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As told to Ruth Saxelby, 2125 words.

Tags: Music, Art, Performance, Inspiration, Process, Creative anxiety, Mental health, Independence.

On burnout, embarrassment, and having the patience to transform

Interdisciplinary artist YATTA on dealing with burnout, understanding your own boundaries as a performer and an artist, what can be learned from embarrassment, and being patient with yourself.

You moved to upstate New York recently. Has it been long enough to feel like it's having an impact on your music and art?

I feel it's impacted my mind. I took time away, a little bit, from music and art. Well, from performing mostly because I've been very burnt out.

You've been performing a lot in Europe and the US over the past couple of years. I wanted to ask you about your performance at The Shed last summer and the way that you were breaking the fourth wall. I was really curious if that was spontaneous or planned?

I just got an email from The Shed about a play that Claudia Rankine is doing there called *Help*. The photo is her with all of these white, middle-aged men in suits and she's in the middle. That's kind of how I felt performing that piece there. I think it was too raw and too spiritual for a space like that. I regret giving them that work in a way.

I was afraid that would be the case because it was so deep and vulnerable, and yet some people were being disrespectful. I was like, "Why can't you just sit there for 45 minutes and be challenged?" It was a really beautiful work and I could feel you putting everything into it. So your breaking of the fourth wall—the commentary that you did—is it...

I think it's the only way for me to stay present. Yeah, that was a painful experience in a lot of ways.

How do you deal with that and the burnout?

I've been reflecting on what I do, where, and why. I have realized that I deserve to be more protective of myself in terms of what types of performances I give to people. It becomes sacrificial and I guess I couldn't have learned that any other way. I mean, it really impacted my life. I was performing a lot and I think I kind of re-traumatized myself by performing. I put so much into that piece and I think it's an amazing thing that I did. I don't know if I can ever do it again and I don't know what to do with it. It brought up more questions than anything. Music for me has always been deeply spiritual and I've been trying to decide what it can be for me that is different from that, so that I can maintain my boundaries and my peace of mind.

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When did you realize that you were an artist, or were going to be one?

I wanted to be an actress when I was eight, and I got onstage and I enjoyed it. I had a hard time getting roles in the schools that I was in. I think it was because they were rich, white schools that I attended. I don't think they could recognize my gifts. I think that sort of delayed my own affirmation of myself. But I decided after graduating college that I wanted to be an artist.

What were the first steps towards that? Were you always multidisciplinary?

Yeah, I think it came from drawing and dancing and learning. I didn't know that people who weren't

actresses or actors made a living off of doing art. I started to find out that there were other ways of doing that, but I also didn't know what those ways were.

Is there something you wish somebody had told you before you started making art?

I think maybe trusting my instincts about who I spend time with and what spaces I give work to. Letting go of scarcity mindset when it comes to that. Just because a person or an institution takes an interest in you, it doesn't mean that you have just become interesting. You're interesting, period, and they are not, which is why they are seeking you out. So yeah, you have the power in that way.

What other challenges have you faced working with institutions, and how do you circumvent them?

Maybe bringing people in so that it becomes more about the collaboration and supporting each other. I wish that I weren't as deep sometimes, so I could just show up. With that said, I guess going forward, letting the idea lead and also allowing for some of it to stay with me, some of it to just be for me.

How do you decide on an idea for a new project? Or how do you know when you've found a thread you want to follow?

I start to see a lot of signs and I start to joke about something. Usually that's how I introduce something that seems kind of... Sometimes the ideas feel embarrassing. I guess a good idea can feel embarrassing because it seems so obvious.

Right, because it's through your prism, it's so obvious to you.

Right. If I'm laughing about it, then I'm like, "Okay, maybe that's something I'm a little bit embarrassed about and I should probably explore it." I'm so embarrassed lately. Constantly.

Why?

There's just so many things to be embarrassed about if you're trying to be yourself.

It's really interesting that you see embarrassment as this really fertile creative space. Is that something that you have felt for a long time? Or is it something that you've recently noticed?

I didn't get embarrassed as much growing up, or I guess recently I've... I guess it's because it's shame. When you eliminate shame, it can allow for connection and so that feels richer. But then again, maybe that's where you start to be a little bit too vulnerable.

There's something very specific about embarrassment in relation to digital spaces, as well. I guess it's because online we're so aware of being seen.

Yeah, definitely. I think I've been less online lately just because I'm trying to remember who I am outside of it.

Was that part of trying to process the burnout and come out the other end?

I think so. Yeah, I feel like I have nothing to post right now. I don't feel like replying to anything. I've been having a hard time keeping up with the emails. I've been having a hard time keeping up with anything that isn't just eating and sleeping.

The two most important things. What does your week look like in terms of your creative practice at the moment?

I guess, honestly, it's been a lot of tarot, a lot of journaling. I've been doing some breath work and improv. I started playing guitar again. Playing piano. I haven't been doing as much on the computer, which has been really nice. I think I've really needed that. Been going for walks, there's a lot of nice places to walk. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

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What do you do when you feel creatively stuck? Is that something you experience?

I experience it more so in terms of what to share with people. Myself, I feel like I always have something to do. When it comes to the performance space, lately I've been like, "I don't want to share anything." I was doing something where I would just make really quick songs and not even listen back to them, which has been nice.

Do you have a body of work that's instant improv?

Yeah. I haven't even made them into songs. They're just ideas. Just improvising on the guitar and singing has been really nice.

Is that something that you'll put aside and revisit later?

Yeah, I have a residency in May at Pioneer Works. I'm just letting myself play around and then, once I'm

there, I'll start looking at what happened.

I recently found a box of old notepads going back to when I was 10. Going through them has proved so useful for some writing I'm doing now. Some of it is like, "Who was the person that wrote this?" But some of it feels like treasure that I gave to my future self.

When you're writing it, it can feel kind of not that special. It feels so benign and boring, but then looking back there's actually usually something else there.

Why do you think that is?

Maybe you just have a different perspective and feel more loving towards yourself.

Are residencies important to your practice?

I think it helps me a lot. It helps me to have a place to go. I don't have a studio right now, which I think is probably okay because I've been resting more. It's really nice to just have a space and have hope. Reminders that there's other people who are making things and are curious about what you're making.

Because you are so multidisciplinary, how do you view your art? Is YATTA just the music project, or is it the wider art practice?

I mostly think of it as music and I often forget that I do the other things. I'm trying to think of how to remind myself about my video work, digital art, writing, healing arts, dance, theater, and so much more. I want to move into a space where I'm either letting go of the name "YATTA" or evolving it. I have so many selves. My life's work is integration. Sharing that process is complicated. I look forward to wholeness.

Maybe there's a time and a space where all of your works—drawings, poetry, music, performance—could be together.

Yeah. I think that's a good point. I think less that way than I could, but I think it would be actually a relief. I should think that way more.

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What does success mean to you?

Right now it means feeling good in my body and in my mind. I think that's the biggest story.

Are there things, outside of the things that we've talked about, that you do to make sure that you're feeling good?

I guess writing and smoothies. I listen to a lot of podcasts. I listen to a lot of meditation and chakra music. I do a lot of tarot readings for myself. Been trying to go outside more.

I keep thinking about the importance of getting stuff—emotion, art—out of your body so you don't have to carry it around.

Get it out. Yes. I think with this rest period that I had, I have had a buildup. I'm trying to catch up with the release.

What is the most surprising thing you've learned about yourself through making art?

How much I can change. It's almost spooky. I'm becoming a different person and it feels like it's taking awhile and happening fast at the same time. I feel, in a way, I can't keep up with it, with who I'm becoming. Then I realized that that's when I'm trying to describe it to the world and to other people. I guess I've learned patience with the process of transformation.

YATTA Recommends:

(1) Building a relationship with your intuition by listening to your body. I will stop in the middle of the conversation to put my hand on my heart to see how I really feel about something. It's weird, but it works. I've practiced tarot for many years and reading cards has saved me time and time and again. Tarot has provided comfort, time for reflection, and support during crossroad moments. I really love the podcast, [Tarot for The Wild Soul](#). It has deepened my relationship to the archetypes and themes presented in the cards.

(2) I've been listening to [Beautiful Chorus](#) and [music for each chakra](#) while I go about my day. It's nice to clear my head in that way. When I performed with [Beverly Glenn-Copeland](#) in December, I noticed his lyrics felt like mantras. I would love to head in that direction. There's a lot of embarrassment and shame that comes up around spirituality for me, but I know it's who I really am. It's been exciting to embrace it. I look forward to seeing how diving even deeper into reiki, breath work, astrology, tarot, herbalism, and sound healing changes my work.

(3) Reality TV shows about love. *Love is Blind* and *Are You The One* make me feel alive.

(4) Care Work by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

(5) Seeking out and listening to indigenous points of view / communing with nature / calling "hiking" walking / taking a walk with friends.

Name

YATTA

Vocation

Artist, musician

Fact

Photo credit: Hazel Katz

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