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INTERVIEWS WITH
ARTISTS BY MFA
CANDIDATES

*FIVE
MINUTES*

2018-2019

EDITORS'
INTRO

5 Minutes is a limited-run publication featuring interviews between MFA candidates and artists invited to the University of Oregon through the Department of Art's Visiting Artist Lecture Series. In this series, artists from widely varying geographies, disciplines, and methodologies lecture on their work, histories, and ideas, providing insight into their lives and practices.

5 Minutes is a platform to aggregate the casual, short-format interviews conducted throughout each academic year into a tangible, printed-document that gives form to the otherwise ephemeral interactions. With a few exceptions, these interviews took place just before the visiting artists presented their lecture; the interviewer and an editor met the visiting artist near campus and walked with them—sometimes quite frantically to stay on schedule—to Lawrence Hall where they would speak. As suggested by the title 5 Minutes, these encounters were brief, but they were also spirited. Each of the following interviews offers a meaningful glimpse into the individuals on either side of the conversation.

5 Minutes began with Christopher Michlig and Wendy Heldmann's vision to provide an opportunity for artists to share an experience and as a project to support print media: this publication marks its fifth year and is reason to celebrate. We hope that you enjoy.

Sincerely,
The Editors

Tuan Andrew Nguyen graduated from the Fine Arts program at the University of California, Irvine in 1999 and received his Masters of Fine Arts from The California Institute of the Arts in 2004.

His work explores strategies of political resistance through ritual, the making of objects [both as testimony and as devotion], supernaturalism and the impact of mass media on these moments of resistance. In his continual attempts at reworking the power dynamics of public space and mass media in general, he initiated The Propeller Group in 2006, a platform for collectivity that situates itself between an art collective and an advertising company.

He was also a co-founder and board member of Sàn Art, an artist-initiated exhibition space and educational program in Sai Gon, Viet Nam.

tuanandrewnguyen.com

the-propeller-group.com

KEVIN YATSU IN CONVERSATION WITH

*TUAN
ANDREW
NGUYEN*

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Kevin Yatsu: What are kids in Viet Nam listening to?

Tuan Andrew Nguyen: The kids that I have a lot of interaction with are listening to underground rap. I've been working with this rapper by the name of Wowy, I met him when he was sixteen or seventeen, he's in his late-twenties now and has become one of the biggest rap artists out there. Amid a lot of censorship in Viet Nam, what kids are up to and what they're talking about is a very fascinating topic for me. They're all so savvy on the internet. Viet Nam is one of the largest consumers of online videos in the world, so the online video has become such a powerful thing.

From looking at some of your earlier works, you seem to address dualities in Viet Nam, like with your documentaries of street art or collaboration with Wowy, and the advertising components of The Propeller Group...

I like pop-culture, I think that's something that we have... let me rephrase that: I don't like pop-culture, but I look at it as a very powerful mode of distribution, one that effects large amounts of people. I think that when I founded The Propeller Group it was to look at the media in a country that has been closed to the outside world and then suddenly opened up, and how the media kind of takes over. We saw the media as something very much in conflict with the political context of that time; so, we were looking at communism—Viet Nam is one of the five remaining communist countries in the world—and how remarkably different advertising was within that context. Advertising for us was the epitome of capitalism, if communism had propaganda then capitalism had advertising. After Viet Nam opened its doors and started welcoming international brands into the economy, all of these large advertising companies came in and suddenly you would see very old-school communist propaganda right next to very slick advertisements selling Coca-Cola or Pepsi, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and that was very fascinating for us. That's where we thought that our practice could kind of wedge itself in-between, those polarities, and to see what kinds of contradictions could come out of that.

Where do you situate Viet Nam The World Tour within that? Since it's not on the ground in Viet Nam.

We describe Viet Nam The World Tour as a “rogue-nation-unbranding” campaign. As we were doing a project called Television Commercial for Communism in late 2011, we started to get interested in how national identities, governments, would hire advertising agencies to rebrand their nation. It's obvious now but back then we didn't know that politicians would hire advertising agencies to help them with their image and to sell that image; so for us, having been very un-savvy to how the media worked, it gave us a different take on history and how it's made. We took this national identity called “Viet Nam”—the American war in Viet Nam made it one of the most mediatized identities in the world—because of how media in the 60s and 70s kind of branded it. When you do an internet search for “Viet Nam” you see all of these images of the Viet Nam War, we were interested in that relationship between a national identity and the media. So, Viet Nam The World Tour isn't really about Viet Nam, it is more about taking the national identity known as “Viet Nam” and kind of switching it around to become something else.

A moment that we've referenced and were inspired by was in 2012 when the Russian all-girl punk band, Pussy Riot, did a performance which was a remark against Putin; you would do an internet search of “Putin” and would see all of these images of him trying to be this heroic, boss kind of male-figure, and then after the performance you would do a search and Pussy Riot would come up—we thought that was an amazing kind of intervention in the internet, which is kind of like our archives now. For an artist group to make a shift like that was remarkable and that was one of the motivations behind Viet Nam The World Tour, taking this idea of nation branding and trying to flip it on its head. We worked with graffiti artists who had large followings online and asked them to do murals and tag “Viet Nam The World Tour” so that when people would look up Viet Nam, we would hope that Viet Nam The World Tour would come up.

Alright, well, wrapping up: what are you listening to now?

What am I listening to? Wow...I've just rediscovered an album called The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse by Duke Ellington, it's a really crazy album.

*“Advertising for us
was the epitome of
capitalism, if communism
had propaganda then
capitalism had advertising.”*

Shana Moulton is a California born and based artist who works in video, performance, and installation. In 2002, she began the video series *Whispering Pines*, in which she performs as Cynthia, both an alter-ego and an avatar for the artist when she is alone. Moulton has had solo exhibitions at the Palais De Tokyo, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Fondazione Morra Greco, Kunsthaus Glarus, and a retrospective of work at The Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.

She has performed and screened videos at MoMA, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Performa 2009, The Kitchen, Art in General, The Andy Warhol Museum, SFMOMA, The Hammer Museum and Cricoteka, among many others. Her work is distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix and she is a featured artist on Art21's *New York Close Up*.

shanamoulton.info

CAROLINE TURNER IN CONVERSATION WITH

*SHAVA
MOULTON*

Caroline Turner: So, I'll start out with an easy question, how do you take your coffee?

Shana Moulton: I take my coffee with milk, usually whole milk at home. My partner is lactose intolerant so usually we buy organic, whole lactose intolerant milk.

Interesting, I feel like you can learn a lot about a person by how they take their coffee.

Yes, yes.

Okay, so watching some of your lectures you mention in the beginning often that some of your undergraduate research as a dual major in anthropology and fine arts stems from how and why humans became bipedal and how that affects consciousness, does this still thread into your research at all? It seems that certain research communities believe that the rest of our bodies never caught up evolutionarily speaking and that we're always in pain because of this. I'm curious if this is something that continues to inform your work?

Well, I think in an indirect way, yes; I'm not directly thinking about that anymore. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to major in physical anthropology. I probably said this in whatever you watched, but I think the way that gravity affects our bodies as we age is largely related to this. So, when I was thinking about this more, I was making a walker dress to stay upright and a neck brace dress. I was also experiencing carpal tunnel and a bad strain injury from bad posture at the computer and so that was coming into it as well.

Also, in your work, Cynthia is of course this alter ego of yours, but also perhaps a metanarrative that allows you to discuss themes such as consumerism and the absurdity of modern life in a way that feels organic and not so didactic. Can you speak to this relationship? Is an alter ego an effective way to ask big questions?

Yeah! I love how you just put that, I never thought of the term metanarrative to discuss the use of the alter ego. It's me, but there's also some distance with the wig and the makeup and maybe she's me in combination with some

other female relatives in my family. I just can't do these as myself, for some reason I need this layer of distance. I sort of fell into it and it ended up being a generative way for me to work—and maybe "organic" is an even better way to describe it. It's not that I was thinking about these things in particular, but I would be at a thrift store shopping or see something online, you know, some media that I wanted to work with and interpret and the alter ego was the best way for me to string these disparate things together; she could always be the connection between all these things that I was dealing with. And they were more things than themes. It was like I really wanted to make a video about this massage tool and the show Antiques Roadshow, you know, and I really wanted to string these together—not that art really has to string things together in a narrative way—but for me, there was a desire to make a narrative out of those connections.

In a perfect world, what is an ideal setting to display your works?

Oh, um, I think one of the most successful...oh this is hard, because there's two things that I like to do. One, is to screen a lot of videos, maybe 45 minutes of video, which ends up being four or five shorts from the Whispering Pines series; then, without any break, to come out into the space so that Cynthia comes out of the screen and comes to life, the audience gets the chance to see her through the narrative, montaged video and then suddenly, she's in this different sort of time-space in the performance. That, I think, has been really successful.

So not necessarily an institutional gallery or museum?

My other ideal is a way to show video in an installation that brings out the tactile nature of things and allows people to wander around. I get the feeling of being trapped by black box gallery situations, so I prefer to have ins and outs. Even though there's a beginning and an end in my videos, people can come out and stay for however long they want and experience the objects from the videos in real life.

Oh, interesting, yeah.

Yeah, just for me to be able to make the experience

“Even though there’s a beginning and an end in my videos, people can come out and stay for however long they want...”

physical is important.

Okay, so I’ll ask one more question, which is also a fun question, I think. What is your favorite hike?

Oh! That’s hard! Oh, okay, what is my favorite hike...

Do we need to narrow it to just the West Coast maybe?

Well, I think they’re all on the West Coast, just because I never got to really hike on the East Coast. I would have to say...Uh, it’s hard! I think, because it’s tied up with my favorite place is—which doesn’t necessarily mean it’s my favorite hike—I would have to say Dipsea, north of San Francisco. The cabins there are my favorite place in the world, and you get mega views of the bay, I think that would have to be it. I mean, living near Yosemite, I feel bad not picking somewhere around there.

It seems like you’ve lived a lot of places with beautiful nature.

I’ve been lucky that way, yeah definitely.

CT: Okay cool, well, it was really nice talking to you.

Yeah, likewise. That was fun.

Daniel Canty is a writer, director and artist living in Montréal, Québec. He started producing works on the cusp of the new century. His directorial debut was an online adaptation of Alan Lightman's fiction, *Einstein's Dreams*, his first book, a history of automata in 19th century American literature.

Since then, he has been creating a host of living forms, working at the crossroads of literature and bookmaking, film and theatre, the visual arts and design. His practice, which stems from the poetics of writing, and the ethics of directing, extends the written word's wavelength to encompass a vast range of possibilities. He is fond of works that invent their own form. Over the years, he has written and devised an astonishing array of books and films, interfaces and exhibitions, and collaborated on such improbabilities as "transfrontier odysseys" or librettos for automata. He is steadfastly mapping a universe where the enchantments of language assert their import in the weave of time.

danielcanty.com

NATHAN ALEXANDER WARD IN CONVERSATION WITH

*DANIEL
CANTY*

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Nathan Alexander Ward: The first thing that I want to bring up, because I noticed that you do translation work and because your website's text is in French, is that my first experience of your work was through a Google translation—what do you think about that?

Daniel Canty: I don't think that machine translation is up to par just yet. I'm sure that these tools will learn to learn but it's not the same thing, it doesn't have the same kind of fluidity. Playing a language, it's a cliché, but it's a little bit like playing an instrument I suppose; you have to be able to bring a delicacy to it, a point of view that's your own, and that's not a norm or a statistic. Of course, there are also surprises with automated translating systems that sometimes can get poetic, in the sense that errors will happen, and something will be suggested. But for me, I think that it's a tool in understanding languages that I don't understand. I make up words sometimes with Google Translate—like if I want something to sound Icelandic, and I don't know Finnish, and let's put in some Hungarian—I'll use the tool to help me and then I'll look at what I recognize and make up something else. So, I guess that the machine is making up a fiction of its own with what I'm saying in natural language and I'm making up a fiction with what the machine is saying to me after.

That's an interesting kind of interface. I wondered to what extent that you may be using machine translation, because from what I understand, you place a lot of emphasis on the individual doing a translation. So, how does your work doing translation fit in with your work as a visual artist?

It's all about writing. It sounds funny, on my business card it says, "Écrivain, etc." or "Writer, etc." but when my work is covered somewhere, they always have me as a multidisciplinary artist—I think that it's kind of a misnomer because most artists, in one way or another in this day and age, are multidisciplinary. For me, it's more about purview; my first tool is language; poetry, story making, this idea of shaping language and having it interface with other media. I'm always going to consider myself a writer. Often when I do something in other media, like an installation or a film, I'm like the writer doing the installation or doing the film, it's a persona

that sticks to me. A photographer that I know, who works solely with photography, said to me that I really look like a writer.

Somebody told me yesterday that I look like an artist. I was surprised, a gray sweatshirt and black jeans are pretty neutral.

You can always recognize people who go to art school, there's just this consciousness, I guess. It happens in other disciplines of course, business people often look like business people.

I've often heard people say that you can always pick out an engineering student.

But there's always the wild one; sometimes the ones with the brightest and most active minds don't look the part at all. The image is a power but it's always a facade, you have to see which images are truly alive in a sense.

It's a visual language. I've read about your translation process, how you use various colors and different kinds of media to make marks in the margins around text, dealing with things in a very visual sense.

I also like to make the books in the end with the designers, working kind of like a director. It's about the language of collaboration, understanding the language of the people who are working with you, your colleagues, people that you want to shape an object with. I often work in collaboration, I work with teams, it's kind of a film model.

I get that sense, from the amount of output and how interdisciplinary that output is, some of your efforts seem to have been necessarily collaborative, they aren't one-person jobs. Has that always been the case?

There are things that I do alone. I haven't done a film for six years now, I remade a film into an installation last year, but that one I shot myself. But in post-production I'm not doing it all alone, and I like that. Like any community, you want to get people together to see what is the best that they can offer. When I recognize a person whose language speaks to me, then I want to create a context

“It’s about the language of collaboration...”

where we’ll be able to create something together.

Yeah, getting people around you that you believe will surprise you but that you know have the capacity to deal with your ideas...

...and to propose their ideas as well. You just have to set up a system to shape the thing that you’re trying to shape and to get the result—but you don’t know it in advance, it’s a way of setting up a time-based situation where you’re trying to carry some energy and see where it’s going and to get the best result possible. Especially with books. It’s funny, because everybody is claiming the death of film and everybody is claiming the death of the book—these are the best times because the terrain opens up, it’s like you’re not supposed to be doing it so you’re almost more free.

That’s postmodernism in general: you pull the rug out or hit rock bottom, level everything, and all the rules are gone—all you have is freedom.

That’s good, let’s pretend I said that.

Okay, so, we’re running out of time, but I wanted to bring up a quote that I’ve been thinking about, it’s from a French mathematician, Henri Poincaré, he said that, “Mathematics is the art of giving the same name to different things.”

Yeah, it’s a good quote. I think that it’s about structure and I think that this is one of the dimensions where I’m most active in the shaping process; I have an interest in building structures that add to what language is saying, what images are saying, the intermediary dimension. Poincaré is talking about invariance, about things that you can name, things that are happening in a living

system, the geometry of continuous transformation. In a way, you’re trying to recognize what keeps happening, what shapes keep appearing, how the living system carries within itself certain vectors, certain invariance. To me, that is often the beginning point for a lot of my projects.

In my lecture, I’m going to present a book that I did about sleep with the design studio Feed, some other artists, and 24 writers. It’s like a clock: there’s a series of systems that are active in shaping the book and even if you don’t get it at first, they’re there, coursing through the structure. It’s kind of like editing a film, sometimes you edit a film to a piece of music that’s not going to be in the film: there will be a ghost that’s left in the structure and I like these ghosts, these scaffoldings, these systems.

And the work is never just about the system, it’s about putting the system in motion and seeing where it leads you—and hopefully it leads you out of itself. I think that a lot system-based art is a trap because you start to illustrate the tool; we can see it with bad architecture where what you see is software based, vector based, and it feels like you’re walking within a computer graphic, which personally doesn’t make me feel all that great. For me, it has to be about the gesture that will let the system escape from itself and let you see why you wanted to create the system.

[A leaf from a nearby tree falls between us]

You see, the leaf is escaping the system of the tree.

Shannon R. Stratton is the William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. She has worked in the visual arts as an artist, writer, curator, professor, publisher and arts administrator with an emphasis on artist-run initiatives and concepts in contemporary craft. After completing her MFA in 2003 she co-founded the artist-run organization, Threewalls (Chicago), where she was artistic and then executive director for 12 years. At Threewalls, she organized exhibitions with over 100 artists; created The Propeller Fund award in collaboration with Gallery 400 for artist's self-organizing; conceived and published 4 volumes of PHONEBOOK, a national guide to grass-roots and artist-run organizations across the US; and co-organized the first Hand-in-Glove conference which would lead to the founding of Common Field, a national organization in support of artist-focused organizations. In 2015 she left Threewalls to assume the role of Chief Curator at The Museum of Arts and Design in New York and pursue her interest in the future of craft. At MAD she has reimagined the artistic vision of the institution, programming the exhibition calendar, including curating eight exhibitions, from fall 2015 until present. She continues to organize exhibitions independently, with a particular research interest in expanded concepts of the self-taught and grass-roots cultural production.

shannonraestratton.com

DORAN ASHER WALOT IN CONVERSATION WITH

*SHANNON R.
STRATTON*

“When you came into our gallery you were just like, ‘What the fuck is this?’”

Doran Asher Walot: So, one of the most asked questions in this format: What’s your favorite studio snack?

Shannon R. Stratton: These are the best questions! Right now, I’m really enjoying these Blue Diamond almonds that are covered in this powered cocoa, but it will be different next year after I find a new favorite snack.

Sweet and salty.

Sweet and salty.

I’ve seen reference to a paper you wrote about DIY MFAs, but I couldn’t find it, so I wondered if you wouldn’t mind telling me a bit about it.

Yeah, I had a conversation with some colleagues about the cost of MFA programs, particularly in the US, and we were really just reflecting on the number of artist-run residency programs and spaces in the country—so why couldn’t you just construct your own MFA experience? I did the math on it for a certain scale of people, not very many, maybe ten, that could spend way less money on an MFA if they got together and created their own low-residency program. They could borrow an artist-run space or use a family home or even just rent a motel somewhere and could assemble an MFA experience for less than they would spend going to school. Among themselves they could agree on people to pay to come and do studio visits. I can’t quite remember the exact math, but I’d be happy to send it if anybody cared. But the basic conclusion was that the thing that you get out of an MFA is studio visits, studio time, and spending time

with likeminded colleagues—so why couldn’t you just assemble that experience that you wanted to have and not have the burden of student loan debt?

Nice. My next question for you: in your time with Threewalls, what was your favorite project that you were not directly involved in?

It’s kind of hard to say, because in some ways I feel like I was directly involved in everything...but also not in anything because Threewalls was set up so there was a certain amount of content that we curated in terms of groupshows and exchanges with other arts organizations but our solo shows were an open application process and we had a jury of peers from the arts community that reviewed those applications and recommendations; it was set up so there was no singular authority but then I would work with the artists to get what they wanted. So, in a way I was in all of it and in none of it.

I’m just saying that so that I can come up with the answer that’s right because it’s like picking your favorite child. I’m just going to say what one of my favorite things was, no...two, because one was at the very beginning and the other was towards the end of my tenure doing that.

At the very beginning, when we starting doing that space, one of the first projects that happened was with a resident artist named Kyla Mallett; she set up a hotline and put out classified ads to collect local gossip and then re-recorded performances of what she collected, she then had the sound embedded into the walls of the gallery, there was no art on the walls, so you would have

to come in to the gallery and try to find a sweet spot to kind of eavesdrop on this gossip. I loved it, because it was one of the first things that we did as a gallery and we didn't have anything in the gallery which was in a very commercial gallery district. It was a nice intention because in this neighborhood there was a bunch of stuff for sale and when you came into our gallery you were just like, "What the fuck is this?" Because we were new and nobody knew what we were yet, we'd get these folks out looking in the commercial galleries and they'd stumble in and either be pleasantly surprised or deeply frustrated.

Towards the end of being there we had a long-term relationship with an artist, Cauleen Smith, who came to Chicago for a short residency and then we supported her in coming back and she ended up living in Chicago for quite some time. She was doing a project on Sun Ra where different high schools in the south side of Chicago would do a kind of flash mob marching band, they'd get off a bus someplace and play something like "Space is the Place" and then get back on the bus and drive away, and I mean, that's amazing. So, I invited her there, but I couldn't orchestrate something like that.

So that's a safe answer.

Alright, last question: As a Canadian, what is your favorite piece of CanCon?

Oh my god, what is my favorite Canadian content?

...Trailer Park Boys.

Good answer.

Ebitenyefa Baralaye is a ceramist, sculptor, and designer. His work explores cultural, spiritual, and material translations in form/objects, text, and symbols interpreted through a diaspora lens and abstracted around the aesthetics of craft and design. Baralaye received a BFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and a MFA in Ceramics from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Baralaye was an Emerging Artists Program recipient at the Museum of the African Diaspora in 2017 and recently an AICAD Teaching Fellow at the San Francisco Art Institute.

baralaye.com

CAROL YAHNER IN CONVERSATION WITH

EBITEN'VEFA
BARALAYE

“I still believed; I was totally convinced that there was a horse in that tangle of lines.”

Carol Yahner: I'm curious, at what point in your life did you know, or have a sense, that you'd like to pursue art or to be an artist?

Ebitenyefa Baralaye: I remember when I was a child, I think that I was in kindergarten, I scribbled on a piece of paper and inside the scribbles I saw a horse, and I turned to one of my class mates and said, “Hey there’s a horse in there,” and she just looked at me very perplexed and probably responded to the effect of, “No there isn’t.” I still believed; I was totally convinced that there was a horse in that tangle of lines. That’s when it struck me that I saw things differently and it mattered to me—to not only see things differently, but to create.

Wow, in kindergarten, what a gift. So, when you were starting out in art school, did a particular medium stick out to you or have you always worked in a multidisciplinary way?

I really fell for the nature of clay; I started working in clay during high school, in an AP sculpture class it was the material that we were given to work with, and I just took to it right away. I would take it home with me and make a mess of our dining room table, thankfully my mom was pretty supportive. When I went off to college at RISD, I figured that I would move on to other materials like wood or metal and I actually ended up majoring in furniture design because I wanted to have a combination of fine art and design; I was really drawn to the inclusion of drawing and CAD as a part of the curriculum. But I kept on taking ceramics classes and found that I really enjoyed working with the material. If I was going to invest this time in my

life, at college, in one particular medium, I wanted it to be clay. So, I ended up transferring out of furniture design after a semester to go into ceramics.

Looking at your work and reading your artist’s statement, you mention your migration from Nigeria, to the Caribbean, and then to the US, could you expand on this narrative of migration and how it informs your work?

I was born in Nigeria, but I moved—before I could have any recollection of being in Nigeria—to the Caribbean, to Antigua, which was a very beautiful place, a kind of magical place to grow up in as a child; I remember there being so many stars in the sky, and then the contrast when I moved to the States of hardly being able to see any stars at all. I settled on the East Coast, New York mainly, but also Georgia and Connecticut, before going off to RISD, and then to Michigan and then San Francisco; so I guess that I would say that all of the journeys that I’ve been on, all the transitions that I’ve been through—I’m not a fan of moving anymore—have had an effect on the way that I see and think about context. As somebody who came to an appreciation of art at an early age and it being something that I wanted to do with my life, it was the one thing that was consistent throughout all of those transitions. And I realized that those transitions actually caused me to lean into my art practice more because it was something that I was in control of.

So, what is a typical day like in your studio?

That’s a hard one. I’m asking myself if there is a typical day...if I were to take the sum of all of my studio days

over the past year I would say that my time generally looks like: Arriving at the studio and dealing with all the administrative elements that go along with being an art teacher, planning what it is that I need to do—which I find myself doing more and more, breaking things down into steps—and then diving headlong into whatever task is in front of me, whether that’s working on a piece or doing some modeling or drawing to develop a piece; and while I’m working I’ll generally be listening to some music, stand-up comedy, or an audio-book, and I’ll kind of bounce in and out of intense or passive states of focus depending on whether or not the processes that I’m working on are very involved or more repetitive; and then at some point I’ll bounce out of that for lunch, or I’ll hit some wonderful epiphany, or some very low point and just decide to call it a day.

Have to love the epiphanies and low points. Alright, last question: What advice would you offer art students that are just starting out?

Always maintain your studio practice. No matter where you are or what situation you are in, find a way to keep making your art but also to continue sharing your work and to be a part of the contemporary art conversation that is around you. You might have to be pretty creative about this, you might potentially even need to shift materials based on certain seasons that you find yourself in, but I would say to look at those obstacles as an opportunity to grow in distinct ways and to allow obstacles to be launching points for new ways of looking at things. And take care of yourself, make time for things that refresh you outside of your studio.

Alexandria Eregbu is a visual artist and independent curator. At her core, Alexandria is most passionate about re-imagining 21st century possibilities for creative practice through service and support structures that promote sustainability and accessibility for artists and communities engaging the arts. As an artist, her practice has illuminated pathways globally, nationally, and throughout the Midwest. She has held fellowships with ACRE (Steuben, WI); HATCH Projects, Stony Island Arts Bank, (Chicago, IL); The Center for Afrofuturist Studies (Iowa City, IA), Independent Curators International (New Orleans, New York City, Martinique); and The Camargo Foundation/3Arts Residency (France). Among her curatorial projects includes “du monde noir,” an artistically run collective which seeks to identify contemporary evidences of Surrealist activity produced by visual artists and writers of the African diaspora in the U.S. and abroad. Forthcoming projects include Oh, Heavenly Father, Mother Ocean, and Cosmic Seed...! her solo show at Ditch Projects in Eugene, OR.

alexandriaeregbu.com

EDEN EVANS IN CONVERSATION WITH

*ALEXANDRIA
EREGBU*

Eden Evans: Your work involves a wide array of media: photographs, textiles, sculpture, and installation. How do you navigate these media when conjuring a new piece or beginning your research?

Alexandria Eregbu: I'm a feeler. So, I definitely work towards things that initially draw me in. I've found over the years that when I work from that sense of curiosity that there's meaning behind the materials that I incorporate into the work of art, which kind of creates a history and a narrative of its own. I always start with just curiosity on its own and what I'm trying to communicate.

Your work seems to have a strong relationship with research and familial history, but perhaps also extols a sense of nostalgia and longing. Can you talk about the emotion in your work? You kind of touched on it just now, but maybe more specifically.

I think the best way I can really answer that question is by addressing the fact that I'm a triple water sign; if you're not familiar with—wait, no, we were talking about the elements and all that...

Yeah!

...yeah, like I said, I'm kind of a feeler, deeply emotional, everything I read about and my being has kind of been centered on trying to control or manage my emotions. I'm also a black woman, a descendent of slaves, people that survived but have a kind of trauma and violence embedded in their DNA. I think that my sensitivity comes from there, but my power as well. So, I definitely view my art practice as a means of working through some of my emotional sensitivity that I have to the world.

Yeah, I definitely identify with that.

[Laughter]

While your work itself is poetic and intimate feeling, you also incorporate the written word into your practice, can you discuss that?

Our words are power. They're a form of magic. They're a

form of inscribing and speaking that which we imagine in to existence. And so, while I don't necessarily consider myself a poet or even a writer quite yet, these things have always been something that have been really important. And yeah, another source of building meaning. I definitely try to use words that make sense as a source of manifestation and a source of inspiration. These are the things I get excited about.

I think we have time for one last question. Usually, when you hear the word sustainability these days, we think climate change and reuse, but I think these words hold a broader meaning in your biography. Can you tell me about your motives and plans for building and holding art systems that promote sustainability and accessibility?

Yeah, I think that definitely comes through in my curatorial practice. I'm part of a collective called du monde noir, which stands for black people of the world. Our work really looks at contemporary evidences of Surrealist practice from the African diaspora as a means to work, to use that trajectory of imagination, ritual, and play to sustain or imagine a continuation of those traditions that are integral to our being and our daily lives and existence. Through that collective we've been able to touch base with new folks who are interested in the work. I'm also working through Illinois Humanities right now toward this initiative titled "Envisioning Justice," which amplifies the voices of seven organizations and partners who have been working with incarceration and justice.

Wow, thank you so much.

You're welcome! Thank you.

“I think the best way I can really answer that question is by addressing the fact that I’m a triple water sign.”

Julia Bryan-Wilson is the Doris and Clarence Malo Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of California, Berkeley; she is also the Director of the UC Berkeley Arts Research Center. She is the author of *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (2009); *Art in the Making: Artists and Their Materials from the Studio to Crowdsourcing* (2016); and *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (2017), which was awarded the 2018 Robert Motherwell Book Prize.

Bryan-Wilson's influential writings on feminist and queer theory, craft histories, and contemporary art in the Americas have been widely published in venues that include *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *Art Bulletin*, *Bookforum*, *differences*, *Grey Room*, *October*, *Oxford Art Journal*, and *Parkett*, and she is the cocurator of the traveling exhibition *Cecilia Vicuña: About to Happen*.

TANNON RECKLING AND LIAM MAHER IN CONVERSATION WITH

*JULIA
BRYAN-
WILSON*

Tannon Reckling: To start off pretty easy: What's your favorite color?

Julia Bryan-Wilson: My favorite color is gray. Gray is a very beautiful color, there's many types and moods indicated by it...very evocative of sea and sky and metal.

Liam Maher: I like how you had that right off that bat, I usually takes ages.

JBW: I saw that that was the first question. Sometimes I say orange, its actually quite variable, but today I'll say gray.

TR: It matches the weather. I always like the response to that question because sometimes artists will just say that that is a stupid question, but I like that response because it seems like such an easy question to ask artists.

JBW: I mean, I feel like they're all good, all colors are good, but I do think that gray has many stories that it tells.

Okay, so next question: Why Bruce Nauman? For this lecture tonight.

JBW: Well, sometimes talks and the topics are just a matter of what is fresh on your plate. I was invited to give a talk at the Schaulager recently, for which I had to write a new talk, so this is what I have. It's the talk that I'm working on and actually revising so it's useful to get feedback because it hasn't been published and I'm still tinkering with ideas.

LM: And are you looking to publish this in some capacity?

JBW: Yeah definitely, not a book, just an article.

TR: What are some recent exhibitions that have excited you in the past year or so?

JBW: Hmm, so many. I was just in New York and I saw the Hilma af Klint show, the Swedish mystic, and that was great. I wrote a piece in book form about the catalog, but the show was a knock out; actually seeing all of the work was pretty exhausting though, I find the Guggenheim very exhausting by the time you get to the top. Also, at

The Jewish Museum, I just saw this great show about the radical revolutionary art school that Marc Chagall founded in 1918, he brought in Malevich and Lissitzky to be teachers. It's amazing to think about all of those people coinciding at the same time and space and having an aesthetic program for the Russian Revolution.

LM: Wow, I didn't even know that existed.

JBW: It's a good thing to know.

TR: That kind of leads into a future question...But, were there any art pieces or theories that you believe were formative in leading up to this Bruce Nauman talk?

JBW: So, is this a question about formative art? Or is it about Bruce Nauman?

TR: Let's do formative art.

JBW: Okay, yeah, so many. I went to a public arts high school in Houston, Texas and for a lot of idiosyncratic reasons, it was a quite advanced arts school given that it was in Texas and was public; the people that we were exposed to were people that I still think about, you know, like, my favorite artist when I was 16 was Hans Haacke—which is kind of an unusual...

LM: Gosh, I love that.

JBW: ... there were people there who were not interested in pushing a straight forward narrative on us, so I think that it's interesting that certain people that I was exposed to very early, in my teens, I can come back to again and again. And also, like, Jenny Holzer, I was really into feminist conceptual art...

LM: Ah, brilliant.

[Laughter]

JBW: ...I mean, there's also stuff that I'm not so crazy about anymore, but still, it was wonderful.

TR: What are your thoughts—and this is a selfish

question—on things that you’ve seen recently that maybe connect the ideas of queerness, feminism, and the internet?

JBW: Oh gosh, okay, that is a big question. I’m going to have to think about that for a second...queerness, feminism, and the internet...in terms of art or in terms of anything?

TR: Anything, no right answer, just curious about your thoughts when those words are mentioned, what pops in to your head.

JBW: I want to hear what you have to say about that, I’m kind of more interested in what you have to say about it. I don’t know, I’m so conflicted about the internet I guess; It’s many things, it’s not monolithic...I feel the coerciveness of it more than I feel the liberational potential, and I don’t know what it would have been like to come out—which I did when I was 15, in Houston, Texas, in the 80s—what that would have felt like had I had something like the internet. I’m sure that it would have been a lot less isolating and scary and shameful and all the things that I felt as then. For me, it was all about discovering something in the library, finding a story that I could relate to; there were so few glimpses that my life would be possible really, so little culture representation, so little. I had a very early sense of butchness, I guess, like a radar for it, an attraction and desire; very early, like when I was child, I can remember being attracted to a certain female masculinity—but no sense that there might be a whole world out there with people like me. So, I’m sure that the internet has helped but at the same time, of course, I can only think about Cambridge Analytica and Alt-Right and Fake News, right now it just feels so destructive.

JBW: I did find my own way, but there is so much suffering and suicide and it’s still hard, of course; I guess that I feel very ambivalent about queerness and the internet. And feminism the same: I think that, similarly, I was looking for a feminism path for myself and I wonder what that could look like...maybe the internet would have help me find a community of activists—but I found that any way, the feminism part was a lot easier, more visible, for

me anyway, because I had a feminist mom, an actively feminist mom.

JBW: Yeah...queerness, feminism, and the internet...I don’t know.

TR: Thank you for sharing your coming out story. I’m interested in the access to information and that aspect of a community. I think that’s changing, as far as the internet goes, in places where it wasn’t available previously, like Texas or Nebraska.

LM: Yeah, coming out in Indianawas crazy, I didn’t come out until college. Looking back, you know, it’s so interesting because I grew up in a very conservative Catholic family, so I didn’t even know queerness was a thing until I went to college and experienced a wider world. It’s interesting how the access to information can change so much and potentially...

JBW: Yeah, potentially. When I was 15 there was no internet, but there were other things you know, there were women’s bookstores and travel guides and gay pride parades that existed in Houston, which has a really big queer community actually. So, the awareness was there.

TR: Cool, well, I think that’s it for me but did you...

LM: Yeah, so the Whitney is having that big Andy Warhol exhibition and I wanted to pick your brain about that because there’s not a whole lot about his queerness; I think, for Andy Warhol, it’s a very big part of his work so...

JBW: Right, it just opened and I haven’t seen it yet but—there is also another Warhol show that’s very important that’s curated by Richard Meyer and Peggy Phelan at the Cantor Arts Center; there’s always a few Warhol shows going on around the world— you know, Warhol is so saturated in how we think about art in the 20th century, there is no question that he is the most important, in my opinion anyway, I shouldn’t say there’s no question, but in my opinion he was the most important artist in the 20th century. His legacy is central to everything, so prescient in terms of the market and commercialization and self-

branding and all of those things. I'm surprised to hear that queerness isn't a big part of that show because it's seems that that's been a really accepted part of the narrative for quite a while. There was even a book, a really important early book about queer art history, that was called Pop Out about queer Warhol, and so I'm curious to see how it's dealt with. I mean, maybe it's just so accepted that it's taken for granted.

LM: That's a good point, I didn't think about that.

JBW: I teach classes on contemporary art and, you know, it's a contested origin moment—where do we start with the contemporary? But I really feel like Warhol has to be in the mix, you cannot understand contemporary art without some exposure to Warhol.

JBW: I've seen Warhol shows at the Whitney before, this is not the first time; there was a retrospective where they, in a kind of fetishistic way, had his stuff on display that was like, from his bathroom...

LM: They said that there was a lot stuff that they're bringing out from his archive.

JBW: Well, that archive is bottomless.

LM: As an art historian who is interested in queer theory and art, I struggle to find other art historians or queer theorists that talk about art in a way that feels accurate and up to date—not to say that what is out there is unsuccessful—so I wonder if you have like a top three that people should really know about?

JBW: Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation* is a really important book about homosexuality and censorship, kind of looking at the sweep of 20th century American art, that book is great, is still a really important wonderful book. A lot of the queer theorists that write about art are not art historians, which is interesting. Another one that I should say is C. Ondine Chavoya who is a curator and art historian who teaches at Williams; he curated that big Asco show that was at LACMA during the first round of PST in 2011, and also curated *Axis Mundo* which was about queer-chicana networks in LA, and that was also

kind of at the center of queer-color critique in art history. So those two for sure.

LM: Oh! And, last thing, the Met Gala and the "Camp" theme—how could I forget—they're doing that, and I just don't know, it's giving me vibes of appropriation.

JBW: Yeah, we'll just have to see, I mean "Camp" is such a capacious rubric that it could hold many things, but often is in the in the eye of the beholder so...

LM: All I've heard about it just seems to be buzz words.

JBW: It's an interesting idea.

LM: I hope it goes well.

JBW: It could be, really, appalling—but maybe not!

[Laughter]

“The feminism part was a lot easier, more visible, for me anyway, because I had a feminist mom, an actively feminist mom.”

Megan Foster's work suggests a narrative by presenting a frozen moment in time. She aims to preserve and give authority to the everyday experience through a mix of art, architecture, design and science. Using appropriated images, film stills, magazine clippings and staged photographs as a starting point, she depicts banal scenes that have the potential to be spectacular and fantastic. She portrays often-overinflated expectations of the way we live and how we try to better ourselves from previous generations.

Megan Foster earned her BFA from RISD and her MFA from Columbia University. Her work has been included in exhibitions at Black and White Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; Mixed Greens Gallery, NYC; PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY; Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, China; and the San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA, among other venues. Before joining the faculty at RISD in the fall of 2016, Foster taught at The City College of New York where she was the head of Printmaking and director of the MFA program. She was also master printer at the LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies and is the co-founder of Moonlight Editions.

meganfoster.net

NATHAN ALEXANDER WARD IN CONVERSATION WITH

*MEGAN
FOSTER*

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“Like, I’m thinking, what if there is a glow-in-the-dark bear that becomes a lamp through taxidermy.”

Nathan Alexander Ward: Well, as an icebreaker: There are a lot of animals in your work...

Megan Foster: Oh, this will give me a good little warm up for the talk...

Great, so then, the animals?

It's weird because I never did much with the outdoors—it was always domestic spaces, interiors, architectural sort of images—but at some point I became interested in the kind of absurd things that people buy, "As Seen On TV" kind of junk, which led me to the backyard. I was going to do this grand project of outdoing a neighbor with this sort of junk in the backyard; so, I slowly made it outside, but it was still domestic space. When I was trying to make that series, I was basically photographing my brother's backyard and other places trying to come up with something and then I realized that I needed more spectacle, I needed a grand space. So, I was taking trips to Yosemite and...long tangent—I basically ended up looking at technology and nature together and coming up with kinds of hybrid animals, based on the absurd technology of the "As Seen On TV" junk and designer pets and taxidermy. Like, I'm thinking, what if there is a glow-in-the-dark bear that becomes a lamp through taxidermy. I was kind of just making up my own pseudo-science.

It's funny, I saw the painting of that bear and I didn't think about it as a glow-in-the-dark bear. But hearing you talk about it in that way, it makes me think that you're not really making images of animals, you're making images of a kind of secondary-representation of animals. Since you brought up doing those photographs: Looking through your work, whether it's painting or printmaking or whatever, I notice a lot of photographic qualities in it. With the works on paper you're working on top of photographs, but even in your paintings I still sense something photographic about them. So, I'm wondering about the use of photography in your work.

I've always photographed every stage of my paintings. I would use photographs as a way to construct the image, use Photoshop to break up the colors, but it was never really part of the end-result. For the longest time, I

really wanted to have a drawing practice, to have some sketches or whatever; I bought all these fancy pens and markers and it just didn't work for me. When I was trying to figure out the space for those backyard pieces, I was struggling. I went to London and there was a Muybridge show, I saw his pictures of Yosemite and felt like that was the space that I wanted and so I bought a catalog just to tear it up—that was my new way of sketching. I didn't intend to show that stuff initially, I was just scanning them and doing what I would do with my own photographs, breaking them up. Now I have like 250 catalog pages and about 500 postcards...

There was a particular postcard that you used along with all of those landscapes, of a marble bust or something, that threw me because it was kind of a lone figure among all of the grand Yosemite-looking spaces.

MF: You'll see that image come up in my talk. When I tore through that Muybridge catalog, I thought that I needed to go to Yosemite and take my own pictures, it felt sort of, I was using it too...

You were inheriting a lot with them?

...yeah, I needed to make it my own, they were too perfect and beautiful. I needed to photograph it myself, which is something that I've always had to do whether it's a film still or whatever, I have to restage it myself. I went to Yosemite and wanted to photograph it, but I also wanted to collect ephemera and get more catalogs and posters, but surprisingly there wasn't much there. I go in the gift shop and get a few postcards but I really wanted to come back with a bulk of stuff to work on—I joke that I was taking these long hikes there just to get to the gift shop—but I ended up with stuff that wasn't really my style, they were blown up and had super-saturated color, and they ended up just sitting in my studio for a long time. When I started to get bored with the older black and white ones, well I had been staring at these super colorful ones for a long time and so I started to work on them; I had been trying to suggest a kind of waiting for the supernatural or sublime but then I just wanted to actually show a bit more of that, so these colorful ones helped bring that to my paintings...another long tangent, I just figured out that I

could use everything, so every time that I'd go on a trip I'd collect tons of postcards and would envision how it could all become a setup for some hypothetical spectacle.

That just made me think about the two nearly-identical paintings that you made of a hummingbird. I'm thinking about repetition and seriality, and with all of this about your use of photographs, I can't help but see those paintings in photographic terms—or as products of mechanistic processes. And when you mentioned the taxidermy animals...it all seems to come down to processing nature, processing animals.

People are sometimes surprised that my paintings are paintings because I have a background in printmaking. It's just the quality that I know, the lines and the flatness. Those hummingbird ones are actually of solar-hummingbirds, like that are in gardens and that change colors every five minutes or something. Fortunately, or unfortunately, my brother owns a lot of that stuff. I made those before I started doing the taxidermy ones. It's always been about life and technology and how they influence each other.

Who would want that stuff?

A lot of people.

I know! There is a huge market for it.

I actually made three of those paintings, there was a green one, but it didn't work as well as I wanted it to. People think it's funny that I'll spend the time to make the same painting in a different color, but I like the seriality of it.

There was a landscape image that you worked with across mediums that I'm thinking about now as well. What motivates you to return to an image with a different medium?

That was actually a sort of turning point with the backyard, grand landscape stuff. At first, I wanted to keep things kind of neutral, suggestive, just adding some color in with the black and white photographs; but then

I wanted the more saturated colors that would show the spectacle or supernatural that I had been trying to suggest. I wanted it to be there more. So, I'd go back and forth, do a series of paintings and struggle with them, so then do a few postcards or a few prints, just to balance.

So, you're not really switching modes, it's more of a juggling act?

Yeah. That image: the painting was handmade with acrylic, but the print was much simpler, I just screen-printed the black on top of a giant piece of holographic vinyl. I just wanted to stop suggesting and alluding to spectacle and instead just show it.

Do you think that the previous iteration, the painting, is made obsolete then? If it doesn't have that spectacle?

It's weird, you know, because the prints were shown with the paintings—not the same iteration, I made eight or so—and I felt like the prints couldn't work at the scale of the paintings; so I just try to find balance now, between the paintings and another element, try to have it all there in pieces.

Showing them together, they kind of color each other then, and emphasize the anticipation of the spectacle. Where it is obvious in the print, it is more of something to be anticipated in the painting.

I feel like nature is the backdrop, you know? You're sitting around all afternoon waiting for fireworks...so I'm okay with the paintings being that. And then you have the spectacle for an hour.

With a 20-year history of picture making, Whitney Hubbs explores both straightforward and uncertain modes of image production. Educated as a traditional documentary photographer and as a conceptual artist examining the role of photographs, Hubbs brings a rigorous approach to her work. Her subject matter has included staged poems to the landscape, the figure in the landscape, self-portraits, and literal and abstract examinations of the female body.

Born and raised in Southern California with a brief stint in Portland, Oregon, Whitney Hubbs was involved in the punk rock riot grrrl community from a young age, where she made fanzines, organized art shows, participated in performances and worked as an activist. She later received her BFA from the California College of Arts in 2005 and an MFA at UCLA in 2009.

Hubbs has participated in group exhibitions at The J. Paul Getty Museum, Gallery Luisotti, and Shulamit Nazarian Gallery in Los Angeles, CA; The California Museum of Photography, Riverside, CA; Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, TX; Yancey Richardson Gallery, Fresh Window Gallery, and Situations Gallery in New York City, NY. Her book, *Body Doubles*, was published by Hesse Press (Los Angeles) in 2016, and in 2019 she will publish a book with Self Publish Be Happy. Hubbs is represented by M+B Gallery in Los Angeles and Situations Gallery in New York City. Hubbs is an Assistant Professor of Photography at Alfred University, Alfred, New York and lives and works in New York State.

whitneyhubbs.com

IAN SHERLOCK MOLLOY IN CONVERSATION WITH

*WHITNEY
HUBBS*

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“I’m choosing to be an artist and the lifestyle of an artist.”

Ian Sherlock Molloy: Hello.

Whitney Hubbs: Hello, it’s nice to meet you.

ISM: It’s good to meet you too.

In an interview with Self Publish, Be Happy you say, “In a parallel world, I’m a film director.” How does outside media influence your work and how does the role of a director influence your work?

I’m going to talk about this in the lecture, but I was raised on film sets. My dad was a cinematographer or a director of photography, my mom worked on film sets, my step-mom did, so I would hang out on sets with all the crew—so it’s been in me from a very young age, to direct and to control the frame. But I don’t like working collaboratively, I never have. Photography is a way to direct without having to collaborate.

Film plays a huge part in my work, more so than photography. Like, when I was younger, I would go to movies and it was like church to me; I would go alone and sit in the theater on a weekly basis, so watching films and watching my dad work was a huge influence on me and still is.

Cool. So, sort of changing directions slightly, in your bio on your website you acknowledge the influence of punk and riot grrrl music, in what way does that still appear in your work?

I’m choosing to be an artist and the lifestyle of an artist; I mean, I have a safe job and I know where I get my paycheck every month, but choosing my own path is very punk and very feminist. My community is very important to me, I learned that through riot grrrl and punk in my

high school years. We have a wide community around the country, and I keep in touch with people, we make zines and write letters to each other, it still plays out that way. As far as my work goes, I’m not too sure if it’s punk—but it’s emotional and so it’s punk.

I like that, I need to use that. Does that also influence why you teach?

Yeah, because I’m giving back. I went to CCA for undergrad, all of my teachers were amazing, but I had two mentors, Larry Sultan and Jim Goldberg, that really informed me about what a teacher can do. That’s why I teach, to give back to youth.

I also noticed in your bio that you acknowledge your high school photography teacher.

Yes, yes.

That’s refreshing to see.

Yeah, I took photography in ninth grade and it was an accident because the painting class was closed; he took me under his wing and let me be a lab person and I was on the yearbook—but I was punk, which was kind of funny—but yeah, he was very influential and told me that I should just keep with it.

On your website you have “Photographs” at the top of your navigation, I assume that’s because that’s your most consistent practice, but underneath it you have “Video Sketches”; could you unpack the use of “sketches” for me?

Because they are unresolved to me. I have the knowledge and experience of selecting images to go into a book or

a show, and thus translate onto a website; I don't have the experience to do that so much with video, as much as photography. I don't even know why I put them up there, honestly, because I like them, but they are unresolved. Gesture is really important to me and having a film background—growing up on film sets, not an educational background—I feel tied to cinema and movement more than photography...but what I do is photography.

Do you have photographic sketches as well then? That don't make it online?

Yeah, and you'll see that tonight in the lecture.

That's interesting that you have the impulse to put these unresolved video works out there but not the photographs.

I know, I don't know why that is...maybe because the unresolved photographs I'm just more private about because it is my primary practice. But something that I'm just playing around with, that's not my medium, I feel more comfortable putting it out in the world. If I painted, I'd probably put painting sketches out just for fun. Also, it kind of gives people an idea about what else is interesting to me.

Yeah, you have a sketchbook and you're illustrating a process. I think that's really important and that more transparency is something that we are seeing more of. It's refreshing to see that. Can a sketch be a finished work...

I've shown some of the videos, people have wanted me to show them, but I wouldn't say that they are finished. I mean, I don't really know how to edit video. I think that putting sketches or works in-progress out in general makes it less professional and more human.

And you could argue that it brings back that punk ideology or aesthetic.

Yeah, exactly.

Cool, that's a great evolution of punk within a short interview: how it can still come into play with a stable job

and consistent income and still permeate every facet of your life.

Thinking back to your first questions, I'm trying to think about how I can tie it all in.

In terms of directing?

Yeah. In grad school I had this professor, Charles Ray, and he's like, "It's like you're a director sitting in a chair and screaming 'Action!' at a plant" and I loved that.

Was that intended to be a compliment?

Yes! I mean, how could you not take that as a compliment? Like, you're screaming at a thing that doesn't move but you made it move or do something...

I would totally have gone to film school if I had known that you could. I didn't know that you could at that time.

So, does photography just take that place? Or is it something totally different?

Yeah, people say that you can do anything and that you could make a film...but like I said, I don't want to collaborate with a crew. If I could I would be a landscape photographer all the time.

Well, thank you, that was really insightful.

Amy Franceschini (b. 1970 Patterson, CA, US) lives and works in San Francisco and Gent, Belgium and is the founder of Futurefarmers. Amy received her BFA from San Francisco State University in 1992 and her MFA from Stanford University in 2002. Amy has taught as an adjunct and visiting professor in the graduate programs in art at California College for the Arts, Stanford University and San Francisco Art Institute since 2003. Her work has been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Whitney Biennial in New York, MOMA, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, the 2014 Venice Architectural Biennale, the 2017 Sharjah Biennale, the 2018 Taipei Biennale and she is the

recipient of a 2010 Guggenheim Fellowship, 2017 Herb Alpert Award for Visual Arts and a 2019 Rome Prize Fellow in Design.

futurefarmers.com

CAROLINE TURNER IN CONVERSATION WITH

AMY
FRANCESCINI

Caroline Turner: Futurefarmers was founded in 1995, I'm curious to hear what spurred the initial collaboration or the root idea to begin. Was there a specific catalyzing force in that place, that time?

Amy Franceschini: So, Futurefarmers was started as kind of a hiding place from this other collaborative group called Atlas, we were gaining a lot of attention and I wanted a space to work where I didn't have any stakes at hand. So, I just started working with people that had different skill sets than me to try to expand my own. We started to get projects and we had to have a name to get a bank account and I want to live on a farm in the future, so that's why we called it Futurefarmers. At the time it was just three of us and we started to make money doing design projects and we began an artist residency program to continue building this network of people with other skill sets. I've never been comfortable with the individual artist practice, it's not interesting to me, but it's always interesting to try to meet people through making. All my friends are Futurefarmers, so there's an intimacy and a common interest in stretching our skill sets through collaborating with new people and configurations. That's where the interest came from.

When I ask this, I'm thinking specifically about the Soil Kitchen project in Philadelphia—but feel free to bring up other projects as well—What are the best strategies that you've learned from Futurefarmers for going to a place to enact a project? What are your first steps when approaching unfamiliar methodologies, places, subjects, or processes?

I don't think that any of us think in terms of methodologies. But from several projects and experiences now, I think it's been fun to work with local people who are embedded deeply in the local situation that we're invited into. It's not just a place, it's a moment in that place, it's a socio-economic reality, it's a political reality, an environmental reality, so we try to find partners that know that situation really in depth. For us, trying to make a project that is durable and lasting, you need those partners because otherwise...for us, that's just how we work.

In a lot of your projects, you're on the ground and talking

to people in this really embodied way. I wonder, do you see this format having the potential to augment other disciplines? For instance: anthropologists do ethnographies, architects make site visits. Is that a consideration for you?

I reflect by being so embedded and physically present in that situation and that's demanded other people to do that too. So, for instance, this large-scale commission we did in Norway—which I'll talk about more tonight—we were often meeting in the 16th floor of this executive office and looking at the site as a 3D model on a desktop. We wanted to meet on the site, but that's very vulnerable and transparent for commissioners because everyone is privy to what the conversation is; so we said that if they can't do that then we don't to participate. That translated into their other public art commissions and their development of the space being a more transparent process because they were imagining these spaces with no people in them. They were creating a new urban area of the city, but they weren't imagining how people were really going to use it. So, to see people actually as a part of the process translated to a new way, at least in Oslo, of how they plan their cities.

Does one of these have more merit: subverting a system from within or creating a new system within which to exist?

Both.
[Laughter]

I think there is no one way. I think it's just demonstrating on a small scale what you want to see, and then it becomes so infectious that it contaminates, or it collapses because it's only interesting to yourself. We don't start at the onset saying that we're going to demonstrate something in any given way, it's just an organic process of listening to what needs are in a certain situation and reflecting that or amplifying that through our tools or our means—means being, maybe, money from a commissioner, redistributing it, and demonstrating another way of being. Seeing what that looks like and having the flexibility as an artist group to do that, in the position of being invited to do something, you do have some malleability.

“I think it’s been fun to work with local people who are embedded deeply in the local situation that we’re invited into.”

Shadi Harouni is an artist based in New York and Tehran. Harouni's practice ranges from site-specific interventions and sculptures, to printmaking, photography and film. Her research is centered on disavowed and marginalized histories of dissent and resistance, chiefly in the Middle East. Harouni's projects have been exhibited at Queens Museum (NY), Kunstmuseum Bonn (DE), Prague City Gallery (CZ), University of Toronto (CA), Fondazione Ratti (IT), Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (NY). Her work has been featured in Art Forum, The New York Times, The Guardian, Flash Art and Mousse, among others. She has been awarded a Gattuso Prize for Outstanding Exhibition, Harpo Foundation Grant for Artists, AIR Fellowship, residencies at Skowhegan (ME), SOMA (MX), LES Printshop (NY). Harouni holds an MFA from NYU (2011) and a BA from University of Southern California (2007). She serves as Visiting Assistant Professor and Director of the Undergraduate Program in Studio Art at New York University, Steinhardt.

SAJAD AMINI IN CONVERSATION WITH

*SHADI
HAROUNI*

SA: I know that you'll be speaking specifically about your works specifically during your talk later, so let's talk about the concepts and ideas behind them. There is a future and a hope that you talk about in your statement, which I feel is kind of related to religion, can you explain how this is related to your work?

Shadi Harouni: Well, you know, if you're making work that has to do with yourself and your history or has to do with oppression and resistance to that oppression, it can get pretty depressing; it becomes really important to actually locate hope. For myself, there are a lot of questions: Why make art? Why look at this? Why engage with history or histories? Why go searching for histories that have been erased or pushed into margins? When I use the word hope, I'm not exactly sure that I understand it; it's a proposal in some ways, it describes more the process of what I do, than the product. I'm not convinced that anything that I make somehow gives another individual more hope, it's really not about that, but the process has to do with being able to locate it. Can you locate hope in dead bodies, in forbidden objects or spaces, in spaces of lethargy or silence? And so, when I'm looking at the history of resistance, for example, I'm really looking at the process of resistance, and I think that it is hinged on hope—that's what I'm looking for.

Early on, a lot of the work that I did had to do with hiding and retrieval and narratives of hiding and retrieval. That work was really out of this world, exaggerated in every way. How do you hide an object? Asking that question and coming up with narratives that are complex, exaggerated, over the top. And in every one of them there was the hope for retrieval but never an actual retrieval; no one ever goes back and finds the things that they've hidden in the foundations of a building that is probably too big to be destroyed anyway. But there is hope in that act and that's really what I'm looking at. So, the word is a way to position myself or to describe the process.

Is it related to religion? You said that you came to the United States twenty years ago—as an immigrant you from Iran, we know that there is oppression toward certain religions—so how do you think that this hope relates to your background in that culture?

I didn't grow up religiously. I didn't even know what I was until it was made clear by force. I grew up with a very Marxist father, so I grew up more with the history of dissent than I did with the history of religion. Of course, there is oppression, there is everywhere in the world; probably the Islamic republic oppresses Shia Muslims more than it does any Jewish individual, so I never really experienced it as such. There are ways to go back into the history of the Jewish people and to consider hope within that history in general, in that very disparate, difficult, never uniform history, perhaps the thing that actually ties all these different people from around the world together is that positioning of hope, somehow it is defined similarly. But of course, it is a metaphysical concept and it exists in spite of religion, it's the spirituality of religion, it's the stuff of poets.

Can you explain a little bit, about these metaphysical, intangible things? As a person living in western culture for twenty years, do you think that you're feeling that now?

It's related to history and it's related to what we as Iranians are exposed to. I think that some of the most significant spatial experiences I've had have been in mosques and there is a direct line from that to my practice as a sculptor, there's a direct line from reading text in relation to space and metaphysics and politics and poetry. It's history and also research, it's what I engage with. I'm drawing from a very long history of the sacred in architecture, and painting and text. It doesn't necessarily only come from Iran, I'm looking at abstract Tantric paintings from India, looking at practices from around the world, and I'm trying to understand the relationship with abstraction, as we know it, to all of these practices. And also, the relationship with text, I'm looking at illuminated manuscripts from Europe and from elsewhere—I think those connections are very clear. I have a very Western education and probably the only kind of sculpture that I was introduced to in school was Minimalist sculpture, but if you open up the Western education, there's so much there. I'm of a generation that has also been able to have access to all of these other traditions.

I saw that you had an article about the Iranian art situation, I saw the text related to modern art in Iran. There is such

“...no one ever goes back and finds the things that they’ve hidden in the foundations of a building that is probably too big to be destroyed anyway.”

a difference between the ‘79 revolution and right now. What do you think about contemporary art in Iran?

I’m not saying that that is the state of things, just one possible state.

I think that in Iran, contemporary or not just contemporary, we all have a sense of the significance of poetry, as the art form. As the art form that can be both spiritual and political at the same. We all understand it and have a relationship to it, every individual: religious or not, traditional, modern. I think because of that relationship, as public or as practitioners, we all want to locate that in whatever is called contemporary art. And that is almost impossible, it’s impossible to compete with the history, but I think that the project of trying is very beautiful, it’s a deep human endeavor; I think that there are a lot of people, especially of the younger generation, that are considering contemporary art in that way, and that is a beautiful thing. I think that Iranian artists are extremely informed about the world, they read and look at everything and there is a great curiosity. But there is a problem of trying to copy what one thinks is happening in the West and what that does is erase the other approaches to making art—that are grand and hopeful and not at cynical, and that I enjoy very much.

Pope.L (b. 1955, Newark) is a visual artist and educator whose multidisciplinary practice uses binaries, contraries and preconceived notions embedded within contemporary culture to create art works in various formats, for example, writing, painting, performance, installation, video and sculpture. Building upon his long history of enacting arduous, provocative, absurdist performances and interventions in public spaces, Pope.L applies some of the same social, formal and performative strategies to his interests in language, system, gender, race and community. The goals for his work are several: joy, money and uncertainty— not necessarily in that order.

EDEN EVANS IN CONVERSATION WITH

POPE.L

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Eden Evans: Thinking back to your time in grad school, was there something that was said to you, or a moment that you experienced, that you look back on now as being particularly significant?

Pope.L: Yeah, I was in the Whitney Independent Study program when I was 19—or was it 20, whatever—and I had a meeting with Yvonne Rainer, she came to my studio to do a visit. There were a number of things that were in the studio before I got there and I had just built these structures with them, and so she looks at what I had going and she says, “What has this to do with anything?”

[Laughter]

And that led you think about it more? What the content...

No, I just thought about what an asshole she was, she's tough.

So, you wrote plays in grad school asking your performers to read directly from the script instead of reciting from memory, and I'm wondering what it is about the live read that continually commands your attention? How has this affinity influenced, or infiltrated, your performance work?

I think that it was just something that I needed to do, to have people read from the page. But there were problems with that. Sometimes, I had very good performers who, if they hadn't been doing that, could have really blossomed—but I wasn't strong enough as a director to know that that was a gimmick. Even though it got me to a certain place, conceptually, if I had let go of it, I could have done more. It was a good idea, but I held on to it for too long.

Interesting, I think that we've all felt that at one time.

[Laughter]

Okay, moving on. All of your work has some relationship to time and duration; how do you define your understanding of time, how it functions in your work?

I guess it's the idea of everything at once, or one thing after another...both at the same time.

Can you elaborate on that?

Yes, I mean, I think that this really clear when you direct something, and you break it down. I know that I have one action that's happening in the foreground, another action that's happening in the background, maybe something off-screen that is happening in terms of audio, but I can't work on all of them at the same time very well, I have to work with them compartmentally; even though they will be experienced at the same time, I'm working one thing after another.

That makes perfect sense, thanks. You have this sort of clear connection to material and material metaphor in you work; I'm wondering how you find balance between metaphor, narrative, and absurdity?

I think that the central place to be is where there is no difference, that's what I want, and it's just making enough—not mistakes, but you know, I'll get the absurdity right but not the tone, or I'll have to the tone and the absurdity is off. It's funny but it's not absurd, so maybe people laugh but there's nothing underneath it. It's really about getting the recipe right, and once I've done it, then I have to ask myself if I can do it again. And getting it again gives confidence and also knowledge about how to go on. Some subject matters can get you there sooner than others, I know that, and some are more resistant. So, I guess that it's a lot like cooking.

Okay, yeah, I was going to ask how you know, but it sounds like you would just instantly know if the recipe were off.

I think that one way to know is to do something in a process that goes against the process, and to be very attentive. There was a teacher that I had, her big motto was that it had to be bad in the beginning—if it's too good in the beginning, and this has happened to me, then you'll lose it and won't be able to get it back. You have to be patient, to see what you've been given, and you can't brush that. You will have more appreciation and understanding of the thing that you eventually do arrive at or that arrives at you.

“It’s really about getting the recipe right, and once I’ve done it, then I have to ask myself if I can do it again.”

I would have cases where a scene was working perfectly well, and then it would just dry up or I couldn’t carry it to the next scene. I don’t know...it was almost too good, it would block my ability to keep it up, I’d be so unhappy that I couldn’t get it that it would stop me from learning from it. It’s kind of weird, you know; success too soon can really fuck up your ability to see the whole.

I think that happens a lot with artists, you see someone blossoming really early and then they can’t live up to the hype or something.

So, let’s take it down a little bit: What advice would you give to a MFA student now that you wish you would have had?

That’s taking it down?

A little?

[Laughter]

A little bit. Hmm, what advice? I’d say to not try to be so smart, and to listen to what you’re being given by your situation. Try to play against what’s expected. Listen to that which is being offered to you by the circumstance that you create and to not be so impatient about something working right away.

When I went to New York, a teach from my undergrad said not to expect to go to New York and expect to be famous

in five years—and that’s great advice, it settled me in a way. I didn’t have the pressure to make it happen so soon. And you now, you read these stories about, say, Jasper Johns in the Museum of Modern Art when he’s 25, and shit like that. It’s even more the case now that people have that happen to them. But he actually succeeded, I mean, he actually continued—his success didn’t diminish his ability to work and I think that he’s unusual in that way, very unusual in that way. So, I remember my teacher telling me that, he wasn’t trying to be negative, he wanted to save me from myself or the market or from those forces that kill young artists in terms of their talent.

That’s so thoughtful.

Last thing: when you’re in the studio, do you have a snack that you like to have?

[Laughter]

No. No, my assistants...I eat my assistants.

THE CENTER FOR ART RESEARCH MISSION

The Center for Art Research (CFAR) is a collaborative artist-run platform for experimentation and exchange rooted in art making. The Center cultivates diverse modes of engagement related to the practices of artists at the University of Oregon by supporting speculative Research, Discourse, Exhibition, and Publication. CFAR is directed by the faculty in the University of Oregon's Department of Art and is sustained by the contributions of individuals and institutions from around the world.

RESEARCH

CFAR brings together artists and scholars from around the world to catalyze unexpected connections and outcomes related to the practice-led research of affiliated artists. CFAR takes an expanded view of art research by supporting individual and collaborative projects, residencies, and a variety of initiatives that happen within and outside of studio practice. CFAR research responds fluidly to dynamic currents in society and culture that are relevant to a range of people and communities.

DISCOURSE

CFAR challenges, synthesizes, and expands engagement with contemporary art through diverse approaches that include studio dialogue, public lectures and symposia, experimental gatherings, and more focused seminars and workshops. By approaching art practice as a catalytic mode of inquiry, center affiliates also work with colleagues from adjacent fields to develop transdisciplinary discourse that is relevant to broad constituencies.

EXHIBITION

CFAR makes visible the work of contemporary artists through the Center and with partners by facilitating exhibitions and alternative forms of public display in local, national, and international spheres. Activities range from gallery exhibitions and site-responsive installations to experimental screenings, performances, and social actions.

Publication: CFAR publications vary in form and content, proliferating art thinking related to the experiences and conditions of contemporary life. Publications, authored by center affiliates and others, are both printed and web-based, and include essays, monographs, periodicals, public archives, editioned art multiples, and other experimental forms.

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