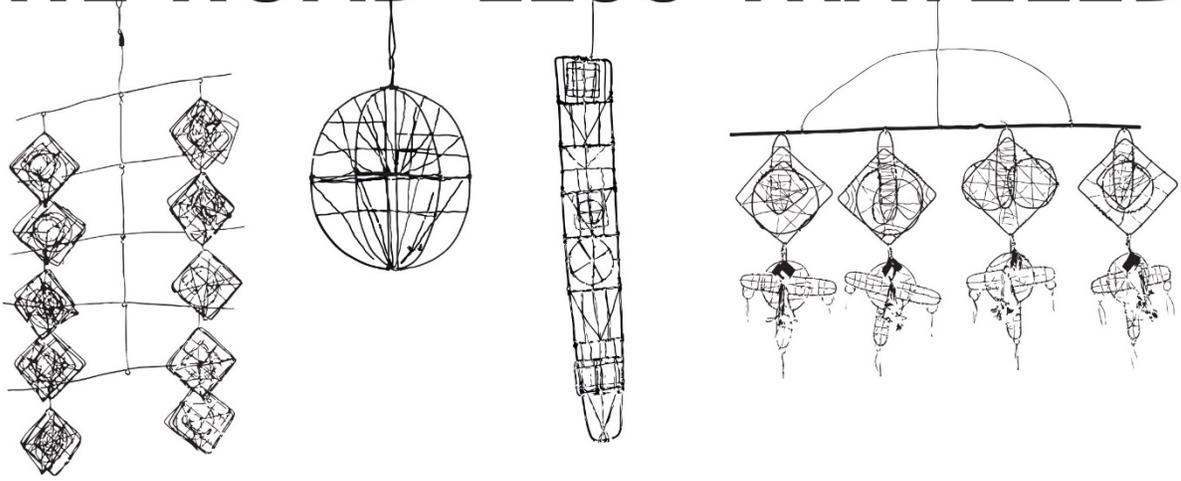


THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Sheboygan, WI September 27-29, 2017

The Fast Lane Session

Karen:

We have about an hour together with these panelists on this table, who to me represent the crux of this year's open ended investigation into artist built environments. Because each environment varies in intent, location, scale, and material there are countless ways to explore their significance. This panel represents few of those interdisciplinary responses.

I also want to encourage you to meet some of the other responders who worked with us throughout the year. Robert Lowe with Emery Blagdon. Faythe Levine with Levi Fisher, Ames, and Albert Zahn. Doctor Iain Jackson with Nek Chand. Although they couldn't be here we also worked with Catherine Morris from the Brooklyn Museum on Mary Nohl site, and Leslie Umberger from the Smithsonian, and my mentor at the Smithsonian and she worked on David Butler. Then we also reached out to author David Rhodes to talk about Nick Engelbert. They couldn't be here today, but their presence is felt.

This will be a quick fire, very fast paced panel, so that we can get through everyone. We might not have time for questions at the end of it, but again please feel free to reach out to them individually after we do this talk. We're going to start by talking to Shannon, who was also on the first panel that you see here in the photo. This is where we met in February. These brave souls came to Sheboygan in the middle of February, and talked to us about how they responded to our collection. Shannon is going to talk to us first on her response to Emery Blagdon.

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Shannon Stratton was appointed the William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator of the Museum of Arts and Design in 2015. Shannon joined MAD after 12 years as the founder and executive director of Threewalls, a Chicago based contemporary art organization that presented exhibitions and public programs, while providing grants and resources to arts and organizers. With the inclusion she responded with Harry Bertolia, Ben Laposky, and the sound performance with Robert Lowe.

Shannon S.:

Thanks Karen. Now it's me. Okay, that's the cosmos. I am no expert of visionary artists, but have always been a big fan. Thanks to Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi, who I always acknowledge in that regard. As a student of the School of the Art Instituted in Chicago. It was really exciting when Karen invited me to respond to Emery Blagdon's piece. Which I always found to be really kind of an incredible and inspiring experience any time I visited the Kohler when the piece was up.

The cosmos is up here, and then some electricity, then some acupuncture. Everybody here knows that Blagdon created the healing machines as a means to capture and transmit natural energy in order to heal. Harry Bertolia, while he was described by his critics as having a commitment of non-objectivity, described his own work as representing cosmic relationships.

Initially when I was asked to respond to this I had just finished doing an exhibition at MAD on Harry Bertolia's sounding sculptures and his sonambient barn. Which here is pictured inside. The sort of inspiration seemed really clear to me at that moment, that Bertolia had this ... He described his work very differently than the way critics wanted to describe his work. Had this interest in the energetic, and nature, and the cosmic, and had quite kind of loosen and some what organic language to describe that. He build out of space on his property, in a 18th century barn in Bally, Pennsylvania to house these sounding sculptures that you see him playing here.

Here of course is Emery Blagdon in his shed in the 1950s. Sorry, in his shed that he began putting together in the late 50s. So Bertolia began doing this 10 years later. He chose the best pieces out of his sound sculptures to put in the barn. Which ended up being 117 sculptures that he would record, and then occasionally invite people for concerts. Then of course Blagdon operated his healing machine out of a shed where he believed it would channel curative electricity.

Here are the sonambient's in the barn, and the records that Bertolia pressed of his recordings. Bertolia's sonambient barn was preserved until last fall by Harry's son Val, who was his only studio assistant and continues to make the sculptures in the tradition of his father today.

It was Val who often described the sounding sculptures and the barn itself as healing. If you were in the barn sort experiencing them being played, and he would talk about his fathers interest in energy, and carries that on in his language today about the work. There's no records that exist with Bertolia

specifically describing the work as healing. This is something that his son has passed on.

The healing machines and Bertoia's work had a kind of resonance to me. This is one of Harry's early broach pieces. So you can see his kind of kinetic interest and sort of kinetic sculpture in his earliest work. Jewelry was his first body of work, and the sound sculptures were his last body of work before he passed away. You can see in his monotypes, I think, a similar kind of line quality that you also see in Blagdon's conductors.

I wanted to bring the work together for a number of reasons. One to draw out this kind of similar line quality and kineticness in the work. A shared material use of metal to draw a parallel between two artists who created environments, particularly since one was preserved, Emery Blagdon's by the Kohler, and the other was partially dismantled. Harry Bertoia's. Then to bring the implied energy and cosmic relationship in Bertoia's work in contact with the stated intention of Blagdon's.

Here's the Bertoia exhibition at MAD, where we played a kind of ongoing piece of his recordings that had been mixed especially for the exhibition. Then also allowed audience members to play the pieces that Val continues to make to this day. Then you can see the Bertoia's facing Blagdon's shed here at the Kohler. There was also this interest in bringing in the implied sonic quality in Blagdon's work, and to conversation with the explicit intentions of Bertoia.

When we put the exhibition together at MAD, when we put the exhibition together originally at MAD I invited Robert Lowe to record the sonambient at the barn before it was ultimately dismantled, and make new work with those recordings, as well as do a performance on Val's pieces at the museum. Then as an extension of that collaboration, invited him to Kohler where he was able to make recordings of the healing machines. Which played back in the space here, and of course he'll also perform this evening. Thank you.

Karen: Thank you. Just to be clear, he will not be playing the healing machine tonight.

Shannon S.: Sorry. That's true, he won't be.

Karen: Next we have Heather Hart. Heather is an interdisciplinary artist who fuses fabricated and historical belief systems to produce works of art that invite people to participate and engage by bringing their own frames of reference and ideas. Hart was an artist and residence at the LMCC workspace, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, Santa Fe Art Institute, and the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, among others.

Heather Hart: Hi. Thank you. I thought I'd just ... There's my name. I thought I'd just give you a little context first. I had been trying to find the 1870 census that included my

great grandfather's mother, Minnie Wells. Eventually I found her on that census, and discovered that the reason I had missed her before was because someone had transcribed her name as Winnie not Minnie. Her entire history had been hidden. I'm captivated by that slippage, the liminal space between truth and fiction, oral histories and written histories. Between what I say and what you hear.

A recipe book that my great grandfather had, whoops, published appeared in an anthology of traditional black family recipes. Which was ironic to me, because my family knows none of those recipes or family recipes. Beyond that his book was filled with nutritional theory and training tables for the sports teams at Williams College. He was in charge of building athletes health. I think about the persona my great grandfather built for himself, and the power of black authorship and black fantasy. It also makes me think about what sort of things actually were bequeathed to me by him.

In 2015 a new research showed that trauma could be inherited biologically through chemical changes that occur in DNA. Which ... This of dancing by itself. Which may scientifically prove concepts of collective memory, and perhaps post traumatic slave syndrome. I began searching for forms that were intrinsic to my own story. Architectures that I feel of this real response to, and that's what brought me to the porch.

I grew up learning carpentry from my dad. Which I view as a oral history, because you learn from someone directly. The porch form resonated for me, because it's a liminal space between the inside and outside. Private, public, the side of leisure, and didactics. Visitors had to climb above, or crawl beneath, and piece constantly adapted to take the form of the frames of reference of the visitors, or a public program.

I want my work to always leave space for another persons translation. Beneath the porch visitors found a path leading to an iPad. The iPad contained an archive of oral histories that were gathered from that local area. Which they could then add to. The porch project had hosted movie nights, poetry readings, lectures, performances, yoga, life drawing, and meditation.

When I first met Doctor Charles Smith, at his African American Heritage Museum and Black Veterans Archive in Hammond, Louisiana. There were two impactful aspects among many that I kept coming back to in conceptualizing the space. One was the density of his work, both conceptually and the physical installation. The way Doctor Smith speaks is like experiencing his work at the museum. It's dense, and full of culture, and metaphor, and allegories, illustrations, and abstractions, winding this way and that, translating fragments of black history. Much of which has been left out of the mainstream historical record. To the visitor it might seem overwhelming or chaotic at first, but if you slow down and listen you go to church.

The second aspect I kept returning was context. Doctor Smith's work is created to teach black youth about themselves and their history. So what does that mean to have the work taken offsite and put into a museum like this one?

I didn't want to mimic the way that he uses his space, nor mimic the way the museum installs the work, so I built a space that asks visitors to work for access to each of Doctor Smith's pieces. Visitors must be active in the art viewing process, creating an experience that echos outside of this one to the art center. One can climb up and crouch down, weave around and through. Visitors are literally on a different level.

When they climb or crouch they physically have a different vantage point, a new perspective on the pieces. Which asks them to think about this as a metaphor for themselves and the world at large. They experience the work one on one, asking them to slow down and contemplate each individual piece as they make their way through the space.

For example, visitors experience Doctor Smith's untitled piece from the floor as he towers over them. I used gold leaf to halo the sculpture to reference icon paintings in western art history, the Buddha in eastern culture, and Pharaohs of ancient Egypt. But for me, this figurative sculpture immediately referenced Rodin's The Thinker, who was supposed to have been Dante himself evoking history of his journey through hell.

Visitors can climb a ladder onto a balcony that allows them to see the reflection of the gold on the scars of the sculptures back. Transforming his narrative to that of Gordon the escaped slave from Louisiana who became known from photographs used by Abolitionists documenting the scars on his back. Like my other work, visitors are invited to create or engage with public programming to translate the space into their own activation. The end.

Karen: Thank you Heather. Rachel Smith is the founding director and chief curator of the Kansas City Art Institute H&R Block art space. Smith has organized exhibitions featuring the works of Jesse Howard, drawn from a collection acquired directly from the artists by the Kansas City Art Institute in the 1970s. Including signs of the time, Now Read On. Smith has also collaborated with and supported other Maverick curators to consider Howard's work. Right alongside the works of contemporary artists who intersect with writing, text, politics, and current events.

Rachel Smith: Thank you Karen.

Karen: You're welcome.

Rachel Smith: So while I wasn't one of the responders for the exhibition, I'm just thinking about myself and wanted to share with you. I'm seeing myself now as a foster parent who's delivering Jesse Howard to his new forever home, that'll help do a

little match making along the way. I'm really pleased to be here with you today to talk about Jesse Howard.

I came up with four titles for this talk, and I know we're short on time, but I couldn't choose between one of them so I've used all four. Jesse Howard goes to Sheboygan. Jesse Howard's journey has taken him from Sorehead Hill, his property in Fulton, Missouri all the way to Sheboygan in the Kohler Art Center, with some pretty interesting stops along the way.

Visitors to Sorehead Hill even passersby, discovered an extraordinary environment of hand painted signs and assemblage constructions made between the 1950s and the late 1970s. Displayed along the fence line and on the outside of buildings, and the outer surfaces of the out buildings on Howard's property.

In many ways Howard was a man of his times, and to imagine the time, and context, and what may have influenced Howard's sign making tendencies. I went back to explore some of Walker Evans photographic work, and think about the visual vernacular of signs that Jesse may have encountered when he was traveling around the country as an itinerant worker before settling down to start his family in Fulton. These are some of Walker Evans photographs.

My introduction to this artist happened in 1996 at the Kansas City Art Institute, when I opened an envelope with a loan request for this extraordinary sculpture, Voice of the Bird, along with a selection of signs to be included in American self taught artists, pretty major traveling exhibition that would pair Howard with some of the most highly regarded artists of the 20th century. This exhibition traveled to many venues. Including the Museum of American Folk Art in New York, to Philadelphia, to Atlanta, and beyond.

Working on this project I gained an understanding of the importance of this artist, and the uniqueness of this collection of work. Which the Kansas City Art Institute had acquired directly from Howard in 1974. In 1968 an article by Gregg Blasdel published in Art in America, was an invitation to many artists and others. Including Roger Brown, who was studying in Chicago at the time. Also artists from Kansas City, who visited Howard in the 70s, collected and exhibited his work at the Kansas City Art Institute, and invited him to the college as a visiting artist. Which would've been a very big deal for Howard, who was really ostracized and something of an outcast in his own community.

Howard's works had also been included in a Naives and Visionary exhibition, which Lisa talked about earlier, at the Walker Center in '74. Thereafter included in many group exhibitions that were important and placed him in a new league, in a strong [lineage 00:18:15] of artists.

Howard referred to himself as a writer, and his text reveal him to be angry, suspicious, anxious, indigent, critical, patriotic, God fearing, a tad evangelical,

and pessimistic. While some who visited Howard at Sorehead Hill described him as hospitable and a likable character. His signs portray a pervasive sense of anxiety. Which come to think of it reminds me a little bit of the present moment. Above all else, Howard wanted truth, and he wanted justice.

Howard had a narrow band of sources that inspired him and fueled his work, including the Bible. Which you see spread out on that table in that image. It was a King James versions specifically. The daily newspapers, including the St. Louis Post Dispatch. I like to think of his growing display of signs as a very practical strategy to getting his rants out there for others to see. His own hand lettered rapid response to local and global news. As NPR's current motto goes, responding to a never ending stream of breaking news, and for Howard it all seemed urgent and pretty apocalyptic.

As Lisa Stone has described, this was free thought and free speech from the home front of Howard's fence line, like yard tweets, but I'll come back to that in a minute. Howard's work has been shown and contextualized with works by other self taught artists in gallery museum settings quite a lot, but there also seemed, to me, to be a strong affinity between his work and more contemporary mainstream artists.

Many artists were attracted to Howard's unique environment of home, studio, and showplace, and his ever revolving installation. As well as his [theosencratic 00:20:08] brand of messaging, and his bold and unapologetic use of text. Now Read On, Jesse Howard and Roger Brown, looked at the connection between these two artists and what my co-curator Lisa Stone and I saw similar ideas and themes in their work. Including world politics, family, corruption, local government, outrage, and disappointment.

As a curator of contemporary art I was continually struck by how relevant Howard's signs and strategies seemed in relation to contemporary art. While working with Jenny Holzer on a public art project, I was inspired to explore some of these affinities in an exhibition I called Signs of the Times. Featuring the work of three artists. Jenny Holzer's the Living Series, and Jack Pierson's sculptural signs made from salvaged signage and letters. I was interested ... And this of course is an installation of Jesse Howard's signs. I was interested in exploring how Howard and other artists were responding to current context, as well as the technologies and the materials that were at hand for them.

For Howard this was salvaged materials. Remanence of abandoned buildings, and farm equipment, and house paint for the most part. Jenny Holzer's earliest truisms were wheat paste posters that she inserted quietly into public spaces around New York City in the 1970s. But of course her works increased in scale and complexity as she gained access to new technologies and more public spaces. Jesse Howard would've like this one.

More recently I've been thinking a lot about expressions of protest, and outrage, and the successive waves of occupy movements and activism in public

space. Once again, I'm very struck by how relevant and perhaps even ahead of his time, Howard's work appears in relation to the present age of outrage culture and organized protests. Howard and others have learned to capitalize on the humble power of the simple handmade handheld sign to proclaim conviction and announce belief.

I'm going to share just a few examples of contemporary artists that I think have been successful in using these strategies, including Gillian Wearing's I'm Desperate. From her ongoing series in the early 90s, signs that say what you want them say, and not signs that say what someone else wants them to say. Dread Scott's performance I Am Not A Man. Sharon Hayes I Am A Man. Which is part of her in the near future series. When Is This Going To End? Also by Sharon Hayes. Nothing Will Be As Before. This range of artists, including Edgar Heap Of Birds used these systems and strategies of signage very strategically. Working with old and new technologies.

What about the digital age? I wanted to bring this up to the present moment and the readily available materials that are at hand now for artists and activists. Hans-Ulrich Obrist Instagram feed features posts of handwritten notes from artists. We Want The Truth by [Olifer Aliason 00:23:35]. Democracy Needs Morning After Pills, Douglas Copeland.

With some artists and activists taking to social media platforms, guess where my imagination went? I'll leave you with this thought, hoping it will help frame Howard's spirit and the works you see here at the Kohler Art Center. While Howard's work certainly conveys something of his own time and place, I believe his signs are his legacy, and serve as a testament to the power of his voice to carry on into the future. It's not hard to imagine is it, that Howard would've wanted to push his messages out into the digital realm. So we went ahead and created a way for his messages to enter into this never ending stream of breaking news, feeds, and posts. Now you can follow him too. Thank you.

Karen: Scott Reeder is a Detroit based artist, who's practice is primarily focused on text. In 2002 with his brother Tyson Reeder and wife Elysia Borowy-Reeder, they established a storefront gallery, General Store in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Reeder's also organized the Dark Fair, an art fair operated in a black wall space only by candlelight at the Swiss Institute Contemporary Art in New York in 2008 as part of Art Cologne in 2009. Scott and Tyson Reeder additionally operate, or operated I'm not sure, Club Nutz. Built as the worlds smallest comedy club. Reeder is currently an associate professor of painting and drawing at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago.

Scott Reeder: I was just going to focus on the part of my practice that deals with text, and how it might relate to Jesse's work. Straight out of high school I went to University of Iowa, and I think I was initially equally interested in writing as much as visual art. They have this well known writers workshop program that John Irving, Flannery O'Conner, Raymond Carver, I went to. But, once I got there I think I was surprised to find out too that the painting department was really great. Philip

Guston, and Jacob Lawrence had taught there over the years, and so it was a great place to be.

This is a piece, this is a much younger and thinner version of myself, and this is a piece I did at the time. The Spike Lee Malcolm X movie had just come out in 1992, and there was this little mini trend where people were wearing X hats, and t-shirts, and including white frat guys in the middle of Iowa. I was just thinking this is a little strange, or far removed from whatever the symbol meant. So I made this X hat and wore it around campus thinking it would cause outrage, but just one person said cool lid.

I think besides having these other great departments there, for some reason at the University of Iowa there's this great fluxes and data archive, and I was also learning about John Cage at the time and his experience with chance. So I made these lists of words as a way to generate paintings, called the Dart Board System. I would just throw darts at these words, and then it would make these paintings. So this is a painting from that time called Skin Diver Shopping for Glue. I liked how it was just a way to get painting or generate imagery, but also create these kind of accidental narratives.

Then after Iowa I found out about this exchange program in India, called the Foreign Student's One Year Casual Course in Painting. Which in the word casual sort of caught my eye. I was really interested in this Indian and Persian miniature painting, and there is beautiful examples of that there. But, once I got there I found myself even more drawn to how everything was hand painted in India. So the outside of a building would describe what was for sale on the inside, and even something that you would think would be very uniform, like the logo for a bank, would alternate from one corner to the other, because whoever was painting it was just copying the last person that did it.

Then also just something about the palette, and the sun bleached colors I really responded to. Then in addition to the painting that this sort of Indian English, this was a hotel near where I was staying. There's another good hotel. There was a restaurant I ate at called Dining Point. Just a great name. So these are the paintings I started to make while I was India. Tall Igloo, Crystal Ball and Chain, Pencil Thinking It's a Pen. This was called Monster. I had a final critique and I thought I would get some anti-capitalist, anti-western points, but no one in the room recognized any of those objects. This is a while ago, a different India. What is that? What is that? This is Progressive Ping Pong, Yin Yang Yung. You have the good and bad and gray area. Cool and Dead, and then this is Suicidal Shape, Gay Barn.

Then they started to change where they became more and more contingent on the title where you might not know what to think of it without the title, so this is All The Boring States, Continuous Hotdog. I'm jumping ahead in time now. More recently I started to make these paintings that were just the titles, and so maybe this idea that the viewer would be more active, and I wouldn't have the paint the imagery, but what would happen if I just made these titles. So I had a

limitation for these paintings where it was all four letter words, and I liked how it made it a little mini poem. These were also made using pasta and spray paint. So, it's different kinds, it's like Linguine, Fettuccine. The thinner lines are made with different kinds of pasta. Let's see. I showed an installation shot. These were all sort of small. This one was made of pennies.

I made, using that same kind of four letter word thing, this is a public sculpture I made. It was originally made in 2013 for Art Basel in Miami. When it was exhibited there people thought it was about plastic surgery, or fake people, or fake art, but then more recently it was installed as part of a public art initiative in Chicago, and it was put right in front of Trump Towers. I honestly didn't have anything to do with the placement, but I was really excited by it. It's been really popular on social media, but maybe almost too popular. It was on Breitbart, it's especially on all these conservative websites. So what happened just recently, someone caught it on fire. Someone lit the sculpture on fire. Now it's been removed to be repaired, and I guess that's just part of it. You know? Interesting how there's all this discussion with the monuments, and yeah interesting moment for public sculpture.

Then, this is a full circle back to sort of the lists that were generating those imagery paintings back when I was an undergrad. I started making lists. I mean, I always have lists as part of my studio practice. So recently I've started to make these list paintings. So instead of realizing these ideas, I just write them as lists and let the viewers sort of image them. So this is ideas for a TV show episode, or a painting. I'll just read the bottom one. Just subtly shifting colors. Could be a great TV show, or a great painting.

This one's hard to read. These are top 50 baby names. Beat Nick, Jail Bird, [Gollom 00:33:15], Ikea, Quinoa. This shows you how these look, these lists look in space. This was a show I did in New York. A two person show. This artist to watch. It's all the biggies, and then it goes down to the three or four most popular names in America, which are also artists, but it gets kind of confusing.

Then I've done neon, I've done some neon text. This one blinks. Then I just ... It was described in my introduction, but I want to just briefly go over. I've done a few artist environments. This is a collaborative gallery/store I ran in Milwaukee with my wife and brother, the General Store. The front was a store that was decorated like a cave for no particular reason, and it sold artist made things, multiples, t-shirts, books, music. Then the back was more like a white cube gallery. So we showed both local artists, and more international artists. This is Lonnie Potter. There he is performing in the window. Then Laura Owens, she's a LA based artist. She has a retrospective coming up at the Whitney in the Fall. This was our big marketing blitz for her show, this pumpkin. So she had a few paintings there.

Then this is a film I just finished recently. It's about a hotel on the moon. I wanted to show this just because it was like ... I worked on it for 10 years, and I just designed all the sets, and built them on a no budget. The sort of filmmakers

I'm interested in are, especially like Jacque Tati, and Cocteau where the environment and the props end up being almost like characters in the film, and that ended up what happening with this movie. The actors would just respond to the space. It was also probably influenced by artists like Robert Morris, or Michael Heizer, or light and space artist. This is some pictures of that set.

Then just wrap it up one more collaborative project that I did with my wife and brother, and then two galleries from Milwaukee. We did this art fair in the dark. So this is when art fair mania was really happening. We set up these booths, but instead of being like a normal gallery booth, it was like a restaurant booth. You could still hang art on the walls, but it was also really set up to be a social space. So there's a lot of interactive things going on. The only rule was everything was lit by candles or flashlights. So there was no overall lighting.

This was a well known DJ, he would spin a record for one on one for people. It was a battery powered turntable. Oh yeah, this is Michele, participated in her gallery the Suburban was there. I think it was like a light reflective booth that you could really only see with a flashlight. Then within this show we also did the show called the Submerging Artist Show, where it was these fish tanks, and we asked different artists to make things that could go under water, and co-exist with fish. So they were little group shows within these tanks. Rachel Harrison, Mary Hallman, and that's it. I brought these hats... Oh just one last thing.

This is an art historical model of what some big influence to me was this Duchamp's Mile of String, or sometimes it's called 16 Miles of String. This is an exhibition on surrealism that he co-curated with Andre Breton. His contribution was wrapping this string throughout the gallery. I just always loved this piece. That all these paintings in the show went on to live normal lives, but anyone who was at this event will never think about them the same way. I'll leave it right there. Thanks.

Karen: Thank you Scott. Up next we have Michelle Grabner, who is an artist, independent curator, and writer based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Internationally renowned for her work in drawing, painting, video, and sculpture. She is currently the chair of the Painting and Drawing department at the school of the Art Institute Chicago, as well as senior critique at Yale University in the department of painting and printmaking.

Michelle : Thank you Karen.

Karen: You're welcome. Do you want the clicker?

Michelle : Sure. Clicker.

Scott Reeder: Oh I'm sorry.

Michelle : Thank you. My examination of Eugene Von Bruenchenhein's paintings, that are included in the catalog are really an examination and an exercise in both space, change, and context. In 1987, now 30 years ago, I curated my art history masters thesis exhibition at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Art Museum. It was titled Post Modernism, A Spectacle of Reflexivity. This exhibition was an indictment of modernism, a deconstruction of expression, a condemnation of originality, an embrace of pastiche, and a celebration of the simulacrum. Appropriation, impurity of meaning, crisis of meaning, rupture of meaning made more sense to me as an artistic engagement, than invention, mastery, closed systems of knowledge, controlled narratives, and technical achievement.

When I was working on my thesis the work of Eugene Von Bruenchenhein was inescapable and ubiquitous throughout the galleries of Milwaukee. Its anti-intellectual modes of production made me recoil. Then as a young artists in the mid west I outright rejected it's idiosyncratic and vernacular regionality in favor of a critical post modern discourse. Now I take a wholly different position. I find great value in Bruenchenhein's break collage practice, the works fugitive tendencies, the works embrace of the imaginary, the accumulations, the discursivity, the hybridization, it's wide awakesness, it's marginality, it's improvised porous shape shifting heuristic, and in determinant self status of self expression.

The world has changed in our last 30 years. This of course is in value system within our cultural institution have changed, and so has Von Bruenchenhein's influence on our collective imagination. Thank you.

Karen: Thank you Michelle. Up next we have Brett Littman, who is the executive director of The Drawing Center. He has lectured and written numerous catalogs, essays, and articles on art and design. In 2011 he curated and wrote the exhibition catalog Eugene Von Bruenchenhein: Freelance Artist-Poet and Sculpture-Innovator-Arrow Maker and Plant Man-Bone Artifacts Constructor-Photographer and Architect-Philosopher at the American Folk Art Museum.

Brett Littman: Thank you. Thank you for mentioning the title. I appreciate that.

Karen: You're welcome.

Brett Littman: I didn't remember all of the things.

Karen: That took two of your minutes right there.

Brett Littman: Exactly, I'm done thank you. It was really great when Karen had asked me to come back and think about Von Bruenchenhein's work for the Mythology show. I had done a show at the American Folk Art Museum in 2011, which was really initiated by a conversation that I was having with Brooke Anderson at the time, who was the curator there, and also [Celic Sax 00:41:52], who is the collector

who owns the drawings that are actually in the exhibition in the Wallpaper Sample book.

At first the idea was that I would just do a show of the drawings at the Drawing Center, that would make sense. We're the Drawing Center, we could show drawings. Brooke would've done the show of the Censor Pots, the photographs, the paintings, really all the great stuff over at the Folk Art Museum, but she ended up leaving the museum, and they kind of circled back to me. I decided that I actually really wanted to kind of dig in, and think about EVB's work in relationship to a more formalist analysis. I didn't want to kind of get stuck in the biography, and the personal story. I was very interested in how to tie together an artists who works in so many different mediums.

Essentially I came to the conclusion that there were two kind of parallel tracks that Von Bruenchenhein was looking at. One was botany, which was incredibly important to him. He actually described himself as a botanist. You see even in the show here there's a room of plants, a greenhouse of sorts. The other thing was a kind of art tectonic sensibility that really are shown in the bone towers, and the bone chairs, and also in some of the later paintings, and in the drawings as well.

In the research phase of working on the exhibition, I came out to Kohler I think it was last November, and we ended up taking a look at this document. Which Karen, correct me if I'm wrong, I don't think this has ever been published.

Karen: No. You're correct.

Brett Littman: This was a kind of document that was in the archive of Kohler, that really is about seed growth. This started for me and kind of confirmed for me some very speculative ideas that I was having about trying to go deeper in understanding what was EVB's kind of, if I could put it, the Crete of engine that drove a lot of his work. Here I really started to think about in a way historical precedence for self generating systems. What I would describe this as would be aesthetic systems that bare commonalities with seed growth. Non content driven strategies, often geometric, organic, mathematical, or process based that might use a set core of units or techniques to develop images, or three dimensional forms.

This led me on a fairly wide ranging exploration of very speculative ideas. I want to be clear that everything that I've written in the catalog, and even talking about today are primarily just thoughts and ways of kind of trying tie this work to other histories, other kinds of work. Both in architecture design, and in contemporary art.

The first thing I really started to think about were Girih tiles. The Islamic tiles, which are made up of fundamental five cores shapes. These can then be combined and recombined to make an infinite number of designs. In some ways

I really began to think about these in relationship to the censor pots, particularly his use of the leaf form as a kind of building structure. He was able to build many, many, many interesting forms simply out of just the leaf. This of course brings it back to the seed and botany in general. But, this concept of being able to make pattern, being able to make image, not from figurative, not from the idea of particular content. Just simply by working with self generating systems was very, very interesting to me.

Of course Gaudi, the great Catalonian visionary architect has often been, I think, associated with Von Bruenchenhein, and surely there would be some questions about whether or not he had ever seen that work in reproduction. I know that there is some discussion that he had seen pictures of the Watts Tower, but of course with Gaudi he is using essentially organic forms, tree canopies, to build his great chapel. Which is still unbuilt, and continuing to be built to this day. The Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. I think that it was interesting again to think about EVB's work in relationship to Gaudi, in terms of a strategy of using natural forms. He really was using hyperboloid, helicoid, cone forms, parabolas as the core way to make form. In a way, the whole building form and shape is coming out of the use of these kind of geometric ideas.

This very much related, I thought, to some of the drawings. Which are very art tectonic. The drawings are coming out of the wallpaper sample book, made fairly late in his career. For EVB, my assumption is that he's using some kind of architectural stencils. These are ball point pen drawings. They have a very kind of again, art tectonic form, in the way that he's kind of building also by using points and dots to connect things. In a way, reminded me of the kind of visionary style of Gaudi's architecture.

In a more contemporary vein, and here again I just want to be clear I'm not trying support a relationship to contemporary art, or saying that his work can only be validated by looking at contemporary art. I think in and of itself as important, and totally valid. But, I did want to think about other contemporary artists that were using similar kinds of strategies. If I could describe them self generating forms. This is a fairly early Russ Buckner painting, which of course is using the image of the cell, the human cell, but relating to AIDS, so a pathological cell. As a kind of system of composition. I think that Buckner would be an interesting person to look at in relationship to unit structures that EVB might have used for composition, particularly in relationship to the seed texts that I showed earlier.

Philip Taaffe is an artist who definitely has been directly related to EVB's work. His technique of kind of using transferring wet paint from surface to surface to create these kinds of gossamer like tower forms. Which are very close to some of the architectural paintings that EVB made later by using his fingertips, and special brushes, and tools. I think that Taaffe would be, again even in terms of color and palette, would be very relatable to EVB's project in relationship to thinking about self generating systems that create images. Here the self

generating system is his kind of system of transferring the paint to make the image. This is an example of an EVB painting.

Another artist that I really started to think about was Roxy Paine. Roxy Paine may not be the first person that would come to mind in relationship to EVB's work, but if you wouldn't mind I'm just going to read a quote. "I wasn't interested in the beauty of a mushroom in it's form. Casting a mushroom didn't interest me at all. What interested me was that fungus is another way of understanding the world. So I take a species and view it through the lens of morphology. I would study every permutation of how mushrooms grow, how they propagate. I studied them for months, looking at them as a series of elements at the range of their formal properties, and the rules by which they were implemented. Then I use those rules to create a new way of looking at the species as an organism mushrooming into mycological systems."

The piece that I'm showing here is not a mushroom piece, but Roxy did work a lot with mushroom forms. This is more dendritic sculpture. These are sculptures that are based on plant growth in many ways, or tree growth. I thought that it was interesting that Roxy also is generating form from organic, or for that matter plant based ideas. So again, to kind of bring that into the discussion about EVB's work, I thought would be something that would be relevant. Again, some of the drawings of EVB.

Particularly I wanted to end with two artists that I've worked at recently at The Drawing Center. One is the work of Louise Despont. Louise made an installation at The Drawing Center that included a very large drawing that was 60 feet by 10 feet tall. Louise generally works on old ledger book paper, and is using architectural stencils, and colored pencils to create essentially free formed designs. There is no format for these, they just kind of happen, and they happen over long periods of time. The drawing that she made for The Drawing Center took about two years. Surely I really haven't given a lot of thought in relationship to EVB's drawings, and Louise's work, and we talked a lot about his work in relationship to her own work.

Her process again, is not something that is preplanned. There is no formal analysis, there's no sketching. These drawings can be erased. I mean, sometimes she kind of goes back and changes things, but overall I would say that it follows that kind of very interesting self generating strategy of making image.

The last artist that I wanted to bring to your attention is an artist named Susan Hefuna, an Egyptian artist, but born in Berlin. Susan has been making over the past 30 years a series of drawing, which again are art tectonic in some ways, or related to jet travel, kind of air streams, the idea of organic movement. This is a body of work actually based on a project that we did together where she worked with a choreographer, and this was kind of in a way a labanotation or a dance notation that she used. But, I was really thinking a lot about the way in which she makes her drawings, which again are never pre-sketched or pre-

thought through. She always is using some kind of formal geometric, organic way of creating image.

To me it's very important, I think, in the future of thinking about EVB's work that we open up that space for relating him to the worlds of design, and architecture, and contemporary art. Obviously in my feeling, my sense would be that there's a lot more to be done here, and I'm just literally trying to scratch the surface, and open up some point of dialogue, but I hope that you at least kind of follow along, and think that this is worthwhile endeavor. I appreciate you allowing me to present this today. Thank you.

Karen: Thank you Brett. Lastly we have Rita Barros, who has lived in New York City at the Chelsea Hotel since 1980. For three decades Barros has documented her neighbors, home, the creative environment of the hotel, encapsulating the diverse and bohemian life that has evolved there through her book in the last 15 years, *15 Years, The Chelsea Hotel*.

Rita Barros: Thank you Karen, thank you Kohler, and also would like to thank Amy Chalupa. It was wonderful working with her, and putting this all together. As a responder to Stella Waitzkin, I figured out I would do a handmade book on the story of her apartment. She was my neighbor at the Chelsea. I met her when I moved there in '84. Somehow I tried to photograph her when I did this book *15 Years, Chelsea Hotel*. It kind of didn't work out, but I still have this amazing memory of visiting her, and seeing this magic cave. Literally you would walk through this corridor and there would be all these books, and installations. Then you would realize that it wasn't books, it was objects. I still, that many years later, have that memory.

I came across, the Chelsea got sold and Stella's granddaughter was still living there, so we had quite a contact within that time. Unfortunately she had to let go of her apartment where she kept the memory of grandmother, so this we kind of tied into how do you preserve an artist environment, and what do you do. This book reflects that movement into where right now the walls of her apartment don't exist anymore. There's just the outside.

The building is being completely gutted out, so I am very happy to see that the Kohler is showing that memory, because that memory would exist in photographs, but how do you show that. So when I came and arrived yesterday, and saw Stella's apartment there, I was just like unbelievably, it was quite emotional to see that. Somehow I think that could answer the question that we've been asking. What you do with an artist environment?

Some of the photos I put in, and they're on show, are the different people that Stella would have come across at the hotel. Which for those of you who don't know used to be this amazing party time. Philip Dempsey lives there by the way, and so on. This is Alan Majid, who was hired by Rural to do the party circuit, the lecture circuit sorry. This was the ... This was actually done in 2000 when Alan was asked to redo, revisit the Rural presence. Arthur Mueller lived there once,

at one point with Marlyn Monroe, and then he worked there with one Arnold Weinstein with a neighbor. [Ditty 00:56:35] Ramon.

The thing that is stunning is we're talking about artists environments and the Chelsea in itself is an artist environment. The building got sold and nobody could preserve anything. So basically those tenants, I'm still there, those tenants managed to hold on to their apartments. That would be as original as you can get at this point.

Shirley Clark, who filmed a portrait of Jason in the hotel. Very important. She did it on the roof show, video experimentation's and so on. Virgil Thompson, composer. A lot of these photos run from '88 through 2000 and something. What I was interested was exactly the atmosphere and how each artist had made their own apartment into their own idea of how they wanted to live. This is Gregory [Corson 00:57:48]. This is the progression into the demolition of the artists apartments there.

This, when things got really tough and I was taking care of a garden roof, they destroyed it in front of me. There was nothing I could do. The only I could do is I started a whole series of performance, which is based on breaking bricks. Bricks being the meaning of the house. It was actually a fabulous release. So this is it.

Karen:

Thank you to our panelists.