

**Wom+ns Creative Network, Brixton, Creative Conversation
Transcript for Reframed: *The Woman in the Window.***

15 November 2021



Discussing: Andrew Jackson, *Hand #1, Kingston, Jamaica, 2017*

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Present:

Deborah Ajia

Magdalen Rubalcava

Elle Moss

Mars

Jini Rawlings

Polly Waterworth

Kes

Anonymous

Facilitator

Brixton Project Team:

Aoife Delaney

Sarah Henderson

Jessica Dyer

Ella Jones

(Facilitator)

The first question is: What do you think is going on with this picture?
Yes, Deborah?

(Deborah)

So, I think maybe he's calling her? But that's like the first thing that comes to my head. But to be honest, they could know each other. It could just be like him asking her a general favour. They could just be talking about, like, sort of debating something. And she's like, Nope, that's not right. Yeah. It's hard to say.

(Facilitator)

Thanks. So, Deborah is thinking that your first impression is maybe the man is cat calling the girl and then maybe, perhaps they know each other and they are having a debate or conversation so you are kind of torn between two different interpretations. Is that right?

(Deborah)

Yes.

(Jini)

I think it's much more. I mean, what I like about it is your whole narrative context is very filmic. And it's like she's saying "No!". And I really, this is it, that "No!" I think it's quite important, that action. So, whatever...that's... I don't think she's waving. I think she is saying "No".

(Facilitator)

What's your name?

(Jini)

Jini

(Facilitator)

So, Jini thinks that it's a filmic image and that the girl is kind of saying no. Setting up a boundary around the conversation. Thank you very much, Jini.

(Mars)

Yeah, I just felt that when you put the hand up, it's like "Don't take any photographs" as well as "No" so I couldn't work out whether there was some two way thing with the images of the wing mirror and the idea of camera lens. Somebody is taking the photograph. Do you see what I mean? And the other - a non-driver - is actually taking the photograph because he's got his hand there and I think he has got his other hand up. So I am just interested in the idea of, you know, stopping himself being photographed.

(Facilitator)

So, Mars is wondering kind of about consent.

(Mars)

It's all about consent, yeah.

(Facilitator)

So thinking about what's happening from our perspective instead from the perspective of the person in the car, and she thinks that the girl is saying no to having her photograph taken. So you're thinking about...

(Mars)

I am identifying with the woman, but also because I am the viewer, I am imagining being the viewer - or the voyeur - or the camera operator / the artist even.

(Facilitator)

Thank you. Anything else?

(Sarah)

There's something about the... it looks like a builder's tool or something that is laying on the... against the driver's lap but I'm not sure if it's him trying to kind of compliment her kind or, as you say, beckon her over, but it's almost like a cat call. She just does not have any intention at all, exactly what Deborah was saying, but I just think that's something that's interesting. That at the bottom. What that is. It's like a spirit level. I think it's that that makes me feel he's just a passer-by more than just a... you know... someone who has set up a picture.

(Facilitator)

Thank you. What's your name?

(Sarah)

Sarah

(Facilitator)

Sarah noticed the object in the corner here and thinks that it's kind of building equipment maybe a spirit level and it trying to slot that into the composition of the picture. Thank you. Great. What more can we find in the picture? What have we not seen yet?

(Unknown Speaker)

Location.

(Facilitator)

Where do you think it is?

(Unknown Speaker)

I can't quite read the actual language that the text is - at the back.

(Unknown Speaker)

Somewhere warm.

(Unknown Speaker)

Yes, somewhere warm.

(Mars)

I was thinking Havana myself.

(Elle)

Yeah, I thought Havana when I first saw it.

(Facilitator)

What makes you think it is Havana?

(Mars)

Cars and distressed buildings. But somewhere in Latin American or Spain. The tree obviously is a...

(Unknown Speaker)

It's a chili tree.

((Unknown Speaker))

It just looks like it might have fruit.

(Facilitator)

So, Mars thinks that it might be Havana in Cuba and, what's your name?

(Elle)

Elle

(Facilitator)

And you agree?

(Elle)

I do. I think it's the colour palette as well and the light.

(Facilitator)

So, the colour palette and also the car - the type of car, like Mars said. And the kind of distressed appearance of the buildings and the plants as well.

((Unknown Speaker))

And you said the light. The angle of the sun as well.

(Unknown Speaker)

And the types of plants - makes it feel it's more South American.

(Facilitator)

Anything else?

(Magdalen)

I'm not fully convinced that the woman... To me the... if you look at the hand... it just... it feels quite male. The hand. There is something about it that just doesn't... It just - the whole thing feels quite masculine and quite aggressive.

(Unknown Speaker)

Hum, interesting.

(Facilitator)

What's your name?

(Magdalen)

Magdalen

(Facilitator)

Magdalen is questioning the gender of the main figure in the picture. And she thinks that perhaps, she could be a man. "She" could be a "he" because of the size of the hands and that the hand is hiding the face. What more can we find?

(Kes)

My comment was about the blur. The black blur on the right-hand side there. It was with the light coming through the window - it should have more definition there, but it's just like a blacked out face and why is that?

(Facilitator)

Thank you. What's your name?

(Kes)

Kes

(Facilitator)

Thanks, Kes.

(Unknown Speaker)

It's a choice.

(Jini)

My question was her hand is very... her hand has no shadow. It's lit up and if the sun is coming from behind them or to the right here. There's something that doesn't quite marry up. I don't know why.

(Unknown Speaker)

Why is her hand in shadow?

(Unknown Speaker)

Well, it's kind of right. Above right. But his hand is perfectly... There is not even an ounce of shadow across it.

(Facilitator)

So, you are wondering about how it's lit. How it has come about that her hand has no shadow because you think that it should have shadow if the sun is coming from...

(Jini)

I think it's top right. I think that the light is coming from up here and that if you look at his arm and the reflection in the mirror as well.

(Facilitator)

So you think that should be blocked by the car?

(Jini)

There's no, there's no... yeah. There's something about shadows it's not quite working out. It is two pictures? With one on top of the other? Maybe?

(Mars)

The arm of the possible driver is going through the plane of the wound down glass window. That's an interesting point. It's like one side of the same interior into another plane. So maybe that there's an overlap of two photographs as well.

(Facilitator)

You're thinking about how it could be either set up or two photographs superimposed onto one another, but you're... am I right in thinking that you are thinking about maybe his arm crossing the interior...

(Mars)

So, like you said is it the arm or the driver or is it an arm coming... So it does set up an issue.

(Facilitator)

Get closer if you want to have a look.

(Jini)

I can't work out whether it's posed or whether it's just a coincidence.

(Unknown Speaker)

That's the way I look too. If you go closer, because it's really important.

(Jini)

So, it's the view you would have like if we were in a car, somebody potentially taking a photograph of a man... maybe the idea is that you presume that she is a prostitute and the man beckoning her, but maybe not. Maybe the person is putting their hand up because their friend is across the road say and the guy's saying, "You can cross, I have stopped" or "Don't walk now. It's too dangerous". I mean, it looks so simple, but I think initially when you look at it, you think that he is harassing her and she is saying "no" or "go away", but I'm not sure. It's interesting that - like her stance...

(Unknown Speaker)

I don't think she's that relaxed. I think she's very focused - she / he. Her eye line is very interesting because she is looking towards this character here. Is she looking more to where someone is taking the photograph? Because her eye line is going towards this character, if you have got someone in the passenger seat to stop people and take photographs, she should be looking straight ahead, but she's not.

(Magdalen)

She would be looking at the camera.

(Unknown Speaker)

That's a really good point because it's on the left isn't it?

(Unknown Speaker)

It's interesting. Which side is the steering wheel. It's a funny angle.

(Unknown Speaker)

It depends what country it's in.

(Unknown Speaker)

No, that's why I'm trying to decide what country. Thinking about what letters they would use.

(Facilitator)

So, you have really already answered the next question which is, what is your impression of the figure? Does anybody want to add to what has been said about her body language and her relationship to the photographer and the line of the car?

(Unknown Speaker)

Her dress - it's nice on the dress. That's what I would say. There is a choice on what she is wearing.

(Elle)

I am going to say the word "foreshortening". The arms coming out are all...

(Unknown Speaker)

What's foreshortening?

(Elle)

It's the perspective. The actual plain of vision. You see the front of the hand. And there you can see it foreshortens the arm.

(Unknown Speaker)

And that's why the hand looks so big.

(Elle)

And that's why it's all curious. If you set it up now then the space is warped somewhat.

(Unknown Speaker)

You can see that she's absolutely at the centre and all the hands are pointing at her.

(Facilitator)

And so we are looking at the composition again.

(Unknown Speaker)

There's more in it than you think.

(Elle)

Look at the colour of it in her dress.

(Facilitator)

I think you spoke about colour earlier - colour in Cuba. Talking about colours in her dress and how that's a choice as well potentially.

(Unknown Speaker)

The framing is really interesting because she is right in the middle between the door and the window and then the tree is right in the middle of the door. And his arm is just dumped across the tree. I mean, it's really clever to have got that all working.

(Unknown Speaker)

So she's slap bang in the middle between the window and the door. And that's another composition element as well. I suppose it has taken

us a while to notice that, but you start to see all the different lines and shapes of the picture.

(Unknown Speaker)

It kind of draws all straight to her. No matter where you are; you go straight to her and the hand, really.

(Facilitator)

So she's definitely the focus of the picture. The main character. Next question, can you relate to the figure in any way?

[Laughter]

(Elle)

Basically, who hasn't ever been catcalled in any way?!?

(Mars)

I haven't been accosted; I must admit. Yeah, that's sort of my first thought, so I don't feel like I know this particularly. But, I have been asked by various people for directions. [Laughter] I may or may not have the wherewithal to tell them where to go!

(Unknown Speaker)

So, that's totally relevant – what Mars has to say. It may not be kerb crawling, it may be asking for directions. It might just be something like somebody going to say "Do you know the way to this place?" and that is an interaction that everyone has at some point probably.

(Jini)

His very hand so like, relaxed so relaxed, and like, you know... He's not just asking for directions, is he? He has done that before. [Laughter] So, I don't know. I mean, it might be the way that he was just caught in that moment, but I don't know it's difficult to tell actually. And maybe he is reaching out to try and get her attention rather than being really passionate. I mean, that's why I kind of thought he was saying across the road, because he's like that casual but I mean, that could be the most innocent explanation, maybe there's something much more sinister going on.

(Unknown Speaker)

I think it's a really interesting power relationship between those two. I mean it is relaxed. His relaxed arm and that...

(Unknown Speaker)

She's... she's quite forceful and he's quite confident, isn't he?

(Facilitator)

So even just from this forearm, you can tell a lot about his body language and that is telling you a lot about the relationship and it's telling you that he has more power than she does? And that he is not just asking for directions - he might be asking for something else instead.

(Kes)

When I'm driving and it's hot outside and I've got my window... I've got my hand hanging out the window, it doesn't mean anything to me. It's just means I'm feeling the heat and it's a nice sunny day. I dunno that... I dunno what you are all saying.

(Unknown Speaker)

Just going like that through the wind.

(Facilitator)

So, you are just relating to that movement. Got your arm out. It's a sunny day.

(Kes)

I like to tan my arm.

(Unknown Speaker)

He could be sun bathing.

(Elle)

I think that she looks really polished actually. She has got make up on. Her hair is - not a hair out of place. Her dress is really clean and lovely. I think that she looks like she's um... you know I don't think that she is a working girl. I think she's... I think that she's quite polished.

(Kes)

Where did the working girl bit come from?

(Elle)

I don't know that was just my interpretation. Because he is beckoning.

(Kes)

My dad lives in a hot country and he has always got his hand out. Like he is a farmer and he has always got his hand out of the window. I don't see what you guys are seeing. I'm sorry.

(Facilitator)

So, we've got disagreement here. Kes, you don't think that there is anything untoward. It's a hot day and you can relate to wanting to stick your arm out of the window. Elle, you are thinking that maybe she is not a working girl because of the way that she is presented. She is very clean, she's got nice earrings...

[Break in recording]

(Kes)

No, No. No, I knew you were gonna say that. I was always approached in Southampton...

(Elle)

I mean, we can talk about that, because that's a really relevant conversation, but actually...

(Deborah)

I guess I relate in a way because I think possibly the man is making that assumption about the figure and that isn't the right one. But again, we don't know.

(Facilitator)

Deborah, am I right in thinking that you are saying that the man might be the one making the assumption about the girl and her position or the work that she's doing?

(Deborah)

I also think that it could be quite innocent. From the man's perspective, it could be as simple as his hand is out of the window or he just asked directions. It's a very, very simple thing, but she has interpreted it as a gesture that she is familiar... she's taking it as a negative gesture. She's taking it as "No, I'm not", yeah, but it's actually quite an innocent thing from his point of view, but it's what's her reaction and her behaviour it is - maybe there is just years of being like "No!" this is not on. I don't know.

(Elle)

It's about being photographed, isn't it? It's about being photographed rather than the man. She is not actually... Her gesture isn't towards the guy here. She is looking towards him, but the gesture is towards whoever is taking the photograph. This is about being yourself? It's not she's not actually said, she's not actually... Her gesture isn't towards the guy here. She is looking towards him, but the gesture is towards whoever is taking the photograph.

(Kes)

Yeah, don't take my... I mean, we have to give consent even to get... even for you to video us today. Yeah. And she's just... she could be just like "No, it's alright". Talk to the hand.

(Facilitator)

So we have talked about consent and how that might be within their relationship to being photographed. Can we relate to the girl in that way? You have already said, Kes, that, you know, that we all had to give out consent to get recorded or have our picture taken. Is that something that we can relate to with the girl?

(Kes)

So, I have to take pictures for when I am at work and you have people that say - "Don't take a picture of me!" In my workshops as well they do that. You know? "I don't want to get in the picture".

(Unknown Speaker)

But if that? What is it about? What does the artist want? What's the artist trying to say? Because if, you know, we've all jumped to our own

conclusions - varying conclusions - but if ... it's just about some... an artist taking someone's picture, and they don't want their picture taken, why have they produced this piece of art?

(Facilitator)

We don't know. That's what we are asking you today. Then the next question, which is about going back the composition again, what is the relationship between the figure and the window? Or what is the significance of the window in the artwork? So, the relationship between the girl or man and the window.

(Kes)

If she doesn't want her picture taken, where is his face in the picture? Why have you got no faces there? What's going on here? Sorry.

(Deborah)

I think you're very protected from our perspective, because of the car, but she, the person in it is quite exposed. There's a lot of attention on her and from our perspective we're quite kind of... it's either incidental or you feel very sort of contained by the car really.

(Unknown Speaker)

She's a very famous influencer and she really doesn't want her picture taken anymore.

(Unknown Speaker)

Spotted on the wrong side of town.

(Magdalen)

I think what's quite interesting though is that the majority vote was for this painting, and it's all women here and I think somehow we all related into the hand and just "Leave me alone". And I wonder if there was a group of men, if they would choose this. I think there is a...

(Unknown Speaker)

Yeah, you are either inside the car or outside the car. You are in the room or you are outside the room.

4:55 (Facilitator)

That's a matter of thinking about why everybody, well not everybody, but the majority chose to talk about this picture and was it a conscious thing? Can people relate to this girl's experience of putting up that barrier and maybe being spoken to or shouted at or cat-called or just having a photograph taken? And...

5:19 (Kes)

I actually didn't. I didn't want to talk about this one. I just thought "Oh. It's just a..." I would have liked to have known actually more about the other pictures and why everybody didn't want to talk about them. Why this? Why then this one? That is quite an interesting factor for me.

5:47 (Facilitator)

But that is a good conversation to have....

(Unknown speaker)

I might say that I swapped parties from this one to the older, more set up art painting because I thought the story that we're all trying to struggle with here is something perhaps we are more familiar with and we've forgotten what the other one was.

(Unknown Speaker)

I didn't like this picture. I didn't pick this one either. I just found it really aesthetically annoying - that she is right in the middle, but she had her hand up.

(Unknown Speaker)

Absolutely. Same.

(Unknown Speaker)

The other ones, I don't know. There was just a little bit of an edge. Good composition.

(Facilitator)

So, you both found the composition quite jarring. And maybe not what you wanted to do anymore - you wanted to pick the other one. They're more open. They're more like obvious kind of portraits.

(Facilitator)

We have got like 5 more minutes if you did want to do another one as well?

(Unknown Speaker)

Seeing this picture and being here, and what's coming from the other exhibition, it was...for me it was like, this is the only representation of a black person, a person of colour, that I've seen today whilst being in here. And I think that maybe the conversation could have been like, why and questioning why, and talking about power, and the gaze and like, a woman in a window, but it's a black woman. So, most of us here don't have an affinity or an experience of that. And I didn't look at it and thought "Oh, yeah! I can relate to that because it's a completely different experience". So for me, it was like, this is a conversation about layers of the gaze and the gaze specifically on black women and art and photography. And I thought that was an interesting conversation to have. So that was my position.

(Kes)

That nobody has actually had. Actually, I didn't want to talk about that. And similarly, I just think to myself, you're talking about something that the other lady said. Something about a person in Brixton and coming to this gallery - this art has been here for 200 years. But why, as a black person, taking me back to 18, why I would come here, and there's no representation of me, so why would I come? So, I know you have side exhibitions and other exhibitions, but I just thought, here we go again.

(Magdalen)

I have to say that it's funny, because I asked, Kes, could I say that, as we walked into the Gallery and actually, I haven't been able to concentrate since...since I said it to you - which you know... I actually didn't even notice that the person in the painting was black like since as you know, I just felt really upset with that since you know we are all very close. It's just all I see is the hand.

(Kes)

So, it doesn't just say painting there, it actually says, you're not represented here. Actually, it is funny everyone has chosen that. Where am I in these pictures? Nowhere. Where's my...whatever.

[Break in recording]

(Unknown Speaker)

BNI in the North... Bromley... whatever and they actually had... they commissioned paintings from an Asian background, you know, portraits that were intervening so like you would have a bit one there about somebody of colour so it's actually there in the space.

[Break in recording]

(Facilitator)

So, we have still got 5 minutes. I can ask you another question or we can discuss that.

(Unknown Speaker)

I just think it's so important, just wonderful paintings. I mean, but yes, there has to be a way of intervening with that. It's what has happened at the National Trust etc. Looking at all the issues around the Colonial, Empires and slavery and everything, but also looking at depictions you know. I mean, also I find that really quite difficult you know, that sort of large white woman, naked. I mean, that's problematic as well. I mean, there are all sorts of quite problematic stuff that actually could be I don't know animated in some way... intervened with... I mean, made to live.

(Kes)

I mean, I what I find difficult is that art is history and it's my history. So my parents are from Barbados and we had lots of sugar, obviously, you know, Tate & Lyle is sugar. Money was made from sugar. Now that money was invested into galleries. The Tate - well, Hello?!? My point is, represent me because Tate made a lot of money off my ancestors, and it's painful because I'm not represented here. So, you're right, it is an issue.

(Unknown Speaker)

You are very, very accurate in what you are saying, and the Tate next year has got up Hew Locke, who's a Brixton artist, showing in the big gallery space. It is taking that long to get to that point for him as a working artist and intervention is one way it's great and you've tried in

various ways in the past - I know I have been to certain exhibitions - but the actual debates don't get aired.

[Break in recording]

(Unknown Speaker)

To keep up... actually have a sort of synergy with what else was going on. So, people would come and ask questions.

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