MoMA Audio
Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces

Guided by Linda Goode Bryant and several members of the Just Above Midtown community, the exhibition playlist evokes the relationships, conversations, and creative moments that made JAM a meaningful place for everyone who came through its doors. The playlist makes use of interviews conducted by the Department of Media and Performance as part of the Just Above Midtown Oral History Project, and includes contributions from artists Maren Hassinger, Janet Olivia Henry, Suzanne Jackson, G. Peter Jemison, Senga Nengudi, Lorraine O'Grady, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees, and Randy Williams; as well as JAM staff, volunteers, and friends like Horace Brockington, Gylbert Coker, Pat Cummings, Kathleen Goncharov, A.C. Hudgins, Lowery Stokes Sims, Faythe Weaver, and Tony Whitfield. MoMA Audio is available free of charge at moma.org/audio/playlist/326.

MoMA Audio is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Transcripts

359 Introduction to *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*

Linda Goode Bryant: I'm Linda Goode Bryant, and I'm the Founder and Director of Just Above Midtown, JAM, Gallery.

It was started in response to the dominant art infrastructure not supporting or showing the work of African American and other artists of color. JAM was always about artists being as creative as they could possibly be driven by their visions and imagination and supported for that.

People certainly thought of me as the leader, but it was the most massive, amazing, diverse collaboration in terms of the types of people, personalities, processes and the way they thought, just massive.

JAM's locations really came about because we were being evicted from one place to another, to be honest. We go into places that we see opportunity and then as we develop in those places, they become more desirable places for other folks who have more financial resources than we do, and that inevitably pushes us out.

But in the beginning, 57th Street was a political statement. When we had to move off 57th Street, we needed more space for artists to do performances, to be able to show films and media, video. Space was cheaper in Tribeca, so we landed on Franklin Street. We were evicted from Franklin Street. That took us to Broadway and that took us to 25,000 luxurious square feet of raw space. We finally declared ourselves a laboratory and that was liberating.

362 JAM in One Sentence

Artist, Maren Hassinger: JAM was a laboratory ...

JAM assistant director and children's book author/illustrator, Pat Cummings: A hub ...

Artist, Dawoud Bey: A community ...

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Lowery Stokes Sims: Relationships ...

JAM curator and artist, Kathleen Goncharov: An experimental, alternative space ...

JAM volunteer and art historian, Faythe Weaver: A heady melting pot of what could be possible in the arts ...

Artist, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees: JAM was pivotal to my life as an artist.

Artist, Randy Williams: Before it was JAM, it was an idea in Linda's wonderful brain.

Lowery Stokes Sims: She came up with the idea of Just Above Midtown. "I wanna open a gallery," and we went, okay.

Linda Goode Bryant: And everybody thought, well, you can't do it. You have to have money. And I've always believed that there's something that is both a passion and a mission, which I think art is, you just do it.

JAM volunteer, AC Hudgins: I know what drew me to JAM and that was Linda's personality. She was a dreamer.

Lowery Stokes Sims: She was an unstoppable force. So, the best thing we could do was just help her to keep going.

Faythe Weaver: It was very difficult to be Black in the seventies and be in the art world. people were so dead set against a major Black arts movement defined by Black people themselves.

JAM curator and artist, Tony Whitfield: JAM actually was like a home base in a hostile world for generations of Black artists.

Randy Williams: I never had worked with other artists of color. And JAM really opened up all those possibilities for me as an artist.

Pat Cummings: If you were doing something creative, off-center, and Black, you would gravitate towards JAM.

Linda Goode Bryant: Artists talked about how they couldn't get shown. "They won't let us" was a phrase that was used a lot. "They won't let us? Fuck them!" you know, is really how I said it. You find a way.

So that's how JAM got started. On 50 West 57th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, us Black folks have got a gallery.

363 *Photograph of Linda Goode Bryant's son, R. Kenneth Bryant*

Linda Goode Bryant: Nothing could have happened at JAM without the family of JAM. And it was a family of artists, musicians and dancers, writers, also chefs.

I will never forget the night that really just flipped me out. We pooled all our money together and there was enough money to buy two pork chops and a cabbage and an onion. And one of the people at the house that night made a meal for at least seven, eight or nine people, including my two kids. Shit like that happened.

Artist, Janet Olivia Henry: Everybody volunteered at JAM. And a part of volunteering at JAM was babysitting.

JAM volunteer and art historian, Faythe Weaver: Nobody minded pitching in with Linda's kids Kenneth and Brienin, because it's hard work. JAM was almost a 24-hour-a-day enterprise.

Linda Goode Bryant: I was a single mom and had friendships with other single moms and we shared taking care of our kids. So when it was my day to take care of the kids, they were in the gallery.

JAM assistant director and children's book author/illustrator, Pat Cummings: Kenny was like seven years old and selling artwork. And I remember somebody was interested in buying one of his pieces and he wanted $50, and whoever it was was like, that's a lot of money. And he says, you can do installments. He's seven years old! I was like, he learns very quickly.

Linda Goode Bryant: A number of those mothers were part of this group that decided We got these kids, let's start Sunshine Circle, let's start this school for kids. It was in Harlem. And it was another really creative space.

364 Senga Nengudi. *Insides Out*. 1977/2003

Artist, Senga Nengudi: I very much like the idea of used pantyhose because I felt as though somehow they were infused with the energy of the woman that wore them. And when placing sand in the pantyhose, there was a sense of sensuality, which I also wanted to express with these pieces.

Linda Goode Bryant: It was all about her expressing her body and what it felt like as she was nurturing a baby inside her. I had had children, and I remember what that felt like when your body is being so stretched, and it's like, whose body is this?

Senga Nengudi: I was fascinated in how resilient the body was and I really wanted to somehow duplicate that experience. I also was dealing with the idea of the female psyche—that your psyche can stretch, stretch, stretch and come back into shape.

I want the viewer to participate or respond to the piece itself. The first reaction is to giggle because you see something so common as pantyhose being used in sculpture.

Linda Goode Bryant: It was just the freedom. There is the freedom to that work that I loved. A freedom that pantyhose actually stripped you of. There was no freedom in pantyhose.

365 Mallica "Kapo" Reynolds. *Roberta Flack*. 1970

JAM assistant director and children's book author/illustrator, Pat Cummings: Linda always had a lot going on. She'd like to have celebrities come in. She had a big opening planned for Kapo. He was an artist that Roberta Flack had discovered.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Over the years, JAM's various locations attracted a diverse crowd, including celebrities like Roberta Flack, a singer whose portrait is shown here.

Artist, Senga Nengudi: It was a combination of Black celebrities and artists.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Gylbert Coker: Linda said, well, let's see if you could get your cousin to get Stevie Wonder to come to the gallery.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Horace Brockington: Robert De Niro is living down the street. Of course, Linda's going to somehow engage him in some craziness of hers.

Artist, Janet Olivia Henry: Liza Minnelli came to the opening.

Horace Brockington: How do you get Harry Belafonte in there every other day? And he's arguing with her about politics.

Linda Goode Bryant: That amazing opening happened where people were out on the sidewalk, on 57th Street. You couldn't get into the gallery. It was that crowded.

Gylbert Coker: Back then, if you had a party, everybody brought somebody. You know, plus one, plus two, plus somebody who heard about it. Everybody wanted to be there because Linda had the guts and the nerve to do this.

Artist, Randy Williams: What I remember is the curiosity factor. I think people showed up in a sense of disbelief that this actually had happened.

Horace Brockington: There was no forum for Black artists. Everybody would stop in there because they were so happy that there was a place for them to talk about their art, to have conversation.

JAM curator and artist, Tony Whitfield: Just Above Midtown was that rare place.

366 Suzanne Jackson. *MaeGame*. 1973*

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Suzanne Jackson's painting *MaeGame* was included in JAM's first group show, *Synthesis* in 1974.

Linda Goode Bryant: *Synthesis*, as a show, for me, was an opportunity to put together work being made by African American artists that was figurative and also abstract in the same gallery. This was during a time where Black artists were debating whether or not you could be a Black artist if you were working abstractly or conceptually, that you can only be a Black artist if you were a figurative artist.

That debate was just, to me, a distraction. We needed to figure out what it is we really wanted to talk about. Maybe the question is, why are we following the traditions of Western art?

Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Jackson ran Gallery 32, an alternative space in Los Angeles, from 1968 to 1970. Like JAM, Gallery 32 reflected a desire among artists of color to build shared spaces for creativity.

Artist, Suzanne Jackson: Gallery 32 was really an accident. I had this very large studio, so we had some exhibitions there. We didn't worry about whether other people would create spaces for us. We just decided that we had to make our own space.

Linda visited the West Coast and met a lot of the artists. It was seamless in the sense that, well, why shouldn't we support Linda? We didn't even think about it. She was very bold in that effort of going to 57th Street.

Linda Goode Bryant: I would say, certainly the energy that came from LA at that time into New York was really key to JAM. Because folks in LA were just pushing beyond abstract painting in ways that reflected their experience and what they had and were able to use to make what they wanted to create.

367 David Hammons. *Body Print*. 1975

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Lowery Stokes Sims: It was clear from the beginning that a focus at JAM would be David Hammons, because he was so out there.

Linda Goode Bryant: When I first saw David's Body Prints, my brain just exploded in terms of how the figure was portrayed through the printing of the body. It was a way of abstracting the figure.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Gylbert Coker: David would take baby lotion and just rub it on his body, and then he would roll onto the paper to make that imprint, and then he would shake the powdered pigment and then blow it away, and then the image would come up.

Linda Goode Bryant: So the Body Prints sold. And, in fact, I was preparing for this Body Print show at JAM and had pre-sold them. And he says, "I'm not doing body prints anymore."

JAM volunteer, AC Hudgins: Most people in life, when they hit a note and it's working, they keep working it. He hit a note in those Body Prints and they were selling. But he says, I'm finished. I got to move. And I respect that.

I remember one time I was going to a wedding, and I gave them a *Body Print* and she told me after a while, she said, "AC, you know, that *Body Print* you gave me was pretty much the ugliest piece of shit in the world. And I really don't like it." I said, "Well fine, give it back. I'll give you something else." So, she gave it back and I gave her a beautiful porcelain bowl. And the last time I saw her, she said, "What do these things sell for now?" I said, "You don't want to know."

368 Norman Lewis. *No. 2*. 1973

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Horace Brockington: I'm sure Linda told you about the famous Norman Lewis issue? That was one of the funniest things that ever happened at that gallery.

Linda Goode Bryant: Norman Lewis was an artist born in the early 1900s. He was important to me as an artist to be shown at JAM.

Horace Brockington: The hunger to be shown in a 57th Street gallery got a lot of the old guard to agree to do shows. You would never think that Norman Lewis would agree.

Linda Goode Bryant: He was tough when I said, "will you show?" Norman was like, "How old are you, girl? Yeah, yeah right." And so I had to work hard to get him to provide that piece.

In 1946, he started this series of paintings called Black Paintings. Opening night, the place is just packed. Given how hard it was for me to get a "yes" that he would allow us to exhibit his Black Paintings, I'm so happy, I'm so proud, I'm so excited. Whew.

JAM volunteer and art historian, Faythe Weaver: Well, somebody leaned up against Norman Lewis's painting and left this glob of Jheri curl grease in this painting.

Linda Goode Bryant: This is not the same painting, but that piece had quite an evening.

The gallery empties. It's late as hell. And as I recall, getting ready to turn out the lights, and I'm going, "Huh? What's that on Norman's painting?" Now, panic attack. We don't have any insurance for art. And Faythe Weaver, who's a dear, dear friend, I said, "Faythe, can you figure out how to get this oil out of here?"

And next thing I know, she pulls out a loaf of Wonderbread. She said, "You just ball it up." [Laughs] "We're gonna ball it up and then we're gonna dab, dab, dab." I said, "What's dabbing going to do, Faythe? This is bread!"

And she goes, “Exactly. It will absorb the oil. It will pull it out of the canvas and off the painting.”

Faythe Weaver: I sat there with my wadded up Wonderbread and kept cleaning and cleaning till I got all this crap out of this painting. And I don’t think any of them ever knew the difference. Thank God.

369 Senga Nengudi. RSVP. 1976 and David Hammons. *Untitled Reed Fetish (Flight Fantasy)*. 1978

Linda Goode Bryant: JAM wasn't about the objects. It always, always was about artists just being as creative as they fucking wanted to be.

Artist, Senga Nengudi: I went to JAM to do my *RSVP* exhibit and I can just picture going up in the elevator and this very small gallery with a lot of energy coming out of it. I love putting as much of a show in my purse as possible. So I was able to do that with a lot of those pieces. I was able to put 'em in a suitcase and then pull them out and stretch them out and have this exhibit.

I would get pantyhose from friends as well as myself and go to thrift stores. They had such great crotches. They were all different. I used very specific nails for each one. And then I used a lot of needles.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: David Hammons also used unconventional material in his work. *Untitled Reed Fetish* features human hair, string, and pieces cut from vinyl records.

Linda Goode Bryant: The reason I'm excited about putting David's piece and Senga's together is that they really influenced each other.

Artists were using what I called remains, like pantyhose. Once you got a run in that pantyhose, it wasn't good for anything else. So I usually tossed them away. David's using hair from barbershops on the floor to make work. Everyone was taking things out of the context of their lives.

I learned from Senga that when David started coming back and forth between LA and New York, that he would let her be in his studio in LA while he was gone. And so she was around that energy and then he'd come back and her energy would be in that space. The synergy of that affects us, even if it's subliminal.

370 Dawoud Bey. *JAM Contextures Launch Party*. 1978 *

Linda Goode Bryant: African American artists and other artists of color were really not being interwoven into Western art history.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Dawoud Bey took this photograph at the launch party for the book, *Contextures*. In that book, Linda Goode Bryant and her friend and classmate, the art historian Marcy S. Philips, explored ideas about abstraction that were fundamental to the artists at JAM.

Artist, Senga Nengudi: I can't express how deeply important that was because a lot of our work, reviewers, critics, their excuse was, "Well, we don't really understand the work, so therefore why should we review it?" She laid the stuff out, so that it was very clear what we were doing.

It was difficult to get something published, especially if it was related to Black art.

Linda Goode Bryant: At JAM, always, it's like you don't have any money, how are we gonna do this? I said we're gonna write a good press release. We're gonna send our presale press release to every art library and college in the United States. We're gonna send it to every museum. People pre-ordered the book! It worked. [Laughs] So the joy in the room for any of the folks in those photographs was just, "Oh my God, once again, we've pulled it off with absolutely nothing."

371 Receipts and Invoices from JAM's Operations [no music]

Linda Goode Bryant: I kept all the bills from JAM and moved them from one storage space to another storage space, and on and on and on for almost 50 years. Because they were part of the key truth to what JAM was.

You know, the way that JAM stayed open was with debt and more debt and more debt. I mean, and I didn't have a large credit line. I was a single mom in my mid-twenties and I didn't have any money. I'm not embarrassed about debt. If you don't have opportunities that allow you to generate what are the conventional forms of resources, use what you have to create what you need.

You're able to do things because people believe in what you wanna do. So, you know, not paying the rent wasn't a strategy I planned out. [Laughs] But being able to talk about how important JAM was, and the realtor knew, he would just look at me and kind of smile and shake his head and let us stay. And same with the printers. They became invested through their belief in how important that space was. They wanted it to succeed.

Money doesn't determine if I'm gonna try to do something. That doesn't make sense to me. Money is just one type of resource. Not having money and operating with debt has been an asset in my life because it requires us to be far more creative than money allows anybody. And it is unfair, but I'm not gonna spend my time focusing on how unfair it is. I'm gonna spend my time figuring out how I do what I need to do to realize my vision and my mission.

372 Janet Olivia Henry. *The Studio Visit*. 1983

Artist, Janet Olivia Henry: I am Janet Henry and I've considered myself an artist I think forever. I met artists in high school. Most of them were white and men, but I met artists. I knew you could have a profession. And when I went into Just Above Midtown, there it was. It was a magnet for artists, who just wanted to follow their minds.

And then somebody told me it was gonna close. So I came up there. I was just, like, spouting, "Well, you can't close, please don't close!" And Linda said staying open was partly due to me almost having a nervous breakdown in front of her.

When JAM moved downtown, every day Linda would get up early, she would look at ads, she'd go walking around Tribeca until she found a place on Franklin Street. I used to say, if you saw somebody in a suit down there, they were lost. It was still industrial.

The office at JAM was in the basement and I remember bringing in toys and photographing them down in the basement. My work, it's social commentary. What I found is that American culture had been replicated in miniature. I have a range of characters. Even though I don't create the dolls and the clothes, I have to find the thing that makes it come together.

I really thought I had to invent my own medium. And I kind of came with that attitude from high school through art school. And it flowered at JAM.

374 Randy Williams. *George Jackson and St. Joan of Arc*. 1984

Artist, Randy Williams: I'm Randy Williams, an artist, a teacher, a father, and a grandfather, and always and forever committed to Linda Bryant and Just Above Midtown.

My father was in a card game in the Bronx and he was killed. He was shot. And I had two sons and the idea of playing with guns became something that I started to think about. When I went back and looked at this work, I was absolutely shocked by the rawness of it.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Part of this rawness comes from the work's reference to a history of violence against Black people. In the upper left, a small watercolor depicts a lynching scene. Moving outward, we see other details such as a toy gun, a folding razor, and a photograph of the activist George Jackson, who was murdered by the state during a prison uprising in 1971.

Randy Williams: I wanted to make art that was a little more confronting. I think JAM is what allowed for a lot of us to go on and do these really experimental, exciting things.

The gallery was not simply a repository for work to be placed on the walls. You could meet up with people and you could talk about concepts and ideas, and then you could go back to your studio and you could play with them.

We still were struggling with the concept of identity. Like, who are we? Who are we in this country? We've been excluded, how can we strengthen our voice? What is ours to use and to make art out of? And I think a lot of the conversations fostered the collaboration.

I had never worked with other artists of color. I could never really talk about the things that were really important to me as a young Black man. And JAM really opened up all those possibilities for me as an artist.

375 G. Peter Jemison. *Toy Indian/Indian Toy*. 1984

Artist, G. Peter Jemison: My name is G. Peter Jemison. I am a member of the Seneca Nation of Indians.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Jemison was Director of the American Indian Community House Gallery, or AICH, a nearby alternative arts space that showed work by indigenous artists.

G. Peter Jemison: Linda Goode Bryant wanted to show some of my work down on Franklin Street in Tribeca.

It's work that I had created on paper bags. I'm always open to different ways of making marks and different kinds of tools. I like big fat crayons. I like big fat pencils that have a lot of color and pigment. I'm not limited by what other people think of as "this is fine art and that's not."

Linda Goode Bryant: Artists said, "Hey, why can't we make work that doesn't require that we have to buy art supplies?" Using what you have to create what you need.

G. Peter Jemison: The thing that I really recall recognizing was how ubiquitous bags were on the subway. Everyone carried some type of a bag, whether it was from shopping, whether it was a lunch bag or maybe a grocery bag, or maybe it was just a handbag or a briefcase. Then I really began, at the same time, to visit different Native American collections and saw a variety of bags, made from leather or woven and they were decorated. And that propelled my idea further.

Indian Toy / Toy Indian was a sort of a manufactured image of what we look like. And then placing it on a paper bag, and the paper bag is a commercial object. It's a little bit of a tongue in cheek commentary about the way in which everything is commercialized, including us, including our image.

376 Linda Goode Bryant. *The Business of Being an Artist*. 1983

Linda Goode Bryant: At JAM, we learned how little artists knew what the business of art was. They didn't understand how business affected who got in galleries and who didn't get in galleries.

And so from my perspective, starting The Business of Being an Artist—the BBA workshop, as we called it—was to provide artists with an opportunity to figure out how they wanted to work around that business within their sense of integrity, and be discerning about, who do you want to represent you? You're just clamoring to be in a gallery so people see your work and somebody's selling it. The Business of Being an Artist at JAM was meant to weaponize artists so that they were deciding their fate and not this market that they knew nothing about.

I hope that there are aspects of this show that cause both artists and the public that comes to MoMA—to stop and consider. You're in this space because there is an infrastructure that is supported to provide you with an opportunity to experience art. You need to know what that infrastructure is. Because in knowing what that infrastructure is, you're gonna be better able to say, this infrastructure includes and excludes. And if I want a more expansive sense of creativity in what's being produced from artists outside of this infrastructure, I now know I've gotta go seek that out.

377 Lorraine O'Grady. *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*. 1980

Linda Goode Bryant: When Lorraine first walked into Just Above Midtown, I have to say, I felt her energy right away. *Mlle Bourgeoisie* was her first performance, where she created this character and then came into the gallery and everybody was like, "Whoa!" [Laughs] *Mademoiselle Bourgeoisie*'s point was we must take risks as African American artists.

Curator, Thomas (T.) Jean Lax: Artist, Lorraine O'Grady describes performing as her character:

Artist, Lorraine O'Grady: So here she is, dressed in her gown and cape made of 180 pairs of white gloves. And she's also carrying a bouquet. She'd begin to give away the flowers from her bouquet and she smiles and she says, "Won't you help me to lighten my heavy bouquet?" After a while all of the flowers are given away and the bouquet has now become unapologetically the cat of nine tails or, what she called, "the whip that made plantations move." And she begins to beat herself with the whip.

When she first did the performance, she shouted out, "Black art must take more risks!" She'd never encountered a world as absolutely segregated as the art world. Not just a social form of segregation, it was an intellectual and cultural form of segregation with this use of the word "quality." But this was concealing a totally lethal combination of condescension towards Black capacity and Black relevance. Everyone seemed to have settled: "This is the way it is, we have to just do the best we can." Unfortunately, Mlle Bourgeoise Noire was not about settling. She was about breaking down doors.

378 Maren Hassinger. *Consolation, after Palmetto, 1980*. 1996

Artist, Maren Hassinger: My name is Maren Hassinger.

I primarily do sculpture. But movement and dance were a big part of my development. At some point, I discovered, in a junkyard, wire rope. And I could weld it and heat it and make it bend and do all those kinds of things to it. To make these, I would ask the factory to cut them into 16 inch lengths. Then I would pry open one end with a screwdriver, and unwrap around until I got it down to where I wanted it.

And I always thought of them as palmettos or tropical vegetation. And in putting these palmettos together, facing one up, one down, they also danced, I thought. They danced in space. They became very humanoid in that way.

I met Linda Goode Bryant sometime in the early eighties. When JAM moved into its headquarters in Tribeca, I remember one of the things about that space was it was fairly cavernous and there was the opportunity to really start experimenting boldly with performances. It was a very, very lively, very artistic group of folks who inhabited the neighborhood and I felt really part of something.

373 Posters for JAM at Broadway

Linda Goode Bryant: The Broadway space was amazing, all that space that we could just be a laboratory in.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Lowery Stokes Sims: She really became more of a kind of, you know, resource for people, particularly when she moved to Broadway. If you had a good idea, Linda would help you realize it.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Horace Brockington: The performance part of it started getting heavier and heavier. And it was clear to people that Linda was not going back to traditional painting and sculpture.

Lowery Stokes Sims: There were a group of Black women who were doing more installations and performance and video. I think JAM was a really important venue for these artists because there were not many other places that they could go.

Artist, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees: Because JAM was so alive with other artists, the process of creating and the opportunity to get feedback from other artists was unique. I began to understand that there was a world that I could participate in and grow in.

But I remember conversations about the lease. Keeping this space seemed like it was harder work.

JAM curator and artist, Tony Whitfield: I think, probably, someone else would not have occupied 503 Broadway without paying any rent for as long as Linda did. It was basically, let's keep trying to raise the money.

Linda Goode Bryant: Closing JAM, the Broadway space, was really hard. There were so many things that contributed to me saying, “I think I'm done now,” not the least of which was the market itself. Art was becoming more and more commodified. But it's about being aware of to what extent you are compromising your work, let alone your spirit.

So much of my art is made from the people I'm with and the people I know and how we collaborate to create this thing together. That's really fulfilling.

380 Conclusion to *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*

Artist, Randy Williams: Just Above Midtown, as much as it is a physical entity, I think it's also a spiritual entity as well. It created, for a lot of us, this extended family.

Linda Goode Bryant: There was arguments, there were thoughts and ideas. There were debates that were going on.

JAM curator and artist, Tony Whitfield: It's where you actually would meet people in other disciplines, who are people of color. But you also met all of these folks who wanted to be involved with them.

Artist, Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees: I think that there was something about the time of JAM, the place of JAM, the liberty that JAM offered us and the kind of collective care that people had for each other.

Randy Williams: I'm still a part of that connection with all of those things that happened.

Artist, Senga Nengudi: It's sort of like when you throw a rock into a pond. That's how JAM was. It kept expanding and getting larger and more beautiful.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Horace Brockington: It was a forum for letting people know the diversity of Black artists. There's no one aesthetic that ever ran through.

JAM curator and artist, Kathleen Goncharov: Anything goes. Basically, you could do anything if you could figure out how to do it.

JAM volunteer, art historian, and curator, Lowery Stokes Sims: JAM was a rule-breaking experiment in highlighting the work of artists who would've not got any recognition and spawned many of their careers. And I think it lives through the relationships that were built.

Linda Goode Bryant: And it was electric, it was alive. It was unexpected. Every moment you didn't know what to expect. It was life-giving. It really was.