

Intro by Mish Green:

Welcome to the TransBareAll podcast - limited series where you get to know some of the most exciting trans and non binary artists and writers working in the UK and beyond today. Each of our guests on the show is featured in the TransBareAll anthology which is a gorgeous hardbound anthology of new writing and art by trans and non-binary creators.

You can grab a copy of the book at our online shop at TransBareAll.bigcartel.com.

This limited series is going to introduce you to trans and non-binary creators that we want you to know, our wonderful guests and collaborators and, as well as that, each episode we want to shout out some of the trans artists to light our fires and illuminate the world around them with their work.

We know that our communities are bursting with creative skill and vision and the more than 60 artists and writers represented in the TBA book are just the tip of the iceberg.

This podcast is a joint creation produced by myself, Mish Green, and by my co-conspirator Emil Green who you'll hear from in the interviews. However, Emil has had to step back from recording to take care of their health, which is why they aren't with me today and that has been a consistent theme for us over the time that we've been making this podcast. We are committed to increasing accessibility as much as we can and that includes for those of us who make the events and creations that live under the TBA banner. We work at the pace that works for us, for our artist guests, and for those who attend our live events and make up the community that is TBA.

So that is a definitive 'no' to hustle culture, 'no' to burn out culture and YES to kindness!

On that note, before we speak to our guest: the trans artist I want to amplify this week is one who explores kindness among many other things in their work - and that is Sandra Alland.

Sandra experiments with form and integrated access in writing, film, performance and interdisciplinary arts. San lives in Glasgow and retains ties to Edinburgh, Toronto (which is Dish with One Spoon Treaty territory) and Coburg (which is Williams Treaties First Nations). San is interested in language, mourning and archive. The one line that really jumped out at me from San's bio is that San is committed to slowness and to her communities thriving beyond the diversity crumbs from arts institutions. Her recent zine

'*Sore Loser*' on queer disabled grief was cowritten with Etzali Hernández and it just blew a hole in me.

It's now on its second or third printing and - with UK government deep into a policy of abandonment when it comes to disabled, ill and sick people in year three of the covid pandemic - this zine articulates the rage, the defiance and the deep grief that so many of us carry with us each day. This is the kind of art that works like medicine, at least it did that for me. You can buy Sandra Alland's books and watch their films at blissfultimes.ca and I will include a link in the show notes.

Now: today we are talking with the artist who created the container into which all of the TBA art and writing was poured.

Frank Duffy designed the book from cover to cover, including a number of illustrations that appear throughout and gorgeous little details like this scratchy painterly texture that runs down the edges of each page.

Frank Duffy is a graphic designer, illustrator and printmaker who has an MA with distinction from Falmouth. They grew up in a very normal suburb of Cardiff, and thus are delighted to now be living in a static caravan on a beautiful 20 acre smallholding in rural Carmarthenshire with fellow queers, rare butterflies, waterfalls and plastic flamingos. Their work explores the spaces between the cracks. Gender, magic, power, and death.

I am so, so, so happy to share with you my conversation with Emil Green and our wonderful book designer Frank Duffy.

Conversation with Frank Duffy, Mish Green and Emil Green:

Mish: It's wonderful to see you today and to get to talk to you because we got to talk a little bit at one of the online launches for the book and that just felt like this really intriguing taster session into Frank's artistic brain [*Frank laughs*] and I really would like to know so many more things.

Frank: Wow!

Mish: So I guess the first thing that we wanted to ask you about, was, was to start, to start with the practical and with what's in front of us, which is this gorgeous design that

you did for the book. The container, the visual container that holds over 60 people's writing and artwork. What was it about this project that, that interested you because you were very fiery with ideas about it right from the start.

Frank: This project was one of those serendipitous things in that when I got asked about it, when I got contacted, I think by Lee originally, I was coming towards the end of my Masters degree down in Falmouth and for my Masters degree, I produced an illustrated book, which had 33 pieces each 333 words long, exploring different facets of identity, of my identity. Some of them true, some of them false. It's this idea of shifting a blurred nature of identity and a queerness. And I developed this new style with lino printing and mixing up with the oil paints. And then this, this request came out of the ether, of 'Would you be interested on working on this book?' And I was like, 'Woah, this is what I've been working on. This is what I have been preparing myself for.'

So I was just like BANG, you know, of course. Definitely. This is exactly what I want to be doing. It was amazing.

Mish: That's really, really interesting to hear that your work with linocuts is far more recent than I would've guessed, actually. Your style is so grounded. There's so much depth to it and it feels like something you've been doing a lot longer than that. So what was your practice before you found lino cuts?

Frank: Oh the reason I did the Masters, I started the Masters is because I could draw and I was working as an illustrator, but I wasn't happy with what I was doing and I felt that it wasn't... My illustration practice wasn't speaking to who I was and I was sort of trying to find myself. Trying to find... Put my soul, put my stamp on the things that I was creating and all. You know, my commercial work, my clients were happy with it and things, I just felt like there was something... I couldn't connect to my own practice.

So I did the Masters as a way of finding out what I wanted to be doing. And that took some time. It took a lot of experimentation and the theory that I read fed into it. I didn't even know there was Queer theory before I started it. When I first saw Jack Halberstam's book '*The Queer Art of Failure*' on the library bookshelf. I was like... 'There's a whole book. There's a whole theory!' So I learnt so much. I just read, read, read. Absorbed, absorbed, absorbed.

And then, but I couldn't quite find a way of getting my mark-making or the aesthetic of what I was producing resonate with what was going on inside. I was really resistant to trying lino cutting and for some reason did. And then one of my course leaders lent me

his wood cutting tools and suddenly BANG, just something clicked. And I'd already produced a few illustrations for the book that I mentioned was my final project. They were oil paints, but they felt kind of goth. Which, there's nothing wrong with being goth, but I wanted them to be something different from that and then I started off... And I came up with the idea of mixing up oil painting and lino cut. And what that did was, the lino cut gave me the black and white of the binary, if you like. And the oil paints messed it up. It was kind of as obvious as that. And using wood cutting tools on lino produced a very specific effect that I really love. Lino cutting tools on lino don't do that. And then the oil paints just sort of subvert. And then you can do stuff on top, you can draw on top, you can put printed words on top. There's all sorts, and it just felt like it was giving the kind of blurred nature of queerness, or my gender identity, or however you want to put it. Because, you know, there's magic there, there's death in there, there's darkness. The space between the cracks, where the creatures crawl. Where there are little beetles scuttling around. *[Mish: mmm]*. That's the space I'm interested in exploring.

The smudginess gave me that. It gives a sort of slightly disturbed nature and I think it is just everything come together. It feels like I've been doing it a long while. Sort of everything came together and (I'm making gestures which is no good!) *[Mish laughs]*. It just sort of knitted together and became something bigger, you know and yeah it blew my mind.

Mish: Yeah, I can feel that when I look at your work and like for the listeners, the gesture was this like this round exploding hand gesture which I really get. *[Frank laughs]* The round exploding hands of everything coming together and you have a lot of hands in your work actually.

So you illustrated a number of different written pieces in the book and then you created illustrations that were drawing from your own interpretation and translation of the whole of the book. Quite a few of the poem-specific illustrations have got hands in them and then I started noticing feet and eyes and there's these like individual body parts that are present in unusual ways that are not binary and they're mixing with other, you know, non-human animals as well, which I totally adore. I think that's one of the favourite things actually, that I like about your work is the human and the non-human animals are one and the same. I wanted to ask you about the animals - the animals; the humans - were they a part of your work before you had this alchemy during your masters or was that something that happened as part of the alchemy?

Frank: Before the alchemy, I was never particularly interested in drawing people. I have always liked drawing animals, and I think it's perhaps being a little bit misanthropic in

the past, which is something I'm working through – I've had some recent epiphanies around that - and I think that comes from a place of fear of being the outsider, being this autistic queer kid and seeing people as a threat, you know, people I don't know as a threat. People will often say that they think that I'm scary when they first meet me. I don't think that I am at all but perhaps I have this kind of front that is a little bit standoffish because I'm shy and I'm a bit like, ooh is this person gonna hurt me? Can I trust them? But therapy's wonderful and I am getting through that. But yeah, the alchemical process, the sort of coming together of all those things, what I learnt was because in lino cutting (in the way that I linocut) it's quite difficult to be very accurate in the way that you might depict someone's face, and you have to be quite accurate in a face to get a likeness. What I started to do was to use a lion's head on my body in my book and therefore I could give my body breasts or I could give myself a penis, or I give myself chest scars (surgery scars) or you know could change what I was but the lion head would tell the viewer - the reader - that it's me, that no matter how the body changes, it's still who I am. And also, I think that the lion head helps sort of...it brings an element of ridiculousness to work, which I really like because I think that there always has to be an element of laughing at ourselves a little bit and laughing at our pretentiousness - for me, laughing at my own pretentiousness, I shouldn't generalise.

So yeah, the animals came in...you know I'm vegan and I've been vegetarian since I was 11, and I don't know, vegan 10 years. I say that as that's my thing, it's what I do and I'm not trying to proselytise you or do anything like that, but I just really adore animals and I see them as kin. And so I like to work with them and I like to represent them and I just feel like I've always connected with them better than I have people so that's probably why they show up as well. When you asked about the sort of disembodied hands and eyes and lips and things - I was re-reading my Master's thesis before I came on just to sort of remember some big words and remember what I'm supposed to be doing [*Frank, Emil and Mish laugh*] and what I read was how the 3 artists that I looked at for my Master's dissertation, which was looking at how people who are assigned female at birth can represent themselves through subverting norms. And what I looked at was how they used their body to subvert norms, and one of the people was, for example, Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo paints herself as really beautiful but there's always shit going on in the background or maybe her chest is open and she has got like a broken pillar in there, or there's thorns in her mouth or there's a monkey grabbing her breast. She subverts – she lures you in and then she pushes you away. She creates this disturbing feeling. So I was looking at how these particular artists used their body in their work and I was like - do I want to use body? And then, thinking about taking parts of bodies, which is still essentially human but it's disrupted.

Mish: Yes

Frank: But that doesn't necessarily mean that it's disturbing or bad. It's just sort of...we are so often reduced to our bodies as trans people and there are media panics around that, particularly with trans women and trans femmes obviously. I think ways of talking about the body that are a little bit disruptive are quite useful.

Mish: Disruptive and very much not foreseeing a particular reading of like this type of hand belongs to someone of this kind of gender, like that's very clear in the body parts that are in your work. It is disruptive of that.

Emil: I wanted to ask actually, cos we absolutely love the cover of the book. I remember I was actually in hospital when we got the first draft through, which - I'm all ok now - but I just remember sitting in my hospital bed and just like a rush of excitement just seeing the cover and just thinking like I can see how it's all going to come together. So I just wanted to ask you a little bit about where you got your idea for the cover, and also the process you went through to create that piece of art, cos it's quite a textured piece.

Frank: I was working with collage at the time and I don't know where I got the idea for cutting up all these different pieces of other people's work. When I was doing my Master's I had this thing called the "reject book" where I was bringing together other people's rejected - people on my course - bringing together their rejected work, with their permission. They would leave it on my desk (work that they didn't like) and I would stick it in a sketchbook and work over it, and so it was like a collaboration, and I found it a really inspiring way to work. And I had a lot of this work left over in this folder and I started to cut it up into squares and stuck it on this big A1 bit of cardboard, and then paint the trans colours on top of it. And the idea for me was that this was an anthology, it's a mosaic of lots of different people's stories, lots of different people's work, and it comes together as one thing. It's really quite that obvious - but it works!

Emil: Yeah, it definitely does, yeah. I absolutely love it. And I also wanted to ask you, cos you didn't just do illustrations to go alongside pieces but you also had a piece of work in the book as a contributor as well so I just wanted to ask more about what the story was behind that piece and the writing that comes with it.

Frank: The piece is one of the pieces from the book that I wrote for my MA and the illustration goes with it - they were both in that book. I wanted to...I know that this isn't the same for all trans people, and I'm not suggesting that this experience makes me more trans than anyone else, but what I was trying to convey in that piece is that I knew

at 3 or 4 years old. And I didn't understand why this decision that I was a girl had been made for me. I went back to that age when I was trying to describe what it felt like and I thought the easiest and most simple way to do that is as a child, use a child's voice to describe, "if I can choose which flavour ice cream that I can have then why can't I tell you...why have you decided that I'm a girl? Where does that come from?" Seeing that this was a decision that was made for me, and I had no say in it. And again, you know obviously people's experiences...people might not found out until their teens or their twenties or their forties or their sixties whether they're trans and all of those experiences are completely valid but: believe trans kids. And what is so wonderful to me these days is that kids know! You know I'm 43, there was no word for this when I was 4, 5. I find out, I was 28, 29 when I first heard the word words "non-binary". I heard choirs of angels, you know? So I'm just so reassured that kids have the language that I didn't have but just: believe trans kids. We know what we are talking about.

Emil: That's such an important message currently as well. Yeah I really loved that child's voice in your piece. That really resonated a lot with me.

Frank: Thank you

Mish: It's so difficult to conceive of things that are beyond language when you are told that language rules everything.

Frank: I haven't done much writing, as in creative writing for a little while, it hasn't just come to me. But it just sometimes will...You know, I know you're a writer and I don't know what your experience is but I'll be sitting on a train and some words come to me, or I'll be in the shower and whatever, and then it's like oh I need to write this down! And then there is also the thing that you can generate, that you can sort of force yourself to write and maybe the first page will be shit and then suddenly the flow comes and the ideas come. I haven't sat down and kind of pushed myself into it recently but that's fine, it will come when it needs to come and when I want it to come. But it is nice to have different ways of expressing myself. It's very gemini. *[Mish and Frank laugh]*

Mish: I'm just going to have to be like "absolutely" because I don't know what that means. *[Mish and Frank laugh louder]*

Frank: We're communicators darling!

Mish: Oh is it? Ah geminis... *[laughs]* Ok, so who do you want everyone to hear about? Which artists or makers or writers or thinkers? If you could download those straight into

the hearts and the souls and the minds of others, who would you recommend? It's an impossible question and if I ask you the same question tomorrow you might give a very different answer, and so we know that. That's all good. But right now?

Frank: I'm going to say Jenny Hval is a genius. Her first (I think it's her first album) "Apocalypse Girl" I've listened to so many times. She was actually one of the artists I looked at in my final Master's dissertation and the way that she speaks about her body and she's a cis woman, I believe she's queer. She certainly writes from a queer place. And she is...she writes about the body in a really interesting way. She writes about sexual desire in a really interesting way. So, there's a great line in one of the songs that goes, "I grab my cunt with my hand that is not clean". So, you know she's going now for masturbation, but the words "grab" and "cunt" are really vio- like horrible in that sense, in the way that it's used and then "my hand that is not clean" completely disturbs the idea that there could be arousal - that there could be a voyeuristic reading. You know, it would be unlikely that I would be getting off on that sentence, if you like. She just disturbs any kind of desire around her body. She's written a brilliant book called...God I can't remember the name of it now. "Paradise something". Anyway if I think of it I'll let you know. She also writes in "Apocalypse Girl", she sings about dreaming of being a boy when she's a child and she has talked about gender uncertainty. I just...I think she does it with such intelligence and she's so well read and she talks about language and patriarchal language and dominant language and how we disturb that. But she also does it with a wry sense of humour and this self-deprecating, "Yeah I'm smart but I don't really know what the fuck I'm doing" kind of thing and I just love her!

Oh! There's someone on Instagram that...I'll need to find their handle and maybe you can put it into this. She's a trans woman living in Berlin and she does these amazing comics called something like "Something is not totally repaired". I'll have to - I think her name's Judy Moore - I'll have to find her Instagram tag and send it to you because she does these really incredible little comics on Instagram that explore different aspects of being trans and sometimes they are very personal day to day stuff, and sometimes they're based in theory, sometimes they are fantasies. She often brings in pictures of Liz Taylor. There's a very glamorous aspect to what she does. Sometimes it's advice for cis people - you know a cis friend says "*I saw the most beautiful, glamorous trans woman in the street. I wanted to tell her. What should I have done?*" So Judy responds to that. There's just something really fragile and beautiful and incredibly strong in the way she both communicates visually and with words, and I just love her.

Mish: What you're describing now, that makes sense to me that that would really speak to you because that strength and vulnerability - that's definitely something that I can see

when I look at the images that you make, and it's powerful because you're right, there is so much strength in being able to stand in and hold our vulnerability. And I think art is one really interesting way of investigating that. And also as you said earlier - yay for therapy!

Frank: I've always been one of those... or I used to be one of those terrible over-sharers on Facebook. I'm not on Facebook anymore you'll be glad to hear. Therapy helps heal that. I mean there's one thing about blurting everything out in a Facebook post and there's another think about learning to examine those demons and thinking about where they come from and make friends with them in more healthy ways I suppose, but yes, certainly yay for therapy.

Mish: It's amazing to hear the journeys that your art is going on and the joyfulness in a world that's not so interested in hearing about our joy. It is an act of defiance and love to express that joy.

Frank: Absolutely I mean there's that quote by - I think it's Dianne di Prima - which is from one of her poems. It's something like "no one way works, it will take all of us pushing at the thing in different directions to bring it down". And as you say a lot of activism comes from a place of "ooh let's all get arrested". But ok you are a white middle class person with money in the bank who can afford to get arrested. Are you saying that a young working class black man should get arrested? I'm looking at you Extinction Rebellion. Umm...

Mish: Yes.

Frank: So...I know that they sort of changed their policy a bit now under that sort of scrutiny, but the fact that they didn't even think about that before they went to do it is kind of interesting. Queer solidarity is incredibly online, and trans solidarity, and we have never even met in the flesh and yet I feel kinship with you, because we have certain lived experiences that are in common.

Mish: Yeah. And I certainly feel that with the exchange, so yeah we haven't been in the same room breathing the same air, but we've had this long period of creative exchange through the TBA book.

You wrote recently about - you wrote a post called "on resting" talking about an evolution in your approach to work in response to the needs of your body and your brain and your mind and navigating that differently and being very clear about 'this is when

I'm able to work and then this is what I need to do in order to come back to work', having a much more strict kind of time away from work as well. And it's something that I'm thinking about a lot and I'm constantly negotiating as a fellow spoonie and it's been a challenge. Like I lost a lot of my clients when I became more ill because a lot of the arts world and the funding structures are built around a burnout model. They are built around a neurotypical, ableist, kind of you need to be throwing 16 hour days at it. Very extrovert etc. And that doesn't work for so many people, not to mention people with caring responsibilities. People with three jobs. There's so many ways in which that burnout model is bad for everybody. So I wanted to ask you - what have you found that is good for *you* in that respect?

Frank: The first thing I want to say is that I haven't quite got there yet but I'm getting there. I'm definitely finding more things that you were talking about - social media, *feeding the algorithm* is often what I call it because it's like that Noface Ghost in...you know it's just like "devour devour devour". It wants you to put something up every day at the same time every day, and I do still feel pressure to do that and if I have something available that I might be able to share I will post it, perhaps sooner than I should. Perhaps I shouldn't be sharing things that are in progress, but there is pressure to do that so I don't know that I have negotiated that successfully. However, I am getting better at it and I'm not gonna beat myself up for any mistakes that I make. I can always move onto things and make them better and change them.

As to what works for me, I don't know what comes first really - being autistic or being freelance - in the sense that I'm very privileged, in the sense that I have a commercial job that pays a decent hourly wage (as a freelancer in graphic design and illustration) and I'm also not a consumerist person. I live very cheaply. And that's not to say...we have huge expenses these days, you know our parents and grandparents had a much lower cost of living, especially rent. Because I have second hand clothes and a second hand phone, the only things I buy new are computers really and that's because I need them for my work. And because I've got a decent hourly rate I can afford not to work full time.

But, it's probably...I've done that and I've forced myself, even when it's difficult, when I probably should have taken a minimum wage job to pay the bills because I was getting into debt and I was struggling - I don't think I could cope with a job. With the way that I work I can take naps if I need to. If I need to have a lie down after a Zoom meeting I can do that. If I can't work for the rest of the day, then I can switch my work to being on the weekend and I can manage my time in that way. And so I guess the only option with that really is freelancing. But I know that not everybody can do that, and I have certain

skills that are valued by capitalism, whereas say caring work is not valued. So, that's a privilege that I have and I want to articulate that. So, what I have found works for me is that I work three days a week and then two days I spend in a studio and that's kind of whatever I want to do - it's often creative work. It's often messing around with pastels and inks and paints and that sort of thing. It's coming up with ideas. And then two days are weekend.

I feel uncomfortable talking about it because I wish everybody else had this.

Mish: Yeah.

Frank: And so many people go through burnout and so many people are in debt and so many people don't have access to the kind of mental health care that they need, and so yeah, I feel very lucky and very blessed that I've been able to sort of structure my life like this. But it is starting to work for me, for sure, and I'm much more creative because of it, and I think that my client work, my commercial work is better because of it. But yeah, autism is exhausting (laughs)...for me anyway. I don't want to speak for other people, but you know recovering from just meeting someone new might take me a whole day, so...

Mish: I hear what you're saying about feeling uncomfortable talking about the choices that you're able to make and I'm so sorry that you feel uncomfortable talking about those choices because absolutely everyone should be able to work in a way that is not going to make them more ill. I mean that's something I'm realizing more and more with the many, many people in my life who have different demands on their energy, whether that's neurodivergence or disability stuff, caring work, or mental health: there's something in common with all of those things and that is fatigue. Like that's something that a lot of us in those categories that I just skimmed over, that's something that we have to deal with a lot and I think that recovery time is not time off. It's not free time.

Frank: That's such an important point, thank you for making it cos I never thought of it that way.

Mish: It's not free time. It isn't, so the time you need to lie down, the time that you need to rest the rest of the day recovering after meeting a new person, like that's not free time for you. That's something that you need to build in so that you are well and able to do the things you wanna do and saying: "I think we both might be crashing out. Emil might be joining us after we all chat and it is absolutely necessary."

And I think that this is where like, especially with very... well, I don't like to throw the word fascist around without it being very, you know specific because it gets overused and misused in a million ways, but I do think that there is a very kind of fascist attitude strain of opinion that has been growing certainly in UK and other places as well towards people who have more fatigue-inducing things in their life. You know this idea that we are less, that we are not meeting capitalism's demands, and erasing that need for recovery, that need for down time for, you know, all of that maintenance stuff and that labour that we have to do that is invisible, that is absolutely necessary for all the other stuff to exist: for you to do your client work, or for you to have the two days in the studio - you know *all* of that - it's contingent on that and I really wanna... It's something I just... I'm so desperately wanting to see more recognition of invisible barriers generally in society. I think that's why that post that you wrote really jumped out at me because you're just making the invisible visible, and like, whoosh here it is let's talk about it. And it feels so crucial, so necessary right now.

Frank: I've learnt a lot from [The Nap Ministry](#), I can't remember her name, she's a Black activist and she talks about rest a lot. She's on Twitter and Instagram. She's basically like 'sit your asses down. Stop working for capitalism, it's what they want'.

Capitalism a) wants us to grind like we imagine Beyoncé does and she appears like she's one of the hardest working people in the world and I'm not saying she isn't at all, but I'm sure she has her moments of just lying down and going 'oh my god'. It wants us to grind like Beyoncé and also it wants us to be exhausted cos then we can't fight.

Mish: Yeah.

Frank: The Nap Ministry talks about rest an act of resistance and that comes out of narratives and discourse around slavery, that Black people were made to work, and so to look at these Black activists and Black theorists and learn from them then be like 'Okay, this is a really important theory. This is really important to know.' Who are we working for when we work?

Mish: Yeah, and there's so many lessons that we need to be constantly learning from those you know, huge, huge, huge struggles that began at different points in the past and continue today. *[Mish sighs]* The Nap Ministry, is that right?

Frank: The Nap Ministry, as in N A P, as in go have a nap.

Mish: I thought you first said The Map Ministry and she wants us to rest and I was like, 'all my interests converging!' *[Frank and Emil laugh]*

Frank: She very rarely mentions her name so I don't know her name, she doesn't post under her name and I've got a terrible brain for names anyway. Obviously there are people like Audre Lorde talking about 'the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house', we've got to find different ways of doing this. So it's just interesting to read around and realise all our struggles are all connected.

Mish: Yeah, they absolutely are.

Emil: Yeah I'll probably have a nap first, and then I've written it down, so... because I'm a spoonie *[Emil, Frank and Mish laugh]*

Mish: That sounds right, that sounds like the right approach.

Emil: Otherwise I'll just be staring blankly at the screen not really taking anything in.

Mish: While we're thinking about the things that are showing the way, I've recently been reading more of Octavia Butler's work, her incredible visionary science fiction. That's very much her and the thing that I think is particularly amazing is her work is hopeful, it's apocalyptic and also 'here's what's possible' and –

Frank: To read.

Mish: Incredible, incredible She's starting, I think, to be much more widely known. I've come across her work through listening to the How to Survive the End of the World podcast which is a very, very good one run by two Black women activists in the US, one of whom I believe is queer also. And there's been an anthology inspired by Octavia Butler's work that's again looking for the hopeful, looking for the... kind of...how do we... we can see these problems facing us, these many many problems. How do we want to work together to acknowledge them, address them and change things? Yeah all my favourite books seem to be recommended to me by people so I want to ask you, what are you reading right now? If you are reading, you might not be reading might be listening or watching or something instead. What do you recommend? I wanna know.

Frank: I don't listen, I have to read - I can't listen to things. What I recently read and recommend is '*How To Do Nothing*' by Jenny Odell. That's a practical book and that's really good around rest and the politics of rest. It's not around doing nothing at all, it's

around doing nothing for capitalism, it's about reconnecting, and it's about nature. It's about finding out what we really want to do. She addresses the very thing I was just talking about, that yes you may say that doing less is a privileged position. But the argument is that everybody should be able to do this and if we had universal basic income: can you even imagine what that would be like?! I can't recommend that book highly enough, I think it's incredible.

I want to plug Shelf Life Books in Cardiff cos this is where I get my books and there's a lot of amazing queer books, theory books, novels, graphic novels, kids books, and they do zines as well. It's run by my friend Rosie and she is amazing. So Shelf life based in Cardiff. Before I read Jenny Odell I read a book called '*We Both Laughed in Pleasure*', which is selected entries from Lou Sullivan's diary. Now, you may have heard of Lou Sullivan - I had not, to my great shame. He was a prominent trans activist in San Francisco, he set up the FTM Foundation in San Francisco, and he was the first trans man who convinced the cis to give him surgery even though he was gay - so they didn't accept that somebody could be both trans and gay, as in his case attracted to men is what I mean by that. He died of AIDS in the 90's and he quips in his diary, 'they said I couldn't live as a gay man but I'm going to have the honour of dying as one'.

Mish: Oh wow.

Frank: It's just so powerful, and he started his diary when he was 11 or 12 so it's reading from his first childlike thoughts around his gender to as it matures and then going cruising and passing as a man. Oh my God - just go and read it!

Another book that I read recently that I really loved was called something like '*Untold Night and Day*', anyway it's an amazing Korean book by a female writer and it's just, it's incredibly queer in its creation, not necessarily in the characters or anything but there is this loopingness to it that's incredibly surreal. It feels like you're in a dream. She repeats the same phrases over and over again. Characters sort of mix up together. What I really love about it is that it's obviously set in Seoul but the characters, if they go out for a meal they go for a McDonald's so she's disrupting this idea that there should be this authentic Korean novel and she's intercepting it with all these Western things. Which is what people do, you know, around the world people go to McDonald's, and I think anyone who is interested in writing should read it. I've never read anything like it, it's bizarre.

Mish: That sounds really interesting and I am intrigued by your description of it being queer, not necessarily in subject but in form. That's interesting! Like, what is a queer

form? What is a queer aesthetic? It's hard to... I find it hard to put into words, but it's something that's like... I kinda know when I see it. There is something really tangible about that.

Frank: So yeah, for me what would be a cis het narrative or a cishet way of doing things would be a straightforward narrative, it's linear and the characters are very obvious. Everything is straightforward. Yes, it might be a mystery, it might be like a Raymond Chandler novel or an Agatha Christie - although there have been writings around Agatha Christie being queer - but it's when you disrupt, for me, it's when you loop things, it's when you confuse things, it's when you disturb, and it's when you - queering as in to query as in to question – it's those sorts of things, but other people might have another opinion. I'm not sort of providing a definitive 'this is what queer writing is', that's just how I interpreted that particular piece. It's called *'Untold Night and Day'* by Bae Suah.

Mish: That's an interesting take on what queerness is in terms of an artistic form or creative form. I should be clear as well when I say the word creative, I'm pretty broad when I talk about that - so Emil is one of the most creative people I know and your form is bakery [*Emil and Mish laugh*] Things that are made in the oven to an incredibly high creative and artistic level. I was going to ask you question Emil about queer cakes, but I don't know if that is either me just wanting to eat more of your cakes at some time soon or you know a relevant question,

Emil: Yeah, I think it'll be hard to explain but there is definitely an element of that. Although I think my queerness and veganess combine into different kinds of things. But yeah, I think compared to my colleagues, I do have like more of a queer style but I don't know if that's just cos I'm more outrageous with colour.

Frank: I often flippantly said that the three queer super powers are interior decoration, baking and the naming of pets. I can't bake, my partner is a chef, he is a baker. Please don't judge the magnolia, that's him. He doesn't have the interior decorator skills. Here the greens that are going to be this room, I've got to paint it so yeah I think that baking is inherently queer.

Emil: [*laughs*] I think you're right.

Mish: That's great. We've decided it, we're gonna... I'll just get in touch with Companies House, whatever it is. Trademark: it's queer. [*all laughing*]

Emil: So I just wanted to ask a little about... Would you say your art is activism or resistance? Expression, exploration, like a mix of things?

Frank: All of the above. Yeah just existing and surviving as a non binary trans person is a political act. Being out is a further political act and expressing yourself and creating work is a political act and act of resistance. To take up space by expressing myself, and putting my work out there is a way of me taking up space. Hopefully, and I hope, creating space for other people and that's the activism. I think so many of us who are queer, trans, are spoonies, have disabilities, are neurodivergent and it's imperative, this what I tell myself, it's imperative that I find an activism that I can do that doesn't damage me too much. There are certain things I just can't do. I can't go battling TERFs on Twitter, that's not how I work. How I work is that I am here. I am taking up space, if you want to come and join me - I am making a gesture of bringing you all in with me - we can take up space together. The more space there is, the more room there is for other people.

Judith Butler talks in 'Undoing Gender', they said about how visible queerness opens up possibilities for other queers. I don't know how many people have come to me and DM'd me, some people I've not even met, and said 'I might be non binary. I think I might be trans.' It's like 'Fuck.' Just me being me has opened up a possibility for them. I'm just choked up even thinking about that. So my work is part of that.

Mish: Yes, it is.

Emil: Yes, absolutely. I just wanted to say actually that in relation to you saying creating space for other people, in the last few years I still do my work for TBA but I've kinda stepped back from a lot of the online discourse cos it is just so toxic and there's just no logic there, you can't argue with it, but what I've loved so much is your merchandise. Your t-shirts, your Cats Not Terfs stickers and the crows. I just absolutely love wearing your t-shirts, I'm getting such a big collection cos it feels like a beautiful and safe way for me to take up space with your artwork, and everyone absolutely loves them as well, so I wanted to tell you that. I don't mean to choke you up or anything

Frank: Yeah, I am actually crying *[laughs]*. It's wonderful.

Emil: Because they always sparks so many questions, they're never particularly obvious and people always ask about them. Yeah, great conversation maker and safe way for me to feel visible as well a lot, so thank you. I look forward to every time you have a t-

shirt drop. Both me and my husband both buy them at the same time now cos he's just as obsessed as I am.

Frank: That is just beautiful. Erm..I am doing a bit of a cry but I cry all the time so don't feel bad about it. It's a good cry. I feel really... I have a slightly uncomfortable relationship with the merch cos it feels like I'm profiting off transness but at the same time I've got bills to pay [laughs]. So, often I'll donate a big chunk of it to either the Black Trans Foundation or something like that so that I feel that 'yes, I've made some money' but I'll spread it around. But yeah, I feel there is a weirdness around it and I sorta think people must be bored of my crow pictures or the Cats Not TERFs stuff but people keep telling me to make more of them [laughs] so it's taken off in a way that I didn't anticipate and I have yet to quite make peace with it That's not to say that I'm ashamed of it in anyway or I don't like it, I love it. I'm just kind of amazed other people love it too and it means so much to other people.

Emil: Oh, I kinda understand that guilt and where that comes from but do know that, like, I love just supporting trans creators and to know that I'm wearing a t-shirt, like, created by a trans person, to me that's super important. We need to support our community cos we don't always have the same access to customers as everyone else and it's a bit harder out there so I can imagine it is difficult to juggle.

Frank: It is interesting and you know you look at the kind of Elon Musk's of the world and they just don't give a fuck. They're just coining it in and they really don't care then there's me who cares about making a couple of hundred quid off a t-shirt [laugh]. What's been really interesting is that cis people have got in touch and said 'ok so I've got your Cats Not TERFs t-shirt. Is it ok for me to wear it on trans day of remembrance?' and like, well I can't speak for all trans people but I think that's amazing, the one thing is that people might assume you're trans and if you're comfortable with that then that's grand. A lot of people who have bought them have been cis allies so that's pretty fucking cool.

Mish: Gorgeous.

Emil: Definitely. One of my cis friends immediately bought one after seeing me wear it so yeah, definitely.

Frank: I'm @mxfrankduffy on Twitter and Instagram. Instagram is probably place to follow cos it's just pretty pictures and not like the screaming hell void that is Twitter with the occasional cat picture.

And then the Patreon is forward slash a curious queer. I have a patreon and I kind of write at the intersection of magic, cos I'm a practicing witch, queerness, I talk about my autism and it's sort of around creativity and I see creativity as... almost everything is a magical act, cooking is a magical act, gardening is a magical act. It's all about the intention that I put it into things, the presence, the connection I have with things so I guess I talk about that. I'm always sort of wondering cos I don't know some of the people who follow me on patreon, what do they want?, and they haven't left me yet so god knows, but yeah I sort of talk about those things and I try to post once a week but sometimes it might only be once every three weeks then depending on the sliding scale I send out a linocut print. There is a low scale with no prints at all, maybe one pound a month, I forget the exact prices cos they've changed them recently cos of tax reasons, then it's £3 a month and I think that's like one print a year and it goes up so that's a really lovely source of monthly income. Sometimes it's been used to buy cat food and sometimes it's been used to buy cinema tickets or paints and it's just like a little... It's a real help and it's a lovely space for me to write and think. I don't know about you but I think through writing *[Mish agrees]*. That's the best way for me to think and come up with ideas, also to show my creative process so yeah that's what I have on my patreon. Then I've got a newsletter which is like a merch newsletter that I can send you the link to and that's got discount codes for the prints in my shop and launches of new t-shirts - you will get them in advance. I do a lot of my t-shirts through We Are Print Social which is a thing where you pre-order them and they only print the sizes that people have ordered so there is no waste, they are very eco and ethical. Some of the money gets donated to charity so they are lovely humans.

Mish: Thank you so so much to Frank for joining us today. You can find Frank online under the title mxfrankduffy on Twitter and Instagram. They also have a patreon where they share their writing and images, and send out limited edition prints as rewards and that's <https://www.patreon.com/acuriousqueer> . You will find links in the show notes.

You can buy our beautiful anthology of trans voices at transbareall.bigcartel.com and you can find out more about our upcoming events at transbareall.co.uk.

None of this would be have possible without the generous support of Arts Council England - thank you - and thank you to everyone past and present on the TBA team.

I wanna leave you all with a line from the TBA book.

This week's line is from the writer, performer and facilitator and artist Rami Yasir.

Rami is an exceptionally talented writer and I was so struck by the poem they sent in and yeah I really can't wait for you to read their work in the book. I'm really looking forward to seeing what they do next.

So this is a tiny tiny bit from a big beautiful poem by Rami Yasir:

*There is a difference between the ghosts of things you lost
and things you almost had, but here they sit
together, stroking your hair, telling you to breathe*