

Brown girl in the art world.

Do you remember catching sight of your mum after loosing her in the supermarket? That soft landing when you see her down the aisle and you are safe. This is the way it feels when seeing another brown girl in a room full of white people... Safe.

My favourite poem is by a great friend of mine, Jemima Khalli. Someone who gives me that safe feeling.

There is an awareness
within us
of one another
tying eyes
when we cross footpaths
and sinking into where we are

- women of colour

When you are a woman of colour you are a part of something so so soft. A link in a chain. Hand in hand, always. Being 6 years old, alone down the cereal aisle in Aldi is how it feels, for me, to be alone in a room of white people.

Actually, that's a good way to describe the art world: A room of white people.

The other day I went to my first symposium that my wife had organised on 'artist led spaces.' I have just become an artist in an artist led space so I felt as though this may be something I could resonate with.

I am the only person/artist of colour in the artist led space that I am involved in. I was also the only person of colour amongst the 20 plus people that were in that room, sitting opposite a panel of white people.

I sit and observe, I'm uncomfortable as I am the only person not having a conversation. Small electric shocks of anxiety keep pulsing through my veins as time goes on and still no one has even dared to make eye contact with me. The coffee encourages the anxiety and I am left thinking about how if someone was to talk to me perhaps we'd spark a real good conversation and exchange Instagrams. Networking, the dream.

Melissa Harris-Perry is the author of a book called 'Sister Citizen.' She's also a professor in political science. She's the definition of a boss ass bitch. In the book, she references research called 'the crooked room.' They would take someone and put them in a dark room and when the lights are turned on, all the angles of the room are crooked and everything is tilted differently. sitting on a movable chair, the person's responsibility is to find the upright. It's basically asking how dependent are we perceptually on the things that we can see when figuring out what is up and down.

Most people are field dependent and they would get themselves tilted in that chair as much as 45 degrees but perceive themselves as straight up and down because they are inline with the crooked images all around them (lol society).

Harris-Perry describes being a black woman in america as being in a constant crooked room. Society presents to us a series of crooked images that makes it hard to figure out what the true upright is.

Mate, this shit is like being a woman of colour full stop. But lets talk about the hashtag ART WORLD which I am now describing as a crooked room of white people which I have snuck into and am standing in the corner. The art on the walls is exploring the identity of the white male. To the field dependent people aka the majority of the (art) world, this room is upright, they can stand peacefully even though its only at 45 degrees, because their chair is inline and adjusted perfectly to allow them to view the ceramic pot that's been made by the white boy and his mum. The work "explores his identity and their relationship" - stuff that those people can really resonate with. They stand alongside it comfortably while discussing last weeks PV, wine in hand. Meanwhile the person of colour is well aware that the room is at a 45 degree angle and the blood is rushing to their head and they finna pass out while wondering what the relevance of this shit is. Is it just to take up space so there's no room for PoC? Prolly.

And so what happens when the room is upright to the minority? The wine starts to spill from the glasses of the white people. The work on the walls is too political, too girly, too angry, too black, too scary, too confronting. I spot a woman of colour across the room and I am safe. BUT everyone else has lost their shit so we go back to the comfortable 45 degrees. An example of the journey back to the 45 degrees is when Tate Liverpool had Glenn Ligon: Encounters & Collisions along side Jackson Pollock: Blind Spots. I sat in the gallery and watched people walk straight past Ligon's carefully curated show exploring race, gender and sexuality in visceral, vibrant ways. They had come to see Pollock, and Ligon's show was "too political" for them. Apparently some white gallery visitors actually complained about the use of the word Nigga in one of his paintings.

Last night I went to a PV in someones flat (hold tight it's 2016). A caucasian exhibition in a caucasian home. I didn't speak to anyone. Some guy legit came up to my wife and I and only introduced himself to her and started a conversation. Must be nice. I spent my time looking out the window, the world was still beautiful. The more I make art the more I fall in and out of love with everything. I'm just trying to work out what the upright is. It's exhausting and it hurts. To women and to artists like myself, you are not weak for struggling. This stuff is real hard. And to Basquiat, I apologise, as we are still tired of seeing white walls, with white people, with white wine. We will get there one day.