

Kat Buckley: Welcome everyone to *Conversations on Care: A Between You and Me Virtual Artist Panel*. My name is Kat Buckley, and I am the Curatorial Fellow at the [John Michael Kohler Arts Center](#). Today's conversation will be between curator Shannon R. Stratton and the artists featured in the Arts Center's upcoming exhibition, *Between You and Me*. Stratton will lead a round-robin discussion with artists [Chloë Bass](#), [Sara Clugage](#), [Harrell Fletcher](#) and [Lisa Jarrett](#), [General Sisters \(Dana Bishop-Root and Ginger Brooks Takahashi\)](#), [John Preus](#), [Benjamin Todd Wills](#), and [Christine Wong Yap](#). The exhibition *Between You and Me* examines how artists care for their communities. During this conversation, the artists will delve into the practices and processes that inform and shape acts of care in their work.

Our conversation today will be about 45 minutes, followed by Q&A. So, if you have any questions today, put them in the Q&A box, which I've circled on this slide. We are going to record this webinar for archival purposes and we will also put it on the Arts Center's website. We are muting everyone to ensure audio clarity. We do not have images of the work that we will be discussing today, but we encourage you to visit [jmkac.org](#), where you can find more information about the exhibition, curator, and artists. Although the Arts Center is currently closed due to COVID-19, we look forward to reopening when it is safe to do so with *Between You and Me* on-view. In the meantime, we are very excited to bring everyone this new virtual programming from the Arts Center, and hope you will forgive any technical hiccups.

To introduce the leader of our discussion, Shannon Stratton is a guest curator and writer with a background in studio art and focus on craft media. In 2003 she founded Threewalls, a Chicago based visual arts non-profit, where she was Director until 2015. With Threewalls she co-founded the Propeller Fund, MDW, PHONE BOOK, the Hand in Glove Conference, and Commonfield. From 2015-2019 she was Chief Curator at the Museum of Arts and Design. She was faculty at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago from 2005-2015, and has taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Tyler School of Art and Warren Wilson MA in Critical Craft Studies. She is currently programming at The Poor Farm in Wisconsin, and serving as Executive Director of Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists' Residency. In 2019 she served as Interim Senior Curator at The John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

Shannon, please take it away!

Stratton: Hi, everyone! This is exciting and weird. But, it's wonderful to have everybody together at last to have a conversation with one another. I would like to send out a lot of thanks to Kat Buckley, who has been my assistant on this show through the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and is the one who coordinated tonight's panel discussion. So, thank you, Kat, for spearheading this and bringing us all together.

I'm going to start by talking a little bit about how the show came together. I have a short piece of writing from a book that I want to read, called *The Power of Gentleness*. And then I will kick it off with a question for Christine.

Just briefly, *Between You and Me* was curated last summer and fall for the Kohler Arts Center. It was an exhibition that was in the works far before the current viral pandemic that has changed the landscape to how we interact with one another, how we have relationships, and how we work

creatively in our communities. I am excited to see how the show and the context that we now live in, how that informs how people experience the work when the exhibition does open to the public. But, originally, the exhibition was curated as a part of a season at the Kohler called *On Being Here and There* that was a response to a prompt from the Arts Center itself to do some programming in 2020 around concepts of neighborliness. As I think everyone knows, 2020 is an election season. And so, Kohler was interested in content or subject matter that might have an interesting relationship or conversation to the current politics and the current cycle of elections that would be occurring in November. It also dovetailed with the Kohler's opening of a new part of its institution, the Art Preserve, which was slated to open in August. So, it was an expansion of how the Arts Center served its community in Sheboygan and how its cultural work and work as neighbors to that community was expanding.

So, that season, *Being Here and There*, was looking at different ways of creative work, creative practices, and artists talked about or expressed ideas of location, neighborliness, and nestled in that is the show *Between You and Me*. *Between You and Me*, for me, came from looking at artists whose work was invested in exploring relationships, but not necessarily always through specific active relational gestures. It's not what I would describe as a social practice show. I would describe it more as an exhibition where a variety of practices talk about what it means to be interdependent or relate with others. Whether that is a poetic practice or a more practical practice, or time-based, grounded in education, or in the wide variety of ways artists express that kind of work in a community.

What's exciting about this round-robin format is that you'll hear everybody coming from the specificity of how they work and bringing that to a question to their colleagues in this show. Maybe we'll experience different, overlapping concepts of care and what it means to be in a relationship.

With that, I wanted to introduce this discussion with this brief reading from *Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living* by the late Anne Dufourmantelle. It's a brief reading from a chapter called "Taking Care."

In the beginning, animals and humans go through the same stages. Without care, does a newborn survive? Doesn't it need to be protected, surrounded, spoken to, thought of, or imagined so it can truly enter the world? What does it become with an absolute lack of gentleness? A mother's care of the small mammal is another expression of the envelopment of what has not finished growing, and finds itself threatened in its integrity. The study of early attachment indicates that the baby's body, like that of an animal, retains the memory of all the intensities and all the deficiencies that have been lavished upon it. Any serious attack will endanger, now or later, its capacity to survive. Philosophers have named this thought "care" because it allowed them to speak of the vulnerability of beings in a groundbreaking way. Taking the appropriate actions to curb the disease, close up the wound, alleviate the pain—from the beginning of humanity, care has been related to gentleness. Is gentleness sufficient to heal? It equips itself with no power, no knowledge. Embracing the other's vulnerability means that the subjects cannot avoid recognizing his own fragility. This acceptance is a force; it makes gentleness a higher degree of compassion than simple care. To empathize, to suffer with, is to

experience what the other really feels, without giving into it. It means being able to open yourself up to others, their grief and suffering, and to contain that pain by carrying it elsewhere.

But gentleness is not only a principle of relation, regardless of the intensity behind it. It makes way for what is most singular in others because the attention of gentleness beckons to our responsibility as human beings toward the world around us, toward the beings making up this world, and even towards the thoughts we commit to it. Then, gentleness is part of an intimate connection to animality: to the mineral, the vegetal, the stellar.

So, I just wanted to read that as a meditation – not a question. Nor is it meant to overly inform the questions we ask one another. But, that’s a book I’ve been reading while more or less confined, like everybody else, and thinking about this relationship between gentleness. This is a French book, this is a translation of a French word, *décor*, into care and gentleness in English. In thinking about this meditation in a moment when, I think, everybody is faced with a different contemplation about their vulnerability and the ways that they can stay connected to and care for their communities and loved ones.

I’m going to be asking the first question to Christine Wong Yap. So, you may or may not know this, but my thinking about this exhibition actually started with me thinking about you and your practice. You were the springboard, so to speak, for the show for me — for the concept for the show and the idea of showcasing a range of practices that, at their foundation, were about the between, or interaction, and how that connectivity was crucial to individual and community livelihood. And, by livelihood, I mean, the necessities of life, like nourishment and sustenance.

My gateway was [your *Belonging* project](#). I was struck by how your encouraging people to connect with that feeling and identify where it resonated was a way of helping people care for themselves. It felt like it had the power to guide people to recognize where they felt most seen, most full, most held as a person. I see that as a kind of nested gesture of care. You have developed work that cares deeply for others' wellbeing by helping them manifest that for themselves. Can you talk about how you arrived at working in this way, and how your talent as a printmaker and an illustrator intersects with the concepts that ground your work?

Christine Wong Yap: Well, first, I just want to say thank you. I am super honored to be part of this show, among these artists, working with you, Shannon, and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. So, thank you so much. I really respect a lot of artists on this panel, so this is a treat for me. Thanks to everyone for tuning in, too.

I actually started investigating positive psychology about ten years ago, and that’s been a huge part of my practice. Positive psychology is the empirical study of what people do to maintain or increase their own, subjective wellbeing. When I first started thinking about optimism and pessimism in my work, I approached it in a really intuitive way, thinking “oh, sometimes I’m an optimist, sometimes I’m a pessimist,” or thinking “some people are always optimists, some people are always pessimists, and that’s that.” And then I started reading about optimism and learning about how optimism can be described as a set of skills. That opened the door for me to

study positive psychology. And then I came across all this research written by psychologists about all these domains of psychology. Often, I think it's easy for people to think that joy or happiness or pleasure are all the same things, and that they just happen to you, and that you have no control over it. Reading all these different psychologists about these different domains of positive psychology made me realize that we have a lot more agency over these things than we think, and studying about it, learning about it, putting into practice can really improve our lives, or our own agency over our emotional wellbeing, if we want it to.

That compelled me to want to share it with other people. I think of my practice and a lot of my projects as nudges for people. Sometimes it's sharing information that I've learned; sometimes it's reminding people to do things that they already know how to do. For example, I probably first read about writing gratitude letters ten years ago. Writing a letter expressing your thanks deeply and sincerely to someone is one of the most commonly well-known ways to boost your own mood as well as somebody else's mood. And yet, maybe in the past ten years, how many times have I done it? I know for myself, I could always use a reminder to put into practice the things that I know nourish me, but I might not always prioritize because I'm busy, or because there's an army of engineers at different companies who want me to just keep scrolling. So, there's a lot of things I know I could be doing. Having the nudge is helpful.

The human mind also tends towards anxiety, fear, and discrimination. That's just a fact. There's an analogy in relationships where healthy relationships have this ratio of nine positive interactions for every one negative interaction. So, I think it's okay, given these kinds of things, to tip the scale towards the positive, and to keep pushing that. That's why in my work, I think, offering people the opportunity for self-reflection, for diving deeper into thinking about resilience or belonging, even if I've said it before, I'm going to say it again: recognition is not behavior change. I think continuing to offer these nudges over and over is worth repeating.

About the media I use, because some of the concepts I talk about are quite abstract. If you ask someone about belonging and they hadn't thought about it in a while it might seem a little bit like, "what does that mean? I know what it feels like to belong, I know what it feels like to not belong, but I don't know how to talk about belonging as a whole?" So, I use a lot of media, materials, and forms that are accessible. For me, printmaking and publications are super accessible. They're inherently democratic. Lettering and illustration are other ways for me because a lot of my projects not only are looking at research that other psychologists have done, but inviting participants, forming my own research, and then sharing that research with other people. That's how the lettering and illustration also conveys and gets out other people's voices.

Okay, that's my response!

Stratton: Thank you, Christine.

Wong Yap: Thank you, Shannon.

I'm going to ask Chloë a question. I had written a few different ones, and this is kind of cheating, but I think Chloë's questions are actually more interesting than mine. Chloë, you are exhibiting a project called *The Book of Everyday Instruction* that's an eight-chapter investigation of one-on-

one social interaction. Each chapter asks a central question. One of the questions that jumped out at me is something that I would like to ask of you. I have my own reasons for thinking of it now, but I think I will let you take it where you want it. And the question is: how do we know when we're really together?

Chloë Bass: That's a very good question right now. I want to come back before I wind up bouncing off and asking Benjamin a question, I'm going to come back and ask you why you wanted to ask that question now. Because I feel like there are a million reasons that people are thinking about that question at this moment, as I sit here with all of you on Zoom and I can kind of guess where some of you are but I actually don't know for a fact where anybody is. There's this interesting experience where some of us were planning to see each other at the opening or planning of an exhibition that has now been postponed that I actually would have missed, so I'm getting to see people in a way right now that I wouldn't have if we were "really together."

So, that question really was one of the foundational things that I was thinking about during *The Book of Everyday Instruction*, because I had started out with a project about intimacy at the individual scale called *The Bureau of Self Recognition*. As I was transitioning from the individual to the pair, the question becomes, what does that mean? How do you know when you're with another person? What constitutes a pair? What constitutes a pairing? I didn't really want to take it for granted in the way that we take for granted a lot of aspects of pairing. I think that in many societies, including ours, there's a very dominant focus on the form of the couple. I feel very resistant to that. Whether or not I am in a couple form, it's only one way that we think about and learn about intimacy. When we over-rely on the form of the couple, we're actually doing a lot of disservice to types of intimacies that we might engage in other arenas and really cutting ourselves off in a lot of ways.

I wanted to think about what different pairings might emerge, either between different individuals, whether romantic or non-romantic. Pairings that emerge over short periods of time versus longer periods of time. I think these are all kinds of variables that are very interesting to me that we don't question often enough. So that question, "how do we know when we're really together" was a way of distilling one aspect of that, so that when you're thinking about the pair, you might know that at this moment, we constitute a pair, and that might break at the end of 30 seconds, or half an hour, or three days. And then, there are these other types of pairings that go on. For example, my grandparents were married for 72 years, right? I think that they were a lot of people over the course of that time. I actually don't want to call them just a "pair," but the reality is, they were married for 72 years.

Finding the moments where we feel really together with something was a way for me of making a metric of something that works, or something worth probing into a little bit more, or something that can handle a little more scrutiny or interest or pressure or development or magic or surprise. I don't have a prescriptive answer for how we know when we're really together, but, I think the reality is if you're actually paying attention, you can tell. And a lot of the times, what goes wrong is that we're not really paying attention, and we resume these forms of togetherness that waiver in and out over the course of a day, let alone over the course of a lifetime, or between different people.

Why did you want to ask me that question, in particular, right now? I don't want to assume.

Wong Yap: I really resonate with what you just said about attention. One of my favorite quotes is by this psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who said "[the quality of life is determined by the quality of consciousness](#)," and he's really talking about attention. So much of care is attention. Also, the phrase is social distancing, but it's really physical distancing, and what we're seeking is social connectedness. So, how do we know when we're really together? We could be together with someone physically and separated from someone socially.

Bass: Absolutely. I think that there have been a lot of forms in my life where the person that I would have been isolated with, if this pandemic had happened at a different time, I actually would have felt more alone than if I was alone. It's a fascinating thing to think about: the choices that we make, what we can tolerate under circumstances where we believe everything will be open or permitted, versus what we believe we can tolerate when it isn't. I'm sure a lot of people are learning a lot about that during this time, but I hope that people are finding moments and ways that you are really together with others, regardless of whether they are in the same household or room or germ-isolated family with you, or if you're connecting primarily through screens and conversations, co-walks, projects, whatever. We're going to be thinking about this for a long time. And it's something that I've been thinking about, separately, in a lot of really different ways, so I'm happy to answer it for you now. Thank you.

So, Benjamin, I am interested in so many different things about your project, *Airplanes*. Right now, it's connected to this feeling of social isolation, or touch isolation that some people are experiencing. Other people are experiencing too much touch as the hands of the same people, over and over again. There's a lot of different consequences of being stuck in this way.

But, I wanted to ask you, because the planes that you receive are messages that you've gotten from people, letters, and I wanted to ask: what do you like about handling objects that you know other people have touched? And has that changed in a context where many of us are lacking touch, or being touched too many times a day by the same people? What does it mean to handle things that have come from people that you know you might otherwise never reach?

Benjamin Todd Wills: That'll take a second to pull out. I think that the root of the project is in creating a relationship with somebody who, in another context, I wouldn't have had a relationship with. So, just to start, handling this question, for me, I really like handling an object that can step in and kind of be some kind of object that represents an individual. What I really like about the airplanes is how everyone makes them in such a different way. But they're all recognizable as paper airplanes, right? If you start going through the collection, no one is using the same piece of paper and folding it the same way. So, they really become this nice stand-in for these people who are separated from everyone else.

I think that there's a lot of power in something handmade. And I think that there's a really great kind of storytelling aspect that comes in the fold of a paper or in someone's handwriting that doesn't exist. I'm really interested in how can it translate into something more digital? I think it's really unique to the physical object. The way that the paper is starting to fade with the sun. As these things continue to be shown, as they move around, every time they get shipped, the objects

are alive. So, I think that the power of the handmade object is that, especially since this is paper-based, not only does it represent the person but as time goes on and a person changes, the collection changes, each individual plane changes, and the overall message of the whole piece changes.

I'm trying to answer all of that in five minutes, it's a little bit difficult. Does that kind of start to address anything that you're asking about?

Chloë Bass: It's interesting for me to think about these different pieces of paper as stand-ins for a body. Because paper is quite soft and skin can be quite soft. There is this possibility that the thing that was touched by somebody who you will never touch, or maybe beyond this particular correspondence never really know, that becomes their way of sending their body to you and also out into the world under a system where they are or have been incarcerated. How do we free ourselves from conditions of extreme constraint feels like a really important question for people to be pondering right now, even though we are inside out of protection and by choice instead of out of extreme cruelty of our society?

Benjamin: That's really fair as a comment about the piece. The comparison between paper and skin being soft is really beautiful and something that I wish that I had thought about my piece before this conversation. It'll be interesting to see how this year – I really feel like the pandemic is going to affect prisons in a way too that's a little bit different from the way that it's going to affect everybody that's not incarcerated. To see how the correspondence changes and see just how what I'm receiving every day is going to change even though we're still working through the mail. We're seeing how COVID-19 will play a really interesting piece of how this thing moves forward.

Is that right?

Bass: Is it? You're the expert!

Wills: I'm not! Because the piece never ends, right? So, the installation has been growing for the last six years. Looking at the pandemic and how the pandemic affects it will be not only interesting this year but in 10 years it will be really something else to look back at what was made and what was coming about during this time.

Bass: I've been thinking about the very long-ranging consequences of the pandemic that we're gonna even forget are because of the pandemic because they're going to go on so far into the future. And so, I am excited for you and how that impacts your project and the way that you think about it and the things that we all can or can't touch moving forward.

Wills: Thank you, I think I'm over my time.

Bass: Nice to meet you!

Wills: Nice to meet you too!

And, my question is for Sara. Hi.

Sara: Hi Benjamin!

Wills: It's great to chat with you. I've spent a lot of time looking at the dinner parties that you're making. The *Gradient Cocktail* piece, thinking about when you're hosting these dinners or the happy hours or just serving drinks, what experience are you hoping to cultivate, and then also, what community is being served in this work?

Clugage: That's a great question. For the past several years I've been doing these salon dinners that are based on the art economies of different periods in history. We make the food from that time; I pair those in courses with short lectures and a round of trivia. I hope people have fun. And I hope that they learn stuff. The most important part of it to me is that they feel welcome. Hospitality has become a really keyword for me in thinking about how art institutions function, how homes function, and extrapolating that out into larger aspects of society where the guest/host relationship becomes a little more complicated.

What I like about dinner parties is that it's a form of welcome that I think a lot of us understand. If I invite you to my house for dinner, Benjamin, I think we kind of know what's going to happen. You're going to try to show up on time, and maybe you'll bring a bottle of wine, and I'm going to not poison you, take your dietary restraints into consideration. It's a conditional and limited hospitality in that way that when dinner is over, you go home. The contract between us at that part of it has come to an end. The space of hospitality can be very generous and welcoming and go beyond what a lot of institutions think about as access into actively seeking someone's comfort, which, I think, is a very different thing. I hope that people, when they come to the dinners, learn a lot about how the art world has functioned at different times in history, and in so doing, can imagine a different way that it can function in the future. I think that these imaginary possibilities are very important.

Wait, what was the second question?

Wills: What communities are served?

Clugage: It's really important to me that the dinners are accessible both in terms of dietary needs and physical accessibility and economics. They're mostly free. Mostly artists come to them, but they're open to the public. I think it's important that they're not just people I invite. I don't want to be in charge of deciding who comes into a space and who doesn't. But I want everyone there to see other kinds of people around them. So that, when we create a kind of knowledge together, you see how other people's bodies are in a space. You can see them. It's how we can recognize the situatedness of knowledge. That, what I think, is dependent on how I came to this place today and the body that I inhabit and a million other considerations about me.

I also hope that the community is served by recognizing the limits of hospitality. It depends on people's whose names and situations you know because we are thinking it might be reciprocal at some point in the future. And that's a limit to how far hospitality can take you. Because true, radical hospitality would not depend on the linguistic and legal frameworks that govern that

relationship. There are so many people who are left out of hospitality relationships, and I think, in relation to your work, that includes incarcerated people, stateless people, and unhoused people. People who don't experience the guest/host relationship in the way that is conditioned by the restraints of property ownership.

Wills: Thank you.

Clugage: You're welcome!

Well, then, I'll go on. I am going to ask a question to John. Hi, John.

John Preus: Hi, Sara.

Clugage: How are you?

Preus: I'm doing alright, how are you?

Clugage: I'm good. I really love your *Stoops*, the project that's at the Kohler show. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how you feel about the life-cycle of the objects as stoops and as their component materials. A friend of mine calls the junk pile of discarded furniture that's at her University "the boneyard," and I really like what considering those objects as alive, and what their carcasses mean.

Preus: That's a good question. I think about that a lot. I sometimes think I care more about stuff than people, and I think it's because people scare me. I think stuff is a way to have relationships with people without as much risk. You could see that as cowardly, but you can also see it as a way to touch people that you're never going to touch, physically. I feel like that the objects, in a way, carry a tactile – you know, you feel some resonances from the lives the thing had before. I think of it as this kind of epic morphology. It started off as a material that was buried in the ground somewhere, or growing in a tree, and then somebody mined it. There are those hands that have touched it and turned it into some material that can then be manipulated into a thing, which has a certain relationship to the person who uses it.

I sometimes get overwhelmed by thinking about how much touch has gone into everything that we are in contact with. Heidegger, the philosopher, talks a lot about the relationship...he's in a way the founder of relational aesthetics, the idea that an infant starts first with the relationship. They're not building up their sense of their own being from material and atoms and so forth, and then now, I have consciousness. People start more so with this sense of being the object of someone else's care, and growing and being taken care of, and learning to take care of other people.

The relationship between things, in a way, feels, to some degree, like a stand-in for relationships between people, and finding ways in which the materials, their life cycle as objects and then as functional things and then as changed into some other functional thing or displayed thing, that in a way mirrors how human relationships bleed into each other. In the context of the stoop is a sort of staircase, it's something you walk-up, so it has a functional dimension to it. But, in this case,

it's more like staircases that have been turned into furniture. Most of the time furniture sits there looking pretty; it's not in use. So, it has this exhibitionist nature. But then, we also know how to use it in a very specific way.

I'm always thinking about the language between how things talk to each other, how we talk to each other through things, and how that's carried on through material relationships and material histories.

Clugage: I love what you said. I also love objects. I think that our relationships with objects are incredibly complex and, maybe, prepare us for relationships with human beings in a way that's not often recognized.

Preus: Yes, you just encapsulated what I was trying to say. Thank you, Sara. It was a beautiful question.

My question is for Harrell and Lisa. I think the project I looked at most was the KSMoCA one. It's really interesting to me. I feel like there's often a tension between care. A lot of your projects have a complex social and political dimension, which runs into the language of how do you represent that, and what becomes the most important part of the project? Is it the relationships, or is it getting the documentation right? Those things are, at times, in conflict with each other. How do you think about the relationship between art and activism, the duration of care as framed through the art discourse? Do those things conflict with each other for you?

Jarrett: Thanks, John, that's a really interesting set of questions. I hadn't really thought about this relationship between art and activism and duration within the context of care. I think for a project like KSMoCA or [the Harriet Tubman Center, which is a project that extends out of KSMoCA and into the Harriet Tubman Middle School](#), duration has become a really important part of our work. Because, when you're working with kids and young people in educational settings, there's sort of a pre-existing understanding that it's a long-term endeavor. Part of the work that we do, we have an intention to continue working with the students as long as they are in contact with the public school system. So, figuring out what that looks like over the course of multiple projects over multiple grade levels has been one of our ongoing challenges within our work, but it's also an amazing opportunity. I'm not sure if I'm getting at the heart of your question, but designating an end-date, if you will, isn't really part of the work that we're doing.

There was something else that you mentioned, informing the question that was about where the value is if it's embedded in art or the art world, or if it's embedded somehow outside of that, that's kind of how I'm reading this relationship between art and activism. I think for Harrell and me, we've often talked about our work as being centered around art and contemporary art practice because we're artists, with the recognition that a lot of what we do could be modeled or replicated in a lot of different arenas or settings, depending on what the expertise looked like of the people involved. I think that's really important for us in terms of how the knowledge can transfer to the students that participate in our projects with us. We think of them as our co-authors in a lot of ways. It's not necessarily important to us that they become artists, but we are using art as a platform for understanding what larger access to different parts of communities can look like, what engagement can look like, what empowerment can look like. A lot of the students

that we work with and the communities that we work within are historically underrepresented, historically disadvantaged in terms of resources that are brought to them, just by the nature of the way our societies are constructed in the United States, particularly in public education. And so, in those ways activism is inherently embedded in the work. For me, and Harrell may have a different thought, but for me, I don't think of it as a project that is activism per se, although it is necessarily embedded in the work.

Harrell?

Harrell Fletcher: If it's activism, it's activism by saying "here is an alternative, and we're going to just do it" as opposed to "we wish this was happening, how can we make it happen?" We're just making it happen. And so, it's just a very pragmatic project. But I think it is mutually supported by its connection to the art world. And so, as a result of that, we need to do things like document it and represent it and those things. That also has a value within the school, because it gives the students to have a chance to feel valued because people are paying attention to what they're doing and what they're saying. It's actually not a conflict as far as I'm concerned. Instead, it's just looking at the resources that are available: the University, grade school, connections to the art world – sort of putting those things together and trying to make the most out of all of them together through these shared resources.

Thanks.

Lisa Jarrett: The kids were really fascinated by the *Stoops*, by the way. We had a long, long conversation with them about it.

Preus: Oh, cool. That's great.

Fletcher: So, I think we'll move on to our questions, and I think Lisa is going to ask them, but we worked on them together.

Jarrett: Yeah, so, this is for General Sisters, so, for Dana and Ginger. We have a basic question, but just in listening to and reading some of the thoughts you were able to share with us today, Dana, I've kind of fleshed it out within this conversation. I really love how you talked about the interruption of how we see waste and how particularly relevant that has become at this moment. For the exhibition at the Kohler, for Shannon's exhibition, we learned that you were working on a project about engaging humanure and composting as a system of care from our bodies to the water. And so, I think we're really interested in how this work – this sounds really basic, but just, how this work has been influenced in the context of the current moment because it's so relevant even before the moment. So, what's the shift there? Would either of you be willing to talk about that?

Dana Bishop Root: Maybe I'll start and then, Ginger, you can go. I mean, the first thing that comes to my mind is I, I think that in terms of the current moment, one of the things that feels so important to recognize is that everything that's happening right now is just a tangible form of everything that has already been happening. And so, every time we say "unprecedented", you know, everything is related to root causes. Part of living an act of care is recognizing that all of

these things that we're experiencing, the virus is scientific, but the pandemic and the way that it's affecting people in our communities and our neighborhoods and each other is by design. It has to do with every systemic injustice that exists in colonial history. And so, I guess that's just where I'd want to start. And so, why thinking about how we think about waste feels really relevant right now is because it felt really relevant three months ago. I pass it on to Ginger.

Ginger Brooks Takashi: Sure, thank you. I think that one of the things that stood out for me is one of the pieces in our sculpture related to humanure and human waste is a print that is in the form of toilet paper, that's [text printed on toilet paper](#). And we didn't really realize that it was going to take on a different meaning once the pandemic first hit and toilet paper was at a shortage. It will just have a different meaning. It will be a marker of this time, even though it wasn't intended to be.

Bishop-Root: One of the things that in thinking about any resource that exists, it's a decision. People are making decisions about what gets to be a resource and what's not, so between resource and waste. And, oftentimes, that's something from the exterior lives that's the dominant system that's deciding what is of value and what's not. And so, I think, in a practice that is based on the interruption of thinking of shit as this thing that comes out of our body, that's our body processing something into waste, it doesn't acknowledge all of the embodied labor that went to make that so our body could process. And so, it's this incredible gift. And so, what is this continuation, the continuation of care, with that is to not devalue it and say it's not waste, but ultimately, how can we create systems that can then continue to transform what is valued and what is not. And so, I think humanure is both a metaphor and also a very active way of practicing that care.

Jarrett: Thank you so much. It really occurs to me that this is a consistent thought throughout your practice. In every moment that I've been able to read about it and explore it, the ideas within humanure really are present within all the other aspects of your work, all the way down to the name. All the way down to thinking about sistering. Thanks so much for considering the question. It may have seemed kind of simple, but Harrell and I were thinking and we were like, "Well, this is what we really want to know." So, we really appreciate you answering.

Takahashi: Thank you.

Jarrett: Really nice to meet you all.

Bishop-Root: Harrell was my professor, guys.

Jarrett: He told me! I had no idea.

Takahashi: Okay! And, we have a question for Shannon.

Stratton: Yeah.

Takahashi: Okay. So, Cornell West says, “Justice is what love looks like in public. Just like tenderness is what love feels like in private.” How do you, we, cultivate spaces for care while living with anger caused by both personal and proximate impacts of systemic injustice?

Stratton: Say it one more time.

Takahashi: Dana, do you want to give it a go?

Bishop-Root: Okay, and this can be as personal as you want. We were really thinking about this with the exhibition. So, Cornell West says, “Justice is what love looks like in public. Just like tenderness is what love feels like in private.” And so, our question is, how do you, or we, cultivate spaces for care while living with anger caused by both personal and proximate impacts of systemic injustice? And, just from the conversations that we had with you while preparing this show, it’s kind of like holding both the recognition of how do you hold the rage, and also continue the care.

Stratton: I’m really struck by the West quote because it feels really close to my attraction and interest in this book on gentleness as risk. That connection between justice is what that looks like in public and tenderness is what that looks like in private, I think that is sort of at the core question to this.

I really just started reading this book, and I think, In some ways, I was attracted to it because I was struck by how one can operate from a place of isolation in a way that feels still actively engaged in caring for others, and how that is at the same time, I think it has to be personal. I don’t think I can answer this in any other way. For me, I’m struck by what it means to try to keep that active connection to rage or to a community, to care, to other people, while experiencing a really strange transformation of what it means to take care of the self. And starting to recognize how much is exchanged in in-real-life interpersonal relationships that helps, at least for me, to power a certain amount of that rage and also that tenderness.

I still live somewhere. I’m living at my job right now, which is kind of an unusual situation. I’m living at Ox-Bow, which is an artists’ residency, and lots of the staff are here now, and we’re trying to prepare a campus as carefully as possible for, potentially, a group of people to be here with us this summer and potentially, not. And so, it’s really the most personal way I can respond to this question is that I’m in the middle of this preparation with a group of people and anticipating others that we don’t know if they will arrive at that point, and experiencing the administration of that as a part of an isolated community sharing that space together and thinking how we’re going to share that space and look after other people in the future. And it’s just a kind of very intense relationship to that tenderness when we’re isolated at that moment together. There’s no particular endpoint. So it becomes a really micro-relationship to care of self and others while everybody’s considering that larger macro moment. I think of a lot of people on our staff as being folks who are really themselves connected to and active in social justice movements or in activism or just themselves through their work connecting to a deep sense of rage and care for the communities that they live in. So, it’s a real intense metabolizing of both the public and private at the same time.

And then, to think about this show and metabolize what the meaning of all this work is through this context is something that I will have to reflect on in three more months. As this conversation forefronts, a lot of people's work has not necessarily shifted in meaning, but magnified, in a way. In a lot of ways, I think that the intentionality of the work is a lot clearer. The impact or the resonance of it so much more intensified by the collective experience of shock and rage and sadness and grief and interiority and disconnection and social recession, and all of these things are different, they're the same, people are collectively metabolizing.

In the past, as the show as coming together, I was drawing connections between everyone's work and how that was related to care. Those connections seem stronger to me now than maybe they had in the much more connected but somewhat disconnected way that we functioned as a society before.

I think we have four questions in the Q&A box. I will ask. We won't see the person who asked the question, I'll read the questions, and everyone can contribute as they feel moved to. Before we ask those questions, I just want to thank everybody for participating in this format. This round-robin Q&A is something that Kohler has done in previous artist panels, but live, on a stage, in front of people. It's a risky endeavor, it's a vulnerable endeavor to ask people questions and field them back and return that energy and empathy towards them. I appreciate everybody trying this endeavor together, and for all of the thoughtful questions that were generated.

So, here are some questions from our invisible audience! Unfortunately, we can't see any of you.

Patricia: Many people have experiences with social isolation prior to the pandemic due to disabilities, socioeconomic status, or other barriers to social connection or physical social spaces. How are your new experiences with social isolation during the pandemic going to change the way you engage with individuals and communities in your practice going forward?

Wills: It's an easy question for me because incarcerated people have been removed the entirety of the project, or just, in general, they are. Looking at simple things like letter writing and finding ways to connect with people that are taken for granted – I think there are a lot of ways to maintain connections with people that even work on a more intimate level than when we were allowed to go out everywhere. So, certainly, my practice is exactly the same as it was before the pandemic started, but I feel, for some reason, a greater connection with somebody right now while I'm writing letters.

Jarrett: Hi Trish! This is Lisa. Trish is a former student and dear friend. Really great to have you here. I wanted to respond in a little bit of a different way from Ben, not necessarily about my own responsiveness but what I'm seeing in terms of how other people maybe perceive or are able to respond to the work that Harrell and I are doing in our various projects. The one thing that I have noticed in the context of the pandemic is that the very real issues affecting the lives of many of the students that we work with have now become realities that other people can relate to – or, they're forced to relate to whether they'd like to or not. And so, I'm curious to see moving forward how that influences the work that we're able to do. I think that inclusivity is really at the forefront of much of our work anyway. We're always stumbling and trying to figure out best

practices and best ways of moving forward around the questions that you're asking. One thing that does occur to me is how the secondary audiences can understand and think about our work.

Wong Yap: I think I'm having a hard time answering this question because the things that I've been changing because of self-isolation because of the pandemic have been getting better at social media and Zoom. And I don't think those are structures that challenge accessibility or access or equity. I think, maybe, they reinforce them. So, TBD.

Clugage: I want to just answer by saying that I don't know. I think a lot of us don't right now, and I think that's probably okay. At least for the immediate future. I'm wrestling with how my practice with feeding people moves forward since large social gatherings and touching each other and each other's food seems like a problematic practice to invest in right now. But, as Christine said, I am not satisfied with moving that work online, because I think this takes on a political frame of instruction or information-giving and not material support. And the material support portion of the project is super-important to me. You need to actually be useful to people, you need to be of service. I feel I need to be. I need to give them something that helps them, that isn't just a recipe. So, I don't really know. I just want to be honest about that.

Stratton: Thanks, Sara, I think that's fair and honest. The next one is from D. Rosen, who says "Thanks for this conversation and for sharing your ideas. I admire each of your practices and appreciate your work in the world very much. I'm interested in care-based practices that also consider non-human animals, beings, or entities. One of the things I wonder about is how to be mindful of the assumptions that might come into play with care-based practices. How do we engage in gestures of care with those who do not speak or use human language?"

Ginger: The only things that I'm thinking of are the microbes in compost that break down humanure. They're definitely entities, but consent doesn't really come into play. But I definitely think about uplifting something that we as a society think of as waste or as trash. Centering care around this substance that can produce more life.

Stratton: Thanks, Ginger.

Wong Yap: I don't know if my practice encompasses this question as well as Sunaura Taylor's work. She's written a book called [*Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*](#) that I think might speak to this really well.

Stratton: Thanks, Christine. The next question, I guess is for me.

G. Ciscle: All of the impressive artists you selected for the exhibit assume the role of caregiver through working with their communities. What is your role as the curator, from the Latin 'to take care of', to take care in connecting their artistic practices to your audience at the Kohler?

Stratton: I find that root for curator as caretaker something that I've considered for a long time as somebody working in the arts. I want to note that I'm not a full-time employee of the Kohler, I'm a guest curator who put this exhibition together. As somebody who came to curating as an artist who founded an artist-run space, a lot of the way that I thought about my work was as a service

to my colleagues, to my community, and to the field that I worked in. That was how my practice began to take shape after I moved away from having a studio practice. As I started to do work in institutions that were not institutions that I co-created with others, I was interested in how I could bring practices to those larger arts organizations, both administratively advocate for certain kinds of care of the artists that were doing the work at the institution through artist fees or through material support for their work. That's been a lot of how I have worked as a curator, whether at the Museum of Arts and Design or as an Independent Curator at other institutions.

In the context of the Kohler, to come in and be given a prompt to work with around neighborliness in some ways could be kind of a confounding thing, because that wasn't a place that I lived. It was an Arts Center I've been really involved with over a number of years. And so, I was interested in how a group of people who had very sited and specific practices either where they lived or in other kinds of organizations or by invitation to other organizations, how they were citizens and neighbors in their practices. So, it was about bringing a lot of those different viewpoints and lenses to a community and an Arts Center that has really centered itself as a community center in the city that it's a part of.

So, beyond the assembly of everybody and the conversations that happened between that work and the conversations between those artists that are entirely driven by them, the work that they want to create and the things that make sense for them in that context, the Arts Center has done a great job as an Education Department in terms of connecting to their local community. I think that's important that it's the Arts Center who takes on that connective work because I'm personally not living and embedded in that place. So, it becomes a nested number of relationships between people responding directly to communities that they're a part of.

The next question is from Rena Siegel, who asks "What does care look like in professional workspaces, not care as something for others but the act of care? What forms can it take on, what benefits can it offer an institution or organization?"

Bass: One of the things that I do as part of the *Book of Everyday Instruction* project is I've actually developed a couple's counseling workshop between individuals and institutions. In thinking about counseling between individuals and institutions, I specifically started doing that because I felt like a lot of artists were saying that they felt like they were in these abusive relationships with institutions they work with. I question that and I have all kinds of things to say about that that I won't say now, but it occurred to me that there are many frameworks of institutions that individuals are operating within at the same time as institutions are pretending privately to be individuals. The places that I most noticed that happening was on Twitter. I love the internet, so we can talk about that all day, but when Twitter was first getting interesting to me was when I realized that I was on Twitter, and MOMA in New York was on Twitter, and me and MOMA could have a one to one conversation for the first time because of Twitter. It was an interesting problem or question to explore: what happens when you put the individual and the institution in the same way, as equals, and say "we're going to mediate your relationship as a couple."

I don't have an answer directly to the relationship between those things and care, but thinking about what equalizes those spaces, even if it's a false set-up, a false-comparison or a broken

metaphor is a really interesting way to consider what might work, what might be possible, or what might work but is just impossible, which is something that I think we're doing in care frameworks a lot of the time.

Stratton: Thanks Chloë.

Clugage: I, too, love the internet, and I think about care a lot in the context of Wikipedia, which I work with a lot and on a lot. Wikipedia is a place that's framed in this classic liberal politics of open access, like how anybody can edit Wikipedia. But, there's a disconnect there between being able to edit and wanting to edit, which Wikipedia is incapable of addressing in its current form, which is why so many people don't. They don't feel welcome, they don't feel like they can, even though they're technically allowed to. I think a lot of institutions have that same problem with framing, art museums among them. They offer transparency and openness but not support and help. For people who don't feel comfortable walking into a museum or walking into an article talk page on Wikipedia, when people don't feel like they have permission to be somewhere, what they really feel is that they don't have the support necessary to engage in that space. Hospitality has been a framing for that for me.

Bishop-Root: I feel a need to say that in general, it's important that we don't think of care as one-direction. I don't know that care can be from an artist to blah blah blah. To me, care has to be an embodiment of an environment, whether that's physical or emotional. That's interesting, Chloë, to think about couple's counseling as a space, which goes back to the space *Between You and Me*. There's nothing in this that implies that care can come from one and just go to another. I think about how important it is to counter that, because if we think that care is serving this community, then we're not caring for anybody if we're excluding ourselves. That's the same in a professional environment, if we're not able to care for ourselves as a worker, then how can we expect the institution to care for ourselves, and sometimes it's because we think that we don't deserve the care.

Stratton: I'm going to follow up that question with this next anonymous attendee question, which I think is related to Rena's. If anybody has more that they would like to say, particularly in response to what Dana just added, I think this will be a good way to keep it going.

Anonymous attendee: Thinking as an artist who takes care in their process and how they engage their materials, how do you think that sense of care and attention plays out in the administrative workspace? How does that sense of craft benefit an organization working with people?

Stratton: I'm going to add that if there is something in that question that can be turned back on Dana's question, like, how does a sense of craft benefit the self and one's capacity to work with others, and the interrelatedness or interdependent-ness of that work.

Wong Yap: The key to the success of my practice is actually about the success of the partnerships with the community-based organization. A lot of that is the administrative work of reaching out, connecting, getting connected to the right people, setting up meetings, going to meetings, being organized. I really think those are administrative skillsets that behoove the social practice artists

and also behoove people in developing collaborative relationships with other groups and institutions.

Jarrett: I would second what Christine is saying, and thanks to Dana for bringing up this idea of empathy and reciprocity in care. So much of the work that we do is reliant on building actual, human relationships with people in administrative ways. Without those relationships of emailing or sitting with people in rooms and following up, the work itself can't happen. And even within the KSMoCA project, there are so many other core collaborators – Mandalay Evans, Roz Cruz, the principal at the school, Jill Stage, Nancy Rios, Michelle Peak – I could name people on and on and on. While Harrell and I are representing the face of the work here, really, without those relationships – relationships to me are about care, an ongoing commitment to care, for another person, for another circumstance. Without those relationships, the work can't happen. It undermines the ability for the work to exist at all.

It's making me think of Chloë's original question to Ben, about paper and its softness and the way that skin is also soft, and about contact, and the care that is involved in constructing the objects, and this idea that contact is not physical but there's a lot of contact and relationship and trust-building that underscores all of our work. I can't think of anybody here whose work isn't contingent on building relationships, institutional or otherwise. Institutions are not isolated entities; they are made up of entities. I think it's interesting to remind oneself that even institutional representatives are actually human, most of the time.

Stratton: When people can see the exhibition, one of the things that is really notable is that everybody has a very long list of the folks that they work with and contribute to their work, with whom they are in a relationship with in order to enact a lot of the practices that are a part of the exhibition. It's probably 50 or 60 names between this group of people, not to mention the extended institution that is the Kohler, like Lisa points out, that are also part of the production of these projects, and are a part of all these relationships and this interdependence. In some ways, that was a big part of the show's title, *Between You and Me*, because relationships are at the heart of all of this work. It was also connected to wanting to highlight how an Arts Center and art practice, in general, is a practice that is relational. It's relational in object-making in somebody like John's work and it's relational in a collaborative education project like Lisa and Harrell, and it's relational in trying to throw a dinner party. We're trying to provide a lot of different ways of exploring what that means, to be in a relationship, and then what that means on an institutional level for an Arts Center and a community.

There is a question specifically for you, Christine.

Helen Lee: As Cathy Park Hong stated in the LACMA panel the other night, she's "not interested in belonging to a failing infrastructure." Maybe this overlaps with the question of simultaneously holding space for care and rage, but I'm wondering how you, Christine, respond to this since the keyword "belonging" seems so pivotal to your practice.

Wong Yap: Well, I was honored to be among this panel before, and now with Helen Lee here, I am even more honored.

Cathy Park Hong was speaking in the context of this Asian American panel on racism as a public health issue, and I think, specifically, she was saying, she doesn't want to belong to a failing infrastructure. I think she was referring to what I imagine to be that thing that bell hooks says when she's talking, which is "capitalist/patriarchal/colonial" and on and on and on. All these other systems of injustice and inequality. And, of course, nobody would want to belong to that.

But I do think it is possible to frame, stating that, different communities belong. Cathy Park Hong, what she was talking about is that Asian Americans belonging in America within the context of anti-Asian violence and xenophobia during the COVID crisis. But, I think it's possible to talk about belonging in terms of multi-racial solidarity, or communities that have been marginalized or excluded, and all these other things that we need to also form to house the collective rage.

I was thinking about with this panel, what if there is a way for care to be fierce? If the public face of love is justice, maybe there's a way that justice and care and solidarity is a fierce type of care. I need more time to work that out. But there's lots of room for belonging on a very personal and political level, infrastructural levels, and societal level. It can mean a lot to a lot of people. It's all a continuum because when a society accepts you and you accept yourself, your self embraces multi-dimensional aspects that become who you are when you're free.

When you come to see the show, you'll see what I mean.

Stratton: That's a great way to wrap-up the panel. There's one more question from Carole Lung, which I think is a good, final question that maybe, everyone, if they feel comfortable being candid, might answer.

Carole Lung: What are each of you doing to take care of yourselves during the intense times of work?

Jarrett: I don't know is the most honest answer I can actually give you right now.

Wong Yap: For me, physical activity and recognizing who is being caring of me and recognizing that verbally and through contacting them is really helpful. And also, being self-compassionate is really important. There are so many pressures right now to be productive or be whatever, do whatever, and it's a tough time. It's a crisis that a lot of us haven't lived through before. There's a lot of uncertainty and it's a tough lesson to learn how to take things one day at a time, but it's a lesson that behooves you because change is always constant.

Fletcher: I'm going on lots of walks. I've been kayaking with my daughter, spending a lot of time outside, gardening. Portland has been really beautiful lately, so it's been a pretty nice place to be under these circumstances. I am trying to see what the positive aspects of this experience are.

Clugage: One of the things that I've really enjoyed in this isolated period is every week Carole Lung and I are part of a card game. It's virtual gin-rummy that we do over Zoom, and everyone plays with their own deck. It was our friend Megan Kanning's idea. It kind of works, but it's also

pretty ridiculous. It's fun to have unstructured play with people, which is something I really miss.

Preus: I've moved my studio. I've begun taking care of things. I moved out of my apartment. So, a lot of moving stuff around has occupied me for the time period. Socially, it's been really hard for a lot of people. I didn't expect to be as affected by the isolation as I have been. I thought, "Oh, it's not going to be all that different from my normal life." I spend a lot of time in my studio by myself anyway. But it really has affected me in ways that I couldn't have predicted. I've been trying to address it in a variety of ways, such as doing Zoom conversations with friends. I had a few times where I had a friend come over for a backyard bonfire. We kept a fair distance from each other, so things like that have been nice. A lot of walks outside. But, yeah, it's been rough.

Wong Yap: I just also remembered one other thing is: service can be a form of self-care. It's a way of connecting you to people that you might not have been connected to before. I sewed some masks and offered them to workers out at emergency food banks as well as volunteers at breast cancer support groups. The amount of love and gratitude I've gotten back has really made it a gift to me.

Bishop-Root: I'm really excited to learn that writing letters of gratitude is a psychological thing that helps because I've been doing that! And it's great when you learn "oh my gosh, I'm doing a thing that's real! It's proven! It's helpful!" So, that's a relief.

I've been trying to write a letter every morning around gratitude and send it. It's been a really great practice. It's also really fun to buy stamps because our US Postal Service really needs our support right now. And there are some good stamps right now.

Wills: I spend a ton of time with my dog. We hang out all the time. I've given her a little fake voice. We have conversations. I don't know if it's helpful, but that's what I'm doing with my time!

Bass: I relocated to move in with my partner, which has been both astonishing and frightening, and also, very beautiful and very full of care. It's a strange time to be away from my usual home, which is New York, especially because of what's happening in New York right now. But, it is also, for me, far and away the best thing that I could have done. I am also grappling with complicated feelings as an element of care, which I hope other people can find space for and ways to do as well.

Stratton: I think I am also grappling with complicated feelings around care. I also just moved right before this pandemic, but not within it, back to the Midwest, and then moved to my job the same week that the stay-at-home orders were enacted. I'm working full time, but I'm at my job, and I'm also at home, which is a strange intensifier. A lot of that self-care for me has been about trying to figure out how to create healthy boundaries around caring for all of those things: my work and myself. I would say, very plainly, a big part of that for me is walking, spending my time with my dog, doing a lot of reading, trying to have a lot of gratitude for the situation that I find myself in.

Takahashi: I've been doing two polar opposite activities that I started doing. One is playing video games. The other is doing meditation with friends. They've both been really, really helpful, and kind of escapist.

Stratton: Thank you, everybody, for being willing to share what you're doing. Thanks to all of our participants who came tonight, wherever you are in the world, to meet and hear from everybody who's part of the *Between You and Me* exhibition at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. We don't know when the exhibition's opening date is scheduled for yet, but we're hopeful that many of you will get to come and see it in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. KSMoCA is producing a publication for the exhibition, so, if you don't get to visit us, that's one way you can connect with the show and the artists in the exhibition. There's also a lot of really excellent digital programming that the Kohler will begin to post on their various social media platforms over the next couple of months. All of the artists in the exhibition are producing different kinds of content: videos, Instagram postings, workshops – different forms of engagement that are drawn on their practices in general, but also, the projects that are in the show. If you're not currently following the Kohler, if you found us in some other way, shape, or form, you'll be able to see what's happening on Instagram or on Facebook or on their Website by checking out their upcoming events.

Having said all that, thank you, everybody, for participating in this round robin, and thank you very much for participating in the show. As Kat said earlier, you can learn more about everybody's project by going to the Kohler Website. I will just say for those that joined us this evening that one of the things that's really exciting to me about the exhibition is that it's kind of an exhibition with many, many exhibitions nested within it. It's a really wonderful way to get to know all of these artists better and to see a really invested look at their practices. I hope you can make it to the exhibition, and if not, connect to KSMoCA's publication.

Thank you, everyone, for being here, Thanks to the Kohler for hosting us, and thanks to Kat Buckley for putting this round table together. It has been recorded and will be available on the Kohler's website.