this. Sorry [inaudible]. I feel like it wasn't getting hot. [inaudible] It'll be a disaster if we don't get to fry any of these.

Joshua: I know, I'm looking forward to it.

Jay: You'll be able to see it simmer if it's hot. It's not quite hot enough.

Joshua: You want it to be like ... you want to hear that frying sound.

Jay: Yeah. Yeah that frying sound. It might just be what it is. So these are ... I made this from jackfruit. It's called jackfruit carnitas. And so something that I'm really inspired by is the Manila galleon. Have you heard of this?

Joshua: No.

Jay: It's not it's the trade route between Southeast Asia and Latin America, and essentially the Spanish conquistadors would essentially through slaves, trade goods between the Philippines and Mexico. The reason there is tamarind and coconut in Mexico is because it came from the Philippines. The reason there's corn and potatoes in the Philippines is because it came from Latin America.

Joshua: Because you see lots of crossovers in the food.

Jay: In the food.

Joshua: Despite not being from either culture, but having tons of friends and colleagues and acquaintances over the years, you see lots of crossover in the food. And I think also in culture, in the philosophy and thinking about family and things like that.

Jay: If you get the indigenous culture and you mix it with Catholicism ... [inaudible]. And you think about survival, that's why these families stay close and you also think about food. In the Philippines, we have tamales in the Philippines.

Joshua: I've had a Filipino tamale before. It was [inaudible] Banana leaf.

Jay: So, through my work as a community organizer, I've been thinking more about how I can bring food into my practice, and asking all these questions about how the majority of my family ... My favorite American tradition, the inspiration for this dish is my favorite American tradition is on Christmas. My family would exchange lumpia with tamales with our neighbors. To me, that's the most American thing I've ever done. And so this dish kind of fusion ... I think of fusion as the other F word. Fusion to kind of help me understand why in California Filipinos have such kinship with our fellow Mexican leaders.

Joshua: Yeah, definitely. It's a thing that in my life ... and it's really interesting. To sit here with you, a movement artist, to think about these things. It's something that I've thought about extensively throughout the years, but there hasn't really been a way for me to think about it on a deep level. And now that we're having this conversation that is seemingly about your practice as a dancer, it is now telling me, you need to do more research about that. About the relationship, about the trade route that you mentioned. And I think another thing in that I'm reeling about working on this exhibition of Blondell's work and engaging with your work and everybody else who's doing these programs, is how much of choreography and dance is a vital way of telling stories. And kind of cataloging these things and holding space for them over time.

Joshua: You see in Blondell's work at the exhibition so many works about food and about how food affects different types of people, whether it is the construction worker or the African American woman. All these different things. And so I think it's really interesting the way that dance and movement can talk about these really universal topics in such a beautiful way. And it can do it in a way that goes across cultures. I think food maybe is maybe one of the only other things that can do that.

Jay: Well you need [inaudible]. But we're going to have to eat some of them.

Joshua: Yeah. We'll get some.

Jay: Food isn't embodied. You can't ... you're inherently embodying as you're eating. And I think of food, not just from when it's on your plates and in your mouth, and not just from cutting it or picking it from the store, but like how it grew, and who grew it, and what weather conditions. I really like to think about digesting my food, not just when it enters my mouth, but like all the hands that touched it. And I think of that as choreography. I also think a lot of Filipinos, a lot of people of color, black people, we are embodied people. We tell stories through song and dance. And I think that's why Filipinos kind of gravitate so much towards black culture, is because when we came to America, we're like, "Where are the embodied folks?" And they're like, here they are.

And so, the way that we tell stories is through that and food. [inaudible] is important to telling these stories.

Joshua: So you're thinking that, in a lot of different ways, the ideas of food will start to come into your practicing more.

Jay: Oh yeah. I just started. So actually one of my [inaudible]. I did another food event when I made this dish, and a lot of my community came out. "They're like, are you dancing now? Are you going to be moving?" I was like, I made food and I'm thinking of that as choreography. But I'm not against dancing about food. And I do want to integrate it more, I'm just trying to think ... And this is during a pandemic, so I'm trying to figure out how food can be a part of my process a little bit more. And I think that has to do with my love for sustainability. Or, we mentioned earlier about finding more sustainable practices [inaudible] and more sustainable practices in terms of healing. And to me, food is interesting.

Joshua: Yeah. Yeah. That's a part of it. Tell me, let's speak a little bit, while we wait for the rest of these to fry, about have you worked in the Philippines? Have you done any work in Philippines?

Jay: So I was just in the Philippines in February 2020. And I ... Sorry, I have to make sure this stays on.

Joshua: The chef's [inaudible].

Jay: If we're going to cook these all, but it's not going to be [crosstalk].

Joshua: I think we'll the rest after. We'll have a little feast.

Jay: Yeah, sure. Sorry. What was the question?

Joshua: The question was about your work in the Philippines. Have you had a chance to work in the Philippines, stage work there?

Jay: I've been trying to work more; I taught a bunch of classes at my parents' high school.

Joshua: Oh wow.

Jay: So I just went to the high school. This island that my family is from, it's called Cabilao, it's in between Cebu and Bohol, which is in central Philippines. And it's three square miles. There's no running water on this island. They just got electricity. There's no roads, there's only motor bikes on these islands. So you can imagine, it's rough. But I went to my parents' high school and then I asked if I could teach a class, and I taught their PE classes for the day, and it was lovely. It was just so nice to come into ... To feel like I'm giving back. A lot of Filipinos, we send Balikbayan boxes, these huge boxes of often old clothes and Spam. I don't know why.

Joshua: Like to Nigeria, it's always Fritos.

Jay: Just why ... they have food there, in the Philippines. But so I've been trying to figure out ways to have a better relationship to the Philippines rather than just sending money, and Spam.

Joshua: Yeah, totally. That makes a lot of sense. And I think, given all the things that we've talked about today, that makes a lot of sense that you're thinking about that. Because you're essentially living a very embodied life, where you're thinking about all of these things, and it would make sense that you would think in that matter. We started off this by welcoming ancestors into the space and doing all of that. So, in my mind, it's like, "Yeah, this is what he should be doing." So, it makes so much sense. I'm so excited to have done this with you. I'm really hoping that we can eat one of these now.

Jay: Yeah. So I make a dipping sauce for this. This is mole that I got from Guelaguetza. You know Guelaguetza?

Joshua: Oh, yes. Love it. It's one of my favorite places.

Jay: If you're in LA, go to Guelaguetza. They have great mole.

Joshua: It's like the best mole that you can get.

Jay: So it's just a white dipping sauce that I made. The reason there's chocolate in the Philippines is because it came from Mexico. So we actually have mole dishes in the Philippines, too.

Joshua: Oh, wow.

Jay: Yeah. So it's a unique interplay, between different cultures. And so, part of choreographing this dish is imagining that I'm getting to know my ancestry a little bit better simply by ... Oh, wait, hold on. Can I get one of those? Because you got to make this [inaudible] one of the ... yeah. Fold it this way, and then I'm going to put it in here.

Joshua: Get the presentation on lock, everything.

Jay: There we go. Yeah. I feel like by creating this dish, it kind of helps me get to know ...

Joshua: Just show this to the camera. I'm going to eat [crosstalk].

Jay: Go ahead. Be careful, it's hot. You eat it. [inaudible]. Yeah. So making this dish is not typically this sauce, usually it's like a garlic chili oil that they would use. But I was like, well, how can I try to use more of these flavors that are [inaudible], but jackfruit grows wild in Philippines. I used canned jackfruit, but ...

Joshua: You didn't even have to say that. Nobody would have ever known.

But this is really amazing. I think one of the things [inaudible] this space where we've been doing this practice for about a year and a half. And when the founders of Art + Practice [inaudible] about things like this and thinking about people talking about their cultural history and talking about their artwork in concert with each other and feeling comfortable doing that. So one of the things I want to say is thank you for sharing your culture with me. Thank you for bringing the food in and feeling comfortable talking about your family and all of those things. I really appreciate it.

Jay: Yeah, I appreciate it too. Honored to be here.