

David Zwirner

Lucas Zwirner: From David Zwirner, this is *Dialogues*, a podcast about artists and the way they think.

Alex Da Corte: I needed to create spaces that were my standard, even if that standard was completely fantastical or totally out of this world.

Charlie Fox: I don't feel at home in the world very much. It can be a really hideous experience. So I wanted to make a place where I could be at home.

LZ: I'm Lucas Zwirner, and every episode features a conversation. We're taking artists, writers, philosophers, designers, and musicians and putting them in conversation with each other to explore what it means to make things today.

This episode's pairing: the artist Alex Da Corte and the writer Charlie Fox.

So Charlie and Alex, first of all, just thank you for doing this. Maybe the first thing, Charlie, you've for a long time been interested in a kind of fantasy realm, or at least in the kind of self transformation. And I'm curious how that began. Where does the, I would say, the monster interest come from?

CF: Interest in monsters? Yeah, that's deep. I mean, it's so deep. Let me think. I need to have a classy origin story here.

LZ: Or an unclassy one, actually.

CF: How I became a monster...

LZ: A classless origin.

CF: Yeah, a classless story, a dirty story.

LZ: Exactly, a smutty story.

CF: I don't know, man. I mean, I remember when I was five or six, on the weekend I would dress up like a vampire and have blood running down my face, fake blood, and just stalk around in my parent's back garden, fully devoted to this thing of being a vampire. Or looking at getting a werewolf mask in the post, and just sitting in my room, wearing that, and just feeling really good.

ADC: Was your family, your mother or father, were they into horror movies, or?

CF: No, I don't think so. I mean, no, I don't know. They didn't discourage it. Though I was really into Disney as well, and I really liked the scary parts of

Disney. And I think that freaked my mom out a little bit. She saw that as a bit odd, to really be into Cruella de Vil as a figure. And I think that she was just...

LZ: I can relate. I can relate to that.

ADC: They're the most fun.

CF: Yeah, exactly.

ADC: They're having the most fun.

CF: They are, they're having fun. They really... they're apart from the normal world, you know what I mean?

LZ: Right.

CF: They're these figures who are like, "Fuck you, I'm going to do this." Like, Cruella de Vil is going to go and live off in Hell Hall—her amazing house with the dying trees that looks like something from a Roger Corman Poe film or whatever—and just sit in bed and smoke cigarettes and dream of... she wants to be an artist or whatever. She wants to make this amazing garment.

It's like the red shoes. It's like *Edward Scissorhands*. I'm just thinking, yeah, I do remember rewatching the trailer for *Edward Scissorhands* on VHS so much that the tape wore out. And I really like the thing of being scared by these people and being drawn to them at the same time. I knew that it was a kind of love that I was feeling for them that I didn't get off these regular people. I wouldn't get off Hercules in the Disney film because he was just a hunk. I didn't because I had problems with—and still have problems with—my body, like physical ailments and conditions and things.

So I've always felt, even on some unconscious level, not like a level that you purposely feel, but you know this certain world isn't accessible to you. The world of an ordinary world, where you couldn't maybe run really fast, or do certain things with your hands, or know how to tie up your shoes or something, which is something I still don't know how to do. My hands don't work well enough for me to do that. It just precludes you from certain things, so you have to kind of create your own royalty and fall in love with these other figures. Every time I see the devil from *Fantasia*, or I see Boris Karloff as Frankenstein, my heart throbs in a delicious and disturbing way. And I like that feeling.

David Zwirner

LZ: How I came to your guys' friendship, or came to discover it, was this piece that you wrote about Frankenstein and about *Slow Graffiti*, I think in *The New York Times*, right? It was a *Times* piece?

CF: Mm-hmm, yeah.

LZ: You talked a lot about how that might be... that there's something about queerness in that Frankenstein character. And there's something about that distancing and that intense romance and tragedy that's being captured and maybe even, sort of in a larger sense, could be identified with a character like that.

CF: I mean, that's a great tradition of that. There's a long, long history of there being these kind of other families. I mean, *The Addams Family* or *The Munsters* or... to give the really trashy example.

ADC: Or it's Diane Arbus.

CF: Or Diane Arbus. I mean, I shouldn't badmouth *The Munsters*, they ruled. So did *The Addams Family*. Yeah, Diane Arbus. And John Waters films are all about these other families and these kind of carnival families, where these misfits can all live together in a world which is apart and separate from the tyranny of normality, the tyranny of good taste.

ADC: *Paris Is Burning*.

CF: Yeah, *Paris Is Burning*.

LZ: Is that something, Alex, that you think... I mean, so much of your work, I feel, is also creating these other realities, right, where things don't work, even the objects that we recognize. I remember being in your studio and seeing these benches. The bench has a light on it. The bench is not to be sat in, and the world is not colored the way we typically expect worlds to be colored. The house doesn't function the way—whether it was the haunted house—it doesn't function that way. Are you sort of aware of constructing this totally other realm, or wanting to inhabit it when you make the work?

ADC: I think if you have ever been marginalized, you get used to living on the periphery and understanding how the center—how the normative behavior—works, how it functions. And you recognize that that function isn't for you necessarily. And the best thing that maybe one can do if they have ever been marginalized is to accept that difference and not even try to level it, to accept that difference and sort of relish in maybe the dysfunction, or relish in what is your normal. And so I don't see a chair with

a light on it as absurd or un-normal or against the standard. I think of it as just a hopeful proposition for what is my reality.

LZ: How do you cultivate, I would even say, the strength to stay the course? I think that is what is so powerful about the show that you've curated at Sadie Coles. It's just consistent. Or your book, *This Young Monster*, this consistent vision for something else.

CF: It's good if it makes the regular people or whatever, it makes them nervous, or question their idea of what normal is, or makes them realize that the idea of being normal is like a flimsy hologram or something. Do you know what I mean? That there is... nobody's body is safe. There's something wrong with everybody's body, and everybody has these dark thoughts or weird thoughts. It's definitely like there are bats in everybody's attic or whatever. It's definitely the truth. So it's nice in a way to draw people into this world and make it very seductive and delicious, even if some of the stuff in there is disturbing.

But I think everything is... I think it's all beautiful. It's just maybe not a kind of traditional beauty that people are fed by these... it's a kind of analgesic beauty of this is a sunset that is obviously gorgeous. And it's like every other sunset that you've seen. And it turns it into a kind of banal thing, which you just use to be like, to just have some idea of that's what taste is or whatever.

And the thing I hate most of all is just being in the world in a sort of numb way. I'm trying to make these delicious kind of perverse worlds where these unruly things can happen. These weird creatures can come out and play. I don't feel at home in the world very much. Do you know what I mean? Like walking along, or walking down, the street or whatever, it can be a really hideous experience. So I wanted to make a place where I could be at home.

LZ: You have chosen to work in a very specific place in Philadelphia, in a specific part of Philadelphia. Is that a place where you feel at home? What I mean is you've avoided many of the more mainstream—I would say aside from when we were at Yale together, since then basically—you have not engaged as readily or in your everyday life with the predictable or more normal way of being.

ADC: For me, Philadelphia is just where my family is from, so that makes sense to me. And I moved around quite a bit when I was younger, so...

LZ: Like where?

David Zwirner

ADC: Well, I grew up in Venezuela, in Caracas, Venezuela. I lived for a bit of time in Pittsburgh and then in the suburbs of New Jersey and suburbs of Philadelphia. I guess that sort of ricocheting that occurs as a young person when you're trying to find your, trying to get your sea legs, I think, and you're moving around a lot. And for me, I get very attached to spaces. I'm just very sentimental towards objects and how they are. And it's a tendency that I have where I really care a lot about just the material things. I needed to create spaces that were my standard, even if that standard was completely fantastical or totally out of this world.

So I still go to that space. So for me, to be in Philadelphia is fine. I could be anywhere, but there's a kind of generative space for me to... there's a literal physical space that's allowed for me to make these kind of fantastical worlds and have that be my anchor.

LZ: And a safe space.

ADC: Mm-hmm, yeah, one hundred percent.

LZ: And it definitely feels, I mean, for both of you, to me, it feels like the studio space—and even your shows, the show you curate but the shows that you put on—are also kind of like creating a home for yourself on some... I mean, it does. Is that sort of a fair?

ADC: Yeah. I've been thinking about that Deborah Cox song "Nobody's Supposed to Be Here." The very first two lines are "How did you get in? Nobody's supposed to be here." And I think about that in relationship to the film *Halloween*, because the film starts out and Michael Myers is looking into this house. And you, the viewer, are looking into a house. And then the camera moves into the house, and you participate with this vicious thing inside of the house. And then when the camera pans out, you realize that you are this inhabitant of the house as well. You're this child in this house.

I can really relate to that idea of wanting to be in, or wanting to be a part of, that center—whatever that normative space is. It's what you want as a young participant that feels like an outsider, feels like a queer outsider. And so I kind of rushed towards that in some ways, but I understand that that's not... that ideal is not worth rushing towards. So I'll make a new ideal, or a new standard, and that is what these worlds are, I think.

LZ: I think what's amazing about both of these worlds, or homes, that are constructed is that they're extremely inviting.

CF: Yeah. I mean, I just hate stuff that's clinical, or it's designed to withhold pleasure, you know what I mean? Enough things exist in the world to...

LZ: Withhold.

CF: Yeah, which don't give me pleasure, or I find torturous, or boring or whatever.

LZ: What would be some of those things?

CF: What would be some of the things? Oh, man. There's so many. Cars. Just looking at a car is just depressing to me. Cars, cheese.

ADC: You don't like cheese?

CF: I don't. I hate cheese.

ADC: You hate cheese?

CF: Yeah, I hate cheese.

ADC: Oh, man.

CF: I know, and I know that I'm missing out and whatever.

ADC: I don't know if we can be friends.

CF: I know I'm missing out on a whole galaxy of pleasure, which I understand. I hate the word, I hate the color, do you know what I mean?

I hate banks. So many things. It's not like... I don't have a considered list of hates. I should be really principled and say I hate something of... I hate things that are, yeah, just designed to be like numbing agents or whatever. Fuck all these things that don't give me pleasure. I really want to do something that is almost like a drug, like a drugged reality, like a heightened hallucination of the world, of a world that doesn't exist so that you have to make it real, so you can live inside it and feel good in there.

ADC: Even with propositions of spaces that are seductive or psychedelic, there can be critique. There's ways to pull you in and then to zap you. For me, to present a space that is actually really garish, or really overly saturated, or overly saccharine is one way to say maybe your taste isn't what you thought—or also to privilege bad taste. I mean, that's what John Waters does. It's sort of to embrace the things

David Zwirner

that are taboo or the things that scare you because, What is a world that keeps out taboos or things that scare you? To me, that's a really boring fucking world.

LZ: What is the interest in sugar? It feels like that's something that just became an obsession of some kind?

ADC: The work that you're referring to, which I sort of... I did maybe ten-plus years ago, was this work where I was cooking down bottles of two-liter soda, Coca-Cola and Cherry Coke. And in its distillation, the color would become really saturated and also become a syrup. I would paint these Vaseline walls: little, essentially, dams of Vaseline that would keep this water, this syrupy stuff, from spilling over certain edges.

And I would make these floor maps. And my first interest in this idea of pouring on the floor was just questioning how one lives in a space, how one keeps their bodies in a space. And that we're just so thin. Our skin is so thin. It's just a thin layer around a bunch of blood and meat and ooze, and that it could just explode. And that the same could be said for a two-liter bottle of Coke. There's just this thin piece of plastic containing in this color, or this liquid. And what does it mean to resist that structure, to resist the standard and say, "I'm going to pour this all over the fucking floor and just let it be." And so that was where that work kind of developed.

LZ: Is there sort of an erotics to the monster world, do you know what I mean? Is there an attraction?

CF: I mean, I'm obviously going to say yes.

LZ: But how does it manifest?

CF: Like the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*—the Cocteau version and the Disney version—he's hot. You know it, and she knows it too. And the tragedy of that film is when he reverts back to being just a white, blond dude. It's a thing of huge sorrow to me still. I still feel like when I was a child and I would watch it, I would be very distressed by that ending, that he becomes this. Why can't she just marry the Beast? She spends all the time falling in love with the Beast. And then for that to be taken away, it's just cruel and unusual.

ADC: Charlie, did I ever tell you about how I had all of the Disney villains painted on my bedroom wall?

CF: No. Oh, man.

ADC: When I was like ten, eleven, twelve—it went on for years—it was sort of my version of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, but it was just the Disney villains painted in my bedroom. And the one outlier that never made sense to me was that I painted the Beast on the wall. People would say, "He's not the villain." And I thought, "But he kind of is sometimes. He's just not constantly the villain, but maybe he's sometimes the villain." But that that was sexy and attractive to surround yourself with these flamboyant baddies.

CF: Like *Edward Scissorhands*—which is, again, another mutation of that same tale—is about an artist on one level, that he's there making art for the family. And there's a great moment when... or making art for this suburb. And then there's the great moment where the redhead housewife, who's trying to bang all the mechanics or whatever, comes down. She's looking at him all smoldering, Johnny Depp, cutting this dog's fur or whatever. She goes, "Oh, he's a perversion of nature. Isn't that exciting?" Like, yes. That woman knows what's up. That was such a powerful moment, do you know what I mean? Because that's true.

These things that disturb you, they're... to me, often the things that I'm drawn to are things that, at first, I'll be like, "Holy shit. What is that?" It really kind of freaks me out, or I don't like it, or I feel like it's wrong or tasteless. And then I go towards those things and try and eat them up, because I know that really that's the first shock of love, if it's the first shock of love.

ADC: Yeah, the first shock of love.

CF: Because it's like, you can hear the '80s drums just pounding underneath.

ADC: The shock of love.

CF: The shock of love. Like, no. But that to me is the first big hit. Again, it's like a weird combo of stuff. I wish I'd had the Disney villains on my bedroom wall. All I had was Jack Nicholson as the Joker.

LZ: It's sort of a question for both, but what were sources of erotic excitement early on, in developing sexuality? Just because I think so much of... there's a real acceptance of what was exciting to each of you or what continues to be exciting to each of you. I feel it in the work in a way. Sometimes when I look at your videos, I think that there's something about what you're doing which is sort of exciting to you to watch and exciting to us. And I think especially interesting when you're a straight white guy to sort of watch the video and be like, "There's something really exciting

David Zwirner

here." And I don't know how to access it necessarily, but I can absolutely feel it, right? I can feel it pulling me in.

CF: I mean, in a way, when you're a child, all the excitements kind of come together in one sort of delicious ooze. So there may have been things that I was getting off on in a way that I can no longer achieve—in a way like chocolate in a sandwich. There was something about that that was overpowering, like a chocolate-spread sandwich.

LZ: Oh, like Nutella or something like that?

CF: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that stuff. And just that, or certain flowers. I had a real secret thing I was really into as a child, which was it was this thing that Homer Simpson does, where to pretend flowers were food and just eat them just randomly. I really liked that. So I probably was erotically drawn to flowers.

LZ: But it's almost like there's a continuity. I think that's maybe the interesting thing that, for most of us, there's a very clear division between what you're interested in and what's arousing. For you guys, it seems actually pretty fluid. It's like interest can become directed in a different way.

ADC: If I think about, again, the movie *Halloween*, and I think about Jamie Lee Curtis. And as a young gay man watching that film, for me, I wasn't attracted to Jamie Lee. But I was attracted to the idea that someone would want me that much that they would want to come and kill me, or that they'd want to follow me to the end of time, say, not the killing part. But she had that kind of appeal, and then Michael was the person who stalked her.

So for me, it made sense to put myself in her position and say, "Oh, this is this way that this person will come to me. This is where this flip happens, to be desired by someone else that's maybe a monster too."

CF: Mm-hmm. The werewolf in *American Werewolf in London*—I also had him on my wall, like picture of him midtransformation, screaming. That was really attractive to me. I really understood that. The Beast, I didn't really understand why I was drawn to these figures. It took me a long time to figure out why that might be, but I just felt drawn to them. And I really loved them.

LZ: But it's not gendered really, right?

CF: No, no.

ADC: No.

LZ: It's like it doesn't matter if... it's really more about the Beast and less about it being a male beast or a female, yeah?

ADC: But it's interesting for something like, say, the cartoon character from *Lion King*, Scar. So I was really into Scar. I thought he was just a cool and seductive figure. But going forward, you find out that there's this animator who made it was also queer.

LZ: I had no idea.

ADC: Andreas Deja. And here, he's kind of putting himself in this figure. All of the characters that I was finding myself attracted to were people of his making. Then you kind of realize, "Oh, I'm folded up into this kind of path towards a fantasy that maybe we might share in common."

LZ: I was thinking, Charlie talked a little bit about his childhood, or at least aspects of. And I was curious if you, Alex, would say sort of what it was like, what the world was like for you growing up? You talked about one of your parents is Venezuelan, or both of them are?

ADC: My father is.

LZ: Father. And what that... if that played a role? Does it play a role now? I mean, it's interesting. I'm sure you've thought about that, is that you present as white at least to... I think there's no racial ambiguity, but actually there is a biracial...

ADC: Yeah.

LZ: Sort of like that is your reality. I guess I'm curious about if that was something that... if that felt present when you were growing up. And then if there's any way it's present now?

ADC: Yeah, it absolutely did. My mother's from New Jersey. And growing up in Caracas, Venezuela, this idea—to be totally displaced, and to not speak the language and then learn the language, and then to come back to a place where now you've developed a language separate from the spoken language of the town, and to feel like an outsider again—totally kept me on my toes. It totally kept me wondering, "Where is my place? What is my race? Who are my people? Who is similar to me that I can relate to?"

David Zwirner

LZ: Have you found that at all? Do you feel you've found a... not in a sort of lame community, but do you feel like there's a set of people or a number of people that make you feel most comfortable?

ADC: Yeah, I have my *Paris Is Burning*. I have my Philadelphia's burning. And that's where I stay. That's where all of my garden is, and I'm happy to be a part of that garden. But it took some time. It definitely took some time to not feel alone or not feel like an outsider.

LZ: Was that refinding Philadelphia that sort of made that happen? Like after school, or...

ADC: I think it's just about the world becoming more accepting of difference. And maybe this is not totally true, but there's a hope that maybe people are. And so you push forward, but of course, there's still challenges.

LZ: That feels a little bit like the question of accepting of difference, or at least interest in difference. That's a little bit the premise of *This Young Monster*: the idea that the monster as a character is more and more someone that people are thinking, or is in our psyches in some way.

ADC: Yeah.

LZ: Did you realize that that was... your interest has obviously come forever.

CF: Deep.

LZ: It's deep. And it's personal, and there are many reasons. But at what point did you realize, "Oh, shit, actually, this thing that I've been interested in for a long time is actually getting attention, as it were?"

CF: It wasn't like a move. I was at home watching *A Clockwork Orange*. And I was twenty-three or twenty-four, I was watching *A Clockwork Orange*, and the line just happens in the film when Alex goes home—Alex DeLarge, not our Alex.

LZ: Right.

CF: In the... in Alex's shot-by-shot remake of *A Clockwork Orange*, which...

ADC: ...is forthcoming.

CF: ...which is never going to be made. But, I mean, I was watching it. And there's the line when Malcolm McDowell goes home, and he's had his behavioral treatment, and he's been fixed—or sort of supposedly

fixed by this aggressive therapy and viewing these films and everything. And then there's a lodger in his old house, in his parent's house. There's now this guy, and he refers to Malcolm McDowell as "this young monster." And as soon as I heard those three words, I was like, "Oh, shit, that's what my book will be about." Which I had no intention of writing a book at that point, you know what I mean? I was just going out and smoking cigarettes and barking at ambulances or whatever I was doing. Do you know what I mean?

I wasn't thinking about doing a book, but it just suddenly became inevitable that that's what it would be. I knew that the form would change, and it would do these things. And it was just the right thing. It became an unmovable thing in my head of, "Yes, this will be the meat," do you know what I mean? Like, "This is what I will be into thoroughly." And I realized that I was so... it was almost like I'd been so steeped in it for such a long time that I didn't even notice, like it was the air or whatever. The monsters and stuff, that they were just always there. And then all of a sudden, they activated for me in a different way. And I went into that world.

I would say that I was a totally different person by the time the thing was finished. Because I had, I mean, been through heavy things in my own body and all of this stuff—and feeling huge alienation just from my own body, and in some way, my own taste—that I knew I was repressing a lot of things, maybe, before I started working on the book. And things were maybe... that perversity was there. That evil was still there inside me, that sort of delicious evil. But the book fully allowed it to be like this bird or whatever, this thing that was then unleashed. The sort of host body died and the monster...

LZ: Just came out?

CF: ...came out, do you know what I mean? There was another part of me that was wrong. And then that died, and I had just a different kind of courage by the time it was done. The werewolf transformation had occurred. And I could allow all of this stuff to come out because it was horrible walking around knowing that you're repressing these things.

LZ: I'm wondering if you, Alex, had... if there was a moment or some project or something that... because you also feel to me now, as a person when I'm with you, that there's no struggle to be anything other than you are, right? And that's a simple thing to say, but it's not true of many. Like I wouldn't say I'm there fully, but I think I'm attracted, drawn to people who seem to be there more. I think a lot of people

David Zwirner

are governed by more fears about what would happen if they let those defenses down and just accepted whatever came.

ADC: Yeah. I think that if you kind of see death really closely, and see real tragedy closely, it kind of shakes you. It sort of reminds you that whatever hang-up you have, or whatever kind of feeling of difference that keeps you down, is to be put aside, because our time is limited. And to just own what you got. Just own it and rise above whatever fucking bullshit is being thrown your way.

LZ: And certainly you don't have to answer that, but is there something you're thinking about in terms of that intimate moment? Not in any specifics, but was there a moment of closeness to tragedy or something intense that....

ADC: Yeah, I would say there's...

LZ: Been a couple, yeah.

ADC: ...countless moments.

LZ: For you, yeah, yeah.

ADC: Yeah, for me, for sure. I think seeing... I was thinking about my father and thinking about his relationship to his family in Caracas, Venezuela, and having left. He was the first person to come to the states from his family and to spend his young adulthood here and start a family—but always be thinking about that distance and always thinking back to his family that he wasn't with, and as those pieces of his family go away, what was maybe missed or what gaps could've been bridged between them. And I kind of try to think about that in my day to day—to kind of squash those gaps, or connect with the people I can—and to not let fear govern my existence, which is maybe why I'm largely attracted to fear as a language that operate in, to insist upon confronting the things that keep me in my place, maybe.

LZ: When you say it's sort of a language for you, what would be an example of sort of deploying fear? I'm just curious how you imagine, when you say fear, are you talking about characters or scenarios or?

ADC: I think it's about... I'm a wallflower. This makes me scared. This is hard for me. Leaving my house is hard for me. I'm largely...

LZ: Are you like that too?

CF: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I feel that.

ADC: I feel agoraphobic on days. I'm totally like... it's a brave new world every day for me, so my mind is a kind of... it's a wild place sometimes. So there's a certain kind of insistence to have to confront it and go into the world, I think.

CF: Anxiety is a big cauldron of stuff. It's definitely like...

LZ: That you're stewing?

CF: Yeah, yeah, constantly. I mean, there's a lot of anxiety. And anxiety is a kind of negative excitement or whatever, like a weird reverse, like a sort of bad lightening or whatever that happens inside you, in the same way that when you get really excited about something...

LZ: A lot of great titles. "Bad Lightening," another great...

CF: That's the name of my drug I'm going to do: "Bad Lightening." You have to snort it...

ADC: Only take it if you're Charlie Fox.

CF: Just sit there and just be snorting bad lightening all day.

LZ: But sorry...

CF: Yeah, anxiety is a huge thing.

LZ: Is that something that you've always have?

CF: Yeah.

LZ: It sounds like clinical, struggled with. But it's been present.

CF: Oh, clinical is fine. I'm very happy with... my mom is a doctor. She still is a doctor. And I grew up around medical stuff in a very heavy way. It was great and a huge, huge influence in all the stuff, that there would be these... she would get copies of the *British Medical Journal* delivered every week. She still gets it. And they have photographs of people with different conditions in them. It's just a standard thing of a particular kind of lesion, or scars, or a skin condition, or whatever. I'd be eating cereal and looking at those pictures and just taking it as a very normal thing.

And also you grew up, people were dying all the time, or people were getting sick. And you were always just very aware of mortal stuff. The condition of the body is almost to be wrong all the time. The

David Zwirner

body's almost always in this kind of condition of hideousness, or being kind of off, or needing to be medicated, or something. And then obviously, that combined with my own going to the hospital all the time and stuff like that.

So it's a very familiar world, and gives you a very different understanding of the body and what the body is: that the body can be devious and hideous and unfaithful to you, and not even work for you. Yeah, parts of my body still don't work very well. Locking a door can cause anxiety, going to the supermarket...

ADC: But then it causes you... I think that's what this thing is about then: embracing this kind of politics of fear or something that then you say, "Well, if this thing that is supposed to be my vessel, and is the thing that's supposed to carry me through here, and it's let me down, then fuck it. What is the standard?"

CF: Yeah, exactly.

ADC: And really then, say, "Well, let's have a ball with all these other things that..."

LZ: I was thinking about with the medical journal, when you were talking about getting that every day and seeing the bodies, and seeing the bodies in states of... this idea that that can be normal. Let's put it this way, that's one of the last frontiers of where there is very little acceptability. People who are ill are not being including and accepted most of the time. And illness is one of the things that I think we have the hardest time, especially in this country, making real space for—whatever the illness might be—and actually, frankly, just looking at. It's like we're starting to look at now many more things that have been ignored forever, basically, whether it's things having to do with sexuality or race. But it's like illness, or what Diane Arbus calls "freaks," people don't want yet, it feels like, to be confronted with that. And it feels like that's a bit of the impetus—maybe not in a moral sense for some of what you're doing, but in kind of like, "Just look. Here it is. Look."

ADC: That's the mortal mirror. That is the...

LZ: Yeah, right. That actually looking at that is the thing we should be looking at most in a way, because it's operative all the time. Like what you're saying, it's like the body's always degrading in some way, or there's always something wrong. But there is this culture of nonadmission, like, "Don't let that be."

ADC: Because there's a culture of constant catering. It's constantly making everything easier. You can get

your food in an instant. You don't have to wait—no more lines, convenience, convenience. But there's still this thing about the body that is material.

LZ: Yes.

CF: You can't get away from it. You can't get out of it. Do you know what I mean? You can try in a way. There are these ways to escape your own body, but ultimately, you're always in it, this cage of meat.

ADC: Meat cage.

CF: Meat cage.

LZ: Another great title.

ADC: That's a cool club, "Meat Cage."

CF: Meet Cage is like, yeah...

LZ: The nightclub, by the end of this...

CF: It's like a nightclub where it's very hardcore, in the Meat Cage. And maybe Slayer is playing over the top, and there's flames around the door.

LZ: I mean, it's funny. I hadn't thought about... I mean, no, the Meat Cage thing obviously is funny. But I was really trying to say that I hadn't really... when your body's working for you most of the time in a normal way, you don't... it's not thematized for you with the same level of kind of intensity.

CF: I think that my body is hard to use, and I have to acknowledge that all the time. I think that there's some kind of idea maybe... people assume that I'm getting off on this stuff in a nasty, snotty way or something of just, "Oh, look at these people who are hideous, or whatever, or perverse." And it's just like it's a kind of sickly thrill for me or something. You know what I mean? And that isn't really the case. I feel a lot of... a deep empathy.

Even the spider that's at the haunted house show that Alex made: the spider being crushed by the huge boot, that's cowering. I know Alex hates spiders, so I shouldn't bring this up and bring another anxiety into the collective meat-cage threesome. But I feel empathy for the spider getting crushed. Or when I look at the Diane Arbus kid with the clawed hand holding the hand grenade, I totally understand what's going on in that kid's head. I don't look at it and think, "Oh, that's strange." Do you know what I mean? I really... I feel that. I feel like at that point, if I was to turn on the TV, I wouldn't see somebody like me necessarily.

David Zwirner

LZ: Maybe the last thing I want to just ask about in general and see where it goes is just movies, right? Because both of you have a sort of real deep love for movies of all kinds, horror in particular.

CF: Yeah, yeah.

LZ: But I guess in the context of this conversation about... you don't typically watch movies where anyone like a Diane Arbus character is being represented in any way, right? I mean, that's not the common experience of a moviegoer. How do you reconcile the fact that sort of probably a lot of the movies that you're watching, even that you like, have nothing to do with exploring that? I mean, I'm sure some of them do, but I guess as a mainstream medium, you don't see those bodies, those characters, that stuff as readily, you know?

ADC: Yeah. Maybe more and more you do.

LZ: Maybe you do, yeah.

ADC: Yeah, maybe.

LZ: Yeah, maybe I'm wrong about that. Yeah.

ADC: Yeah, I'm trying to think of...

LZ: I mean, of course, all of the movies that you're going to mention are, of course, ones where characters like that exist. As I was saying it, I was like, but of course, all of Charlie's movies are about these beast-like characters.

CF: Yeah. And you can always find these things in this work or whatever, or in a movie that may be... There can be... furniture can be perverse. Or you can be watching a movie and looking at ...

LZ: But that's kind of what I wanted to get at: that both of you, I think, can look at a film and see something subversive, or subvert the normal thing by obsessing or sinking energy into cathecting an object so intensely that suddenly it's like that thing turns the whole movie on its head, if that makes...

CF: I can tell you what my favorite example of that is recently. I was watching *Meet the Parents* a while ago, which I love that movie. It's a great movie, great comic set pieces. I was really hungover and watching *Meet the Parents* for like the thousandth time. And there's an incredible moment when they're playing volleyball in the pool at Owen Wilson's house. And Ben Affleck wants to be—not Ben Affleck, Ben Stiller. That's a different movie, the Stiller one. But there's this moment when he goes, he spikes the volleyball

and breaks his sister-in-law's nose with this huge spiked ball. And then the whole family dives over to save his sister-in-law. His mother jumps in the pool. And Ben Stiller is left on the other side of this net with the whole family around. And then on the other side of this thing, and he's desperate and heartbroken.

And then Robert De Niro turns, and it's a first-person shot. And he looks at Ben Stiller, but he's looking at you, and he does this repulsed face. And that's an amazing, amazing thing to be confronted. That's some kind of Kafka-level horrific nightmare. The father looking at you, looking at you, horrified, like, "You grotesque thing." And you're forced in that position into this pool.

And then I was doing some background thinking about it, or research on it. And the director said, "That movie's not a comedy. That movie is an anxiety dream that you're watching. It's a romance set within an anxiety dream."

All of the set pieces are all weird. There's shit everywhere. There's a cat pissing on some ashes or whatever. They're completely horrific, anxiety-making, nightmarish set pieces that all just follow sequentially. It's like being in the sweatiest, darkest fever dream. That's wonderful to me. Yeah, to see stuff like that going on. These little moments of mainstream entertainment giving you something really creepy...

LZ: A different kind of entertainment.

CF: Yeah. And to know... maybe to a lot of people that wouldn't be entertaining. They wouldn't think about that. But there's something so deep about the idea of your father scowling at you. This man scowling at you, and you're on the other side of this cage. That's a whole movie in itself. Who is this thing quarantined on the other side?

LZ: It's also amazing because I feel it's a way of finding your world in that other world, right? And I feel you do that with objects too. It's like you can look at a group of objects and make yourself at home in a normal world—if we want to call a mainstream movie a normal world—by carving out some sort of object space for yourself or some...

ADC: Yeah. I think you just... Yeah, the joy of watching moves, for me, has always been about that that screen offers you this place to escape, but it also reminds you that that place is made from the physical space that you're in too. So that there's the bridge, that whatever's happening in the film, that capacity is here and now too. It's within in my reach. And not in

David Zwirner

a poltergeist way, but that it is within my reach. You can actually meet that vision halfway, or more than halfway.

CF: Yeah.

LZ: I think on that note of being within reach from the meat cage, thank you, Alex and Charlie, so much.

CF: Thanks, man.

LZ: It was really, really nice to talk. Thank you so much.

ADC: Thanks for having us.

LZ: *Dialogues* is produced by David Zwirner. You can find out more about the artists on this series by going to davidzwirner.com/dialogues. If you liked what you heard, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen. It really does help other people discover the show. I'm Lucas Zwirner. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you join us again next time.